

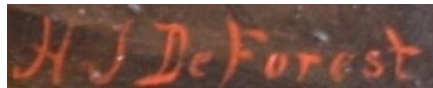
## H. J. De Forest's 18<sup>th</sup> Century Paintings of the Whanganui River

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During December 1889 a Canadian landscape painter by the name of Henry Josiah De Forest (1855-1924) embarked on a two week sketching trip up the Whanganui River by canoe<sup>2</sup>. He was part way through a three year<sup>3</sup> tour of New Zealand which included extended stays in Dunedin, Nelson and Auckland<sup>4</sup>. Mr. De Forest sought out and painted well over 100 vistas from Fiordland all the way to the Wairua River<sup>5</sup>. The oil paintings he produced in New Zealand were sold through local retail outlets<sup>6</sup> and by sponsoring at least four Art Union lotteries approved by the Colonial Secretary<sup>7</sup>. He was also invited to participate in the 1889 Exhibition of the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts<sup>8</sup> and the 1890 Exhibition of the Society of Arts, Auckland. Mr. De Forest held at least two exhibitions while visiting Whanganui. He exhibited his work at the Oddfellows' Hall during a Trinity (Wesleyan) Church sale on December 4, 1889 and in late December after his sketching trip up the Whanganui River he exhibited in the shop of A. D. Willis, Bookseller, Claxton Buildings, Victoria Avenue.

Henry was an accomplished artist who had studied at South Kensington in London and completed the grand tour of the European art and culture centers with his wife Ruth before travelling to Australasia. While visiting Switzerland and France in 1881 they inscribed the names of sixteen mountains and passes onto their Alpenstock walking sticks. He has, not unfairly, been described by some as Victorian in his approach which is perhaps not surprising as New Brunswick was still a British colony when Henry was growing up, as of course was New Zealand when he visited. Mr. De Forest credited J.D. Moultray, who had emigrated from Edinburgh to Dunedin, as a significant influence on his artistic style.



In 1891 Mr. De Forest returned to his home province of New Brunswick by way of Hawaii, San Francisco and Vancouver where he continued to sketch scenes he encountered such as the Kilauea Volcano, Yosemite Falls and the Rocky Mountains. In September that year he settled into a quiet life in a small town in New Brunswick where he began creating oil paintings based upon the sketches made during his world travels. Five of the twelve large canvases which he painted in 1891/92 were New Zealand scenes and two of those were set upon the Whanganui River. We do not have high quality images of these two Whanganui paintings but we do have a documentary trail of various exhibitions where they have been displayed over the years, ending with auctions in San Francisco in 1988 and 1992. We also have a smaller painting of the Whanganui made by Mr. De Forest which has been passed down through the artist's family and was likely a model for one of the larger canvases.



*Oapehu, Whanganui River, New Zealand, H.J. De Forest<sup>9</sup>*

In October and November 1893 the twelve large paintings and numerous smaller ones were exhibited in five cities in New Brunswick. The Moncton Times described two of the paintings in the shows as *Wauganni River, New Zealand* and *At even ere the sun was set (scene laid on the Wauganni River)*.

During March of 1893 a painting by Mr. De Forest titled *Valley of the Wauganni River, at Evening* was entry #33 in the Royal Canadian Academy of Arts Exhibition at the Art Association Gallery in Montreal. This is no doubt the second of the paintings above. The same painting was then selected for exhibit in the Department of Fine Arts Exhibition at the World's Columbian Exposition (aka Chicago World Fair) later in 1893<sup>10</sup>.

In an April 13, 1894 article in the Vancouver Daily World it was reported that "The drawing for Mr. De Forest's fine painting of *The Valley of the Wanganni River at Evening* is postponed from the 17<sup>th</sup> to Saturday the 21<sup>st</sup> ...". This was surely the same painting which had been recently exhibited in New Brunswick, Montreal, Ottawa and Chicago.

The next possible sighting of this painting has been trickier to decipher. I maintain an extensive database of H.J. De Forest paintings which have been exhibited, mentioned in newspaper clippings, or offered at auction. I had been troubled for some time by Lot 3109 of a Butterfield & Butterfield (now Bonhams), San Francisco auction of November 11, 1992. It was titled *View of Washington River in the Evening* and was dated 1892. I had no other record of that painting and am not aware of the existence of a river of

that name. When I obtained a copy of the auction catalogue I was intrigued by a provenance note which stated “Columbian Exhibition, 1893”. As the only painting which H. J. De Forest exhibited in Chicago was the New Zealand river scene mentioned above, a reasonable hypothesis formed that this was in fact the “Wauganni” from Chicago renamed by accident or perhaps to make it more appealing to U.S. buyers.



*View of the Waugaus / Washington (Whanganui) River in the Evening<sup>11</sup>*

My theory was confirmed when I later obtained the catalogue from another Butterfield & Butterfield auction in San Francisco held four years earlier. Lot 2865 of the November 9, 1988 sale was titled *View of Waugaus River* and the image printed in the catalogue was the same painting as the 1992 Washington River auction lot with the same World’s Columbian Exposition, 1893 provenance note.

After moving to British Columbia in late 1893 Henry De Forest went on to further develop his career as a landscape painter and founder or active member of many of the early arts institutions in Vancouver<sup>12</sup>. He painted dozens of majestic and realistic scenes of the mountains, lakes and rivers of British Columbia. Despite supporting himself throughout much of his life as a professional landscape painter, he received short shrift from New Zealand art historians. The only entry in Una Platts’ authoritative reference book *Nineteenth Century New Zealand Artists: A Guide and Handbook* was – “De Forest, H. J. - A Canadian [?] who painted in Nelson in 1889”. He does have one oil painting titled Buller Creek, Ferry Lyell in the collection of the Auckland War Memorial Museum<sup>13</sup> and his paintings do come up for auction from time to time in New Zealand<sup>14</sup>.

The H. J. De Forest 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings of the Whanganui River have travelled the world, been exhibited widely, and been variously titled Waugauuni, Wauganni, Wanganni, Wanganui, Waugaus and



Washington. Mr. De Forest wrote Wanganui on the back of his sketch, but those reporting on the exhibition of the paintings clearly had serious challenges with the Māori language. The only thing which most reviewers seem to agree upon is that the second of the paintings is set in the evening “ere the sun was set”. It is a great tribute to the beauty and unique status<sup>15</sup> of the Whanganui River that Mr. De Forest returned several times to this subject, particularly considering all of the other beautiful scenery which he had sketched throughout the world. Hopefully these paintings will someday emerge from the anonymity of the private collections where they currently reside so that their images may again be shared and appreciated by all.

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Segger is a retired Canadian chartered accountant who writes regularly on a wide variety of history, geography, art and nature subjects. He has spent many years researching the life of H.J. De Forest since first purchasing one of his paintings in 1980. To learn more about the life and art of Mr. De Forest readers may refer to an article published in the September 2019 issue of the New Brunswick Genealogical Society journal *Generations* - <http://grahamsegger.com/henry-j-De-Forest-and-ephraim-De-Forest/>. As a keen boater and owner of a Canadian canoe and a kayak Graham hopes to be able to visit New Zealand some day and paddle on the Whanganui River.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. De Forest wrote an eloquent and at times humorous account of this trip in an article published in the December 28, 1889 Wanganui Herald titled *My Trip Up the Wanganui* (see reprint elsewhere on this website).

<sup>3</sup> Mr. and Mrs. De Forest arrived at Bluff Harbor from Melbourne on January 16, 1888 and departed from Auckland on January 26, 1891 destined for Honolulu and San Francisco (per New Zealand newspaper shipping reports).

<sup>4</sup> Mr. De Forest maintained a studio located in Room 102 of the Victoria Arcade Building, Auckland during the second half of 1890.

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the paintings of the Whanganui mentioned in this article other examples of New Zealand scenes painted by H.J. De Forest include:

Fiordland – Head of Wet Jacket Arm; Lake Manapouri; Moonlight scene in George Sound; Moonlight in Preservation Inlet; Lake Te Anau; Entrance to Milford Sound; Evening, Milford Sound

Other South Island – Sunset from Stoke (near Nelson); Christchurch-Hokitika Road Looking South; Christchurch-Hokitika Road Looking North; The Valley of the Taramakau; On the Road to Mount Cook; Mount Cook from Lake Pukaki; Buller River, Ferry Lyell; Shakespeare Bay, Queen Charlotte Sound; Purakanui Cliffs looking toward Blueskin Bay; Paradise Flat, Otago; Dunedin (view from the peninsula made from about three miles below Anderson’s Bay looking toward the Heads); St. Mary’s Industrial School at Stoke; Otira Gorge; Rolliston Peaks from the foot of Otira Gorge; Purakanui Cliffs; Lake Wakatipu; Lake Rere approached from Lake Wakatipu; Cosmos Peaks from Dart River; Lake Waiholā

North Island - Waikare moana (A Sheltered Bay 'neath Jutting Crags); Waikare moana (Ohiringa and Natives wearied at the close of day); Te Ringa (Reinga) Falls, Wairua River; Primrose Terrace, Wai-o-Tapu; Mount Egmont (Taranaki) from Normanby; Waikare Lakes; Manawatu Gorge, Tarawara from Black Crater; Mangata Range

<sup>6</sup> He exhibited in the windows or rooms of the following establishments - Wilkie & Co., Dunedin; Queen’s Hotel, Oamaru; H.D. Jackson, Nelson; McGregor Wright on Lambton Quay, Wellington; W.A. Collis, New Plymouth; Wildman & Lyell’s Booksellers, Auckland; Craig’s, Napier

<sup>7</sup> In an Art Union, purchasers buy a ticket which guarantees that they will receive at minimum one small painting with a chance to win a grand prize draw for a much larger and more expensive canvas. The Oamaru, Nelson and Auckland art unions run by Mr. De Forest are documented in a number of advertisements and articles in historical

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newspapers of the period.

<sup>8</sup> Robin Kay and Tony Eden, *Portrait of a Century: The History of the N.Z. Academy of Fine Arts 1882-1982*, (Wellington: Millwood Press, 1983). Listed as Deforist, H.J., 1889.

<sup>9</sup> Oil on board, 29 cm x 20 cm. Undated but on the back is written Oapehu, Wanganui River. Painting passed down through De Forest family. Used with permission.

<sup>10</sup> The Valley of the Wauganni River, at Evening, NZ was entry #122 and was hung on the North Wall of Gallery 11 of the Fine Arts Building in Chicago

<sup>11</sup> Oil on canvas, 60 cm x 91.5 cm. This image and description is taken from the black and white photo for Lot 2865 of the November 9, 1988 Butterfield & Butterfield Auction catalogue. Photo courtesy of Bonhams.

<sup>12</sup> Among many other roles, he was the founding Secretary of the Arts, Historical and Scientific Association of Vancouver and the first Curator of what eventually became the Museum of Vancouver.

<sup>13</sup> PD-1970-5 - [https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/collection/object/am\\_library-paintinganddrawings-1868](https://www.aucklandmuseum.com/collection/object/am_library-paintinganddrawings-1868)

<sup>14</sup> Anyone knowing the location of any of H.J. De Forest's New Zealand paintings is encouraged to contact the author at [graham.segger@gmail.com](mailto:graham.segger@gmail.com) so that these can be added to the database of De Forest paintings which he maintains and shares with other interested followers of his art.

<sup>15</sup> This final endnote will not be included in the published article but has been added to this version to provide additional context for non – New Zealand readers.

The article below from The Guardian of March 16, 2017 describes the very unique status granted to the Whanganui River by New Zealand courts - <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/new-zealand-river-granted-same-legal-rights-as-human-being>. The mouth of the Whanganui River is a 2.5 hour drive north of Wellington in the south west sector of the North Island.

### **New Zealand river granted same legal rights as human being: After 140 years of negotiation, Māori tribe wins recognition for Whanganui river, meaning it must be treated as a living entity**

In a world-first a New Zealand river has been granted the same legal rights as a human being.

The local Māori tribe of Whanganui in the North Island has fought for the recognition of their river – the third-largest in New Zealand – as an ancestor for 140 years.

On Wednesday, hundreds of tribal representatives wept with joy when their bid to have their kin awarded legal status as a living entity was passed into law.

“The reason we have taken this approach is because we consider the river an ancestor and always have,” said Gerrard Albert, the lead negotiator for the Whanganui iwi [tribe].

“We have fought to find an approximation in law so that all others can understand that from our perspective treating the river as a living entity is the correct way to approach it, as in indivisible whole, instead of the traditional model for the last 100 years of treating it from a perspective of ownership and management.”

The new status of the river means if someone abused or harmed it the law now sees no differentiation between harming the tribe or harming the river because they are one and the same.

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Chris Finlayson, the minister for the treaty of Waitangi negotiations, said the decision brought the longest-running litigation in New Zealand's history to an end. "Te Awa Tupua will have its own legal identity with all the corresponding rights, duties and liabilities of a legal person," said Finlayson in a statement.

"The approach of granting legal personality to a river is unique ... it responds to the view of the iwi of the Whanganui river which has long recognised Te Awa Tupua through its traditions, customs and practice."

Two guardians will be appointed to act on behalf of the Whanganui river, one from the crown and one from the Whanganui iwi.

Albert said all Māori tribes regarded themselves as part of the universe, at one with and equal to the mountains, the rivers and the seas.

The new law now honoured and reflected their worldview, he said, and could set a precedent for other Māori tribes in New Zealand to follow in Whanganui's footsteps.

"We can trace our genealogy to the origins of the universe," said Albert. "And therefore rather than us being masters of the natural world, we are part of it. We want to live like that as our starting point. And that is not an anti-development, or anti-economic use of the river but to begin with the view that it is a living being, and then consider its future from that central belief."

Financial redress of NZ\$80m is included in the settlement, as well as an additional NZ\$1m contribution towards establishing the legal framework for the river.

