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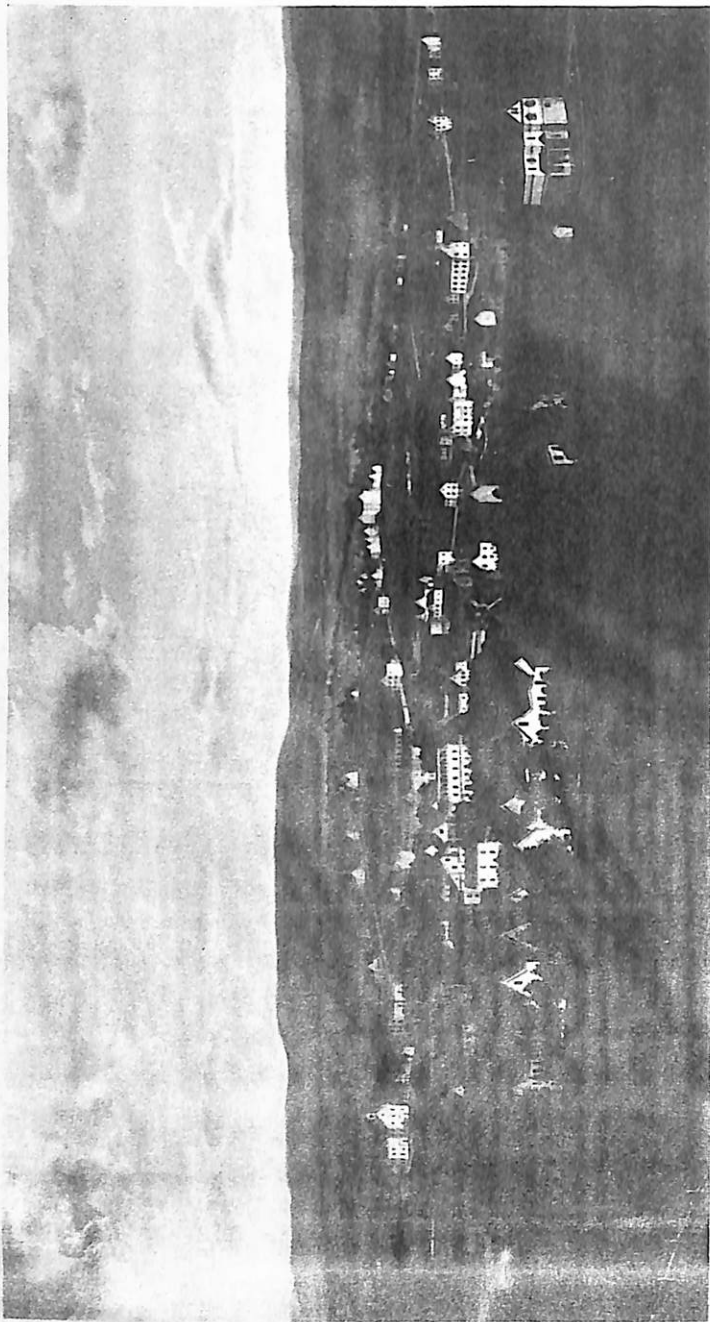
A PORTRAIT OF SUSSEX

An Exhibition of Paintings
by the
Sussex painter

LOUIS LARSEN

May 15 — June 19, 1966

THE MONTCLAIR ART MUSEUM
MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY



20. View of Deckertown

FOREWORD

A significant record of a past era of American life has recently been discovered in the paintings of Louis Larsen, a little-known artist who lived and worked in Sussex County, New Jersey, at the turn of the century. These paintings are as unsophisticated as the man who produced them. Many of the paintings now on exhibition have been out of sight for years after their relegation to some farmhouse attic. These varnish-darkened "views" of countryside and country life, mementos of the horse and buggy days, were stored away along with the old-fashioned family relics. Until a new and growing interest transformed relics to antiques and old pictures to paintings the Sussex painter's work was remembered by only a few of the town's residents.

About a year ago, a revival of interest in Larsen took place in Sussex with the first one-man exhibition of his known works. Through the sincerity and diligence of Theodore F. Holbert and Carroll O. Dailey, both of Sussex, the owners of paintings by Louis Larsen were invited to lend to a weekend display in the new business offices of Mr. Dailey on Main Street. Previous to this exhibition there had been little opportunity to see Larsen's paintings. As early as 1949, the first revival of public interest began when Miss Beatrice F. Smith, lifetime resident of Sussex, whose father owned and operated the Union House hotel at the time of Larsen's arrival in Sussex, rediscovered five of the artist's paintings in the attic of the family home when it was about to be remodeled. These were put on display in the council rooms of the borough hall. After one painting mysteriously disappeared and another was damaged and destroyed, Mr. Theodore F. Holbert, officer in the Bank of Sussex County, arranged to have the remaining three paintings put on display in the bank. Here they were safe and noticed by many local people who set about rediscovering their own Larsens, finding them in sheds, basements, and attics.

Now the Montclair Art Museum takes pleasure in presenting the first museum showing of the work of this recently discovered New Jersey artisan painter. We commend the Messrs. Holbert and Dailey for their public spirited efforts to preserve the Larsen paintings and to dignify the memory of this Sussex painter and we are pleased that many Sussex residents have agreed to assist in the presentation of this exhibition.



22. *Lake Rutherford*



ACKNOWLEDGMENT TO LENDERS

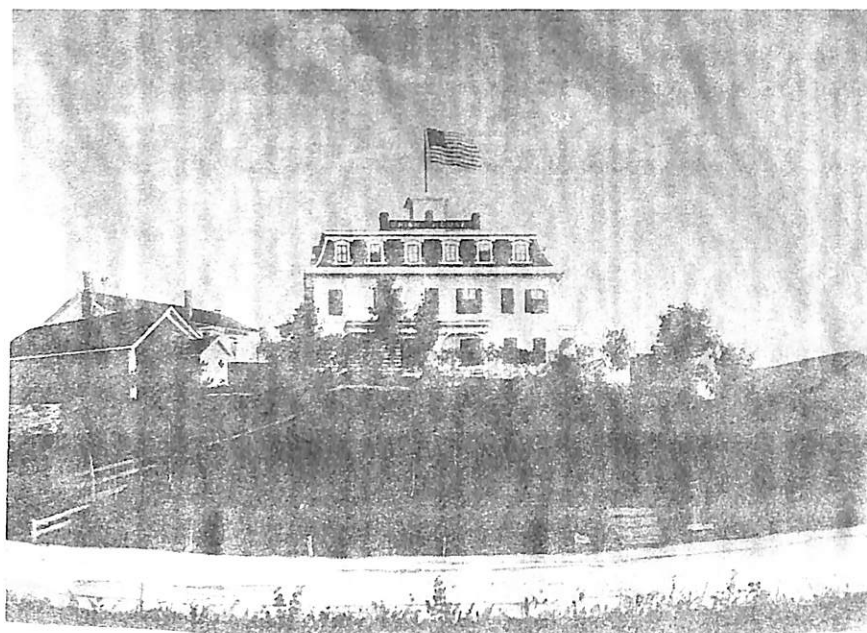
The Montclair Art Museum wishes to express its grateful thanks to all the owners and lenders to this exhibition. The generous cooperation of the Sussex community has made possible this exhibition which illustrates another chapter in New Jersey's history. Our thanks must go particularly to Mr. Theodore F. Holbert and Mr. Carroll O. Dailey who assisted in the assembling and organizing of the loans.

LENDERS

Mrs. Fred Armstrong
Mr. and Mrs. Fred Beemer
Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Bennett
Mrs. Clarence E. Brown
Mr. and Mrs. Edwin T. Carroll
Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Constable
Mr. and Mrs. Carroll O. Dailey
Mr. and Mrs. Irving Day
Mrs. Cleveland Dunn
Mrs. Emmett Ferguson
Dr. and Mrs. Jack S. Haggerty
Mr. and Mrs. Theodore F. Holbert
Mr. and Mrs. Theodore M. Holbert
Mr. and Mrs. Alonzo Little
Mrs. Clarence Little
Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence McLean
Mr. and Mrs. Andrew W. Roy
Rutgers Dairy Research Center
Mr. and Mrs. Harry Simpson
Miss Beatrice F. Smith
Mrs. Roe Van Ness
Mr. and Mrs. Lester W. Wesighan



9. *Union House*



INTRODUCTION

This selection of paintings by the Sussex artist Louis Larsen offers an opportunity to enjoy a glimpse into a bygone era. It is a look at the village of Sussex with its surrounding community of farmers where some of the flavor of its early days is still preserved. Inevitable changes have commenced to erase the quiet character of the village. In a changing economy we witness the disappearance of New Jersey's great dairyland. The herds of cows, the farm horses, the farmers themselves are vanishing into the past along with a way of life known only to rural people of earlier generations.

It was into this county in the late 1800's that Larsen, born Lauritz Larsen Mossige, came from his native Norway. He arrived in New York and there it is believed that he stayed for several years painting scenery for the New York stage. From New York he came to Sussex County about 1885, arriving at the Simeon Mabee farm near Harmonyvale. Larsen lived here for a time, befriended by Mabee who taught him to speak English. He made paintings of the Mabee farm and of other barns and farm houses in the area. His works at this time are done in a very limited range of colors, possibly because he lacked a variety of painting materials.

A strong dichotomy of style makes itself evident even in these early paintings. Although most of the artist's work was taken from well-known landmarks or familiar homesteads, there is an insistent appearance of romantic views painted in a reminiscent mood, often in darker tones, as if the artist's eye had turned inward upon a memory. These alter ego paintings occur throughout his whole life. Among the earliest of the romantic group is a view of a fiord painted in 1886. This may be the Stavanger Fiord in southern Norway showing Sandnes, his native village and an old man crossing the footbridge, reappearing out of his recollections of childhood memories.

In contrast to his romantic style is his reportorial approach with accounts of countryside and buildings in Sussex. At first it would seem that this work is chiefly a detailed record of the dairy country and the town of Sussex. Indeed the subject is a recurring one. A closer look at the exhibition, however, reveals a subtle range of approach to his subject with an undercurrent of personal comment sometimes plainly spoken, sometimes only whispered, but always pointing up his powers of observation as a painter.

About 1887, Larsen moved into the town of Sussex, then known as Decker-town. Here he set up a shop where he was in demand for wagon and chair striping, a little carpentry, and sundry other kinds of jobs. Larsen lived in back of his shop and held these lodgings for fifty years until his death in 1932. He remained a bachelor, plied his painting trade, and indulged in the bottle. His eccentricities made him something of a character-about-town and his social reputation was highly colored by his inordinate passion for fishing, drinking, and card-playing. If these

profligate, for far from destitute when he died, he is known to have left a goodly bank account of over \$3,000. Neither relatives in the midwest nor family still in Norway drew him away from his little world with headquarters in his shop on Main Street. He seems never to have ventured farther than to the streams and lakes in the county where he fished and the farms whose buildings he painted. When he finished house painting or barn painting, the farmers frequently requested him to paint a picture of the clean, fresh buildings. At other times, Larsen did the paintings on his own, then offered them for sale to the homestead owners. In 1887, during his highly productive year, he painted two versions of the George Armstrong farm which has been in the Armstrong family since Revolutionary times.

Larsen's farm paintings are done with great attention to detail. The exact number of windows with their shutters, the four kinds of characteristic fencing, stone outcroppings and stone walls, the many kinds of farm animals, are all faithfully rendered. He took every opportunity to paint horses, often including them as an embellishment if he thought he could work it into the picture. In others of his paintings he contrived to introduce some "local color" to enliven his work. One such painting is owned by Miss Beatrice F. Smith whose father built the Union House and also encouraged the artist with commissions. There is special attention to details and unusually careful workmanship evident in the paintings done for Smith. Some say it is due to very satisfactory payment for the finished painting. One view of Main Street with the Old Stone Bakery carries an added dividend in entertainment. "Kidley," the baker, is seen lingering with "the other woman" at the side door of the bakery while his wife Laura is just leaving by the front door.

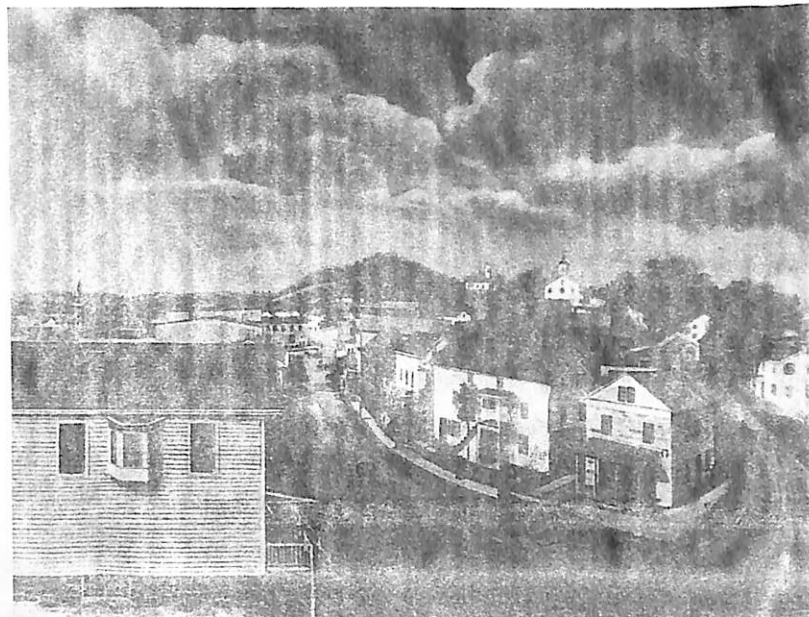
Larsen painted very few town houses, possibly because his drinking habits made him less welcome at this proximity. He did, however, do fine paintings of the hotels — Union House, Hamburg House, and the De Camp Hotel now known as Fountain Square Inn. In the early days, this was a popular stop-over for commercial travellers who came out from New York City to Deckertown, the terminal of the railroad.

Larsen was never a chronicler of events in his paintings. However, he did enjoy peopling his scenes with actual townsfolk who are easy enough to recognize if one knows something of the history of the village. The local horse trainer was a certain Sam Harrison who may be seen driving his sulky across the foreground of a view of Union House. This same painting shows the irreconcilable Pierce Cole who lost his girl to another man, then took up residence in the Union House and remained a confirmed bachelor to the end of his days. Possibly the artist saw himself in his last known painting called "Every Fisherman's Dream." It was painted from his fishing shack on Papakating Creek at Berry's Cove and certainly delighted all who knew the angler-artist.

As this exhibition has recreated the Deckertown of eighty years ago, so now the present day people of Sussex honor one of its talented citizens. Here in old Deckertown lived Louis Larsen, a Norwegian immigrant who must have found his county somewhat reminiscent of his native land; here he came and painted and left to his adopted country a heritage for its history — a Portrait of Sussex.

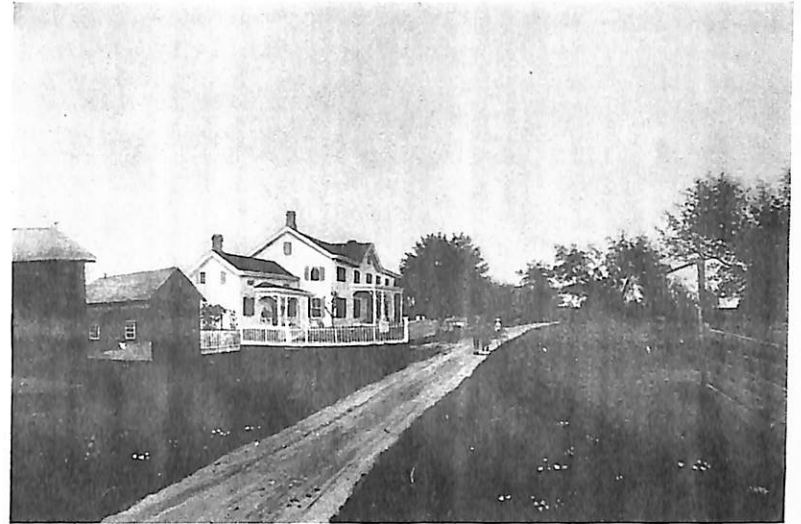
CATALOGUE

1. Simeon Mabee Farm, 1885/6
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Andrew W. Roy
2. Stavanger Fiord (?), Norway, 1886
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Andrew W. Roy
3. Ephraim Kimble House, 1886
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Lester W. Wesighan
4. Wilson Farm, 1886
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Theodore F. Holbert
5. George Armstrong Farm, 1887
Lent by Mrs. Fred Armstrong

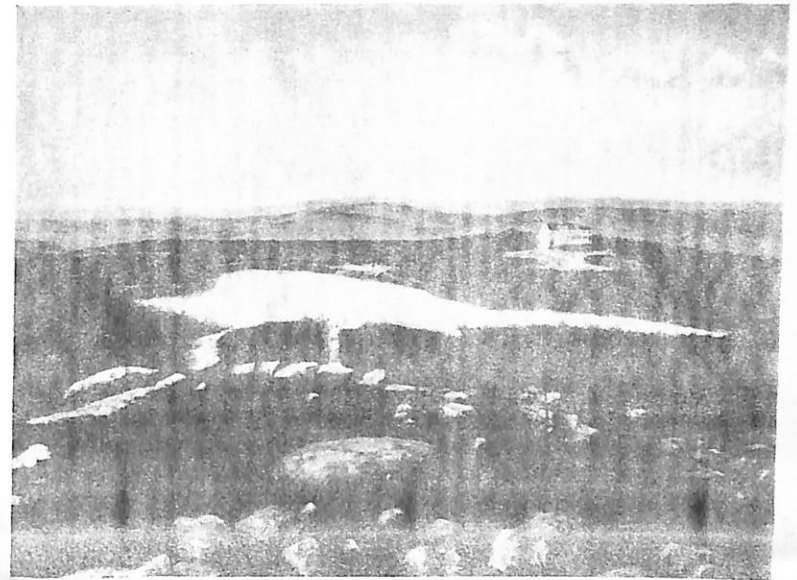
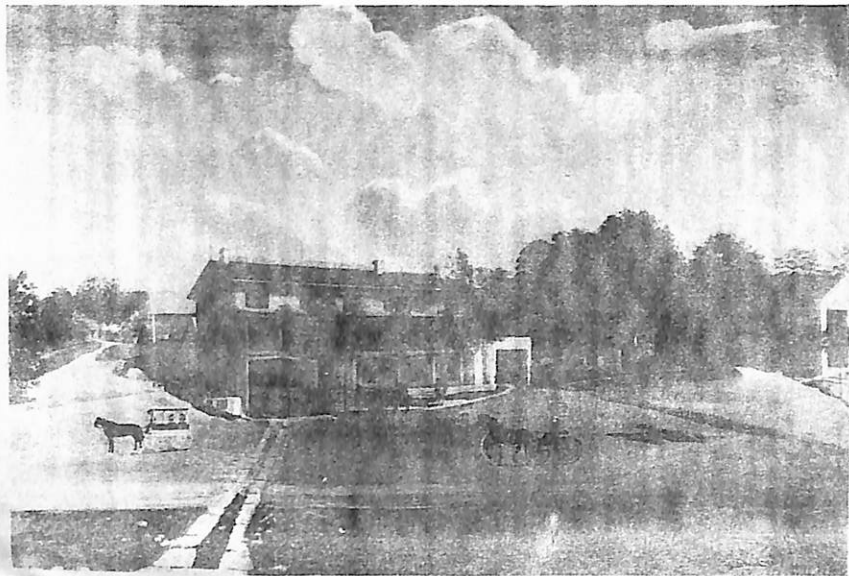




24. *Animals on Sam Vandruff Farm*



13. *Nicholas Cox Homestead*



6. George Armstrong Farm with Brook, 1887
Lent by Mrs. Fred Armstrong

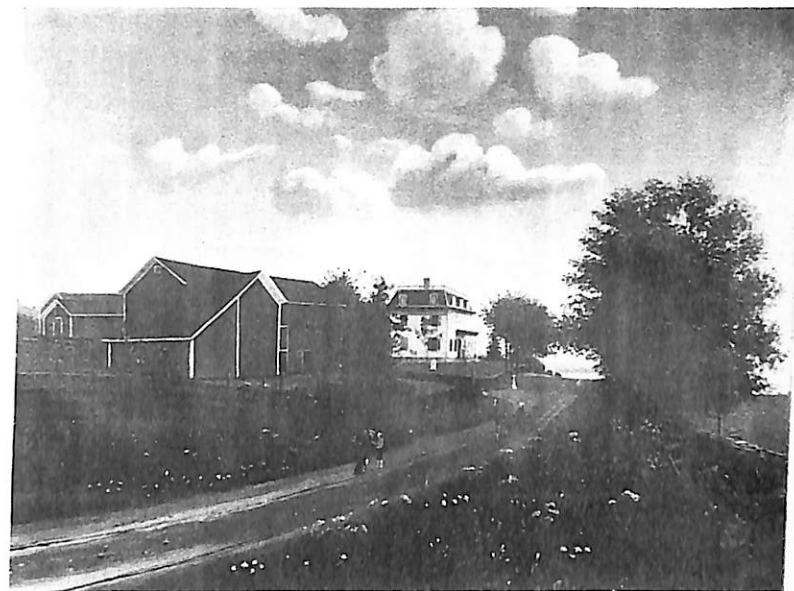
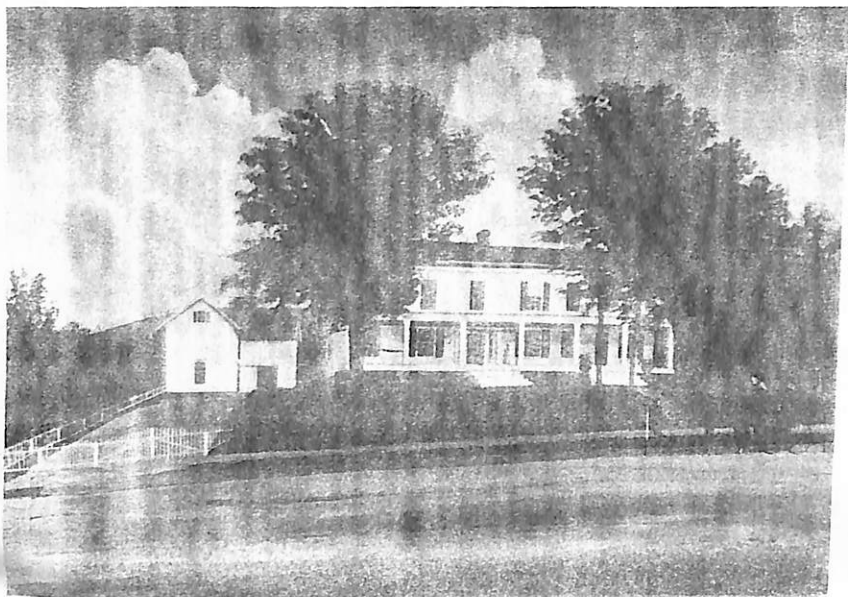
7. Bakery on Main Street, Deckertown, 1887
Lent by Miss Beatrice F. Smith

8. View of Union House from the Rear, 1887
Lent by Miss Beatrice F. Smith

9. Union House, 1887
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Carroll O. Dailey

10. Clark Farm, Unionville, 1887
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Carroll O. Dailey

11. House on Main Street, Deckertown, 1887
Lent by Mrs. Cleveland Dunn



10. Clark Farm, Unionville

12. DeCamp Hotel (Fountain Square Inn), 1887
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Carroll O. Dailey

13. Nicholas Cox Homestead, 1887
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Theodore F. Holbert

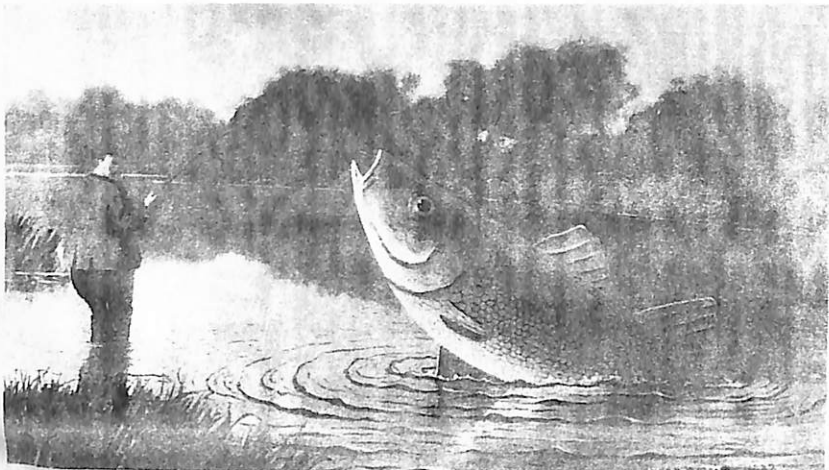
14. Newman Benjamin Store and Post Office, 1887
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Harry Simpson

15. Van Ness Farm, 1887
Lent by Mrs. Roe Van Ness

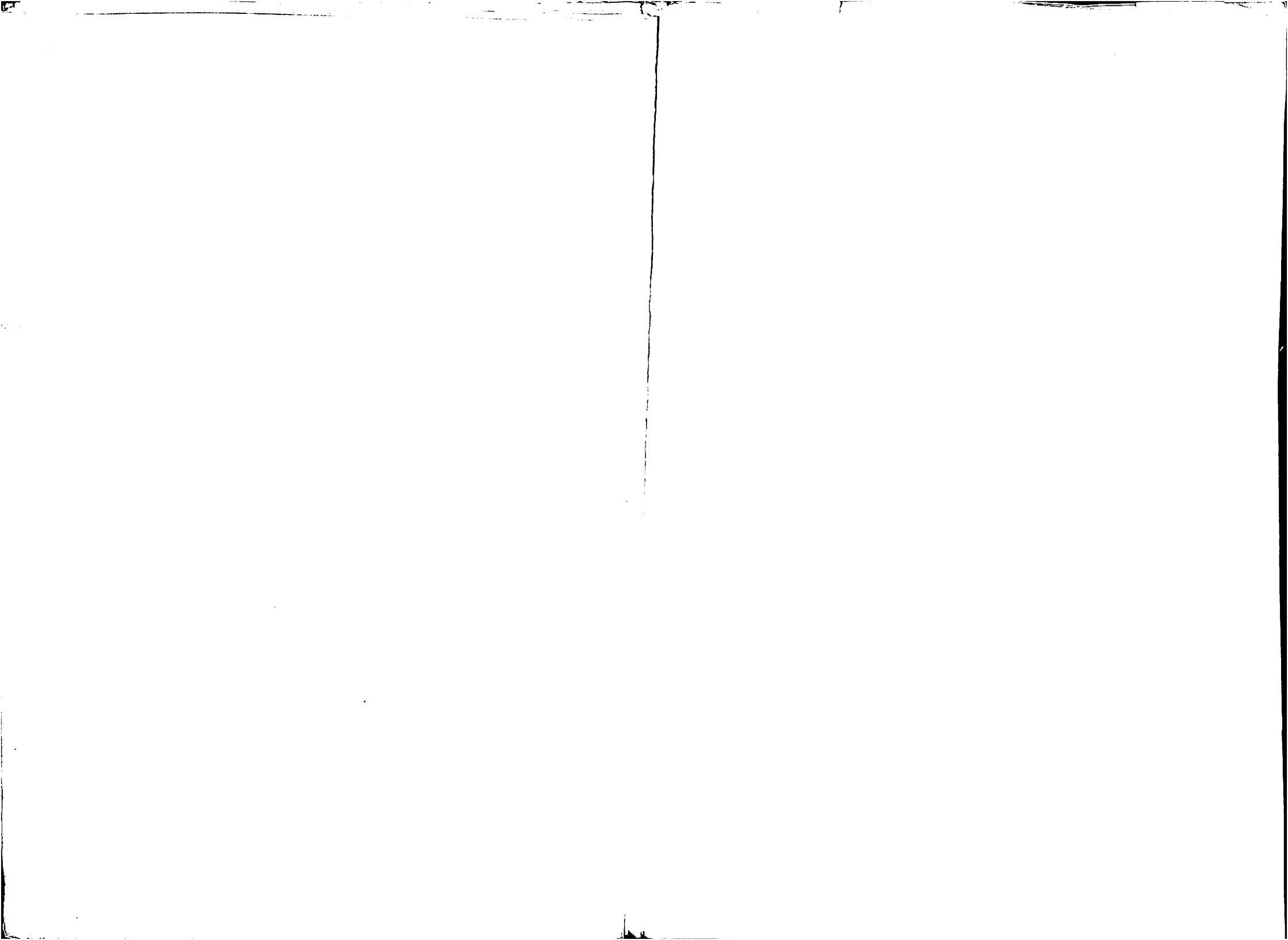
16. Wickham Farm, Harmonyvale, 1887
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Irving Day

17. Joseph Sharp Farm, 1887

18. Northrup Farm, 1887
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Alonzo Little
19. James Cox Farm, 1891
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Theodore M. Holbert
20. View of Deckertown, 1892
Lent by Miss Beatrice F. Smith
21. River and Falls, 1892
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Theodore M. Holbert
22. Lake Rutherford, 1896
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Theodore F. Holbert
23. Unidentified Lake
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Theodore F. Holbert
24. Animals on Sam Vandruff Farm, 1907
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Theodore F. Holbert



25. Lake Grinnell, 1915
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin T. Carroll
26. Artist Sketching at Woodbourne Falls, 1909
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence McLean
27. Layton Homestead, 1915
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Constable
28. Rutan House on East Main Street, Deckertown, 1915
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Bennett
29. Brookcroft in the Clove, 1915
Lent by Mrs. Clarence E. Brown
30. Beemer Farm, 1916
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Fred Beemer
31. Haggerty Homestead and Sunrise Mountain, 1916
Lent by Dr. and Mrs. Jack S. Haggerty
32. Lewis Van Sickle Farm, 1916
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Theodore F. Holbert
33. Courtright Farm, 1916
Lent by Mrs. Emmett Ferguson
34. Lusscroft Farm (Rutgers Dairy Research Center), 1918
Lent by Rutgers Dairy Research Center
35. Kuser Mansion on High Point, 1929
Lent by Mr. and Mrs. Theodore F. Holbert
36. Every Fisherman's Dream



Lady A. Little