

238 Putnam Avenue
Cambridge, MA 02139
November 14, 1991

[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]:

Re: Eastman Johnson, Negro Life in the South (small version), oil on canvas, 18 x 24 inches. This painting, which is in your possession, was formerly with the Chicago art dealer, Richard Love.

I first saw this small version of Johnson's Negro Life in the South on May 1, 1984, in Boston, where it had been sent to me for my examination. At that time it belonged to [REDACTED] of Washington D.C. They told me that the painting had come from a [REDACTED] of Rome, George. I saw the painting again on June 3, 1984, after having made a trip to New York to see the large Negro Life in the South at the New-York Historical Society.

The small painting was then in poor shape with chips of paint falling off and very dark in the area of the background hearth. It seems that at some point it had been restored and the restoration was not holding up. At the time I concluded that in my opinion I could not "assign it primarily to the hand of Eastman Johnson," however I speculated that Johnson might have had worked on it--perhaps with a student. I wrote a letter stating my opinion.

I next saw the painting on May 21, 1986, in the gallery of Taggart, Jorgensen and Putnam of Washington D.C. In the two year interval it had been cleaned by Charles H. Olin of Washington D.C. I am enclosing a photocopy of his report.

However, when I examined the painting that day (along with William T. Truettner), I came to the conclusion that it was TO: indeed by Eastman Johnson. Mr. Truettner concurred with me. I next saw the painting in New York--I think it was the fall of 1986. (My notes for this examination are not in the file; I will have to look them up in my daily records, but I don't think the exact date is important.) A New York dealer brought John I. H. Baur and myself to the New-York Historical Society, and we compared the large NYHS painting with the smaller version. At first Mr. Baur had his doubts but when I pointed out several details, he, too, agreed that in his opinion it was by Johnson.

[REDACTED]

I next saw the painting at the Richard Love Gallery in Chicago in February 1987. Although the painting looked a bit brighter than I had recalled, it was obviously the [REDACTED] painting.

You told me last December that your father, [REDACTED], bought it in September 1986. Hence, it

belonged to [REDACTED] when I saw it at the Richard Love Gallery.

As I have mentioned, we know of the existence of a print made after the painting, although I have never seen an example of that print. It is possible that the painting was done for an engraver, but it is also possible that Johnson simply made another, smaller version of the NYHS painting.

One idea I believe I mentioned to you is that perhaps your version was the painting sent to the 1867 Exposition Universelle held in Paris. A group of American works were sent there and were listed in the official catalogue. The exposition took place from April 1 to October 31, 1867. Johnson sent four paintings including "Rustic Scene in Kentucky" lent by [REDACTED].

However, we know that the large NYHS version was sold for \$6,000 at the sale of the [REDACTED] collection on March 18, 1867, also called "Old Kentucky Home." [REDACTED] of New York purchased the painting at the sale.

I would question how a painting could be in Paris (or on the boat enroute) for an April 1 opening and also be at the same time on the auction block in New York on March 18. Moreover, the New-York Historical Society records do not indicate that an "[REDACTED]" was at any time an owner. Of course, one might argue that the painting got there late, the [REDACTED] notation in the catalogue was a mistake, etc. I hope someday to find more facts to bolster this speculation of mine.

I hope that this has been some help to you. I will include the painting in the catalogue raisonne I am compiling of Johnson's work.

Sincerely yours,

Patricia Hills
Professor