



John Marin  
American, 1870 - 1953

## *Third Street, New Castle, Delaware*

1931

oil on canvas on cardboard

overall: 35 x 45 cm (13 3/4 x 17 11/16 in.)

Inscription: lower right: Marin 31; upper left reverse: (Houses and Trees) 1931 / 14 x 17 3/4 SR#172[the "172" crossed out"]

31.11; upper right reverse: NBM 2/21/84

Gift of John Marin, Jr. 1986.54.5

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### ENTRY

John Marin painted four views of buildings on the New Castle, Delaware, town green in 1931: *View from the Green, New Castle, Delaware*; *Third Street, New Castle, Delaware*; *Immanuel Church, New Castle, Delaware: Close View*; and *Immanuel Church, New Castle, Delaware: Distant View*. By this period in his career, the artist typically divided his time between Maine and New Jersey, but he had an early history with Delaware; as a child he visited his grandfather's peach farm near Milford. Marin's biographer, MacKinley Helm, describes this family farm as the site of young Marin's first sketches. [1] Marin's letters from 1931 document time spent in Small Point, Maine; in North Hero, Vermont (on an island in Lake Champlain); and at his home in Cliffside, New Jersey. The timing of and reason for a visit to New Castle that year is unknown. [2] The town, a port on the Delaware River, is just south of Wilmington and about 15 miles south of Arden, an artists' colony.

New Castle, founded in 1651, had a complex early history, changing names as it passed from the Netherlands to Sweden, to Great Britain. In 1704 New Castle became the capital of the colony of Delaware. Because the town's historic

architecture remained largely intact, it became a popular tourist site at the height of the Colonial Revival during the early 1920s.

Marin depicted buildings that border the New Castle Green, a focal point of town life. In painting *View from the Green*, Marin faced the town hall (built in 1823), the Sheriff's House (partially visible, built in 1857), and the back of the courthouse (built in 1732). [3] Marin paid close attention to architectural details like the cupolas atop the town hall and the courthouse, while still rendering large swaths of the scene in broad brushstrokes.

In *Third Street, New Castle, Delaware*, Marin painted seven historic homes lining Third Street. Specific houses are recognizable because he included accurate architectural details. Silsbee's Alley, through which a house on Fourth Street is visible, appears slightly to the left of the center of the composition. The tall brick house to the right of the alley is the Gemmill House, built around 1801. The building to the left of the alley is Rodney House, built in 1831. [4] The branches of the six trees on the New Castle Green reach up to fill the sky, providing an expressive quality to this otherwise quiet view of the colonial town.

*Immanuel Church, New Castle, Delaware: Close View* and *Distant View* represent one of the town's most prominent colonial buildings and tourist attractions [fig. 1]. [5] The original church (the present hip-roofed nave) was begun in 1703, and the transept, tower, and steeple were added when it was reconstructed between 1820 and 1822. In *Close View*, Marin concentrated on the distinctive battlemented tower surmounted by a shingled spire, which he cropped slightly. The clock dial is almost delineated enough to be legible. An obelisk peeking up in the left foreground is probably the Stockton family monument in the church cemetery.

In the less detailed *Distant View*, the entire Immanuel Church is seen from the southwest. Marin excluded the old two-story Academy building that stands at the northwest corner of the New Castle Green, which would have competed with the view of the church. The steeple, topped with a delicate cross in the full view, is dramatically framed by Marin's treatment of the sky in triangular bands of blue. [6] What appears to be a tree leans into the frame in the left foreground, and Marin has suggested its foliage with gestural strokes of brown, leaving the steeple fully visible.

The artist's interest in historic ecclesiastic architecture began during his extended stay in Europe between 1905 and 1911 and endured throughout his career. Marin

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*American Paintings, 1900–1945*

made etchings, drawings, and watercolors of Trinity Church in lower Manhattan (the National Gallery owns several such drawings from the mid-1910s), but his less abstract paintings of Immanuel Church are more closely related to his nearly contemporary etching *St. Paul's Against the El* (1930). Twenty years later, in 1950–1951, Marin made etchings of a similar Dutch church in Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, including *Ye Old Dutch Church, Upper Saddle River, New Jersey* and *Ye Old Dutch Church, Upper Saddle River, No. 2*.

Marin's four views of New Castle's historic center, painted quickly with active brushwork, waver between accuracy and modernism. He took interest in specific sites and details, such as particular houses on Third Street, the church clock, and the cupolas on the town hall and courthouse. His early training in architecture—he worked for six years as an architect before becoming an artist—may explain his eye for these aspects. In these four paintings, Marin took his greatest liberties with nature, experimenting with trees and sky to abstract and dramatize the scenes.

Robert Torchia

July 24, 2024

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## COMPARATIVE FIGURES



**fig. 1** W. S. Stewart, *West Facade—Immanuel Church (Episcopal), The Green, New Castle, New Castle County, DE*, October 23, 1936, photograph, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, DC

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## NOTES

- [1] MacKinley Helm, *John Marin* (Boston, 1948), 5. Ruth Fine noted “inaccuracies” in Helm’s biography, which was completed in collaboration with the artist. See Fine’s *John Marin* (Washington, DC, 1990), 304, and 22 for mention of the Marin farm in Delaware.
- [2] John Marin, *The Selected Writings of John Marin*, ed. Dorothy Norman (New York, 1949), 137–143.
- [3] This painting is related to a 1931 watercolor by Marin that is listed in Sheldon Reich’s catalogue as *Old Court House, New Castle, Delaware* but actually represents the town hall. Sheldon Reich, *John Marin: A Stylistic Analysis and*

*Catalogue Raisonné* (Tucson, 1970), 635, cat. R. 31.26.

- [4] The 1936 guidebook *New Castle on the Delaware* (New Castle, DE), published five years after Marin's paintings, provides historic descriptions of the town's landmarks. See 71–72 for information on the Third Street homes.
- [5] John Marin Jr.'s inscriptions on the reverse of these paintings erroneously identify the subject as Old Swedish Church, a well-known historic church in Wilmington, Delaware. The works are titled as such in Sheldon Reich's *John Marin: A Stylistic Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné* (Tucson, 1970), 636, cats. R. 31.27 and R. 31.28. Old Swedish Church in Wilmington is described and discussed in *Delaware: A Guide to the First State; Compiled and Written by the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Delaware* (New York, 1938), 277–281. The churches do not resemble each other.
- [6] This painting is related to the 1931 watercolor that Sheldon Reich also listed as *Old Swedish Church, New Castle, Delaware*; its subject is actually Immanuel Church. Sheldon Reich, *John Marin: A Stylistic Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné* (Tucson, 1970), 636, cat. R. 31.29.

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## TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The painting is on a solid support, which has been constructed by the artist by stretching a piece of prepared canvas over cardboard. [1] The canvas is adhered only where it is folded over onto the back of the cardboard. There is a bulge between the two elements of the support visible on the front. The fabric is prepared with an evenly applied white ground. The paint is applied wet into wet with lively brushwork and strong impasto. In some places Marin scratched into the wet paint to define contours or imply areas of foliage. The painting is in good condition. Ultraviolet examination showed there has been some alteration of the sky by retouching; the textural match of the retouching to that of the original paint suggests that it might have been done by the artist. The surface of the painting is unvarnished; it has a dry appearance that is exacerbated by a heavy layer of gray grime dulling its tones.

Michael Swicklik

July 24, 2024

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### TECHNICAL NOTES

[1] All four of the trimmed fabric edges can be seen adhered to the reverse of the cardboard over which this fabric had been stretched. The trimming is uneven, the glue is sloppily applied, and the cuts of the canvas are ragged, leaving little doubt that the canvas was applied by the artist and that the support was not manufactured. Cusping at the top and bottom edges indicates that this piece of fabric was probably once mounted on a stretcher and may have been the support for a different painting. There is one nail or tack hole at the center of each edge that probably helped the artist stretch the canvas over the cardboard.

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### PROVENANCE

The artist [1870-1953]; his estate; by inheritance to his son, John C. Marin, Jr. [1914-1988], Cape Split, Maine; gift 1986 to NGA.

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY

- 1970 Reich, Sheldon. *John Marin: A Stylistic Analysis and Catalogue Raisonné*. Tucson, 1970: no. 31.11.
- 1992 *American Paintings: An Illustrated Catalogue*. National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1992: 231, repro.
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