

Carl Hambuck

richmond artist

by R. Lewis Wright

The German-born painter Carl Hambuck left his native country in 1873 or 1874 to seek his fortune in America. Nothing is known of his early life or education. The scant information that survives has been handed down by descendants of two families who engaged his services and found in three brief Richmond newspaper accounts of the late nineteenth century.

His obituary in *The State* (Richmond) of August 18, 1879 stated that he had come to Richmond completely by accident. Retained for a period, as was then customary for immigrants, at

Staten Island in New York Harbor, he intended to board the ferry boat for Hoboken, New Jersey, to visit friends who resided there. Instead, he boarded

a steamship of the Old Dominion Line and arrived in Richmond. He remained here for the rest of his life.

Hambuck painted in a meticulous but simple style, which was unique for a Virginian artist at that time. His three known surviving paintings are of farms of prosperous butchers and meat handlers in Richmond in the 1870s. When they were painted, all were still in Henrico County just north of the city. Owners, children and various hired hands are depicted and sometimes identified, and the owners and locations of each of the paintings are also



Fig. 1

The Lambert Home

Carl Hambuck; Richmond, Virginia; 1874; Oil on canvas; 24 x 34.5"; Private collection.



recorded. Hambuck's style, while precise, in no way suggests that he was academically trained in Germany at institutions such as the then prestigious Düsseldorf Academy. It has been suggested that he may have been trained as a coach or sign painter.

The earliest of these paintings, executed in 1874, is of the home and farm of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Lambert, which was in the 900 block of West Moore Street (Fig. 1). Mr. Lambert was a prominent butcher and meat dealer in Richmond. According to Richmond city directories, he moved to the house that same year from his former home at 418 Catherine Street. In the foreground are Mr. and Mrs. Lambert and the daughter of friends, Amelia Nickel. On the porch is Annie Belle Coots, the younger sister of Mrs. Lambert, who later married Henry L. Nickel, Amelia's brother. The frame for the picture was hand-carved by Amelia and Henry's father, Henry Nickel (1830-1911). Nickel was born in Bavaria and was well established in Richmond on North Gilmer Street as a cabinetmaker. The painting is still in the possession of the Nickel family.

In 1878 Carl Hambuck painted the working farm of "Theodor Frick, porkpacker, at Brook Avenue" (Fig. 2). Frick was born in Böblingen, Germany in 1830 and is said to have come to Richmond prior to the Civil War and to have returned to Germany during the War. Back in Richmond thereafter, he became a prominent butcher and sausage maker. He married German-born Christine Wunsch (1826-1904). In the late 1860s he purchased the home depicted in the painting (Fig. 2). This house had been built in 1830 by Philip Snider, another butcher of German origin. Theodore Frick maintained his market shop at 306 North Sixth Street. Although he died in 1881, the house remained in the family until 1920 and was finally demolished to give way to the early nineteenth century suburb of



Fig. 2
The Farm of "Theodor Frick, porkpacker"
Carl Hambuck; Richmond, Virginia; 1878;
Oil on canvas; 44 x 44"; Private collection.

Ginter Park. Located at 1417 Brook Avenue, the Snider-Frick house is depicted in a photograph in Mary Wingfield Scott's *Old Richmond Neighborhoods*. Stripped of its dependencies, the home was then in a state of disrepair.

Descendants of the Frick family survive in Virginia, and tales of the artist and the painting have been transmitted from one generation to another. It is said that Hambuck painted the vista from the roof of a house across the street and that his fee was ten dollars. A self-portrait of Hambuck is in the lower left corner. Mr. Frick is in the carriage in the center of the foreground of the painting. Also in the foreground are daughters Caroline, Emma, Lizzie, Al-

vina and Paulina, as well as an unidentified young lady. In the carriage to the right was a "ne'er-do-well" nephew from Germany who lived for a period with the Fricks. It has been stated that Mrs. Frick wished to remove the laundry from the clotheslines but that Hambuck insisted this not be done.

The last of Hambuck's Richmond paintings, completed in 1879, depicts the "C. Holzhauser house on Brook T.P." (Fig. 3). Located diagonally across Brook Road from the Frick house, this was the house and farm of Charles H. Holzhauser (1843-1913). He also was a prominent butcher and meat dealer of German origin and had a shop in stall 4 of Richmond's second Market



Fig. 3
C. Holzhauser House on Brook T.P.
 Carl Hambuck; Richmond, Virginia; 1879;
 Oil on canvas; 28 x 39.5"; Private collection.

during the 1870s. No survivors of this family have been located, but judging from burial records in Richmond's Hollywood Cemetery, the couple in front of the entrance represents Charles Holzhauser and his wife Catherine (1848-1931). The young lady to the right, pruning a camellia bush, is probably their daughter Henrietta, who was eleven at the time of the painting and who died in 1883. The infant in the arms of the Black servant is probably Rosa, who was born and died the year the painting was done. The boy in the black suit is unknown and may represent a neighbor's son. The Holzhausers' only son was born in 1881 and died the next year. The young lady at the extreme right is probably Laura, their daughter, who was born in 1877 and was two years old when depicted in the painting. She never married and died in Richmond in 1967 at the age of ninety. This house and its farm were also demolished in the early twentieth century for the then-developing suburb of Gin-

ter Park. Of special interest in this painting is a distant view of the first building of Richmond College, later to become the University of Richmond. At that time it was located near Grace and Lombardy Streets.

As a painter in the naive style, Hambuck's informality in depicting these families and their residences is unusual and refreshing. In all three paintings the owners and their servants are well dressed and neatly groomed. They are posed informally in carriages, cutting flowers, leaning against porch columns and splitting firewood. Stacks of firewood, lace curtains at the windows, pots of blooming flowers, birdhouses and nursing dogs are depicted in fine detail. The laundry drying on the line of the Frick house even includes a blanket that has been made out of an old Confederate flag. Most painters in the naive style in America in the late nineteenth century presented impeccably groomed individuals and houses in sterile detail. Hambuck's informality

presents family groups and working farms with a graphic slice of the working day. His paintings are filled with activity, a vitality readily perceived by the viewer.

Although only three paintings by Carl Hambuck are known at this time, he undoubtedly completed many others. *The State* (Richmond) of August 17, 1876 mentions his recently completed painting of the Planters' Warehouse owned by the Richmond Tobacco Association. An early morning vista from east Cary Street to the dock where tobacco was being unloaded is depicted through the open doors of the warehouse. The newspaper account says, "The picture was painted by Carl G. Hambuck, one of the old masters, and attracted much attention by the tobaccoists." *The Richmond Whig* of September 6, 1876 mentions a recent painting of a family group, though the family is not identified.

During his five or six year period in Richmond, he is listed in a single Richmond directory, for 1877-1878. At that time he had a studio on the second floor of the Columbian Block and resided in Manchester.

Hambuck's obituary states that he died on August 15, 1879. Having been found in a comatose state in West End Park (now called Monroe Park), he was taken by city ambulance to the almshouse, where he expired within an hour. The newspaper account comments, "The chief obstacle to his success was inebriety." His mother survived in Stuttgart, Germany.

Carl Hambuck's paintings possess the unusual mixture of naive simplicity presented in meticulous but casual detail. One can only hope that more of his work will be discovered.

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