

2018

The Indian Artist 1938

Fannie Hardy Eckstorm

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/eckstorm_papers



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#), [History Commons](#), and the [Linguistics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Eckstorm, Fannie Hardy, "The Indian Artist 1938" (2018). *Fannie Hardy Eckstorm Papers*. Submission 45.
https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/eckstorm_papers/45

This Book is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Fannie Hardy Eckstorm Papers by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

The Indian Artist

The oil painting in St. Anne's Church, Indian Island, Oldtown, has been the subject of some speculation, but the identity of the artist is proved by an article printed in the Penobscot Journal, of Bangor, for Tuesday, October 4, 1831 (Vol. 1, no. 9).

The article is quoted from the Juvenile Miscellany for January and February, 1831, a periodical not identified, but probably published in Boston. It says the Indian Artist "is again in town".

"This young man is the third son of John Osson, one of the chief men of the Penobscot tribe; the remnant of which reside on a beautiful island in Penobscot river, about twelve miles above Bangor." His name is Paul Joseph Osson, or in Indian Pool Susup

The article says that in 1828 a new priest settled among the Penobscots and started a school of about a hundred young Indians. "They learned reading and writing, many Latin words and some Canadian French. In writing the pupils made astonishing progress". The priest was no doubt Rev. Virgil Barbour, the date of whose coming to Oldtown had been undetermined.

The writer goes on to tell of a school exhibition which he attended on the island. "At this exhibition Osson first attracted attention, by his fine figure, ingenuous countenance, melodious voice, and uncommon improvement in reading and writing. In conversation he showed intelligence unusual in comparison with his tribe; and his manners were very respectful. The Penobscots seemed to look upon him with uncommon interest. They elected him Deacon; a title which he still retains among them

"This school continued but little more than three months. At the end of that time Osson returned to his Indian habits of hunting and fishing and pursued them without interruption for about a year. He then made a visit to Bangor, and some other towns

in the course of which his attention was arrested by the engravings he saw for sale in the stores. The delight he evinced induced some gentlemen to take him to a painter's room, to see a collection of portraits.

"From that time painting seemed to take possession of his whole soul. He employed himself continually in sketching figures upon wood and bark.

"The Priest, perceiving the bent of his genius furnished him with conveniences to practice his beloved art. He chose a variety of subjects-- flowers, figures, animals, vessels, houses, and some miniature likenesses of his tribe. Some of his landscapes were done with wonderful accuracy. His rapid progress soon attracted attention and last summer, some bangor gentlemen obtained the consent of his parents to place him under the care of some one who could instruct him. He is now with an artist at Bangor, who declares his progress to be highly satisfactory. He is about eighteen years of age. It is yet uncertain how far the experiment will succeed, but should he prove to be a real genius, how the world will stare at the Indian Artist!"

Thus far the writer of 1831. It shows conclusively that Paul Joseph Osson was the third son of John Osson, a chief of the penobscots; that he was born about 1812, was not uneducated and did receive instruction in art from a resident bangor artist, who could have been none other than Jeremiah Pearson Hardy, the portrait painter, who at that time had a studio at the lower end of York Street, near the Penobscot Exchange site.

The altar piece in St. Anne's was painted by him. Many years ago Sister Cecelia tried to find for me the identity of the painter of this picture and Mrs. Cecelia Barker, the oldest woman in the tribe, and others, said that they thought Pool

Susep painted it. He never married, they said, but lived to a good age and in his later years lived in a room back of the church, where he was very faithful in serving the church, a kind and gentle old man.

The picture, which represents the Crucifixion is painted on cotton cloth, two strips being sewed together to make the canvass. The coloring is rich and good, the drawing not crude. "A very interesting picture", remarked a New York artist who saw it thirty years ago. It was then stored in the sacristy behind the church. It had long hung as an altar-piece and the older Indians had a great reverence for it; but the march of improvement caused its removal from the place of honor in the chancel. It is well that it has been restored to the Church, though not to its former place. It now hangs on the north wall near the front of the church.

One other record of the artist has been found. In the Penobscot Journal for Jan. 3, 1832, there is an advertisement inserted by the Indians who adhered to Gov^r. John Atean, when there was a split in the tribe. Among the signers ^{is} Paul Sousep John Orson, that is, Paul Susep, son of John Orson. This is proof that at this time he was above eighteen years of age, the legal voting age among our Indians at that time. There is no record of his death unless upon the Church registers. Nor is anything known of his art work except the painting in St. Anne's.

August 18, 1938

Fannie Hardy Eckstorm