

## Currier & Ives



*The Champions of the Mississippi – “A Race for the Buckhorns”, 1866*

hand-colored lithograph, 18 3/8 x 27 3/4 in  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City

## The Artist

### **Nathaniel Currier**

Born in Roxbury, Massachusetts 1813; died in New York City 1888

Nathaniel Currier was born in Roxbury, MA. In 1828, Currier began a series of apprenticeships beginning with William and John Pendleton in Boston and ending in 1834 at M. E. D. Brown in Philadelphia. Once trained as a printmaker, Nathaniel moved to NYC and opened a firm with a man called Stodart called Currier & Stodart. The partnership and firm dissolved within a year. Moving to lower Manhattan, Currier began his own business and began creating prints of events that happened including the fire of the hotel New Orleans, the sinking of the steamboat Lexington, etc. Soon newspapers were using his prints in their papers, making him one of the first photojournalists. He soon had a weekly spot in the New York Sun newspaper. Upon retiring in 1880, Currier's son Edward took over his half of the partnership until 1902 when he sold out to Chauncey Ives. Currier & Ives published over 7000 prints.

### **James Merritt Ives**

Born in New York City 1824; died in New York City 1895

James Merritt Ives was born in New York City, where he spent most of his life. In 1852, Ives joined Currier's firm as the firm's accountant. Five years later, he made partner because of his astuteness as a businessman knowing what the public would buy. The firm's name became the famous Currier & Ives. James Ives stayed on after Currier's death until his own death in 1895 and was succeeded by his son Chauncey Ives. After Chauncey bought out the Currier's portion of the company, he began to liquidate and finally sold out to Daniel W. Logan. Eventually the company was sold entirely and the contents of the shop auctioned off.

## Art Movement

### Lithography

Currier & Ives adopted the phrase, “The BEST, the CHEAPEST, and the MOST POPULAR PICTURES in the World” to be placed on their price listing for their lithographs. Lithography is a printing process invented by a German printer, Alois Senefelder. The basic steps begin by drawing

the composition on a flat limestone with special greasy crayons. Next, the stones are placed in a chemical bath to fix the drawing and the entire stone is coated in lithograph ink, which only adheres to the grease crayon drawing. Lastly, a piece of paper is pressed down on the limestone to transfer the image uncolored. It would go down a line of colorists who each only painted one color onto the paper.

## The Artwork

### *The Champions of the Mississippi – “A Race for the Buckhorns”*

This lithograph began as a sketch by Frances Flora Bond Palmer, who worked for Currier & Ives. Currier & Ives then created the lithograph and published prints of her artwork. Frances Flora Bond Palmer was known as Fanny Palmer and was a Brooklyn artist hired by Nathaniel Currier in 1851. This print captures a steamboat race between three steamboats in which people cheer on both sides of the river.

## Discussion Suggestions

### Discuss the Painting:

- *What is happening in this picture?*
- *What colors do you see? Where are the brightest colors? What colors attract your attention the most? Why?*
- *What mood does this picture create? Shy-Quiet, Bold-Loud? Why does it look that way?*
- *What different textures do you see? Rough-Smooth? How did the artist make them look different from each other?*
- *What details can you find in the print? Why are they important?*
- *Prints like this one gave people visual information about current events of their day. Where do we get similar visual information today?*

## Activity Idea

### Printing like Currier & Ives:

- Pass out materials and have children put their names in the corner of the cardboard.
- Go over all the steps before they start.
- Making the printing plate: Have the students think of a fall, winter, or holiday scene similar to what they might see on a holiday greeting card. (For Kindergarten and first grade have the children use single leaves as their image/scene) (2<sup>nd</sup> thru 5<sup>th</sup> grade, using scissors, will cut large leaves into shapes i.e. houses, sleigh, mountains, etc. and glue those items on the cardboard using glue sticks). Next they will use smaller leaves to add details (bushes, trees, grasses, etc.) Glue down.
- After the students make their plate, have them take a white paper and lay it over their cardboard plate. Using the flat side of crayons, rub over the white paper, exposing the image. Encourage them to use multiple colors. Take a second piece of white paper and make a second copy, either the same, or at a different angle/with different colors.
- Take the colored piece of construction paper and fold in half. Take the two images, using scissors have them trim the paper to fit, use glue to secure in place with one image as the front of the card and the other as the back.

### Materials Needed:

- Cardboard (1 per student)

- White drawing paper (2 per student)
- Triangular crayons
- Assorted leaves (fresh/not dried out)
- Scissors
- Colored construction paper (1 sheet per student, folded in half)
- Glue sticks