



**MINNESOTA STATE CAPITOL**

**Artists' Search For Historical Accuracy**

# Artists' Search For Historical Accuracy

To create a work of art depicting a historical event, like those found in the Minnesota State Capitol, is not an easy undertaking. The artist cannot provide a broad brush stroke to tell the entire story. Like the four corners of the canvas, they are confined to depicting a moment in time.

To achieve this, required study. From models in the studio to gathering information from photographs and historical accounts; conducting interviews with experts and event participants, and visiting the location where the event occurred was part of that process.

The skill of the artist and the quality of the painting is essential in determining the success of a historical scene. In addition to that, the painting's impact can be measured by its ability to connect the viewer, from the witness of the event to a visitor one hundred years later, that the depiction is as close as possible to what happened.

The following images provide some insight into the artists' attempt in their search for historical accuracy to make these connections occur.

# Battle of Nashville



Howard Pyle, *Battle of Nashville*, painted 1905.



Shy's Hill, ca. 1880s.

Pyle included this image in the painting.

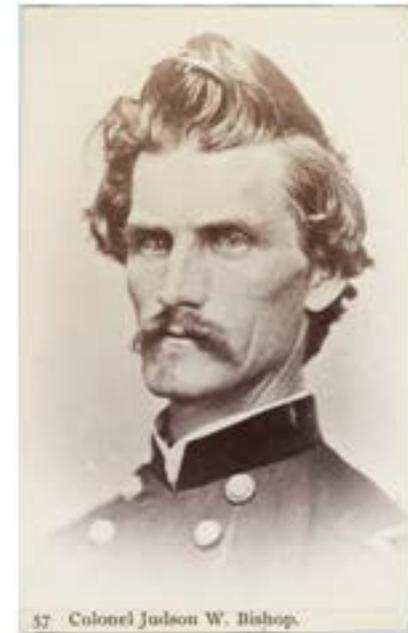
(photo: *Confederate Veteran*, 1909)

# Second Minnesota at Mission Ridge



Douglas Volk, *Second Minnesota at Mission Ridge*, painted 1906.

Minnesota State Capitol



Judson Bishop, about 1865

The officer waving his hat in the painting is Bishop. The depiction is based on this photograph. Each painting in the Governor's Ante Room and Reception Room has portraits of participants of those events.

# Second Minnesota at Mission Ridge

OFFICE OF  
J. W. BISHOP  
ENGSTOTT BUILDING

ST. PAUL, MINN., Sept. 12<sup>th</sup> 1905

Mr. Douglas Volk  
Center Lovell Me.

Dear Sir: Your favor of 23<sup>rd</sup> Ult. was duly received and has been too long unanswered. I have delayed from day to day hoping that I might decide to go to Chattanooga to the Army of the Cumberland meeting. I find that I cannot prudently go. This is my Hay-Fever season and that trouble originated with me in the Chattanooga Campaign 42 years ago and has revisited me annually ever since - is particularly aggravating if I happen to be in that vicinity. So much to my regret I shall miss the meeting this year - when I spoke to you of joining you there I supposed the meeting was to be in October.

I enclose a circular recently received from which it appears that the meeting is to be on the 18<sup>th</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> September.

I wish you might be there, as you would meet many of the men who climbed The Ridge Nov. 25. 63.

I note what you say about the picture now in progress and approve all your suggestions.

OFFICE OF  
J. W. BISHOP  
ENGSTOTT BUILDING

ST. PAUL, MINN., \_\_\_\_\_ 190\_

Answering your questions - I wore that day the ordinary uniform of a Regt. Co. of Infantry with the soft black hat as I remember. I went up with the boys on foot - the horses could not climb the face of the ridge, covered with "entanglements" they were all sent round by the "drag-rod" leading up the face of the ridge from south to north a little bow right and they came up soon after we had gained the ridge. I carried a sword - or rather a cavalry sabre with steel scabbard, and an army revolver in my belt. I do not remember actually using either. My men had been instructed not to waste time or cartridges by firing during the ascent - at the enemy fully protected by the log breast-work - but to get there with loaded guns if possible.

So the assault on our part was a grim steady climb taking what came our way until near the top when a sudden rush & a short contest and all was ours.

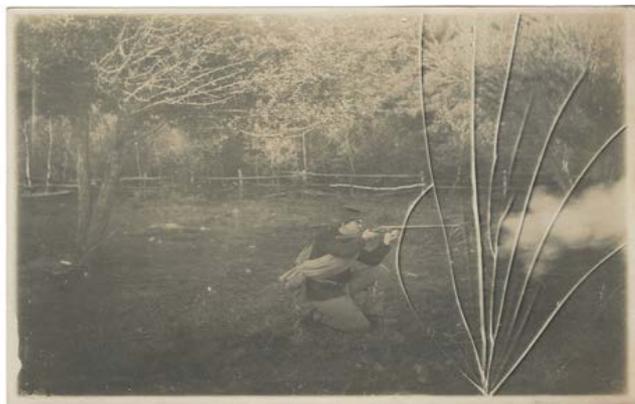
I greatly regret the unexpected death in June last of Genl H.V. Boynton, whom I hoped you might meet.

Very truly Yours J.W. Bishop

Judson Bishop to Douglas Volk, September 12, 1905

Bishop describes for the artist what he was wearing and other battlefield details during the battle of Missionary Ridge.

# Second Minnesota at Mission Ridge



Studies for the *Second Minnesota at Mission Ridge* painting used by artist Douglas Volk. These were used in his first study of the battle scene that after reviewed by Cass Gilbert, was changed to show the advance up the slope of the ridge rather than the apex of the charge.

# Third Minnesota Entering Little Rock

*Mpls Tribune July 3, 1910 P19*



Stanley M. Arthurs, *The Third Minnesota Entering Little Rock*, painted 1910

## *Critics After New Picture Just Hung at the Capitol*

Artist's War Painting Is Not  
Correct in Military Detail, Say  
Soldiers Who Know

Although the painting by Stanley M. Arthurs of Wilmington, Del., placed this week in the governor's waiting room at the state capitol, is satisfactory from a technical standpoint, critics have been busy ever since its hanging.

It is another war picture depicting the Third regiment, United States volunteers, entering Little Rock, Ark. The regiment is shown crossing the Arkansas river on a pontoon bridge and marching up the levee by rout step, Col. C. C. Andrews commanding. The chief feature of the picture, as brought out by the artist, is the youth of the soldiers.

But soldiers who took part in the event are not pleased with the painting in many respects. It is said that the blankets are not properly arranged. One soldier who was with the army during the war pointed out that late in the war the blankets were rolled around the shoulders as worn in the Arthur picture, but at the time the Third regiment entered Little Rock the blankets were folded on top of the knapsack. In Mr. Arthurs' picture musicians are shown marching ahead of the colonel, and it is explained that in reality no one marched ahead of the officer in command.

Some have also sought to attack the artist for putting in two color honors, but it was pointed out by General Andrews, then colonel of the regiment, that one flag is of the nation and the other of the state, and that the artist is entirely correct in putting in two flags.

Critiques of the painting by Third  
Minnesota regiment veterans, 1910.



# Battle of Gettysburg



Rufus Zogbaum, *Battle of Gettysburg*, painted 1906



First Minnesota veterans of the Gettysburg charge down Cemetery Ridge reenact where they fought and were wounded on July 2, 1863. The rocky terrain is portrayed front and center in the painting.

Photo: about 1897 (Minnesota Historical Society)

# Fourth Minnesota Entering Vicksburg



Francis Millet, *Fourth Minnesota Entering Vicksburg*, painted 1904



Warren County Courthouse, Vicksburg, Mississippi, about 1864

(photo: Vicksburg's Old Court House Museum)

# Battle of Corinth



Edwin Blashfield, *Battle of Corinth*, painted 1912



Father John Ireland, about 1862



Colonel Lucius Hubbard, about 1865

# Attack on New Ulm



Anton Gag, *Attack on New Ulm*, painted 1904



Dakota House, about 1865.

This building served as a hospital during the attacks on New Ulm and is depicted on the extreme right edge and center of the painting.

# Eighth Minnesota at the Battle of Ta-Ha-Kouty



Carl Boeckmann, *Eighth Minnesota at the Battle of Ta-Ha-Kouty*, painted 1910

# Treaty of Traverse des Sioux



Francis Millet, *Treaty of Traverse des Sioux*, painted 1905.

Minnesota State Capitol



Frank Mayer, *Treaty of Traverse des Sioux*, painted 1885.

Minnesota Historical Society

This painting is based on Mayer's sketches as an eyewitness to the event in 1851.

# Father Hennepin at the Falls of St. Anthony



Douglas Volk, *Father Hennepin at the Falls of St. Anthony*, painted 1905.

When this painting was completed, the falls, due to it receding upriver no longer existed in this natural state. Based on his studies, Volk took care to include Spirit Island in the center of the falls.

# Father Hennepin at the Falls of St. Anthony

CASS GILBERT.  
Rec'd AUG 22 1904  
Am'd..... 25 -

Center Lovell  
Oxford Co.,  
Maine  
Aug. 15th 1904.

*Referred to Mr Seabury*  
Mr. Cass Gilbert,  
New York. *(House return)*  
My dear Gilbert:-

I read with great interest your comments on my composition recently sent to St. Paul and I assure you I shall be glad to follow as many of the suggestions as possible, with regard however to one or two of the historical points to which you call my attention, and which Mr. Seabury also mentions; my reading has led me to somewhat different conclusion, I will say, however that when I first went over the ground gained practically the same impression which you seem to have. I refer to the two companions of Hennepin which you suggest that I introduce into the picture.

I have gone over and over the somewhat involved English of the good missionary and after careful consideration can not make out what he had more than one white person with him when he made his memorable discovery.

Hennepin started up the river after leaving La Salle, with two voyageurs, Du Gay, and Michel Accau.

They were in due time captured by the Indians taken up the Mississippi and from St. Paul or near there, were conducted overland to Mille Lacs where they spent the winter in the Sioux village.

The first of July the several tribes started out on a Buffalo hunt, Hennepin and the two Frenchmen with them, on reaching the mouth of the Rum river all encamped for the purpose of getting supplies, making canoes, etc.

In the mean time Du Gay and Accau had both treated Hennepin very shabbily, refusing to take him in their canoe, he embarked finally with a couple of better disposed Indians, and reached the Rum river camp with the others. At this point Hennepin wanted to leave the Indian horse and go down the Mississippi to join a section of La Salle's party. It was at this juncture that Accau refused to accompany him, and I will here quote Hennepin's own words from the "Description of Louisiana" P. 241. ....

"This obliged us two to go alone as Michel Ako refused, in a wretched canoe to the Ouisconsin river....." "The Indians would not have suffered this voyage had <sup>one of</sup> not the three remained with them".....  
"As we were making the portage of the Falls

Letter: Douglas Volk to Cass Gilbert, August 1904.

This letter helps illustrate the process between architect and artist to determine accurate information and details for this painting.

# Father Hennepin at the Falls of St. Anthony

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of St. Anthony, we perceived five or six Indians who had taken the start, one of whom had climbed a tree and was wearing a beaver robe" &c. &c.

Hennepin also says in his "New Discovery" page 277: "This extreme want made us take a resolution, upon Michel Ako's refusing to accompany us, to venture ourselves in a little sorry canoe as far as the river Guscousin"....."But Michel Ako who was apprehensive of the many hardships he was like to meet with on the expedition could never be prevailed upon to consent to it, so that seeing that he began to relish the Barbarians way of living, I desired their chief, that I might have leave to accompany Picard in his stead who accordingly granted my request." &c. &c.

The following quotation from Parkman's "La Salle and the Discovery of the greater Northwest", page 266- indicates his interpretation of the foregoing. "Du Gay wished to go with him, but Accau who liked the Indian life as much as he disliked Hennepin preferred to remain with the hunters." ....

"Thus equipped they began their journey and soon approached the Falls of St. Anthony. .... As they were carrying their canoe by the Cataract they saw five or six Indians." &c. &c.

The account given in the "Golden Jubilee" book, page 12 is of course very brief-

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and though it speaks of the two voyageurs starting with Hennepin, it does not mention the stop made at the mouth of the Rum river, and the split in the party which took place at that point. The picture of the scene at the falls which is introduced, and which shows two white men with Hennepin, seems therefore, according to my best judgment to be inaccurate but if I am at error on this point I shall be only to glad to be set right.

Now with regard to the position of the party at the Falls. I confess this point has been a most perplexing one, for it is most difficult sometimes to make fact accord with harmonious arrangement, you say that the Falls appear to be below Hennepin, and I was glad the sketch gave such an impression for that is where I wanted to suggest them as being, though I would like to have <sup>had</sup> greater latitude in the matter, and perhaps place the party differently, but the fact is the carry led over ~~the~~ the bluff, which according to Pike's survey in 1806 was about 60 feet high, with an elevation at the point of debarkation of 46degrees. The beginning of the lower end of the carry was, as near as I can figure out from the accounts written by the explorers about 500ft. below the falls, and possibly it was a good deal more in Hennepin's



# Father Hennepin at the Falls of St. Anthony

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time, for the recession of the Falls has since that period amounted <sup>to</sup> over 1000 feet. Thus the brink of the Falls when our missionary stood there was about at the southern end of Hennepin Island, the water therefore would ~~be~~ have been very turbulent in the channel which is narrow at this point, and the beginning of the trail ~~therefore~~ <sup>probably</sup> would have been lower down the river. Thus an observer standing on the shore at this particular point would find himself at a considerable distance from the Castaract. I also gather from ~~the~~ what Hennepin says, - "As we were making the portage," &c. and from Parkman, - "As they were carrying their canoes by the falls," &c. that in view of the fact ~~that~~ Hennepin was coming down the river he must have stopped to view the scene before he reached the end of the trail, and consequently must have looked down upon it from the cliff, but I have taken, and shall take, in line with your suggestions, as much license as possible, and assume that the group was at a point not too high above the river. Then the thought occurred to me that Hennepin would be a more commanding figure a little above the scene, relieved against the sky, than he would with a turbulent background such as would be inevitable if he were on a level with the mass of falling water.

The whole problem is difficult

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because I have not only to show the group of figures but also the scene which the different people are contemplating, but I think you will agree that for artistic reasons the figures should dominate. If I make too much of the landscape the figures would become mere pigmies.

Concerning the figure of the Indian offering the beaver skin to the Great Spirit, I am inclined to think that Mr. Seabury is right as I am not sure but he would be too important, and detract from Father Hennepin, who must have the center of the stage, I put him in as a concession to historical fact, though I need not necessarily choose the moment when he is a factor.

Your idea about the cross in Hennepin's hand is excellent it seems to me. I had thought of it, but made no attempt in the sketch to even suggest details. I did ~~not~~ think that the attitude of the Monk in itself was suggestive of the cross, but the figure may lose in dignity, in consequence, while the ~~lower~~ <sup>lower</sup> unbroken line you indicate is fine, and I shall consider the pose most carefully with this in mind when I work out the drawing. The sketch was very crude, and gives little idea of what I propose to develop, my studies are coming on in fine shape, and I am confident that if all goes well the picture will be ahead of anything I have done. <sup>and</sup> you will not be able to get much



# Father Hennepin at the Falls of St. Anthony

of an idea of it until you see the cartoon.

There is nothing more picturesque perhaps, than fur, and I would enjoy painting a fur cap on Picard Du Gay, as you suggest, but how about it in July? It would be all right here to night, for it is cold enough for an overcoat, but if you think a coon skin will go, I will be glad to put one on the Picard, I have found just the type for this personage.

Hennepin is going to be a stunning figure to do, and I have a fine old Monks gown, that looks as if it had been worn through miles of forest.

If you can find time will you let me know what you think of the advisability of my asking Archbishop Ireland's opinion regarding the cross and Hennepin's ceremonial attitude?

I marvel at your being able to keep so many things going at once, and I hesitate to encroach on your time, but if you can tell me whether what I have written seems plausible or not, I will be greatly obliged. What you wrote concerning the elevation of the falls is vital, and "Gives me pause", If you feel strongly about it, I shall be tempted to try a new setting to the composition, for I value your artistic judgment most sincerely.

I was much pleased to receive a letter from Mr. Seabury, in which he says he went

over this subject with you, so if it is agreeable you might forward this letter to him which would save my going over the same ground again.

The first instalment from the commissioners <sup>could be</sup> duly at hand.

I thank you for your attention and interest in the matter.

With cordial regards, and thanks for your letter, I remain,

Very sincerely yours,

*Boydell Vail*

*Please excuse the several characters of this typewriting, it is an amateur effort, but I think maybe you can make through it with greater ease than you could if this letter were in my handwriting.*

*B.V.*



# Discoverers and Civilizers Led to the Source of the Mississippi



Edwin Blasfield, *Discoverers and Civilizers Led to the Source of the Mississippi*, painted 1905.