

Jeff Fioravanti: Painting the Soul of America

Always a welcome site, a good friend's June 30th e-mail heralded an eventful weekend. The invitation to join him and some friends for a guided battlefield walk during Gettysburg's anniversary observance offered the chance to visit portions of the field not typically seen. Meeting people with a similar fondness for the 19th Century only added to the day's potential rewards. After a hearty breakfast at my friend's favorite eatery, we proceeded to the walk's starting point fittingly set at the Conewago Church, a Civil War hospital site in Hunterstown, Pennsylvania.

During the usual mulling around before such an event, my friend introduced me to a fellow participant, a polite, unassuming man, who like the others in our little band possessed and shared a similar love for history. As the day's activities commenced, Troy Harman, a National Park Service Ranger, historian, and one of two featured guides for the day, took a moment to introduce to the gathered crowd Jeff Fioravanti, an award winning historical landscape and preservation artist; my new acquaintance.

As the tour progressed, we spoke some as we strolled over the gently undulating terrain, enjoying along the way the many comments and conversations. The unspoiled ground, the guides' stories, and the rustic homes and barns effortlessly spanned the 142 years standing between us and the events of July 1863. As we hiked the three plus miles, Mr. Harman and his associate, a Licensed Battlefield Guide, spoke reverently but enthusiastically of the sacrifices made during the actions which took place where we stood.

Later that evening, we renewed friendships old and new, and the day's earlier conversations, during a gathering at the home of my good friend and his wife, enjoying their hospitality and an abundance of delicious food to the fullest. At this gathering, I enjoyed the good fortune of spending a good deal of time talking with Mr. Fioravanti. As we spoke, I learned that Jeff not only possessed a passion for our country's past but also devoted a good deal of energy towards ensuring that our heritage endures. My admiration grew as I discovered that through the sale of his art, he contributes to the preservation of the grounds upon which our ancestors struggled, our nation grew, and we had walked earlier in the day. With an obvious love and devotion, he spoke of his efforts to help save these treasured lands. Time passed quickly as I conversed with this quiet but driven artist. However, the hour grew late, and grateful to my hosts for a terrific day with so many good people, I began the long drive home.

Upon arriving home, invigorated by my new artist friend's earlier conversation and his infectious enthusiasm for the preservation of battlefields, I fired up the computer, eagerly searching the Internet for images of Mr. Fioravanti's work. Not knowing what I might find, I hoped for something special. I was not disappointed.

Locating his web site, my eyes fell upon vivid thumbnails of his art cradled by the page's eloquent title, "Fioravanti Fine Art: Painting the Soul of America." Exploring his site further, I came upon a page entitled "Historical Landscape Gallery." Confident I'd soon

encounter the battlefields' familiar sites, I panned down the page. But this was not to be. Although familiar, the images were quite unexpected yet still extremely pleasing. Minus the modern intrusions, Jeff had created views of portions of eastern theater battlefields as we might walk and see them today, giving them a feel as they likely appeared so many decades ago. Some depicted simple scenes such as a grouping of virgin trees on a shallow ridge. Another held the image of a distant pastoral homestead, seemingly chaste but rich with the memory of the swirling conflict that stained the ground now so beautifully rendered before me. Unexpectedly still, a few had images of solitary cannons on tranquil fields, lone sentries to the memory of the deeds past.

His work possessed an unspoiled beauty, a purity juxtaposed with the knowledge of the terrible suffering now gone from those fields. Each view offered a glimpse of the former innocence once held by these now sacred grounds. None of his work offered the sensational ghastly images of lives shattered but instead affords the viewer a small window into a life that once was and perhaps could again be. Intimate portraits each, they speak of a respect and love for these grounds and of the country that they and we call home.

Eager to speak of my reaction, I wrote to Mr. Fioravanti and offered my compliments for such inspirational work well done. As humble as he is talented, he graciously thanked me for my words and spoke of his desire to give back to his country and those who came before. In one of our correspondences, Jeff relayed, "My work is created to entice people to pause and reflect. They are about remembrance, peace and tranquility, innocence and sacrifice." He added further, "If through my feeble hands I can capture the pristine lands of our nation, and connect people to the history of those lands, to help them realize that these lands belong to all of us, and that once under concrete, tar, and development, those lands, our lands, our history, is lost forever, then I have succeeded." His dreams, he said, are to "...reconnect people of all interests, civil war buff and non buff alike, to our heritage, and through that connection to help protect and save it."

Reading the artist's brochure, I realized I was not alone in my admiration of Jeff's work, noting that he has touched the hearts of many throughout the civil war and preservation community. These include such notables as Pennsylvania State Representative Harry Readshaw, himself a tireless preservationist, who asserts that Jeff's efforts, "... enable historical treasures to continue to speak silently and eloquently to future generations."

The late Brian C. Pohanka, a highly respected author and Civil War historian offered, "Jeff Fioravanti's paintings evoke an almost tangible sense of place; not in the hills and streams, the fields and forests alone, but in the still greater sense of the heroism and sacrifice that transpired there. The landscape itself is a timeless memorial to those heroes in blue and gray, and Fioravanti has created a lasting tribute to that Hallowed Ground."

And Troy Harman, our guide for the battlefield walk earlier in the day said, "Jeff Fioravanti has applied his extraordinary gift for art to the preservation of our nations' historic treasures and is quickly becoming recognized as one of the very best in the field. His intuitive feel for how historic scenes and settings can best affect one's senses and

emotions is truly special."

In 1889, at the dedication of the 20th Maine's monument on the Gettysburg Battlefield, Union General Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain spoke poignantly of the sacrifices made and of what was yet to come. Of us, he said, "...And reverent men and women from afar, and generations that know us not and that we know not of, heart-drawn to see where and by whom great things were suffered and done for them, shall come to this deathless field to ponder and dream; and lo! the shadow of a mighty presence shall wrap them in its bosom, and the power of the vision pass into their souls." Jeff Fioravanti's art captures that vision, relaying the essence of the land and fields he loves. His works touch the lives of those who have experienced his art and his efforts to preserve our heritage. He allows us each to ponder and dream while protecting the fields to inspire those who have seen them not and those who are still yet to come.

Since its inception in 2003, Jeff's labors have helped to generate close to \$20,000 for various preservation groups and museums via the sale of his artwork. American Artist Magazine, will be running a feature on Jeff in their November 2005 issue, (on sale nationally in late September/early October) and an exhibit of his work will be on display at the Lynn Museum & Historical Society October 2, 2005 – January 2, 2006. (In keeping with Jeff's dedication to preservation a portion of any sales from this exhibit will benefit the museum, their programs and operation) If you would like to enjoy the work of this dedicated artist, learn more about him and his efforts to preserve the historic lands of our nation please visit:

Fioravanti Fine Art: Painting the Soul of America.

www.fioravanti-fineart.com