

I spy. . .

by Deborah M. Child

Holding pride of place above the mantelpiece in the Sawtelle Reading Room, this painting is a masterpiece work by the Portsmouth-born John Samuel Blunt (1798-1835). It is a view looking east across Noble's Wharf over the Piscataqua River towards the shipyards. However, it is more than a topographical rendering as the artist has deftly captured the serene appearance of water under an early morning rising sun. This canvas will be featured in an upcoming article on Blunt's marine paintings to be published in the upcoming August/September issue of *Antiques and Fine Art* magazine — www.antiquesandfineart.com.

The author, Deborah M. Child, requests that anyone

who owns other historical views of the Piscataqua River, its docks or waterfront structures, contact her directly. She's also interested in any primary documentation about Blunt's grandfather, John Blunt (1734-1798), the pilot on Washington's Delaware crossing who in later years apparently provided ferry service to the mainland from Blunt Island — the family's island across from the present day Wentworth Hotel.



'I SPY'

View of Piscataqua River from Noble's Wharf
Oil on canvas. H: 26 inches; W: 33 inches
Signed and dated lower left "J. S. Blunt 1824"
Collection of the Portsmouth Athenæum
C06.509
Gift of Joseph and Jean Sawtelle

For those of you counting, since I commenced a catalogue raisonné on this artist in 2005, I now have 250 entries including paintings owned by descendants of the artist residing as far away as California.

Quips for the Curioso, cont.

alcohol and buried in a lead-lined coffin—was discovered March 31, 1905, in the Saint Louis cemetery "for foreign Protestants" near the Porte Saint Martin.

A long list of officials was involved in verifying that the coffin contained the body of John Paul Jones, who died at 45. Gen. Horace described the scrutiny as "the most scientific, painstaking and conscientious examination conceivable."

The forensic team procured two copies of a bust of Jones by the famous sculptor Houdon (a copy of this same sculpture is in the John Paul Jones house in Portsmouth) and took measurements for comparison to the corpse.

"Doctor Georges Papillault, with his delicate instruments, made all the necessary anthropometric measurements of the head, features, length of body, etc. and found them so entirely exact as to be convinced that the busts were made from the subject before him," the general reported.

There were other clues. The body was dressed in a ruffled linen shirt of "very fine workmanship." That corresponded to the "Admiral's fondness for dress," Porter wrote.

"To our intense surprise," Gen. Porter reported, "the body was marvelously well preserved, all the

flesh remaining intact, very slightly shrunken, and of a grayish brown or tan color."

During their autopsy, the physicians found indications that Jones had suffered from Bright's Disease, a kidney disorder. According to the eminent microscopist Dr. V. Cornil, the cause of death was "interstitial nephritis with fibrous degeneracy of the glomeruli of Malpighi."

Kidney failure would explain the symptoms Jones experienced, according to an account written by Col. Samuel Blackden of North Carolina, an intimate friend, witness of the admiral's will and pallbearer at his funeral.

"A few days before his death his legs began to swell, which proceeded upward to his body, so that for two days before his decease he could not button his waistcoat and had great difficulty in breathing."

The discovery of Jones' body came at a time when President Theodore Roosevelt was ruthlessly pursuing his dream of making America an international power. The body of John Paul Jones was just what the doctor, or rather, the president, ordered.

It was brought back to America with great pomp and circumstance and installed in the crypt of the U.S. Naval Academy chapel in Annapolis, Md., on April 24, 1906.