

118. "Scholl's tavern Clarksburg"

10 October 1811

Pencil, watercolor

20.4 cm. × 32.2 cm. (8 in. × 12-3/4 in.)

SKETCHBOOK VI

Map reference: Germantown Quadrangle, Maryland

UTM coordinates: Tavern: 18.090346, 434522

Orientation: 315°

"View about 10 o'clock of the Elephant, going towards Georgetown. Showing the position of the Comet at the time." (BHL, SKETCHBOOK VI)
As shown here, the elephant troupe, which was probably heading south for the winter, traveled at night to avoid spooking horses and providing any free looks at the elephant.

The Comet of 1811 was the first great comet of the nineteenth century. It was independently discovered by Pierre-Gilles-Antoine Honoré Flaugergues (1755–1830), of Viviers, France, and by the young American astronomer and instrument maker William Cranch Bond (1789–1859), of Boston. The comet was visible in the northern skies throughout the night during the autumn of 1811. Because of its unusual brightness, the comet was widely observed in America and Europe. Few other comets have been one-tenth as bright, and only two comets with longer tails have been recorded.

The comet attained some notoriety when London vintners prepared the Comet Wine of 1811. And Napoleon, expecting the imminent

outbreak of war between Britain and America, declared the comet a good omen for his ill-fated campaign against Russia. The comet is the one seen by Pierre in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

In a letter to Daniel Carroll Brent of Richland, Virginia, concerning an order for thirty-five cords of hickory, Latrobe wrote: "Pray have mercy upon us as soon as possible for November is at hand and I am unwilling to rely upon the Comet for warmth this winter." (16 October 1811, BHL Letterbooks)

Scholl's Tavern was owned by Frederick Scholl, who had purchased it in November 1800. The inn had been known as Dowden's Ordinary since 1750, when Michael Ashford Dowden received a license to keep an ordinary at his home. Frederick Scholl obtained a tavern keeper's license soon after buying the property, and he and his wife Catherine operated the inn until his death in 1815. The tavern remained in the hands of the Scholl family until 1834. The hill upon which the tavern stood was for many years known as Shaw's Hill, after a later owner of the property.