

The itinerant portraitist J.H. Mifflin practiced his art in Columbus in 1838 and 1839.

Today in Columbus History, November 22, 1838, the itinerant portrait painter James H. Mifflin advertised “his professional services to the citizens of Columbus and its vicinity” in the *Columbus Sentinel and Herald*. Although less well known than his contemporary competitor, C.R. Parker, Mifflin was highly skilled as a painter and one of the earliest practitioners of daguerreotype photography in Georgia.



1 Columbus Sentinel & Herald, November 22, 1838, page 3.

James Houston Mifflin (1807-1888) was born in Pennsylvania and studied in the early 1830s at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and under the English artist Thomas Sully, a renowned portrait painter who worked in Philadelphia and who may have encouraged Mifflin to travel south to Georgia, Alabama, and Florida, according to art historian E. Lee Eltzroth. In 1835 and 1836, Mifflin worked as a portrait painter in Augusta, Georgia, and Mobile, Alabama, and then traveled

variety of manner. To observe the subjects selected by different students—their variety of appearance—their manner of working—some carelessly clad, and student-looking enough—others “dressed like a bridegroom,” and “twixt the finger and the thumb” a pencil, “which ever and anon they give their canvas, and then take it away again.” There are a few fine specimens of this sort, which are too picturesque themselves to produce pictures—others scraping away with patient labor—some with affected slip dash, and many with happy facility. Van’yc’s portrait, by himself, is a good picture, and in a good place to copy, so it is frequently attacked. It is somewhat remarkable, that out of a score

2 In the spring of 1837, Mifflin was already an old friend of the town of Augusta, writing a long letter from Paris to the editors of the Philadelphia paper, the American Weekly Messenger that was reprinted in the Augusta Chronicle & Sentinel, describing the Louvre and his adventures. In this excerpt of his descriptions of students who come to the Louvre to copy the great masters (he refers to that kind of copying as being “attacked”), Mifflin makes amusing observations of young artists. Augusta Chronicle & Sentinel, May 1, 1837, page 1.

to Europe with a group of artists to study art in 1837 and 1838. It was after his European tour that Mifflin came to Columbus (and to Augusta again) to live and work in 1838 and 1839. The invention of the daguerreotype process of photography by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre was announced in Paris in August of 1839, and soon after, Mifflin began practicing the craft himself in the American South. Eltzroth notes (40) that he was “one of the earliest artist-photographers documented in the state.”

Mifflin had advertised in the Columbus newspapers since at least September of 1838, alerting potential clients that he “expect[ed] to visit Columbus in October next.” However, just above Mifflin’s ad in the same paper, appeared the ad of his chief rival, C.R. Parker, who announced that he would be staying in Columbus “some time longer...for the purpose of painting Portraits.” Parker, who had been living in Columbus since the beginning of August, had rooms and a studio upstairs on “Broad street, in the rear of Judge Thomas’ office.” That same year, Grigsby E. Thomas and his wife, Mary Shivers Thomas both had portraits painted by Parker, which are now in The Columbus Museum.

Both the *Columbus Enquirer* and the *Sentinel & Herald* encouraged Columbusites to take advantage of the artists’ visits to have their portraits made. The *Enquirer* inserted a little editorial encouragement for C.R. Parker before his arrival in Columbus in August of 1838. The *Sentinel & Herald* complimented the abilities of both the artists and urged elites, especially women, to have portraits made, “ere the adverse winds of this cold world shall have blown too roughly upon her beauty, and sorrow shall have crossed the joys of that smiling face.”

Portrait Painting.

MR. PARKER informs the public that he will remain some time in Columbus, for the purpose of painting portraits. His rooms are on Broad street, over the store of Mr. Levison, where persons wishing a view of his work are invited to call.

Sept. 20. 34 tf

J. H. MIFFLIN,
PORTRAIT PAINTER.

Expects to visit Columbus in October next.
Philadelphia, Aug 20, 1838. P. & N. 31 tf

above: *Columbus Enquirer*, October 11, 1838, p. 3;
right: *Columbus Enquirer*, August 2, 1838, p. 2

PORTRAIT PAINTING.

Mr. Parker, a Portrait Painter of very considerable celebrity, has arrived in our city, and taken the rooms hitherto occupied by Mr. McClintock's select school. We have been favored with a view of some of his specimens, which are very fine. Will our citizens witness them for themselves? Here is an opportunity to patronize the fine arts—to perpetuate the forms and features of beauty and loveliness, which we hope will not be neglected. Mr. P. can make the pictures as nearly represent the splendor of some of our originals, as perhaps any other of his profession.

With Mifflin's announcement that he would be in town in October, the competition for portrait subjects must have increased dramatically. Was Parker's claim that he had, "after much study and many experiments, discovered a method of painting and preparing his pictures so as to render them less liable to be injured by time and a southern atmosphere," real or was it only a marketing ploy designed to lure clients to him and away from competitors like Mifflin? (above right: *Columbus Sentinel and Herald*, December 6, 1838, p. 3)

PORTRAIT PAINTING.

MR. PARKER respectfully informs the public that he will remain some time longer in Columbus, for the purpose of painting Portraits. His rooms are in Broad street, in the rear of Judge Thomas' office.

Mr. Parker, from many year's practice in this part of the country, has found that the climate of the South is particularly injurious to oil painting. He has, after much study and many experiments, discovered a method of painting and preparing his pictures so as to render them less liable to be injured by time and a southern atmosphere.

Dec. 6. 44tf

Whether or not Mifflin was concerned about competitors in portrait painting, he was multi-talented and had other ways of making money. He wrote lyrics for a song composed by well-known local judge and legislator [Alfred Iverson](#), *When the Birds of the South*. And Mifflin wrote poetry for several popular Southern publications including *The Orion*, published by William Richards (whose brother, T. Addison Richards* was also a sought-after painter of Southern landscapes and did many of *The Orion's* illustrations).

According to Alfred R. Frankel, author of *The Artists of Old Florida 1840-1960*, James Mifflin moved to Florida in January 1840. By January of 1841, he had returned to Charleston, SC, where he made daguerreotypes and was back in Augusta the next month (Eltzroth 40). Although he doesn't seem to have returned to Columbus, in February of 1841, the *Columbus Enquirer* (left) noted that Mifflin returned to Augusta to practice his new craft. That year he also traveled to Macon and Athens and by 1842 Mifflin was living in Savannah, painting portraits and making daguerreotypes.

Mr. J. H. Mifflin the artist, is in Augusta exhibiting to the curious, the process of taking miniature likenesses by the **DAGUERREO-TYPE**.

These likenesses are said to be wonderfully correct in their delineations of the human countenance, and requiring only fifteen or twenty seconds in their execution. The artist will no doubt be well rewarded by the citizens of Augusta for his exhibition of this curious and interesting process.

Mifflin eventually moved back to Pennsylvania, married and raised a family, including a son, the artist, Lloyd Mifflin. J.H. Mifflin died in 1888 and is buried in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. Several of his portraits are held by the Thomasville (Ga.) History Center. Much more can be found about itinerant artists in Columbus at links and books in the source list. —**Rachel Dobson**

Our weekly snippets of Columbus history are usually based on a few days of searching through the most popular sources for Muscogee County history. Meant to inspire readers to explore more about

Columbus history, they are not exhaustive dissertations on the topic and may contain mistakes. If you have corrections or additional information, feel free to share them with the group.

NOTES, SOURCES & FURTHER READING

E. Lee Eltzroth, Georgia Photographers: The First Generation, 1840-1860, *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Spring 2008, Vol. 92, No. 1 (Spring 2008), pp. 37-64.

See also: E. Lee Eltzroth, "A Pennsylvanian in Georgia and the South, 1834-1846: J. H. Mifflin — Artist, Daguerreotypist, Poet, and Entrepreneur," *Belonging: Georgia and Region in the National Fabric: the Ninth Henry D. Green Symposium of the Decorative Arts*, Dale Couch, ed. (Georgia Museum of Art, University of Georgia, 2020) pages 49-76.

"[The Daguerreotype Medium](#)," Library of Congress.

Georgia Historic Newspapers: <https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/>

Mike Bunn, "[Artist for Hire: The Legacy of Itinerant Artists in Columbus, Georgia](#)," *Muscogiana* 17(1), Spring 2006, 17-39.

The Columbus Museum, "[Artists for Hire in Antebellum Columbus, March 18 - June 24, 2007](#)" (Resource Library, Traditional Fine Arts Organization):

Columbus was a popular stop for itinerant artists, often on their way to Mobile or New Orleans. Along with Mifflin and Parker, the Columbus Museum identifies Henry B. Matterson, Edward Troye, Edward Mooney, John W. Jarvis, George Cooke, John Maier, and Thomas Wightman as itinerant artists who came through Columbus and painted the portraits of its elite citizens.

Mike Bunn, "[A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: Some Items from the Collection of the Columbus Museum](#)," *Muscogiana* 21(2), Fall 2010, 1-13.

The Columbus Museum, [works by C.R. Parker](#), including portraits of Grigsby E. Thomas, Sr. and Mary Shivers Thomas.

Thomasville History Center [holdings of John Houston Mifflin](#).

J. H. Mifflin, "[Love's Last Trick](#)," *The Orion - A Monthly Magazine of Literature and Art*, vol. II, no. 1, November 1842, (Athens and Penfield, Ga.: William Richards), page 5. [illustrated by T. Addison Richards]

Bertram Holland Flanders, [Early Georgia Magazines: Literary Periodicals to 1865](#) (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1944). [PDF]

Paul Manoguerra, "[Paintings of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries](#)," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, 2015.

*Thomas Addison Richards (1820-1900) painted what is one of my favorite landscapes, [River Plantation](#), around 1855 or 1860 from sketches he made during his travels through Georgia in the 1840s, in the Morris Museum of Art. [More about Richards at the Georgia Encyclopedia](#).