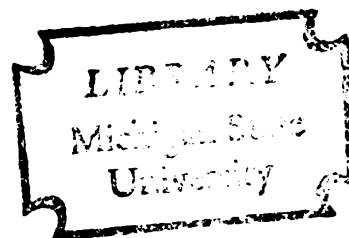




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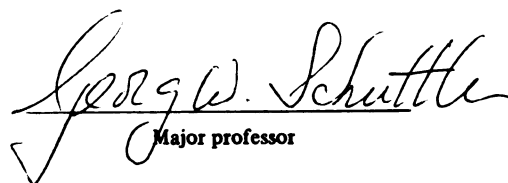
Adventures of an Artist:
John Banvard (1815-1891) and
His Mississippi Panorama

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THE ADVENTURES OF AN ARTIST:
JOHN BANVARD (1815-1891) AND HIS
MISSISSIPPI PANORAMA

By

John Banvard

A DISSERTATION

THE UNIVERSITY

THE HARVARD UNIVERSITY

RECEIVED: 1979

Submitted to

Michigan State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Theatre

1979

ABSTRACT

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JOHN BANVARD (1815-1891) AND HIS
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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The Introduction provides a brief history of the panorama before Banvard. Chapter I covers 1815-1841, Banvard's boyhood in New York and his young manhood on the Western rivers. Chapter II, 1842-1852, examines Banvard's remarkable success with his Mississippi Panorama in England and America. Chapter III, 1852-1891, concerns Banvard's activities in New York, the failure of his theatrical

enterprises, and his final years in Watertown.

Banvard's theatrical art served the public as entertainment, newsreel, historical record, and travelogue. As a symbol of the Western wilderness, the Mississippi River Panorama inspired Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Henry David Thoreau to include it in some of their most important works. The panorama temporarily fulfilled the public's aesthetic need for moving pictures and contributed to the logical impetus of the development of pictorial stage realism and the cinema. Banvard and his work, however, were soon forgotten and by 1900 the era of the moving panorama had ended.

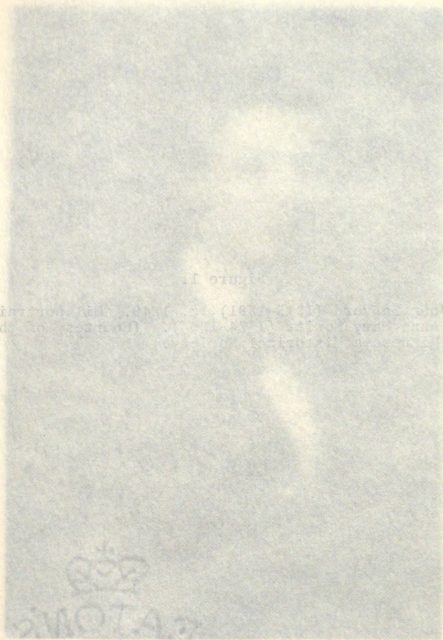


Figure 11

Figure 1.

John Banvard (1815-1891), c. 1849. Oil portrait by
Anna Mary Howitt (1824-1884). (Courtesy of the
Minnesota Historical Society.)

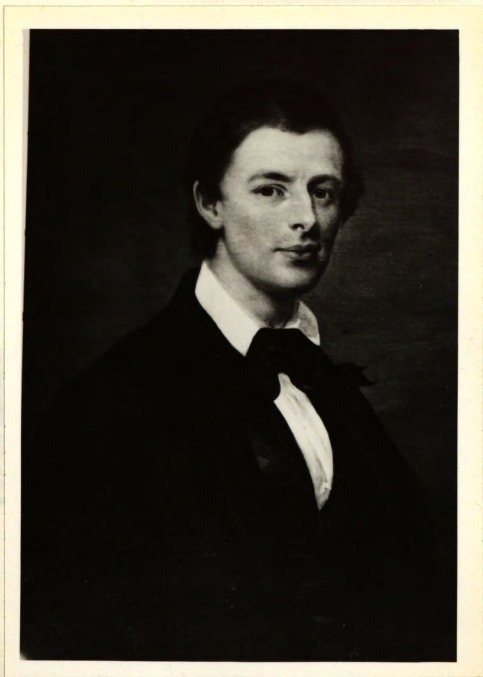


Figure 1.

FOREWORD

John Banvard had faded into obscurity before his death in 1891 in Watertown, South Dakota, and today he is forgotten by all but a few specialists in American art. But from 1847 through 1854 he was the most famous theatrical artist in the western world. His Mississippi River Panorama, advertised as a "three-mile painting," captured the imaginations of millions of Americans and Europeans who

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the following individuals for their generous assistance in the preparation of this study: Mrs. Ruby J. Shields, Research Assistant, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota; Mrs. Margery A. Tauber, Librarian, Watertown Regional Library, Watertown, South Dakota; and Joseph Stuart, Curator, South Dakota Memorial Art Center, Brookings, South Dakota. I would also like to acknowledge my dissertation committee for their guidance and suggestions: Dr. Georg Schuttler, Chairman; and Professors Frank Rutledge, Donald Treat, John Baldwin, and Roger Funk.

A few scholars, notably John Francis McDermott and Joseph Earl Arrington, have published articles on Banvard, but this study is the first complete account of his entire career. At seventeen, John Banvard worked as a scenic artist on the Chapman Family showboat. The Chapman's Floating Theatre, the first showboat in American theatre history, provided Banvard with the inspiration to operate his own showboats. In the early 1850's he lived for a time in New Harmony, Indiana in the famous Utopian settlement on

FOREWORD

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A few scholars, notably John Francis McDermott and Joseph Earl Arrington, have published articles on Banvard, but this study is the first complete account of his entire career. At seventeen, John Banvard worked as a scenic artist on the Chapman Family showboat. The Chapman's Floating Theatre, the first showboat in American theatre history, provided Banvard with the inspiration to operate his own showboats. In the early 1830's he lived for a time in New Harmony, Indiana, the famous Utopian settlement on

in this study. Other items in the Banvard Family Papers include fragments of Banvard's diary, a scrapbook containing newspaper clippings, letters, photographs, sketches, oil paintings, and other items. The introduction provides a brief history of the townspeople, and devoted his life to poetry and theatre. In 1867, he constructed and ran Banvard's Museum, located at 1221 Broadway, New York. This building later became Augustin Daly's Theatre, a landmark in American theatre history. By 1882, Banvard lost his fortune through bad investments and financial malfeasance, and he spent his final years writing and painting in the remote frontier community of Watertown, South Dakota.

This study will examine the life of John Banvard and the influence of his panoramas on nineteenth century life and letters. The popularity of the panorama contributed to the development of stage realism and the cinema and during its day served the public as newsreel, historical record, travelogue, education, and religious instruction.

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INTRODUCTION

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Robert Barker (1733-1806) invented the panorama in Edinburgh in 1787. His patent No. 1612 read:

Figure

1. John Banvard (1815-1891), c. 1849 "Spring, 1849" 33
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to James Thayer and with the proceeds returned to America where he devoted himself to building the first steamboat.⁴ Thayer collaborated with several artists, and included Robert Barker (1739-1806) invented the panorama in

Edinburgh in 1787. His patent No. 1612 read: "The way of painting an entire new contrivance, which I call a coup d'oeil, for the purpose of displaying views of nature at large by oil painting, fresco, water colours, crayons, or any other mode of painting or drawing."¹ Panoramic paintings were based on a

In 1787, Barker built a "semicircular exhibit" of his paintings that was "not successful."² In 1792, he constructed a circular building in London's Leicester Square and arranged a series of paintings entitled "English fleet anchored between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight." After the success of this exhibition and encouraged by the reception of his circular paintings, Barker added "Naval Battle of June 1, 1795," "Baths of Brighthelmstone," and "Environs of Windsor" in 1795.³

Robert Fulton, an American studying in England under Benjamin West, saw Barker's work and was intrigued by the potential of the panorama form. Fulton interrupted his studies and moved to France to paint his own. He received "exclusive rights" to produce panoramas in Paris, but they failed financially. He sold his "exclusive rights" and gained widespread popularity in France and England.

to James Thayer and with the proceeds returned to America where he devoted his energies to building the first had steamboat.⁴ Thayer collaborated with several artists, including Pierre Prévost and Charles Marie Bouton, and opened a "Vue de Paris" in that city in 1800. There paintings were displayed in two circular halls on the Boulevard Montemarte.⁵

These early panoramic paintings were based on a simple premise: seated in the center of a circular unframed painting, a spectator felt part of the environment of the work, that he "was participating in the astonishing illusion of reality in the depicted scene."⁶ Guides led viewers through a dark tunnel into a circular central room of the panorama building. Chairs (one-hundred and fifty in Thayer's hall) were placed in the center as equidistant from each painting as possible. The illumination came from above the painting and behind it, so that the viewer saw no ceiling or framing device.⁷ Parisians L.J.M. Daguerre, the inventor of photography, and Charles Marie Bouton altered the panoramic form with their invention of the diorama in 1821.⁸ Rendered on transparent linen, dioramas were "enormous. . . paintings under changing lighting effects."⁹ Dioramas gained widespread popularity in France and England.

The improvement was significant; now the only restriction

on a painting's length was the size of the roller that Bouton and Daguerre used a round auditorium that turned on a pivot before stationary paintings.¹⁰ The building had a depth of 169' and a height of 52'. One painting alone measured 71'6" X 45'6".¹¹ Their exhibition of "The Interior of Trinity Chapel, Canterbury Cathedral" was so realistic that one patron "asked to be conducted down the steps [of the cathedral] to walk in the building."¹² A witness wrote:

Few could be persuaded that what they saw was a mere painting on a flat surface. . . . This impression was strengthened by perceiving the light and shadows change as if clouds were passing over the sun, the rays of which occasionally shone on the floor. . . . The illusion was rendered more perfect by the excellence of the painting, and by the sensitive condition of the eye in the darkness of the surrounding chamber.¹³

Daguerre and Bouton achieved these effects and others by "a combination of translucent and opaque painting, and of transmitted and reflected light by contrivances such as screens and shutters."¹⁴ Dioramas were also cut out in various places for highlighting and two or more transparent surfaces on "separate frames placed a short distance apart" created three-dimensional effects.¹⁵

The next step in the evolution of the panorama and diorama was the invention in London in the early 1820's of the moving panorama, defined as the unrolling of the canvas "from an upright roller and winding it up on another."¹⁶ The improvement was significant; now the only restriction

on a painting's length was the size of the roller that on held it. However the canvas had a tendency to sag in the middle as it was being drawn from one roller [onto the others], other and this remained troublesome until Banvard invented an upper track system that eliminated slack.¹⁶ The

According to German philosopher Dolf Sternberger, the panorama was the most popular art form in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ First, as the forerunners of the cinematic news-reel, they offered pictorially transmitted information. In his study of the panorama on the American frontier, Joseph Schick comments: "The first and Daguerre exhibition, was overheard to say The contribution of the panorama-type display to the life of the community was not without significance. Contemporary news events at home and abroad became vivid actualities. In an age devoid of our ready methods of picture reproduction, the panorama served as an oasis in the desert of the printed page."¹⁸ The widespread acceptance and fascination

The panorama also appealed to the desire for travel. One panorama producer declared, "The love of travel is inherent in mankind. He therefore, who by means of panoramic exhibitions makes travellers of those who would otherwise tarry at home is not an ordinary benefactor to his fellow creatures."¹⁹ John Banvard recognized the opportunities afforded by the travelogue; after the success of his "Mississippi Panorama he painted exotic scenes of the Nile River and the Middle East. In America the first view of Jerusalem displayed in New York in 1794. On August 21, 1795, a "View of the Cities of London and Westminster."

Second, panoramas functioned as tools of education. reportedly covering 2,400 square feet, was advertised in After viewing Banvard's Mississippi Panorama, Charles Dickens wrote, "New worlds open out to them [the spectators], beyond their little worlds, and widen their range of reflections, information, sympathy, and interest. The more man knows of man, the better for brotherhood among us all."²⁰

In an age that made no distinction between popular art and serious art, the panorama appealed to serious artists as well as the masses. David, on taking his students to a Prévost and Daguerre exhibition, was overheard to say, "Really, one has to come here to study Nature!"²¹ And in 1800 the Institut de France officially sanctioned the panorama as a high art form and encouraged its development.²² The widespread acceptance and fascination with the panorama led Sternberger to refer to the nineteenth century as the "panoramic age."²³

A random selection of titles during this period reveals the historical, topical, religious, and geographical nature of panoramic subject matter: "View of Ireland,"²⁴ "Panorama of the Bible,"²⁵ "The Battle of Wagram,"²⁶ "Grand French Dio-Panorama of the Funeral of Napoleon,"²⁷ "Midnight Mass in Rome."²⁸

The earliest panorama in America was view of "Bunker Hill,"²⁹ "American Fleet,"³⁰ "Jerusalem displayed in New York in 1790."²⁹ On August 21, 1795, a "View of the Cities of London and Westminster,"

"A Trip to Niagara,"³⁶ "A Trip up the Hudson River,"³⁷ reportedly covering 2,400 square feet, was advertised in "Billard's Panorama of New York City,"³⁸ "Mammoth Cave in Kentucky,"³⁹ and showing of these panoramas developed in popularity. One showing of these panoramas developed in South Carolina, 110' x 20', was shown in New York on February 4, 1797.³⁰ John Vanderlyn built a large rotunda in New York in 1818 to house his paintings of Versailles.³¹ In the early 1820's Pierre Martin Stollenwerck invented a panorama with moving "mechanical" figures in a painting form. By the late 1840's the stage was set for the most prolific panoramist of them all--John Banvard, poet, dreamer, showman, and theatrical artist. Combining a modest artistic skill with shrewd management, Yankee Europe and England it was said because "America had no ingenuity, and hard work, he became world famous, earned artists commensurate with the grandeur and extent of her scenery."³³ In America landscape painting was of secondary importance to portraits and sentimental domestic scenes. By the late 1830's, however, inspired by the large landscapes of Thomas Cole (1801-1848) and the Hudson River School, native American artists adopted the panoramic form. Theatrical scene painters, because of their speed, skill at background detail, and mastery of large-scale landscape painting techniques, emerged as the most successful panoramists. They also possessed knowledge of theatrical mechanics, an essential part of a successful panorama show.

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Panorama titles began to reflect an emerging national consciousness and less emphasis on foreign subject matter:

"Bunker Hill,"³⁴ "American Fleet Against Tripoli,"³⁵

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 modest artistic skill with shrewd management, Yankee
 ingenuity, and hard work, he became world famous, earned
 millions of dollars, and in the process helped pave the
 way for realistic spectacle in the American theatre and the
 development of the motion picture.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Gernsheim, p. 18.

¹¹ Gernsheim, pp. 14-15.

¹² Gernsheim, p. 14.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Gernsheim, p. 18.

¹⁵ McDermott, p. 6. W. Williams, Transparency Painting on Linen: For Decorative Purposes, Panoramic and Dioramic Effects, Ornamental Blinds, Etc., with Instruction for the preparation of the linen, the combination and transfer of ornamental designs, combined surfaces, etc. (London: Winsor and Newton, 1855) describes the panorama and diorama painting techniques.

FOOTNOTES

¹William Burt Gamble, The Division of Scenic Art and Stage Machinery: A List of References in the New York Public Library (New York: New York Public Library, 1928), p. 100.

²John Francis McDermott, The Lost Panoramas of the Mississippi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 2.

³Ibid.

⁴Helmut and Alison Gernsheim, L.J.M. Daguerre (1787-1851) (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1956), p. 3.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷McDermott, p. 5.

⁸Gernsheim, p. 13.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Gernsheim, p. 18.

¹¹Gernsheim, pp. 14-15.

¹²Gernsheim, p. 14.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Gernsheim, p. 18.

¹⁵McDermott, p. 6. W. Williams, Transparency Painting on Linen: For Decorative Purposes, Panoramic and Dioramic Effects, Ornamental Blinds, Etc., with Instruction for the preparation of the linen, the combination and transfer of ornamental designs, combined surfaces, etc. (London: Winsor and Newton, 1855) describes the panorama and diorama painting techniques.

³³"John Banvard's Great Picture," Littell's Living Age, XV (December, 1847), 511.

¹⁶McDermott, p. 17.

¹⁷Dolf Sternberger, Panorama of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), pp. 185-189. Richard Carl Wickman, "An Evaluation of the Employment of Panoramic Scenery in the Nineteenth Century Theatre," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1961) also supports this view.

¹⁸Joseph S. Schick, The Early Theatre in Eastern Iowa (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 136.

¹⁹John Rowson Smith, quoted in McDermott, p. 8.

²⁰[Charles Dickens], "Some Account of an Extraordinary Traveller," Household Words, I (Saturday, April 20, 1850), 77.

²¹Gernsheims, p. 6.

²²Ibid.

²³Sternberger, p. 185.

²⁴Schick, p. 136.

²⁵Schick, p. 139.

²⁶Gernsheims, p. 34.

²⁷Gernsheims, p. 6.

²⁸Gernsheims, p. 34.

²⁹McDermott, p. 8.

³⁰Kenneth Lindsay, The Works of John Vanderlyn: From Tammany to the Capitol (Binghamton, New York: State University of New York at Binghamton, 1970), p. 57.

³¹Theodore Bolton, "Vanderlyn and the American Panoramania," Art News, (November, 1956), 43.

³²Joseph Earl Arrington, "John Banvard's Moving Panorama of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers," The Filson History Club Quarterly, XXXII (July, 1958), 208.

³³"John Banvard's Great Picture," Littell's Living Age, XV (December, 1847), 511.

³⁴Schick, p. 141.

³⁵McDermott, p. 9.

³⁶Arrington, p. 208.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Schick, p. 139.

³⁹Ibid.

John Bonivard claimed to be descended from the renowned Bonivard family of the Republic of Geneva.

In 1519, three de Bonivard brothers were imprisoned for their revolutionary activities in the notorious Chateau de Chillon. Two brothers soon died, but the oldest, Francois, survived, and, as the story goes, wore traces in the stone floor of his dungeon with his ceaseless pacing. According to Bonivard, his worn path, clearly visible, was "still shown to travelers visiting the castle."¹ De Bonivard's bravery and zeal for freedom inspired Lord Byron's 1816 poem "The Prisoner of Chillon." A neighbor recalled that Bonivard, well into his seventies, entertained visitors with the de Bonivard story by bounding from his chair and "dramatically" reciting Byron's lines:²

Chillon! Thy sad prison is a holy place,
And thy sad floor an altar--for 'twas trod
Until his very steps have left a trace
Worn, as if thy cold pavement were a god
By Bonivard [sic]!--May none these marks efface!
For they appeal from tyrants to God.

Unfortunately, like many of Bonivard's legendary claims, the pedigree was false. There was no historical de Bonivard

CHAPTER I

THE EARLY YEARS: 1815-1841

John Banvard claimed to be descended from the renowned de Bonivard family of the Republic of Geneva. In 1519, three de Bonivard brothers were imprisoned for their revolutionary activities in the notorious Chateau de Chillon. Two brothers soon died, but the oldest, Francois, survived, and, as the story goes, wore traces in the stone floor of his dungeon with his ceaseless pacing. According to Banvard, his worn path, clearly visible, was "still shown to travelers visiting the castle."¹ De Bonivard's bravery and zeal for freedom inspired Lord Byron's 1816 poem "The Prisoner of Chillon." A neighbor recalled that Banvard, well into his seventies, entertained visitors with the de Bonivard story by bounding from his chair and "dramatically" reciting Byron's lines:²

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 For they appeal from tyranny to God.³

Unfortunately, like many of Banvard's romantic claims, the pedigree was false. There was an historical de Bonivard

family, but John came from humbler stock; the Banvards originated from the Montpelier region in the southern coastal area of France.⁴ His grandfather, Pierre Banvard, a Moravian, emigrated to America c. 1760 and settled in New England. Daniel Banvard, John's father, was born in 1767. He became an architect, married Elizabeth Mead, a member of a prominent New England family, and settled in New York City where he established a construction firm in 1791.⁵ His business prospered and, allied with the Lorrillard Brothers, tobacconists and fellow Moravians, he drew up plans for and built the first continuous row of buildings from street to street in New York City.⁶

Daniel built a simple frame house for his family at the corner of Broadway and Pearl Streets, near the site of what was later the Tombs prison complex, and although wide pastures were nearby, the house lacked privacy. He wanted to "move a little way out of town instead of living directly in the city."⁷ He sold his house and lot for one thousand dollars, a "good speculation" he thought, and invested sixty pounds sterling for another lot "well up on Broadway" at the corner of Canal Street, where he built a spacious two-story house. There on November 15, 1815, John Banvard, the third son and last of eleven children, was born.⁸

Young John grew up in a staunchly Moravian household. Daniel and Elizabeth actively participated in church affairs and prayers, Bible study, and hymn singing were important in John's upbringing. This was a strict home, but a loving one.⁹ Banvard was precocious and his father encouraged him to paint, draw, and design simple buildings.¹⁰ Literature, particularly poetry, was read aloud by family members and John could recite from memory long verses while still in his highchair. At nine he composed a lengthy poem commemorating Lafayette's visit to New York in 1824.¹¹ Banvard's interest in poetry never waned; he wrote an estimated 1,700 poems in his lifetime.¹²

His first teacher was Joseph Hoxie, later a prominent New York politician and City Judge, and Banvard and his classmates enjoyed frequent spring picnics, trips to watch Fulton's steamboat on the Hudson River, and mature outings.¹³ Banvard's most unpleasant experience occurred when his best friend and next door neighbor, a boy named DeWitt, was killed by a team of runaway horses. Afterwards the teacher refused to let any student occupy the deceased boy's desk; "It remained vacant thereafter," Banvard later wrote, "and as it was near mine I was reminded daily of my play-fellow's death. . . I never forgot."¹⁴

At the age of ten, Banvard attended a Moravian school taught by Benjamin Mortimer, Jr., a family friend and son of the Banvard family pastor. During the first

term the eccentric Mortimer led his pupils to Stuyvesant Fields to witness the hanging of a murderer named John Johnson. Banvard thought it was "a horrible idea, to take a lot of children to see such an exhibition."¹⁵

In addition to his drawing and painting, Banvard built a small laboratory where he conducted simple scientific experiments. At the age of nine or ten he co-ordinated a neighborhood entertainment with his next door friends the Woodworth brothers, sons of Samuel Woodworth, minor American poet famous for his "The Old Oaken Bucket."¹⁶ John and the Woodworths built their own printing press and distributed handbills.

BANVARD'S ENTERTAINMENTS

(To be seen at No. 68 Center Street, between White and Walker.)

Consisting of
1st. Solar Microscope,
2nd. Camera Obscura,
3rd. Punch and Judy
4th. Sea Scene
5th. Magic Lantern

Admittance (to see the whole) six cents
The following are the days of Performance viz.
Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays.
Performance to commence at half-past 3P.M.

The bill for Daniel John Banvard, Proprietor
F. Woodworth, printer, 521 Pearl Street¹⁷

This childhood exercise with its optical illusions contained Banvard's first diorama. Entitled "Sea Scene," it featured moving "boats, fish, and a naval engagement."¹⁸

Banvard usually spent his summer vacations with his maternal cousins in New England. He loved listening to his maternal grandfather, Jesse Mead, tell stories of the Revolutionary War; old Jesse had been an original Minute Man and had fought at the Battle of Lexington.¹⁹ At summer's end, 1831, Banvard returned home "to find it in great tribulation and sorrow."²⁰ His father had suffered a severe stroke and was paralyzed. In the meantime, his business partner had liquidated all the construction firm's assets, pocketed the proceeds, and left New York, never to be seen again. Daniel, stunned by the sudden turn of events, suffered a second stroke and died August 2, 1831. Young Banvard arrived home to attend the funeral and discovered that all the family property, including the household furnishings, was impounded. Two deputy sheriffs attended the funeral, held in the Banvard home, to "see that none of the mourners bore off anything with them."²¹ John's mother was prostrate with grief and could not attend the burial. For a time the family feared that she might die as well.²²

The bill for Daniel Banvard's funeral listed twelve dollars for a coffin, one dollar for a shroud, and two dollars and fifty-two cents for miscellaneous expenses.²³ The death of his father and the subsequent family humiliation followed Banvard all his life and he devoted a good portion of his time in an effort to gain respectability and

accumulating wealth. Incidentally, that funeral bill was among Banvard's few possessions when he himself died in 1891.²⁴

Now fifteen and the eldest son at home, Banvard was responsible for his mother and two older sisters Catherine and Margaret. He searched the newspapers daily for job advertisements, but without success. After three weeks he gave up. An older brother, Peter, had settled in Louisville, Kentucky, and John decided to follow him there. He borrowed travel fare, and after a tearful farewell to his mother, Banvard set out for the West in September 1831.²⁵

Louisville, Kentucky, was a sprawling, thriving frontier town in 1831. A special census that year disclosed a population of 10,366,²⁶ a 260% increase over a decade before.²⁷ Louisville was an ideal place for a young man making his way in the world and the city was full of men who arrived in the same impoverished condition as Banvard. John found his brother operating a dry goods store, but for some reason Peter did not hire him. However, the youngster found employment as an apothecary's assistant in a drug store. The sights, sounds, and smells of the river city fascinated the fifteen year old boy. He watched a slave auction where a slave refused to accompany his new master and was consequently dragged and whipped through the streets of Louisville crying, "You may kill me, but I won't go!" He looked on in amazement as his next door

neighbor, a city constable, regularly whipped his slave with a heavy leather lash in the front yard. "The slave's shrieks," wrote Banvard, "were heartrendering [sic] to hear."²⁸

In the spring of 1832, Louisville was struck by the worst flood in Ohio River history. Rains fell every day from February 10 through February 21, the river rose far above flood stage, and there was a "total cessation" of business.²⁹ Banvard described the destruction.

Many buildings were carried away. I saw a large three storey mill that stood on the Indiana side of the Falls carried away. The river was filled with floating farm waggons [sic], hay stacks, house furniture, etc., which came floating down and were swept over the falls. As I stood on the levee one day an immense timber raft came sweeping down close to shore, as it past [sic] the landing it struck the bow of the steamer Cavillier [sic] with a terrible crash [and] tore an immense opening in her side when she immediately filled and sank. The water came up over the levee into the side streets and many buildings were carried away--my brother procured a cable and tied it around his store, which was a wooden structure, and thus preserved it from being carried off. With other buildings it was raised from its foundation and floated on the surface of the flood. All the cordage that could be had in the city was employed in similar use and the price in consequence rose enormously. . . . The steam boats ran up the side streets to discharge their freight, and when the water began to recede it went down so fast that the steamer Reindeer was left aground in Fourth Street.³⁰

After the flood waters receded, Banvard's employer gave him the task of unloading freight south of Louisville below the Ohio Falls. Despite the opening of the Portland Canal

in 1830, which enabled steamboats ascending the Ohio River to pass around the treacherous Falls, many steamboat operators were unwilling to pay the stiff toll (sixty cents a ton) necessary for passage. The annual freight toll could equal half the amount required to build a new boat.³¹ Consequently, merchants sent their young clerks to Shippingsport, Kentucky, the nearest south port to the Falls, to unload merchandise. Banvard often stayed overnight if the steamer was slow in unloading its freight and it was here at Shippingsport that his fascination with rivers and river life began. He met the rough riverboat men whose romantic life at once appealed to him. Robert Baird, an early traveler in the West, commented, "There is not on earth a class of men of a more peculiar and marked character, than the western boatmen."³² Historian R. Carlyle Buley remarked on the lure of the river for these men.

The life was attractive because of [its] color and danger, in freedom, its periods of ease, and the opportunities offered to see the world. From the Allegheny to the farthest reaches of the Arkansas, from New Orleans to the Yellowstone, the boatmen roamed in labor and adventure, subject only to the law of their kind. It [river work] was rough and hard, and it produced a class of rough and hard men. Whether they were the toughest class in the West cannot be proved, but in their own opinion there was no doubt about it, and this view is often supported by others.³³

were self-taught.³⁸ They worked in one of two modes,

Banvard and several other young clerks were once treated to a free supper aboard a steamer on her maiden trip. The owner, typical of the "arrogant and independent" captains of the period,³⁴ insisted that each clerk toast the new steamer with a glass of wine. A crew member locked the cabin door and the clerks were ordered to continue drinking until, one by one, they passed out. Banvard, who pretended to be "exceedingly hilarious," poured his drinks into a spittoon hidden beneath a berth, and after the group was soundly asleep, made good his escape.³⁵

Banvard lost his job at the drug store during the latter part of 1832 when he entertained his fellow clerks by drawing sketches of the owner on the drug store walls. His employer told him "he though he could make better likenesses than he could pills," and fired him.³⁶ One version of this dismissal states that Banvard found the drug business "distasteful" and his employer, recognizing the boy's talent as an artist, advised him to "devote his future to that profession."³⁷ Then, in the spring of 1833, Now seventeen years old, Banvard looked for work as an itinerant artist, an occupation that he pursued during the next fourteen years. The itinerant artist was a fixture on the American frontier, and most, like Banvard, were self-taught.³⁸ They worked in one or more modes, give the whole family employment.³⁹ So William, his two

including miniatures, clay modeling, fractur (illuminated handwriting), sign painting, silhouettes, frescoes, and interior decoration of public halls.³⁹ Even the best American artists from 1750 to 1840--Benjamin West (1738-1820), John Singleton Copley (1738-1815), Gilbert Stuart (1755-1828), Charles Wilson Peale (1741-1827)--moved from city to city in search of work. These artists were forced to do their work quickly and accurately, for only by having a high turnover of jobs could they make a living.⁴⁰ With the proceeds from a job "ornamenting and decorating" a city park, Banvard rented a studio for the painting portraits.⁴¹ During this time he acquired some of the skills that led to the success of his later panoramas--a quick brush stroke, an ability to paint in oil from hurried sketches, and a careful study of backgrounds. When the studio enterprise failed through a lack of customers, Banvard looked for work as a scenic artist around the theatres of Louisville, but his youth and inexperience made that fruitless.⁴² Then, in the spring of 1833, he finally found theatrical work--he was engaged as an artist by the famous Chapman family. William Chapman and his family emigrated from England to New York in 1827. They achieved modest acting success in New York City, but "no single theatre was willing to give the whole family employment."⁴³ So William, his two

sons, Samuel and William, Jr., and their wives and ~~atre~~ children, and his daughter Caroline came to the West in 1831.⁴⁴

After several frustrating experiences performing in inadequate halls and hotels, William Sr. decided to launch "the first river craft built with the intent to perform aboard it."⁴⁵ Chapman fitted up a barge, christened it,

the Floating Theatre, and with nine Chapman family members and two unidentified crewmen, pushed off from Pittsburgh down the Ohio River.⁴⁶ Chapman's enterprise was a logical solution to the problems inherent in bringing theatre to the sparsely populated regions of the West: he merely adapted an "Eastern institution (the theatre) to the Western environment (dependence on the rivers)."⁴⁷ The family developed a routine. Beginning their annual tour at Pittsburgh, they drifted down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers, often starting the day at 3:00 A.M. to avoid heavy morning headwinds. They stopped at dozens of remote landings for one night stands during their 1,800 mile journey. When they drifted into New Orleans, they dismantled the boat, sold the lumber, and with their accumulated capital, made their way overland to Pittsburgh.⁴⁸ In later years, when the business became more profitable, they sailed by steamer to New York.

No contemporary sketches of the Floating Theatre survive, but some descriptions do. Noah Ludlow wrote:

My first knowledge of the family [the Chapmans], if my recollection be correct, was about the year 1831 or 1832, when I beheld a large flat-boat, with a rude kind of house built upon it, having a ridge-roof, above which projected a staff with a flag attached, upon which was plainly visible the word 'Theatre!'⁴⁹

Showboat historian Philip Graham, without documentation, says the boat was "a little more than one hundred feet long and sixteen feet wide" with the 'enclosed portion of the boat measuring one hundred feet long and fourteen feet wide.'⁵⁰ According to Graham, it had a narrow, shallow stage at the stern, a pit in the middle, and a rear gallery for blacks.⁵¹ Banvard, however, describes a more sophisticated vessel; box seats were built along the sides of the boat extending over the water. Wooden guards were built behind these boxes to prevent water from splashing over the spectators.⁵²

The Chapmans, noted for their acting, emphasized regular drama more than any other showboat in American history. The pioneering efforts of this theatrical family "set the pattern for the American showboat," and "wherever they played, danced, and sang, they spread the charm and geniality of the showboat."⁵³ However genial the atmosphere on board during performance, Banvard soon discovered that the Chapmans were less than genial to their hired help.

Banvard was employed as a scenic artist by the Chapmans during the 1833 season, but for some undisclosed reason they refused to pay him. He decided to stay on board until such time as "the management would accumulate enough funds so as to liquidate" his claim. He took an area back of the left side of the stage proscenium and boarded off a place in which to stand and sit. He then constructed a berth which extended underneath the stage left box seats directly over the water. As the summer passed and he still had not been paid, however, Banvard discovered his rigged cabin was uncomfortable. The guards behind the box seats had been assembled while green and during the fall they cracked from warping and seasoning. High waves or heavy swells from passing steamers doused Banvard day and night. He began to wonder if he could make it to New Orleans, but his stubbornness matched the Chapmans'.⁵⁴

One fall morning he awakened to discover that an early frost had frozen his bedding. When he sat up his "blankets and spread broke in two in the middle and stood straight up like a trap door."⁵⁵ In a typical display of pluckiness he solved his problem.

The roof was now discovered to leak badly all over. At one of the towns where tar could be procured, the management bought enough to put on that portion of the roof or deck directly over where the

rooms of the family were situated. Just as the man had got the tar heated and all ready to put on, dinner was announced and he left to consume his portion of that meal. While he was absent, I took the material to the roof over my room where I worked like a good fellow and by the time dinner was over I had the area over my apartment thoroughly tarred so I did not suffer from leakage as long as I remained aboard. I consumed about half the tar the manager bought and rendered it necessary for him to purchase more to make his own roof tight. I made my roof tight, and myself more comfortable by the operation, although I had to eat a cold dinner. He did not like what I had done, but I did not care.⁵⁶

By the time the Chapman showboat reached New Orleans, Banvard fifty-six year old George Rapp on 25,000 acres on the Mississippi River in the spring of 1815, established a disciplined, celibate, thriving community under the man orchestra, Wilbur, a fiddler, and Woodward, a clarinetist, joined Banvard. Other troupe members were Scudder, an older man and Banvard's closest friend, and Mortimer, a comic singer. Scudder had once performed as the "Great American Fire King," and his speciality was eating live coals and licking red hot iron.⁵⁷

Banvard's relationship with Scudder, whose first name is unknown, is intriguing. A J. Scudder ran a museum that featured a panorama in Albany, New York, in 1808,⁵⁸ and John Scudder⁵⁹ and an F. Scudder⁶⁰ both ran theatres in New York that displayed panoramas in the early 1820's. John Scudder died in 1825,⁶¹ but nothing more is heard of F. Scudder. Could F. Scudder and Banvard's friend be the same person? If so, it is important because Banvard would

have had close personal contact with a man who had not only displayed panoramas, but had publicized them and knew the mechanics of a panorama performance. The five men made their way overland from New Orleans to New Harmony, Indiana, and in July 1834 built "an exhibition boat and theatre."⁶²

New Harmony was the site of two major nineteenth century social experiments. The first, founded by fifty-six year old George Rapp on 25,000 acres on the Wabash River in the spring of 1815,⁶³ reestablished a disciplined, celibate, thriving community under the auspices of a religious and economic dictatorship. The first buildings erected were separate dormitories for men and women and soon:

They established branch stores at Vincennes and Shawneetown. Since their own wants were simple and they worked under rigid discipline, they got ahead; they accepted only specie and notes of the Bank of the United States. In time a fine . . . church, a house for Rapp, a tavern, spacious community houses and other improvements were added.⁶⁴

The "other improvements" included a theatre and a concert music hall.

In 1825, Rapp, after a vision, sold the New Harmony lands and buildings to the British industrialist and great social reformer Robert Owen (1771-1858). Owen wanted a practical socialist community to refute his critics' claims

that such an enterprise was impossible because of the nature of human greed. Twice Owen addressed the Congress of the United States in the presence of the President and the Supreme Court Justices, telling of his plans for the "Utopia on the Wabash." He would bring scientists, artists, and skilled laborers together in a perfect communal When supplies dwindled, Banvard went to Louisville for Soon after the Rappites departed and the Owenites arrived, trouble developed. Production quotas and job responsibilities were vague and the first year ended in disaster. each Louisville. 69

After When production failed, meetings were held, resolutions passed. Much planning resulted, little work; it was a system under which the dissatisfied farmer might become a printer, bookkeeper, or teacher, the dissatisfied writer a farmer. It did not work. 66

January 18, 1830, and featured equestrian acts staged by By late 1827, much of New Harmony returned to private Blanchard and his family. 65 Blanchard gradually switched ownership. Robert's sons David and William remained. from circus entertainments to legitimate plays, but by David operated a natural science laboratory and lectured March 1831, the theatre folded. 64 Blanchard now ran a once a week on natural philosophy. Banvard "attended every clothing store in Louisville. There Banvard purchased one of these" and gained "considerable knowledge" during the remainder of the Amphitheatre's costumes for his his stay in New Harmony. 67 William founded the Thespian showboat and headed back to New Harmony. 68 Upon Banvard's return the company bought a forty-foot flatboat for forty dollars. The craft had been For over one hundred years New Harmony enjoyed continuous constructed as an apothecary's boat and consequently was seasons of drama. 68

tight Banvard's fledgling company looked for a river-roying
 craft suitable as a showboat. In the meantime each com-
 pany member was also given a specific task. Banvard out-
 fitted the scenery. He laid out his canvases in the
 dancing hall of the New Harmony Hotel, where the company
 boarded for one dollar and fifty cents a week each. When
 his painting supplies dwindled, Banvard went to Louisville
 for more. After a stage ride through southern Indiana in
 which he was "jolted half to death," he found the Ohio ver-
 River low and impassable by boat. It took him several
 days to reach Louisville.⁶⁹ dry goods), was a common sight
 on the After buying his paints, brushes, and canvas, Banvard
 called on G. Blanchard, former owner of Blanchard's day.⁷⁵
 Amphitheatre in New York City. The Amphitheatre had opened
 January 18, 1830, and featured equestrian acts staged by
 Blanchard and his family.⁷⁰ Blanchard gradually switched
 from circus entertainments to legitimate plays, but by
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Banva Upon Banvard's return the company bought a forty-
 foot flatboat for forty dollars. The craft had been which
 constructed as an apothecary's boat and consequently was
 Rivers to New Orleans. Each member of the company,

tight in the hull to prevent water seepage from destroying medicines.⁷³ Its medium-size length suggest that it was probably a "Dead Man's Boat," so called because crew watchmen on top of the small cabin were often drowned after being swept off by overhanging tree limbs and bridges.⁷⁴ Banvard's stay in New Harmony was not all work. He enjoyed Banvard planned to set up a floating grocery store and use the various theatrical skills of the crew members to lure customers at frontier settlements along the river banks. The floating grocery boat, flying a bright red flag (yellow if it carried dry goods), was a common sight on the navigable Western rivers. Sometimes five or six such boats would pass even the remotest places each day.⁷⁵ A dear old traveler, Robert Sutcliffe, described their operation: "As they sail along the river on coming to a plantation they blow a horn or conch shell, to give notice of their arrival; when the planters with their wives and daughters repair to these floating shops and select such things as they are in want of; and make payment in the produce of their plantations, such as grain, flour, cotton, tobacco, dried venison, the skins of wild animals. The shopkeeper, having disposed of his goods in this way, returns home with the produce he has collected and again renews his stock and proceeds on another voyage."⁷⁶ Banvard's crew bought groceries, cigars, and tobacco to sell along the river. Banvard drew up a contract in which all agreed to descend the Wabash, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers to New Orleans. Each member of the company,

including a new man, Mr. Lowe, who joined the troupe into because of the "great prospective profits held up to his view,"⁷⁷ swore he would "do the best he could in his capacity and all money earned whatsoever was to go in a general fund and be divided once a week."⁷⁸ December 1834, Banvard's stay in New Harmony was not all work. He enjoyed the town picnics, dances, and "merrymaking"⁷⁹ and eventually became "acquainted with nearly all the table people in the town."⁸⁰ One of his acquaintances was a young girl named Rosilia, a member of the New Harmony Dramatic Company who "possessed considerable stage talent."⁸¹ These One morning Banvard found a sign attached to the New Harmony Hotel entrance which attributed "villainous and obscene epithets" to him. Upon learning the identity of the author, a young lawyer named Barclay who earlier had been Rosilia's steady escort, Banvard named his attackery in a "humorous and sarcastic rejoinder" which he tacked below the original sign. The rejoinder declared that Barclay had libeled Banvard and had "reflected on the character of certain estimable young ladies of New Harmony, and if he [Barclay] was not careful he might get a horse-whipping."⁸² The next morning Barclay was waiting for Banvard as he descended the hotel steps. A fight broke out and Banvard, after being pinned helpless between a sign post and a cattle post, managed to win. Barclay,

"amidst the derisive shouts of the spectators," fled into the hotel. Two hours later the defeated lawyer left for Mt. Carmel by stagecoach. Banvard owed his success to "scientific boxing lessons" given him by Scudder.⁸³

The ice on the Wabash broke up in early December 1834, and the company was anxious to begin the long journey to New Orleans. With their remaining capital, the crew members bought rough unplanned boards for portable bleacher seating. Banvard built a small stage and constructed a seven-foot high curtain that rose and fell.⁸⁴ He also planned some "interesting physical experiments."⁸⁵ These "physical experiments" may have been simple magic tricks, or lights and flash pots to illuminate some of his paintings. In Banvard's later panorama pamphlets he mentioned that he "got up" some dioramic paintings during his "first" voyage down the rivers.⁸⁶ This was actually his second trip, but his pamphlets omitted any mention of the Chapmans. Only sixty years later did he mention them in his unpublished autobiography.

At two P.M., December 18, 1834, Banvard's troupe pushed off from New Harmony for New Orleans. They floated eight miles the first day. As they prepared to retire for the night, they discovered that no one had brought any bedding. In communal fashion they made one huge bed from with an architectural Florentine

sailor's coats and the few available blankets. They slept that way the entire winter, perhaps not uncomfortably. They were accustomed to hard beds; the Chapman family made its hired hands sleep only on straw.⁸⁷

Banvard's first retail-theatrical enterprise succeeded. The company pulled into river settlements, sang songs advertising their wares, entertained customers with farces directed by the comic singer Mortimer, sold their groceries, and pushed off for the next town. The addition of theatrical fare was a novelty that contributed to their success.⁸⁸ Several months later the company arrived in New Orleans and, following the customary river practice, sold the boat.⁸⁹

In the summer of 1835, Banvard once more assembled a group at New Harmony, but only Lowe returned from the crew of 1834. New members included a Mr. Kemble and a Mr. Harns. This voyage was to be different. Banvard would not sell groceries, but would feature dramatic performances and exhibitions of his scenic paintings. No longer would farces be the sole dramatic fare; he ambitiously planned to produce Shakespeare.⁹⁰

The new showboat was an improvement; it was "all enclosed and decked over." Banvard painted several scenes for the performances, the most interesting a drop curtain with an architectural Florentine view and an open collonade

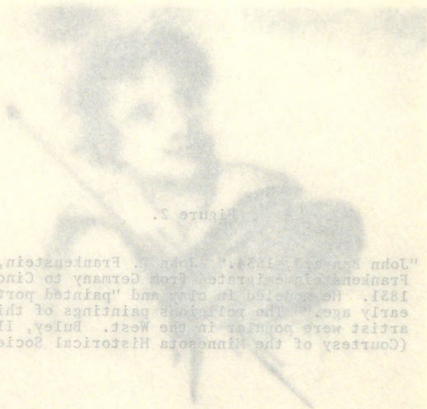


Figure 2.

"John Banvard, 1834. John P. Frankenstein, Louisville.
 Frankenstein migrated from Germany to Cincinnati in
 1831. He modeled in clay and "painted portraits at an
 early age." The portrait paintings of this "eccentric"
 artist were common in the West. Bufile, II, 876.
 (Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.)

John Banvard.

Painted by

J.P. Frankenstein.

Louisville, 1834.

Figure 2.

Figure 2.

"John Banvard, 1834." John P. Frankenstein, Louisville. Frankenstein emigrated from Germany to Cincinnati in 1831. He modeled in clay and "painted portraits at an early age." The religious paintings of this "eccentric" artist were popular in the West. Buley, II, 576. (Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.)



John Bonvard.

Painted by

J. P. Frankenstein.

Lowell. 1836.

Figure 2.

receding in perspective. It was "much admired" by audiences.⁹¹ At this time it is evident that Banvard painted scenes of which he had no personal direct geographical knowledge, a contrasting practice to his later technique of sketching and painting from his own observation.

The new enterprise was doomed from the beginning. New Harmony was struck with an epidemic of ague and the entire company fell ill. The delay of several months caused by the illnesses exhausted the company capital, making it impossible to finish outfitting the boat. The troupe performed to earn funds for provisions, but as the town was under quarantine, audiences were understandably small. Out of food, penniless, and sick, they decided to push off anyway, gambling that the first night's profits down river would help replenish their supplies.⁹²

Incredibly, the first night out the men discovered that, just as in the previous year, they had forgotten bedding! Banvard, because his illness was the most severe, was given one of two mattresses; the other crew members slept on hard benches in the auditorium. The next day the boat ran aground six times. Each time the crew, minus Banvard, waded into the Wabash and using oars and tree limbs, freed the showboat.⁹³

The following morning a head wind stronger than the river current prevented the boat from drifting. To pass the time the company practiced songs, one of which,

"Home, Sweet Home," Banvard found "not at all edifying." He was so ill he could not rise from his mattress.⁹⁴

On the fourth day the wind died and the boat immediately grounded on a sandbar. The situation was desperate. Banvard had calculated it would take three days to get down the Wabash to the Ohio and more populous settlements; consequently, the troupe had only stocked provisions for three days. By the fifth day they had traveled only a third of the distance necessary to reach the mouth of the Wabash. The crew sighted an old trapper wandering along the bank, and after a promise of five dollars cash, he guided the boat through the snags and rapids that lay ahead. Two days later they reached the Ohio.⁹⁵

Reduced to eating paw paws, the group reached Shawneetown, Illinois, in pitiful shape. When the boat could not reach the landing because of large "sawyers," trees lying submerged in the river, townspeople sent out a canoe. As the crew prepared to go ashore, Banvard, too ill to move, gave Harns his last twenty-five cents for pills and quinine. At eleven that night Harns returned roaring drunk and minus the medicine. Harns had decided that Banvard did not need the medicine because he was not sick but had feigned illness and shirked his duty to help clear the boat from sandbars. "Here you had the use of

that mattress ever since we left Harmony," Harns grumbled, "now I am going to have a night's rest; I am tired of sleeping on hard benches." Thereupon he jerked the mattress from under Banvard and passed out. The fever-ridden Banvard spent the night on the wet bottom of the showboat.⁹⁶

The entire company, weak from their exertions on the Wabash, fell ill again. During a performance in Golconda, Illinois, "three characters [were] shaking with agues at one time in a scene."⁹⁷

[Kemble] had taken some medicine just before the curtain rose and while enacting in the scene became sick at the stomach and was forced to leave the stage temporarily and the remaining characters had to talk against time and gag out the scene while Kemble was vomiting over the side guard. But it was play or starve as there were no provisions on the boat and the night's receipts was [sic] depended on to procure supper.⁹⁸

No written agreement existed for this enterprise and tempers were short. As Banvard's condition improved, the troupe's worsened. Banvard now did most of the work--washing clothes, seeking fresh drinking water, and finding milk among the farms that dotted the shoreline. He also spent several sleepless nights pumping water out of the now leaky boat; its trials on the Wabash had damaged its hull.⁹⁹

At Paducah, Kentucky, Banvard sold his share of the boat to Lowe for ninety dollars, but he never received the money nor saw Lowe again.¹⁰⁰ While pondering his future in that town, he met John Betts, a local theatre manager. The Betts family, like the Chapmans, consisted of English

immigrant actors. The members included Mrs. Betts (formerly Mrs. Mitchell), her two sisters Mrs. Hallam and Rachael Stannard, and Betts' stepson, Thomas Mitchell. The sisters had come to Kentucky in a roundabout way. In 1826, John Hallam, an actor related to the famous theatrical family of the eighteenth century, asked Joseph Cowell, his Philadelphia manager, for a leave of absence to travel to England and find a wife. Cowell gave his permission on the condition that if he found any talented actors or actresses who were willing to work for three guineas a week, he was to bring them back. Hallam returned with the new Mrs. Hallam. The new talent consisted of Mrs. Hallam's two sisters, Miss Stannard and Mrs. Mitchell and her husband Mr. Mitchell. Later Cowell noted dryly, "The rest of the family wouldn't come, I suppose."¹⁰¹

Mrs. Betts "had a very pretty face and a broad Lincolnshire accent." She reminded Cowell of character actress Jean Margaret Davenport and he offered her double salary if she played old women.¹⁰² She made her New York debut in The Wandering Boys at the Lafayette Theatre on January 6, 1829.¹⁰³

Rachael Stannard (b. 1800) had just returned from St. Louis where in July 1835, she worked for Noah Ludlow at the Salt House Theatre; she played Ophelia to Charles K. Mason's Hamlet.¹⁰⁴

John Betts, a respected citizen of Paducah, served on its board of health, an important position in a region that suffered from frequent epidemics.¹⁰⁵ Betts had met Mrs. Mitchell, by then a widow, in New York where he married her.¹⁰⁶

Betts was impressed by Banvard's canvases and hired him as a scenic artist. John lived in the Betts' house while the family nursed him back to health. His strength was insufficient for rigging and painting large canvases, so an old actor named King, whom Banvard had known in Louisville, assisted him.¹⁰⁷

Banvard considered the Betts family troupe extremely talented. Little Thomas Mitchell played the children's parts, King the old men's roles, and several amateur actors from Paducah rounded out the troupe.¹⁰⁸

It is not known how long Banvard stayed with the Betts and his whereabouts between 1835 and 1840 cannot be determined accurately. The accounts of Banvard's life in various newspapers, journals, and pamphlets are exaggerated and inaccurate. Banvard claimed to be a scenic artist in Natchez, New Orleans, Cincinnati, and Louisville. What is certain is that Banvard spent these years sketching and using the experiences with the Chapmans, the New Harmony expeditions, and the Betts to work on his artistic technique.

The next record of Banvard is an exhibition in St. Louis in 1841. Miss Hayden (first name unknown), the "far-famed American Sybil,"¹⁰⁹ opened a magic show at the St. Louis Museum on March 17, 1841. She was "the only Lady in the world who has ever attempted those difficult experiments."¹¹⁰ Her program also included a display of "GRAND MOVING PANORAMAS" of the cities of Jerusalem and Venice, "covering an extent of canvas exceeding 100 square feet, painted by the celebrated artist Banvara [sic]."¹¹¹ The Missouri Republican noted:

The Panoramas of Venice and Jerusalem, from the pencil of the distinguished artist J. Bonvard [sic], Esq., are replete with interest and instruction; and all who admire fine paintings, and have a taste for the Fine Arts, we would advise to go and view them.¹¹²

Any early biography states that Banvard lost this painting by the "sinking of a steamer, upon which it was being transported to the city of Nashville."¹¹³ Another version said that he sold it for a "good price."¹¹⁴ The truth probably lies somewhere in between. Miss Hayden exhibited the Venice panorama in Nashville during November 1847, claiming she repaired it after it was "materially injured in the sinking of the Monedo, the boat on which she was a passenger to the city."¹¹⁵ The Monedo, a 55-ton paddle-wheeler, collided with the Western on the Cumberland River

and sank in 1847.¹¹⁶ Banvard either sold the painting to Miss Hayden before the collision, or she told him it was lost and continued exhibiting without his knowledge.

By April 1841, Banvard had accumulated enough capital to buy an interest in the St. Louis Museum as co-owner with W.S. McPherson. On April 19, he advertised the "terribly terrific spectacle" of the "INFERNAL REGIONS, nearly 100 feet in length," and a "GRAND PANORAMA OF ST. LOUIS."¹¹⁷ Then, Banvard later claimed, the Museum went bankrupt, and he was once again penniless.¹¹⁸

Subsequently, Banvard sold a twelve dollar revolver for twenty-five dollars and with the profit purchased a boat which he in turn sold for fifty dollars. Using this buy and sell method and returning to his old practice of selling groceries down the river, he managed to accumulate \$3,000.¹¹⁹

By spring 1842, Banvard was ready for the project that would make him a millionaire and bring him international acclaim within six years. He had progressed from simple showboat scenery to large panoramas, and the success of his St. Louis painting gave him the idea of painting the whole Mississippi River. By the time he finished the latter project he had produced the longest painting in the history of the world. Even today his feat is a marvel.

FOOTNOTES

¹ [John Banvard], Banvard, or, the Adventures of an Artist! A Biographical Sketch (London: Reed and Pardon, [1852]), p. 3. For a discussion of this and other pamphlets relating to Banvard, see the Appendix.

² Doane Robinson, "John Banvard," (typewritten manuscript, [1941?]), South Dakota Memorial Art Center, Brookings, South Dakota, p. 23.

³ George Gordon, Lord Byron, The Poetical Works of Lord Byron, ed. by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: John Murray, 1905), p. 379.

⁴ Edith Banvard, "Traditions of the Family," (type-written, n.d.), Banvard Family Papers, B/.A219, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota. Hereafter, Banvard Family Papers. See also, Letter, Edith Banvard to Doane Robinson, May 8, 1941, South Dakota Memorial Art Center.

⁵ Geneology Folder, Banvard Family Papers.

⁶ John Banvard, "Autobiography," (holograph manuscript #6302), Minnesota Historical Society. Hereafter, Banvard MSS #6302.

⁷ Bertha L. Heilbron, "John Banvard's New York," Antiques, LVI (August, 1949), 108.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Banvard MSS #6302.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Vertical File, Watertown Regional Library, Watertown, South Dakota. Hereafter, Banvard File, Watertown.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Banvard MSS #6302.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶Banvard MSS #6302.

¹⁷Handbill, Banvard Family Papers.

¹⁸[John Banvard], Description of Banvard's Panorama of the Mississippi River, Painted on Three Miles of Canvas, Exhibiting a View of Country 1200 Miles in Length, Extending from the Mouth of the Missouri River to the City of New Orleans, Being by far the Largest Picture Ever Executed by Man (Boston: John Putnam, 1847), p. 3. Hereafter, Description, Putnam Edition.

¹⁹Banvard MSS #6302.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Bill for Funeral Expenses, Banvard Family Papers.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Banvard MSS #6302. His mother and sisters moved to Boston to live with John's older brother, the Reverend Joseph Banvard, Pastor of the Harvard Street Baptist Church.

²⁶William Carnes Kendrick, "Reminiscences of Old Louisville," (typewritten, 1937), Michigan State Library, Department of Education, Lansing, Michigan.

²⁷History of the Ohio Falls Cities and Their Counties, with Biographical Sketches (Cleveland, Ohio: L.A. Williams, 1882), I, 264.

²⁸Banvard MSS #6302.

²⁹History of the Ohio Falls Cities, I, 264.

³⁰Banvard MSS #6302. The Cavalier was raised after the flood waters receded. Plagued by bad luck, she snagged at Evansville, Indiana, and sank with a loss of two lives on August 10, 1838. Bradford Mitchell, ed. Merchant Steam Vessels of the United States, 1790-1860: "The Lytle-Holcamper List" (Staten Island, New York: The Steamship Historical Society of America, 1975), p. 248. Hereafter, the Lytle-Holcamper List. The Reindeer burnt the next year on August 19, 1833, and sank near New Albany, Indiana. Lytle-Holcamper List, p. 298.

³¹R. Carlyle Buley, The Old Northwest Pioneer Period, 1815-1840 (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1950), I, 436.

³²Robert Baird, A View of the Valley of the Mississippi; or, the Emigrant's and Traveller's Guide to the West, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Tanner, 1834), p. 128.

³³Buley, I, 438.

³⁴Buley, I, 442.

³⁵Banvard MSS #6302.

³⁶Description, Putnam Edition, p. 4.

³⁷Public Opinion (Watertown, South Dakota), May 22, 1891.

³⁸Richardson Wright, Hawkers and Walkers in Early America: Strolling Peddlers, Preachers, Lawyers, Doctors, Players, and Others, From The Beginning To The Civil War (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1927), p. 129.

³⁹Wright, p. 132.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Louisville Democrat, November 3, 1846.

⁴²Description, Putnam Edition, p. 4.

⁴³Philip Graham, Showboats: The History of an American Institution (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1951), p. 12.

⁴⁴Graham, p. 9.

⁴⁵Duane Eldon Reed, "A History of Showboats on the Western Rivers," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1977), I, 17.

⁴⁶Graham, p. 12.

⁴⁷Graham, p. 13.

⁴⁸George D. Ford, These Were Actors (New York: Library Publishers, 1955), p. 123.

⁴⁹Noah Miller Ludlow, Dramatic Life As I Found It (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966), p. 568. Manager and actor Ludlow's first-hand accounts of theatrical life on the frontier have been invaluable in the study of the nineteenth century American theatre.

⁵⁰Graham, pp. 13-14.

⁵¹Graham, p. 14.

⁵²Banvard MSS #6302.

⁵³Graham, p. 21.

⁵⁴Banvard MSS #6302.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸H.P. Phelps, Players of a Century: A Record of the Albany Stage (Albany, New York: Joseph McDonough, 1880), p. 32.

⁵⁹George C.D. Odell, Annals of the New York Stage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927-1949), II, 600.

⁶⁰Odell, II, 445.

⁶¹Odell, II, 600. P.T. Barnum bought out John Scudder's museum items in 1850.

⁶²Banvard MSS #6302.

⁶³Buley, II, 598.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Buley, II, 603.

⁶⁶Buley, II, 605.

⁶⁷Banvard MSS #6302.

⁶⁸William Wilson, Indiana: A History (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1966), p. 80.

⁶⁹Banvard MSS #6302.

⁷⁰Ode11, III, 469.

⁷¹Ode11, III, 528.

⁷²Banvard MSS #6302.

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Byron L. Troyer, Yesterday's Indiana (Miami, Florida: E.A. Seeman Publishing, 1975), p. 55.

⁷⁵Wright, p. 247.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Banvard MSS #6302.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Description, Putnam Edition, p. 5.

⁸⁷Banvard MSS #6302.

⁸⁸Ibid.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰Edith Banvard, Notes #4267, Banvard Family Papers.

⁹¹Banvard MSS #6302.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Banvard MSS #6302.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Joseph Cowell, Thirty Years Passed Among the Players in England and America (New York: Harper, 1844), p. 80.

¹⁰²Cowell, p. 81.

¹⁰³Ode11, III, 422.

¹⁰⁴William G.B. Carson, The Theatre on the Frontier: The Early Years of the St. Louis Stage, 2nd ed. (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), pp. 149-50.

¹⁰⁵John E.L. Robertson, "Paducah: Origins to Second Class," The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society, LXVI (April, 1968), 111.

¹⁰⁶Banvard MSS #6302.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ode11, IV, 419.

¹¹⁰William G.B. Carson, Managers in Distress: The St. Louis Stage, 1840-1844 (St. Louis: St. Louis Historical Documents Foundation, 1949), p. 120.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²Missouri Republican (St. Louis), March 24, 1841.

¹¹³Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook, Minnesota Historical Society.

¹¹⁴Description, Putnam Edition, p. 8.

¹¹⁵Republican Banner (Nashville, Tennessee), November 25, 1847.

¹¹⁶Lytle-Holcamper List, p. 282.

¹¹⁷McDermott, p. 22. In the Description, Putnam Edition (p. 8), Banvard claimed to be a partner with Albert Koch, but McDermott disputes this.

The original "Infernal Regions" was a work created in Cincinnati in the late 1820's by Auguste Hervieu and Hiram Powers, with the assistance of Mrs. Trollope, mother of novelist Anthony Trollope. The painting was a diorama with a little working railroad transporting mechanical sinners to hell. The rails gave off a "galvanic shock when touch by unsuspecting visitors." (Buley II, 578.) Considering Banvard's interest in mechanics and science, his painting was probably an imitation of this popular work and therefore may have been a diorama instead of a panorama.

¹¹⁸Description, Putnam Edition, p. 9.

¹¹⁹Littell's Living Age, XV (December, 1847), 512.

CHAPTER II

BANVARD'S PANORAMA
OF THE
MISSISSIPPI RIVER:
1842-1852

I.

John Banvard said that the idea of painting the Mississippi River came to him as a boy and he planned the panorama during his first voyage down the Ohio River in 1831. An anonymous biographer (probably Banvard himself) described the panorama's conception in an early pamphlet.

[Banvard] had heard, and now realized, that America could boast the most picturesque and magnificent scenery in the world; and as he glided along by the beautiful shores, the boy resolved within himself to be an Artist, that he might paint the beauties and sublimities of his native land. . . His grand object was to produce the largest painting in the world.¹

But on another occasion, the artist said he conceived the panorama in 1840 as a reaction against certain critics who declared, "America has not artists commensurate with the grandeur and extent of her scenery."² In a rush of patriotic enthusiasm, Banvard decided to prove them wrong.³

The former statement, that he planned the painting as a boy, was probably an effort to head off rival Mississippi panoramists, all of whom claimed they had thought of the

idea before Banvard. The latter statement may have some validity, but a more likely motive for the painting is that Banvard, through his successful experience with the Venice, St. Louis, and "Infernal Regions" paintings, discovered that a well-publicized panorama could be a lucrative enterprise. He possessed a knack for anticipating public tastes and, until the disastrous theatre ventures later in his life, he consistently created entertainments the public was eager to pay for. Also Banvard's outstanding characteristic as a painter--the ability to work rapidly and accurately--was ideally suited for large-scale paintings.

Banvard probably saw panoramas as a child in New York. It is known, of course, that he constructed a diorama at an early age. Stollenwerck's "mechanical" panorama of a commercial seaport was displayed in the early 1820's at a hall just a few blocks from the Banvard home at 157 Broadway.⁴ In September 1828, William Dunlap exhibited a scenic voyage entitled "A Trip to Niagara," again near the Banvard home.⁵ After serving his apprenticeship with the modest views of Venice and St. Louis and the "Infernal Regions" painting, Banvard was ready for his monumental task of painting the Mississippi River.

In the spring of 1842,⁶ Banvard purchased pencils, brushes, and paper and in a small skiff set out on the Missouri River just above St. Louis. He sketched as he glided along in the current. Banvard later described his adventure.

The Missouri [illegible] a light pine staff and on a bright sunny morning in May I pushed off in the rapid current of the river to begin my apparent endless labor. The currents of the Missouri and Mississippi River flow quite rapidly averaging from four to six miles an hour. So I made fair progress along down the stream and began to fill my portfolio with sketches of the river shores.

At first it appeared lonesome to me drifting all day in my little boat, but I finally got use[d] to this. Where the scenery was monotonous and uninteresting as much of it is, I would let my skiff drift unattended down the current of nights while I would lie on my hay bed in the bottom and sleep. The noise of a passing steamer would always awaken me then I would pull out of his way.

No accident ever came near happening to me while thus floating at night, as I remember, save once when I was awakened by a loud rushing of the water and looking over the side of the skiff, I saw the boat was about rushing on an immense paddlewheel over which the water was rushing at a furious rate. I had just time to seize the oars and turn the skiff away from danger. Had my boat struck, I would certainly have been upset and all my drawings lost.⁷

Banvard's anonymously written pamphlets offered an even more dramatic view.

He would be weeks together without speaking to a human being, having no other company than his rifle, which furnished him with his meat from the game of the woods or the fowls of the river. . . Several nights during the time, he was compelled to creep from under his skiff, where he slept, and sit all night on a log and breast the pelting storm, through fear that the banks of the river would cave upon him, and to escape the falling trees. During this time he pulled his little skiff more than two thousand miles. In the latter part of the summer [1842] he reached New Orleans. The yellow fever was raging in the city, but unmindful of that, he made his drawings of the place. The sun the while was so intensely hot, that his skin became so burned that it peeled off the backs of his hands and from his face. His eyes became inflamed by such constant and extraordinary effort.⁸

His sketches completed, Banvard returned north to Louisville. He acquired a larger boat and made a second trip "trading down the river" to earn money for the remainder of his project.⁹ He returned the following year (1844) and constructed a huge barn on the outskirts of Louisville. After buying "abundant supplies of colors, brushes," and other materials, he prepared "all the necessary studio equipment" in the barn "for hanging the canvas on the wall." Periodically, he worked odd jobs, including painting the interior of an Odd Fellow's Hall, to support himself.¹⁰

In April 1846, Banvard's childhood friend, Selim Woodworth, passed through Louisville on a military expedition and called on Banvard. Woodworth wrote George P. Morris, editor of the New York Home Journal, about the progress of the Mississippi Panorama.¹¹

I took advantage of the detention [at Louisville] to pay a visit to an old school-mate of mine, one of the master spirits of the age. I mean Banvard, the artist, who is engaged in the herculean task of painting a panorama of the Mississippi River, upon more than three miles of canvass!--truthfully depicting a range of scenery of upwards of two thousand miles in extent. In company with a travelling acquaintance, an Englishman, I called at the Artist's studio, an immense wooden building expressly for the purpose, at the extreme outskirts of the city. After knocking several times, I at length succeeded in making myself heard, when the Artist himself, in his working cap and blouse, pallet and pencil in hand, came to the door to admit us. He did not at first recognize me, but when I mentioned my name, he dropped both pallet and pencil, and clasped me in his arms, so delighted was he to see me, after a separation of sixteen years.

Figure 3.

"Mississippi River Plantation Scene." Oil by John
Banvard. (Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.)

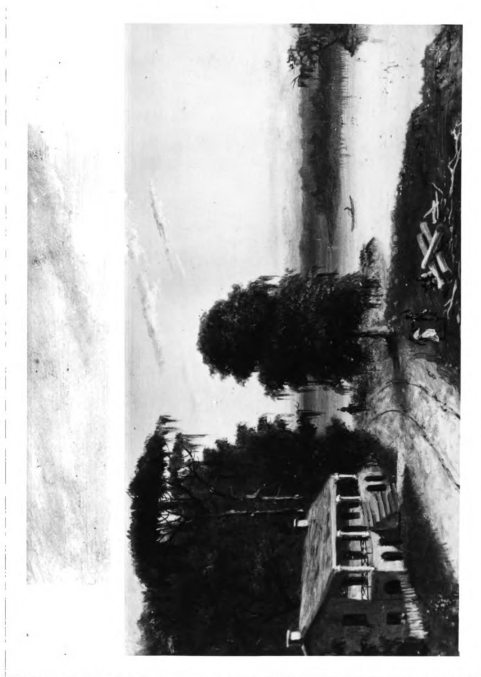


Figure 3.

Banvard immediately conducted us into the interior of the building. He said he had selected the site for his building, far removed from the noise and bustle of the town, that he might apply himself more closely and uninterruptedly to his labor, and be free from the intrusion of visitors. Within the studio all seem chaos and confusion, but the life-like and natural appearances of a portion of his great picture was [sic] displayed on one of the walls in a yet unfinished state. Here and there were scattered about the floor piles of his original sketches, bales of canvass, and heaps of boxes. Paint boxes, jars, and kegs were strowed about without order or arrangement, while along one of the walls several large cases were piled, containing rolls of finished sections of the painting. On the opposite wall was spread a canvass, extending the length of the wall, upon which the artist was then at work. A portion of this canvass was wound on an upright roller, or drum, standing at one end of the building, and as the artist completes his painting, he thus disposes of it. Not having the time to spare, I could not stay to have all the immense cylinders unrolled for our inspection, for we were sufficiently occupied in examining that portion on which the artist is now engaged, and which is nearly completed, being from the mouth of the Red River to the Grand Gulf. . .

As a medium for the study of geography of the portion of the country, it [the painting] will be of inestimable value. The manners and customs of the aborigines and settler--the modes of cultivating and harvesting the peculiar crops--cotton, sugar, tobacco, etc.,--the shipping of the produce in all the variety and novel and curious conveyances employed on these rivers for transportation--are here so vividly portrayed that but a slight stretch of the imagination would bring the noise of the puffing steamboats from the river, and the songs of the negroes in the field, is music to the ear, and one seems to inhale the very atmosphere before him. . . The mode of exhibiting it is ingenious, and will require considerable machinery. It will be placed upon upright revolving cylinders and the canvas gradually will pass before the spectator, thus affording the artist the opportunity of explaining the whole work.¹²

Woodworth's letter provides the earliest documentation of the size of the painting. The claim of three miles was never seriously questioned except by Banvard's rival panoramists, and its actual length is difficult to determine. Banvard always carefully advertised the Panorama as a work "extensively known as the Three-Mile Picture." The figure most often given for its length was 1,320 feet.¹³ Although Banvard later added scenes from the Missouri and Ohio Rivers, this figure is probably correct. Since the painting was twelve feet high,¹⁴ its total area in its original form was 15,840 square feet, not three miles in linear measurement.

Apparently Banvard had nearly finished his mechanical apparatus for showing the panorama by the time Woodworth visited. By inventing an upper track system to keep the top of the canvas taut, he eliminated the sagging problem experienced by previous panorama exhibitors and gained an edge on his competitors. His invention was considered of sufficient importance to be the subject of a lengthy article in Scientific American. (See Figure 4.)¹⁵

In June 1846, Banvard rented a hall in Louisville and advertised "a mile or so" of his painting for public exhibition.¹⁶ The Louisville Gas Company, probably because of past experience with unreliable theatrical troupes and exhibitors, demanded double the usual installation fee for

Figure 4.

Banvard's invention for the moving panorama. (Sketch courtesy of Cynthia Schaefer.)

The mechanical devices employed are very simple but answer the purpose in a most admirable manner. The canvass is wound upon one large vertical roller while it is being unrolled from the other,--This is done by bevel gearing A and B. As there is a great extent of canvass spread at once, which being painted is very heavy, it is very important to hold it up between the rollers and prevent it from what is technically termed sagging. To accomplish this object well, there is a cross beam erected in which there are set a double row of pulleys C C C.

"Banvard's Panorama," Scientific American, IV (December 16, 1848), 100.

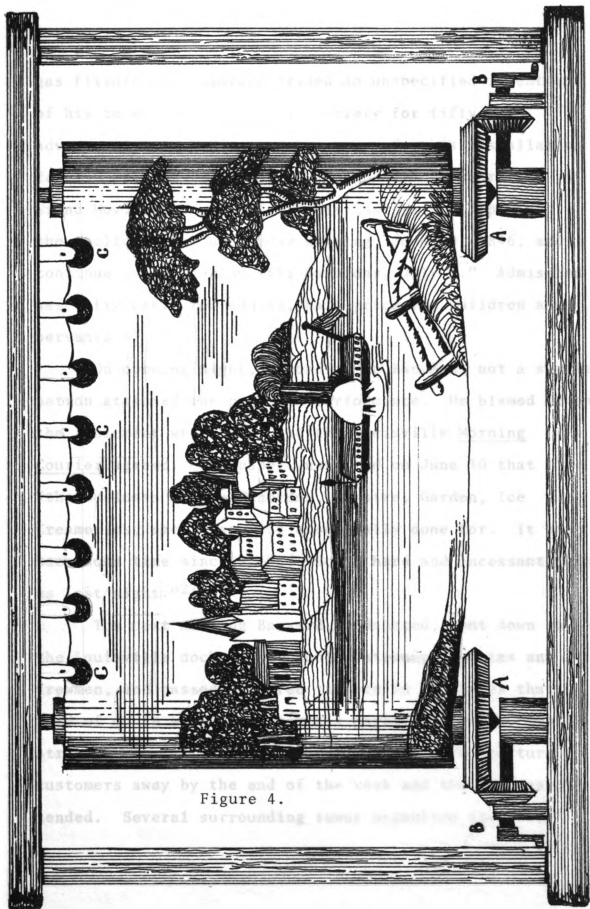


Figure 4.

gas fixtures.¹⁷ Banvard traded an unspecified invention of his to a local scientific society for fifty paid advance tickets and raised the money for his installation fee.¹⁸ On June 29, 1846, he announced: "Banvard's Grand Moving Panorama of the Mississippi will open at the Apollo Rooms, on Monday Evening, June 29, 1846, and continue every evening till Saturday, July 4." Admission was fifty cents for adults, half price for children and servants.¹⁹

On opening night, according to Banvard, not a single patron attended the panorama performance. He blamed it on the inclement weather²⁰ and the Louisville Morning Courier agreed. The paper announced on June 30 that "the business of the Panorama, Theatre, Garden, Ice Creameries, etc., was most essentially done for. It has been some time since we had such a hard and incessant rain as last night."²¹

The next morning Banvard, undaunted, went down to the Louisville docks, buttonholed steamer captains and crewmen, and passed out free tickets in the hopes that word of mouth would increase his paying audience. The strategy apparently worked; Banvard was forced to turn customers away by the end of the week and the run was extended. Several surrounding towns organized steamboat

excursions to see the exhibition and "for a solid month he did great business."²²

Encouraged by the popular response, Banvard closed the exhibition and returned to his studios where he finished the painting and added views of the Ohio and Missouri Rivers in about ten weeks. He re-opened his lectures and exhibit at the Apollo Rooms on October 19, 1846, and closed October 31. "The great three-mile painting," the Morning Courier declared, was "one of the greatest achievements of industry and genius on record;"²³ and it was "destined to be one of the most celebrated paintings of the age."²⁴

After gathering written testimonials on the accuracy of the Panorama from Fred A. Kaye, Louisville's mayor, and the Secretary and members of the Kentucky Historical Society, Banvard prepared to take his work to Cincinnati.²⁵ But he received an urgent dispatch from Boston that his mother was seriously ill. Swiftly changing plans, Banvard bundled up his massive painting into several large boxes and headed for Boston on the steamer Clipper.²⁶ At Brownsville, Pennsylvania, he unloaded his equipment and proceeded by heavy wagon and railroad to Boston.²⁷

II.

After visiting his mother, sisters, and brother Joseph, whom he had not seen since leaving New York fifteen years earlier, Banvard rented Boston's Armory Hall, Washington Street and converted it into a theatre for his exhibition. The exact date of his opening has not been determined, but it was probably December 15, 1846.²⁸ Banvard advertised nightly performances, except Sundays, with matinees on Wednesdays and Saturdays. Admission was fifty cents for adults.²⁹

Banvard worked hard to perfect his panorama performance technique. He commissioned Thomas Bricher, organist for Boston's Bowdoin Street Church,³⁰ to compose a series of waltzes as background music for the performance. The waltzes were published as sheet music by Oliver Ditson at Boston in 1847, and their sale, combined with the proceeds from descriptive pamphlets, "materially augmented" Banvard's income for the next several years.³¹

Elizabeth Goodnow, the daughter of a Sudbury, Massachusetts, dry-goods merchant and an "accomplished pianist,"³² was engaged to play the Mississippi waltzes and other incidental music during performances. Elizabeth, dark, slender, and attractive, soon fell in love with Banvard. After a short courtship they were married by

his brother, the Reverend Joseph Banvard, at his Harvard Street Baptist Church on May 17, 1848.³³

The panorama performance was carefully orchestrated. The audience was led into a darkened auditorium where Elizabeth played soft background music. At eight o'clock Banvard would stride through the house, the curtain would rise, and "ordinary footlights"³⁴ would illuminate the first scene of the painting. Banvard, seated "upon a platform,"³⁵ or more often standing, would describe the scenes as they passed by the spectators. He used a long pointer to direct the audience's attention to certain details. The viewer could watch an ascension of the Mississippi River from New Orleans and at the next performance descend the Missouri, Ohio, and Mississippi Rivers as the panorama was unrolled in the opposite direction.³⁶ The painting was framed in such a manner that the large machinery necessary for turning the cylinders was hidden from the audience's view. (See Figure 9.)

Banvard worked on his lectures until he no longer seemed "as uncultivated as the scenery he. . . delineated."³⁷ His "racy anecdotes"³⁸ and his "short, pithy remarks" revealed "much information on the manners and habits" of the people in the West.³⁹ "Take the artist from the painting," a critic noted, "with his instructive lectures,

interesting explanations, and amusing anecdotes, and you take away one of the principle attractions."⁴⁰

The lectures concerned the geographical, social, and scientific aspects of the Western river system, but Banvard's stories (unverifiable for the most part) demonstrated his showmanship. One of his stories, an attack by the notorious Murrell gang, a band of riverboat pirates who terrorized the West for years, was an impossibility. The gang had been broken up prior to Banvard's voyages.⁴¹ On one occasion, as Banvard's floating grocery store and theatre descended the Mississippi, a group of disgruntled customers, unable to attend a sold-out performance, cut the boat's shore rope and the craft floated several miles downstream before performers or patrons were aware of what had happened. The story was suspiciously similar to one told by the Chapmans. Some young men, angered by the Floating Theatre's fifty-cent admission fee,

took an occasion when the performance was proceeding and the audience seemed to be highly diverted, to quietly cast the boat from its moorings, and before actors or audience were aware of the situation. . . the stream had carried them more than a mile before they got to shore again.⁴²

Banvard also told the tale of his trip to Boston when he passed off his panorama cylinder boxes as coffins containing recent casualties of the Mexican-American War. Banvard transported the boxes through the generosity of several

patriotic steamer passengers who volunteered as pallbearers. Banvard thanked the ship's captain "for the honor conferred upon Banvard's grand panorama of the Mississippi."⁴³

The performance lasted from two⁴⁴ to three hours,⁴⁵ and the difference lay in Banvard's improvisational abilities and audience reaction. During one Boston performance a St. Louis merchant recognized his store and stopped the show by shouting, "That's my store! Halloa there, captain! Stop the boat--I want to go ashore and see my wife and family!!" He later remarked that "in a moment he seemed" to be back in St. Louis.⁴⁶

Audiences certainly found the illusion of the Mississippi Panorama fascinating. Banvard's technical skills as a painter were those of a theatrical scenic artist and it is difficult to judge the panorama as a work of art. His later paintings show a certain proficiency, particularly in color and perspective (probably with the aid of a camera obscura), but the Mississippi Panorama was a part of a theatrical event. Because the painting was "in motion and had to be viewed from a distance, it was more like stage scenery than studio art."⁴⁷ The life-like effect that his contemporaries wondered upon was a combination of motion, lighting effects, and Banvard's entertaining performance style. The eye, faced with the monumental task of sorting out thousands of moving images, received impressions rather than detail.

"His distances and atmospheric effects," said an acquaintance, "were his leading characteristics as a painter. His hills always seemed miles away with a soft haze resting on them."⁴⁸ Banvard's pictures, says Sara G. Bowerman, "were executed with [a] certain crude vigor, but without technical skill."⁴⁹ His biographical entry in the National Cyclopaedia of American Biography comments, "In rapidity of execution he never had an equal,"⁵⁰ hardly a testimonial to great art. Banvard himself, at least in the early years, realized the limitations of his talent. A London pamphlet stated that he "does not exhibit the painting as a work of art, but as a correct representation of the country it portrays and its remarkable accuracy and truthfulness."⁵¹ "This is," noted the London Times, "exactly the point of view from which the work should be considered."⁵²

The Mississippi Panorama created a sensation in Boston. Audiences packed Armory Hall to see the "acres and miles of canvas."⁵³ The New Englanders' "scarcity of knowledge [about the West] gave such knowledge as there was a peculiar appeal,"⁵⁴ and Banvard, rather than being received as a "folk painter of geographic newsreels,"⁵⁵ was hailed as a contributor to the artistic, educational, and scientific knowledge of the age. After the Boston exhibit he would not consider himself a theatrical entertainer

and scenic artist--which he was--but a serious artist whose opinions and achievements merited attention in scientific and artistic circles. He cultivated friendships with scientists and poets and men such as Edward Everett, Abbott Lawrence, and George Bancroft.⁵⁶ He also immersed himself in civic affairs. When Boston's old Mason Street City School was torn down, Banvard offered space in Armory Hall for classrooms.⁵⁷ By emphasizing the educational nature of his painting (at specified times school groups were admitted free to the performances) he promoted the Mississippi Panorama as family entertainment, above the supposedly low moral standards of the regular theatre.

"Banvard's Panorama of the Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio Rivers" ran at Armory Hall for over six months and attracted 251,702 spectators.⁵⁸ Banvard's profits were in excess of \$50,000, an enormous sum for the period.⁵⁹ Following plans he had made earlier, Banvard announced that he was taking the Panorama to New York. At one of his final Boston performances on April 20, 1847, he invited several dignitaries, including Massachusetts Governor George N. Briggs, William Bradbury, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, and South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun. The audience was believed to be the largest in Boston's theatrical history.⁶⁰ Governor Briggs read a flowery speech at the conclusion of the performance,

Figure 5.

"Autumn Scene." Oil by John Banvard. (Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.)



Figure 5.

declaring that the "vast and beautiful panorama" and the "genius and enterprise of the author" would be honored as long as the "Great Father of Waters and its numerous tributaries" continued to "pour their great tides into the ocean."⁶¹ Then the audience "unanimously adopted" a resolution offered by Senator Calhoun.

Resolved, that we regard the Panorama of the Mississippi River, painted by Mr. John Banvard, as a truly wonderful and magnificent production; and we deem it but a just appreciation. . . of the boldness and originality of the conception, and of the industry and indefatigable perseverance of the young and talented artist, in the execution of his herculean work.⁶²

The Mississippi River Panorama left its mark on New England life and letters. Writers found in its immense size and subject matter an expression of the undeveloped future of the nation. The Panorama inspired Longfellow, Whittier, and Thoreau to directly refer to it in their works.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882), who was on the final drafts of his epic poem Evangeline, attended a Banvard performance as indicated in his journal.

December 16, 1846.

Finished this morning and copied, the first canto of the second part of Evangeline. The portions of the poem which I write in the morning, I write chiefly standing at my desk here, so as to need no copying. . . I see a panorama of the Mississippi advertised. This comes very à propos. The river comes to me instead of my going to the river; and as it is to flow through the pages of the poem, I look upon this as a special benediction.⁶³

On December 19 Longfellow devoted his entire journal entry to Banvard's performance:

Went to see Banvard's moving diorama [sic] of the Mississippi. One seems to be sailing down the great stream and sees the boats and the sand-banks crested with cotton-wood, and the bayous by moonlight. Three miles of canvas, and a great deal of merit.⁶⁴

The painting inspired much of the "romantic backdrop" for Evangeline's long trek to Louisiana,⁶⁵ and soon after completing the poem, Longfellow used the Panorama again. In Kavanaugh, a novel that used Banvard's spectacle as an antithesis to the idea that a great national literature must be universal in nature, the pompous Mr. Hathaway argues with Mr. Churchill, a writer and Longfellow's spokesman.

"I think, Mr. Churchill," said he, "that we want a national literature commensurate with our mountains and rivers,--commensurate with Niagara, and the Alleghenies, and the Great Lakes!"

"Oh!"

"We want a national epic that shall correspond to the size of the country; that shall be to all other epics what Banvard's Panorama of the Mississippi is to all other paintings,--the largest in the world!"

"Ah!"

"We want a national drama in which scope enough shall be given to our gigantic ideas, and to the unparalleled activity and progress of our people!"

"Of course!"⁶⁶

Literary historian Dorothy Ann Dondore says that the Panorama also served John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) as the source and title poem of his The Panorama and Other Poems (1856).⁶⁷ According to Dondore, the opening stanzas of the title poem "might. . . be taken as an accurate description" of Banvard's Boston shows.⁶⁸

Through the long hall the shuttered windows shed
A dubious light on every upturned head. . .
On the pale Showman reading from his stage
The hieroglyphics of that facial page;
Half sad, half scornful, listening to the bruit
Of restless cane-tap and impatient foot,
And the shrill call, across the general din,
"Roll up your curtain! Let the show begin."

At length a murmur like the winds that break
Into green waves the prairie's grassy lake,
Deepened and swelled to music clear and loud,
And, as the west-wind lifts a summer cloud,
The curtain rose, disclosing wide and far
A green land stretching to the even star,
Fair flowers hummed over by the desert bees,
Marked by tall bluffs whose slopes of greenness show
Fantastic outcrops of rock below;
The slow result of patient Nature's pains
And plastic fingering of her sun and rains;
Arch, tower, and gate, grotesquely windowed hall,
And long escarpment of half-crumbled wall,
Huger than those which, from steep hills of vine
Star through their loopholes on the trilled Rhine;
Of the land's dwellers in an age unguessed;
The unsung Jotuns of the mystic West.⁶⁹

Interestingly, Banvard's first scene featured a wrecked steamer called the West Wind. The rest of the second stanza reproduces the first scenes in the Panorama. (See Appendix.)

As late as 1862, Banvard's Panorama influenced New England writers. In Atlantic Monthly, Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) compared Banvard's Panorama with European panoramas and saw the symbolic value of the depiction of the vast Western regions.

Soon after, I went to see a panorama of the Mississippi, and as I worked my way up the river in the light of today and saw the steamboats wooding up, counted the rising cities, gazed on the fresh ruins of Nauvoo, beheld the Indians moving west across the stream. . . I saw that this was a Rhine stream of a different kind; that the foundations of castles were yet to be laid, and the famous bridges were yet to be thrown over the river; and I felt that this was the heroic age itself, though we know it not, for the hero is commonly the simplest and obscurist of men.⁷⁰

III.

In New York, Banvard rented a studio and leased Panorama Hall, a building adjoining Niblo's Garden at 598 Broadway, and opened his exhibition in time for the Christmas season, Monday, December 13, 1847.⁷¹ Like Bostonians, New Yorkers were fascinated by the massive painting.

Close observers [says critic Joseph Earl Arrington] pointed out the main characteristics of its execution. The separate objects of interest appeared fully visible and not lost in the general landscape, and each scene made an interesting picture in itself. The drawing was bold in outline, the coloring and perspective absolutely true to nature. The daily atmospheric conditions and the changes from

day to night where all delineated on the canvas, so as to correspond to the actual voyage on the river, which took four days and three nights by fast steamer. The artist, therefore, introduced three lovely moonlight views.⁷²

Newspapers praised the Panorama as the "most superior exhibition ever produced before this public"⁷³ and "a monument of native talent and American genius."⁷⁴ An observer who had traveled on the Mississippi wrote:

As the curtain rises and the painting begins to move, the visitor has only to imagine himself on board the swiftest steamers, passing on towards New Orleans, and he can enjoy the life-like and pleasing view of all the interesting scenery, towns, islands, boats, etc., that would meet one's eye between the upper regions of the Mississippi and the Gulf of Mexico. The illusion of the artist is so perfect that when you see a steamboat, it appears in its full size and dimensions, with the steam and vapor passing out of the smoke pipes, and the water splashing and foaming about the huge paddles on the sides of the boat, and so with other objects. Indeed, the whole painting appears more like the living reality than a work of art.⁷⁵

Banvard decided to enlarge his Panorama by adding a section featuring the Upper Missouri River, although no evidence exists that he ever traveled on the Upper Missouri. A visitor to his New York studio discovered that Banvard had intended to paint "a panorama of the Missouri before he left the West, but his funds gave out. . . So he brought the drawings with him and has transferred them to canvas."⁷⁶ This is highly suspect. Historian Doane Robinson, who knew Banvard, believes he borrowed scenes of the Upper Missouri from paintings by George Catlin (1796-1872), the famous

chronicler of Indian life.⁷⁷ A few years later Catlin accused Banvard of copying his works; Banvard counter-claimed that Catlin stole his views of the Mississippi. This was not the last time that Banvard would be accused of plagiarism.

The Missouri River addition renewed public interest in the Panorama and its run was extended through September 1848. Banvard was now "one of the wealthiest individuals on earth;"⁷⁸ 175,896 spectators attended the Panorama performances in New York.⁷⁹

The Boston and New York performances established John Banvard as the most famous artist in America, and despite the fact that his exhibitions were theatrical events, his "greatest influence was in the arts--the panorama movement itself."⁸⁰ Artists, hoping to duplicate Banvard's critical and financial success, were "going to work in all directions, painting rivers, etc."⁸¹ John Rowson Smith, who produced a "four-mile painting,"⁸² Sam Stockwell,⁸³ Henry Lewis,⁸⁴ and Leon Pomaréde⁸⁵ all exhibited panoramas of the Mississippi, and John J. Egan and Samuel A. Hudson exhibited long panoramas of the Western regions.⁸⁶ Panoramas flourished and artists strived "to satisfy or attempt to satisfy all demands that an exacting public could make on an expanding industry."⁸⁷

Banvard remained the most successful. He was the first to exhibit a panorama of the Mississippi and his painting was the longest in history. His performances, despite the homespun humor, were sophisticated (in St. Louis a panorama of "The Burning of Moscow" featured "experiments in Magic and Ventriloquism" and, of course, Miss Hayden, a magician, backed up panoramas⁸⁸), and by emphasizing the moral and educational values of his work as well as the entertainment values, he lured both theatre audiences and those who ordinarily considered the theatre immoral. Of the thousands of panoramas produced in the middle of the nineteenth century, Banvard's Mississippi Panorama was the only one to win widespread fame and bring its owner financial success.

While in New York, the untiring Banvard began negotiating for an English tour.⁸⁹ He cut short the New York engagement, he later told a friend, because he learned that John Rowson Smith, a former theatrical artist from New Orleans, was planning a London exhibition.⁹⁰ Smith's panorama, said to be "half as large again as Banvard's,"⁹¹ was considered by its creator as a serious work of art and, unlike Banvard's work, "not a crude effort of the uncultivated artist."⁹² The "four-mile panorama" had been painted "to show places in their true light, instead of a

mere apology from imagination, and to give something like a correct and general character of the Great West."⁹³

On September 12, 1848, Banvard traveled to Cambridge, Massachusetts, to call on Edward Everett (1794-1865), President of Harvard College, and ask for letters of introduction to England.⁹⁴ Everett, ex-Governor of Massachusetts and former U.S. Congressman, served as U.S. Minister to Great Britain from 1841 to 1845.⁹⁵ Banvard sought advice on how he could best exhibit his Panorama in England. Everett plainly told him that his only chance of establishing superiority over Smith was to win the patronage of Queen Victoria. But Banvard was a private citizen and a commercial exhibitor and as such could not count on any official American governmental introduction to the Queen. The proper approach, Everett counseled, was to approach the Queen indirectly by gaining access to those around her. To illustrate this indirect approach, Everett related to Banvard how he was instrumental in the English success of P.T. Barnum (1810-1891) and Charles S. Stratton (1838-1883), "Tom Thumb." Everett had introduced "Tom Thumb" at a banquet attended by the Queen's personal physician and Prince Albert's private secretary. After hearing of the midget's antics from the two men, the Queen requested a command performance and the ensuing publicity insured

Barnum's English success. The statesman suggested this sort of approach would work for Banvard, too.⁹⁶ Then Everett wrote letters of introduction under the cover of the following.

Cambridge
11 September, 1848

Dear Sir:

I enclose you three letters for London. One is to Mr. Bancroft. If it is profitable to effect the object you consider of importance--a visit from the Queen, he is the only person who can give you much and toward it--Dr. Holland is a physician of the highest respectability, a man of Science, and as intelligent traveller, in this country. Sir Roderic Murchison is a celebrated geologist, and a scientific traveller of great repute, formerly President of the Geographical Society.

Wishing you much success, I remain

Dear Sir,
Very truly yours,
Edward Everett⁹⁷

Later that afternoon, Banvard visited Abbott Lawrence (1792-1855), wealthy cotton mill owner, ex-Congressman, and recent founder of the School of Science at Harvard College, who also wrote a letter of introduction.⁹⁸

IV.

At 12:30 P.M., September 27, 1848, Banvard and his wife Elizabeth and a male secretary identified only as Paul, sailed on the Europa bound from New York to Liverpool.⁹⁹ The voyage proved eventful. Elizabeth and Paul fell seasick the first day. They were confined to their cabins for the rest of the voyage, but Banvard

avoided illness by pacing back and forth on the deck during the daylight hours. A near collision with another ship occurred on October 2,¹⁰⁰ and on October 4, a bottle of Elizabeth's cologne water fell into a kerosene lamp, igniting the Banvard cabin. Elizabeth seized a water pitcher and doused the fire, but the cabin suffered damage.¹⁰¹

The Banvards arrived in Liverpool, Thursday, October 10. The customs officials could not decide the proper tariff charge for the four heavy cylinders containing the panorama. Banvard expected to pay forty pounds (\$200) in duty taxes, but the Inspector General, in a gesture of Anglo-American goodwill, charged only four pence, one penny for each cylinder.¹⁰² Banvard spent three days in Liverpool while Elizabeth and Paul recovered from the effects of their transatlantic journey. He hired a carriage and rode around the city, observing the houses and people and found Liverpool a dirty city, the "streets filled with beggars."¹⁰³ Before leaving for London Banvard paid his bill at the Waterloo Hotel.

9 lbs 15 shill 6 pence, (near \$50) for three of us. In the U.S. the same accomodations could be had for \$16 or \$18. Tallow candles for lights! Newspapers are not plentiful. Found it hard to get hold of one. Landlord takes several and hires them to his guests at a penny a turn.¹⁰⁴

On October 14, the Banvards left for London by rail ("fare 1 pound 17 shill") and arrived at dusk. They stayed at

Figure 6

John Banvard, Illustration. From title page of Banvard, or, the Adventures of an Artist: An O'er True Tale (London: Chapman, 1849). (Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.)

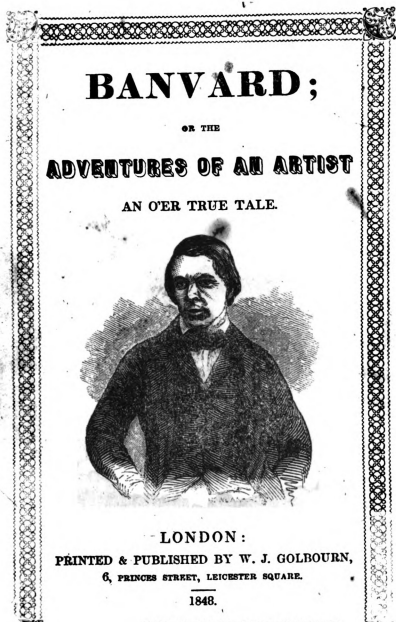


Figure 6.

Morley's Hotel in Trafalgar Square until more permanent lodgings could be found.¹⁰⁵

The next morning Banvard "roamed about the west-end," observing the architecture and the manners and customs of the Londoners. London, he thought, was "the cleanest city [I] was ever in."¹⁰⁶ That afternoon he called on George Catlin, the famous ex-patriate painter of American Indians, at his Indian Museum in Leicester Square. The two men were both "chain-lightning artists," alike "in temperament. . . and restless activity."¹⁰⁷ Catlin had just returned from Paris and advised Banvard to exhibit his panorama there. Banvard, impressed by Catlin's thoughtfulness, did not know that at that very moment Catlin was involved in a scheme to copy Banvard's Panorama and pass it off as the original. Banvard was unimpressed, however, by Catlin's appearance. Dirty and unkempt, the painter looked nothing like the world famous artist Banvard had expected. Catlin confessed that he was penniless. The unsuspecting Banvard loaned him fifty pounds, an act he would later regret.¹⁰⁸

After renting Egyptian Hall in Picadilly (the site of Catlin's first London exhibition in 1840) Banvard began preparing for his opening. He gave a private performance for newspaper editors on November 25, 1848,¹⁰⁹ and on December 6, 1848, in time for the Christmas holiday

trade, presented his first public shows.¹¹⁰ Performances were at 2:30 P.M. and 7:30 P.M. and admission was two shillings.¹¹¹ Banvard also contracted publisher J.W. Golbourn for another batch of descriptive pamphlets and sold them for sixpence each.¹¹²

London reacted to the Panorama in the same manner as Boston and New York. The London Observer stated, "This is truly an extraordinary work. We have never seen a work. . . so grand in its whole character, so truthful in its delineation, or so interesting to the spectator."¹¹³ The Morning Advertiser was even more effusive.

It is impossible to convey an adequate idea of this magnificent work of art. It is something more than an exhibition. It is a great work, which not only astonishes by its magnitude and grandeur, but it is highly instructive and interesting. It is, in fact, a work calculated to something more than gratify or amuse a vacant hour.¹¹⁴

The London Times, despite an English bias, offered a more balanced appraisal.

It is drawn along on two cylinders, a small portion being exhibited at a time, so that the audience may imagine they are performing the journey along the river, especially as the illusion is heightened by dioramic effects representing the changes of the day. The southern portion is somewhat monotonous, the towns and landscapes along the shore being very similar to each other, and the vessels on the river, totally unlike anything European, giving the chief animation to the scene.

The labour of the artist, Mr. Banvard, in making the drawings for this panorama must have been very great, and herein lies his chief merit, for although a feeling for atmosphere is generally

Figure 7.

"Mississippi River Scene at Night, with Steamboat."
Oil by John Banvard. (Courtesy of the Minnesota
Historical Society.)



Figure 7.

Figure 8.

"John Banvard, c. 1849." Artist unknown. (Courtesy
of the Minnesota Historical Society.)



Figure 8.

shown in his backgrounds, and isolated portions of his picture evince a knowledge of effect, much of it is crude, and as a work of art, it will not bear comparison with the dioramas and panoramas of this country.¹¹⁵

Banvard's "witty and entertaining" lectures delighted audiences. For many Londoners this was their first encounter with an American.¹¹⁶ "Mr. Banvard," a newspaper reported, "tells many an amusing and illustrating anecdote; while it adds not a little to the entertainment, affords also a glance at American character, and is not without interest and instruction."¹¹⁷ The London Sun thought Banvard's performance was delivered in "the most quaint and humorous style imaginable. His Yankee twang [was] delicious."¹¹⁸

A Miss Egan replaced Elizabeth as pianist,¹¹⁹ and Banvard commissioned Madame Schweiso to set "The White Fawn," a romantic poem written by Banvard, to music.¹²⁰ On reaching the Selma Bluffs portion of the Panorama, Banvard would recite the poem and this segment of the performance was a favorite of English audiences.¹²¹

Banvard and Elizabeth moved into permanent lodgings at 162 Regent Street,¹²² and each day the artist would leave home for the American Minister's house in hopes of meeting a close acquaintance of Queen Victoria. He invited Charles Dickens to a private showing, but the famous writer attended a performance unannounced with the general public instead.

Sixteenth December, 1848

Sir:

You were so good as to send me a card of admission to the private view of the result of your extraordinary perseverance and energy. I could not avail myself of it, being out of town at the time, but I have since visited the exhibition and in thanking you, your remembrance of me, cannot refrain from saying that I was in the highest degree interested and pleased by your picture--by its faithfulness--by your account of it--by its unmarkable characteristics--by the striking and original manner in which the scenes it represents are plainly presented to the spectator. Accept my best wishes for your success in England.

Faithfully yours,

Charles Dickens¹²³

As a journalist, Dickens found the Panorama useful. In an article in his magazine Household Words, Dickens presented the indomitable Mr. Booley, a meek London gentleman who describes his lengthy travels and adventures around the world beginning with a trip down the Mississippi River. At the conclusion of the piece the reader discovers that Mr. Booley has gone no farther than the distance between his house and the nearest panorama hall.

When I was a boy [Mr. Booley explains] such travelling would have been impossible. . . It is a delightful characteristic of these times, that new and cheap means are continually being devised, for conveying the results of actual experience, to those who are unable to obtain experiences for themselves; and to bring them within the reach of the people; for it is they at large who are addressed in these endeavors, and not exclusive audiences. New worlds open out to them, beyond their little worlds, and widen their range of reflection, information, sympathy, interest. The more man knows of man, the better for common brotherhood among us all.¹²⁴

Banvard assumed that Dickens, as England's most popular author, had some influence with the Queen, but he did not.¹²⁵ All through the winter Banvard called on George Bancroft (1800-1891), scholar, diplomat, ex-Congressman, and America's first great historian.¹²⁶ Appointed "envoy extraordinary and minister plenipotentiary to England" by President James Polk in 1846, Bancroft was the highest ranking American official in England.¹²⁷

One day in January 1849, Banvard was at the Bancrofts when Bancroft's wife, Elizabeth Davis Bliss, introduced the artist to Amelia Murray, Maid of Honor to Queen Victoria. This was the opportunity Banvard had been waiting for. He invited Miss Murray and Mrs. Bancroft to a private showing of the Panorama that evening and the two women agreed to come. Banvard then rushed out and had one of his pamphlets "beautifully bound in crimson velvet and gold for to get in Her Majesty's hands in some manner."¹²⁸ At the conclusion of the evening performance, Banvard gave the pamphlet to Miss Murray and asked her to deliver it to the Queen. She did so the next morning.¹²⁹

A few weeks later Banvard received a summons to Buckingham Palace where Charles Phipps (1801-1866), Prince Albert's private secretary, informed the artist that the Queen was anxious to see the painting. Her Majesty's

schedule was full until April 1849, so it was agreed that Banvard would exhibit the Panorama, at the Queen's expense, at Windsor Castle over the Easter holidays, April, 1849.¹³⁰

Banvard selected St. George's Hall in Windsor Castle for his command performance. The Hall was a good choice; a "fine organ" located there¹³¹ greatly enhanced the atmosphere surrounding the exhibit.¹³² On April 11, 1849, Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, young Prince Edward, and several members of the Royal Family attended the Panorama performance. The Queen was delighted with it and at the conclusion of Banvard's lecture she gave him a special medal and a "distinguished mark of her Royal Approbation."¹³³

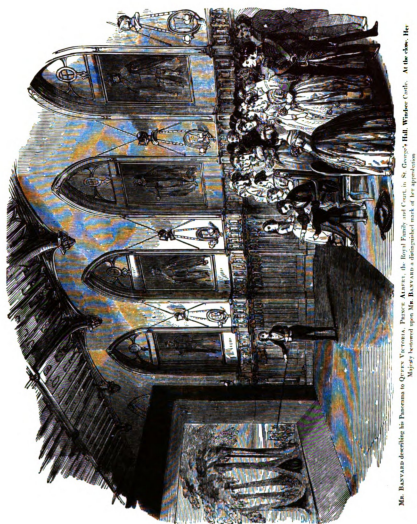
A week later, Banvard received a letter from Major General Bowes, Master of the Queen's Household.

Sir:
Colonel Phipps has received the commands of Her Majesty to forward to Mr. Banvard the enclosed cheque for £25, for his Exhibition of the Panorama of the Mississippi at Windsor Castle.
Windsor Castle
April 16, 1849¹³⁴

Banvard considered this command performance the highest point of his career, and he returned to London convinced that the Queen's recognition assured him a lifetime income from the Panorama.¹³⁵

Figure 9.

"Mr. Banvard describing his Panorama to Queen Victoria."
 Sketch from Description of Banvard's Pilgrimage to the
Holy Land (London, 1852). (Courtesy of the Minnesota
 Historical Society.)



Mr. Bayard describes the Palace in Queen Victoria, Prince Albert, the Royal Family and Court, in St. George's Hall, Windsor Castle. At the show, Her Majesty seated upon the Bayard's distinguished seat of her apartment.

Figure 9.

During the 1849-50 theatrical season fifty panoramas were exhibited in London¹³⁶ and several were advertised as the "original Mississippi panorama." Banvard's most serious competitor was John Rowson Smith. Smith's business partner, a Professor Risley, informed English audiences, without documentation, that Smith's first Mississippi panorama was shown in Boston in 1839, but unfortunately it was destroyed by fire. Smith worked for five years producing another and exhibited it in 1844, two years before Banvard's Louisville debut.¹³⁷

For the first time Banvard's virtual monopoly on panorama performances was seriously threatened. He issued a pamphlet in 1849 that warned:

The public should be on their guard against several spurious copies and incorrect imitations which have been hurriedly prepared by parties of unprincipled persons, who are now endeavoring to palm them off as being original in various parts of the country; thus robbing Mr. Banvard of the fruits of his years of toil and danger.¹³⁸

Banvard solicited testimonials from Edward Everett ("Mr. Banvard. . . is the originator and inventor of this enormous class of paintings."), Charles Dickens, and Bayard Taylor (1825-1878), well-known travel writer and poet.¹³⁹ His friend Abbott Lawrence, who had replaced George Bancroft as U.S. Minister in London, certified that Banvard was "the sole author of the moving panorama of the Mississippi."¹⁴⁰

George Catlin, now an embittered, broken man whose wife and youngest child had recently died, entered the controversy. Catlin charged Banvard with copying his scenes of the Upper Missouri and Mississippi Rivers from Catlin's paintings of the same region. Banvard counter-attacked by charging that Catlin and others painted Risley and Smith's panorama in England by sending art students to his performances to hurriedly sketch the various scenes.¹⁴¹ Banvard's charges were probably true; English audiences had tired of Catlin's endless Indian exhibitions and he and his three small daughters were living in poverty in Waterloo Street. Catlin took on odd painting jobs to survive.¹⁴²

When Englishman W.A. Brunning, age thirty-one and a member of the Society of British Artists, died in 1850, Banvard grimly noted in his diary that the Sunday Times credited Brunning with being "the principle painter on 'Risley's panorama of the Mississippi.'" ¹⁴³

However, Banvard also contributed to the confusion by exhibiting two panoramas. He spent several months in London painting the western bank of the Mississippi (the original featured the eastern bank) and new views of the Missouri and Ohio Rivers. He also added scenes from the Ohio to his original painting.¹⁴⁴

In May 1849, leaving the new panorama behind in London, Banvard launched a tour of the English provinces with the original Mississippi Panorama. He assured audiences that they were seeing the genuine painting and critics agreed.

Surely we love fair play, [commented the Manchester Spectator] and would wish to be found taking the side of the man of intellect, skill, and physical endurance against him who is a mere purloiner of a good idea. We say thus much because another picture of the Mississippi is about to be exhibited here, which picture was hurriedly painted about a year after the first exhibition Banvard's in the United States, brought over to London, and palmed off as the original. The faithfulness of Banvard's picture--independent of all considerations with regard to the origination of this great panoramic idea--which faithfulness is attested by hundreds who have steamed the great father of waters--should protect it from the efforts of those who hawk about spurious copies for mere speculation purposes.¹⁴⁵

Comments of the American press on the controversy were reprinted in England. The Boston Bee declared that Risley and Smith had "no claim to originality."¹⁴⁶ The Louisville Democrat came to Banvard's defense by saying, "We understand that some speculators have 'gotten up' a panorama of the Mississippi. . . This impudent falsehood may humbug some people in England, but here it could only excite a smile at the assurance of the author."¹⁴⁷

For the next two and a half years Banvard's Panorama toured the English provinces, including stops at Edinburgh, Leamington, Bath, Leeds, York, Halifax, Worcester, New Port, Cheltenham, St. Leonard's, Cardiff, Merthyr, Swansea, Jersey, Brighton, and Dublin, Ireland. By the winter of

1850-51, the London panorama performances had drawn 604,524 viewers, while the provincial tour had a total audience of 93,976.¹⁴⁸

In May 1850, Banvard and Elizabeth traveled to Paris to exhibit the London version of the Panorama. After settling into lodgings at the Hôtel de Paris in the Champs Elysée, the entrepreneur took long walking tours, carefully jotting down in his diary the habits of the shopkeepers and hat and flower girls, the smells and sounds of the city, and the architectural features of the churches and houses.¹⁴⁹ But the novelty of Paris soon wore off. Banvard wanted to travel to exotic places in search of fresh material for new and better panoramas. In the summer of 1850, he left Elizabeth and their new daughter Gertrude in Paris in care of a housekeeper named Mrs. Palmer and headed for Egypt and the Nile River.¹⁵⁰

For twelve months John Banvard disappeared from public view. He hired a guide, Hassan Ismael, and, in the company of William A. Lilliendahl, an American businessman he met in Egypt,¹⁵¹ ascended the Nile River, making "drawings of all the antiquities and scenery along its banks."¹⁵² He also collected several ancient artifacts.¹⁵³ Next he made his way through Palestine "to the Jordan and Dead Sea making sketches of the cities, scenery, etc."¹⁵⁴

He then returned to Paris by way of Italy, Switzerland, and other European countries.¹⁵⁵

Back in Paris Banvard began a new panorama based on his sketches, but it turned out to be a long term project. Elizabeth had given birth to another child, John Jr., during Banvard's absence,¹⁵⁶ and the growing size of his family coupled with Elizabeth's homesickness for America and her family, prompted Banvard to leave Paris, pack up his two Mississippi panoramas and the new Nile River and Holy Land panoramas, close down operations in London, and return to America. The Banvard's arrived home in the spring of 1852.¹⁵⁷

FOOTNOTES

¹"Mr. John Banvard," Banvard File, Watertown, (typewritten, [1925?]). This anonymous article uses several journals, newspapers, and pamphlets as unattributed material.

²Littell's Living Age, XV (December, 1847), 511.

³Ibid.

⁴Arrington, p. 208.

⁵Ibid. Niagara Falls, first painted by John Vanderlyn in 1808, became the most popular of all panorama subjects.

⁶Description, Putnam Edition, p. 9, gives a starting date of 1840, but this is probably an attempt once again to establish an earlier date than potential rival panoramists. Banvard was busy in St. Louis in late 1841, so 1842 is undoubtedly the correct date.

⁷Banvard MSS #6302.

⁸Description, Putnam Editon, pp. 9-10.

⁹Robinson, p. 2.

¹⁰Arrington, p. 212.

¹¹Morris, author of the poem "Woodman, Spare That Tree," was the most popular American poet during the first half of the nineteenth century. E. Douglas Branch, The Sentimental Years: 1830-1860 (New York: Hill and Wang, 1962), p. 134.

¹²Description, Putnam Editon, pp. 4-5.

¹³Holden's Dollar Magazine (New York), Banvard Scrapbook.

¹⁴Louisville Democrat, May 23, 1849.

¹⁵Scientific American, IV (December, 1848), 100.

¹⁶Morning Courier (Louisville), June 29, 1846.

¹⁷Description, Putnam Edition, p. 14.

- ¹⁸Description, Putnam Edition, p. 14.
- ¹⁹Louisville Democrat, June 29, 1846.
- ²⁰Description, Putnam Edition, p. 14.
- ²¹Morning Courier (Louisville), June 30, 1846.
- ²²Robinson, p. 3.
- ²³Morning Courier, June 29, 1846.
- ²⁴Louisville Democrat, October 16, 1846.
- ²⁵Arrington, p. 216.
- ²⁶Ibid.
- ²⁷Ibid.
- ²⁸Dorothy Ann Dondore, "Banvard's Panorama and the Flowering of New England," New England Quarterly, XI (1938), 818, says the Panorama opened by December 15, and the earliest mention of the painting is in the December 15, 1846 edition of the Boston Journal.
- ²⁹Boston Journal, January 1, 1847.
- ³⁰John Tasker Howard, Our American Music (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1946), p. 153. The six pieces were: "Iowa Waltz," "Peytona Waltz," "Bayou Sara," "The Indian Dance," "The Crescent March," "The White Fawn."
- ³¹Robinson, p. 25.
- ³²Edith Banvard Notes #4265, Banvard Family Papers.
- ³³Geneology Folder, Banvard Family Papers.
- ³⁴Letter, Edith Banvard to Lawrence K. Fox, May 8, 1941, South Dakota Memorial Art Center.
- ³⁵Daniel Boorstin, The Americans: The National Experience (New York: Random House, 1965), p. 238.
- ³⁶Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.
- ³⁷Arrington, p. 218.

- 38Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.
- 39Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.
- 40Home Journal, February 12, 1848, Banvard Scrapbook.
- 41McDermott, p. 22.
- 42Ludlow, p. 569.
- 43Arrington, p. 222.
- 44Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.
- 45Lynn Forum (Massachusetts), July 24, 1847, Banvard Scrapbook.
- 46Ibid.
- 47Boorstin, p. 238.
- 48"Mr. John Banvard," Watertown.
- 49Sara G. Bowerman, "John Banvard," Dictionary of American Biography, I, 583.
- 50"John Banvard," National Cyclopaedia of American Biography, V, 327.
- 51London Times, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.
- 52Ibid.
- 53Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.
- 54Boorstin, p. 237.
- 55Boorstin, p. 239.
- 56Banvard corresponded with many prominent Americans and considered them his friends; however, few of these men mentioned Banvard in their memoirs.
- 57Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.
- 58Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook. These and subsequent attendance figures are Banvard's.
- 59Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

⁶⁰Robinson, p. 4.

⁶¹Ibid. These quotes are from the Description, Putnam Edition.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Samuel Longfellow, Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, With Extracts From His Journals and Correspondence (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1886), II, 67-68.

⁶⁴Samuel Longfellow, II, 68.

⁶⁵Dondore, p. 821.

⁶⁶Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Longfellow's Works (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904), VIII, 425.

⁶⁷Dondore, p. 822.

⁶⁸Ibid.

⁶⁹John Greenleaf Whittier, quoted in Dondore, p. 823.

⁷⁰Henry David Thoreau, "Walking," Atlantic Monthly, IX (1862), 664-65.

⁷¹Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

⁷²Arrington, pp. 220-21.

⁷³Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

⁷⁴New-York Times, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

⁷⁵New York Mercury, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

⁷⁶Boston Journal, June 8, 1848.

⁷⁷Robinson, p. 6.

⁷⁸New York Sun, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

⁷⁹Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

⁸⁰Arrington, p. 219.

⁸¹Arrington, p. 221.

⁸²McDermott, pp. 47-67.

⁸³Joseph Earl Arrington, "The Story of Stockwell's Panorama," Minnesota History, XXXIII (Autumn, 1953), 284-90.

⁸⁴Bertha L. Heilbron, "Lewis' 'Mississippithal' in English," Minnesota History, XXXII (December, 1951), 202-13.

⁸⁵John Francis McDermott, "Portrait of the Father of Waters: Leon Pomorede's Panorama of the Mississippi," Bulletin of the Institut Francais of Washington, N.S. No. 2 (December, 1952), 46-58.

⁸⁶Arrington, "Banvard's Panorama," p. 219.

⁸⁷McDermott, The Lost Panoramas, p. 15.

⁸⁸McDermott, The Lost Panoramas, p. 16.

⁸⁹John Banvard's Diary, August, 1848.

⁹⁰Robinson, p. 4.

⁹¹McDermott, The Lost Panoramas, p. 48.

⁹²McDermott, The Lost Panoramas, p. 49.

⁹³McDermott, The Lost Panoramas, p. 48.

⁹⁴Dairy, September 12, 1848.

⁹⁵Paul Revere Frothingham, Edward Everett: Orator and Statesman (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1925), pp. ix-x.

⁹⁶Dairy, September 12, 1848.

⁹⁷Letter, Edward Everett to John Banvard, September 11, 1848, Banvard Family Papers. For some reason the letter was backdated one day.

Sir Henry Holland (1788-1873), Physician Extraordinary to Queen Victoria, visited every capital of Europe, "most of them repeatedly." Thomas Humphry Ward, ed., Men of the Reign: A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Persons of British and Colonial Birth who have died during the Reign of Queen Victoria (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1885), pp. 436-37.

Sir Roderic Impey Murchison was the foremost British scientist between 1800 and 1850. Four times President of the Geological Society and President for eleven years of the Royal Geographical Society, he received a knighthood in 1846 for his massive geological survey of Russia. Ward, pp. 652-54.

⁹⁸Diary, September 12, 1848.

⁹⁹Diary, September 27, 1848.

¹⁰⁰Diary, October 2, 1848.

¹⁰¹Diary, October 5, 1848.

¹⁰²Diary, October 13, 1848.

¹⁰³Diary, October 10, 1848.

¹⁰⁴Diary, October 14, 1848.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Diary, n.d., [1848].

¹⁰⁷Robinson, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸Banvard MSS #6302.

¹⁰⁹London Observer, November 27, 1848, Banvard Scrapbook.

¹¹⁰Illustrated London News, December 9, 1848.

¹¹¹Ibid.

¹¹²The Golbourn Edition contains twenty-four pages.

¹¹³London Observer, November 27, 1848, Banvard Scrapbook.

¹¹⁴Morning Advertiser (London), n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

¹¹⁵London Times, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

¹¹⁶Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

¹¹⁷Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

- ¹¹⁸London Sun, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.
- ¹¹⁹Arrington, "Banvard's Panorama," p. 232.
- ¹²⁰The White Fawn of the Mississippi, Music by Madame Schwieso, Words by John Banvard, Esq. (London: S.H. Webb, [1849]).
- ¹²¹Arrington, "Banvard's Panorama," p. 232.
- ¹²²Diary, October, 1848.
- ¹²³Letter, Charles Dickens to John Banvard, December 16, 1848, Banvard Family Papers.
- ¹²⁴Charles Dickens, "Some Account of an Extraordinary Traveller," Household Words, 77. /
- ¹²⁵Diary, n.d., [1848].
- ¹²⁶Russel Blaine Nye, George Bancroft: Brahmin Rebel (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1945), p. 159.
- ¹²⁷Ibid.
- ¹²⁸Banvard MSS #6302.
- ¹²⁹Ibid.
- ¹³⁰Ibid.
- ¹³¹Winslow Ames, Prince Albert and Victorian Taste (London: Chapman and Hall, 1967), p. 113.
- ¹³²Diary, n.d. [1849?].
- ¹³³Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.
- ¹³⁴Letter, Major General Bowes to John Banvard, April 16, 1849, Banvard Family Papers.
- ¹³⁵Banvard MSS #6302.
- ¹³⁶H. Southern, "The Centenary of the Panorama," Theatre Notebook, V (1950-1951), 69.
- ¹³⁷McDermott, The Lost Panoramas, p. 50.
- ¹³⁸McDermott, The Lost Panoramas, p. 47.

- 139"Mr. John Banvard," Watertown.
- 140McDermott, The Lost Panoramas, p. 47.
- 141Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.
- 142Majorie Catlin Roehm, The Letters of George Catlin and His Family: A Chronicle of the American West (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), p. 315.
- 143Sunday Times, n.d., in Banvard's Diary, [1850].
- 144Arrington, "Banvard's Panorama," p. 229.
- 145Spectator (Manchester), n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.
- 146Boston Bee, May 1, 1849, Banvard Scrapbook.
- 147Louisville Democrat, May 12, 1849.
- 148Oxford Chronicle, February 8, 1851, Banvard Scrapbook.
- 149Diary, May 1850.
- 150Diary, n.d., [1850].
- 151William A. Lilliendahl, "Memoranda of Matters relative to John Banvard and the New-York Museum Association," (holograph manuscript #3307), Manuscript Collections, New-York Historical Society, New York, New York.
- 152Affidavit, Hassan Ismael, Consulate of the United States of America, Beiruh [Beirut], April 16, 1851, Banvard Family Papers.
- 153Robinson, pp. 6-7.
- 154Affidavit, Hussan Ismael.
- 155"Mr. John Banvard," Watertown.
- 156Geneological Folder, Banvard Family Papers.
- 157Diary, [1852?].

Figure 10.

John Banvard, c. 1860. (Courtesy of the Minnesota
Historical Society.)



Figure 10.

CHAPTER III

SUCSESSES AND FAILURES: 1852-1891

I.

After their arrival in America, John Banvard and his family settled in Cold Spring Harbor, Long Island. The artist purchased "sixty acres of shore front, woods, and upland meadows" and picked for his home site "a gentle rise of land affording a fine view of the harbor."¹ Over the next three years, Banvard erected a "story-book castle," based on ones he had seen in Europe, adapted for family living.² One entire year was spent in "landscaping, furnishing, and adornment."³

The immense home aroused the curiosity of Long Islanders and "people came from near and far, commented, admired, criticized; a 'furrin,' fantastic, fairytale castle in a plain Long Island setting."⁴ Because of the fortune spent on its construction, the home was called "Banvard's Folly" by the artist's neighbors, but Banvard named it Glenada, after his newly-born daughter Ada and the wooded lot behind the castle.⁵

Figure 11.

"Glenada." A sketch of the Banvard residence by John Banvard. (Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



GRENADA

Figure 11.

One of the first rooms built at Glenada was a spacious studio,⁶ and during the summer of 1852, Banvard completed the "Panorama of the Holy Land." The size of this painting was enormous--forty-eight feet high and nearly as long as the original Mississippi Panorama.⁷ No available building in New York was large enough for its exhibition, and Banvard was forced to use the "extensive and capacious ball court" at the New York Racket Club for its opening in late 1852.⁸

"Influenced by Banvard's exposure to the art galleries of Europe," the Holy Land Panorama was considered artistically superior to his earlier paintings.⁹ An 1853 pamphlet, Description of Banvard's Pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the Holy Land, listed the following scenes:

Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Castle of David, Tower of Hippicus, Latin Convent, Damascus, Scopus, Cave of Jeremiah, Tomb of the Kings, Gate of Herod, St. Stephen's Gate, Church of St. Ann, House of the Aga, Golden Gate, Mosque of Omar, Wailing Place of Jews, Jew's Quarter, Mohammedan Cemetery, Zion Gate, Armenian Convent, Tomb of David and House of Amos, Protestant Church, Plain of Ephraim, St. Stephen's Rock, Tomb of the Virgin, Garden of Gesthsemene, Jew's Cemetery and Valley of Jehosophat, Garden of Olives, Mosque and Chapel of Ascension, Valley of Gihon, Pool of Hezekiah, Pool of Siloam, Mount Moriah, Road to Nablons, Mount Zion, Valley of Kedron, Mosque of the Deswisher, Mohammedan's Judgement Seat, Mosque of El Aska, Public Baths, College of Deswisher, Bazaars, Tombs of Absalom, St. James and Zacharias, Arch of Ecco Homo, Ruins of Herod's Palace, and a Turkish Mosque, Dwellings of Lepers, Jaffa Gate, Well of Job, Tombs of the Prophets, Cave of the Creed, Upper Pool of Gihon, Road to Jerico, Tree of Isiah, Potter's Field, Well of the Virgin, and the Road to Bethlehem.¹⁰

In 1853, Banvard purchased a building adjoining the Metropolitan Hotel at 593 Broadway,¹¹ and opened Georama Hall, a theatre 150 feet long, 40 feet wide, and 60 feet high.¹² The walls, floor, and seats were dark colored and the ceiling "was shut out by a canopy of dark cloth, coming down to the top of the painting."¹³ "No man," wrote an admirer, "understands the secret of the panorama effect more than Mr. B. He was the originator [sic] of that style of representation, and among all his imitators, none have yet excelled, and, we think, none have equalled him."¹⁴

Although the Holy Land Panorama failed to achieve the success of the Mississippi Panorama, its exhibition captured a wide audience. It appealed to the public not only as a vehicle of geographical education but its religious theme--bolstered by reduced prices for Sunday schools and Bible classes--insured its success as a family entertainment. A newspaper summed up this success by saying:

One can have an idea of its [the Holy Land Panorama] real merits and popularity, when clergymen recommend it from their pulpits to their congregations, advising them to go and study it--a circumstance never known in a Christian community before."¹⁵

In February and March 1853, the Mississippi Panorama exhibited at the New Hall on Broadway near Bleecker

Street.¹⁶ In April 1853, Banvard added 12,000 square feet of the Nile River to the Georama Hall exhibit.¹⁷ However, during the next three years, Banvard spent most of his efforts promoting the Holy Land Panorama and scenes from the sea of Galilee.

In July 1853, the entrepreneur, recalling his success with Queen Victoria, bound his Holy Land pamphlet and sent it to President Franklin Pierce with an invitation to a private performance at Georama Hall. Pierce, in New York for the World's Fair, never bothered to reply. "The President," Banvard wrote disgustedly, "preferred to look at the Ballet girls' legs. . . and listen to the strains of foreign artists of doubtful reputation. How different my reception by Queen Victoria."¹⁸

In late 1854, Banvard displayed his Holy Land paintings at Boston's Horticultural Hall in School Street. The exhibition lasted fourteen months and his accompanying lectures were delivered in "such a manner so simple and palpable that the beholder has but to look and listen in order to enjoy a real visit to the Holy Land."¹⁹ At the nearby Hall of Art, the Mississippi Panorama was shown.²⁰

The next year the Holy Land Panorama was taken to the Temperance Temple in Baltimore,²¹ where it ran until the fall of 1856, when it was exhibited in a spacious hall on

Broad Street in Philadelphia.²² At the conclusion of a performance on November 1, 1856, Philadelphian Henry Charles Carey (1793-1879), sociologist and father of the U.S. school of economics, offered a resolution thanking Banvard for his performances.

Resolved, That his audience have witnessed with the most sincere pleasure and gratification, the interesting and artistic representation of the classic scenes of other lands--scenes rendered doubly dear to them by the most sacred associations, and which have been so beautifully portrayed and so intelligibly explained as almost to transport us in person to the Holy Land.²³

After returning from Philadelphia, Banvard, now forty-three years old, retired to Glenada. Long Islanders overcame their initial suspicion of the man who built "Banvard's Folly," and the artist was accepted as an important member of the community.²⁴ His children "delighted" their playmates with "invitations to ride in their pony cart."²⁵ Banvard involved himself in civic affairs; he joined the local Temperance Society--good publicity for his religious paintings--gave lectures at local school benefits,²⁶ and personally paid for New Shore Road, Cold Spring Harbor's first road to its steamboat landing.²⁷ At the road's opening in 1860, Banvard published a broadside "the size of a windowshade" announcing a "Fair Extraordinary after the manner of the English fairs and the Fetes of France" at Glenada.²⁸ The artist also painted several folk murals,

"largely of horses and dogs," on the walls of Totten's Livery Stable and the Blacksmith Shop in Cold Spring Harbor.²⁹

Banvard devoted the years between 1860 and 1864 writing poems and plays and painting. At the 1860 National Academy of Design exhibition he offered for sale two paintings and a charcoal sketch: "Ruins of Koom Obos, Egypt," "Ancient Tyre," and "The Residence of the Artist."³⁰ He also produced versions, some as small as 5" X 7", of scenes from his Mississippi Panorama. His most successful work, however, was "The Orison," based on his sketch of the Convent of St. Eustace in northern Italy. In 1861, this 5' X 7' painting³¹ came to the attention of Sarony, Major, and Knapp, America's largest producer of color prints.³² The firm manufactured a 16" X 24" color- or chromo-lithograph of "The Orison," glued it to a canvas backing, and by running the two sheets through a corrugated roller, produced a print that resembled an original oil painting. This ingenious process "was the sensation of artistic circles."³³ The canvas-backed prints sold for ten dollars; regular prints cost five dollars.³⁴ William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878), author of "Thanatopsis," Editor of the New York Evening Post, and a neighbor of Banvard's, discussed the painting in an editorial.

The picture painted by Banvard, called "The Orison," represents the Convent of St. Eustace on Iago ci Garda, in Northern Italy, a building erected in the Fifteenth Century by Micheli [Di Bartolommeo Michelozzo (1396-1472)] the celebrated Veronese architect. . . The atmosphere has the distinctive feature of Italian skies, the peculiar mist or haze that prevails just as the light of the moon mingles, or predominates over the receding twilight, clearly defining the outlines of the landscape and softening the hard edges that a strictly moonlight is apt to have. . . In the original this scene is most feelingly rendered by the artist and it is a marvel how it should have been transferred so effectively to printed colors. A person not used to judging works of art would be unable to distinguish the difference between the original and the copy. The perspective, the light, and the shade as well as the forms are given the minutest fidelity. (My underlines.)³⁵

"The Orison" chromo-lithographs sold well in England. The London Times, impressed by the colors and textured effect, noted, "Mr. Banvard has done more to elevate the taste for Fine Arts, than any single artist since the discovery of painting and much praise is due him."³⁶ Banvard obviously enjoyed a high reputation ten years after leaving England.

Banvard spent the early years of the Civil War writing letters to Union gnerals with advice on how to push Confederate forces from the upper Mississippi River, but only John C. Fremont (1813-1890) took him seriously. The upper Mississippi remained in Southern hands primarily because of the heavy fortifications--fifty guns and a floating battery of sixteen more--on Island No. 10, located in the middle of a horseshoe bend above New Madrid, Missouri.³⁷ Banvard mailed Fremont a complex set of plans

Figure 12.

"The Orison." Chromolithograph on canvas, by John Banvard.
Printed by Sarony, Major, and Knapp, 1861. (Courtesy of
the Minnesota Historical Society.)



Figure 12.

for capturing the island, suggesting that a shallow slough, which cut the bend in half, be dug into a deep canal. Then, out of range of the Island No. 10 guns, Union gunboats could pass through the canal and outflank the Confederates above and below the island.³⁸ Fremont replied:

Headquarters, Western Dept.
St. Louis, Sept. 6, 1861.

Mr. John Banvard:

Sir: I have received your letter of 22 July with its valuable enclosures. I shall be glad to see your portfolio or drawings and have no doubt but that I shall find them very useful in the coming campaign on the river. Accept my thanks for your thoughtful consideration and be assured that it is appreciated by

Yours truly,
John C. Fremont³⁹

The canal was built, and on April 3, 1862, the Union ironclads Carondelet and Pittsburgh passed through it, outflanking the Southerners and winning a significant victory for the North.⁴⁰

The events at Island No. 10 and other military activities on the Western rivers brought about a "revival of interest" in Banvard's Mississippi Panorama.⁴¹ During Christmas week, 1862, Banvard exhibited it at New York's Hall of Art, 652 Broadway.⁴² The artist dropped the Ohio and Missouri sections of the painting and added "naval and military operations" on the Mississippi.⁴³ The

Panorama was shown periodically in New York throughout the War, including a popular run at Low's Buildings in September 1863.⁴⁴

Also in 1863, Banvard displayed his Holy Land Panorama at the Lee Avenue Sunday School. On June 11, a "historical tableaux of the War of the Rebellion" was presented on the same bill.⁴⁵ This performance marks the first record of actors--probably members of the Lee Avenue Sunday School--appearing with Banvard's panoramas. Banvard continued to show an interest in the theatre and became a playwright.

In September 1864, a verse drama by Banvard entitled Amasis, or The Last of the Pharoahs was produced at the Boston Theatre. The play, produced by Orlando Tompkins and Benjamin Thayer, featured a distinguished cast led by E.L. Davenport, J.W. Wallack, George H. Clark, and Rose Etyinge. Since it was never exhibited again as a panorama performance, most likely portions of the forty-eight feet high Nile River Panorama were used for scenery. Amasis ran for three performances during a week in which Macbeth and Richard III were presented in the same theatre.⁴⁶

II.

Banvard's experience with Amasis apparently whetted his appetite for full-scale theatrical productions. After the Civil War, he started his own theatrical enterprise,

and through either fraud or naive financial management, subsequently lost the theatre, his reputation, and his fortune. The venture began auspiciously, but a combination of circumstances led the artist into total bankruptcy. In 1866, Banvard called on William A. Lilliendahl, his Nile River expedition companion, at the latter's business offices at 64 John Street in New York City. Would Lilliendahl, Banvard wondered, be interested in investing in a new theatre? Lilliendahl, who always "possessed friendly feelings" toward Banvard, gave the artist \$2,000 for investment purposes.⁴⁷

Banvard then formed the New York Museum Association and issued \$300,000 worth of stock in lots of \$2,000 each to several prominent New York business families, including the Beaches and the Fowlers. Unfortunately, Banvard failed to register either the Association or the stock with the State of New York.⁴⁸ The entrepreneur then leased six three-story buildings at Broadway and Thirtieth Streets from Henry Schiefflin for \$7,000 per year. Banvard built his theatre on a large vacant lot behind the buildings. He rented out five of the buildings and used the sixth as a museum storage area for what Lilliendahl later described as "broken and dilapidated curiosities."⁴⁹ They were probably

artifacts Banvard had brought back from Egypt, the Middle East, and Europe.

The artist paid for the construction of the new theatre by trading Association stock for materials and labor. Two firms, the Donat Lumber Company and Jones' Brick Company, provided materials at a "very low price" in return for shares on which they paid sixty to eighty per cent of the face value.⁵⁰ The artist had total control of all the financial arrangements for the building, managing the money "as he saw fit." He formed a Board of Directors consisting of his two sons, Eugene and John Jr.; his father-in-law, E.K. Goodnow; his nephew, W.K. Banvard, Joseph Ayers, W.R. Brown, Lilliendahl, and with himself as President. All of the members, five of whom were of course related, purportedly bought \$2,000 worth of shares, but Lilliendahl testified that they, in fact, did not, and he himself never attended a Board meeting or saw a stock certificate.⁵¹

When completed the theatre was one of the finest in New York. Covering forty-thousand square feet, it contained rooms for museum curiosities and a three-tiered auditorium that seated two thousand persons.⁵² A fifty-foot long entrance "terminated in a steep stairway of some nineteen steps" that led to the auditorium.⁵³ According

to theatre historian T. Allston Brown, it was the "first building erected expressly for museum purposes" in New York,⁵⁴ but its primary function was the presentation of theatrical events.

With S.B. Duffield as his stage manager, Banvard assembled a "large if not brilliant" company and opened the theatre as Banvard's Museum on June 17, 1867.⁵⁵ The museum section opened before noon and two dramatic performances were given in the auditorium each day. A display of Banvard's Mississippi Panorama opened the festivities and was followed by Jonas B. Phillips' recitation of an address written by Harry B. Phillips. An operatic chorus sang "The Hymn of Four Nations," and the company closed with two "burlettas," Jenny Lind at Last and A Husband for an Hour.⁵⁶ The historical drama Rob Roy and Professor Longrenia, a magician, were added to the bill during July, and a production of the popular comedy Nobody's Daughter ran August 12 through August 31.⁵⁷

Banvard closed the theatre August 31 for financial reasons. He paid many of the construction workers and stage hands in cash and worthless Association stock. Joseph Ayers, a member of the Board of Directors and nominally financial director of the theatre, merely "puttered around" and left everything to Banvard.⁵⁸ The gullible Lilliendahl had

co-signed a promissory note for \$5,500 for Banvard, but it was of little help.⁵⁹

Banvard's theatrical fortunes temporarily revived when producer John De Pol was engaged to stage Arthur Cuyas Armengol's ballet spectacular The Devil's Auction, or The Golden Branch. The Devil's Auction, "obviously intended to rival the glories of The Black Crook,"⁶⁰ featured a "very slight thread of drama" and a stage full of women dancers in tights.⁶¹

Ironically, Banvard, who once chided President Pierce for his interest in "Ballet girls' legs," now dropped all pretense of running a museum and offered the public the very entertainment he once deplored.

De Pol engaged several "excellent dancers" from Europe to appear in the play,⁶² but difficulties in mounting the massive production (the stage had to be widened by twenty feet) and the necessity for several rehearsals, twice delayed the reopening of the theatre,⁶³ further draining Banvard's financial resources.

Renamed Banvard's Grand Opera House and Museum, the theatre reopened with The Devil's Auction on Wednesday, October 3, 1867. The minimal plot concerned a peasant girl given by her miserly father to a lecherous old count, but, the Daily Tribune intoned, "few persons expect a ballet

play to contain positive merits of a literary character. It is enough if pretexts are found for the frequent introduction of the dancers."⁶⁴ The four-act spectacular was "a sensation."⁶⁵ "The point of interest," commented the New-York Times, "is, first, the dancing; next, the dancers; and last, the scenery."⁶⁶ The titillating production sold out for several weeks and "most of the spectators were men."⁶⁷

On December 3, 1867, De Pol abruptly withdrew his company and joined the Academy of Music, leaving Banvard's Grand Opera House and Museum "cold and dark at the beginning of the holiday season."⁶⁸ Banvard closed the theatre until December 21, when he presented Our Mutual Friend, a popular adaptation of Charles Dickens' novel of the same name. That was followed by several unfamiliar plays until March 2, when Dion Boucicault's The Octaroon, followed by Mrs. G.C. Howard in Uncle Tom's Cabin, took the stage. But Banvard was losing money,⁶⁹ and George C.D. Odell commented, "One predicts failure of an enterprise falling back on such hacknayed material."⁷⁰ The Theatre closed on April 3, with The Six Degrees of Crime, Raising the Wind, and The Adopted Child.⁷¹

Pressed by creditors, Banvard looked for someone to buy the theatre. Lilliendahl introduced him to George Wood, who agreed to rent the place,⁷² and after "extensive

alterations," the theatre reopened as Wood's Museum and Metropolitan Theatre on August 31, 1868. P.T. Barnum leased the museum rooms and exhibited the Siamese Twins, Sophia Ganz the Dwarf, and General Grant, Jr., a midget.⁷³ Banvard reportedly received and kept \$12,000 for the next five years in rent from Wood and Barnum; he never paid the New York Museum Association a cent in dividends.⁷⁴

In 1873, the stockholders of the Association finally discovered they had no charter. Banvard, in effect, had sub-leased the theatre to Wood and Barnum. Henry Schiefflin was still the legal owner of the buildings and theatre and the property reverted back to him. Banvard's reputation was ruined.⁷⁵

But the artist evidently had a good portion of his personal fortune left. He continued living at Glenada, and its upkeep must have been expensive. He continued his literary efforts and in 1875 published a 590-page book entitled The Private Life of a King: Embodying the Suppressed Memoirs of the Prince of Wales, Afterwards George IV., of England.⁷⁶ Although the title page announced the memoirs as "NOW FIRST PUBLISHED," whole portions of the book had been lifted verbatim and without acknowledgment from Robert Huish's *The Memoirs of George the Fourth*, published in London in 1830.⁷⁷

In 1876, Banvard somehow regained control of his theatre. No financial records survive, but perhaps he worked out an arrangement with Schiefflin to lease the theatre and pay off his debts. The establishment reopened as the New Broadway Theatre on December 26, 1876, with Corrinia, A Tale of Sicily, written by Banvard. The play-- "clearly an adaptation of a commonplace French melodrama-- was uninteresting and the performance bad."⁷⁸ The production starred J.B. Studley, E.F. Knowles, May Hart, and Louise Leighton. The theatre was "spacious and commodius" and "to render it popular," the Times said, "the management need only see to it that an attractive entertainment is offered its frequenters."⁷⁹

The newspaper's advice went unheeded. After eight performances of Corinnia, Banvard staged a combination of mediocre plays and past hits such as Rip Van Winkle, La Jolie Bouquetiere, and Uncle Tom's Cabin. On February 19, 1876, however, Banvard brought in Augustin Daly's troupe for the comedy Our Boys and thereafter dropped the resident stock company and "rented [the theatre's] stage to companies that came in at their own risk."⁸⁰ Banvard's reputation suffered another blow when it was discovered that the February 26 production of Inshavogue, or The Days of '98, starring John T. Hinds, was plagiarized from Harry Watkins' Trodden Down. The play was hastily withdrawn.⁸¹

Several managers leased the theatre during the 1878-1879 season, and it "emerged as a first-class" house under James Duff.⁸² Meanwhile, Banvard searched for a buyer. Incredibly, Lilliendahl agreed to help him; the ex-stockholder probably hoped to get back some of his investment. Lilliendahl asked P.T. Barnum if he was interested, and on February 28, 1878, the legendary showman tersely replied, "No sir!! I would not take Broadway Theatre as a gift if I had to run it. I have but one theatre and that is all I will have."⁸³ Three days later Barnum's New York theatre caught fire and was completely destroyed.⁸⁴

After a production of The Merchant's Daughter, or The Curse of Drink, "produced under the patronage for the benefit of the Temperance Societies,"⁸⁵ Banvard's New Broadway Theatre "suddenly closed"⁸⁶ on April 11, 1878, and the house, "full of vicissitude and woe," was vacant once more.⁸⁷

In the autumn of 1879, Banvard finally found a buyer for the now "antiquated and dilapidated" theatre--Augustin Daly (1836-1899).⁸⁸ The innovative manager and director had been impressed with the house during his brief tenancy there in February 1876 and he wanted it for a permanent home.⁸⁹ After "many alterations," Daly's Theatre, 1221

Broadway, opened on September 17, 1879.⁹⁰ Daly, America's first régisseeur,⁹¹ used the theatre as a home base for important productions in New York, London, Paris, and Berlin.⁹² Banvard's theatre, in Daly's hands, became "America's foremost theatre for the next two decades."⁹³

Banvard's efforts at theatrical management were disastrous. During his early professional career his financial operations were a one-man enterprise. In the years between 1847 and 1865, with only the help of a single secretary, he earned millions of dollars; he never had a business partner, a lawyer, or an accountant. The financial aspects of the panorama performance were simple; he needed only a hall in which to display his painting. The cash flow from ticket, pamphlet, and sheet music sales passed directly into the artist's hands.

In 1867, faced with fiscal responsibilities toward others for the first time, Banvard failed to perform the most rudimentary tasks: setting up a corporation, getting stock licensed, and following conventional legal business practices. His personal charm persuaded businessmen like the Beaches, the Fowlers, and William A. Lilliendahl, all of whom should have known better, to invest in the theatre, and as late as 1878, Lilliendahl was still willing to help him. Banvard probably did not set out to defraud his investors, but his financial naivete strains credulity.

Two other events occurred during Banvard's theatre years that also contributed to his failure. A stock market panic occurred in 1873, and banks and hundreds of mortgaged theatres throughout the United States folded. The resulting depression affected the theatre for several years. Then, on December 5, 1876, two weeks before the opening of Banvard's Corrinia, two-hundred and ninety-two people died in a fire at the Brooklyn Theatre. This "caused a theatrical depression all over the country for at least a year."⁹⁴

The abrupt and ignominious closing of the New Broadway Theatre in April 1878, ended an unfortunate chapter in Banvard's career.

His theatrical misadventures over, Banvard turned once again to writing. In 1880, he published a new edition of his George IV biography, now titled The Court and Times of George IV., King of England. Banvard answered charges of plagerism against his first edition in an Introduction that read in part:

Surely it would not be expected to produce the authorities of that volume, any more than to expect Washington Irving to produce the authority of Fernandez de Navarette, whose researches he has embodied in his life of Columbus, as he informs us in his preface to that work. We trust future reviewers will bear this in mind, should they honor the author by noticing this volume.⁹⁵

The Introduction was the last page in the book; the publishers evidently enclosed it at the last moment. The

plagerized portions remained.

Also in 1880, Banvard published The Tradition of the Temple; the Origin of the Building of Solomon's Temple. An Oriental Tradition, a profusely illustrated twenty-five stanza poem that was as cumbersome as its title suggests.⁹⁶ These literary efforts were probably to raise money.

On April 25, 1881, Banvard announced that the "Original Panorama of the Mississippi River" would run at Republic Hall for two weeks.⁹⁷ This exhibition was the last public showing of the massive painting that won Banvard fame and fortune.

By 1881 the fortune was gone too; Banvard's "last dollar was sunk" into his theatre and his money had melted away.⁹⁸ That summer Banvard sold Glenada to W.B. Gerard of Long Island, who turned it into a "fashionable boarding house,"⁹⁹ and his household goods and furnishings at public auction.¹⁰⁰ He had come full circle; exactly fifty years before Banvard had watched his father's possessions being sold for debt. After the auction, the peniless artist, just as he had done as a boy of fifteen, moved to the West.

Figure 13.

John Banvard, 1880. Photograph by L.W. Cook, Boston.
(Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.)



Figure 13.

III.

In 1880, Banvard's son Eugene and his wife Jesse had settled in Watertown, South Dakota, where within two years he became a prosperous attorney and loan and real estate agent.¹⁰¹ Accompanied by their daughters Ada, Estella, and Edith, Banvard and his wife arrived in Watertown in July 1883, and moved in with Eugene at his home at 803 Second Street.¹⁰² Now in his late sixties, Banvard was described as "spare. . . with clear cut features and alert eye."¹⁰³ His Watertown neighbors remembered him as a "very pleasant, a genial man," who exhibited a "keen intellect" and "commanded. . . respect."¹⁰⁴ He always produced "some little witticism or story that just fitted the occasion;"¹⁰⁵ and he and Elizabeth were "cultured and educated people. . . fine entertainers."¹⁰⁶ Banvard quickly became "a central figure in all matters of a public nature."¹⁰⁷

John Jr. joined the rest of the family in late 1883, and the father and sons headed various building and construction projects throughout the next decade.¹⁰⁸ John Sr. raised funds for and "superintended" the building of the town's first armory, and actually built its stage, outfitting it with a large drop curtain.¹⁰⁹ In 1889, he submitted architectural plans for a proposed Watertown city hall, and while the selection committee was "pleased with the appearance and elevation of building," it rejected the design in favor of another.¹¹⁰

The aging showman spent his days in Watertown writing, painting, and lecturing. He wrote hundreds of poems and published them whenever and wherever he could. Most of the surviving poems have little or no literary value and are entirely forgettable, but they are good examples of the florid, sentimental verse in vogue during the latter half of the nineteenth century. This Easter poem is typical of Banvard's work.

AN EASTER PAEAN

Sing, sing aloud hosanna
 With joy awake the skies;
 Wave, wave aloft Christ's banner,
 Let sweetest anthems rise,
 For Jesus, King of Glory,
 Has triumphed o'er the grave;

Go, go repeat the story
 What He has done to save;
 Repeat the glad hosanna
 Till all the mountains ring;
 Raise high the shining banner
 Of Christ, our God, our King.¹¹¹

With its reliance on four and six line stanzas, Banvard's poetry contains a hymn-like quality traceable to his Moravian origins. His father and mother belonged to the Moravian sect and he attended Moravian schools. "Some of the most beautiful hymns in the collections of the various Protestant denominations are Moravian hymns," he wrote in his autobiography, "and I am happy to say that I was brought up in their communion."¹¹²

Banvard published verse containing political and topical comment under the pseudonym "Peter Palette," but his work seldom found an audience in the frontier community where "few were seriously interested in literature."¹¹³ "Peter Palette" also contributed poems for weddings and funerals, including the following one written for Leslie Goddard and Nellie Hatch, grandparents of early film star Paulette Goddard.

LINES

Suggested by the wedding of Mr. Goddard and Miss Hatch, Watertown, Sept. 1887.

A sight most beautiful to see
Is a lovely youthful bride,
When yielding up life's destiny
To him that's by her side;
To whom her loving heart is giv'n
To pass life's troubled sea,
And bound on earth and bound in heav'n
For all eternity.

For to us it is God's holy chain
Does bind each loving heart,
And in sweet fellowship remain
Till death the twain shall part;
And here He brings love bonds around
As part of his [sic] great plan,
And what together God has bound
Must ne'er be rent by man.¹¹⁴

In 1885, Banvard reissued The Tradition of the Temple in Watertown and thereby became South Dakota's first published poet.¹¹⁵ In 1887, he published a curious little book on "how to learn the art of shorthand in a week, by self-teaching."¹¹⁶ However, the book did not sell well for "the

opportunity to learn this useful art in a week was not taken advantage of."¹¹⁷

Banvard also lectured on his travels and adventures which he illustrated in chalk on a blackboard. This lecture method, popularized by cartoonist Thomas Nast (1840-1902), was ideally suited for Banvard who could draw quickly and accurately. His 1888 lecture on the New York Egyptian Obelisk and its hieroglyphic inscriptions received considerable attention. A spectator who saw both Nast and Banvard thought the latter "out-Nasted Nast."¹¹⁸

Painting, however, remained Banvard's primary interest during his last years. He painted several large tablets inscribed with the "Lord's Prayer" and donated them to Watertown's Trinity Episcopal Church.¹¹⁹ He reworked some of his "simple boyhood sketches" in hopes of publishing them as a book. Although he wrote an accompanying text entitled "Some Old Houses in New York," Banvard for some reason abandoned the project.¹²⁰

In 1886, at the age of seventy-one, Banvard began construction of a massive diorama called "The Burning of Columbia."¹²¹ Based on General William Tecumseh Sherman's destruction of Columbia, South Carolina, on the night of February 17, 1865, the diorama furnished South Dakota audiences with a "spectacular illusion."¹²² His daughter

Edith, seventeen years old, assisted him, but the rest of her family, especially "mother and the older members of the family, were quite adverse to his giving it, as they felt his health was too impaired for him to attempt it."¹²³ But he ignored them and continued working on the painting. It was not an easy task, according to Watertown resident Doane Robinson, but the results were more than satisfying.

Practically without money, relying upon his ingenious [sic] production of mechanical devises [sic] out of any material upon which he could lay his hands, his extraordinary resources were never so well illustrated as in this production. Painted canvases, ropes, windlasses, kerosene lamps, lycopodium, screens, shutters, and revolving drums were his accessories. Marching battalions, dashing cavalry, roaring cannon, blasing [sic] buildings, the rattle of musketry, and the din of battle were the products resulting in a final spectacle beyond belief, when one considers it was a one man show, with John Banvard operating the immortal works, winding windlasses, pulling ropes, firing rockets, setting off trains of lycopodium, ringing bells, and divers other things to multiply the illusion and augment the tumult. There were boys in blue daubed upon canvas cylinders, revolved by a hand-contrived gear and lighted from the inside by a kerosene lamp.

When the tumult and the shouting died away and the last ember was dead, a bleareyed moon, created by pasting red tissue over a crescent [sic] shaped hole in the ceiling cast just enough glow over the wreckage to leave the assembly, sitting in the dark, in breathless awe.¹²⁴

Banvard exhibited the diorama in Watertown and various nearby communities. It was his last public exhibition. Elizabeth, Banvard's wife for forty-one years, died of

"congestion of the lungs" on December 7, 1889. Banvard was haggard and confused at her funeral and "there were but few dry eyes at the sight of the aged mourner, whose feeble and grief-stricken steps were directed and supported by his children."¹²⁵

Banvard's "health was failing" from a heart condition, and the death of his wife and the effort expended in building and exhibiting "The Burning of Columbia" drained Banvard's strength.¹²⁶ During the next year he showed some signs of regaining his "wonderful vitality,"¹²⁷ but his heart ailment worsened and at dusk, Saturday, May 16, 1891, John Banvard died at the home of his son Eugene.¹²⁸ He was seventy-five years old and one newspaper thought "at the time of his death he was the oldest scenic artist and theatrical manager in the United States."¹²⁹ After Sunday services at Trinity Episcopal Church, he was buried beside Elizabeth in Watertown's Mount Hope Cemetery.¹³⁰

The disposition of the Mississippi River Panorama remains a mystery. Banvard brought it with him to Watertown; a grandson remembered playing with it in the Banvard basement.¹³¹ Local tradition in Watertown says the massive painting was cut up and used as insulation for a house.¹³² Edith Banvard, the last person known to have seen the Panorama, commented:

As to what became of the panorama which my father painted. . . I cannot say with any certainty. I always understood that part of it was used for scenery, and think that some might have been so used in the Watertown Opera house as it was built after we went to Watertown to live. I do remember that for quite a while it was stored away in our home there.

As for many years it was wound on a cylinder probably twenty feet long, and made a roll at least six feet in circumference, it was rather a bulky thing to care for. Also the years had taken their toll and the cloth was giving away in places and the paint was peeling off in spots, so it may be that it was finally destroyed, but as to that I could not say.

You see it was painted about a hundred years ago, and my father probably thought it had fulfilled its mission of showing the beauties and possibilities of the country to the easterners and Europeans, and so was of no more use.¹³³

According to the Watertown Public Opinion, John Banvard "was one of the greatest men the world ever saw, and by his genius and skill has made himself so famous that his name will go down in history as such."¹³⁴ The newspaper was wrong. Banvard certainly sought fame and wealth and for several years enjoyed both. But in the end, like his Mississippi River Panorama, his prolific efforts at art, literature, and theatre faded from public view and he was quickly forgotten. But his contributions and influence were genuine and significant in the nineteenth century American theatre.

FOOTNOTES

¹Estelle V. Newman, "The Story of 'Banvard's Folly,'" Long Island Forum, XV (May, 1952), 83.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Newspaper clipping, n.n., Banvard Scrapbook.

⁷Arrington, "Banvard's Panorama," p. 233.

⁸Arrington, "Banvard's Panorama," p. 234.

⁹Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

¹⁰[John Banvard], Description of Banvard's Pilgrimage to the Holy Land (London, 1852). The Holy Land Panorama was never shown in England, although Banvard published his pamphlets there before leaving for America.

¹¹Wickman, p. 109.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Wickman, p. 110.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Arrington, "Banvard's Panorama," p. 234.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Diary, July, 1853.

¹⁹Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

²⁰Arrington, "Banvard's Panorama," p. 235.

²¹American Courier (Philadelphia), November 1, 1856, Banvard Scrapbook.

²²Ibid.

²³Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook.

²⁴Newman, p. 96.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷LongIslander, n.d., Banvard Family Papers.

²⁸Newman, p. 96.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰National Academy of Design, National Academy of Design Exhibition Record: 1826-1860 (New York: New-York Historical Society, 1943), I, 22.

³¹Letter, Edith Banvard to Lawrence K. Fox, May 8, 1941.

³²Robinson, p. 9.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Handbill, Weston Gallery, 765 Broadway, [1861?], Banvard Family Papers.

³⁵William Cullen Bryant, "Editorial," Evening Post (New York), April, 1861?, Banvard Scrapbook.

³⁶Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Scrapbook. Wickman (p. 113) mistakenly attributes this quote to a discussion of the Mississippi Panorama. The original of "The Orison" was destroyed by fire at the St. Paul, Minnesota Public Library in 1910.

³⁷Norbury L. Wayman, Life on the River: A Pictorial History of the Mississippi, the Missouri, and the Western River System (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971), p. 289.

³⁸John Banvard, "Letter to the Editor," Century Magazine, XIV (September, 1888), 795-96.

³⁹Letter, John C. Fremont to John Banvard, September 6, 1861, Banvard Family Papers.

⁴⁰Wayman, p. 289.

⁴¹Arrington, "Banvard's Panorama," p. 235.

⁴²Odell, VII, 525.

⁴³[John Banvard], Description of Banvard's Geographical painting of the Mississippi River, extensively known as the "three-mile picture," with new additions of the naval and military operations on that river, exhibiting a view of country 1,500 miles in length, from the mouth of the Missouri to the Balize (New York: L.H. Biglow, 1862).

⁴⁴Odell, Vii, 536.

⁴⁵Odell, VII, 541.

⁴⁶Eugene Tompkins, The History of the Boston Theatre (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1908), pp. 111-12.

⁴⁷Lilliendahl, "Memoranda."

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²T. Allston Brown, A History of the New York Stage: From the First Performance in 1732 to 1901 (New York: Dood, Mead, and Company, 1903), II, 522.

⁵³Joseph Francis Daly, The Life of Augustin Daly (New York: Macmillan, 1917), p. 314.

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Odell, VIII, 216.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Banvard's dramatic offerings for the first part of the 1867-1868 season ran as follows:
 June 17, 1867--A Husband for an Hour, Jenny Lind at Last;
 June 22--A Husband for an Hour, Turn Him Out; June 24--
Rob Roy; July 4--Love in '76; July 15--The Lady of Lyons;
 July 17--Dreams of Delusion, The Loan of a Lover; July 19--
The Factory Girl, The Swiss Cottage; July 25--The Marble Heart;
 August 5--The Bear and the Maiden; August 12--
Nobody's Daughter.

The stock company for June 17 through August 31 included: Julia Nelson, Ada Monk, Carrie P. Wells, Laura Williams, Fanny Stocqueler, Emma Somers, Marian Summers, Katie Tilston, Kate Talbot, Frankie McClellan, Nellie De Vere, Miss H.E. Anderson, Mrs. M.E. Berrell, Sally Wyman, J.W. Albaugh, R.J. Rikeman, G.F. Metkiff, Fred Williams, F.J. Evans, E. North, H.B. Phillips, W. Mack, M.C. Daly, W. Murray, D.W. Miller, J. Melville, J.H. Phillips (prompter) S.B. Duffield (stage manager), J.H. Chatterton, J. Thompson, S.L. Knapp, Kate Reingolds, and W. Harris.

⁵⁸Lilliendahl, "Memoranda."

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Odell, VIII, 318.

⁶¹Daily Tribune (New York), October 4, 1867.

⁶²Odell, VIII, 318.

⁶³Daily Tribune, October 2, 1867.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Daily Tribune, October 4, 1867.

⁶⁶New-York Times, October 4, 1867.

⁶⁷Daily Tribune, October 4, 1867.

⁶⁸Odell, VIII, 319. The plays and opening dates for the second half of Banvard's season were:
 October 3, 1867--The Devil's Auction, or The Golden Branch;
 December 21--Our Mutual Friend; January 13, 1878--The Day After the Wedding, The Frost King; February 7--The Little Treasure;
 February 10--East Lynn; February 12--Romeo and Juliet (matinee), Medea, London Assurance; February 13--
The Hidden Hand; February 17--The Ticket of Leave Man;

February 25--Cavaliers and Roundheads; February 29--Othello; March 2--The Octoroon; March 9--Uncle Tom's Cabin; March 16--Ten Nights in a Bar-room; March 19--Oliver Twist; March 21--Richard III; March 25--Rip Van Winkle; March 30--The Rag Picker of Paris; April 11--The Six Degrees of Crime, Raising the Wind, The Adopted Child.

⁶⁹Lilliendahl, "Memoranda."

⁷⁰Odell, VIII, 319.

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Lilliendahl, "Memoranda."

⁷³Brown, II, 523.

⁷⁴Lilliendahl, "Memoranda."

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶John Banvard, The Private Life of a King, Embodying the Suppressed Memoirs of The Prince of Wales, Afterwards George IV., of England (New York: The Literary and Art Publishing Company, 1875).

⁷⁷New-York Times, June 15, 1875.

⁷⁸New-York Times, December 24, 1876. I have been unable to locate a copy of Corrinia. It was copyrighted by Banvard on December 13, 1876. Dramatic Compositions Copyrighted in the United States: 1870-1916 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1918), I, 511.

⁷⁹New-York Times, February 28, 1868.

⁸⁰Odell, X, 218.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Odell, X, 219.

⁸³Letter, P. [Phineas] T. [Taylor] Barnum to William A. Lilliendahl, February 28, 1878, Banvard Family Papers.

⁸⁴Brown, II, 8.

⁸⁵Brown, II, 542.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Odell, X, 219.

⁸⁸Daly, p. 314.

⁸⁹Daly, p. 256.

⁹⁰Brown, II, 542.

⁹¹Bernard Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A.: 1665 to 1957 (New York: McGraw-Jill, 1959), p. 219.

⁹²Hewitt, p. 241.

⁹³Marvin Felheim, The Theatre of Augustin Daly (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 23.

⁹⁴Daniel Blum, A Pictorial History of the America Theatre: 100 Years--1860-1960 (Philadelphia: Chilton, 1960), p. 21.

⁹⁵John Banvard, "Introduction," The Court and Times of George IV., King of England (New York: Hurst, 1880).

⁹⁶Boston: Howard Gannett, 1880.

⁹⁷Handbill, April 25, 1881, Banvard Family Papers.

⁹⁸Robinson, p. 17.

⁹⁹Long Islander, n.d., Banvard Family Papers.

¹⁰⁰Newman, p. 96.

¹⁰¹State Historical Society, South Dakota Historical Collections and Report, XXIV (1949), 378-79. Hereafter, Historical Collections.

¹⁰²"Mr. John Banvard," Watertown.

¹⁰³Robinson, p. 23.

¹⁰⁴"Mr. John Banvard," Watertown.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Public Opinion, May 16, 1891.

- ¹⁰⁸Public Opinion, May 16, 1891.
- ¹⁰⁹Newspaper clipping, July 30, 1942, Watertown.
- ¹¹⁰Historical Collections, p. 451.
- ¹¹¹Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Family Papers.
- ¹¹²Banvard MSS #6302.
- ¹¹³Robinson, p. 11.
- ¹¹⁴Banvard Collection, South Dakota State Historical Society, Pierre, South Dakota.
- ¹¹⁵J. Leonard Jennewein and Jane Boorman, Dakota Panorama (Pierre: Dakota Territory Centennial Commission, 1961), p. 270.
- ¹¹⁶Newspaper clipping, n.d., Watertown.
- ¹¹⁷Ibid.
- ¹¹⁸Robinson, p. 18.
- ¹¹⁹"Mr. John Banvard," Watertown.
- ¹²⁰Heilbron, "John Banvard's New York," p. 108.
- ¹²¹Joseph Stuart, The Art of South Dakota (Brookings: South Dakota State University, [1974]), p. 11.
- ¹²²Robinson, p. 21.
- ¹²³Letter, Edith Banvard to Lawrence K. Fox, May 8, 1941.
- ¹²⁴Robinson, pp. 21-22.
- ¹²⁵Daily Courier (Watertown, South Dakota), December 9, 1889, Banvard Family Papers.
- ¹²⁶Daily Courier, May 22, 1891.
- ¹²⁷Ibid.
- ¹²⁸Public Opinion, May 22, 1891.

¹²⁹Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Family Papers. I have been unable to substantiate this claim, but the combination of scenic artist and manager is rare in the American theatre, so the statement is probably true.

¹³⁰Geneology Folder, Banvard Family Papers.

¹³¹McDermott, The Lost Panoramas, p. 162.

¹³²Letter, Margery Tauber to author, February 7, 1979.

¹³³Newspaper clipping, n.d., Banvard Collection, South Dakota State Historical Society.

¹³⁴Public Opinion, May 22, 1891.

AFTERWORD

An examination of the career of John Banvard reveals that one of the primary reasons for his unprecedented success was his fulfillment of the aesthetic need of the public for realistic pictorial motion.¹ This aesthetic need can be defined as the visual and intellectual predisposition of an audience toward a series of pictures that move. The more realistic or natural those moving pictures are, the deeper and more satisfying the aesthetic response.

Attempts to satisfy nineteenth century audience demands for realistic pictorial motion developed along two parallel modes of expression: the painted moving panorama and the photograph. These modes developed simultaneously and provided the impetus for a wholly new art form--the cinema. Painters such as Banvard believed that only the painted canvas was capable of reproducing life-like images in motion. On the other hand, inventors, scientists, and some artists favored methods employing the photograph, believing that its non-illusory nature engendered a more gratifying aesthetic response.

Banvard's remarkable success temporarily satisfied the aesthetic desires of the public for motion pictures. Ironically, he created a mass audience for realistic moving images and then was unable to satisfy increasing public demands for it. By the 1860's his audience had deserted him for a medium that offered more pictorial realism--the melodramatic stage spectacle.

Thomas Grieve (1799-1882) painted a moving panorama for the performance of a play at Covent Garden in 1824,² but it was not until the 1860's that play producers generally adopted the panorama as a scenic device for their productions, not because they "were a great step forward in scenic or staging practices, but because they had caught the public's fancy."³

Eventually, plot and character development became secondary to scenic and sound effects as artists enhanced dramas with moving panoramas and "architectural settings, costumes, lights, supernatural effects, fireworks. . . and continuous musical accompaniment."⁴ Dion Boucicault (1822-1890), Henry Irving (1838-1905), David Belasco (1859-1931), and Steele MacKaye (1842-1894) used the moving panorama to achieve the "photographic ideal" in stage pictures.⁵ Plays such as Mazeppa (1861), Uncle Tom's Cabin (1860's), Forty Thieves (1868), and Evangeline (1886), with live horses

on a treadmill, heroines tied to railroad tracks and sawmill conveyor belts, and ships tossed upon swelling oceans, created a realistic illusion of motion that Banvard's panoramas were unable to duplicate. By the last showing of the Mississippi River Panorama, the panorama exhibition, so profitably exploited by Banvard, had been replaced as a theatrical art form by the pictorial melodrama. Panorama artists such as Sir Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867), William Lewis Telbin (1846-1931), and Joseph Harker (1855-1927) deserted the panorama halls for the regular theatres.

Meanwhile, scientists and artists alike were intrigued with Daguerre's 1839 invention of a practical process for photography. Daguerre, inventor of the diorama and an accomplished panoramist, became the first artist to leave the simulated realism of the moving panorama for the possibilities of the photograph. Inventions utilizing the photograph proliferated during the 1840's: the kaleidoscope, Lampascope, Phenakistiscope, Zeotrope, Praxinscope, and Kinematoscope were all developed in an attempt to reproduce believable moving images. Most of these primitive devices were actually toys based on the principle that a series of consecutive action pictures when spun inside a cylinder and viewed through a side slot would recreate motion.⁶

In 1894, Thomas Edison (1847-1931) invented the Kinetoscope, the first workable movie camera. Edison considered his invention only a mechanical amusement and neglected to extend his temporary patent. Several theatre practitioners, however, immediately saw the potential of the cinema as an art form. George Méliès, the first important European filmmaker, was a magician and director of France's Theatre Hôudin, a theatre that used moving panoramas in its variety entertainments. David Wark Griffith (1875-1948), America's first great filmmaker, had worked as a theatre technician for David Belasco, the man most responsible in America for utilizing the moving panorama for realistic stage spectacle.

The cinema immediately captured the imagination of the public and became the ultimate expression of the aesthetic need for moving pictures. By 1900 the era of the moving panorama had ended and the age of the cinema had arrived.

In March 1943, Edith Banvard, John Banvard's last surviving child, christened a Liberty ship in her father's name at Baltimore's Bethel-Fairfield shipyards. At the dedication ceremonies the United States Government officially recognized John Banvard as "the first motion picture producer."⁷ Three years and several collisions later, the USS Banvard was dismantled and sold for scrap.⁸

FOOTNOTES

¹A. Nicholas Vardac uses the phrase "aesthetic need" in Stage to Screen: Theatrical Method from Garrick to Griffith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949).

²Wickman, pp. 177-78. Philip De Loutherbourg (1740-1812) invented the "Eidophusikon," a "winding machine" that drew a "considerable length of machinery across the stage" in 1781, but no evidence exists that it pulled a panorama. See Wickman, p. 168.

³Ibid.

⁴Vardac, p. 118.

⁵Vardac, p. 89.

⁶An account of these early attempts at creating motion pictures is found in C.W. Ceram [Kurt W. Marek], Archaeology of the Cinema (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, [1969]), 73 ff.

⁷Newspaper clipping. n.d., South Dakota Memorial Art Center.

⁸Records of Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, National Archives.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

BANVARD'S PANORAMA PAMPHLETS

John Banvard's Mississippi River Panorama disappeared without a trace. The only extant record of the painting, aside from a few copied scenes of uneven quality printed in London newspapers and Banvard's own miniatures, are the descriptive pamphlets. Since the pamphlets were intended as guidebooks featuring entertaining and educational information, they are "much more informative than theatre handbills or programs usually are."¹ Banvard published four known editions of pamphlets describing the Mississippi River Panorama, the earliest published by John Putnam at Boston in 1847. The Putnam edition contains forty-four pages covered with blue-green end papers. The first fourteen pages entitled "Adventures of an Artist," describes Banvard's experiences on the Western rivers.²

¹John Francis McDermott, "Banvard's Mississippi Panorama Pamphlets," The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, XLIII (First Quarter, 1949), 48.

²This Appendix uses the Putnam edition contained in the Clements Library Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. McDermott, in "Banvard's Mississippi Panorama Pamphlets," uses a copy owned by Edith Banvard and now in the Minnesota Historical Society Collection. The Minnesota copy is at considerable variance with the Clements' copy. Copies in collections at the University of Kentucky and Columbia University also contain differences; the Kentucky

Pages fifteen through twenty, "Mississippi River," quotes verbatim Timothy Flint's A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States or the Mississippi Valley, I, 131 ff., published in Cincinnati in 1828. Section three, pages twenty one through thirty-two, includes captions for the scenes passing by the audience. "Life on the Mississippi," the fourth section of the pamphlet, borrows heavily from Flint (I, 229 ff.) and covering pages thirty-three through forty-two. The last section offers various testimonials and is entitled "Tribute to a Native Talent."

The following is an annotated list of the scenes contained in the Mississippi River Panorama as it appeared in Boston and covers pages twenty-one through thirty-two in the Putnam edition.

Description of Banvard's Panorama of the
Mississippi River, Painted on Three Miles of Canvas,
exhibiting a View of Country 1200 Miles in Length,
Extending from the mouth of the Missouri River to
the City of New Orleans, Being by far the Largest
Picture ever executed by Man.

copy reverses page five and forty-three; the Columbia copy uses section five in place of section one. These inconsistencies probably resulted from the haste in which the printers assembled the pamphlets. In slightly more than six months, 251,702 people saw the Panorama performances in Boston and the demand for souvenir pamphlets was great.

RUSH ISLAND,² [Missouri]

And Bar, with the wreck of the steamer West Wind, managed here in June, 1846,--at the same time the artist was painting this portion of the river. This was a very unfortunate boat, having been previously blown up, and killing a large number of persons.

BLUFFS OF SELMA³

These bluffs have a very striking and majestic appearance, varying from two to four hundred feet in height; some of them are beautifully variegated, and resemble the facade of mighty temples,--the face of them having uniform arches and carved niches almost as regular and order like as if they were chisled out by the hands of man.

HERCULANEUM,

Standing as if it were an immense natural amphitheatre, the high rock below the town has a very peculiar castle-like appearance. Further up the river we have the "cornice rocks" and Cornice Island.

PLATEEN ROCKS,

Extending ten or twelve miles along the banks of the river; they have a wild, romantic appearance, some of them shooting up into towers and spires, as Jefferson remarks, not unlike those of cities.

JEFFERSON BARRACKS,

Pleasantly situated on a low hill, which rises gradually from the river, presenting a very fine view to the spectator passing on a boat and calling up patriotic emotions as he beholds the noble star-spangled banner waving, with the graceful folds, in the loyal western air.

²Banvard has probably mistaken the West Wind for the West Wood. The West Wind, a 208-ton paddlewheeler built in Cincinnati in 1842 (Lytle-Holcamper List, p. 228) had no official accidents. (Records of Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation) and was abandoned in 1848. Lytle-Holcamper List, p. 228. The West Wood exploded and burned with a loss of twelve lives in 1846. Lytle-Holcamper List, p. 36.

³Selma Bluffs provided the setting for Banvard's recitation of his poem "The White Fawn," a lachrymose tale about a doomed Indian princess who throws herself off the bluffs after the death of her lover. It was a favorite of English audiences despite the fact they had seen accurate portrayals of Indian life during George Catlin's exhibitions.

VIDE POCHE (or, in English, Empty Pocket)

In the style of building, the taste and simplicity of the old French settlers are very apparent. The French have a fashion of annually white-washing their houses, which produces a pleasing appearance when viewed from a distance. There were a number of villages settled by the French in this neighborhood--one at Kaskaskia, one at Vincennes, and several others. They were all characterized as a people of great simplicity and innocence of life--social, disinterested, fond of gaiety; but destitute of that enterprise, energy of character and aspiring disposition, which the Americans exhibit. Their lands were generally held and cultivated in common, and their little communities constituted, as it were, but one great family.

UNITED STATES ARSENAL

It is beautifully situated on a gentle declivity immediately below the city, at the foot of "The Bar." A short distance below the arsenal commence some rocky bluffs, upon which are situated, very prominently, several lofty shot towers; they have a very striking appearance when viewed from the river.

ST. LOUIS

St. Louis is one of the oldest and first settled towns in the Mississippi Valley. It was settled and occupied by the French until the country was purchased by the American Government. A great number of steamboats, and river craft of all descriptions, bound to all points of the boatable waters of the Mississippi are seen at all seasons of the year lying in harbor. Miners, trappers, hunters, adventurers, and emigrants, and people of all character and languages, meet here, and dispense in the pursuit of their various objects, in every directions, some even beyond the remotest points of civilization. Population about 60,000.

BLOODY ISLAND,

The name being given to it from the number of duels that have been fought within its shades.

MISSOURI RIVER⁴

This is the largest tributary of the Mississippi River, discharging more water into the channel than the Upper Mississippi itself; in fact, it is the longer river of the two. At its confluence it is about half a mile wide;

⁴The Reed and Pardon London edition (1852) listed these additional scenes: Indian Encampment, Grassy Plains, Indian Hunting Buffaloes, Village of the Dead, Grand Prairie, Prairie on Fire, Indian Village, Knife River, Indian Ruins, Teton Islands, Brick Kilns.

the united stream from this point to the mouth of the Ohio has a medial breadth of about a mile. This mighty tributary appears rather to diminish than to increase the width, but it is materially altering the depth of the channel.

A short distance above the mouth of the Missouri stands the town of Alton, situated at the base of a beautiful bluff, which rolls in on the river in a graceful outline clearly defined against bright sky beyond.

Immediately in the foreground, under the shade of some stately elms, is an encampment of Shawnee Indians; the warriors reclining lazily upon the greensward, while their squaws are preparing their rude repast.

Below the junction of the Missouri stands out in fine relief, some very beautiful islands, clad in the brightest verdure.

THE MOUTH OF THE OHIO

This is a very beautiful stream, called by the French "La Belle Rivere." Its banks are thickly settled, and contain many fine cities.

The spectator has, at the Mouth of the Ohio, a view of three states at one time. To his right, he will see the State of Kentucky; to his left, the State of Missouri. On the delta of the two rivers stands the city of

CAIRO,⁵ [Illinois]

Which, like New Orleans, is protected by the levees raised above the highest known floods--from thence, to the Gulf of Mexico, the navigation is always open for steamers

⁵Cairo, Illinois, was settled by the French in 1702, and John Comegys established it as a town in 1818, naming it after the Nile River delta which it resembled. The town prospered after the Cairo City and Canal Company built a levee there in 1837. The company went bankrupt in 1840 and numbered among its losing investors Charles Dickens. (Wayman, p. 131.) The 1970 U.S. Census listed Cairo's population as 6,277.

The Civil War L.H. Biglow edition (1862) listed at this point: Cairo--steamers and Soldiers, The Ohio River--Soldiers and Steamers, View of Lucas Bend, The Battle of Belmont, Town of Columbus, Iron Banks, Chalk Banks, Burial of the Dead, Wolf Island, Island No. 10, Vicksburg, Forts St. Phillip and Jackson, The United States Fleet.

in winter, are often closed by ice, and in summer, impeded by low water. Hence the importance of the Central Railroad commenced from this place, by the state, to connect with the Illinois and Michigan Canal, Galena, and Chicago, and upon which was expended one million dollars; and whenever completed will form the most direct, speedy and certain route at all seasons, between the South-western and Northern States. Cairo, from its geographical position and the immense range of navigable rivers, all centering at this point, is destined to become one of the largest inland cities in the United States.

N.B. The views of the painting above the Mouth of the Ohio are all on the Western shore; below the Ohio they are all on the eastern shore.

IRON BANKS⁶ [Missouri]

And the town of Columbus, the eye of the voyager after passing the Ohio. They are introduced into the picture by moonlight, with the magnificent steamer Peytona wooding; one of the largest and fastest boats on the river, commanded by Capt. John Shallcross, a well-known and gentlemanly commander of the west. In the distance can be seen the

⁶The 548-ton Peytona, built in Louisville in 1846 (Lytle-Holcamper List, p. 171), was 365' long (Louis L. Hunter, Steamboats on the Western Rivers: An Economic History Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949, p. 143) and her smokestack rose 85' above the water. Hunter, p. 649.

Captain John Shallcross managed a crew of fifty-five (Hunter, p. 143.) and was listed as Master and Managing Owner. Records of Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation. Shallcross organized the first association of steamboat captains in the United States and in 1827 was the first to use a safety barge to accompany his steamer in case of any of the disasters that steamboats fell prey to: fire, storms, capsizing, boiler explosion, collision, snags. William J. Peterson, Steamboats on the Upper Mississippi (Iowa City: The State Historical Society of Iowa, 1968), p. 223. Figure 7 is probably a painting of the Peytona.

CHALK BANKS,

A high bluff of white clay, and falling nearly perpendicular to the river, which washes the base.

MILLS POINT,

This is not a point of the river, but a point or spur of high lands that strike into the river, and affords an excellent location for a town. In the foreground of the view is a diving bell at work on the wreck of a steamer.

INDIAN MOUNDS

And Island Number Twenty-Five. The islands on the Mississippi, below the mouth of the Ohio, have all been numbered; but at present, the number are very irregular, owing to the circumstances of many being washed away by the force of the moving waters; the "chutes" of others "growing up," as it is termed, and new ones continually forming.

This "growing up" of the islands of the Mississippi is one of the most striking characteristics of this mighty river, and one that would not present itself to the eye of a voyager in passing along the stream, unless the island that were growing up were pointed out, and the philosophy explained to him. This singular peculiarity even escaped the observation of Mr. Flint, as he makes no allusion to it in his excellent description of the Mississippi, contained in his geography of the Western States.

The cause of this "growing up" of the islands is this:-- where the current strikes diagonally off from a point above the head of the island, the eddy waters produce a sand bar under the point at the mouth of the "chute," or channel, round the island. Upon this bar collects the alluvial soil of the river, from which spring the young cotton woods,-- and being of very rapid growth, soon shoot up into tall trees and completely shut out the channel from the view of the river. The "chutes" behind the islands then form lakes. Upon these waters congregate all kinds of aquatic fowls,-- swans, geese, ducks, pelicans, and the like. These lakes are likewise the resort of alligators.

PLUMB POINT [Tennessee]

This is one of the most difficult places to boatmen on the Mississippi, from the frequency of the change of the channel, the snags, bars, and sawyers. A large number of steam, and other boats, have been lost here. It was a short distance from this place where Murell, the notorious land pirate and robber, had his encampment.

When the artist first descended the river, the small flat boat on which he was travelling laid by here; and during the night the boat was attacked by these robbers,

and it was only by desperate resistance, during which one of the robbers was shot, that the boat was rescued, after cutting the lines and leaving them on shore. During the conflict, Mr. Banvard had a volley of shots fired at him,--but, fortunately, none of them took effect, although several struck the planking of the boat, only a few inches from him.

FULTON [Arkansas]

On the First Chickasaw Bluffs, an unimportant town, with the town of

RANDOLPH, [Tennessee]

On the Second Chickasaw Bluffs, seen in the distance; the view looking down the chute of No. Thirty-Four.

MEMPHIS

This city is beautifully situated on the Fourth Chickasaw Bluffs, presenting a very fine appearance as you descend the river. It is laid off in regular streets, and, under the impulse of its enterprising citizens, it is fast rising in importance. It is advantageously situated for trade, being a great shipping point for cotton. The United States Naval Depot is located here. On the lower end of the "Fourth Bluffs," is situated the town of

FORT PICKERING

A new place laid off by speculators. It is very handsomely situated opposite the head of

PRESIDENT'S ISLAND

A large and beautiful island, which divides the river just below. Here the voyager will begin to see fine cotton plantations, with the slaves working in the cotton fields. He will see the beautiful mansions of the planters, rows of "negro quarters," and lofty cypress trees, the pride of the Southern forests. A little farther down he passes the town of

COMMERCE,

Situated at the head of a deep bend of the river.

STACK ISLAND,

By moonlight. Here we have a beautiful view of about ten miles up the river,--the island in the centre reposing quietly upon the surface of the river, which is broken by the ripples of a passing steamer,--the moon observed aloft, shedding its mellow light and gilding the surrounding landscape with its silvery hues.

Here we have the first view of the Spanish Moss hanging in gloomy grandeur from the bough of the cypress trees; likewise the Palmetto, with its broad, fan-like leaf, the lofty Cotton Wood, the sea grass, the impenetrable canebrake, and all the concomitants of a Southern forest.

VICKSBURG

Situated on the Walnut Hills. These hills come in and extend along the river for about two miles. They rise boldly, though gradually, with alternate swells and gullies, to the height of nearly 500 feet; and present one of the most beautiful prospects to be met with on the Lower Mississippi. At the lower end, the city of Vicksburg is situated, on the shelving declivities of the hills, and the houses are scattered in groups on the terraces, and present a very striking view as the spectator descends the river. A few miles farther down will be seen the small town of

WARRENTON,

The seat of justice for Warren County, Mississippi.

PALMYRA ISLAND,⁷ [Mississippi]

With the steamer Uncle Sam. This is one of the finest boats on the river, commanded by clever officers, and makes very regular trips from Louisville to New Orleans. All the steamboats introduced into the Panorama of the Mississippi, are correct likenesses of the boats that now are plying on those waters. In the foreground of this view we have a wood yard, and the Pecan trees treselled with the Muscadine vine. After passing these, we come to the city of

GRAND GULF,

Situated at the base of a bold and solitary bluff. A few miles below is the

PETITE GULF

And the town of Rodney. A few miles below Rodney, near the point, stands a very fine cotton plantation belonging to General Zachary Taylor.

NATCHEZ

This city is romantically situated on a very high bluff of the east bank of the river, and is much the largest town in the State of Mississippi. The river

⁷The 432-ton Uncle Sam was built in Louisville in 1845. Lytle-Holcamper List, p. 217.

business is transacted in that part of the city which is called "under the hill." Great numbers of boats are always lying there. Some very respectable merchants reside in this part of the city. The upper town is elevated on the summit of the bluff, 300 feet above the level of the river, and commands a fine prospect of the surrounding landscape. It is, at present, supposed to contain 5,000 inhabitants. It is 300 miles above New Orleans.

ELLIS'S CLIFFS

These cliffs have a very peculiar and majestic appearance; being of sand, the rains are washing them off into a variety of fanciful shapes, some of them resembling towers and battlements. After passing these, the traveller will see the little town of

FORT ADAMS,

Romantically situated on the side of a beautiful hill, with a noble bluff just below the village called Loftus's Heights. Here are the remains of an old fort, erected during the administration of John Adams, in honor of whom it was named.

BAYOU SARA [Louisiana]

By moonlight. A short distance above this town stands an old dead tree scathed by fire, where three negroes were burnt alive. Each of them had committed murder; one of them murdered his mistress and her two daughters. After passing Bayou Sara, the traveller will see some very beautiful cliffs, called the

WHITE CLIFFS,

On which are situated the small towns of Port Hudson and Port Hickey, and immediately below these is the very picturesque and romantic looking

PROPHET'S ISLAND

Here formerly lived and died Wontongo, an Indian prophet,--the last of his tribe.

BATON ROUGE

This is now the Capital of the State of Louisiana. This place is handsomely situated on the last bluff that is seen descending the river. From Baton Rouge, the river below to New Orleans, is lined with splendid sugar plantations, and what is generally termed the "Coast,"--a strip of land on either side of the river extending back to the cypress swamps about two miles. It is the richest soil in

the world, and will raise nearly all the tropical fruits,-- oranges, figs, olives, and the like. This coast is protected from inundations by an embankment of earth six or eight feet in height, called a levee. Behind the levee, as we see extensive sugar fields, noble mansions, beautiful gardens, large sugar houses, groups of negro quarters, lofty churches, splendored villas, presenting in all, one of the finest views of country to be met with in the United States. The inhabitants are chiefly native French or Creoles.

Just before arriving in New Orleans, will be seen a beautifully situated town in the bend above, called

CARROLTON,

From this point there is a railroad extending to the centre of New Orleans. After passing a left hand point, the traveller will be off the city of

LA FAYETTE

This is attached to New Orleans, but under a separate corporation. It is where all the flatboats descend the river.

NEW ORLEANS

This is the great commercial emporium of the South, situated on the eastern shore of the river, in a bend so deep and sinuous, that the sun rises to the inhabitants of the city over the opposite shore. It stands in latitude north, 29° 57' and 130° 9' west from Washington, and about one thousand miles from the mouth of the Ohio River, and a little more than one thousand two hundred miles from the Mouth of the Missouri.

Viewed from the harbor on a sunny day, no city offers a more striking panoramic view. It envelopes the beholder something in the form of a crescent. An area of many acres, covered with all the grotesque variety of flatboats, keel boats, and water craft of every description, that have floated from all points of the valley above, lines the upper part of the shore. Steamboats rounding to, or sweeping away, cast their long horizontal streams of smoke behind them. Sloops, schooners, brigs, and ships occupy the wharves, arranged below each other in the order of their size, showing a forest of masts. The foreign aspect of the stuccoed houses in the city proper, the massive building of the Fauxbourg St. Mary, the bustle and movement in every side, all seen at one view in the bright coloring of the brilliant sun and sky of the climate, present a splendid spectacle.

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