



Overmantel from the Reverend Joseph Wheeler House

Date

about 1787–1793

Primary Maker

American

Medium

oil on Eastern white pine panel

Description

The Wheeler overmantel features three individually delineated properties and, on the right side of the image, a tightly compressed town center. The two-story, cream-colored house at the far left has two chimneys, a large burgundy front door, and a smaller door of the same color on the right side. The front door opens onto a yard surrounded by a decorative lattice fence. The side door leads into an open yard; the back corner of that side of the house abuts a wooden wall and a barn, both vertically clad with gray barn boards. The wall has three doors mounted with large strap hinges. The barn is nearly as tall as the house and has two large doors, also fixed with strap hinges. A split-rail fence encloses a U-shaped pasture that extends in front and to the right of the barn, behind the house and barn, and to the left of the house; it joins the ornamental fence in the front yard. The next house over—yellow, with a hipped roof and central chimney—is obviously the focal point of the painting: it is placed near the center, is larger than the others, and is moved forward in the pictorial space. Despite significant paint loss, it is possible to see such features as dentil molding at the cornice, a pedimented entrance with an arched door, and quoins to simulate block construction at the corners. To the left are three smaller structures: a single-story yellow building with two burgundy doors (painted to match the main house) at the left and right ends of the facade and a central chimney; a smaller gray barn behind this yellow building; and a tiny yellow building with a cupola between the barn and the main house. The third house from the left is also a two-story yellow dwelling with a pitched roof and central chimney. The burgundy front door is framed in white and opens onto a yard surrounded by a white lattice fence with a high front gate. To the left and behind the house is a barn. At right is a dense cluster of dwellings painted in various shades of red, blue, yellow, and brown, with a white church steeple in the middle. Stretched across the front of the picture plane is a row of trees, including one stump in front of the town center at right. There are two smaller groves of trees—one behind the town and another, perhaps seedlings, to the left and behind the freestanding house on the right. The dark-green grass stretches behind the houses and town in gently rolling contours. Behind this area is another series of rolling hills, painted in a lighter green, followed by a third set of hills in blue-gray; this succession of colors is meant to suggest depth. Paint losses in the buildings reveal a dark-green first layer, demonstrating that the houses were painted over the first field of green grass. The sky consists of a creamy pink that shifts to a pale blue and then a medium blue at the top of the image. Several horizontal clouds, ranging from cigar shapes to puffy hillocks that echo the contours of the land, are modulated from dark gray on the bottom to light gray in the middle to white on top.

Dimensions

60.6 x 152.5 cm (23 7/8 x 60 1/16 in.)