



PLATE 8. Anna Botsford Comstock, 1895, *Luna Moth and Crinkled Flannel Moth*, original wood-engraving.

WORKING IN THE GREAT OUTDOORS

In 1882, Elbridge Kingsley caused fireworks with an engraving directly from nature. He said that he had done it mostly with a single graver on a hand-held block while on location in the woods. *View in New England Woods* (plate 9) shows one of the settings where he worked from his sketching car, an enclosed horse-drawn wagon equipped as living quarters.

Kingsley's first version of his sketching car was built in the spring of 1879 by his brother, who happened to be a blacksmith. The contrivance was a box: ten feet long, four feet wide and six feet high. It was mounted on wagon wheels and was designed to be drawn by a single horse. There was a door in the center, a window to either side of the door and a small opening in front through which one could manage the horse. There were hooks for hanging things, including Kingsley's hammock.

On his second trip, Kingsley eliminated about half of the things taken on the first trip. But he added a jug of cider, which proved to be an important addition.

With the car in a picturesque place (the abandoned portion of a local cemetery), Kingsley lay in his hammock at dusk one evening reading when he heard voices and people approaching. On opening the door, there materialized a hostile crowd of armed men apparently bent on doing harm to a supposed grave robber.

"Oh, it's you, Kingsley!" They recognized the artist from his many sketching and painting trips in the neighborhood. He invited them in to look over the car and then dispensed cider and later reported that they all departed in a hilarious mood.

The sketching car went through modifications after its first year: a large window was cut opposite the door and a bunk was installed. The bunk had a lid that could be let down to serve as a desk for engraving. From the first, Kingsley had taken along a boat so he could explore the Connecticut River and adjoining waterways. An encounter with floating logs left him astride one of the logs. His boat had sunk, but Kingsley still held the oars and the boat's chain firmly in his grasp. "This was a situation for a hot day, coming to a near-sighted man, with no pretensions in athletic sports." He affixed his glasses firmly, emptied the boat, extricated himself, and continued his exploration.

In spring 1881, Kingsley bought waterproof material and had curtains made for the back so another brother, a photographer, might use the car for photographic work. In addition, heavier wheels were installed and the car's motive force was doubled from one horse to two. There were picnics and parties and visits from family and friends. Of course, sketching, painting, and wood-engraving continued during summertime trips, often with fellow artists.

Kingsley seemed pleased and satisfied. "Nothing impossible in the individual or the car. But put the two together the combination was a most strange and wonderful performance."

In late summer 1887, a plan developed for a wood-engravers' camp-out. Four artists (and an uninvited woodpecker who turned out to be an avid wood-engraver) would do



FIGURE 2-8. One of the later, improved versions of Kingsley's car, circa 1895.³²

original engravings and each would write an article to accompany his work. The group — William Closson, John Parker Davis, and Frank French — gathered at Kingsley's car, engraved, and generally had a fine time. Occasionally, they talked all night about such things as the New School of Wood-Engraving, the future of wood-engraving, and the Society of American Wood-Engravers. The results, an article by each artist and fourteen original wood-engravings, appeared in *The Century Magazine* in 1889.³³

During the 1887 camp-out, they christened themselves the Original Workers on Wood. Because the woodpecker had persistently done its own wood-engraving on a nearby tree during the camp-out, they incorporated its image into the logo of the OWW. That logo appeared in most of the original wood-engravings in the articles. Plates 10 through 14 reproduce some of the original engravings from this camping event; others appear in chapter 9.

Frank French wrote the first of the four articles and made the initial ornament (figure 2-9) and six additional original wood-engravings. Two of French's wood-engravings appear as plates 11 and 12. French was as skillful at portraits as he was with landscapes. He drew and engraved his portrait (plate 12) of Uncle Moses, who drove the team and wagon to mow the hay in the local cemetery. Uncle Moses easily maneuvered between the tombstones. But French confessed to a moment's uneasiness when he observed the wagon, loaded with hay, driven rapidly down over an embankment. In turning back onto the road, two wheels lifted off the ground along with some hay and Uncle Moses. All settled back in good order, thus relieving French of his anxiety.

32. Kingsley and Knab, 6. Reproduction courtesy of the Forbes Library, Northampton Massachusetts.

33. Closson; Davis; French; and Kingsley 1889.



PLATE 9. Elbridge Kingsley, 1882, *View in New England Woods*, original wood-engraving.



FIGURE 2-9. Frank French's "decoration" for the articles in *The Century Magazine*, 1887.

William Closson did two rather fanciful original engravings for "Wood-Engravers in Camp." One of them, which appears in plate 10, shows the filmy and ethereal qualities that were characteristic of Closson.

Elbridge Kingsley made four original wood-enchavings that were published in *The Century Magazine* as part of the story about the trip. He made two others that were eventually published by *Scribner's Magazine*, and one of them, *White Birches* (plate 13), won a gold medal at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris. It later came out that the gold medal was intended to encourage originality in wood-enchaving and, indeed, Kingsley, perhaps more than any other engraver, pressed for producing original wood-enchavings and publishing them in limited editions. He himself produced at least sixty original wood-enchavings.

John Parker Davis, whose office in New York became more or less the center of the Society's activities, wrote a brief article that contained two subjects. One was a description of Whately Glen in Massachusetts as a picturesque place and the other an acknowledgment of his debt to the vocal nemesis of the New School wood-enchavers, William Linton. "[Linton] meant art to us, and the lines he cut were, in lieu of nature, our wonder and our study."

These are not words one might expect from the secretary of the Society of American Wood-Engravers and one of its nine founders. A wood-enchaving that resulted from the camp-out, and that Kingsley rated as one of Davis's best, appears as plate 14.

Original style and original design (and with Kingsley's sketching wagon, an original approach) were inevitable expressions of the creativity of the Society engravers once they had cast aside the strictures of the Old School. Both original style and original design played roles in bringing American wood-enchaving to a standard of excellence that still influences printmaking and illustrating around the world.



PLATE 10. William Closson, 1887, *Night Moths*, original wood-enchaving.