

Neil Jeffares, *Dictionary of pastellists before 1800*

Online edition

BECK, George

Elford, Staffordshire 1750 – Lexington 1812

Born in Stafford (and christened at All Saints, Alrewas, 25.III.1750), Beck's precocious talents attracted the patronage of Marquess Townshend (*q.v.*), who intended for Beck to be appointed professor of mathematics at the artillery's Woolwich Academy, although he was in fact appointed to a position in Plymouth with the rank of captain. When Townshend was replaced by the Duke of Richmond, Beck was transferred to a lesser appointment in London, and he resigned in 1789. He then turned to art, becoming a drawings teacher to Townshend's daughters and touring the west of Britain. He exhibited landscapes at the Royal Academy and the Society of Artists between 1790 and 1793 (from 6 or 5, Park-Row, Knightsbridge, 1790, 1792; 8 Panton Street, 1791; 4 Portland Road, 1793). In 1786 he married Mary Menessier (of French origin, though they met in London); she also exhibited landscapes. In 1795 they emigrated to the USA, where Beck's celebrity was ensured by Washington's purchase of his painting of the Great Falls of the Potomac (1796). He was based initially in Baltimore, then spent 7 years in Philadelphia before moving to Kentucky in 1804. Among his other talents he was also an astronomer, poet and translator, and served as a scout for General Wayne. With his wife, he ran an "academy for young ladies".

A couple of landscapes in mixed media, perhaps including some pastel, date from just after 1800; a number of very similar earlier works seem to be in watercolour and gouache (several at Sotheby's, New York, 26.IX.2008, fetched prices of up to \$250,000).

Bibliography

Bénézit; John Wilson Townsend, *Kentucky in American letters, 1784–1912*, Iowa, 1913; *The port folio*, II/2, .VIII.1813, pp. 117–22; Edna Talbot Whitley, "Mary Beck and the female mind", *Register of the Kentucky History Society*, LXXVII/1, 1979, pp. 15–24

Pastels

View of Philadelphia and the Delaware River from Kensington, Pennsylvania; & pendant: Falls at Montmorency, Quebec, pstl, gch., watercolour, charcoal/ppr, 41x54.3/39.7x53.7, c.1800–04 (New-York Historical Society, inv. 1971.123/122. ?Kennedy Galleries, New York; Hall Park McCullough, New York, 1971; don Mrs. Ethel McCullough Scott, Mr. John G. McCullough, and Mrs. Edith McCullough Heaphy) φ