

## WILLIAM MCNEILL WHISTLER (WILLIE)

William Whistler (see Images 27, 30), the child and adolescent, was seven to almost thirteen years old during his sojourn in Russia. Like James (see Images 24–29), he was beautiful to look at and for several of their early years they resembled one another. In the Dessain portrait (see Image 27), they almost look like twins, and are both slender. But Willie was robust in health compared to James: “round, ruddy and hard as a Spitsbergen Apple.”<sup>1</sup> He did not suffer from a major chronic illness, nor did he fall sick from minor bouts of cold and flu as often as his older brother. In 1848, however, possibly because he was entering puberty, Willie became fat. In June of that year, after he had been on an inspection trip with his father while James was suffering from another attack of rheumatic fever, Anna Whistler recorded how fat he was.<sup>2</sup> He had a face “like ‘plum pudding Jack.’”<sup>3</sup> Even in referring to his excellent progress in his studies, his mother, calling him “our little Parson elect,” exclaimed “what a student the fat boy is.” He became thinner while attending Baxter’s Commercial School that fall,<sup>4</sup> perhaps because he was so unhappy there.

In temperament he was gentle, tractable, obedient, studious, probably slow in his speech and deliberate in his movements,<sup>5</sup> and a homebody. As he was “rather less excitable than Jemmie, & therefore more tractable,” Anna Whistler (see Images 1–5) preferred to take “this gentlest of my dear boys” as her interpreter when she went shopping.<sup>6</sup> Observing Willie during their 1847 trip to England, she felt that in his manliness as he strode “about the deck holding the Capt’s hand & talking German so eagerly with him”; in his “lovely combination of gentleness and determination to do what is right”; in his constant concern for her when she was seasick, he “was prompted by his dear father, whom he is so much like.”<sup>7</sup>

An obedient child, he held his parents’ views and mouthed similar thoughts. He accepted that his mother approved only of puppet shows but not of the theater. He was surprised that James attended private parties in England that he and their parents had seen held up to ridicule in *Punch*.<sup>8</sup> He did not understand how James, knowing that their parents

disapproved of such snobbish parties, would nevertheless participate and risk injury to his health as well.<sup>9</sup> Major Whistler's last words to him, "Goodbye, be a good boy,"<sup>10</sup> were hardly necessary.

Anna Whistler constantly held Willie up for James to emulate.<sup>11</sup> Recounting to him the abusive treatment Willie suffered at Baxter's, she asked him whether he was not sorry that he was "ever ... rough to so gentle and loving a brother?"<sup>12</sup> None of this changed James's nature, nor did it mar or weaken the brothers' close relationship, which lasted until Willie's death.<sup>13</sup>

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While Koritskii (see Images 167–170) had been engaged solely to give drawing lessons to James, Willie took drawing lessons from their regular tutor, Mr. Biber, but there was a certain amount of interaction: Koritskii lent models to Mr. Biber;<sup>14</sup> Willie was present when Koritskii came to their home on Saturdays; and on at least one occasion Koritskii drew him. Willie was thus engaged in seeing Koritskii drawing and at work with James and participated in the excitement of that atmosphere. We know that he painted some watercolors for James when the latter was sick, that he went to the Academy in March of 1847 to sit to Koritskii for his portrait and saw the exhibits there, and that there is documentation for his acquaintance with Briullov (see Image 173). But James's enrollment at the Academy apparently prompted him to want to take a drawing course, too.

In 1846, when James was not enrolled, Willie, who was nine years and seven months old, was registered in Drawing Course 1: "From Originals of Heads" (see Image 162).<sup>15</sup> Koritskii signed the receipt book at the Academy on 18 February / 2 March 1846, and paid nine rubles for ticket No. 341, which was issued to "Villiam Uistler, son of a Major in American service" (see Image 161).<sup>16</sup> "Villiam" is also registered in the "Book of Addresses of Academy Pupils for 1846" (see Image 162),<sup>17</sup> but only his ticket number and name are recorded. In the columns for noting down documents presented in order to register, and for his address, nothing appears. He was one of 475 students registered for 1846.<sup>18</sup> Willie seems even to have submitted a drawing at a monthly examination just two weeks later: "341. Uistler, Villiam" in Course 1 was ranked "28" in

a group of 52 students for his drawing at an examination held on 2 March 1846 (14 March NS).<sup>19</sup> His ranking was reassessed and changed to “38” (see Image 162).<sup>20</sup>

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Willie was the only Whistler child to remain in St. Petersburg until his father’s death. Parting with James in the fall of 1848 distressed him very much “& for some time, [he] could not bear to hear [James’s] name mentioned without the tears coming to his eyes.”<sup>21</sup> Once he was back in Russia, the question of his education became paramount, and his parents did not know whether to hire tutors or send him to a private school. They considered hiring a previous tutor, Monsieur La Roche, to teach him again,<sup>22</sup> but ended up sending him to Baxter’s Commercial School.<sup>23</sup>

He tried very hard to please his parents by being a good student. He had hated boarding at Monsieur Jourdan’s in 1846, and the necessity of parting with his mother on Sunday night after a day-and-a-half weekend at home had inevitably reduced him to tears.<sup>24</sup> In his homesickness, he was “a complete Whistler,” very like his father and his half-brother, Joseph Swift Whistler.<sup>25</sup> While Anna Whistler had sympathized with him “tenderly” then, duty, she had felt, required her to conceal her sympathy in the hope that “time may reconcile him to his privations.” Asked by her whether he wanted to stay home instead, he had bravely answered that “it is right to go to school and I will do all fathers wishes.” He had brought her “the best testimonials from his masters,” and she did not think he would “disappoint his father.” It was the same when he was sent to Baxter’s. He “dislike[d] going there so much”<sup>26</sup> and “was sad when the weather forced him to have to board for a few days.”<sup>27</sup> For a while, Anna Whistler reported, “the boys flocked around him as a natural curiosity, *because he is an American*,” but then let him alone, “call[ing] him *Independent*.”<sup>28</sup> She also reported that he became “the pet of the whole school,” loved by “all the boys and all the teachers.”<sup>29</sup> How long “all the boys” loved him is not clear, because he wrote to James, telling him of the continuing hazing and rough treatment he received: “they cuff him and taunt him, call him ‘American monkey’, ‘Milk Sop’ etc., when he asks them about the lessons he is to learn, they ‘have to get their own’ and will not oblige him, yet when he takes out his white roll to eat . . . for the

3 o'clock recess ... they beg him and he never refuses to share it."<sup>30</sup> Each evening, he recounted to his mother "the vexations of the day," and she, who had held English boys up as an example of good manners for her wild sons, decided that "the English lads here are of a degenerated stock." Major Whistler (see Images 7–8, 21) counseled him "either to become entirely independent of the boys in lessons play and all, or to knock down any who touches him" and "to become hardened to rough and tumble."<sup>31</sup> Willie pointed out that "they attack him in a gang" and wished that the fearless James "were at the same school with him to fight his battles which he cannot do himself" because "his gentle spirit is principled against tit for tat."<sup>32</sup> His parents, who could do nothing, simply hoped that eventually the other boys might "find out what a high principled lad the Yankee is and that merit and forbearance will meet its reward." Despite his unhappiness at Baxter's, close to the end of their stay in Russia he was second in his class.<sup>33</sup>

Dr. Rogers advised them to send him back to England to study, as apparently in the climate of St. Petersburg there was a risk even "to a healthy boy in going from heated rooms to extreme frosty atmosphere, before and after daylight."<sup>34</sup> Had Major Whistler lived, and had James come home for the summer of 1849, Willie would most certainly have gone back to England with his feisty brother.

When he stopped in England with his mother on the decimated family's journey home, she sent him for that brief period to take lessons from the clergyman with whom James was studying,<sup>35</sup> ever aware of the fragmented education both were receiving. They could also be a solace to one another and talk of their father.

Willie "scarcely knew Jim," who had "grown so very tall and look[ed] much fatter than he used to."<sup>36</sup> They both had their daguerrotypes taken, as did Anna Whistler, by Kilburn (see Images 29–30; the whereabouts of the daguerreotype of Anna Whistler are unknown to me).<sup>37</sup> One of the few cultural events in London that Willie and Anna Whistler attended was the Royal Academy exhibition, where they saw James's portrait by William Boxall (see Images 28, 209).<sup>38</sup> Aunt Alicia (see Image 39) took the boys on a trip to Scotland.<sup>39</sup> They visited Preston, Liverpool, Fleetwood, and all the old haunts, saying what at that

difficult moment might have seemed permanent goodbyes to their relatives and friends.<sup>40</sup> On 29 July 1849 they sailed for home.

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The documentation for Willie's biography comes from the diaries and the family correspondence. Neither contains any mention of him as a pupil at the Imperial Academy of Fine Arts. The information in the Pennells' correspondence with the Academy, while surprising and confusing, revealed that perhaps Willie had also attended the Academy, and my own research in the Russian State Historical Archives in St. Petersburg and the Pennell–Whistler Papers at the Library of Congress showed that there was indeed documentation for this supposition.

## NOTES

1. John S. Maxwell to George W. Whistler, Paris. September 13th? 15th? 1845, N-YHS: Maxwell Papers.
2. Entry for June [1848], AWPDP, Part II. This single entry covers all of June. A.I. Shtukenberg recalls in his memoirs that Major Whistler visited him for the last time in Pen'kovo, accompanied by his little son (Shtukenberg, *Memuary*, vol. 2, fol. 516).
3. This and the following two quotations are from Anna Whistler to James Whistler, [St. Petersburg] Monday morning Dec. 11<sup>th</sup> [1848], GUL: Whistler Collection, W371.
4. Anna Whistler to James Whistler, Thursday. Sept. 30th Oct. 12th 1848. St. Petersburg, GUL: Whistler Collection, W364.
5. His slowness of speech and deliberateness of movement were described by Mrs. Leyland (Pennell and Pennell, *Whistler Journal*, p. 105) and in his obituary (Obituary, William MacNeill Whistler, M.D., Senior Physician, London Throat Hospital, reprinted from the *British Medical Journal* [16 March 1900]: p. 3, GUL: Whistler Collection, W1021). Whether they were present in the child and adolescent is not supported by any manuscript or printed document I have consulted. I assume that as the quality of excitability was present in the young James, so slowness and deliberateness were features of the young Willie. Perhaps they were the result of a birth trauma.
6. Entry for Monday July 1<sup>st</sup> [1844], NYPL: AWPDP, Part I.
7. Anna Whistler to George W. Whistler, Tuesday morning June 8th 1847. Steamer Nikolai, GUL: Whistler Collection, W353.
8. Anna Whistler to James Whistler S<sup>t</sup> Petersburg. Feb. 19<sup>th</sup> Monday eve [1849], GUL: Whistler Collection, W383.
9. Anna Whistler to James Whistler S<sup>t</sup> Petersburg. Feb. 19<sup>th</sup> Monday eve [1849].
10. William Whistler to James Whistler, S<sup>t</sup> Petersburg 10<sup>th</sup> May 1849, GUL: Whistler Collection, W978. When Willie returned to St. Petersburg after having spent the night at Alexandrofsky, his father was dead.
11. Anna Whistler to James Whistler, Sept. 30th Oct. 12th 1848. St. Petersburg, GUL: Whistler Collection, W364; Anna Whistler to James Whistler, St. Petersburg. Sunday night November 5th 1848, W367.

12. Anna Whistler to James Whistler, St. Petersburg. Wed. Dec. 13. 1848, GUL: Whistler Collection, W373.
13. There was a rift between them for several years late in their lives (Pennell and Pennell, *Whistler Journal*, p. 254).
14. William Whistler to James Whistler, St. Petersburg Monday Oct 2<sup>nd</sup> [1848], GUL: Whistler Collection, W974.
15. RGIA: Fond 789, op. 19, d. 737. Klassnyi zhurnal po chasti Inspektora na 1846, 1847 i 1848 god [Inspector's Class Journal for 1846, 1847 and 1848], fol. 20r; Fond 789, op. 19, d. 735 Spisok uchenikov Akademii Koim vydany biletu dlia poseshcheniia klassov s pokazaniem poluchennykh imi na èkzamenakh medalei. S 1845 po 1849 g. [List of Academy pupils to whom tickets were issued to attend classes, showing the medals received by them on examinations. From 1845 through 1849], fol. 14v.
16. RGIA: Fond 789, op. 19, d. 734. Kniga o vydache biletov raznym litsam poseshchaiushchim Risoval'nye klassy IAKh za 1845 g. i 1846 g. [Book concerning the issuing of tickets to various persons attending drawing classes at the IAFA in 1845 and 1846], fol. 40r. On the inside cover it says: Spisok poseshchaiushchim raznogo zvaniia litsam Risoval'nye klassy Imp-skoi AKh o vydache onym dlia vkhoda v klassy biletov s ustanovlennoi platoiu i proch. Za 1846 god. [List of persons of various callings attending drawing classes at the IAF, about the issuing of tickets to them for entrance to the classes, along with the established price, etc. For 1846].
17. RGIA: Fond 789, op. 19, d. 736. Kniga adresov uchenikov Akademii 1846 g. [Book of Addresses of Academy Pupils for 1846], fol. 48r; Fond 789, op. 19, d. 735, fol. 14v (see Note 15 above for document title).
18. Fond 789, op. 19, d. 735, fol. 17v (see Note 15 above for document title).
19. RGIA: Fond 789, op. 19, d. 737, fol. 20r and Fond 789, op. 19, d. 735, fol. 14 (see Note 15 above for document titles). The entry for James and Willie in d. 735 reads "Uistler, Iakov, Villiam," but the 28th place is assigned to ticket holder No. 341, who was Willie.
20. RGIA: Fond 789, op. 19, d. 730. Èkzamennaia kniga za 1843, 1844, 1845, 1846 i 1847 g. Spisok Imp-skoi AKh uchenikov poluchivshikh N°N° za risunki po Èkzameni proiskhodiashchemu 3 Marta 1846 god. [Examination book for

1843, 1844, 1845, 1846 and 1847. List of IAFA pupils who have received numbers for their drawings in the examination taking place on 3 March [15 March NS] 1846], fol. 97v.

The documentation showing that Willie attended the Academy is confused and puzzling. The confusion arises when we consult the “Examination Book for 1843, 1844, 1845, 1846 and 1847,” which contains “List of IAFA pupils who have received numbers for their drawings in the examination taking place on 3 March (OS) 1846.” Of the fifty-two students (listed non-alphabetically by surname only from 1 to 52) who took the examination in the course “From Originals of Heads,” “Uistler” is rated “38.” There is thus in this document a discrepancy in the date of the examination (3 March [OS] instead of 2 March [OS]) and in the number received for the drawing (38 instead of 28). In this list “28” was received by the student named “Zubov.” Confusion could have been eliminated had each student’s class admission ticket number been noted down as well, but unfortunately it was not. If we compare a group (thirteen) from these fifty-two surnames with the same surnames listed in “The Inspector’s Class Journal for 1846, 1847 and 1848” for 2 March (OS) 1846, we find that the numbers they received for drawings coincide in both documents in the case of eight students, while in the case of five students, including Whistler, the numbers received for drawings do not coincide in both documents. Three of the five had a number which differed in each document. Two students received the same number in the class journal, but only one of them could and did receive that number in the list of fifty-two students, a decision probably made by the vice-president. The day of the examination and the evaluation of the drawing may have been changed, but, according to the records, the examinee was ticket holder No. 341, who was registered in the Academy in 1846, and he was William Whistler.

21. Deborah Haden to James Whistler, Riddings Derbyshire Saturday [September 15, 1848], GUL: Whistler Collection, H3. Saturday was 16 September.
22. Anna Whistler to James Whistler, St. Petersburg friday afternoon Sept. 29th 1848, GUL: Whistler Collection, W362.
23. Anna Whistler to James Whistler, In my room. St. Petersburg. tuesday evening Sept. 26th 1848, GUL: Whistler Collection, W361; Anna Whistler to James Whistler, Sept. 30th Oct. 12th 1848. St. Petersburg, W364.



24. Entry for Thursday evening 29<sup>th</sup> Oct. [1846], NYPL: AWP, Part II.
25. This and the quotations in the following three sentences are from Anna Whistler to Gen. Joseph G. Swift, St. Petersburg, Sept. 24, 1846, NYPL: Swift Papers.
26. Anna Whistler to James Whistler, In the drawing room, with Willie on sofa Friday 22nd Dec. 1848, GUL: Whistler Collection, W374.
27. Anna Whistler to James Whistler, St. Petersburg, Nov. 27th 1848. 4 o'clock Monday afternoon , GUL: Whistler Collection, W369.
28. Anna Whistler to James Whistler. Thursday. Sept. 30th. Oct. 12, 1848 St. Petersburg, GUL: Whistler Collection, W364.
29. Anna Whistler to James Whistler, St. Petersburg Nov. 27th 1848. 4 o'clock Monday afternoon , GUL: Whistler Collection, W369.
30. This and the following sentence are from Anna Whistler to James Whistler, St. Petersburg Wed. Dec. 13th. 1848, GUL: Whistler Collection, W373.
31. George W. Whistler to James Whistler, St. Petersburg Jan'y 6 / 18-[18]49, GUL: Whistler Collection, W660. In this letter, Major Whistler expressed quite forcefully to James how Willie ought to conduct himself.
32. This and the following sentence are from Anna Whistler to James Whistler, St. Petersburg. Wed. Dec. 13th. 1848, GUL: Whistler Collection, W373.
33. William Whistler to James Whistler, St. Petersburg 19th Feb. [1849], GUL: Whistler Collection, W977.
34. Anna Whistler to James Whistler, St. Petersburg. Monday evening Dec. 13th [OS] English Christmas Day [25 December NS] [1848], GUL: Whistler Collection, W375.
35. William Whistler to Joseph Harrison, Jr., Sloane Street, June 16th 1849, LC: P-W, box 34.
36. William Whistler to Joseph Harrison, Jr., Sloane Street, June 16th 1849.
37. Banta, "Portrait of an Artist as a Boy," p. 117; Anna Whistler to Joseph Harrison, Jr. London, Monday 25 June 1849, LC: P-W, box 34. In this letter, Anna Whistler said: "Mr. Haden will take me [to Kilburn's studio], as you so flatteringly wish it & my boys too before we leave London."

38. Anna Whistler to Joseph Harrison, Jr., London, Monday 25 June [1849], LC: P-W, box 34. In this letter, Anna Whistler does not say that she went to see Boxall's portrait of James, only that she gave her permission for James and Willie to go with Emma Maingay.
39. Anna Whistler to Mr. Harrison, 62 Sloane St. June 19th 1849, LC: P-W, box 34; Anna Whistler to Mrs. Harrison, 62 Sloane St. June 20th [1849]; Anna Whistler to Mr. Harrison, Saturday evening. Preston. July 7th 1849; Anna Whistler to Mr. & Mrs. Harrison, Fleetwood. Monday. July 15th 1849.
40. Anna Whistler to Joseph Harrison, Jr., 62 Sloane St., June 19, 1849, LC: P-W, box 34; Anna Whistler to Mrs. Harrison, 62 Sloane St, June 20th [1849]; Anna Whistler to Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Harrison, Jr., Fleetwood. Monday. July 15th 1849.