

The Rocky Mountains by Currier and Ives (Fanny Palmer)

Print Facts

- Medium: 2 stone lithograph, hand colored
- Date: 1866
- Size: 17.7" X 25.13 "
- Location:
- Period:
- Style:
- Genre: American landscape
- Long train of oxen-drawn wagons cross plains
- women and children inside wagons
- men ride on horses or walk alongside wagons
- two Indian guides on horseback stand to right
- high mountains rise above them.

Artist Facts

- Currier and Ives were two partners who owned a printing business in New York City. They employed many artists; this painting was by Fanny Palmer.
- Fanny Palmer was born in England in 1812 and died in 1876 in Brooklyn.
- She was the daughter of an attorney and attended a fine school for girls in Liecester, England known as Miss Linwood's School in London.
- Fanny Palmer is known as the first female American artist. She worked for Currier and Ives.
- It is estimated Fanny Palmer created over 200 scenes for Currier and Ives, although she rarely signed her work.
- When she did sign her work she used the initials F.F. Palmer to disguise the fact that she was a woman, since it was largely unacceptable for a woman to be working in the professional world.
- Her husband, a tavern keeper, died suddenly in 1859, ironically falling drunken down a flight of stairs in a hotel in Brooklyn.
- After experiencing financial trouble, her family moved from England to New York in 1843, where she began work for Currier and Ives.
- Currier and Ives was a very successful printmaking firm that operated from 1834-1907 in NYC. Nathaniel Currier founded the business in 1834 and in 1852 he brought his brother-in-law, James Ives, into the business and renamed the firm Currier & Ives five years later. (Some say in 1834 he went in on a partnership with Stodart, but it only lasted one year. Then in 1835 he established his own business.)
- Currier & Ives prints were hand-colored. They were neither lithographed in color nor printed in color, but lithographed and printed in just one color of ink and then colored by hand afterward.
- In the Currier & Ives shop the stock prints were colored by a staff of about twelve young women, all trained colorists and mostly of German descent. They worked at long tables from a model set

up in the middle of the table, where it was visible to all. The models, many of which were colored by Louis Maurer and Fanny Palmer, were all first approved by one of the partners. Each colorist applied only one color and, when she had finished, passed the print on to the next worker, and so on until it was fully colored. The print would then go to the woman in charge, known as the "finisher," who would touch it up where necessary. The colors used were imported from Austria and were the finest available, especially valued because they did not fade in the light.

- When large numbers of the rush stock prints were needed, extra help was called in. Then stencils would be cut for the various colors and the extras would wash in the colors. The prints could then be touched up by the regular girls. The larger folios were sent out in lots with models to regular colorists who worked outside the shop. Usually twelve prints from one of the large folio plates were sent out at a time. These outside colorists were often indigent young artists who earned a modest living at this kind of work while awaiting the recognition of their own work. It is said that Currier & Ives paid one cent apiece to colorist for the small prints, and one dollar for coloring twelve of the large folios. Other reports say \$6.00 for each 100 prints.
- Later technology made it possible to produce colored lithographs, which had a more "painted" effect.
- Currier and Ives used the drawings of many celebrated artists of the day.
- Currier and Ives was the most successful lithograph company and covered every area of American life—hunting, fishing, winter scenes, the Mississippi, still lifes, politics, rail roads, etc.
- Currier and Ives prints were among the most popular wall hangings of their day.
- Currier and Ives prints are now highly prized as collectibles.
- A lithograph (from the Greek for "stone drawing") is a print produced from a design drawn onto a limestone surface. The lithographic process relies on the principle that water and grease do not mix. The design is drawn, in mirror image, onto the surface of the limestone with a grease pencil or crayon. The surface of the drawing is covered with water and then with greasy ink, which adheres to the lines of the drawing. A damp sheet of paper is placed on top of the stone and placed in a special press. The pressure of the press transfers the drawing onto the piece of paper, but in reverse of the original design.
- Currier & Ives printed 2 to 3 images every week for 64 years and is believed to have produced more than 7500 different lithographic prints.
- For more info on lithography and Currier & Ives visit <http://www.ifpda.org/content/node/581>
- Currier (1813-88) was left to support his mother and four children at the age of 8 (along with his older brother, 11) when his father unexpectedly died.
- Currier worked odd jobs and then apprenticed with a lithographer at the age of 15.
- James Merritt Ives was initially hired as a bookkeeper in 1852. Five years later he became Currier's partner because he showed himself to be unusually adept at combining features from various sketches into a well-designed composition. This was important because so many of the prints came from the work of more than one artist.
- The company was eventually liquidated in 1907 when other methods of producing art (including photography) made lithographs less in demand.

Key Concept to Teach

- **Landscape** art is a term that covers the depiction of natural scenery such as mountains, valleys, trees, rivers, and forests, and especially art where the main subject is a wide view, with its elements arranged into a coherent composition. Sky is almost always included in the view, and weather is often an element of the composition.

Possible Questions and Suggestions to Teach Landscape

- What elements of nature can you identify in this painting?
- What sounds would you hear if you were in this painting?
- How does the artist depict the sky? The running water of the river?
- What would the weather be like?
- How did the artist paint the sky? Is a storm coming?
- Do you think the water in the river would be warm or cold? (Probably cold! The mountains look like they still have snow on them.)

Keywords

- Landscape, perspective, line, color

Other Possible Questions

- What do you see in this painting?
- Do you see any animals?
- Do you see any people? What are the people doing?
- What are the Indians doing?
- What do you think it would have been like to live in the west then?
- What sounds do you think you would hear if you were here?
- What is the mood of this painting? Busy? Serene? Calm? Chaos?
- Do you think the people in this painting are working hard or having fun or both?
- Cover up the bottom half of the painting. What do you see in this painting? What do you think is at the base of the mountains? What colors do you see? Uncover painting. Now what do you see? What colors?
- Are the wagons in the front smaller or bigger than the ones in the back? Why is that?
- Is the wagon train standing still or moving? How can you tell?