A Journey to Enclaves Of Slavery in the North

By JENNIFER SCHUESSLER

JOSEPH McGILL, first un-"ruled bedding in a former slave cabin in 1999. He was participating in a documentary about Civil War re-enactors and the controversy over the Confederate battle flag, and the producers asked Mr. McGill—an African-American museum professional from South Carolina who dressed in the Union blue—"if he could add some spice to a story being filmed at a plantation near Charleston.

"The floor was very hard, and the bugs were terrible," Mr. McGill, 54, recalled recently. "I woke up at about 3 a.m. to the sound of dogs barking in the distance. I'm not sure 'spooky' is the word, but the thoughts did run through my head of all those who had tried to escape." The experience stuck with him, and in 2000 he formally began the Slave Dwelling Project, with the goal of finding what he calls "a void in preservation" at Southern plantations and beyond.

"We tried to save the iconic, architecturally significant buildings," Mr. McGill said on a recent afternoon after leading a tour of restored slave cabins at Magnolia Plantation and Gardens in Charleston, where he works as a guide two days a week. "But what about these other buildings? They are part of the story, too."

So far, Mr. McGill, whose ancestors were enslaved in Williamsburg County in South Carolina, has slept in more than 70 slave dwellings in 14 states, alone. Continued on Page 26

Joseph McGill, a descendant of slaves, is visiting three Long Island sites where slaves lived.
Digital Catalogs
For 19th-Century Artists
New technology and fresh perspectives are jumpstarting efforts to assemble exhaustive lists of works by 19th-century American painters, sometimes in progress for decades. Next month a consortium of museums interested in the Massachusetts maritime painter Fitz Henry Lane (1804-1865) will launch a website, fitzhenrylaneonline.org, documenting about 300 paintings, drawings, and prints at various institutions. Much of the material is being drawn from the Cape Ann Museum, in Mr. Lane’s hometown, Gloucester, Mass., and images on the website will be linked to infrared film analyses, biographies of Mr. Lane’s clients, newspaper ads for his suppliers, maps of harbors where he sketched, and portraits of owners of the ships moored there.

The website will eventually cover about 200 additional works that are in private collections, and it will explore the career of Mr. Lane’s little-known collaborator, Mary Blood Mellen. The site’s senior researcher, Melissa Getler Tafshin, said the project “can expand infinitely.”

Mr. Lane’s recently rediscovered tuition of a 1860s sailing ship, scheduled to be added to the site, will be offered at auction (with an estimate of $150,000 to $250,000) on Aug. 26 at James D. Julia in Fairfield, Me.

The Lane consortium is working with pantograph, a Manhattan supplier of technology for comprehensive artist data bases, known in the trade as catalogues raisonnés. Roger Shepherd, the company’s founder, said that the site can link artworks to diary entries, removers’ reports, photos of gallery installations and collectors’ homes, descriptions of related works that have been destroyed and more.

Crowdsourcing would bring in more data, and persistent errors could be corrected. (Mr. Lane, for instance, is often erroneously called Fitz Hugh Lane.) Past owners could be identified as they emerge, which is increasingly crucial in an art market riddled with forgeries.

“You don’t want holes in your provenance,” Mr. Shepherd said. Betty Krulis, an art dealer, historian and appraiser in Manhattan, has set out to compile an online catalogue raisonné of William Merritt Chase (1849-1916), who produced radiant landscapes of locales in Europe, North Africa, the United States and Cuba. He was also a heavy drinker whose wives were likewise colorful. He first married his model, the actress Margaretta Beauford Hulick, and after she ran off with another painter, Robert Nibert, Mr. Metcalf married Henriette McCrea, a biographer who ran in the same circles as the novelist and provocateur Eunice Barnes. Mr. Krulis is sifting through Mr. Metcalf’s papers, amassed by dealers and scholars over the last four decades. Given the artist’s fairly manageable output of about 600 artworks, she said, “it’s not an oppressive task.”

Antiques
Eva M. Kahn

“Portrait of the bark ‘Mary,’” by Fitz Henry Lane, whose works will be documented in an online catalogue raisonné.

and she aims to personally see as many paintings as possible. A few weeks ago, she examined a Metcalf some of a Vermont stream, painted in 1836. Christie’s in New York will offer it in September for an estimated $250,000 to $500,000.

Descendants of the peripatetic British-born artist Dawson Dawson-Watson (1853-1909) are working on an online catalogue raisonné, dawson-dawson-watson.org. They are searching for paintings (which routinely bring around $30,000 each) that he produced during stints in Boulton, Quebec, Hartford, the Grand Canyon and Giverny, France, among other places.

Shannon Airon, a great-grandson of Mr. Dawson-Watson, said that sketchbooks, catalogs and a typewritten autobiography from 1929 remain in family hands. They are finalizing a chronology of travels and exhibitions for the artist, who was prolific and did not keep meticulous records.

“He often worked on three or four paintings at a time and could finish two in a day when he was on a roll,” Mr. Airon said, adding, “He was known to give away his paintings if they were admired much.”

One major caveats from the house擅长 only from photos: Mr. Dawson-Watson’s portrait of the poet Bliss Carman, in a frame inscribed with a quote from a Carman poem about daisies, “May this painting in its full color and glory.” Mr. Airon said.

A catalogue raisonné for the landscape painter John Henry Twachtman (1853-1902) has been in progress for two decades, and a handful of paintings resurface each year. The historian Lisa N. Peters, who has taken on the project, said she recently traveled to Venice and identified van- tage points from which Mr. Twachtman painted. Tracing his footsteps, she said, “is a never-ending process.”

Mastodons Remembered

Mastodons, while trampling around what is now New York, shed teeth and tusks, and dinosaur bones, wandering along riverbanks in Massachusetts, left footprints in mud that hardened into sandstone. Remnants of these prehistoric creatures and artifacts from the Americans who discovered them are housed in museums or the region.

The Staten Island Museum is moving its collection, long unseen by the public, into a former 1760s dorm for retired sailors on the South Harbor Cultural Center grounds. The mastodon items in an exhibition opening on Sept. 19 will include a blackened molar, found in the 1860s in an oyster bed in the Arthur Kill tidal strait, and grayish tooth fragments, which turned up at Monaview Cemetery on Staten Island. The origins of a brownish leg bone remain unknown.

The museum has also commissioned a life-size mastodon statue, made by Blue Rhino Studio in Minnesota, that is poised in Iceland goat hair. The public will be invited to suggest names for it: why not consider Tusk Master or perhaps Arky, since, after all, it is in a museum and near the Arthur Kill.

Institutions in western Massachusetts have been collaborating on “Dinosaur Roadshow,” a sort of traveling museum offering events and exhibitions focusing on dinosaur footprints in the Connecticut River Valley and the 19th-century scientists who documented the discoveries. Related shows and programs, collectively titled “Imprints From a Lost World,” are expected in that region in 2017.

This summer mastodon bones and tusks were recovered at a farm in Orange County, N.Y., in 2014, the team paid about $24,000 to an auction for rights to explore the site. The mastodon died some 11,000 years ago, around the age of 56, and there are signs that humans bore apart the corpse. Richard Michael Garnett, an archaeologist who has studied the remains, said the data, photos and skeleton will be turned over to the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard.

Art in Review

Cy Gavin

“Overture”
Serpent's Daughters
170 East Broadway, at Rutgers Street, Lower East Side
Through next Friday

It’s always instructive to read the checklist accompanying a show. Like the ingredients on a food label, the materials detailed on a checklist won’t tell you if an