

PREVIEWING UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS, EVENTS, SALES AND AUCTIONS OF HISTORIC FINE ART

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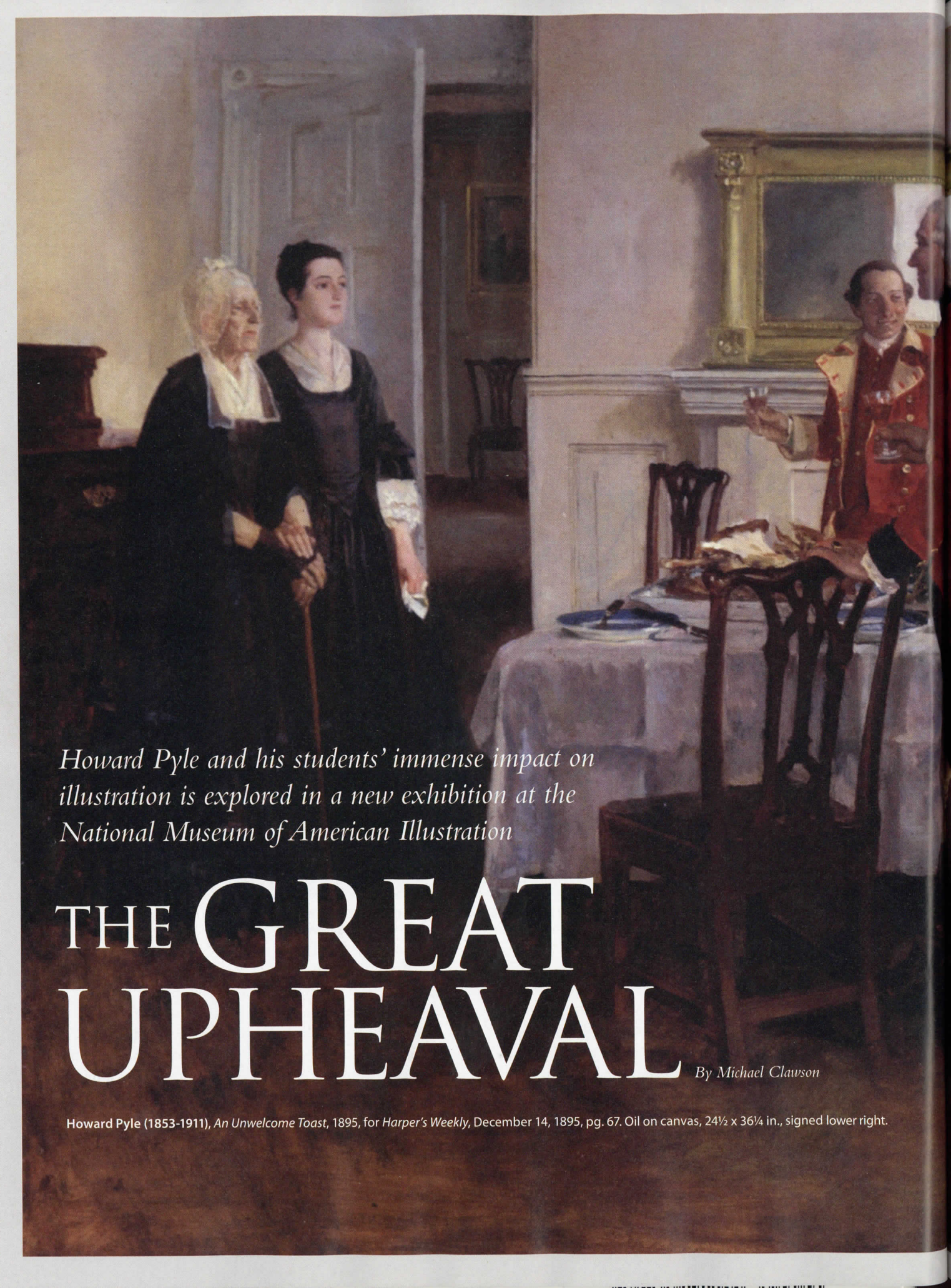
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Howard Pyle and his students' immense impact on illustration is explored in a new exhibition at the National Museum of American Illustration

THE GREAT UPHEAVAL

By Michael Clawson

Howard Pyle (1853-1911), *An Unwelcome Toast*, 1895, for *Harper's Weekly*, December 14, 1895, pg. 67. Oil on canvas, 24½ x 36¼ in., signed lower right.



Before America was obsessed with cowboys and the adventure that beckoned from the West, it found great wonder out over the ocean, where ships moved up and down the East Coast and across the Atlantic, ferrying commerce, culture and people across the horizon to new destinations. Sailing among them was another force, a feared and malevolent scourge “dimly, half hidden by the glamouring mists of legend and tradition.” There be pirates!

“...[W]hen the seventeenth century was fairly packed away with its lavender in the store chest of the past, a score or more bands of freebooters were cruising along the Atlantic seaboard in armed

and would shape the look, sound and stylization of pirates for more than 130 years and counting. It would also set the stage for what was to come: Pyle, the pirate captain in this analogy, forming a merry band of marooners and seizing control of a little isle called American Illustration.

There was certainly illustration before Pyle, but he would fundamentally change it, first in 1891 when he began teaching at the Drexel Institute of Art, Science, and Industry—today it is simply Drexel University—and then again in 1900 at the Howard Pyle School of Illustration Art, which would spawn the Brandywine School of Artists. While his work has had lasting importance,



vessels, each with a black flag with its skull and cross-bones at the fore, and with a nondescript crew made of the tags and remnants of civilized and semi-civilized humanity (white, black, red and yellow), known generally as marooners, swarming upon the decks below.”

That passage comes from the August 1887 issue of *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, from the then-famous, and still celebrated today, article titled “Buccaneers and Marooners of the Spanish Main.” It was written and illustrated by Howard Pyle, whose writing and work would come to define Arthurian legend, Robin Hood and, at that exact moment, pirates. The work was a momentous hit,

what contributed in the biggest way to his great upheaval of American illustration was his teaching, his encouraging and mentoring of other artists, and his forceful push that sent them out into the world to create with rampant glee.

Here's a small sample of his many students: Harvey Dunn, Stanley Arthurs, Philip R. Goodwin, Elizabeth Shippen Green, W.H.D. Koerner, Violet Oakley, Frank Schoonover, Jessie Willcox Smith, Sarah Stilwell Weber, Maxfield Parrish and N.C. Wyeth. And though they didn't study under Pyle, you could certainly include artists such as J.C. Leyendecker and Norman Rockwell who were inspired by his work or benefitted from the

Howard Pyle in his studio.



N.C. Wyeth (1882-1945), *Frontier Trapper*, 1920, for *The Treasure Chest*, by Olive Miller, My Book House, Chicago, IL, 1920, cover piece. Oil on canvas, 34 x 32 in., signed lower right.



N.C. Wyeth (1882-1945), *Fight on Concord Bridge*, 1921, for a U.S. Treasury Bank holiday poster, 1921. Oil on canvas, 33 1/3 x 30 in., signed upper right.

foundation that he laid.

Pyle and his many students are the subjects of a new exhibition that opened May 26 at the National Museum of American Illustration in Newport, Rhode Island. *Howard Pyle, His Students & The Golden Age of American Illustration* will present dozens of works showing the strength of the artists and their reach across the art world. The exhibition was timed with the 125th anniversary of the Drexel school, which was the first stop of the traveling exhibition. It was also organized to bring more attention to Pyle and his many contributions to art.

"Most people know Norman Rockwell, but they don't know the name Howard Pyle, even though Howard Pyle influenced and inspired Rockwell and more than 200 of his students to go on to become prominent illustrators," says Judy Goffman Cutler, museum director, curator and co-founder at the National Museum of American Illustration. "Howard Pyle was a household name in his day. He was an author who had done 14 books, and his work was respected and admired by many people. When he decided he wanted to teach he was turned down because what he was doing wasn't 'fine art.' At Drexel, though, he was teaching the benefits of how to paint, how to sell a product, how to bring out emotion and compose a painting—he was teaching his students how to get work."

Cutler says that Drexel and Pyle's school were thought of more as trade schools—think welding or blacksmithing—than fine art academies. More serious artists might have turned their noses up, but the schools served their purposes with artists getting work in *Harper's Monthly*, *Scribner's*, *Century Magazine* and countless others publications, as well as for posters, advertising and children's books.

"The illustrators were the superstars then. They endorsed products, they were hunted for their signatures, they were admired from afar. Schoonover and Wyeth, for instance, were just ordinary people, but their work made them extraordinary," Cutler says, adding that visitors to the museum are constantly surprised at what went into early illustration. "Most people have no idea. They take a look at the pulp paper that is faded or torn today, and think it was nothing important. But the paintings that were created for those books or magazines were fully realized works and they were made by some very talented artists.



Frank Schoonover, left, Howard Pyle and Stanley Arthurs in the studio.

Those artists are part of our cultural heritage and their work should be preserved and shown.”

Cutler continues, “Illustration was a profession, a way for them to earn a living. They were considered commercial artists, but their friends were the presidents and the authors and the composers—they were not looked at like artists because artists did not

make money. You were considered a fine artist if you went out and painted on your own, which is what a lot of artists were doing, but they were still looking to Europe, where it was all still Barbizon, because they didn’t have impressionism yet. What the illustrators were doing was much more intense: they had to paint, they had to draw, they had to satisfy themselves and their

clients, and they often had to sell a product—it’s the American way. They were doing so much more.”

Works in the show include a number of Wyeth pieces intended for a variety of sources, including *Century Magazine*, a book by Arthur Conan Doyle, *McCall’s* and a line of calendars. Wyeth highlights are *The Horse Fell With His Rider to the Bottom of the Cliff*, depicting a terrified horse and rider as they flip down a rocky face obscured by dust and shadow; *He Never Caught a Thing and Ruined Jon’s Reputation as a Fisherman (Along the Brandywine)*, showing two young boys fishing in a setting that can only be described as a paradise; *Frontier Trapper*, showing a male figure as he prepares to embark on a journey into the unknown; and *A Cloud of Dust Poured Over Him*, a bucking bronco scene done in black and white except for a red striped shirt on the cowboy. In *Daniel Boone, The Home Seeker – Cumberland Valley*, Wyeth paints Boone and his family, including his wife holding a newborn, as they cross through a valley. The painting, which was used in a calendar, suggests danger in the shadows as the male figures carry rifles, but in the center of



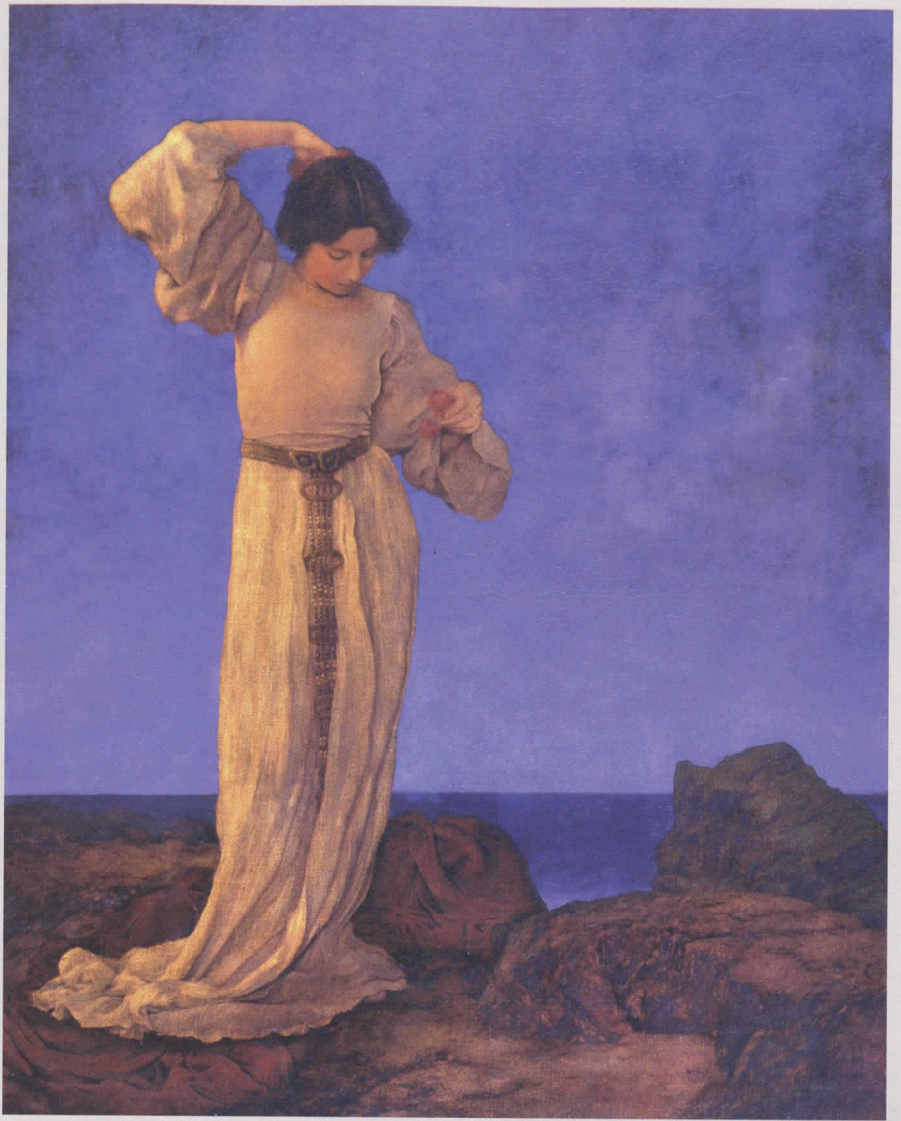
Female students work in the studio in Howard Pyle’s school. The school was inclusive to women, and produced many notable female artists.

the picture, as light falls on a hillside in the distance, the mother and the baby are almost illuminated, as if the heavens themselves have opened to guarantee their safe passage.

Wyeth's artwork and his astonishing career, which are focused on in the exhibition, provide a great example of Pyle's encouraging hand. In 1902 he was accepted to Pyle's school, where he excelled at everything that was put in front of him. Less than two years later, Wyeth had sold his first piece, a bucking bronco that would be used on the cover of the *Saturday Evening Post* on February 21, 1903. Pyle urged him to go west to acquire authentic reference material for other cowboy and Western works—and Wyeth did. The resulting trip would shape much of his early career, one spent documenting the Old West with images of rugged cowpunchers, brawling desperados, ranchers and homesteaders, and stagecoach-robbing bandits.

"As soon as he arrived out West he was blown away. He was doing all this Western stuff, including working on a ranch. He came back from the West and he went on this tear painting Western works," says Tylee Abbott, specialist and associate vice president of American art at Christie's. "These are the works that would put him on the map." In November 2016, Christie's sold Wyeth's 1906 *McClure's* illustration "Hands Up!" (*Holdup in the Canyon*). The piece—described by Abbott as a "tour de force, with everything you want in a Wyeth painting"—sold for nearly \$5 million, double its high estimate and double the previous Wyeth record breaker. Not bad for an artist who tagged along with friends when they were accepted into Pyle's school.

Joining the Wyeth pieces will be scenes of cattle drives and World War I doughboys by Koerner; explorers and Native Americans by Schoonover; children's book illustrations by Green; Arthurs' ambushing of a wagon train by Native American warriors in *Waiting at the Ford*; Clifford Ashley's World War I poster *Sinking of the Lusitania*; Oakley's Pennsylvania's state capitol mural "The Creation and Preservation of the Union"—



Maxfield Parrish (1870-1966), *Griselda*, 1910, for "Seven Green Pools at Cintra," by Florence Wilkinson, appearing in *Century Magazine*, August 1910. Oil on canvas, 40 x 32 in., signed lower right.



Howard Pyle (1853-1911), *Marooned*, 1887, for "Buccaneers and Marooners of the Spanish Main," by Howard Pyle, appearing in *Harper's New Monthly*, August/September 1887. Oil on board, 16 x 23 in., signed lower right.



George Washington at the Constitutional Convention; and several major examples by Parrish, including his famous *Griselda* done in his stylized color and mood. Two rare Parrish Western scenes—*Desert Without Water* and *Pueblo Dwellings*, both for an article titled “The Great Southwest” for *Century Magazine*—will also be on view, in addition to a Dunn work featured in a Elgin Watch advertisement.

Sporting and Western artist Philip R. Goodwin will be represented with a number of noteworthy pieces, including *Sam Houston at San Jacinto*, which shows Texans marching into battle against an unseen Gen. Santa Anna and his army, and *Lucky Catch*, painted for a Horton Steel Fishing Rod advertisement. “This was for the first steel fishing rod ever made,” Cutler says. “They did a whole booklet of images for the rod, and several had the figures in a canoe. But in every one was a fishing rod.” Other Goodwin



W.H.D. Koerner (1878-1938), *Cash Wyble*, 1931, for the *Saturday Evening Post*, December 1931. Oil on board, 30 x 35 in., signed and dated lower right.

Frank E. Schoonover (1877-1972), *Flamingo Feather*, 1923, for *The Flamingo Feather*, by Kirk Monroe, Harper & Brothers, New York, cover and frontispiece. Oil on canvas, 43 x 36 in., signed lower left.



N.C. Wyeth (1882-1945), *The Doryman*, 1933, for *Trending into Maine*, by Kenneth Roberts, Little Brown and Company, Boston, 1938. Oil on canvas, 42 x 35 in., signed lower right. All images © 2017 National Museum of American Illustration, Newport, RI. Courtesy American Illustrators Gallery, New York, NY.

works include several bear scenes—*Bear Hunting* was for a book and *The Right of Way* was for an article in a 1902 issue of *Outing Magazine*—as well as *Cowboy Returning to the Ranch*, which was made into a puzzle.

As for Pyle, he is present throughout the exhibition. “He laid the groundwork, and he influenced the ensuing generations of artists and illustrators. Pyle himself once said that the only distinctly American art to be found was the art of illustration,” Cutler says. “He spawned this whole evolution of successful artists, and he had enormous influence over an entire legacy.”

Pyle’s works include *Among the Daffodils*, an 1884 work that featured a subject matter that would later entice many of the American impressionists; *The Capture of Elizabeth, Frances Callaway and Jemima Boone*, which was

used in three different publications, including *Indian History for Young Folks*, in the immediate years after it was made in 1884; and *An Unwelcome Toast*, a *Harper’s* piece showing British soldiers enjoying themselves in a colonial home that they were not invited into.

Another Pyle piece is *Marooned*, which originally appeared in the famous *Harper’s* article “Buccaneers and Marooners of the Spanish Main.” In the text he describes the pirate tactic: “The process of marooning was as simple as terrible. A suitable place was chosen (generally some desert isle as far removed as possible from the pathway of commerce), and the condemned man was rowed from the ship to the beach. Out he was bundled upon the sand-spit; a gun, a half-dozen bullets, a few pinches of powder, and a bottle of

water were chucked ashore after him, and away rowed the boat’s crew back to the ship, leaving the poor wretch alone to rave away his life in madness, or to sit sunken in his gloomy despair till death mercifully released him from torment. It rarely if ever happened that anything was known of him after having been marooned. A boat’s crew from some vessel, sailing by chance that way, might perhaps find a few chalky bones bleaching upon the white sand in garish glare of the sunlight, but that was all. And such were marooners.”

He was a gifted writer, and his early written pieces were always accompanied by his artwork. He did early forms of travel writing, wrote about Quaker communities in New England, discussed his sketches, told stories of treasure and adventure...he was quite prolific. He often returned to pirates, as he did here, although only minimally, in *Harper’s* in 1905: “A flaming tropical sky of abysmal blue, full of the heavy clouds of the torrid zone; a wonderful sea of sapphire and emerald, creaming to white upon coral beaches; huge mountainous islands, fringed with cocoa-palms and crowned with exotic verdure; stagnant lagoons where the mangroves cover the oozy mud with their dense lush-green foliage, and where crawling venomous life moves obscurely beneath the snaky roots. Flaming heat; blazing light; teeming life; redundant color—and death lurking ever hidden in the slime of the rivers. Such is nature’s background to the life that one time filled the Spanish Main with the drift that floated in broken fragments from the Old World to the New.” ■

Through December 2017

**Howard Pyle, His Students
& The Golden Age of
American Illustration**

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