

Americana

A Selection of 19th Century American Folk Art



Fritz Vogt: Drawn Home to Rural America



Figure 1. Fritz Vogt (1842–1900, Active 1890-1900)
Residence of Mr. and Mrs. Jas. W Parsons, Graphite pencil on paper, 19 ½" x 14 ½"

Fritz Vogt was a captivating figure in late 19th century American Folk Art. An architectural draftsman who drew charming portraits of homesteads across upstate New York, he worked mainly between 1890 and 1900. Vogt traveled the dirt roads and canal towns of five counties in New York State, rendering farmhouses, barns, churches, and shops in graphite and vibrant colored pencil and crayon.

Hundreds of Vogt's drawings chronicle the architecture and agriculture of late-19th century rural New York. The quirky distortions, bright crayon highlights, and lovingly drawn pets reflect a man bringing warmth to forms. Vogt was truly "on the road", sleeping in barns, hotels or the very homes he sketched, living the life of an artist-laborer paid in room and board or modest sums: some drawings cost just \$2, as indicated on their back.

Though self-taught, Vogt's trained eye emerges in the precision of windows, barns and rooflines. He cleverly distorts scale and perspective to amplify emotional content rather than strict realism. Fritz Vogt's drawings are testaments to an era, a region, and an itinerant man who translated rural pride into artworks. Vogt stood at the intersection of architecture and emotion, technique and folk impulse. In his colorful crayon and pencil homesteads, the flame of American rural identity—its labor, warmth, and quiet optimism—burns brightly.

Source: W. Parker Hayes, Jr. (2002) "Drawn Home: Fritz Vogt's Rural America"; *Antiques and The Arts Weekly*, May 28, 2002.

Charles F. Fisher: Louisiana Tigers on a Civil War Battlefield



Figure 2. Charles F. Fisher (1792-1873) Louisiana Tigers on a Civil War Battlefield
Oil on canvas, 31 ½" x 26"

Based on the signature and the distinct visual characteristics of the artwork, this painting is the work of Charles F. Fisher (also frequently recorded as Charles J. Fisher), a 19th-century artist who was born in Prussia (Germany) in 1792 and later settled in New Orleans, Louisiana, where he lived until his death in 1873.

Fisher is known for his primitive or Folk Art painting style. Because Fisher lived and worked in New Orleans, his historical paintings primarily center on local subjects. This painting shares identical compositional hallmarks with his most famous work, *Louisiana Civil War Zouaves on the Battlefield* (circa 1870), which is in the collection of the Louisiana State Museum. Civil War Zouaves were elite, French-inspired infantry known for their flashy uniforms and aggressive light-infantry tactics. Comprising over 100 volunteer regiments, the Zouaves fought in nearly every major battle—from First Manassas to Appomattox—often serving as fearless skirmishers on the front line.

The soldiers in our painting are the "Louisiana Tigers", a famous Confederate battalion known as brave but undisciplined shock troops. They wore distinctive, highly colorful Zouave-style uniforms that often included bright red shirts. The focal point of the painting—a soldier in a bright red shirt supporting a wounded comrade in blue—perfectly highlights this historical uniform. Fisher's *Tigers in a Civil War Battlefield* features a fallen soldier lying on the battlefield clasping a rifle, closely echoing the composition of Fisher's other Civil War battle scenes. Fisher's works are quite rare, and this one serves as an excellent example of a 19th-century American Folk Art depiction of the Civil War from a Louisianan perspective.

Heirlooms in Oil: American Children



Figure 3. Anonymous (Mid-19th century)
Three Girls in a Row Boat
Oil on canvas, 50" x 40"

This painting's distinct style, technique, and clothing details strongly suggest a mid-19th century Folk Art aesthetic. The composition features three young girls positioned in a small wooden rowboat on a tranquil body of water. Their stiff, somewhat flattened postures, relatively large heads, and stylized, almond-shaped eyes are characteristic of the naive or itinerant painters prevalent during the era.

The figures are formally dressed in off-the-shoulder gowns typical of the period's fashion for children. On the left, a seated child in a rich blue dress with white lace trim gently holds a wooden oar. In the center, a standing child with lighter hair wears a white dress adorned with pink ribbons and delicately holds a slender, budding branch. On the right, a third child, clad in a tiered, coral-peach gown, holds a thick rope that is tethered to the vessel.

Behind the girls, a muted landscape of rolling hills, trees, and distant mountains under a softly clouded sky adds depth. This charming piece beautifully preserves both the innocence of its subjects and the earnest aesthetic of 19th-century vernacular art.



Figure 4. Anonymous (Mid-19th century)
Boy with Straw Hat and Bow
Oil on canvas 35 1/2" x 42 1/2"

This full-length portrait of a young boy by an anonymous artist is rendered with a characteristic, flattened perspective and the endearing stiffness typical of naive portraiture. The boy features carefully styled hair distinguished by a prominent front curl. He is formally dressed for an outdoor excursion, wearing a tailored white shirt that is accented with bright red piping and paired with dark shorts that feature striking gold or brass-toned detailing along the sides. Reddish-brown stockings and sturdy black shoes firmly ground his stance within the stylized setting. The background opens into a lush, romanticized landscape.

A carefully curated arrangement of objects surrounds the boy. They serve as classic motifs of youth, play, and vitality. He holds the implements of archery, lightly gripping a slender arrow across his waist in his right hand while resting his left hand upon a tall, curved wooden bow that is planted on the earth. To his right, resting on the vibrant green turf, sits a finely woven straw hat trimmed with a light band and ribbon detail. A small, multi-colored ball rests next to the hat, adding a subtle pop of geometric shape to the foreground. These meticulously placed props balance the composition and reflect the idealized vision of childhood that was highly favored during the mid-19th century.

Heirlooms in Oil: American Children



Figure 5. Anonymous (Mid-19th century)
Girl Picking Roses
Oil on canvas, 36 ½" x 36 ½"

This enchanting 19th-century portrait shows a young girl situated within a lush, stylized garden setting, a hallmark of naive American Folk portraiture from the era. She stands centrally composed, gazing directly at the viewer with the distinctively earnest facial features that itinerant painters of the period often depicted. Firmly anchored in mid-19th century children's fashion, the girl is dressed in a vibrant, off-the-shoulder pink gown that features delicate white trim, a cinched waist, and a tiered skirt, with crisp white ruffled pantalettes visible above her shoes.

The narrative of the painting revolves around themes of youth and cultivated nature, conveyed gracefully through the girl's interaction with the surrounding flora. She is delicately engaged in gathering blooms into a distinctive footed, woven basket suspended from her right arm. She holds a single pink rose near her bodice while her left hand reaches toward another flower blooming on meticulously pruned rose bush. The foliage—with its patterned, almost flattened arrangement of leaves and vibrant pink blossoms—provides a highly decorative, rhythmic backdrop that emphasizes the charm of the sitter rather than strict botanical realism.

Heirlooms in Oil: American Children



Figure 6. Anonymous (Mid-19th Century)
Two Girls in a Classical Landscape Setting
Oil on canvas, 41 1/2" x 33 1/2"

This full-length double portrait of two young girls positioned on a classical stone terrace is a mid-century example of 19th-century elegance. The figure on the left wears an off-the-shoulder white dress that features ruffled tiers and a pale blue sash. She holds a closed, multi-colored parasol. Her left arm rests affectionately on her companion's shoulder. The figure on the right wears a pale-yellow dress with a broad, flat collar and a pink sash. She holds a woven basket that brims with pink and red flowers.

Both girls have identically styled dark hair that is parted in the center and smoothed flat over their ears. They wear white, lace-trimmed pantalettes and flat black slippers that are visible beneath their dresses.

The background is ambitious, featuring a heavy stone balustrade and a monumental classical urn to the left. Beyond the terrace, a somewhat stylized landscape features muted trees beneath a cloudy sky. A few cut flowers are scattered on the stone floor on the lower right.

The off-the-shoulder dresses, the wide flat collar on the yellow dress, and the central-parted, smoothed-down hairstyles are textbook indicators of the mid-19th century. The prominent white pantalettes that extend below the knee were a staple of young girls' fashion during the Antebellum period and particularly popular throughout the 1840s and early 1850s, before shifting silhouettes made them less visible.

Heirlooms in Oil: Portraits



Figure 7. Anonymous (19th century) Portrait of a Rhode Island Lady
Oil on canvas, 24" x 20"

Currently unattributed, though once suggested to be the work of a female schoolteacher, this compelling portrait depicts a woman from Newport, Rhode Island. In the absence of any information other than the sitter's location, and without decisive stylistic matches to any known early-American portrait painters, the names of the lady and her portraitist remain a mystery. But that's not all bad, since that compels us to look deeper at the painting itself.

Originally recorded as "Portrait of a Rhode Island Lady", this painting depicts a fresh-faced young woman dressed in a diaphanous lace shawl that has a cheerful, embroidered flower border. Her hair is styled with a fashionable tortoise shell comb, but she is not too showy or lavish. She seems sensible and likeable. There is something wise and solemn about her gaze.

Perhaps in the future, another portrait will turn up with a similar style that matches this painting closely enough to allow us to designate a limner for both, that is, an unnamed artist with a recognizable style. For now, this beautiful portrait retains all its mystery.



Figure 8. Aaron Dean Fletcher (1817-1902) Mr. Sanford of New York, Oil on canvas, 24" x 29"

The artist Aaron Dean Fletcher was, by all measures, a prodigy. Gifted in both music and the arts, he had an unusual aptitude for creative pursuits and lived a most exemplary life. His artistic ability grew and evolved each decade, morphing from Primitive Modernist flair in the 1830s, to quasi-Realism in the 1840s, to hyper-detailed works bordering on the academic in the 1850s. This portrait of Mr. Sanford of Willsboro, New York, matches the very best examples of Fletcher's 1840s style.

A stylish, handsome gentleman, the sitter rests his arm on a carved sofa, striking a casual pose. Fletcher has indicated the sofa with only a few dashes of his paintbrush, wasting no time; most of his attention is spent on capturing Mr. Sanford's pleasant face and fashionable hair. In the characteristic Fletcher manner, the face is angled at a pronounced three-quarters view, with strongly modeled features and dramatic use of light and shadow.

Most noticeably of all, Fletcher's gift and aptitude extended to the technical details of his medium: Fletcher was so adept at crafting his paints that his portraits display nearly no craquelure. Though this painting remains unsigned, there is every hallmark of Fletcher's authorship in material and style. No doubt Mr. Sanford would have been pleased with this flattering likeness.

Heirlooms in Oil: Landscapes



Figure 9. Circle of Thomas Chambers (1808–1869)
Castles along the Rhine River, Germany
Oil on canvas 31 1/2" x 23 1/2"

This lake landscape is painted in the highly distinctive style of Thomas Chambers (1808–1869). Chambers and his circle of followers occupy a unique and fascinating space in American Art, bridging the gap between the grand, romanticized vistas of the Hudson River School and the bold, expressive aesthetics of 19th-century American Folk Art. While Chambers' subjects were often conventional landscapes and marine views, his execution was highly individualized.

Chambers never traveled to Germany to paint the Rhine *en plein air* as depicted in this painting. He relied heavily on the booming 19th-century market for printed material. During this era, volumes of travel books were filled with steel engravings of European scenery, such as Tombleson's *Views of the Rhine*, and widely circulated in the United States.

Chambers would take a small, black-and-white engraving of a Rhine River scene and use it as a foundational template, often painting multiple versions. The connection to our artist's painting lies in a shared process of transformation that strips away the strict, academic realism of the original European engraving and infuses the scene with Chambers' signature American Folk Art aesthetic. The artist added the dramatic, candy-colored skies; the bold, unblended lighting; and the heavily stylized, scalloped trees, as seen in this fine painting.



Figure 10. J. Breen (1813–1884)
Shaker Buildings Watervliet, New York
Oil on canvas, 24 1/2" x 15 1/2"
Inscribed verso: "Shaker Building Watervliet New York, Green Island, Green"

According to an inscription on the canvas, this painting depicts the buildings of the Watervliet Shaker community. Located near Albany, New York, the City of Watervliet holds a profound historical significance as the first Shaker settlement in America. It was founded in 1776 by the sect's leader, Mother Ann Lee.

The large, multi-story structure that dominates the center of this artwork is likely a communal dwelling house. Its architecture is characteristically Shaker: highly functional, unadorned, and strictly symmetrical. The abundance of windows, accented with green shutters, maximized natural light and ventilation. The multiple red brick chimneys indicate the use of individual woodstoves to heat the many distinct living quarters inside.

On the right, a classic red barn and a long, low shed highlight the agricultural and industrious nature of the Shaker community. The Shakers were highly regarded for their farming, seed businesses, and craftsmanship.

Tiny, indistinct figures can be seen standing on the covered porch of the main building. They appear to wear dark, simple clothing consistent with traditional Shaker dress codes. Near the red barn, a horse and wagon further root the scene in the 19th or early 20th century, prior to the widespread use of automobiles.

This painting is executed in a Folk Art or Naive style. This suggests that the artist, J. Breen, was likely self-taught or untrained in formal, academic painting techniques.

Heirlooms in Wood and Stoneware



Figure 11. Shaker Oval Box in Red Paint
Initialed "M. E." on bottom.
5 1/2" wide x 2 1/8" high

This is a classic Shaker oval box, distinguished by its warm, vibrant red painted finish. The box features a smooth, continuous wooden band that forms its iconic oval shape, topped with a precisely fitted flat lid, copper points and tacks, and nicely shaped swallow-tail fingers. The box retains its original red paint, although you can observe a naturally aged patina along the edges of the lid and the base, giving the piece proof of its historical character and practical use.



Figure 12. Attributed to Nicolas van Wickle
Stoneware Jar, circa 1825.
14" high

This impressive three-gallon stoneware jar presents a classic early American ovoid form incised with floral decoration and strongly characteristic of ceramics originating from Old Bridge, Manasquan, New Jersey.

The jar's tooled shoulder, applied handles, and incised cobalt blue highlights that show a decorative flowering plant are typical of stoneware made by Nicolas van Wickle, to whom this piece is attributed.



Figure 13. Edmond Chatigny (1895-1992) Moose with Birds
Wood and paint, 31" long x 29" high

Upon retiring and handing his Quebecois ranch over to his four boys, Edmond Chatigny strongly suspected that time would weigh heavily on him. He remembered how, as a young man, he would take his knife and whittle, and so he started whittling again simply to pass the time, not because he thought he could sell his work. He undoubtedly also remembered his mother telling him "...that he would do something" with his life as he let his imagination run wild in his later years.

Edmond Chatigny's works are quite easily recognizable by the colors that are almost always present on his pieces: green, white, red, and brown. His birds are also distinctive; sometimes they are standalone figures, but very often they are attached to somewhat whimsical assemblages, as seen with this large-antlered moose, another of his trademark figures. Edmond Chatigny bequeathed a highly interesting Folk Art cultural heritage to Quebec because each of his pieces—even when there are similarities—remains completely unique due to its originality, its breath of fresh air, and its great naivety.



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