

A PUBLICATION OF THE
THOMAS GILCREASE INSTITUTE
OF AMERICAN HISTORY AND ART
RR 6 • TULSA, OKLAHOMA 74106

XL No 1 1968

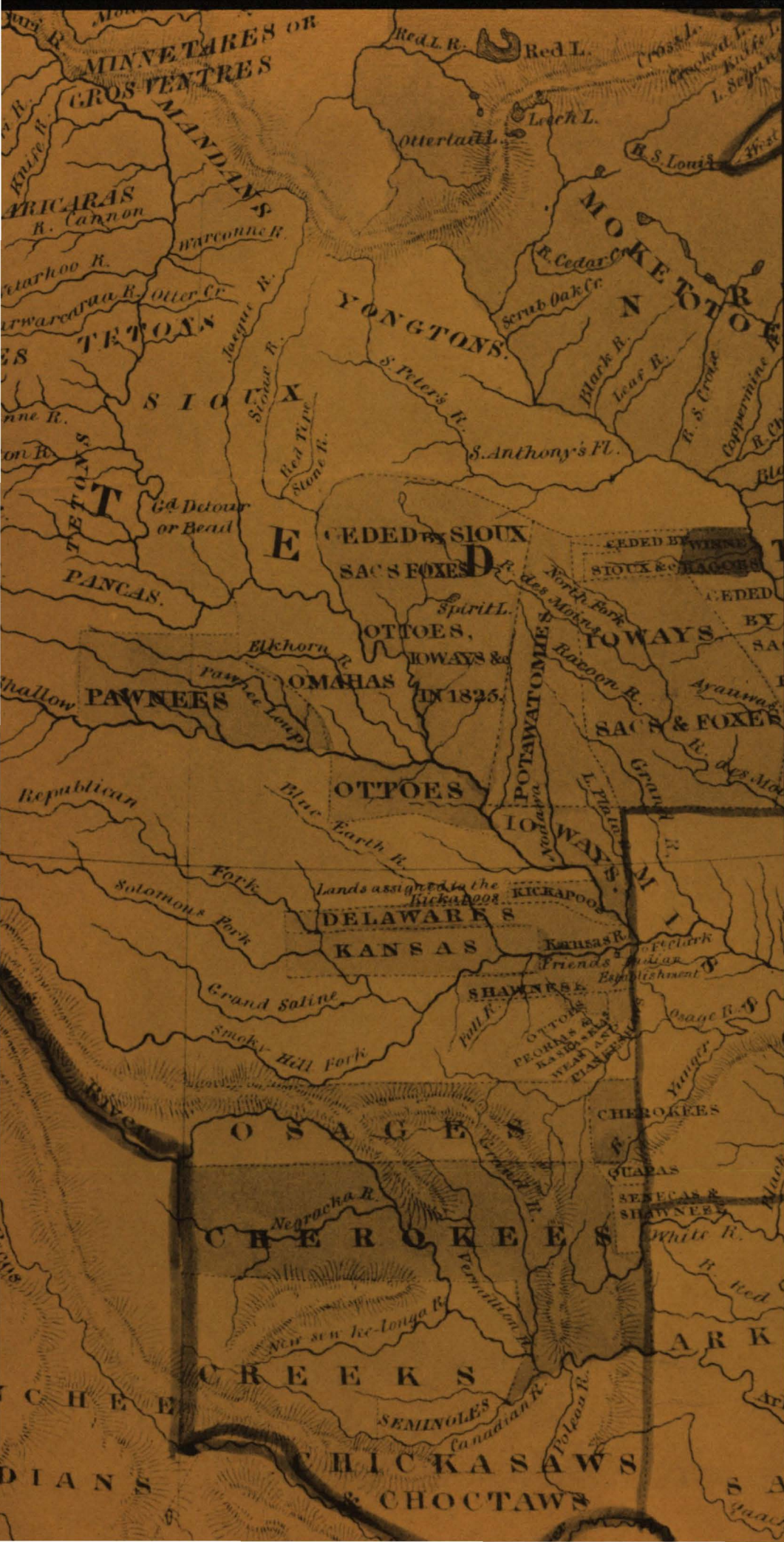
The American Scene



Vol. IX
No. 1
1968

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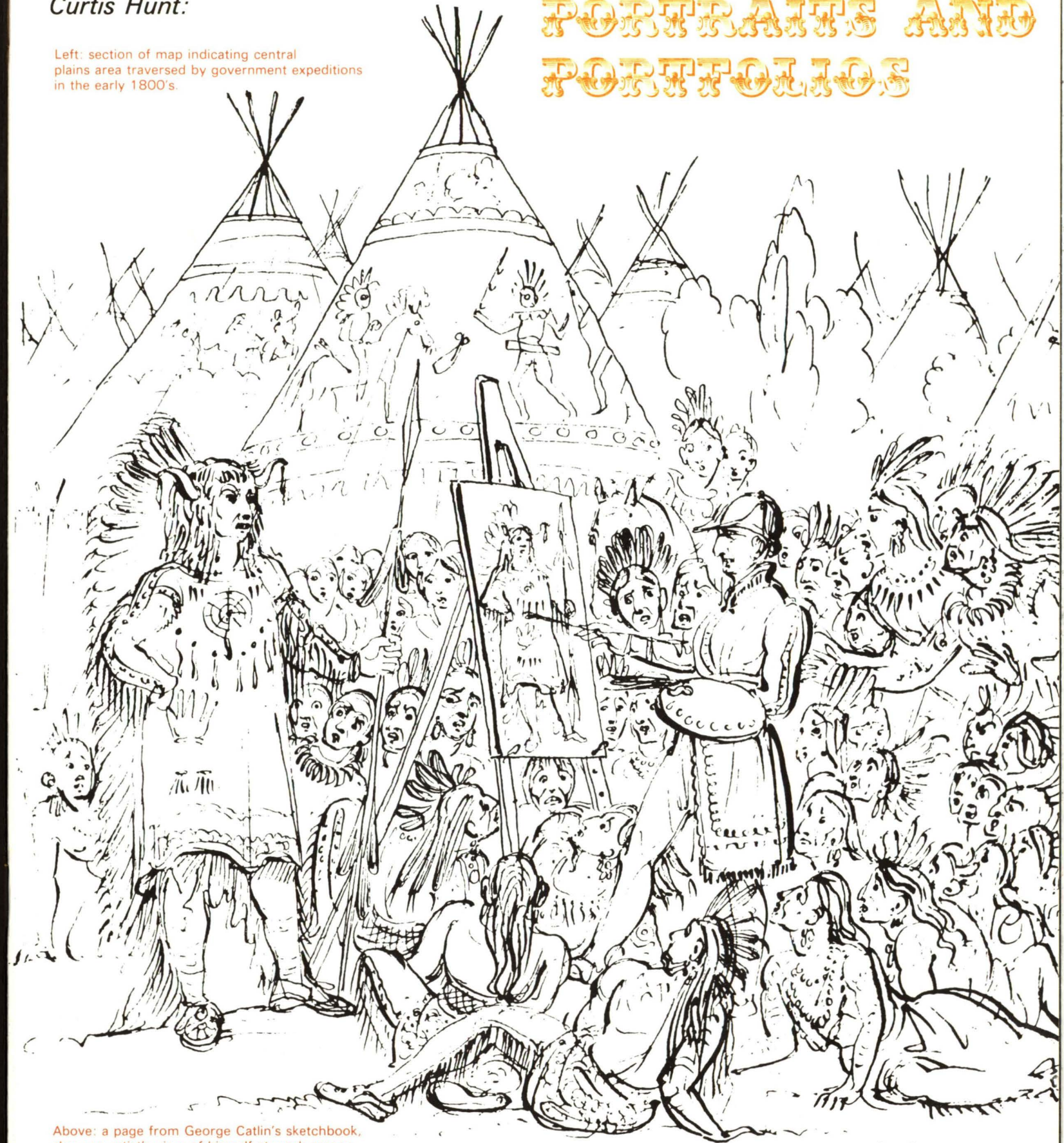
Volume XI, No. 1 of the American Scene, published and copyrighted by the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, an Oklahoma corporation. A membership in the Institute entitles the holder to four issues of the American Scene along with membership privileges. Regular subscription Single issues, (Address: Rural Route #6, Tulsa, Oklahoma).

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A brief review of various reports, both verbal and graphic, concerning life among the Indians of the trans-Mississippi West in the early half of the nineteenth century; researched, written, and prepared for publication in the American Scene by David Curtis Hunt:

PORTRAITS AND PORTFOLIOS

Left: section of map indicating central plains area traversed by government expeditions in the early 1800's.



Above: a page from George Catlin's sketchbook, showing artist's view of himself at work among the Indian tribes.

Success in this world is seldom assured. For the artist it often comes, if at all, only after years of hard work and sometimes painful development. In some instances recognition of his talent rests with a discerning patron or an enthusiastic critic; more often, however, the painter must rely upon his own resourcefulness in order to achieve what he hopes to achieve, encouraged or supported perhaps by his family or a friend willing to act as his agent or promoter.

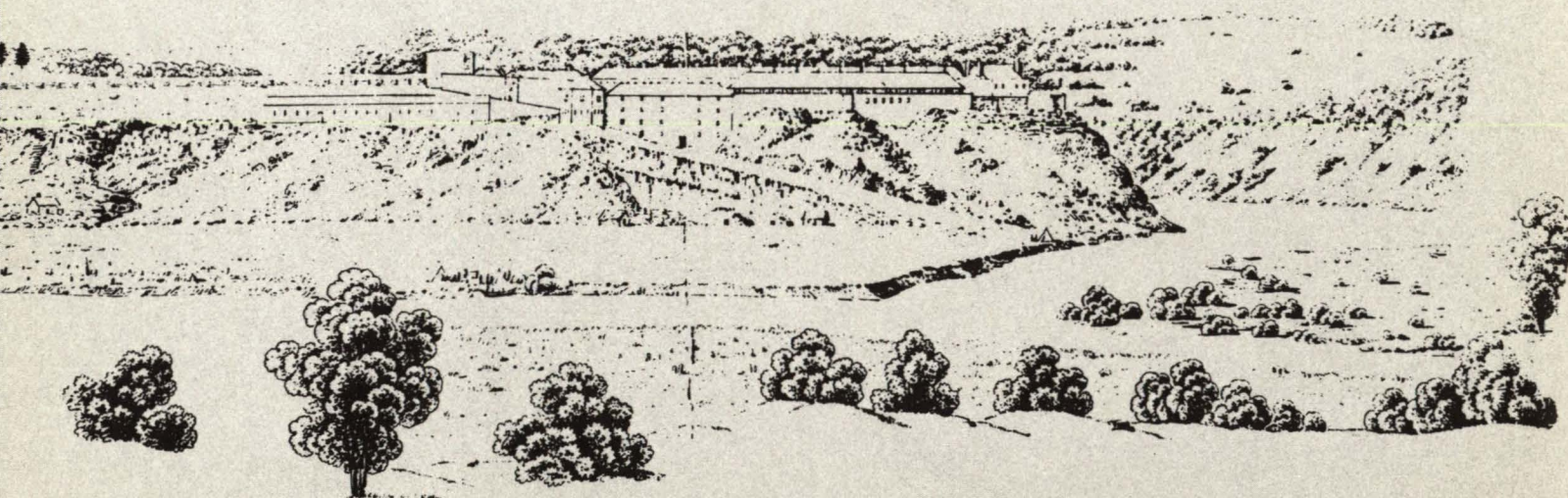
The situation for the artist in America in the opening decades of the nineteenth century was certainly no different, particularly for any who desired to explore the wilds of Louisiana or the distant regions of the Upper Missouri. To be sure, those who were commissioned to accompany government expeditions to the western country as draftsmen or illustrators were to some degree satisfied with the knowledge that their reports would be utilized; but without sponsorship the artist returning from the far frontier often faced the very real problem of what to do with the many sketches and watercolors that filled his bulging portfolio.

Some were able to promote exhibitions of their work in various cities of the East. Others managed to persuade publishers to reproduce their pictures in folio form, thus enabling them to reach a wider audience. Many discovered, however, that they must undertake to exhibit or publish on their own if they would realize any reward for their efforts; and there were as many, perhaps, who never were able to generate appreciable interest in the results of their months or years of labor in the unfriendly wilderness.

Even today historians tend to overlook the accomplishments of these men, feeling that an examination of their works is somewhat disappointing both from the standpoint of art and of historical documentation. Admittedly, not every work included in the portfolios of the western artists is considered to be important for critical or aesthetic reasons. Most of them are, nonetheless, representative of significant trends or developments in the history of American art, works that capsule or reflect an earlier cultural heritage.

It might also be said that they are, with few exceptions, distinctly personal documents; for the artist on the frontier was by no means a disinterested observer of the events he witnessed. And if his pictures seem to report the passing circumstances of his times, they also necessarily speak in the "language" of his times. Thus they may have, in some cases, considerably more to convey to us than simply the particulars of the subject or event that they depict.

Below: a rare view of Fort Snelling near the present St. Paul, Minnesota, by Swiss artist, Peter Rindisbacher. Snelling was among the earliest government outposts established in the western territories, and this sketch represents one of the earliest descriptions of the fort surviving to the present day.



The frontier itself—as a place, an idea, a descriptive term—represented different things to different men, because so many different reasons brought them to the brink of the wilderness in the early days of settlement. To some, of course, it was a new land in which to settle and plant, or perhaps a place of refuge from the poverty, political oppression, or religious intolerance that worked such hardship and common tragedy upon men of earlier centuries. To others it was a wide new world to explore, an unknown wilderness of woods and rivers to discover and name for those who would follow to claim it for their own.

Some came as soldiers to occupy the frontier outpost of the West, to secure the peace and provide protection for the many traders' caravans that crossed the uninhabited lands. Others came as missionaries to educate the ever-retreating Indian tribes, spreading a gospel of brotherly love among those who suffered most from the suspicions, hatreds, and conflicts of interest that characterized encounters between the Indians and the whites.

The territory west of the Mississippi was a wild and dangerous place through which to travel in those days. Most of it was thought by people of that time to be a region unfit for the habitation of civilized men. Throughout much of America's history this notion generally prevailed; and for years the central plains remained a lonely place frequented only by wandering bands of Indians until adventurers of one sort or another pushed inland to stake vast claims to wilderness wealth and, inadvertently, to mark the way for future settlement.

The United States Government was particularly interested in the character and content of the unexplored region beyond its borders. Detailed information was desired concerning the climate, condition, and extent of the western lands. Knowledge of the various Indian nations inhabiting the plains was needed, information as to their friendliness or unfriendliness sought, and reports of their habits requested for study.

Military posts were early established on the prairies, cantonments such as Leavenworth, Fort

Union, and Fort Gibson founded in 1824 near the present site of Muskogee, Oklahoma. Westernmost government outpost at the time of its establishment, Gibson served as the starting point for many expeditions into Indian lands in the 1830's and 40's, and many notable travelers visited this area in the years prior to the Civil War.

Government-sponsored missions to the frontier were common during this period, for throughout the nineteenth century a state of war existed between the United States and one or another of the Indian nations of the West. Many career officers with the army were sent to this area to report on tribal affairs. Professional men in the fields of science or the arts usually accompanied these excursions to observe life among the savage nations and to witness meetings between the warrior chiefs and those sent out to deal with them.

One of the first such expeditions to the western country was that led by Major Stephen Long in 1819. Sent to explore the distant parts of Missouri Territory and to establish, if possible, friendly relations with the Indians along the way, Long met with chiefs of several tribes at a place called Council Bluffs near the present site of Omaha, Nebraska. Also attending this meeting was one Samuel Seymour, an English-born scenic designer who had been sent along to serve as draftsman for the expedition. Seymour accompanied Long for the next three years making landscape studies of the country and sketching portraits of the Indians with whom Long met, and engraved copies of several of his drawings illustrated the first publication of Long's reports as compiled by Edwin James, botanist and geologist for these expeditions, in 1823.

The hardships experienced by those who were engaged to report activities or conditions in this unsettled region are perhaps hard to appreciate today; but James Otto Lewis, also sent out to observe government-Indian councils in the 1820's, describes the inconveniences under which he labored in no certain terms in the foreword to his *Aboriginal Portfolio*, published in 1835.



Depicting a Winnebago war dance, this illustration from McKenney and Hall's 1837 edition of *History of the Indian Tribes of North America* is based upon an earlier sketch by Peter Rindisbacher.



Left: portrait of Appanoosee, Saukie Chief. Below: engraving depicting abduction of a white woman, an early view of Fort Union on the Upper Missouri, and John Wesley Jarvis's oil portrait of Black Hawk and his son.



Attempting to justify the quality of his collection of Indian portraits to his patrons he explains that:

"The great and constantly recurring disadvantages to which the artist is necessarily subject, while travelling through a wilderness, far removed from the abodes of civilization, and in 'pencilling by the way' with the rude materials he may be able to pick up in the course of his progress, will, he hopes, secure for him the approbation, not only of the critic, but of the connoisseur.

"And when it is recollected," Lewis continues, "that the time for holding Indian treaties is generally very limited, that the deepfelt anxieties of the artist to possess a large collection must be no small impediment in the way of his bestowing any considerable share of his time or attention on any one production, together with the rapidity with which he is obliged to labour—he confidently believes, as they are issued in their original state, that whatever imperfections may be discoverable, will be kindly ascribed to the proper and inevitable cause."

Other commentaries go further in praise of the artist abroad in the western territories at this time. In his account of his travels in the interior of North America in the 1830's, German Prince Maximilian of Wied directs the reader's attention to the illustrations by Carl Bodmer which supplement his reports, remarking that "a faithful and vivid picture of those countries and their original inhabitants can never be placed before the eye without the aid of a fine portfolio of plates by the hand of a skillful artist..."

Again, Thomas McKenney and James Hall state similar views in the 1837 edition of their *History of the Indian Tribes of North America*. Crediting an illustration depicting one of the war dances of the Winnebagoes to Peter Rindisbacher—whom they describe as "a young Swiss artist who resided for some years on the frontier and attained a happy facility in sketching both the Indians and the wild animals of that region"—they qualify the importance of such documentation by saying:

"This drawing is considered to be one of his best efforts and is valued not so much as a specimen of art... as on account of the correct impression it conveys of the scene intended to be represented."



McKenney and Hall also present what was probably the prevailing sentiment at that time with respect to the government's treatment of the Indian at the treaty table. Referring in the first chapter of their biographical section to a drawing exhibited some years before by a Tuscarora artist named Cusick, they recall the scene depicted at the moment of the settling of terms of peace between a native chief and an American army officer.

Describing the Indian in the sketch as reaching out to take a scroll from the officer, who stands opposite with his musket and bayonet pointed at the other's breast, they remark that "it was an affecting appeal from the Indian to the white man; for although the Indians have never been compelled by direct force to part with their lands, yet we have triumphed over them by superior power and intelligence, and there is a moral truth in that which represents the savage as yielding from fear what his judgment and his attachments would have withheld."

The editors go on to say, however, that they do not mean to suggest that all our colonial and national transactions with the Indians have been unjust:



"Nor can we in justice charge, exclusively, upon the white population, the corrupting influence of their intercourse with the Indian tribes. There is to be presupposed no little vice and bad propensity among the savages, evinced in the facility with which they become the willing captives and ultimate victims of that 'knowledge of evil' which our people have imparted to them.

"The treachery, also, of the Indian tribes," they continue, "their untameable ferocity, their brutal mode of warfare... have too often assumed the most terrific forms of wickedness and destruction towards our confiding emigrants. And it is difficult to decide between parties thus placed in positions of antagonism, involving a long series of mutual aggressions, inexcusable on either side, upon any exact principle of rectitude..."

"However," they add, "the burthen of guilt must be conceded to lie upon the party having the ad-

vantages of power, civilization, and Christianity, whose position places them in a paternal relationship with these scattered children of the forest.' And they conclude in a somewhat more sympathetic vein:

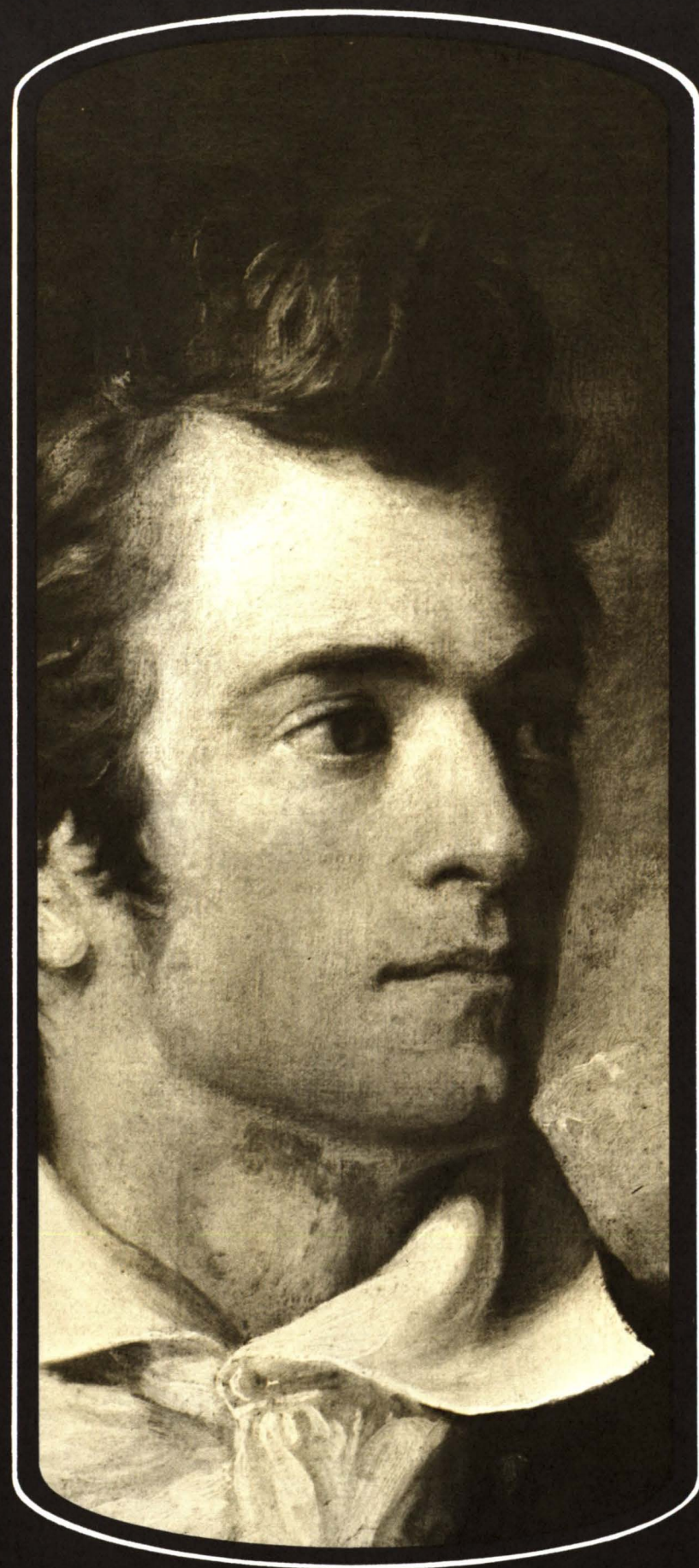
All the controlling interests of the tribes tend to instill in them sentiments of fear, of dependence, of peace and even friendship towards their more powerful neighbors; and it has chiefly been when we have chafed them to madness by incessant and unnecessary encroachment, and by unjust treaties, or when they have been seduced from their fidelity by the enemies of our country, that they have been so unwise as to provoke our resentment by open hostility.

These wars have uniformly terminated in new demands on our part, in ever growing accessions from their continually diminishing soil, until the small reservations which they have been permitted to retain in the bosom of our territory are scarcely large enough to support the living, or hide the dead, of these miserable remnants of once powerful tribes...



Above sketch showing Indian-government council session is one of twelve original Rindisbacher drawings in the Gilcrease collection.

Below: Charles Bird King's oil portrait of Kee-o-kuk, First War Chief of the Sankys, is one of a number of King portraits in the Gilcrease catalog dating from the 1820's.



Self portrait by artist, George Catlin, original oil in the Gilcrease collection

Of all the reporters on the American frontier in the early half of the last century, perhaps none documented wilderness life with such a high sense of purpose, or portrayed the Indians of the West with more evident respect, than Philadelphia artist, George Catlin.

Having abandoned an earlier law practice to apply his hand to painting, Catlin had been following his new vocation with moderately increasing success for several years—"during which time," he says of himself, "my mind was continually reaching for some new branch or enterprise of the art, on which to devote a lifetime of enthusiasm"—when a delegation of some ten or fifteen western chieftains arrived in the city and were exhibited publicly at Charles Willson Peale's museum.

Reflecting upon the effects that "black and blue cloth, and civilization" seemed to be having upon the hapless savage, he relates that he thereupon resolved to give up his current occupation as a gentleman painter, equipped himself for a new adventure, and set out in 1830 for the wilds of Wisconsin declaring:

"The history and customs of such a people are, themselves, worthy of the lifetime of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life shall prevent me from becoming their historian."

"Man, in the simplicity and loftiness of his nature," he continues in the preface to his *North American Indian Portfolio*, "unrestrained and unfettered by 'the guises of art,' is surely the most beautiful model for the painter, and the country from which he hails is surely 'the best school of arts in the world' . . ."

Fortified with such a view, he ventured the following year into "the vast and pathless wilds familiarly denominated 'the Great Far West,'" as he tells it, "inspired with an enthusiastic hope and reliance that I could meet and overcome all the hazards and privations of a life devoted to the production of a literal and graphic delineation of the living manners, customs, and character of an interesting people who are rapidly passing away from the face of the Earth; lending a hand to a dying nation who have no historians or biographers of their own to portray with fidelity their native looks and history; thus snatching from approaching oblivion what could be saved for the benefit of posterity and perpetuating it as a just monument to the memory of a truly lofty and noble race."

Traveling the rounds of Indian encampments west of St. Louis with the former explorer, William Clark, who was then serving as Superintendent of Indian Affairs for the western tribes, Catlin made some of the first pictorial studies of the Pawnees and others in that area. He also resided for a time at Fort Leavenworth painting the now-forgotten Mandans, Minataries, and members of those nations which had lately been pushed westward with the advance of settlement in the Northeast.

In the summer of 1832 he traveled up the Missouri River more than 2000 miles to Fort Union near the mouth of the Yellowstone, where Prince Maximilian and Carl Bodmer were to venture the following year. During this trip he began making sketches of Indian village life and scenes of hunting and other amusements common among the warlike Western Sioux, Cheyenne, and Blackfoot tribes.

NOTE: A sketchbook which Catlin carried on this trip is preserved in the Gilcrease Library. It is filled with hundreds of drawings also reproduced as prints or paintings and as line engravings in his *Illustrations of the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indian* (2 vols., by the author; London, 1841) Gilcrease has first and subsequent editions of this work, as well.



Catlin, "Buffalo Hunt—Chase"

Filled with a sense of excitement for his mission, he moved constantly from place to place among the Indian settlements with his palette and paints, brushes, canvases, and all his other clutter of artist's gear. In 1834 he was at Fort Gibson painting portraits among the Cherokee, Creek, and Choctaw nations recently removed to that region from their ancestral lands east of the Mississippi. During that same summer he also accompanied the Dodge-Leavenworth expedition of U.S. Dragoons on a wide tour of the area, visiting the wild tribes of the Comanche, the Kiowa, and the Wichita peoples at their various scattered encampments.

Not yet satisfied with his growing collection, Catlin next traveled through the Upper Mississippi and Great Lakes regions during the years of 1835 and 1836 making portraits of the Ojibway, Winnebago, and Eastern Sioux in that part of the country. By 1838 he had visited some forty-eight tribes, according to his own reckoning, and had made from life more than 325 portraits of Indian hunters and horsemen, maidens, warriors, and chieftains, as well as 200 other studies depicting all the action and pageantry of Indian life.

A remarkable record, to be sure, and possibly the largest single collection of such scenes ever assembled by one man, these paintings were taken with various ethnological specimens and exhibited by the artist throughout the eastern cities of the United States, during which time he managed to attract considerable attention to himself as an authority on the habits and customs of the American Indian of his day. Encouraged by his success and the urgings of a young English friend named John Murray who had accompanied him on one of his western tours, Catlin took his show to London in 1839 where it was exhibited at the Egyptian Hall in Piccadilly for the next five years. During this period he also toured the continent and acted as sponsor and showman for a party of nine Ojibway Indian dancers who had been sent across the Atlantic by a friend in the States.

An article in the London Chronicle, reprinted in Great Britain's *Annual Register* for the year 1843, refers to a performance by this unusual group; but the artist's paintings are nowhere mentioned in this review. Indeed, it seems that the European public was generally more interested in Catlin's real-life Indians than in his collection of rare scenes and portraits; and several contemporaneous accounts exist today which shed an interesting light upon the reception Catlin experienced at the hands of some members of his English audience.

Not all these reports are favorable, although Catlin would have had his critics believe that his traveling show was everywhere an instant and popular success. Charles Dickens, for example, describing Catlin in a review appearing in *Reprinted Pieces* as "an energetic and earnest man," says that:

Featured below are Catlin portraits and sketches selected from the Gilcrease Institute's fine art and folios collections. Specifically, they are as follows:

- (a) watercolor portrait of Comanche Chief, "Little Spaniard"
- (b) portrait of Blackfoot chief, Stu-mick-o-sucs, from the artist's sketchbook.
- (c) watercolor portrait of Teh-toot-sa, Kiowa chief.
- (d) Clermont, son of old Chief Clermont of the Osages.
- (e) watercolor portrait of war chief, Black Hawk.
- (f) Ee-he-a-duck-chee-a, Crow chief; signed by artist, 1836.

- (g) Similar views of a place called the "Grand Detour" on the Upper Missouri.
- (h) Buffalo Dance: from Catlin's *North American Indian Portfolio* (London, 1844)
- (i) Another Blackfoot chief in Catlin's sketchbook.
- (j) Page from Catlin's sketchbook, dated 1832-34.
- (k) Ball Players: from Catlin's Indian Portfolio.
- (l) Portrait of Chief Red Jacket, believed to be the earliest of all Indian portraits by the artist.



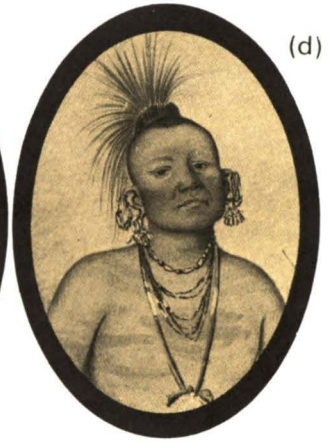
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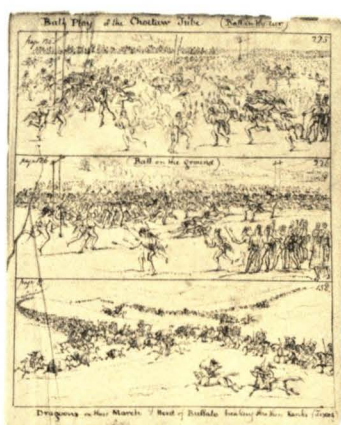
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Wi-jin-jon, Assiniboin Chief—"Going to Washington and Returning to his home": plate from Catlin's *North American Indian Portfolio*. (London, 1844).



Portraits of the nine Ojibways who toured Europe with Catlin in the 1840's.



Preliminary sketch and finished portrait of Mah-to-toh-pa, Mandan chief, left. Compare these two illustrations with the drawing on page 1.

"With his party of Indians squatting or spitting on the table before him, or dancing their miserable jigs after their own dreary manner, he called, in all good faith, upon his civilized audience to take notice of their symmetry and grace, their perfect limbs, and the exquisite expression of their pantomime; and his civilized audience, in all good faith, complied and admired.

"Whereas," he continues, "...they were wretched creatures... and very poorly formed; and as men and women possessed by any power of truthful dramatic expression by means of action, they were no better than the chorus at an Italian Opera in England—and would have been worse, if such a thing were possible."

Historian A. N. L. Munby also transcribes another eye-witness account of the same nature in a chapter devoted to Catlin appearing in a more recently published study. He quotes a nineteenth century London journalist by the name of Madden as saying with regard to Catlin's dancing savages:

"They gave us some of their dances, sham fights, etc., but I must say I was disappointed at the result. The interpreter did not speak a syllable the whole time, and is one of the stupidest looking persons I ever saw.

"Altogether," he concludes, "it was a dear five shillings worth..."

It was while he was in London that Catlin published his first book: *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Condition of the North American Indian* (2 vols., 1841). Other publications followed shortly in which he reproduced his collection of pictures and expounded upon his experiences, observations, and theories concerning the present state and doubtful future of the dwindling tribes in America. Being of necessity limited editions, some of these volumes are now extremely rare, such as his *North American Indian Portfolio of Hunting Scenes and Sporting Amusements* published in Imperial Folio in 1844. All, however, provide fascinating material for study, and his accounts of his adventures with his Indian troop in England and France are especially entertaining as described by the artist in *Notes of Eight Years' Travels and Residence in Europe*, published in 1848.

Again while in London, Catlin became acquainted with a wealthy and eccentric collector of rare books, manuscripts, and other historical artifacts by the name of Sir Thomas Phillipps. Interested in the artist's plans for publication of his experiences among the western tribes in America, Phillipps purchased quite a number of Catlin's portraits. Included in the correspondence between Sir Thomas and George Catlin recently donated to the Gilcrease Library by Mr. William S. Bailey, Jr. of Tulsa, Oklahoma, are numerous references to these purchases as well as to other matters pertaining to Catlin's concern for the ultimate fate of his collection.

A. N. L. Munby, historiographer of the Phillipps Library Collection, mentions that Sir Thomas owned at least 128 of Catlin's pictures. He also relates that at one time Catlin apparently tried to persuade Phillipps to buy his entire collection—or at least receive it on terms of a mortgage—in hopes that he might thereby agitate the Congress of the United States to pass a bill then before the House to purchase it for the National Archives.

In a letter to Phillipps dated February 17, 1846, Catlin expressed his urgent need for money, explaining:

"There has been a bill before the Congress for 5 years for giving me 100,000 dols. for it, but there is so much apathy with them and so little soul for works of art or history, that I am now rather anxious to sell the collection abroad to vex them."

He mentions again in another letter written on August 25, 1848, that "the Government of the U. States are now agitating the question again, and it seems a pity that so much time should be lost and the best part of the energies of my life thrown away, as well as money and labour already expended!"

Phillipps, however, was either unwilling or unable to advance the funds needed to help Catlin in his enterprise, and so the artist was left with the problem of what to do next in order to promote interest in his work.

Catlin's constant references to the state of his finances suggest the difficulty he experienced while on the road and in Europe with his traveling show. He was continually short of cash, it seems, and spent much of his energy upon schemes for settling his debts, which probably explains why he copied and recopied so many of his paintings. Munby himself remarks that since the artist spent much of the latter part of his life reproducing his earlier works for sale, it is difficult to determine precisely which paintings are referred to in much of the Catlin-Phillipps correspondence. In any case, the bulk of Phillipps' collection of Catlin portraits are now the property of the Thomas Gilcrease Institute, included in a larger inventory which numbers some 137 watercolor studies and seventy-six variously sized oils.

A bound folio of replicas of his earlier field sketches, executed in watercolor in 1849, is also preserved in the Gilcrease Library along with various printed exhibit catalogs, one of the artist's original sketchbooks, and the seventy-odd letters from Catlin to Sir Thomas written between the years of 1840 and 1858. Many of these contain long lists of his paintings on exhibit at that time, of which a number are now part of the Gilcrease collection or outlined in rougher form in the artist's studies.

A set of forty-two watercolor portraits, part of the original lot of seventy purchased by Thomas Gilcrease from a sale of Phillipps' collections, are of special interest; for they seem to be the same as those mentioned in another letter written by Catlin to Phillipps from Paris on January 1, 1852. This letter reads in brief:

My labours and works must pay my way, and I am ready to sacrifice anything I have to ease me along in this temporary difficulty. I have now with me a portfolio of 70 water colour portraits of distinguished Indians, every one of which were painted from life, fully coloured, with trinkets, weapons, costumes etc. complete, which I know would please you more than anything I possess... These water colour portraits are all mounted with great care onto tinted Bristol Boards, and ruled, and prepared for a drawing room table, or for framing. This collection, with many other drawings etc. were left with my only sister in N. York, and since her death have been forwarded to me, at my request. I enclose you herein a list of these portraits.

No money could scarcely tempt me to bestow the same labour I have on these drawings, nor is there any other person on Earth in whose possn. I should feel so much disposed to see them preserved as in your

own; and nothing would induce me to part with them at all, except the absolute pinch I am suffering under at this moment for a few pounds to set me at liberty, when I can take up my brushes & easily pay my way, for I have several orders in England which I can soon execute.

The above-mentioned portraits are among the best of Catlin's work extant. Backed by the evidence in the letter quoted above it would seem that they are, as well, the initial set of studies described by the artist to his patron. Many of Catlin's oils are frankly done during the stress of the moment and have very little to offer from the aesthetic point of view other than to reflect, perhaps, the great excitement he seems to have felt for his subjects. But the technical skill revealed in these small watercolors renders them singularly valuable with respect to possible appraisals of his success as an artist, suggesting that with sufficient attention given to his work he was capable of excellent results.

Examination also suggests that these are individual portraits, not generalized studies—and if we may trust his own statement in the matter, the most forthright and spontaneous impressions of those native American personalities whom he encountered on his travels in the Far West. Certainly, they are the only existing portraits of many of the persons represented, and when all else is considered, express to the viewer of today at least something of that sympathy and admiration which George Catlin accorded the American Indian more than 130 years ago.

Reproductions of additional scenes and portraits by Catlin are shown below. The line drawings are derived from originals in the artist's field sketchbook; the others from his published folios or set of watercolor portraits described in the accompanying article.

- (a) Tuche, Cherokee war chief, painted by Catlin in 1834.
- (b) U. S. Dragoons meeting Indians near Ft. Gibson, 1834.
- (c) Osage chiefs: Catlin's watercolor folio, 1849.
- (d) The artist shooting buffalo with Colt's revolving pistol.
- (e) "Buffalo Hunt": plate from artist's 1844 folio.
- (f) "Attacked by Grizzlies": plate from the 1844 folio.
- (g) Watercolor portrait of Sky-se-ro-ka, second chief of the Pawnee Picts.



(b)

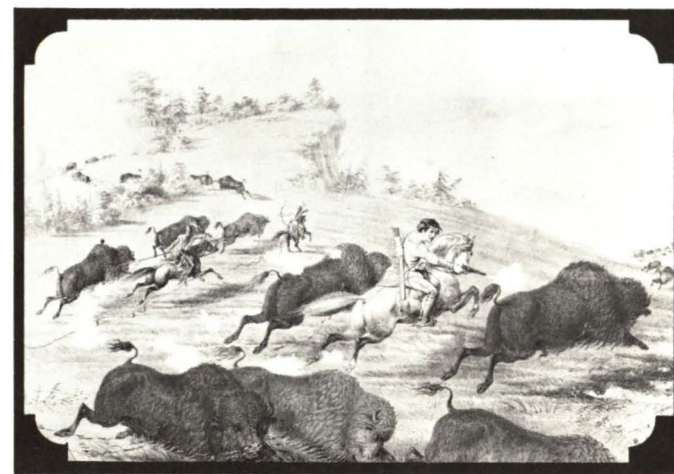


(a)



(c)

(d)



(f)



(e)



(g)





"Mandan Indians": plate from the Bodmer folio accompanying Prince Maximilian's *Travels in the Interior of North America* (London, 1843).



Left: "Interior of a Mandan hut," lithograph after Bodmer. Below are views of a Mandan village and interior of a Mandan medicine lodge found in George Catlin's sketchbook (1832-34).



Catlin seems nowadays to be regarded as something of a controversial figure insofar as his accomplishments are concerned, and is often criticized among cultural or ethnological circles as having been a poor artist and an even poorer historian. Nevertheless, he continues to maintain his singular position in the annals of frontier reporting, for no other man of his time described quite so many scenes of the trans-Mississippi West in those early days before commerce and industry penetrated that region.

Indeed, his pictures in large part are among the only surviving evidences we now have which indicate to us the habits and appearances of many of the native tribes as they lived before the coming of civilization; for even at the time Catlin moved among the Indian settlements with his brush and sketchpad, many of the lesser nations already were dwindling away in numbers, the victims of war, displacement, and disease.

Most of the Indians east of the Mississippi had surrendered their lands by this time, thereby losing, as well, their principle means of subsistence. While many accepted removal to the western reserves, some remained only to find themselves gradually crowded into smaller and smaller areas where they sank in time into indolence and despair. Their dream of a separate state or territory of their own in the East had come to an abrupt end with the death of Tecumseh, forceful leader of the Shawnee Confederacy; and following the defeat in 1832 of the warrior-statesman, Black Hawk, the last of the nations of the Old Northwest were removed from that region.

Between the years of 1835 and 1845 the remainder of the Five Civilized Tribes in the southeastern United States, except for a few scattered and indomitable bands of Seminoles and Creeks, were resettled in Indian Territory west of the Mississippi where the hope of an independent Indian state continued to survive until they became involved in the controversies of the War between the States. The wild tribes still hunted the buffalo on the western plains throughout this period, but even their days were numbered as the advance of civilization continued relentlessly towards the Rockies and beyond.

The Kansas, the Otoes, and the Arikaris visibly declined, while others perished with the destruction of their hunting lands and food supply or as the result of intermarriage and tribal dissolution until they disappeared altogether as a people or distinct group. Fatal contact with the Anglo-American settlers claimed many tribes; however, this contact was not always of a kind so obvious or deliberate as that suggested by the raids and massacres dramatized on television today.

The fate of the Mandans is a striking case in point. Now forgotten perhaps by most historians, it is an instance well documented in Prince Maximilian's version of his travels up the Missouri River. Referring to portraits of this tribe by Carl Bodmer which illustrate his journal, he says in the foreword:

"Authentic and impartial accounts of the Indians of the Upper Missouri are now especially valuable, if the information we have since received is well founded: namely, that to the many evils introduced by the whites among those tribes, a most destructive epidemic—small-pox—has been added, and a great part of them exterminated!"

H. Evans Lloyd also refers to this disaster in his own preface to the English translation of Maximilian's travels, reproducing the contents of a letter written from New Orleans, dated June 6, 1838, which describes in vivid detail the sufferings the Indians of the northern prairies were experiencing at that time as a result of their exposure to the infection.

"We have, from the trading posts on the western frontier of the Missouri," quotes Lloyd, "the most frightful accounts of the ravages of small-pox among the Indians. The destroying angel has visited these unfortunate sons of the wilderness with terrors never before known, and has converted the extensive hunting grounds, as well as the peaceful settlements of these tribes, into desolate and boundless cemeteries!"



Interior of Medicine or Mystery Lodge of Mandan Nation

Relating that the disease was communicated by someone on board a steamer bound with presents from the U. S. Government to the Indians in the vicinity of Fort Union, the letter goes on to explain that it first broke out in June, 1837, among the Mandans a few miles below Fort Leavenworth, and that it quickly spread in all directions, sweeping away that entire nation in one season with the exception of thirty persons.

"Very few of those who were attacked recovered their health," continues the correspondent; "but when they saw all their relations buried and the pestilence still raging . . . life became a burden to them, and they put an end to their wretched existence, either with their knives and muskets, or by precipitating themselves from the summit of the rock near their settlement. The prairie all around is a vast field of death, covered with unburied corpses, and spreading for miles around, pestilence and infection."

The Assiniboin and Blackfoot tribes are also mentioned as stricken, and nations as far away as the trading posts of the Hudson's Bay Company. And the unhappy commentary concludes with:

No language can picture the scene of desolation which the country presents. In whatever direction we go, we see nothing but the melancholy wrecks of human life. The tents are still standing on every hill, but no rising smoke announces the presence of human beings, and no sounds but the croaking of the raven and howling of the wolf interrupt the awful silence.

It seems to be irrevocably written in the book of fate, that the race of red men shall be wholly extirpated in the land in which they ruled the undisputed masters, till the rapacity of the whites brought to their shores the murderous fire-arms, the enervating, ardent spirits, and the all-destructive pestilence of the small-pox. According to the most recent accounts, the number of Indians who have been swept away by the small-pox on the western frontier of the United States amounts to more than 60,000.



"Offering of the Mandans"—near Mandan "village of the dead." Plate from the Bodmer folio accompanying Maximilian's *Travels*, 1843.

Under just such circumstances did a great many primitive peoples of the world perish during the course of the past two hundred years. In one way or another they suffered and by one means or another disappeared, the admonitions of more sensitive or far-sighted men notwithstanding. Some historians have suggested that perhaps in the case of the American Indian such a fate was inevitable. Others declare that it was inexcusable. But regardless of the judgments of the present day, it seems all too apparent that for those "children of Nature" who encountered the ways of civilized men in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was no turning away from the conflicts, sorrows, and tragedy that eventually ensued.

Most of the artists or journalists who recorded life among the shrinking nations in America were aware that they captured impressions of a swiftly passing scene. George Catlin, in particular, was distressed by the evidences he witnessed on every hand that the Indians were threatened with extinction. But it may have been something more, as well—some restless mood or longing against all common sense, perhaps—that urged him to forsake his comfortable career at home and set out on so unlikely an enterprise as that to which he devoted all those years of his life.

As he said of himself, that even while enjoying a growing reputation as a portrait painter in the East, he was continually casting about for some new, fresh motive or idea "on which to devote a lifetime of enthusiasm." And whether or not he realized his dreams, at last, or achieved the success and acclaim he hoped for—yet he did succeed, at least in part, in living up to that vision he had of himself as a man "lending a hand to a dying nation who have no historians or biographers of their own. . . ."

Today his portraits of these vanished tribes are almost all that remains to remind us of their "native looks and history," or to recall to us a way of life as it was lived among a fierce, free people in the days before

European civilization intruded into their unsuspecting world. No one before or after him managed to produce such a documentary of his observations and experiences in the field; and until that distant day when perhaps even the memory of those first inhabitants of this hemisphere has been forgotten, his pictures will continue to serve as a unique and certain supplement to our knowledge of those times.

In later years Catlin returned again to Europe and toured South America, as well, before his death in 1872. An oil painting depicting the nesting grounds of the flamingo is included in the Gilcrease collection, representative of the artist's lesser known works dating from this period.

Rarer still is his self-portrait included in the Gilcrease inventory, and also his very first Indian portrait—that of Chief Red Jacket of the Senecas—painted in watercolor in 1826, some four years before he started forth upon his western tour.

First editions of all his major publications are listed in the files of the Gilcrease Library, as well as the other items already mentioned. These folios and reports, together with other and related sources of information to be found in the Gilcrease archives, were very useful in compiling the preceding article. These sources are listed below.

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