

# HUNTIA

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## HUNTIA

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HUNTIA is a yearbook devoted to studies of the literature on systematic botany and horticulture, botanical voyages and explorations, early agriculture, medical botany, and the related subjects of botanical biography, iconography, and bibliography.

While HUNTIA serves primarily as a record of investigations at The Hunt Botanical Library, its pages are open also to papers from scholars of other institutions.

*Editor: George H. M. Lawrence*

*Director, The Hunt Botanical Library*

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## John Walton (1834-1914): Artist

Bernard E. Harkness and Mabel G. Olney

THE ARRIVAL of a volume titled *A portfolio of flowers*, published by James Vick, edited by Charles Seelye, and illustrated by lithographs "from the originals by John Walton" gave rise to the inquiry, "who were James Vick, Charles Seelye, and, above all, John Walton?"<sup>1</sup>

James Vick's name has national recognition. He was a printer and newspaperman who, when he became interested in the commercial production and distribution of flower seeds, began publishing beautifully illustrated catalogues and magazines. His life spanned 1818 to 1882 and much of his adult life, and all of his connection with seeds and catalogues, was in Rochester, New York (for biography, see *Dictionary of American biography* 19: 264-265, 1936).

Charles Seelye was, for several decades, the catalogue editor for James Vick. Mrs. Vick was formerly Elizabeth Seelye, and Charles, probably, was Vick's brother-in-law. He was in charge of all editorial work for the firm and continued in that capacity for a long time after the death of James Vick.

The subject then of this brief study is the artist, John Walton. Who was he? Where, and in what media, did he work?

His name is not to be found in any known international directory of artists, nor in any American dictionary of art, artists, or illustrators to be found in the New York Public Library. As the *Portfolio of flowers* was published in Rochester (see Fig. 49), it seemed reasonable that he might be found in historical records in Rochester.

No John Walton appears in any of the numerous histories of Rochester or Monroe County, but Rochester is fortunate in having city directories that go back even before its incorporation in 1834. A surprising amount of information can be gained concerning an individual who worked and

<sup>1</sup> The copy here reported was a gift to the Hunt Botanical Library by the late Jane Quinby (1901-1965), whose family long resided in Rochester, N. Y., and from whom it came into her possession. Miss Quinby is the compiler of Volume 1 of the *Catalogue of botanical books in the collection of Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt* (Pittsburgh, 1958). For biographical account and portrait of Miss Quinby, see *Huntia* 2: 138-140, 1965. It is difficult to understand why this *Portfolio* is so rare, as apparently it is. The Hunt Botanical Library is anxious to learn of the locations of other copies.

lived in the city when that information is reinforced by an acquaintance with early Rochester geography.

By combining a brief biographical sketch, found almost by accident, with the information found in the directories, it is possible to write a fairly adequate account of John Walton's life and work. There are many gaps and it is possible that more information may yet be found.

John Walton was born in Newcastle-on-Tyne, England, on 14 January 1834. The name Walton was taken when he was adopted by an uncle and this leads to an interesting question: since there are many Waltons in the history of English art, was he a "poor relation" of some of these and did this induce him to follow the career he did? At any rate, he attended a Government School of Design and Art for two years and then was apprenticed to a house-painter in England for seven years.

In 1860 he came to the New World with his family and in 1863 to Rochester by way of Canada. Whether his family consisted of anyone besides a wife, no record indicates, nor do we know the wife's name.

His first employer was Frank VanDorn, a Rochester sign-painter. Fairchild's account of Walton reports, interestingly, "it was by Walton's work that the picture sign became popular."<sup>2</sup> This is a baffling statement, of the sort that is frequently found in the source material of social and art history. It raises the question: was the picture sign not in common use before 1860, and just what did the author mean by a picture sign?

For some reason John Walton's name does not appear in Rochester city directories published before 1867, though he was known to be working in the area from 1863 onward. In the directory for 1867 he is reported as John Walton: artist, boarder at 8 Sophia Street.<sup>3</sup> He is not, however, listed in that edition among artists, painters, etc., though eight such are listed for that year.

For the next four years John Walton was not listed in the directory, but this is readily explainable. In the 1860's the city limits were not so extensive as they have been since about 1916; many persons lived and worked outside the city and were thus excluded from the directory. The suburban directories existed at an early date, but they were spotty and not inclusive.

In 1871 John Walton, artist, was found working at 62 State Street and living on East Avenue near the city line. James Vick's establishment was then at the State Street address, and Goodman Street was the eastern city line. A very short distance east of this city line, on East Avenue, was where

<sup>2</sup> Fairchild, H. L. "Memoirs of Deceased Fellows: John Walton" *Proc. Rochester Acad. Sci.* 5: 173-174. 1919. [Read in December, 1918.]

<sup>3</sup> *Boyd's Rochester Directory*. Rochester, N. Y., Waite Bros. & Co. compilers. 1866-1867.

Portfolio

...of...

Rare and Beautiful Flowers.

...from...

ORIGINAL WATER-COLOR SKETCHES,

Painted from Nature.



• JAMES VICK, SEEDSMAN, •

Rochester, N. Y.



Fig. 43. Title-page facsimile (reduced), Seelye, *Portfolio of rare and beautiful flowers* (1885).  
Hunt Botanical Library copy

James Vick's farm was established. Today's Rochesterians will know the area when learning that it is that of the two streets named Vick Park A and Vick Park B.

For several years, although his home address changed annually, Walton's working connection with Vick is stated firmly. But in 1878 a startling change appears, there was no listing for John Walton, artist, but instead it was for John Walton, pastor of Hedding Mission Church. Interestingly enough, though, his study was at 62 State Street, probably an example of Mr. Vick's philanthropy. This is the only year that such information appears; the following year we again find John Walton, artist, although the home address was close to the Hedding Mission Church.

By 1881 John Walton resided at 327 East Avenue. This was the address of the Vick Farm "out East Avenue," as it is still remembered by elderly residents. Although the spot is remembered as the Vick Farm, James Vick himself lived a very short time after the historic move. He died May 16, 1882 and apparently John Walton immediately left the employ of the firm. For the first time Walton's name appears in the list of artists, painters, etc. There were now 37 such, an interesting figure in contrast to that of 1867, when only eight were listed. The population of the city had not quintupled in less than twenty years, yet the number of artists did so. It is very significant of the activity in Rochester in the graphic arts.

In 1883, for the first and only time, John Walton was listed as a Rochester businessman. A large, brave advertisement appeared in the 1883 directory (p. 733), which read, in part: "Walton & Somerville, Designers and Engravers on wood and metal. Copper Plate Printers . . . Natural History Draughtsmen and colorists, book covers, show bills . . . to order . . . floriculture a specialty . . . 79 and 80 Reynolds Arcade."<sup>4</sup> The next year John Walton appeared, without a partner, at the same address and then for several years disappeared from the directory once more.

At about this same time he received the only newspaper recognition which so far has been discovered. In the Rochester *Post-Express* for 23 December 1882 (p. 4, col. 4), a reporter wrote an account titled "A Tour Among the Studios or What Rochester Artists are Doing with Brush and Canvas." There he mentioned the prospect of an exhibition by the Art Club. No subsequent mention has been found of such an exhibit or where it was held. It is interesting to note that only five Rochester artists were considered, among them were James Somerville and John Walton. Concerning John Walton, the account says, "Mr. Walton, who is quite a naturalist,

<sup>4</sup> *Rochester Directory*. Rochester, N. Y., Drew, Allys, & Co., 1883.

will on the fifth sail from New York to Florida where he will remain for some time and will sketch, make notes, study the conchology of the beach and the flora of the lands, while at the same time he recuperates." No intimation was given concerning from what the 48-year-old Walton was recuperating. This was the same year that James Vick died and that Walton and Somerville undertook their business enterprise.

As this is the account of John Walton, artist, and not of the Reverend John Walton, no attempt has been made to discover exactly when or where his various charges were. Dr. Fairchild stated that his period of ministry was from 1864 to 1886 and does not elaborate upon the statement other than "in and out of Rochester and as far as Tomaqua, Pennsylvania."

However that may be, 1886 found Walton back in Rochester's Reynolds Arcade, two doors from his address when with James Somerville. The following year he was back at the original address, but with no mention of Somerville; then, once more he "disappeared" for several years. The directory of 1890 indicated that James Vick Co. was in business at 343 East Avenue. James Vick's widow was still living, and Mr. Seelye was still editor, but John Walton was not mentioned.

In 1891 John Walton reappeared as employed by James Vick Co. and so remained for two or three years. Mr. Seelye was listed in the directory of that year as an "editor," but showed no connection with the James Vick Co. and was not listed in any Rochester directory after 1896.

John Walton had an unidentifiable North St. Paul Street address in 1897, and then in 1898 appeared at 20 College Avenue. Almost any "old Rochesterian" would recognize this later address. In fact, it would be recognized in many parts of the world, for it was the home of Ward's Natural Science Establishment. It occupied a large segment of the block immediately back of the old University of Rochester campus. It would be a most logical location for one of John Walton's talents and it is puzzling why the connection was so brief. If it is true that Walton made anatomical drawings for surgeons, he probably made some of the beautiful biological studies published by Ward's.

From 1900 to 1906 John Walton, the artist, appeared regularly in the directories with different addresses, both residence and business. Then in 1906 there occurred what might be termed a population explosion of John Waltons; three are listed, and it is only a conjecture which is the artist, if any. One is cited as "removed to Barnard" (an early suburb); John Walton, painter, worked at 78 State Street and lived at 272 West Avenue; John N. Walton, clergyman, lived at 149 Ravine Street. We might assume this to be the artist if it were not for the initial "N"; this is the only time it appears.

## PUBLISHERS' NOTE.

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In presenting to the public this fascicle of artistic representations of some of the beautiful forms of nature, the publishers desire to give full credit to C. W. SEELYE, Editor of VICK'S *Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, for the inception and the editorial work of the Portfolio.

The artist whose pencil and brush have supplied us the originals of these plates is Mr. JOHN WALTON, whose long experience in flower painting has given him a facility that must be admitted to be of high merit.

Our thanks are due to W. S. KIMBALL, Esq., of this city, for free access to his large and valuable collection of plants; as, also, for the courtesy of his gardener, Mr. GEO SAVAGE, a noted cultivator of Orchids and other tropical plants, whose able advice in the selection of some of the subjects was kindly given.

The skill of Messrs. ARMSTRONG & Co., of Cambridge, Massachusetts, who have worked these forms in stone and reproduced them in oil, the public will undoubtedly fully appreciate

In conclusion, we will add that if this Portfolio meets with a generous reception, as we believe it will, we hope at the close of the next year to prepare and issue another fascicle of plates.

JAMES VICK, SEEDSMAN.

ROCHESTER, *December 18, 1885.*

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Fig. 44. Facsimile of Publishers' Note, *Portfolio of rare and beautiful flowers* (1885).



The John Walton, painter, is obviously another person, as he is listed at the same address until his death in 1909.

In 1911 John Walton, artist, reappeared and remained for two years at 292 Clinton Avenue, South. It is definitely known that by this time he was working for the Rochester Park Board and that address would indicate that he could easily go to Highland Park where he did much of his sketching.

The last address reported for him is 3 Ravine Street. What connection, if any, this has with the former one of 149 Ravine Street, is not known.

John Walton's name appears for the second and last time in a Rochester newspaper when his obituary was printed 15 May 1914. The account stated that he died Wednesday, 13 May, aged 80 years, that he had been the artist for James Vick for more than twenty years and that "until failing powers compelled his resignation he was employed by the Park Board to paint the bird and other signs that ornament the cages of the zoo." The account stated neither where he died, nor where he was buried, nor were any survivors reported.

The Rochester Bureau of Vital Statistics is able to confirm this brief notice and can add that he died in the County Hospital, attended by Dr. Smith and that he was buried Friday, 15 May in Mount Hope Cemetery, survived by a wife, no name.

The records at Mount Hope Cemetery do not add much more. They confirm that he was buried on 15 May and cite the name of the undertaker (whose records are no longer available), but no mention is given of an officiating clergyman or of survivors. The lot in which John Walton was buried apparently belonged to a family named Sweeting, though several other names are present on headstones and the cemetery records give no clue as to possible relationships. The plot was not one owned by a church, though there were such at that time. There is no stone or marker now of any kind in the Sweeting plot to indicate that anyone named John Walton was ever buried there.

A statement in the obituary that he was connected with Asbury Methodist Church caused a search at that institution for more information. His name was found in the membership rolls; in 1896 John Walton and Mrs. Susie Walton joined the church. The relationship of John to Susie was not noted. No other mention of Walton appeared except his death notice, which omits any mention of burial details. Interestingly enough, the Bureau of Vital Statistics lists him as John Walton, artist; the cemetery lists him as the Reverend John Walton.

Four years after John Walton's death he was eulogized by Dr. Herman Fairchild in a paper read before the Rochester Academy of Science and

afterwards published. In this sketch the connections with James Vick, Ward's Natural Science Establishment, and the Park Board are mentioned. There is none of the sadly detractive tone of the newspaper obituary, no mention of "zoo signs." Rather, Dr. Fairchild extols him for his sweet, gentle character and speaks of the great number of flowers painted by him from life in the woods and fields.

It is quite apparent that John Walton was a naturalist as well as an artist. He was for some time Curator of Conchology of the Rochester Academy of Science and upon presenting his own collection of shells to them he was made a life member. It is recorded that he wrote two papers on conchology which the Academy published in their Proceedings, and that in 1897 he read a paper (unpublished) on the fertilization of orchids. Association with Rochester botanists in the Academy stimulated one of Walton's unrealized hopes to have published a volume of drawings of the wild flowers of the region. Dr. Fairchild indicated that originals of these were distributed among the members of the botany section of the Academy, but none have been brought to light.

The location of the original paintings which are reproduced by color lithography in the *Portfolio of flowers* is unknown; possibly they no longer exist, although they may yet be found here in Rochester. Only the Hunt copy of the *Portfolio of flowers* has so far been located, in Rochester or in New York City. A systematic search may yet reveal one elsewhere, in a library or private collection, but librarians and curators in Rochester accustomed to other Vick publications and interested in Rochester imprints have never seen one.

The largest collection of Walton drawings, without doubt, is owned by the Monroe County Department of Parks. Over two hundred water colors, many only partially completed, range in subject from conservatory plants to the outdoor grown trees, shrubs, herbaceous plants, and bulbs. Several are botanical studies of twigs in winter. Though perhaps thought at the time to be the last efforts of an old man who was a retired minister, these may now be considered the culmination of a lifetime of observation and practice by an accomplished botanical illustrator.

Recently some of these were exhibited at the Rush Rhees Library of the University of Rochester, where their delicacy and beauty and great variety attracted and amazed a large number of viewers. A new name—John Walton—nearly forgotten, has been resurrected and added to the list of nineteenth-century botanical artists.



Fig. 45. *Passiflora decaisneana* (*P. alata* × *P. quadrangularis*), by John Walton, in *Portfolio of rare and beautiful flowers* (1885).

Hunt Botanical Library copy