EARLY WESTERN RESERVE IMPRESSIONS
THE SURVEYOR, THE ARTIST, THE LAND SPECULATOR

Gladys Haddad

To experience a geographical place, one seeks ways to communicate about it. There are many ways to do this, that is, to tell others what certain places look like and feel like, what they mean and how they got that way.

At the Western Reserve Studies Symposium in 1986, George Knepper in a paper entitled, "Interpreters of the Western Reserve" reviewed how this part of Ohio was perceived by those who had lived in it, traveled through it and written about it—pillars of Western Reserve lore—Upton, Havighurst, Izant and Hatcher.

This year, David Anderson and I collaborated on the publication of the Anthology of Western Reserve Literature, a chronicle of writings organized by century—the nineteenth and twentieth—writings that are typical for both the region and the time. Through their letters, diaries, journals, memoirs, autobiographies, fiction and poetry, authors who were born or lived in the area portray a particular aspect, such as landscape, demography, or historic events.

Today, I invite you to experience a geographical place through visual "Impressions" of the Western Reserve. We will not, however, abandon the literary. We will utilize the manuscript collections at the Western Reserve Historical Society that abound with letters, journals, maps and records. They offer the perfect complement to the visual representations drawn from the Society's collections that constitute the exhibit for this Symposium. The title, "Mapping the Land" suggests the visual representation we will consider first—maps—probably that which immediately comes to mind in communicating about a geographical place. Serving the remainder of the title, "Western Reserve Scapes and Shapes" we will move to the medium of paintings and drawings in an attempt to experience a geographical place through the impressions of the visual artist.

MOSES CLEAVELAND PORTRAIT

As familiar to American schoolchildren as "in fourteen hundred ninety two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue" is the Western Reserve litany (although not in rhymed couplet) in seventeen hundred and ninety six, Moses Cleaveland (1754-1806) hugging Lake Erie's southern shore, on July 22 entered the Cuyahoga River and upon its banks laid out a "capital city," which his surveyors named
Cle(a)veland in his honor. After three months, Cleaveland and his party left. Moses Cleaveland never returned but almost 75 years later, in 1868, his descendants found among Cleaveland’s papers a map of northeastern Ohio with a letter drawn and written by John Heckewelder (1743-1823) and dated January 12, 1796. Cleaveland’s heirs presented them to the Western Reserve Historical Society.

HECKEWELDER MAP OF 1796

While it is not a survey map, the Heckewelder Map is a very important one in the story of the early occupation of northeastern Ohio. It identified the major streams, tracked early Indian paths and located Moravian Christian Indian mission towns. The accompanying letter identified many geographical factors that were significant in the development of the Western Reserve along with detailed information about its soil, plant and animal life. Who was John Heckewelder? What qualified him to create this map and its thoughtful explanatory letter? Was it used by Moses Cleaveland on his surveying mission for the Connecticut Land Company? How did it happen to be among Cleaveland’s papers?

John Heckewelder was an immigrant, a Moravian missionary based in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. He answered the call from the Ohio country in 1762 to establish a mission among the Indians in their towns on the Tuscarawas branch of the Muskingum River locations accessible from the Ohio River on the south and with a short portage, to the Cuyahoga River and Lake Erie on the north. Hostile Indians forced the missionaries to leave but it marked the beginning of Heckewelder’s acquisition of knowledge that would later enable him to draw his map and to describe the land in detail. Later, Heckewelder returned to the Tuscarawas and succeeded in Christianizing Indians in villages such as Schoenbrunn and Gnadenhutten (1772). During the Revolution, Christian Indians met hostility from other Indians who were allied with the British. In 1781 charged as a spy and traitor by the British, Heckewelder was taken to Detroit. Later freed, Heckewelder and other Moravians encamped in the vicinity of Upper Sandusky and Detroit. In 1786 when their attempts to return to the Tuscarawas were deemed unsafe, they settled a town called Pilgrim’s Rest near the junction of the Cuyahoga River and Tinker’s Creek. For the next fifteen years, Heckewelder journeyed through the Ohio country proselytizing among the Indians and assisted the federal government in negotiations with them.

 Heckewelder’s Map of 1796 was the first one to detail a large amount of information about the northeastern portion of Ohio gained from 35 years of personal observations. The area shown included a large portion of western Pennsylvania to the exclusion of much of
the Reserve's western territory. More than a locational tool, it was informational. For example, Heckewelder noted on the site of the Western Reserve, "Here a late purchase has been made of the state of Connecticut by a number of gentlemen of that State among whom is Mr. Phelps."

The map along with its letter of January 12, 1796, was addressed by Heckewelder to John McNair, a Philadelphia land speculator interested in regions of northwestern Pennsylvania and northeastern Ohio to whom he wrote:

Altho the country in general containeth both arable Land & good Pasturage: yet there are particular Spots far preferable to others: not only on account of the Land being here superior in quality; but also on account of the many advantages presenting themselves.

There is no documentation to support the notion that Moses Cleaveland, a stockholder in the Connecticut Land Company and leader of the surveying party that divided the tract had the Heckewelder Map with him at the time of his survey. He never mentioned it in preparation for the trip or after he arrived in the Reserve. It remains a mystery as to how and when Heckewelder's map and letter came into his possession, but Moses Cleaveland must have warmed to Heckewelder's findings which corresponded with his own that read:

[located] between the Pennsylvania Line; and Cujahaga; & in an East and West course as the dividing Ridge runs between the Rivers which empty into the Lake Erie; & those Rivers or Creeks which empty into the Ohio: Cujahaga certainly stands foremost; [it] furnishes the best portage between Ohio and Lake Erie; at its mouth it is wide enough to receive large Sloops from the Lake. It will hereafter be a place of great importance.

Similarly, Simon Perkins and Paul Williams, founders of Akron, would find their future site favorably described by Heckewelder:

There is a remarkable fine Situation for a Town, at the old Cujahaga Town; & there can be no doubt of a large Trading Town being established here, as both a Road to Sandusky & Detroit crosses here: as also the carrying place between the two Rivers Cujahaga & Muskingum must be at this place.¹

By its royal charter of 1662, Connecticut claimed the right to all lands in America between forty-one degrees north latitude on the south, 42 degrees 2 minutes on the north, and the "South Sea," meaning the Pacific Ocean. Its claim, along with the claims of
other states, many of which overlapped, was ceded to the new national government under the Articles of Confederation in 1786.

OHIO PRINCIPAL LAND SUBDIVISIONS AND SURVEYS MAP

But Connecticut reserved for itself a strip of land along Lake Erie’s south shore extending 120 miles westward from Pennsylvania’s western boundary, between the 41st and 42nd parallels. There were three separate sections of land within the larger Connecticut Western Reserve: the area between the Cuyahoga River and the western border of Pennsylvania, the land west of the Cuyahoga River to the eastern border of the Fire Lands, and the Fire Lands.

In September 1795 all lands in the Western Reserve, estimated at 3,000,000 acres excluding the Firelands, were purchased on credit for $1,200,000 by the Connecticut Land Company syndicate led by Oliver Phelps, Gideon Granger, and Henry Champion II. Before the land could be sold it had to be subdivided. The portion east of the Cuyahoga River was that for which Moses Cleaveland represented the Connecticut Land Company.

In the 1796 survey the east-west line was established on the southern border and range lines five miles apart were run north from this base line.

SETH PEASE PORTRAIT

In May 1797, to prepare for the partition of the land among the proprietors, a Connecticut Land Company party headed by Seth Pease (1764-1819) and Seth Hart returned to survey the land east of the Cuyahoga River into townships five miles square.

CLEVELAND UNDER THE HILL SKETCH 1797

Headquartered at Cleveland, the parties of surveyors and chainmen scattered through the south and western portions of the Reserve. The journals and field books of Seth Pease are filled with reports of bad weather, mosquitoes, swamps, hunger, illness, and exhaustion. Nonetheless before the autumn was over they had completed the township lines east of the Cuyahoga River. They had laid out the town of Cleveland into lots of varying sizes, some of a hundred acres and had staked out the principal streets.

SETH PEASE MAP 1797

As a result, Seth Pease drew "A Map of the Connecticut Western Reserve from Actual Survey" which was engraved and printed by Amos Doolittle of New Haven, Connecticut in 1798. Doolittle printed 500 copies, which Seth Pease then hand colored. One of these is in the
possession of the Western Reserve Historical Society. A color photography reproduction of the original is in the exhibition.

The surveyed land was apportioned among the land company members according to their investments. Through employment of a lottery system, investors picked land of varying qualities from separate boxes which prevented them from owning contiguous tracts. Then, as proprietors, they sold these lands to individuals and groups. Convinced of the desirability of the Cuyahoga River location, the company placed the price of $50 per acre on the city lots.

But Cleveland did not immediately acquire the prominence anticipated by Heckewelder and Cleaveland. Instead settlers chose to purchase the lands in the southeastern part of the Reserve that could be bought for as little as $1 an acre. Also, there were significant geographical considerations for the early concentration of population in the Youngstown-Warren area. It was an easier trip to the Reserve via the Ohio River, Beaver Creek and the Mahoning River than via Lake Erie—a fact that Cleaveland perhaps overlooked since he did not himself visit this part of the Reserve. Although Heckewelder was less familiar with this part of the country than with other parts of the Reserve, he had noted the "vast bodies of very rich Upland" and this the settlers found attractive. ²

MAP OF WESTERN RESERVE INCLUDING THE FIRELANDS 1826

The settlements in the Western Reserve were widely scattered. They did not begin at the Pennsylvania boarder and move west or commence along the lake and move south. Instead, each family or party fought its way through the wilderness along township lines until it came to its assigned spot. There, in the vast loneliness, a hole was chopped out of the forest, a cabin was erected, a few acres of corn or wheat were planted and the struggle for survival began.

Among the fifty-four men who constituted the Board of Incorporators of the Connecticut Land Company whose signatures appear on the original trust agreement preserved at the Western Reserve Historical Society are those of a father, Samuel Mather Jr. and his son also named Samuel Mather. In the summer of 1798, the younger Samuel Mather traveled by horseback to the Western Reserve to locate the lands which they owned. On August 11, 1798 from Youngstown, in advance of his return home, he wrote to his father:

I left Colo. Sheldon at Cleaveland sick with the Fever and Ague, and most of the Inhabitants of that place in the same situation—Mr. Williams who had contracted to build a Mill at Cleaveland this Season is also taken sick and Six of his men, they were to sett out for home last monday, by this misfortune they are not likely to have a Saw or Grist Mill in the North
part of the purchase this Season—I am much disappointed in the prospect of speedy settlement upon the Lake—Butt few inhabitants have come on this Season, and those few are poor and inactive—Provisions of all kinds are scarce and dear, and I know not what prospect the Inhabitants have for a support the ensuing winter—Colo. Harper is on his Township [Harpersfield No. 11 in the 5th] with 3 Families only, and not half their effects, they have had a tedious time upon the Lake—I am told they are not at all pleased with their township—They have cleared about 4 acres for wheat & have some houses built—On the east of their Township there is no improvements making or any surveying going forward—I have been on all your Land upon the Lake, and am more pleased with No. 12 in the 2nd [Sheffield] than the average town—The Land on this Town is rich, but very heavey timbered and hard to make a beginning—This Town is well watered, the other but indifferently—On my way to Cleaveland I found several handsome improvements and a number of Families—Att Grand river about 8 miles from the mouth Mr. Perkins has established his Camp upon a most beautifull peice of Ground—Mr. Perkins has five Men with him and has cleared and prepared for wheat about 7 acres—Att the Mouth of Chagrin Mr. Abbott has built a House and got a good Garden under good improvement. The Settlements upon Euclid [No. 8 and 11] are nothing of any consequence, a few Lotts are partly cleared, The grain sown upon them last year came to nothing—There are 4 Families settled at Cleaveland, they are doing all they can which is but little at best—On the Hundred acre Lotts there are some handsome improvements—The Roads go on but slowly, the contractors say they shall loose money, and are almost discouraged. I am much more [pleased] with the appearance of the Country in general than I expected, more especially the South part of it—[writing from Youngstown] This looks like an old Settled Country fine Gardens & large fields of Corn. On these are 10 families round about here, and yesterday Mr Young raisid a House, and had f[rind]s to help him—The towns in every direction from this place are fast settling. The land is rich and thinly timbered Mr Young has sold the most of his Land from 1 1/2 dollar to 3 pr acre Mr Boardman has sold at 1 1/2—From the present appearance of the Country I have thought it not best to get eithir of your Townships to the Northard surveyed this Season I could not get it done under 4 dollars pr Mile—I think after I have given you a full discription of your property in this Country, you will judge it best to make a beginning in this part of the purchase.

Neither of the two early Mather proprietors settled on the land they purchased in Ohio. The son of Samuel Mather, Samuel Livingston Mather (1817-1890) of Middletown, Connecticut arrived in
Cleveland in 1843 to look after the sale of his father’s property and eventually settled here, married, and reared his family.

People involved in the westward movement of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were conscious of their place in history as part of a large mass migration. They created maps, wrote letters, kept journals, compiled records. Artists captured images in drawings and paintings of portraiture and landscapes. From Colonial times until well into the 20th century, America looked to Europe for its models and for a definition of culture. American art reflected this in its deference to and imitation of European art. While American art may not be judged innovative, it is important for our purposes to note that it is representational and as such serves the historical record with both portraits and landscapes.

A typical early nineteenth century portrait rendered in oil on canvas revealed a physical likeness in which the subject was appropriately costumed and accessorized by objects relevant to the sitter’s social status, occupation and interests.

SIMON PERKINS PORTRAIT 1837

Simon Perkins (1771-1844) came to the Western Reserve in 1798, employed by Moses Cleaveland to handle the exploration, survey, and sale of western lands for the Erie Company. He settled here and served the region as land agent, Indian negotiator, postmaster, banker, and developer of roads, canals and cities. For 23 years he conducted the affairs of the Western Reserve Bank at Warren. A member of the Ohio Canal Fund Commissioners, he saw the strategic importance of Akron, purchased acreage and became a founder of that city. His son, Colonel Simon Perkins became a leading citizen there.

NANCY PERKINS PORTRAIT 1837

Nancy Bishop Perkins (1780-1862) and Simon Perkins were married in March of 1804 at Lisbon, Connecticut. In June they travelled by carriage and horseback, a journey of 34 days, to reach Warren. In this portrait, companion to that of her husband, Nancy and Simon Perkins are portrayed as leading citizens of the Western Reserve. The artist, probably an itinerant painter, travelled the region creating such portraits destined for a genealogical display in a nineteenth century home.

Westward movement and expansion was propelled out of a reverence for the land. This view of the Perkins home in Warren is typical of nineteenth century American landscapes in its celebration of the land.
PERKINS HOME IN WARREN LANDSCAPE ADAM LEHR 1880

The natural landscape of rolling hills and trees together with the tracings of the pioneer who created roads frame an impressive residence. The painting, an oil on canvas, was created in 1880 by artist, Adam Lehr (1853-1910). This was long after both Simon and Nancy Perkins had died and the house had been moved from its original setting on Mahoning Avenue to the pastoral and bucolic setting at East Market Street depicted here.\(^5\)

Nineteenth century landscapes were characteristically rendered in rhapsodic and romantic terms that sprang from emotional responses and motives.

LOG CABIN BIRTHPLACE OF JAMES A. GARFIELD LANDSCAPE-JAMES HOPE 1882

The log cabin birthplace of James A. Garfield in Orange was painted by English born artist James Hope (1818-1892) in 1882 soon after Garfield’s death in September 1881 from wounds inflicted by an assassin. Hope wanted to memorialize Garfield’s humble origins recalling those of Lincoln, an earlier martyred President. In muted hues of greens and browns that lend a mystical quality, Hope placed the log cabin centrally and behind it another, framing them in a densely forested land. In the middleground are tree stumps suggesting the labor and source of supply for the structures. The landscape is animated by a foreground showing young Garfield and his childhood companions playing in and near a stream.\(^6\)

Two focal points for this exhibition of "Early Western Reserve Impressions" are Cleveland’s Public Square and the Cuyahoga Valley. Representative works portraying aspects of Western Reserve life were drawn from the collections of the Society.

THE NORTHWEST PART OF PUBLIC SQUARE WITH THE CLEVELAND GRAYS, ATTRIBUTED TO SEBASTIAN HEINE 1839

This large oil painting in the primitive style, The Northwest Part of Public Square with the Cleveland Grays, was created in 1839. Unsigned, it is attributed to Cleveland painter, Sebastian Heine, a local painter who reiterated the Square’s rectilinear qualities in a celebratory cityscape of enormous detail and deliberate if not contrived perspective. It is the 1839 Fourth of July Parade. In the foreground the Cleveland Grays, a private military company established in 1837, march across Superior Avenue in rigid rows, shoulder to shoulder, as if soldered together. In the foreground left is a corner of a white Greek Revival store block, with a general store below, and attorneys’ offices above. In the background dominating the north side of the Square is the original Old
Stone Church. On either side of the church are white and gray classical residences behind white picket fences with trees. In the center is the northwestern quadrant of the Square, a grassy area surrounded by a white rail fence around which are planted young trees. Relieving the architectural emphasis of the work are the spectators arranged in groups of small, rounded and colorful forms.

EARLY CLEVELAND VILLAGE PRINTS (4) THOMAS WHELPLEY 1833

The drawings executed in 1833 by Thomas Whelpley represent the earliest depictions of Cleveland in existence. A yeoman farmer and surveyor, Whelpley did architectural drawings of cityscapes. The original four scenes of Cleveland were engraved by M. Osborne of New York in 1834 and the prints found their way into Cleveland homes and eventually libraries including the Western Reserve Historical Society.

This exhibition displays reproductions of the prints enhanced by color additions.

(1) The southwest quadrant dominated by the Cleveland City Hotel (present site of Stouffer's Inn on the Square) shows pigs wallowing nearby. Superior, west of the Square was the business center and housed office buildings interspersed with private dwellings. Looking west and north are church steeples, a lighthouse and activity on Lake Erie.

(2) Looking east from the corner of Bank and St. Clair streets, are from left to right the "Old Academy," Trinity Church, Old Stone Church, and the Courthouse.

(3) Cows grazed where East Sixth Street intersects Euclid Avenue today. The building in the center is the County Courthouse on the Square. The tall tower to the right is Old Stone Church.

(4) From a pastoral scene on the west side of the Cuyahoga, one glimpses the growing village of Cleveland.

Thomas Whelpley's "impressions" of Cleveland in 1833 were those of a New England village and like so many other towns of the Western Reserve may have remained just so. But its location on Lake Erie at the mouth of the Cuyahoga precluded such anonymity; its destiny was that of a "capital city" and a "place of great importance." Under the impetus of the canals and lake traffic, Cleveland changed dramatically from an idyllic village to that of a mercantile driven commercial center.
CLEVELAND-COLUMBUS STREET BRIDGE  C. H. HICKS  1835

This panoramic view of the flats from the Tremont area overlooks the site of the Cleveland-Columbus Street Bridge. Nearing completion in 1835 it celebrates the first period of bridge building over the Cuyahoga River. The bridge constructed of wood with masonry piers, at a cost of $15,000, was designed for wagon traffic. Judged the most remarkable structure in Ohio, visitors from all over the state came to marvel at it. In 1836, it became the center of a controversy between Cleveland and Ohio City, competing commercial centers on either side of the Cuyahoga, that resulted in the infamous Bridge War between the cities in 1837. This painting by C.H. Hicks captures the drama commensurate with the bridge’s reputation and portends its notoriety. With a flourish, Hicks signed the painting, dated it, added a paintbrush and all upon the wooden fence in the right foreground. No modest corner for C.H. Hicks! The arrangement of the rails is calculated to direct the eye to the bridge, river and lake. But Hicks had a whimsical way about him as he also placed in the foreground a hummingbird extracting nectar from a large tropical looking plant while nearby, hopping away, is a brilliant green frog. Alas, there is the curvilinear Cuyahoga wending its way under the bridge supporting a sailboat and canoe. Within its loop, a rural scene of homestead and fields stands in contrast to the several buildings and dwellings secured on the river’s banks.

The portion of the Ohio-Erie Canal first completed was that from Akron to Cleveland in 1827; six years later the canal was completed to Portsmouth on the Ohio River.

OHIO CANAL SOUTH OF CLEVELAND  1860

This landscape depicts a quiet rural scene of woods and farmland south of Cleveland through which the canal moves. This is the hinterland. A boat glides along the canal while the towpath receives use as a country road by horses pulling a wagon and a by a strolling couple who pause to converse. In the distance to the north are steeples and buildings. Against a tranquil sky, trails of emitting smokestacks suggest the city and Cleveland.

VIEW OF CLEVELAND  ALFRED BOISSEAU  1853

This elegant View of Cleveland by Alfred Boisseau (1823-1859) painted in 1853 emerges from the Classical tradition of history paintings. Its narrative qualities extol the good fortune of a city blessed with natural resources, alive with commerce and industry. The brilliant color is suggestive of French Impressionists. The artist, Alfred Boisseau was born in Paris in 1823, trained in France, came to New Orleans, then New York and settled in Cleve-
land. Prominently displayed upon the bluff in the foreground at the left is the American flag, a tent, and a uniformed soldier. People descend the hill and gaze at the scene of horses on the towpath guiding the canalboat. In the right foreground is a house with a fenced yard and a woman hanging washing to dry. The relative darkness of the foreground telescopes a scene bathed in bright light of curving river, canal and a stretch of lake between the bluffs. It is a landscape through which a cityscape bursts forth displaying its shapes and structures. All is designed to convey productive use of the land, to represent progress and prosperity, to celebrate the fulfillment of the American dream in nineteenth century America's Western Reserve.11

ENDNOTES

1. Biographical information about John Heckewelder, a discourse on his travels, his map and letter of January 12, 1796 are found in Mildred M. Walmsley and Mary Lou Conlin, The Heckewelder Map 1796 (Cleveland: The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1968), 1-17; Thomas Smith, The Mapping of Ohio (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1977), 133-141.


3. The Mather family interests in the Western Reserve and the letter of Samuel Mather are described by Constance Mather Bishop, "The Mather Family: Part II The Western Reserve Pioneers" MS Interfolio Paper n.d., The Samuel Mather Family Papers, 1834-1967, MSS 3735, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio; Samuel Mather letter to his father, 11 August 1798, V.F Samuel Mather, Western Reserve Historical Society.

5. Simon Perkins House, WRHS #1808

6. Margaret Butler *A Pictorial History of the Western Reserve 1796 to 1860* (Cleveland, The Early Settlers Association of the Western Reserve and The Western Reserve Historical Society, 1963), 4-5; Log Cabin Birthplace of President Garfield, Orange, Ohio, WRHS #71.1551.

7. Christine E. Edwards and Dean M. Zimmerman, "A Fresh Look: American Paintings in the Western Reserve Historical Society" in *The Eleventh Annual Western Reserve Antiques Show, Exhibition Catalogue* (Cleveland: 1986), 56; Butler, 12; Northwest Part of Public Square with the Cleveland Grays, 1839. WRHS #75.67.5.


9. Cleveland-Columbus Street Bridge, WRHS #41.2456; Sarah Ruth Watson and John R. Wolfs, *Bridges of Metropolitan Cleveland Past and Present* (Cleveland: American Society of Civil Engineers, 1981), 4-7.

10. Ohio Canal South of Cleveland, WRHS #56.810.

11. Edwards and Zimmerman, 57; View of Cleveland, WRHS #42.88.