Constable, the Forgotten Genius

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Michael K. Tarver Residence
By Bonnie CRONE

New Orleans is a town rich in French heritage. However, few people realize that it was actually a French Canadian, Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne de Bienville, who founded the famous city. Bienville's father, Charles Le Moyne, was a native of Dieppe who had emigrated to Canada. He was a young man and had made a fortune in trading. He was versed in Indian languages and received many estates in exchange for his services. One of these was Longueuil, opposite Montreal, and when the King raised him to nobility he took the title of Sieur de Longueuil. Each of his twelve sons was given a separate one. Bienville established a colony on the lower Mississippi, entered the French navy, rapidly rising to a rank of admiral. His brother, Bienville, accompanied him and on March 2, 1718, while the Spanish, Americans, and other forces fought, the French Quarter was captured. Iberville became a great hero in Canada. He had crossed the Strait of Belle-Ise, rapidly rising to a command, and during the War of the League of Augsburg was one of the few French commanders who fought in the English with success. During the French Revolution, Iberville, who founded the Vieux-Carré, was called to France, where King Louis appointed him to lead the expedition which was to found New Orleans. Iberville settled on a farm with a crew of Canadians on two frigates, the Badine and the Marin. His brother, Iberville, accompanied him and on March 2, 1718, the French Canadian explorers discovered the mouth of the Mississippi River. Seven years later, in 1720, Iberville died of a yellow fever attack. Bienville continued to explore the area, although it was not until 1718 that he led a party of about 50 men up the Mississippi River to a site he called Port-Bourgeois, where he landed and began to clear the ground of trees and brush to build crude shelters. The new town was officially named Nouvelle-Orléans, or New Orleans, in the name of the King of France's grand-uncle, Philippe, Duc d'Orléans, Regent of France.

A French engineer, Adrien de Pauger, arrived in the colony in 1720, and he laid out the initial settlement which was called Vieux-Carré, or French Quarter as it is known to-day. The city was designed as a French mediaeval town with a central square facing the Mississippi. The Place d'Armes, now called Jackson Square, the church, government office, and official residence, fronts the square. The streets of the Vieux-Carré were laid out in a grid from the square and the area comprised approximately 100 blocks. The first homes were crudely built of ship's cypress slabs and palmetto thatched. However, later buildings were much more elaborate. The warm-spirited Frenchmen lived good lives importing everything from fine chandeliers to fine French antiques in the double parlors. Most of the furniture dates back to the grandeur of Louis XV and XVI. An outstanding Bergere suite of furniture is featured in the second parlor. The marble-top tables are Louis XV. Focal point of the parlor is an Empire secretary of fine mahogany inlaid with a leather writing surface. The table on the left of the Louis XVI canapé is also Empire, while the table on the right of the Louis XVI canapé is a marble top and brass gallery-rail. The two lamps on each side of the canapé are French bronzes, and the pair of lamps next to the fireplace is Empire glass with an Egyptian-influenced goldleaf design.

French accessories are used in the room, including pillows covered in original Louis XVI needle-point tapestry on the canapé, and a pair of fine candlesticks from the same period on the fireplace. Prints on either side of the fireplace are Paris Dans Sa Splendour. The rugs in the double parlors are copies of Aubusson rugs made in France, especially for Mr. Tarver. The chandelier is from Belgium. A Victorian screen adorns the corner. The walls in the double parlors are painted green-mauve and the woodwork is white.

In the dining-room Mr. Tarver chose to use a warm orange sherbet colour on the walls to create a sense of warmth. He chose a combination of monochromatic in the double parlors. A fruitwood Louis XVI buffet with steel hardware is the only other furniture in the room. An eighteenth century oval painting hangs over the buffet. It is titled "Fête champêtre." The brass chandelier is American. Floors are of brick. Chinese porcelain plates are featured on the mantel.

The bedroom is actually a multi-purpose room that also serves as a study and a sitting-room. A handsome stove-covered screen hides the brass bed and acts as a backdrop for the Louis XVI desk. The cove ceiling is coffered with a marble top and brass gallery-rail. The two lamps on each side of the canapé are French bronzes, and the pair of lamps next to the fireplace is Empire glass with an Egyptian-influenced goldleaf design.

The room is a cream colour and the carpet is a needle-point design in grey.

Constable, The Forgotten Genius?

By Jean-Loup BOURGET

Constable was born in 1776, a year after Turner. His bicentenary will be celebrated in London (Tate Gallery, February-March 1976) with great splendour, as was that of Turner. But the Turner commemorations (the enormous exhibition at the British Museum, the Academy and the Tate Gallery, and soon followed by an exhibition at the British Museum in the Royal Academy and the Tate Gallery) gave rise to numerous peremptory and unjustified statements to the
general effect that Turner is the greatest English painter, the only British painter of international stature. Ten years ago, David Piper spoke about the greatness of "the three geniuses of English Romantic painting: Constable, Turner and Blake". He added that, while Constable might not have been the author of the best individual works, he was nevertheless the most important of all British painters (Painting in England, 1968). To which one could add Blake and Turner, each in his own way. As I have already said, the fact is that Turner subordinates, first and foremost, to the (neo-classical) concept of the Sublime. This category is a totally intellectual one, and thus foreign to Constable, who is a meditative but not a transcendent painter. To make a fashion of the Sublime, it is necessary, in this case, not only to see it, but also to feel it. In the end, Turner's aesthetic is quarterly held view of Turner and Constable as "precursors" of impressionism lacks any real basis. Some of Turner's canvases are undeniably "abstract". Let it be said, however, that this can never be said of Constable and is not exclusive to Turner. His intentions (the Sublime is always in mind) have nothing in common with the fundamentally realistic aims of the impressionists. Constable's position is different. There can be no doubt that he was concerned with the same order as were Monet and others, but in terms of form, Constable's nature is not without its surprises. Witness the astonishing Study of Tree Trunks (c. 1821, Victoria and Albert Museum), "shot" from above, which heralds Calliotte's composition (Boulevard du Haut, 1880, or those of Bonnard or Vuillard, a technique generally ascribed to "Japanese influence".)

A more intimate acquaintance with Constable's work will reveal that the epithet which best describes him is not "impressionistic", but, in fact, expressionist. This is particularly evident in some pictures of his maturity: Sketch for Hadleigh Castle (1829), for example, the calmness of the sketches, the daring impressionistic leanings, it might be that they would have rendered admirably the eternal pools and rain of Lorraine. The very thickness of the paint, in so far as it is "impressionistic" at all, evokes such painters as Monticelli or Ziem (the study for The Leaping Horse). The Leaping Horse (Tate Gallery), for example, or the study for The Hanging Horse (c. 1825, Victoria and Albert) gives a foetor of Jack B. Yeats by its texture (the nervous brushwork, and by its composition (in the foreground, a brownish mass, restless trees and sky), that in some scenes huss brought out by two patches of brilliant red) and by its subject (the horse, the crackling), and the Sublime Rainbow (1812, Victoria and Albert), with its leader, reminds one of a "non-formal" composition by Fautrier. If certain works suggest impressionist leanings, it might be that they evoke the ceramics of the Paris-Auteuil workshop. The link is the grainy texture and the "moiré" effect which is such an important element in Constable's art. In turn, Constable's position is different. There can be no doubt that he was concerned with the same order as were Monet and others, but in terms of form, Constable's art is not without its surprises. Witness the astonishing Study of Tree Trunks (c. 1821, Victoria and Albert Museum), "shot" from above, which heralds Calliotte's composition (Boulevard du Haut, 1880, or those of Bonnard or Vuillard, a technique generally ascribed to "Japanese influence".

At times, this art based on the humility of the naturalist approach reaches clearly visionary heights. It is a false humility, to be sure, since it derives from a highly principled sense of inwardness, and explains Constable's almost abstract谭ues with the fundamental needs of the socially responsible, for Bonington, to give but one example. Such a quality can be seen in the sepia wash which, it is thought, depicts a View on the Stour: Dedham Church in the Distance (c. 1830, Victoria and Albert), and which might have been signed ... Victor Hugo. Constable has no cause to envy Turner's fantastic abstraction. On the contrary, we return again to Stonehenge, flanked anew by the double rainbow.

(Translation by Elinth Bourget)