

The American Scene

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THE ART OF THE AMERICAN COWBOY

It is now 92 years since the first tired, dusty herd of Texas cattle came rolling into the newly constructed cattle pens in Abilene. Today every child who is old enough to distinguish a clean cut hero from a black hatted villain knows, or thinks he knows, something of the way of life of the men who drove those cattle and of the men who were their successors in the cattle industry. This knowledge is usually based more on myth than on fact, because the American cowboy, even during the classic period of his existence, so thoroughly permeated popular fiction and drama that he became the common property of the American public, one of our few truly indigenous folk heroes.

However, regardless of how firmly rooted in the minds of the American people the mores of the fictional cowboy may become, the story of the actual cowboy is not in danger of becoming lost or misunderstood, because the people connected with the cattle industry were such wonderful chroniclers of their own activities. They wrote about themselves and graphically recorded their own appearance and behavior in a way that has no parallel in any other profession. As J. Frank Dobie expresses it "For every hired man on horseback there have been hundreds of plowmen in America, and tens of millions of acres of rangelands have been plowed under, but who can cite a single autobiography of a laborer in the fields of cotton, of corn, of wheat? Or do coal miners, steelmongers, workers in oil refineries, factory hands of any kind of factory, the employees of chain stores and department stores ever write autobiographies? Many scores of autobiographies have been written by range men, perhaps half of them by cowboys who never became owners at all." The same may be said of painting, which is our primary concern in this issue of **The American Scene**. There have been so many artists, most of whom were intimately connected with the cattle business, that worked almost exclusively at recording the life of the cowboy we may safely refer to a "cowboy school of art." Where are the parallel schools of art among the miners, trappers or railroad men? They simply don't exist.

Any attempt to explain this phenomenon must face the pitfalls common to all theorizing about social history. There is obviously no single, clear cut explanation; generaliza-



TRAIL BOSS

PENCIL DRAWING BY WILL JAMES

THE ART OF THE AMERICAN COWBOY

tions and probabilities will have to do. It is equally obvious that some of the information needed to answer the question is not available. Nevertheless, some theories on the subject seem to help relate the cowboy artist to his era. First, and possibly most important, the cowboy was in the unique position of being considered a romantic figure even during the time his craft was in its classic period; as such he has aroused an unparalleled interest in the minds of the American people. Even before the Civil War the Southwest had been used as a locale for adventure stories that attributed a sort of innate romance to the cattle business, but the cowboy himself became the center of a particular brand of fiction beginning in the early 1880's. At this time the dime novels, which were as available to cowboys as anyone else, hit upon the idea of what we now recognize as the cowboy story. This obviously had a great appeal to a large number of people with dimes to spend, because the output has been enormous and shows no signs of diminishing even today. In 1903, with the publication of the *Virginian* by Owen Wister, the basic cowboy story with some technical improvements even found a place in the world of "respectable" literature. The point here is not that the fiction about the cowboy was in any way documentary, in fact most of it was grossly inaccurate. What is important is the fact that the cowboy was made aware of himself as an exotic figure, almost a symbol of the West, at a time when the cattle business in the old sense was still in full swing. It doesn't seem far-fetched to assume that this self-awareness had something to do with the cowboy's drive to document his own appearance and activities. This is not to imply that this documentation was done exclusively for a market, for many of the paintings and writings were never sold. It is simply that the cowboy through a series of outside forces realized that his life was different enough to be worth recording. Also, there is no intended implication that the cowboy came to this state of self-awareness entirely because he read fiction about himself, this is merely one of the ways that is fairly easy to pin down.

The fact that the cowboy was unusually aware of his position in the story of the West is only one side of the coin. It is true that the cowboy was distinctive in his appearance and his way of life, and that this aura assumed romantic overtones to the outsider, but this was also true of other groups. What was it about the cowboy that particularly qualified him as an attractive and readily identifiable symbol for a region and an era of its history?

The cattle industry depended on a very delicately balanced adjustment to a land that was uniquely western. Cattlemen, through necessity, created a way of life to suit the land they occupied, and many of the customs they established persisted in the West even after the unique conditions of the land were altered. This is in direct contrast to many groups who came only for a short while and departed leaving nothing permanent behind them, or else who came in small specialized groups and were able to maintain an essentially eastern orientation within their own area.

The story of the cattlemen was, much more than any other group, inseparably associated with the land they settle. There was an interdependence between the type of land and the way of life that does, in spite of all the romanticizing, qualify the cowboy as a valid symbol for that which is western. In art the symbol can sometimes seem more real than the reality. The cowboy artist then was not just recording appearances, he was recording a way of life that was in essence the story of a period and an area.

There was probably no such thing as the typical cowboy in the same sense that there is no typical American, but men who have written scholarly works about the cowboy would seem to indicate that there were certain predominant attitudes in the range country that might help explain the cowboy artist on a purely personal level.

The nature of the cowboy's job gave him an opportunity for introspection that has few parallels today, and in spite of the fact that the rowdy aspects of his life are usually stressed it seems to be true that the cowboy did an uncommon lot of thinking about himself and the world he lived in. These thoughts

were not of a particularly abstract nature, and we know that the voicing of extremely gloomy thoughts was frowned upon, but the campfire stories that have been recorded for us reveal a very shrewd interest in the motivations and subtle characterizations of the persons who are actors in these stories. In other words the conversations and stories we associate with cowboys express exactly the sort of interest in human and animal behavior that would be a necessary part of the background of an artist who tried to realistically record a particular way of life.

The physical appearances would come easily to men whose profession required them to observe automatically and to remember minute details about the animals with which they worked.

Whatever the reasons, a number of cowboys became artists, or in some cases artists became cowboys, and devoted significant amounts of their careers to recording the life of the range. Charles Russell was the master of the school and actually typifies that which was best in this movement, both in his personal life and in his paintings. However, Russell has received so much notice over the years it has tended to obscure the fact that there were other artists who were doing the same sort of work. They, perhaps, didn't do it as perfectly, but their work nevertheless has the same documentary potential as that of the father of the school.

This issue of *The American Scene* is devoted to four of these lesser known artists. These are men who came to their craft in different ways and who used different styles and techniques to accomplish their ends, but the motivation for their work they shared. They worked to record the life of the West and that of the cowboy in particular. The classification of cowboy artists fits them all.

This is, of course, intended as a sampling. There are many important members of this school who cannot be covered, Edward Borein and Ross Santee to mention two conspicuous examples. The point of the sampling is to illustrate that the type of painting with which we are dealing has a depth of tradition and a variety of approach that is often ignored; that the works of the lesser known cowboy artists frequently make a considerable authentic and historic contribution to this unique school of American art. C. C. P.

When Will James had to quit breaking bronses because they had broken his health, he turned to sketching and writing to make his living. He had never spent a day in school and had lived all his life out-of-doors in the West. But he knew horses and had graduated from enough rough and tumble cow outfits to earn a doctorate in every phase of cowboy life. So Will James, cowboy, became Will James, cowboy artist. He thereby set in motion a creative productivity that would enrich the record of cowboy lore and would preserve his own memory in the ranks of American cowboys.

Will James was sketching long before he could write. Born on the trail in Montana in 1892 and left an orphan at the age of four, he grew up with a French-Canadian trapper who roamed the country between the Yellowstone and Mackenzie Rivers in Montana and Canada. Bopy, his foster-dad, never stayed long anywhere and having received no education the boy took to drawing as his natural mode of expression. Will took to something else even more than he did to drawing and that was to horses. There never has

been a human being who loved horses more than did Will James and few who better understood the Western pony.

One sunny morning up in Canada when Will was thirteen, he awoke to discover that Bopy had drowned in a river where he had gone for water. The boy didn't want to admit it and rode all over the countryside calling for the trapper, but he knew in his heart that Bopy had drowned. However the boy kept right on moving across the country just as if the trapper were still with him until eventually he pulled into a ranch and was hired on as a hand. Will James became a cowboy. But he never remained with one outfit long for he had wandered all his childhood and couldn't stay put.

What we read in the books of Will James are the things that happened to him during his years as a wandering cowboy. Everything he wrote, fiction or not, was autobiographical and that is the reason his later books are repetitious. Even so Will James understood what he was writing about and had the integrity to put it down on paper just as he knew it. His great books are his early ones

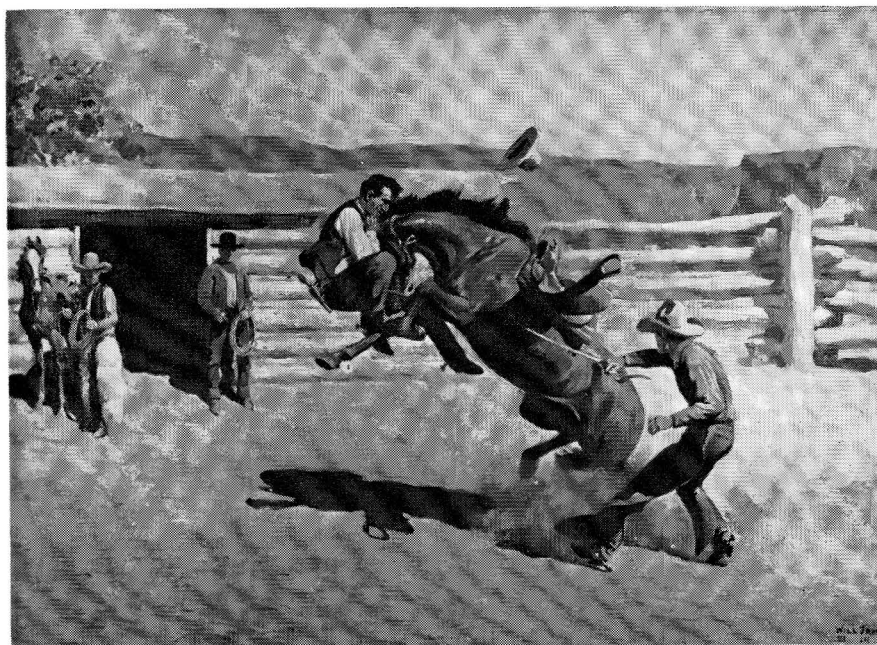
(*Cowboys, North and South, The Drifting Cowboy, Smoky, and Lone Cowboy*) in which he told what he had to tell simply and forthrightly in the manner of a true cowboy.

However many a person has enjoyed the books of Will James merely because of their illustrations. The drawings Will James did for his books have a savvy that make them great cowboy art. When he wanted to tell an incident about a cowboy or a horse he preferred to do it with a sketch that would reveal the story at a glance.

James lived at a time when the trail-driving cowboy had faded away in favor of a more modern, ten-gallon type, a sort of intermediary stage in relation to the present day one. Yet the early twentieth century cowboy was all cowboy just the same: a man who mixed with the dust and tangled with steers. This is the cowboy of Will James, a real cowboy who appears in his illustrations doing real cowboy chores: breaking a bronc, brush-poppin, tailin-up, or branding. A cowboy is a man of action and most of James' sketches are of the cowboy in action. They depict events of everyday life of the cowboy and of sights seen in any part of the West be it Texas, Wyoming, or Oregon. They have the essence of truth in them: plain, forthright drawings just like his writings, yet delineated with such skill and authenticity that we get a more intimate insight into the real cowboy than words convey.

Will James was a true artist expressing his own inner self and creating on canvas or sketch pad the real spirit of the cowboy—"America's man on horseback." The artist who knows his subject, who possesses the intellectual honesty to present it in all its reality, and who has sufficient skill to execute the technical details accurately and truly will always have an audience. The artist who brings to these attributes the additional quality of creating an experience of common knowledge or appeal will create works of art that will endure. When Will James died in 1942 he had achieved that goal. Cowboy artists come and go but this cowboy's art lives on because it was conceived on the trail, nurtured on the range, and born out of this cowboy's inexorable need to go right on being a cowboy after the bronc had thrown him for the last time. M. W.

WILL JAMES . . . PEN AND BRUSH SKETCHES OF THE COWBOY AND HIS HORSE



"WHERE THE BRONCO TWISTER GETS HIS NAME" OIL PAINTING WILL JAMES

From Gilcrease Collections

OLAF SELTZER . ARTIST



"PACK TRAIN"

OLAF SELTZER

From Gilcrease Collections

The high plains and mountains of Wyoming and Montana have been conducive to painting—to the kind of art which has been inspired by the ruggedness of the landscape and the life of the West. Men like E. S. Paxson and Charles Russell made their home in the area and painted the frontiersman and the Indian; several artists passed through, unwilling to leave before capturing on canvas a part of the scene: Alfred J. Miller (1837), John Mix Stanley (1850's), William Cary and William J. Hayes (in the 1860's), Thomas Moran (1870's), Henry Farny (1880's), Walter Shirlaw (1890's) and W. H. Hansen (1903). Native artists of the area included Will James and Bill Gollings as well as contemporaries J. K. Ralston, William Standing, Ace Powell, Edward Grigware and many others—all painting the traditional western story of men and horses. One artist bridges the space between the passing of the frontier and the era as seen today by artists only in retrospect—Olaf C. Seltzer.

Olaf Seltzer was not born in the American West, but rather migrated to Montana in 1892 from his home in Denmark. Seltzer was born in Copenhagen, August 25, 1877; when he was 12 he was admitted to the Art Institute of Copenhagen, an opportunity usually afforded only to considerably older students—but

even at an early age Olaf's ability to draw and sketch was recognized.

Seltzer came with his mother to Montana at a time when great changes were taking place; the Blackfeet Indians were living peacefully on the land granted them in 1888 just north of Great Falls on a line north of Birch Creek and the Marias and Missouri rivers; Fort Shaw, west on the banks of the Sun River was abandoned the year Olaf arrived; the fifteen year old artist watched Blackfeet on their way to the agency for their weekly rations or returning from hunting the small game that remained—the last important buffalo hunts had taken place ten years before in the Sweet Grass region. But young Olaf sketched what was left of the old life; it was true that many of the Piegans had turned to raising cattle by this time, but braves like White Quiver were still stealing horses and the old chiefs Three Suns and White Calf still lived—and dreamed of better days. But the three year old state was experiencing a new boom—the silver mines at Granite and Phillipsburg were working and a smelter had been established in Great Falls. The year the Seltzers arrived in Montana the Great Northern railroad reached the western edge of the state. Much of the Blackfeet land was to be sold away from the tribes in the next

few years—the modern age was not far off.

Seltzer got a job as a ranch hand soon after his arrival in Great Falls and the following year he went into the machine shops of the Great Northern; in his spare hours he walked along the Missouri River towards old Fort Benton, sketching as he went. Sometimes he trekked into the adjoining Indian country to draw portrait sketches of warriors who had become reluctant wards of the government or to observe the camp life of the reservation tribes. The young artist worked mainly in pen and ink at this time, but he recorded the life and the trappings of the passing native of the land in accurate and careful detail.

In 1897 Seltzer rode over the narrow gage rail line from Great Falls to Lethbridge, Alberta, where he was encouraged by Fred Downer, who had admired his sketches, to try painting in oils. A kit of paints and materials was in time shipped up the line from Great Falls and Olaf made his first oil painting—an Indian war party on the trail in the Sun River valley. From this first effort, Seltzer proved to be at home in oils as well as in watercolors; in all, he was to paint nearly 2,500 paintings during his lifetime. Not all of Seltzer's paintings were of the western scene; he loved horses, however, and painted them into most of his canvases whether their riders were Arabs before the great Sphinx in Egypt or rigid French hussars of the Napoleonic period. His best works, or the works for which he has become most widely recognized, are the paintings which portray the cowboy, the Indian, the pioneer, the trapper, the Indian scout—the vigorous man of the mountains and plains.

Seltzer, like many other western artists did not, at least in his own way of thinking, paint women well. In a letter to a patron Seltzer said "I worked particularly hard on the Missionary and the Ursuline Nun and am glad I did not fail. I am at this time working on the Pioneer Mother, and when I tell you I am sweating blood, I am putting it

THE HIGH PLAINS

mildly, for I am surely not a painter of the She-kind of folks."

Dr. Philip G. Cole of Tarrytown, New York, while visiting his native state of Montana, saw some of Seltzer's work and commissioned him to paint what was eventually to become a complete panorama of western life. The artist moved to New York in 1926 and immediately received numerous commissions not only from Dr. Cole but from the owner of the New York Herald Tribune, Mrs. Ogden Mill Reid, and from Amelia Erhart, the famous woman aviator. Seltzer did not like city life and in 1927 he returned to Montana where he continued working on several paintings commissioned by Cole. He painted a transportation series which included: the Indian travois, the "Smoke Boat" (the flat bottom Missouri River craft), the jerk-line outfit, the covered wagon, the early locomotive, and several versions of the stagecoach. Another series, this one in watercolor, he called "Characters of the Old West." These brilliant sketches included: the frontier gambler, the bull-whacker, the rustler, the horse wrangler, the bar keep, the western judge, the sluice box miner, a blacksmith forging a branding iron, a lonely cowboy watching the dust rise from a milling herd, a miner protecting his holdings from potential claim jumpers—all of these are executed with an understanding for the people represented; they are not stereotyped characters.

In still another series, Seltzer worked with a powerful reading glass to produce miniature oils (5 inches by 6 inches) depicting historic events or landmarks in the West. Dr. Cole wrote a long descriptive paragraph to accompany each of the miniatures. In all, the artist produced over 100 of these before the strain on his eyes forced him to relent. Unfortunately, Seltzer's vision was weakened by this work and during his later years he could paint only short periods of time during the morning hours. The miniatures, which are so sharp and clear that they can be photographically enlarged three times their size and still be in good detail, include such scenes

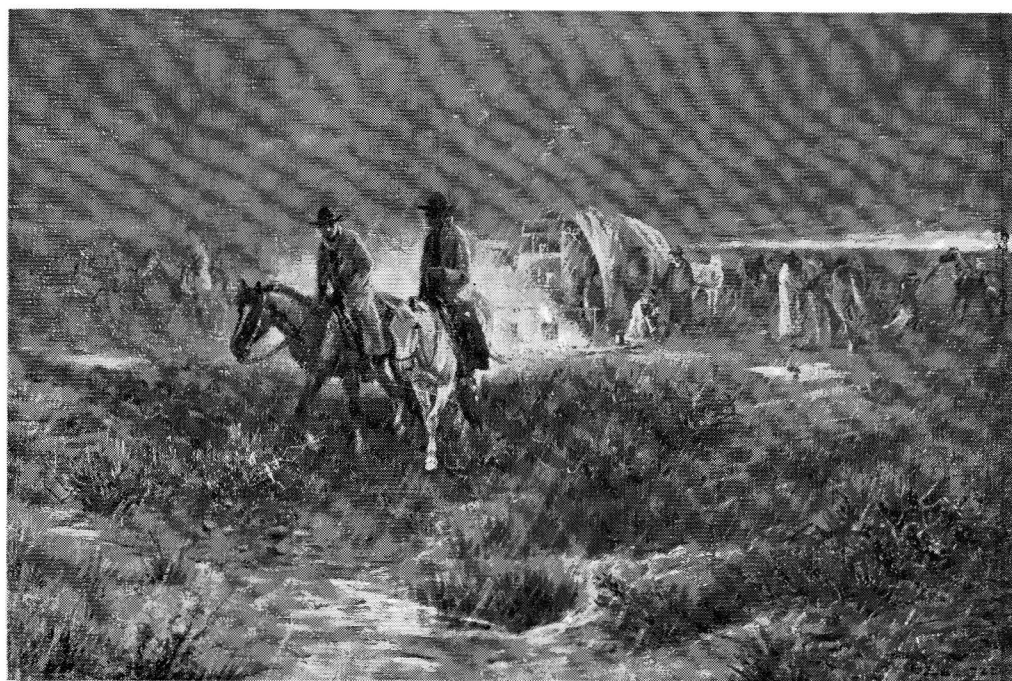
as: Captain Lewis at the Black Eagle Falls on the Missouri River, June 13, 1805; Chief Joseph's Surrender to Colonel Nelson A. Mills in 1877 (this was recently reproduced in color in the **American Heritage**); Buffalo Bill's duel with Yellow Hand; Yellowstone Kelly on the trail in 1869; Portugee Phillips' arrival on Christmas Eve 1866 at Fort Laramie after his 236-mile ride from Fort Phil Kearny, Montana. (A monument erected near Fort Laramie marks this incredible feat which was carried out in a blizzard in temperatures which reached 40 below. Phillips' horse dropped dead at the gate of the fort; he had been ridden almost without stopping for three days. The only supplies carried by the messenger was a hat full of oats for his remarkable horse). Also included in the set of miniatures are: Robbers Rock near Bannack, Montana (the rendezvous for the Plummer gang of road agents); Sacajawea at the Sulphur Spring (1805); Trumpeter Martin bringing his famous last message from General Custer to Major Benteen, June 25, 1876; the stabbing of Crazy Horse; the

Fort McKenzie Massacre; the duel between Kit Carson and Captain Shunan; John Colter's escape from the Blackfeet Indians in 1808. There are, of course, many more exciting scenes re-created in this series alone. It goes without saying that Seltzer was not on hand when this history was made but his careful research and that of his patron makes this a splendid artistic contribution to history.

In 1903, Olaf married Mabel L. Cleeland at Helena; eventually two sons were born, Carl and Walter. The early years were trying ones for Seltzer—in 1926 he quit his railroad job to devote full time to painting—for in spite of his relative success as an artist he found it difficult to achieve national recognition. The American Lithograph Company reproduced some of his paintings in the 1930's. In 1936 a collection of his paintings owned by William Marks of Seattle was exhibited in the Washington Athletic Club. His work has also been shown in New York, Chicago, Great Falls and Tulsa, Oklahoma. In 1938 Seltzer was awarded a commission to do a large mural for the Helena Masonic Lodge.

In 1943 Seltzer returned to his trade as a machinist to aid the war effort, working at Malmstrom Air Force Base until the end of the war. The artist remained at his easel during these years and also found time

Continued on page 8



"WET MORNING ON THE CIRCLE"

OLAF SELTZER

From Gilcrease Collections

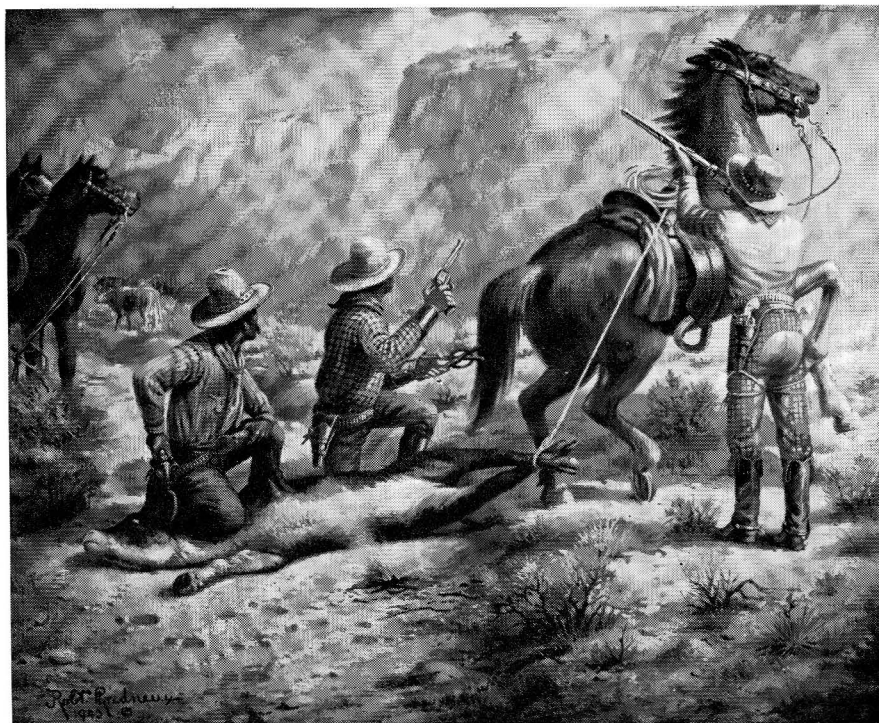
CHRONICLER OF THE WEST

ROBERT LINDNEUX

At the age of eighty-eight, Robert Ottokar Lindneux is a small, pink-complexioned, live-wire of a man crowned with a shock of fine snow white hair. His expressive, animated face tells several things about him; first, that he was a handsome, adventurous youth who always worked very hard at his craft. The deep scar in the center of his forehead shows evidence of the occasional violence of his life on the range; and the twinkle in his eyes hints that, in an instant, he could recall a myriad amusing, reckless, and even risqué incidents from his colorful past. He loves a good story and can entertain a visitor to his studio for hours with one anecdote after another from his richly varied experiences. His adventurous nature, his pride in telling a story interestingly and accurately, and his excellent training in art, are the integral parts of his personality which combined to give posterity his meticulously detailed chronicle of early Western Americana.

Robert Lindneux' training in art began when he was very young. His parents died before he was five; he was brought up by an aunt, who, recognizing his talent, sponsored him in private art lessons in New York from the time he was nine until he was seventeen. In 1890 his aunt sent him from New York schools to Dusseldorf, Germany, placing him in the care of an old friend of Lindneux' father, Benjamin Vautier, who was teaching at the National Academy. After two and a half years, Vautier sent him to Paris to continue his studies at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. In the following years, Lindneux studied under various noted artists in Brussels, Dresden, Vienna, Budapest, Hamburg and Munich.

Lindneux occasionally reminisces fondly about the years he spent in Europe while studying art; the evenings in Paris spent watching Toulouse Lautrec sketch the fabulous gaiety of the Moulin Rouge on the white tablecloths there, his meeting with the famous Rosa Bonheur, who had painted Buffalo Bill when he visited Paris with his Wild West show. Perhaps it was seeing Cody in 1892 and talking with Bonheur about him and the exciting American West that first seeded the idea in Lind-



"CATTLE RUSTLERS CAUGHT IN THE ACT"

ROBERT LINDNEUX

From Gilcrease Collections

neux' mind to see the wild new country which had produced a legend such as Buffalo Bill.

In 1898, at the age of twenty-seven, Lindneux was through with his schooling and was in Liverpool preparing to catch a boat back to the United States when the hotel in which he was staying burned, destroying everything but the clothes on his back. His reason for returning home had been primarily to enlist in the army and join in the Spanish-American War; but by the time he had worked his way across the ocean, the war was over. He docked in Hoboken with no money, no equipment, nothing to do and no place to go. He made his way to Boston where he first cleaned a grocer's cellar for money to buy equipment, then made a fair livelihood painting portraits. The idea of visiting the west grew in his mind. Lindneux saved his earnings tenaciously toward the day when he would have the money for his venture west; 1899 found him with a \$9 suit and a ticket for Denver, Colorado. He was on his way.

After spending three years in Denver, Lindneux moved on to Billings, Montana, where he met and became a friend of Charles Russell. The two artists worked together for

some time in Russell's studio at Great Falls. Lindneux became restless to move about in the new country; he was eager to learn more about the cowboy and the Indian that he felt had been the very heartbeat of the Old "wild-and-wooly, tough-as-nails" West which was by this time being trampled to death under the boots and wheels of civilization. He became dedicated to the idea of becoming an historian of the West. For the next forty years Lindneux traced the footpaths and trails of the pioneer, the Indian, and the cowboy over hundreds of miles of Colorado, Wyoming and Montana—living sometimes with Indians or trappers, working often as a cowboy. From those years on the plains, Lindneux collected sketches of the people with whom he worked and lived, many pieces of the trappers' equipment and clothing, dress and trapping of the Indians, much of the gear and clothing of the cowboy, and a large collection of mounted wild game specimens which he himself had killed during those years. When he made his permanent studio in Denver in 1909, it was filled to overflowing with his collections, making the studio an interesting museum in itself.

Continued on page 8

"The romance and glamour — of the West is an epoch of thrills and wonder and awe. It calls for pictures with color and zest, by a fellow who's seen it and one who can draw; who graphically tells of each spirited deed."* Such a man was Bill Gollings.

Bill Gollings in his autobiography says, "It was this first winter of 1887 on the ranch that I took an interest in drawing. I did not do it myself, however. My brother, Oliver, the next to the oldest, had among his many accomplishments the ability to draw a horse in outline on a slate then he would put on a saddle and bridle. Those simple drawings, sometimes in colored pencil, stick in my memory and certainly created in me a desire to draw, but I had no idea of how to do it."

Although Gollings at this time may not have been able to draw or paint, he was absorbing the pageantry of the West which in later years he would set down on canvas. But at this time he was seeing and sharing in just those things that made up the West: horses and cattle, Indians and cowboys, old prospectors who had been forty-niners, pack trains, jerk-line freight trains, and stage coaches of the old type with six horses.

Gollings, who was born in Idaho in 1878, moved to Chicago when he was twelve years old and while in school there he learned to draw; he admired the work of Frederic Remington whose illustrations were currently appearing in **Harper's Magazine**. In the year 1893 he received his eighth grade diploma and his formal education was ended.

Bill Gollings was thus summarily set loose in the world; the years from 1893 to 1903 were to be filled with a variety of experiences in the West he loved. In August, 1896, Bill Gollings woke up in a chair-car of a train rolling across the plains of Western Dakota with a friend who also had the Western fever.

The stops at western towns in South Dakota provided good amusement. Cowboys would ride their horses into saloons for a drink and they wore six-shooters as if it were a part of their dress. More time was spent drifting north and the country beyond the end of the railroad line held a special charm. Deadwood, South Dakota, Lead City, and Belle Fourche formed a great shipping area for cattle. Steers were shipped

Bill Gollings — The Ranch Hand Who Became An Artist . . .

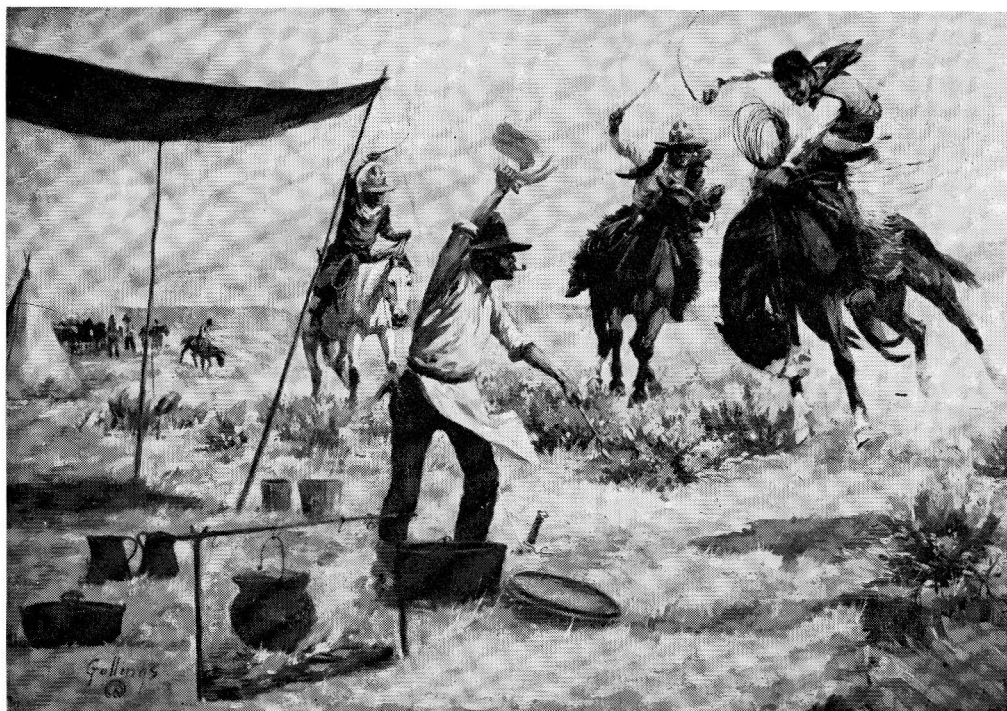
there from Texas and Mexico. The great trail drives from the South were almost a thing of the past, but large outfits still operated.

In 1903 Bill made a few attempts at painting with materials ordered from Montgomery Ward and Company. His brother Dewitt took some of his first work to Sheridan, Wyoming, and showed it to a Mr. W. E. Freeman who ran a furniture store. Freeman was interested and asked Bill to let him show the pictures in his store and he would try to sell them. Later on during the same year while working on a round-up and with little thought in mind of paintings, Gollings received a letter from the furniture dealer in Sheridan enclosing a fifty dollar check and a request for more pictures. Bill quit the round-up, went back to his brother's ranch to paint, to ride line on the Cheyenne reservation and to break horses.

Dewitt, who wished to help his brother in his art, sent some of his work East for an evaluation. The editor of the **Chicago Fine Arts Journal** saw this work, gave Gollings a write-up, and suggested that he come East to study. Preparations were made, money borrowed and

Gollings found himself in Chicago—but not for long. When spring came on, Bill was ready to go home even though he had been at art school for only two months and had won a scholarship. The longing for the West was too great. He lacked travel funds but this problem was solved in a quite unusual manner when he secured a railroad ticket in exchange for a painting. Bill boarded a train for Sheridan, Wyoming.

Back at his brother's ranch, Gollings took up the usual duties of a ranch hand but he was not content; for several years he was to be faced with indecision. Was he to paint halfheartedly or was he to continue at the job of riding for wages? The decision was finally made. He quit his job running beef for the reservation and began his career as a serious artist in 1909. Thereafter, until his death in 1932, Gollings considered himself a full-time artist, but he couldn't resist ranch life and continued to help his brother in the summertime now and then, going on a round-up, or working a week or two "for the fun of it." The painting reproduced here, "Incident in Camp," was probably painted during one of his outings." B. W.



"INCIDENT IN CAMP"

BY BILL GOLLINGS

From Gilcrease Collections

Continued from page 5
to teach a manual training course at the Great Falls high school.

After the death of Dr. Cole, who had been a generous but demanding patron, the Cole collection of Western art was acquired by Thomas Gilcrease, founder of the Gilcrease Museum. The collection includes over 234 paintings by Seltzer and several illustrated letters. The Cole collection, now part of the collection of Tulsa's Gilcrease Museum, has been adjudged one of the finest single aggregates of western art—including work by such men as: Russell, Remington, James, Frank Tenny Johnson, William Leigh and others.

Seltzer's paintings stand as epic scenes, reconstructed, with the eye of the historian—but how does his work fare as art? Perhaps the best criteria for the judgment of art was suggested by Hendrik Willem Van Loon when he said, "What is the artist trying to say? Does he succeed in getting his message across? Were the results worth the effort?" In Seltzer's work, the message is not obscured for it is always simply executed in a straightforward manner. His colors are generally true to nature—although to the viewer not accustomed to the clear vaporless air of the high country his palette seems overly strong. This is especially true of his watercolors. Yet his watercolors are gems of perfection in detail and in color harmony. He was obviously one of the best draftsmen to work in the West at any time in the one-hundred year history of painting in that region. His ability as a draftsman has led some critics to claim a stiffness in his work, yet a careful analysis will indicate that the artist with the seemingly freer style is guilty of distortions never found in Seltzer's painting. Was it worth while? Perhaps only future generations can tell, but it would appear that this is one of the West's great artists.

Seltzer was a devoted family man

with a deep love for his wife and children. Men who really knew him saw through his somewhat brusque exterior and recognized his kind, gentle and somewhat sentimental nature. He was sincere about his work and had a natural love for colors and for creativity. Seltzer continued to paint until the very last although confined much of the time to a wheel chair. He died December 16, 1957. Like most artists, there was a poetry in his work and in his words. The following poem, written by him in 1932, seems an appropriate epitaph for himself as well as for his West. J. T. F.

Where are the days of yesteryears?

They came, they went; but left no trail,

No trail like those we dimly see,
Upon the prairie of today.

But time will tell, and day by day,
These trails will slowly fade away,
As did elusive—yesterday.

CHRONICLER OF THE WEST

Continued from page 6

When Lindneux undertook to record a particular historical incident such as "The Battle of Beecher Island," his drive for accuracy and interest compelled him to collect even the most minute details from eyewitnesses or participants, noting carefully the exact style and manner of dress, the number of people present at the time, the positions of everyone concerned and the precise kind and model of arms worn or used. Then he traveled to the site of the event to recreate the scene in its exact geographical setting.

Although many of Robert Lindneux' paintings are not of such direct historical significance, none are purely ornamental. Each has a fragment of a story drawn from life and fact—some from his own rugged experiences, or those of the men he knew; others from less important incidents or bits of life that he felt were none the less necessary for a

complete picture of early Western Americana, such as his record of "Cattle Rustlers Caught in the Act." Here he has portrayed graphically a common practice in the early days of the open range. The rustling of cattle and changing of brands was a highly developed "art" during those times; and scheming, greedy men, often hiding behind the shield of respectability, developed ingenious methods of "rewriting" brands that were often very difficult to detect. Lindneux has shown the rustlers using a cinch ring to add more lines to an old brand, thus changing it into a new one.

This writer believes that Robert Lindneux' greatest value as an artist has been achieved through his lively nature, his love of adventure, his ability as an interesting and accurate story teller and his excellent training in art. Only a man with his basic background, interest and talent could have taken facts from the Old West which he was almost too late to see and create from them colorful, believable vignettes for posterity. Through Lindneux, we gain insight into the men who shaped the West: the pioneer farmer plowing the first furrow, the Indians in their constant hunt for buffalo, cowboys guarding their herds in a driving blizzard, the pony express rider fleeing attacking Indians, and the placid Indian shepherd seated before an ancient pueblo of the Southwest. L. W.

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