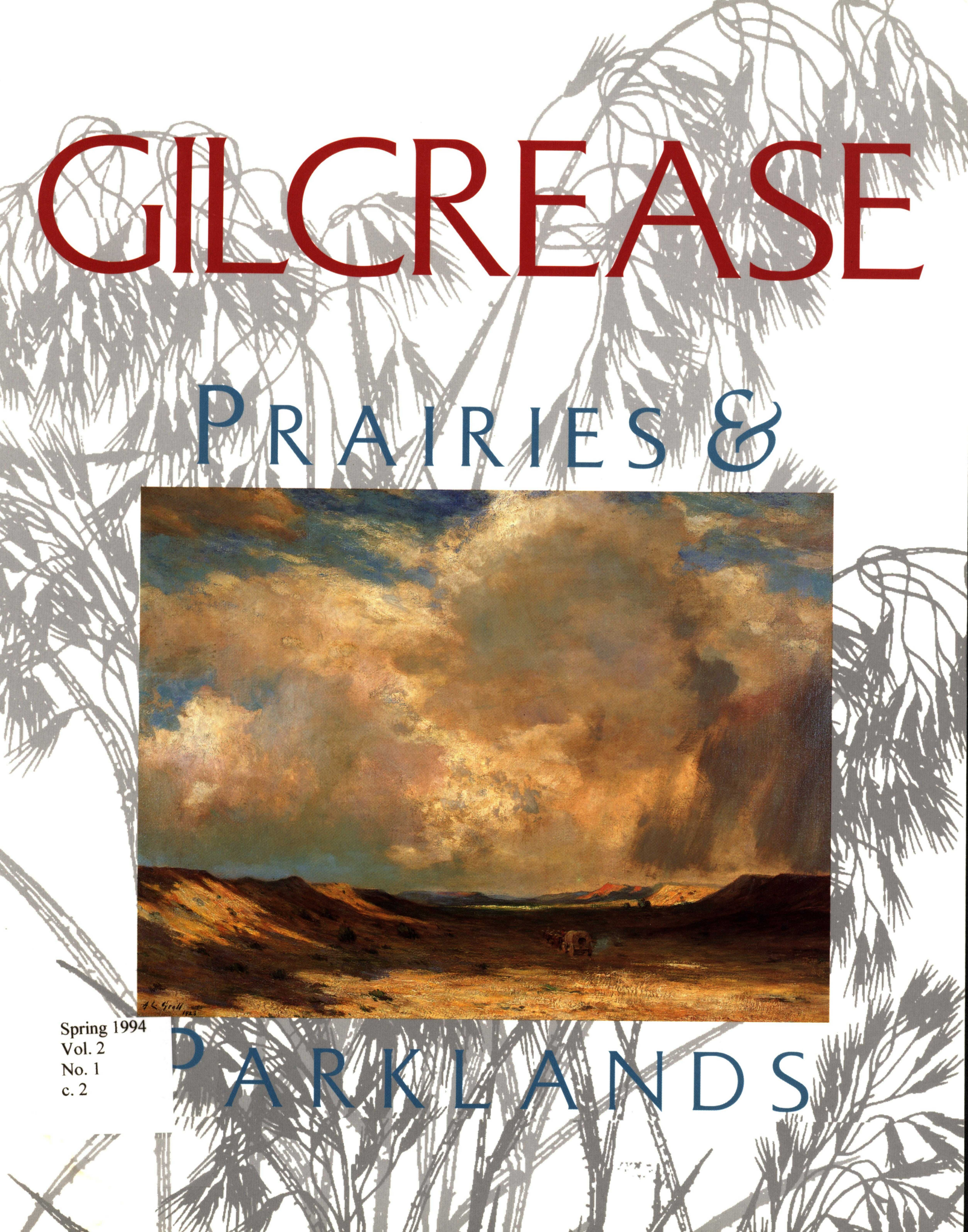




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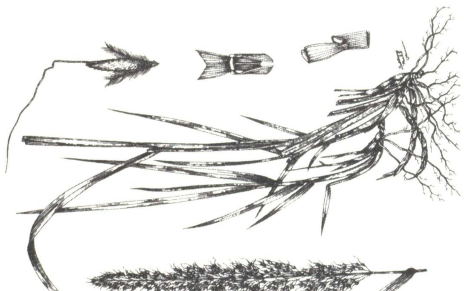
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PARKLANDS

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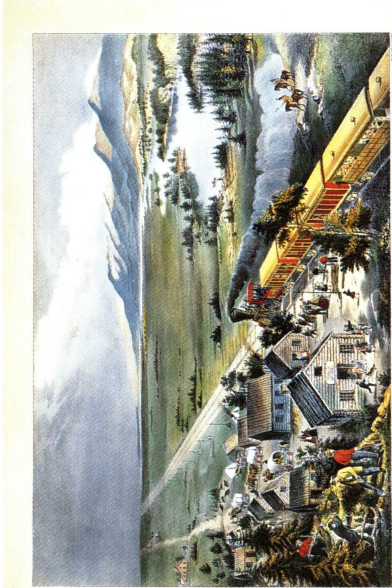


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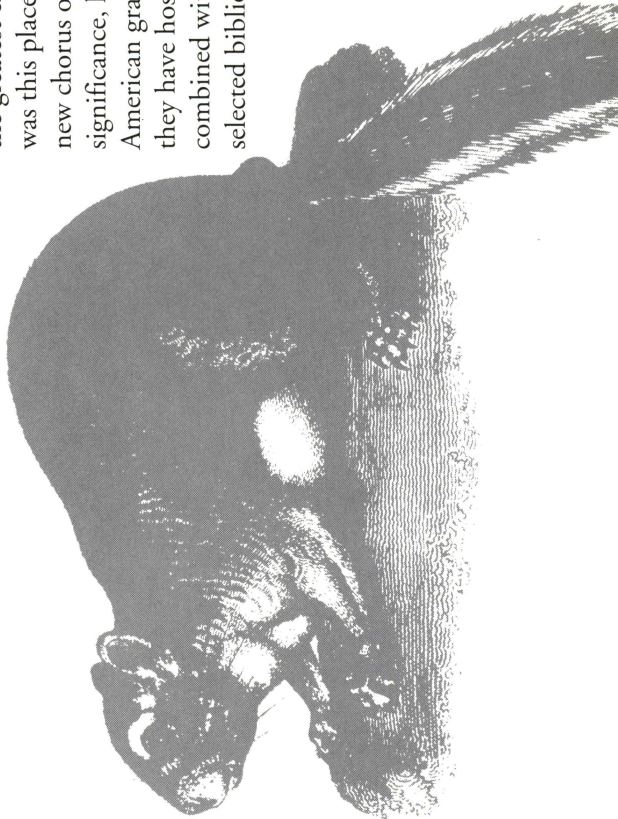
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WILLIAM HENRY JACKSON. BY ROBERT HARRIS FOR THE MUSEUM.

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The Dominion of Grasses

The heartlands of the United States once were covered with the greatest expanse of native grasslands in the world. What was this place called prairie? In contemporary literature, a new chorus of voices has combined to reconsider the significance, history, and rough beauties of the North American grasslands and the varieties of human experience they have hosted. Excerpts from recent writings are combined with images from the Gilcrease Collection and a selected bibliography.

EDITED BY CAROL HARALSON
AND PAULA HALE ELIOT

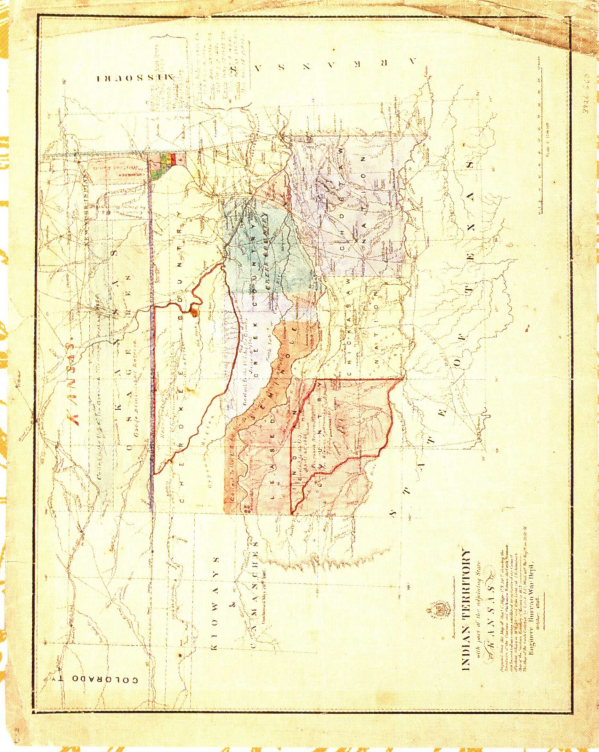


P O R T F O L I O

Early Maps of the North American Plains

As far as the eye could see they rolled on in every direction, immense beyond imagining, apparently featureless but for occasional outcroppings of stone or corpses of trees. How did the early cartographers lay the grid of human consensus we call a map over this unmarked expanse of turf?

JOHN L. ALLEN



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IDENTIFICATION OF GRASSES ON INSIDE FRONT COVER, ROW BY ROW FROM TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT: alkali sacaton, downy brome, Indiangrass, little bluestem, redtop bent, big bluestem, buffalograss, timothy, wild oat. Printed in Canada.

Prairies and Parklands

THE NATURAL
BRIDGE

*“Though the sides of this bridge
are provided in some parts with a
parapet of fixed rocks, yet few
men have resolution to walk to
them and look over into the
abyss. . . . It is impossible for the
emotions, arising from the
sublime, to be felt beyond what
they are here: so elevated, so light,
and springing, as it were up to
heaven, the rapture of the
spectator is really indescribable!”*

THOMAS JEFFERSON, 1785

ROBERT HINSHELWOOD
Natural Bridge, Virginia
Color engraving
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 1526.101

For those of us who grew up in the essentially horizontal landscapes of the central and western United States, distance is defined not as the number of freeway exits to our destination, nor as the names of pedestrian crossings to the neighborhood grocery; distance is that hazy veil of blue between us and the nighthawks dining in midair at dusk, or between us and the nearest hilltop, which may be thirty miles away. Distance is a single white stripe on the blacktop running sideways across Kansas.

What lay between early settlers embarking on the prairie and the communities they sought to establish was a sea of grass. A traveler moving east to west first crossed tallgrass prairies, then, as the area grew drier somewhere around the hundredth meridian, mixed-grass prairies and the short turf of the Great Plains. At some latitudes a rough carpet of short, dry grasses rolled all the way across the continent to the Pacific coastline.

James Galvin, in his book *The Meadow*, tells a story recounted by the son of one of those westward migrants. As the family made its way across the immense, unmarked prairie, the boy’s father, once a sailor, cursed himself for having sold his wayfinding instruments. Without compass or astrolabe, he tied a rope to the back of the wagon and posted his son on watch. Day after day, the boy stared backward at that trailing rope. If it curved a hands-breadth, he shouted to his father who then knew the wagon was off course.

To that young traveler, the face of wilderness was a grassy pelt furrowed by a worn length of twisted hemp. To other immigrants, it was a rock cliff, or the dark beneath the trees. To a Plains Indian on the dry edge of the rolling tide of Euroamerican culture, there was no “wild” in wilderness — homeland had tribal borders, and the grassland was a familiar place.

The idea of the wild and the tame in nature, and our relationship to both, has changed continuously over time. Those changes have been recorded in art, which, in turn, has conditioned our perceptions of what is comely, what is ideal, what aspects of nature are friendly to our intentions. Even the very idea of “nature” as something different from ourselves has a recent history. In “Wilderness, Garden, Park,” Joan Carpenter Troccoli traces our changing attitudes toward nature through art, offering examples from the Gilcrease Collection. Troccoli’s observations are complemented by a look at contemporary attitudes in “Dominion of Grasses,” a compilation of excerpts from recent writings about the prairie, combined with works from the collection and we conclude this issue with a crow’s-eye view of the exploits of 19th-century plains cartographers.

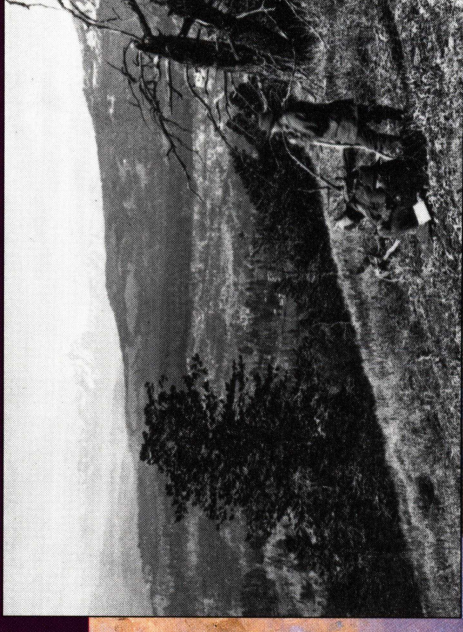
So we tie a rope to the wagon and set a westward course across the limitless terrain of art and ideas. We hope you enjoy the journey. ~ CLH



JOAN CARPENTER TROCCOLI

Wilderness, Garden, Park

Changing Visions of the Wild



WILLIAM R. LEIGH
Grand Canyon
Oil on canvas
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.2157

THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS MUST POSSESS MANY NOBLE VIEWS . . . BUT THE ACCESSORIES ARE NECESSARILY WANTING; FOR A UNION OF ART AND NATURE CAN ALONE RENDER SCENERY

PERFECT. ~ JAMES FENIMORE COOPER, “American and European Scenery Compared,” *The Home Book of the Picturesque*, 1852

It’s always been “out there,” beyond the cities and towns and farms. Whether feared or adored, threatening or threatened, the wilderness has been a continuous theme in American culture since Europeans first settled on the continent. To 17th-century English colonists on the eastern seaboard, the contrast between the congested cities and cultivated farmland they had left behind and America’s vast, largely undisturbed stands of trees made the abundance of wilderness, which was identified with densely forested land, the most obvious distinguishing feature of their new home. As Americans have frequently tended to do since then, they defined wild nature in terms of its opposite. The “waste and howling wilderness” that edged the Puritans’ settlements was the antithesis of the sacred “city on a hill” they hoped to found in the New World. Trees, they thought, were meant to be cut down, their wood used for building and fuel

and the clearings for planting. The axe was the first American symbol of progress.

Indeed, the idea of “wilderness” could only have been invented by people accustomed to more settled landscapes. The Indians who preceded the Europeans in North America did not draw such distinctions. A 19th-century chief of the Ogalala Sioux explained, “We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills and the winding streams with tangled growth as ‘wild.’ Only to the white man was nature a ‘wilderness’ and . . . the land ‘infested’ with ‘wild’ animals and ‘savage’ people.”

It was the city, once it existed in America, that held the key to a radical change in Euro-Americans’ outlook on wilderness. The sophisticated culture and technology of the city provided the vantage point from which wilderness could be seen with new eyes by Americans, whether they were writers and artists or businessmen and shop clerks.

Recognizing beauty is often a matter of achieving the proper perspective. A beautiful face may not be so beautiful when seen too close up; the same loss of appeal with diminishing distance holds true for the experience of nature. In the 19th century, appreciation of a landscape often decreased in direct proportion to one’s dependence on it for a livelihood. People who conducted their business in the wilderness seemed oblivious to its esthetic merits. Alfred Jacob Miller’s painting *The Good Samaritan* (1831), for example, depicts two very

Americans . . . defined wild nature in terms of its opposite. The “waste and howling wilderness” that edged the Puritans’ settlements was the antithesis of the sacred “city on a hill” they hoped to found in the New World. Trees, they thought, were meant to be cut down, their wood used for building and fuel and the clearings for planting. The axe was the first American symbol of progress.



ALFRED JACOB MILLER
The Good Samaritan
Oil on canvas
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.737

Fur trappers were among the first whites to see many of the wonders of the West, but they did not look upon their discoveries from a wealthy tourist’s point of view. James O. Partie, a trapper who visited the Grand Canyon before 1831, did not praise the stupendous vista he saw from its rim but noted instead how “the river emerges from these horrid mountains, which so cage it up as to deprive all human beings of the abilities to descend to its banks and make use of its water.” The same utilitarian mindset persisted for decades. We may see it in Charles Marion Russell’s *Meat’s Not Meat*

different kinds of sojourners in a Rocky Mountain landscape tinted purple and pink by the setting sun. In the foreground, a pair of starving trappers, who during a harrowing and nearly fatal winter in the mountains have exhausted their ammunition and lost their horses, cook two rattlesnakes, the only game they have been able to kill. Beyond them we see a mounted and well-provisioned hunting party led by Miller’s patron Sir William Drummond Stewart, a celebrated sportsman as well as one of the richest men in Scotland. Stewart was an educated, well-traveled man. Although not totally exempt from wilderness hardship, he was far more insulated from it both physically and psychologically than the unfortunate trappers. Stewart was thus a great deal more disposed to recognize the landscape’s scenic charms.

till It's in the Pan, in which the hunter's attention is fixed on the dubious proposition of securing his dinner, not on the spectacular mountain scenery which is partly responsible for his predicament.

Trappers and hunters were assumed to take a purely practical interest in the wilderness. To them it was the source of furs and meat, and mountains were more a challenge to survival than a source of esthetic delight. In fact, before the late 18th century, most Europeans and Americans, whether educated urbanites or rustic country people, viewed the wilderness in much the same way. It was a necessary evil, a source of raw materials that could only be extracted at some risk to life and limb, as well as an impediment to travel between one settled area and another.

CHARLES M. RUSSELL

Meat's Not Meat till It's in the Pan

Oil on canvas

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0137.2244



Early generations of Americans much preferred a pastoral landscape to the tangled forests that covered so much of eastern North America. Gently rolling farmland, enclosed by fences and interrupted occasionally by little towns, was their ideal, celebrated not only by painters like William M. Hart, but also by such national leaders as Thomas Jefferson, who declared in his *Notes on Virginia* (1783) that “Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God” and created his own impeccable agricultural landscape at Monticello.

Americans’ skill and industry in modifying nature to serve human needs created the agricultural prosperity that was considered the foundation of their democratic form of government. Viewers looked with patriotic pride on prospects such as that recorded by John W. Hill in his *View of Tarrytown, Looking Toward the Highlands*. New Englanders who had struggled to build homesteads in rocky, forested hills took



WILLIAM M. HART

Approaching Storm, 1867

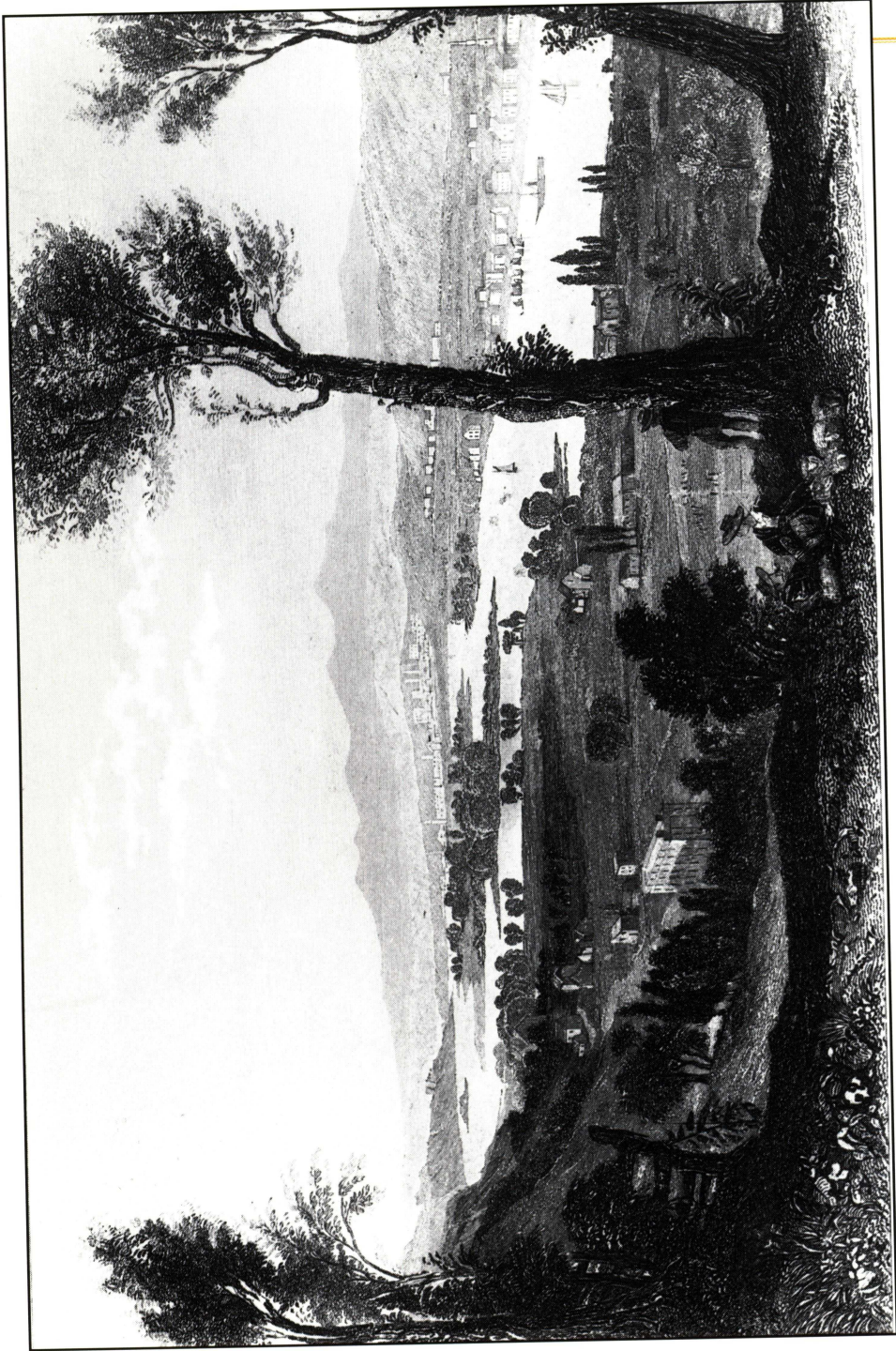
Oil on canvas

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.2259

comfort from the houses, farms, and villages that imposed structure on the disorder and darkness of the wilderness in views such as *Mount Ida on the Hudson*, published by Selmar Hess. These are scenes that James Fenimore Cooper, one of the most trenchant early commentators on the importance of landscape to Americans’ sense of themselves, might have described in *Notions of the Americans* (1828) as “completely. . . American. . . embracing all that admixture of civilization, and of the forest, of the works of man, and of the reign of nature, that one can so easily imagine to belong to this country.”

In the landscapes of Hill and Hess, wilderness has been subdued, or at least “pushed back.” A less subtle expression of the same nature-conquering impulse is found in Frances Bond Palmer’s composition for Currier and Ives entitled *Across the Continent: “Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way”* (page 4). Here the tracks of the transcontinental railroad bisect the landscape into a mountainous wilderness region that is home to a few Indians and the site of a bustling town whose citizens busily destroy every vestige of wild nature. As we shall see, the railroad, like the city, would play a critical role in wilderness appreciation as well as wilderness conquest.

Early generations of Americans much preferred a pastoral landscape to the tangled forests that covered so much of eastern North America.



As much as Americans favored agrarian landscapes, little by little the wilderness began to exert an attraction, even on such lovers of the ordered rural scene as Thomas Jefferson. Like many others, Jefferson took an interest in experiences beyond rational human control as the Enlightenment gave way to the Romantic era in the late 18th century. Wilderness had long been identified with the primeval emotions and chaotic situations that Romantics sought. In 1757, in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, the philosopher Edmund Burke described how an encounter with such overwhelming features of the natural world as the vast and lonely sea or a mountain so tall that its top was lost in the clouds could have a liberating effect on the human psyche, lifting it from its humdrum preoccupation with everyday routine

SELMAR HESS, PUBLISHER

Mount Ida on the Hudson

Black and white etching

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 1526.618

FACING PAGE

JOHN W. HILL

View of Tarrytown Looking Toward the Highlands

Oil on canvas

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.15642

into a heightened state of awareness. Burke's theories of the sublime enabled people to intellectualize their fear of the wilderness and to achieve a psychological distance from its terrors.

Sublime landscape features were distinguished above all by their great size, which often made it impossible for observers to determine their exact

shape and extent. Armed with their newfound appreciation of the salutary psychological effects of sublime experience, educated Americans of the late 18th century were more receptive to such outsized wilderness landmarks as the Natural Bridge in Virginia (page 8). Thomas Jefferson, who acquired the land on which it stood in 1774, praised the Natural Bridge in his *Notes on Virginia* as "the most sublime of Nature's works." Taking in the view from its summit several hundred feet above the ground was not for the faint of heart, Jefferson noted.

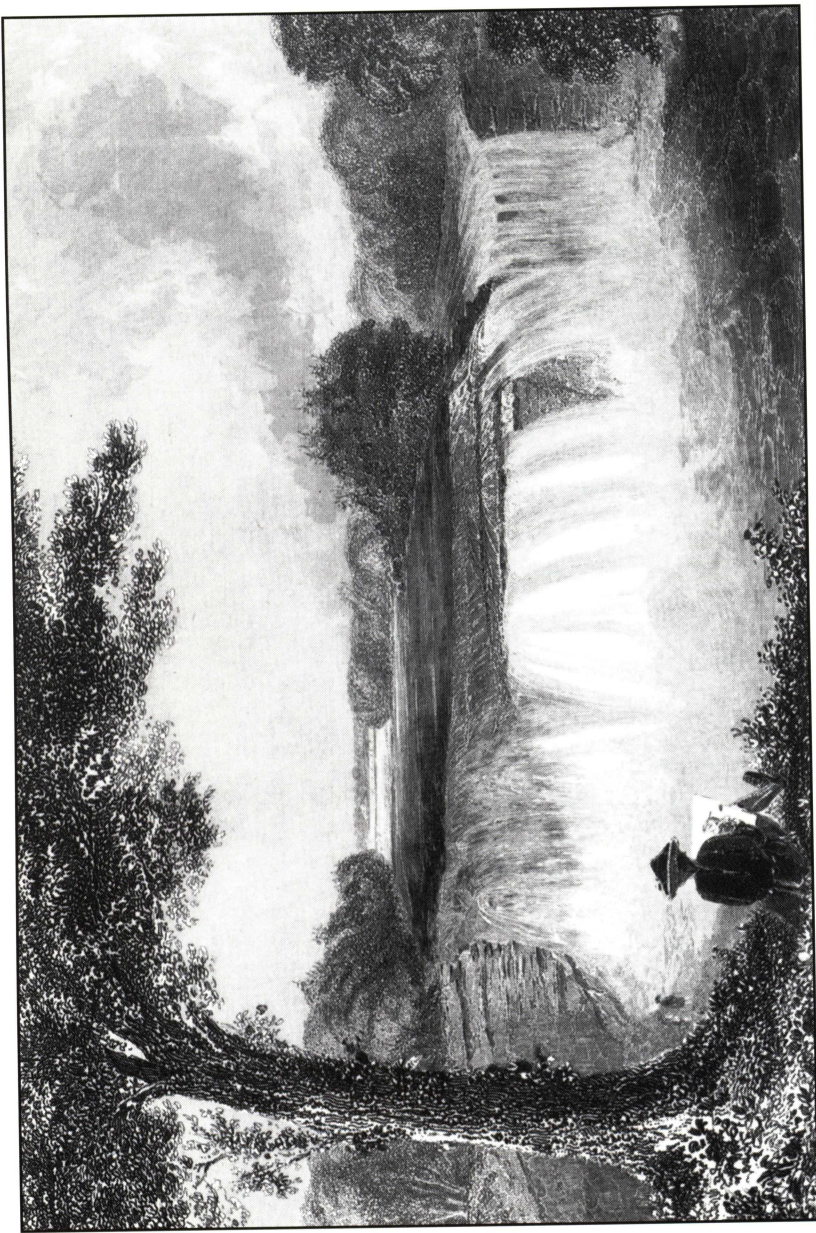
Though the sides of this bridge are provided in some parts with a parapet of fixed rocks, yet few men have resolution to walk to them and look over into the abyss. You involuntarily fall on your hands and feet, creep to the parapet and peep over it. Looking down from this height about a minute, gave me a violent head ach. (This painful sensation is relieved by a short, but pleasing view of the Blue ridge along the fissure downwards, and upwards by that of the Short hills, which with the Purgatory mountain is a divergence from the North ridge; and, descending then to the valley below, the sensation becomes delightful in the extreme. It is impossible for the emotions, arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here: so beautiful an arch, so elevated, so light, and springing, as it were, up to heaven, the rapture of the spectator is really indescribable!

Niagara Falls, described by one admirer as the "sublimest of sublimities,"¹ was even more celebrated. In 1679, Father Louis Hennepin had called Niagara "a vast and prodigious Cadence of Water which falls down after a surprizing and astonishing manner," with waters that "foam and boyl after the most hideous manner imaginable, making an outrageous Noise, more terrible than that of Thunder." Niagara soon became the basis of comparison for all American

cataracts, but not until late in the 19th century was it widely appreciated more for its beauty than for the hydraulic power it produced. In 1806, New York State sold the land around the falls to private interests, and it was soon cluttered with unsightly industrial buildings and tourist traps. Only in the 1880s did a clamor arise for its preservation as a scenic landmark and the state repurchase the property for a public park.²

By the first decades of the 19th century, more Americans were taking nationalistic pride not only in such wonders as the Natural Bridge and Niagara Falls but in the entire extent of their country's vast store of wilderness. In an address to the American Academy of Fine Arts in 1816, De Witt Clinton praised America's "wild, romantic and awful scenery." "Can there be a country in the world," Clinton inquired, "better calculated than ours to exercise and to exalt the imagination. . . Here nature has conducted her operations on a magnificent scale." In his "Essay on American Scenery," published in 1836, the landscape painter Thomas Cole wrote that





FACING PAGE

THOMAS DAVIES

Southeast View of the Great Cataract, 1788

Engraving on paper

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 1516.617

S.V. HUNT, AFTER HARRY FENN

Niagara, 1874

Engraving on paper

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 1526.541

BELOW

J. H. BUFFORD

Pemigewasset House, Plymouth, N.H.

Color lithograph

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 1526.93

“Though American scenery is destitute of many of those circumstances that give value to the European, still it has features, and glorious ones, unknown to Europe. . . the most distinctive, and perhaps the most impressive, characteristic of American scenery is its wildness.” In the wilderness, Cole continued, man encounters the most “undefiled works” of “God the Creator;” there “the mind is cast into the contemplation of eternal things.”

As proud as they might be of America’s natural wonders and as much as they might wish to experience the vaulting emotions of the sublime, few of these new fans of the wilderness were willing to completely relinquish control when they



Steamboats, hotels, and railroad cars offered safe haven for the wilderness traveler and provided a frame for the view, just as the windshield of the family minivan does today.

ventured out beyond the secure precincts of towns and farms. The total submission to wilderness conditions of Alfred Jacob Miller's trappers could put a severe crimp in one's esthetic enjoyment. The visitors who flocked in increasing numbers to the mountains and seashore to enjoy nature's most impressive works did not go without many of the comforts of their city homes.

The growth of the Hudson River School of wilderness landscape painting, the first distinctively "American" form of art, took place against the

background of the development of resorts in the mountains and forests of the Northeast made accessible by new modes of transportation. In the 1820s, well-to-do tourists ventured up a steep mountainside to the Catskill Mountain House, where they marveled at the panoramic view of the Hudson Highlands from the luxurious hotel's long colonnaded porch. Voyages on Erie canalboats and Hudson River steamers were also quite popular: passengers could enjoy a succession of rural, town, and wilderness vistas from the deck of the boat, and when admiring the banks of the Hudson became wearisome, read newspapers, chat, or play cards. Steamboats, hotels, and railroad cars offered safe haven for the wilderness traveler and provided a frame for the view, just as the windshield of the family minivan does today.

JASPER F. CROPSEY
View on Lake George

Oil on canvas
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.2316



AMERICAN AUTUMN
STARRUCCA VALLEY, ERIE R.R. ROAD

JASPER F. CROPSEY
*American Autumn: Starrucca Valley,
Erie Railroad*

Chromolithograph
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 1526.97

A chromolithographed advertisement for the Pemigewasset House in Plymouth, New Hampshire makes the connection between a growing affection for the wilderness and the development of the transportation and resort industries quite clear. Elegantly dressed vacationers amuse themselves on the grounds of the grand hotel, secure in the knowledge that they may travel by rail to Lake Winnepesaukee in the morning and be conveniently deposited back at their

comfortable lodgings in the afternoon. Jasper Francis Cropsey's *View on Lake George* belongs to a higher order of artistic creation, but it too depicts a popular vacation destination, whose "wild and romantic scenery" was "nowhere surpassed"³, as well as comfortably viewed from the lake steamers.

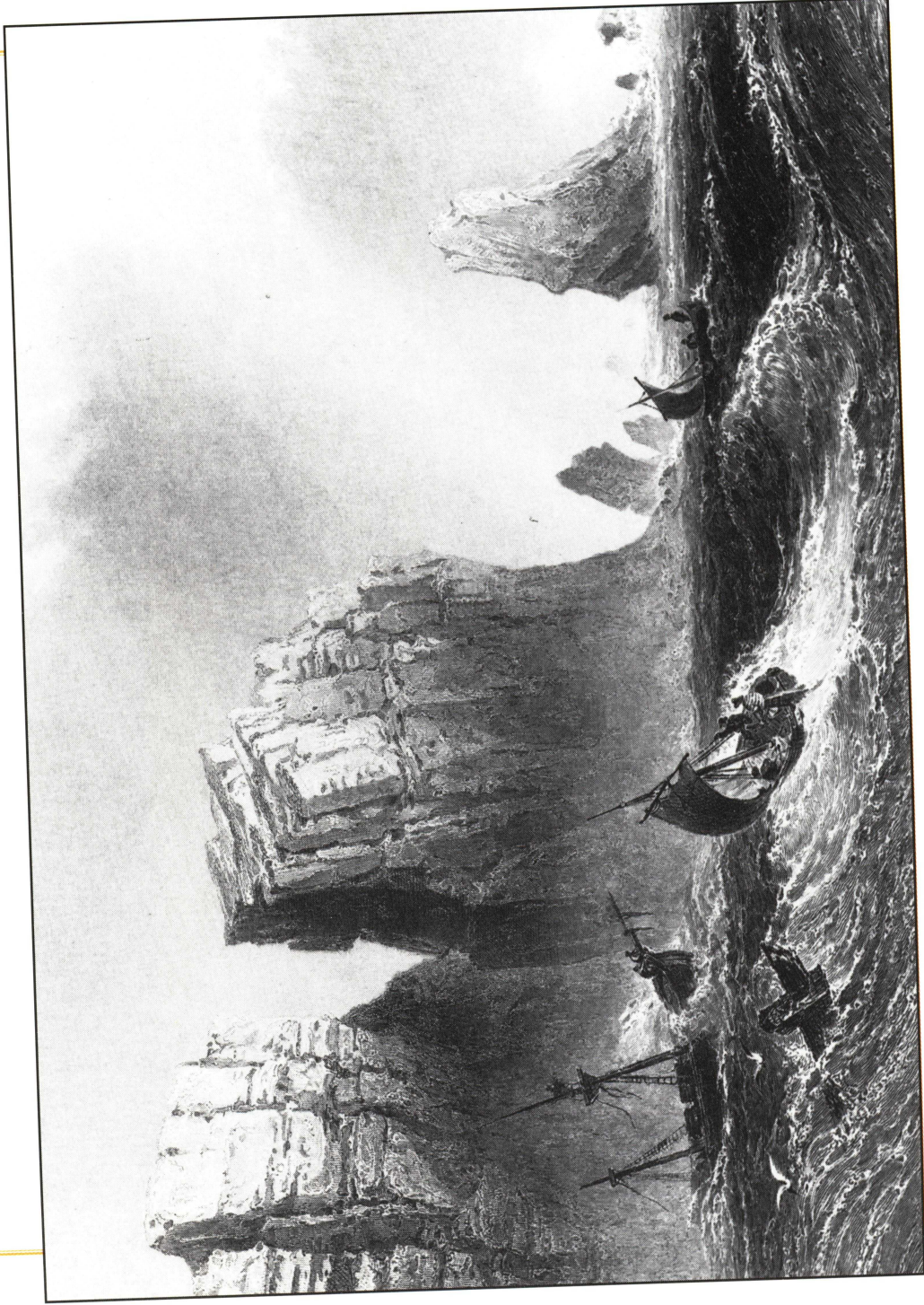
Cropsey's *American Autumn: Starrucca Valley, Erie Railroad* (1867 chromolithograph after a painting of 1865) is a celebration of the impressive stone bridge constructed by the New York and Erie Railroad through a valley of the Susquehanna River in Pennsylvania as well as a salute to America's spectacular fall foliage. In 1854 a writer for the New York Independent described the view recorded by Cropsey, which was taken

It is only comparatively recently that the seashore, like the mountains, has been looked upon less as a place to pursue a dangerous and uncertain career than as the most desirable location for a vacation home.

from a point at which the train stopped to allow its passengers to take in the panorama. “The solid masonry of the Starrucca Viaduct, with its regular arches, is seen in the distance, blending with the scenery the grandeur, and dignity of art, like the effect of a piece of colossal statuary in a green park.” Had the Starrucca viaduct not been built, tourists would have been deprived of another scenic lookout. “What a beautiful view from the R. R. bridge over the Susquehanna,” Cropsey wrote, in something of an understatement.⁴

J. COUSEN, ENGRAVER, AFTER W. H. BARTLETT
Cape Split, Bay of Fundy

Engraving
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 1526.619



WINSLOW HOMER
Watching the Breakers

Oil on canvas
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.2264

The sightseer's vantage point, whether from the top of the Natural Bridge or from a man-made wonder of engineering like the Starrucca viaduct, definitely affected his or her reaction to the view. And that perspective was determined not just by physical position, but by every aspect of an individual's education and situation in life.

Changing attitudes toward the Atlantic coast, along which tourist accommodations began to be built shortly after the turn of the 19th century, exemplify this phenomenon.

It is only comparatively recently that the seashore, like the mountains, has been looked upon less as a place to pursue a dangerous and uncertain career than as the most desirable location for a vacation home. The treacherous coast and frigid waves of the North Atlantic, which make man-

made vessels appear almost pathetically fragile in *Cape Split (Bay of Fundy)*, visualize feelings about the ocean that have far greater antiquity than our current infatuation with seaside living. Winslow Homer devoted many canvases to the unforgiving sea and the people who depend upon it for a perilous livelihood. It is hard to imagine that the stoic figures in *Watching the Breakers* derive much esthetic pleasure from the cold gray sea they scan, perhaps for signs of a fisherman-husband's return.

Urbanites on pleasure excursions take a far less serious view of the ocean than sailors and fishermen and their families. George Hand Wright's *Going to and Returning from the Seashore* gets to the heart of the modern seaside holiday without even showing much of the beach, which is only glimpsed through the train window. Like the happy vacationers at the Pemigewasset House, Wright's contented family can come and go in a single day, the greatest inconvenience being the

outing's disheveling effect on their children's clothes. Their destination may have been a Long Island beach like the one shown in William Merritt Chase's sunny *Shell Beach, Shinnecock*. Here the sea is utterly benign, a placid blue backdrop for shell-hunting, posing no threat to even the smallest child.

F A C I N G P A G E

WILLIAM MERRITT CHASE
Shell Beach at Shinnecock

Oil on canvas
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0216.2252

B E L O W

GEORGE H. WRIGHT
Going to and Returning from the Seashore

Oil on canvas
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0125.2265



The urban parents in Wright's painting were probably well aware of the growing concern, as industrialization and urbanization increased after the mid-19th century, that the city was not an altogether healthy place for children, or, for that matter, adults. Two and a half centuries after the landing at Plymouth Rock, most Americans lived at a safe distance from the wilderness. Now they began to wonder if the absence of nature from their daily lives might do them physical, psychological, and spiritual harm. The city, plagued by disordered growth, potentially disruptive inequities between rich and poor, snarled traffic, riots and crime, began to be assigned some of the negative connotations that had once been attributed to the primeval forest. Now the city was seen as a dark and dirty "jungle" that impeded free movement,

harbored savage criminals, and presented the potential for chaos around every street corner.

Ralph Waldo Emerson and his follower Henry David Thoreau argued that the wilderness was not the home of the devil, as the Puritans had conceived it, but the dwelling-place of God. In the late 18th century, theologians had begun to discern the hand of the Creator in the marvelous complexities of nature. By 1836, Emerson could write, in his essay "Nature," that "behind nature, throughout nature, spirit is present." In nature Emerson discovered an alternative church:

To the body and mind which have been cramped by noxious work or company, nature is medicinal and restores their tone. The tradesman, the attorney comes out of the din and craft of the street, and sees the sky and the woods, and is a man again. In their eternal calm, he finds himself.

In 1854, Thoreau published *Walden*, a book which continues to function as a guide for many in their protest against the hectic commercialism of the city. *Walden* proposes that fundamental

spiritual values can be discovered by immersing oneself in nature. It is significant, however, that Thoreau could hear the whistle of a locomotive from his little abode on Walden Pond. He made no complaint about its intrusion on his retreat from society. Thoreau wished to live, as he wrote in "Walking", "a sort of border life," fashioning his existence around the best qualities of both civilization and wilderness.

In light of such thinking, which was widespread by the time of the Civil War, it is not surprising that *Adventures in the Wilderness: or, Camp Life in the Adirondacks* (1869), one of the first books to extol the healthful virtues of camping to a wide public, was written by a clergyman, William H. H. Murray. In Murray's book the wilderness possesses near-miraculous powers. He tells the story of a hopeless invalid, for whom medicine and prayer have proved futile, who is cured by five months of living in the woods.

He 'went in' the first of June, carried in the arms of his guide. The second week of November he 'came out' bronzed as an Indian, and as hearty. In five months he had gained sixty-five pounds of flesh, and flesh, too, 'well packed on,' as they say in the woods. Coming out he carried the boat over all portages, the very same over which a few months before the guide had carried him, and pulled as strong an oar as any amateur in the wilderness. . . . The wilderness received him almost a corpse. It returned him to his home and the world as happy and healthy a man as ever bivouacked under its pines.

Like Murray's invalid who became a healthy camper, urbanites of the later 19th century had little interest in abandoning their city homes in order to return to the hardscrabble agricultural life

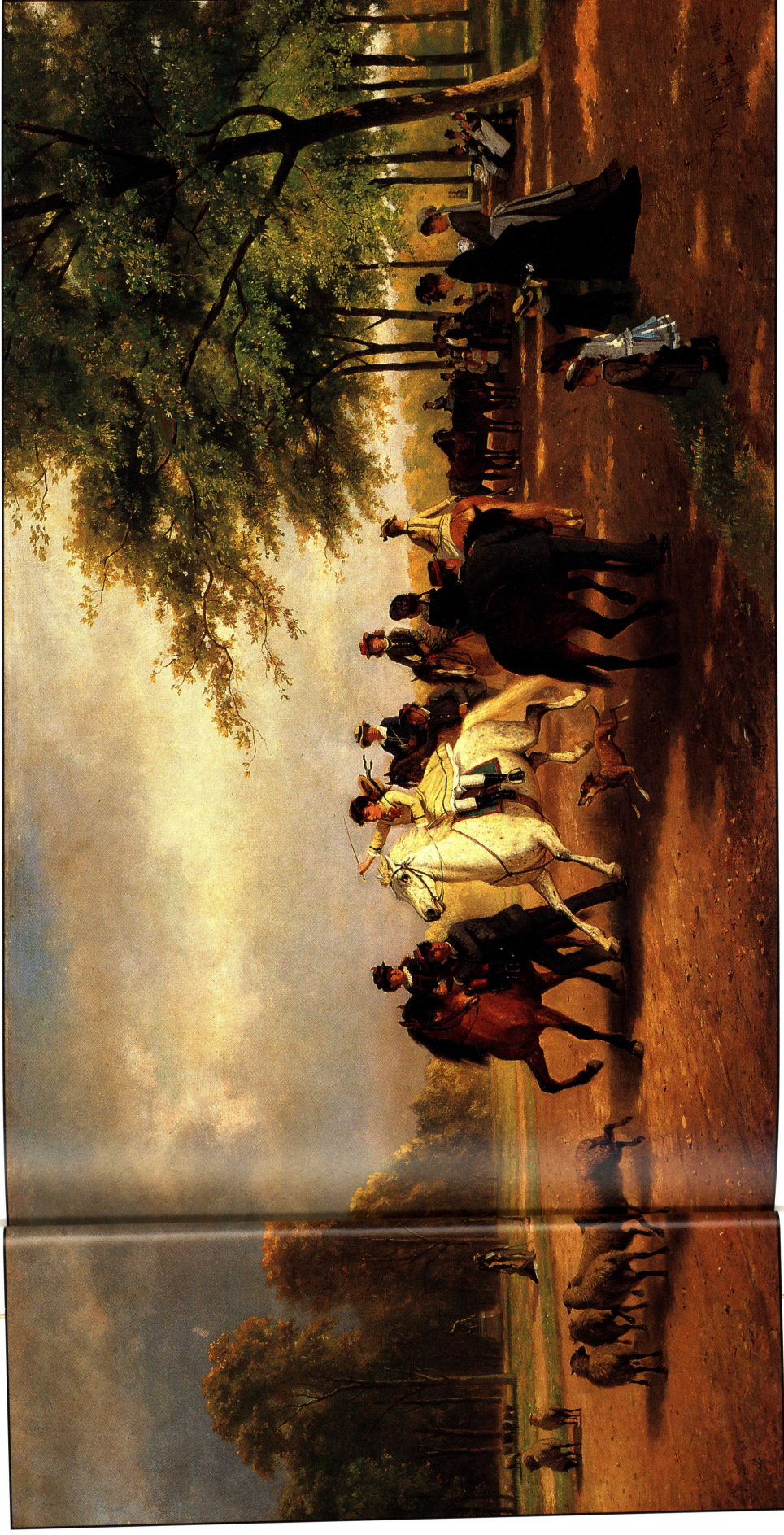
of earlier generations of Americans. They were interested not in farming, but in the spiritual and physically restorative properties that they ascribed to an experience of nature totally divorced from work.⁵

City planners of the later 19th century concluded that one way to reintroduce the wild nature that had been so successfully obliterated was to build informally landscaped parks carefully designed to seem "natural," where urbanites could mingle at their leisure, absorbing nature's benefits as part of their daily public lives.

The first and most famous example of the simulated reclaiming of the city by nature was the creation of Central Park, constructed on a barren, polluted tract of 843 acres in mid- and upper Manhattan beginning in 1858. Now completely under human control, the wilderness was back, no longer on the city's edge, but at its heart. It is ironic indeed that Central Park, designed to heal divisions between social classes and elevate the spirits of urban dwellers, is seen today by many as a dark and dangerous place entered by law-abiding folk at their peril — in other words as embodying the worst elements of the ancient fearful view of the wilderness.

WILLIAM HAHN
Pony Path in Central Park

Oil on canvas
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.2299



The genius behind Central Park, Frederick Law Olmsted, was influenced by the philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson and his follower David Thoreau, who argued that the wilderness was not at all the home of the devil, as the Puritans had conceived it, but rather the dwelling-place of God.

The genius behind Central Park was Frederick Law Olmsted, whose vision shaped American landscapes from coast to coast. His view of the city park as a balm to urban nerves rubbed raw by a competitive commercial environment and tense social encounters, as an antidote to unhealthy overcrowding, and as a neutral ground where all social classes could mix freely in their mutual enjoyment of nature is tied to the philosophy of Emerson and Thoreau.

Frederick Law Olmsted's design for Central Park, upon which he collaborated with Calvert Vaux, comprises a variety of landscapes, including rocky terrain of a rugged wilderness character.

However, Olmsted's

favorite kind of landscape—the kind he thought would do people the most good—was composed of gently rolling green meadows, groves of handsome trees, and peaceful ponds. The park visitors in William Hahn's *Pony Path in Central Park* are not mountain-climbers but well-dressed urbanites playing at an ideal version of country life on the British model. The greatest danger here is posed by a cantering pony that threatens to upset other riders and scatter a flock of sheep momentarily distracted from their lawn-mowing duties. In the left background we see John Quincy Adams Ward's *Indian Hunter*, a bronze sculpture that serves as an ironic reminder of those who inhabited this territory when it really was a wilderness.

THOMAS HILL
Yosemite Valley

Oil on canvas

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0116.1581

The National Park movement was the logical counterpart to the widespread construction of “natural” urban parks in the late 19th century. Both trends responded to worries about the depletion of natural resources as well as beliefs in the healing effects of nature. A democratic conviction that wilderness was a national treasure belonging to all Americans that must be protected from private exploitation was also beginning to take hold. In 1815 Thomas Jefferson had declined to sell property around the Natural Bridge, declaring that “I view it in some degree as a public trust and would on no consideration permit the bridge to be injured, defaced or masked from the public view.”⁶ Eighteen years later, the painter George Catlin published a letter in the *New York Daily Commercial Advertiser* in which he proposed “(by some great protecting policy of government) . . . a magnificent park, where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, amid the fleeting herds of elk and buffaloes. . . . A nation's Park, containing man and beast, in all the wild and freshness of their nature's beauty.”

The concept of a wilderness preserve held in trust and managed by the government was first realized in 1864, when Congress granted Yosemite Valley to the state of California “ . . . for public use, resort and recreation . . . inalienable for all time.”

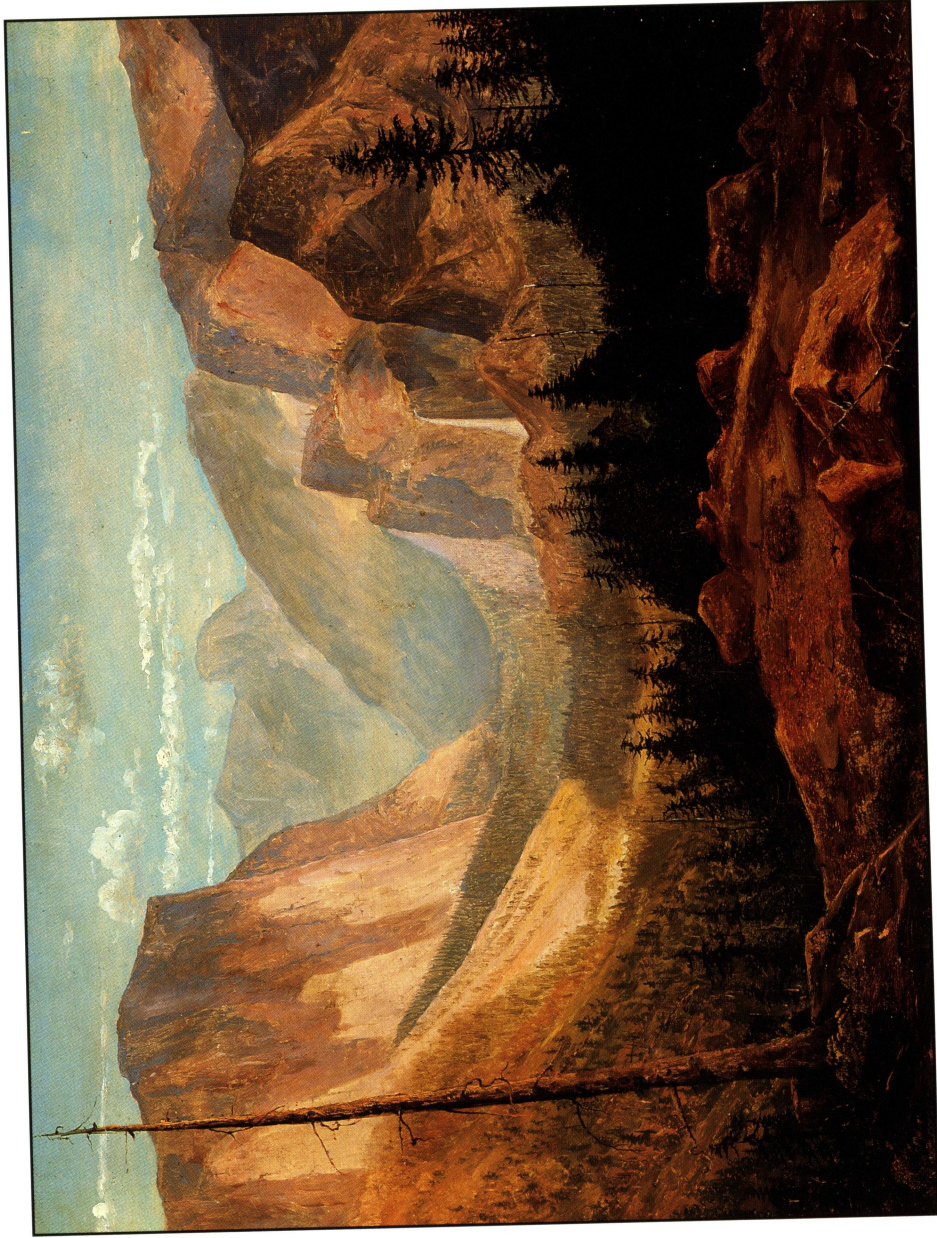
In the early 1830s, however, Americans were still in a mood to expand civilization, not preserve nature. Although others, including Emerson, Thoreau, and the Hudson River School painter Thomas Cole, echoed Catlin's suggestion⁷ the first National Park, in the Yellowstone region of Wyoming and Montana, was not established until 1872. However, the concept of a wilderness preserve held in trust and managed by the government was



Bierstadt presents a hermetically sealed vision of natural perfection in paintings like SIERRA NEVADA MORNING. Not a twig is out of place in this silent Eden, and, for all its apparent depth, the view is completely enclosed by trees and mountains.

first realized almost a decade earlier, in 1864, when Congress granted Yosemite Valley to the state of California on the “express conditions that the premises shall be held for public use, resort and recreation and shall be held inalienable for all time.” It is no accident that the first chairman of the commission appointed to administer Yosemite was none other than Frederick Law Olmsted.

Olmsted fervently believed that nature’s most beneficial effects were derived from the contemplation of its beauties, not from active outdoor recreation. In the advisory report he prepared on Yosemite for the California State Legislature, he wrote that “the enjoyment of scenery employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilizes it and yet enlivens it; and



28 GILCREASE ASE



ABOVE

ALBERT BIERSTADT
Sierra Nevada Morning

Oil on canvas
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.2305

FACING PAGE

ALBERT BIERSTADT
In the Sierra Nevada Mountains

Oil on canvas
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.1180

thus, through the influence of the mind over the body, gives the effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system.” Olmsted resisted the creation of playing fields in Central Park, and he would serve on the front lines with those who wish to limit recreational activities in the National Parks today. Since travel in Yosemite presented arduous challenges to the tourist, Olmsted’s first task was to make the park more accessible, providing the public with “the greatest practicable advantage over the natural scenery.” He sought the advice of the photographer Carleton E. Watkins and the painters Virgil Williams and Thomas Hill (*Yosemite Valley*) in planning ways to eliminate obstacles to the enjoyment of Yosemite’s unparalleled views.⁸ In light of his beliefs about nature as well as his taste in landscape design, Olmsted might well have found such paintings as

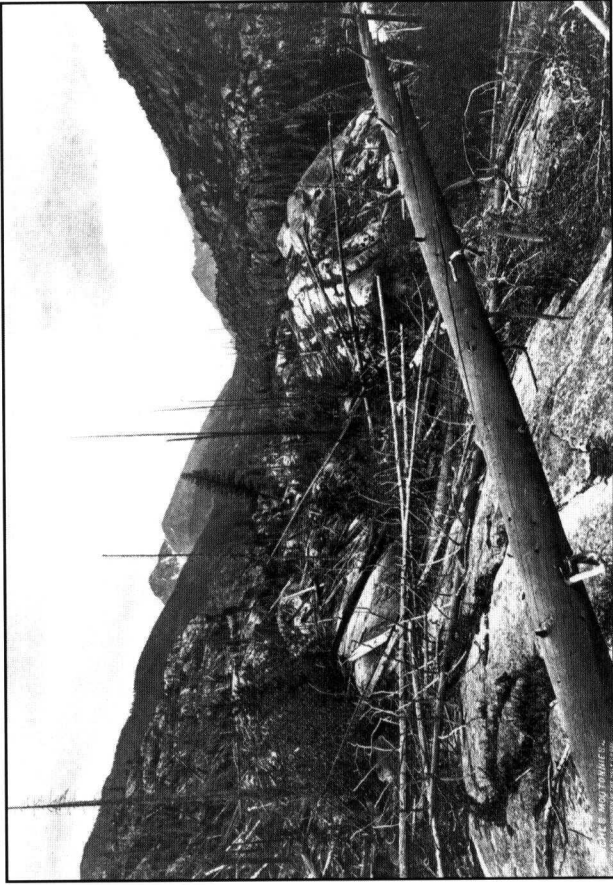
Albert Bierstadt’s *Sierra Nevada Morning* and *In the Sierra Nevada Mountains* satisfying substitutes for the real thing. Bierstadt’s pictures certainly seem to correspond in spirit to Olmsted’s description in “The Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Trees” (1865).

There are falls of water elsewhere finer, there are more stupendous cliffs, there are deeper and more awful chasms, there may be as beautiful streams, as lovely meadows, there are larger trees. It is in no scene or scenes the charm consists, but in the miles of scenery where cliffs of awful height and rocks of vast magnitude and of varied and exquisite coloring are banked and fringed and draped and shadowed by the tender foliage of noble and lovely trees and bushes, reflected from the most placid pools, and associated with the most tranquil meadows, the most playful streams, and every variety of soft and peaceful pastoral beauty. The union of deepest sublimity with the deepest beauty of nature, not in one feature or another, not in one part or one scene or another, not in any landscape that can be framed by itself, but all around and wherever the visitor goes, constitutes the Yosemite the greatest glory of nature.

Big enough for viewers to lose themselves in their spectacular yet tranquil depths, Bierstadt's paintings of mountainous western landscapes were composed in a way analogous to the construction

of Central Park. Bierstadt reordered the landscapes he recorded in his field sketches and photographs into carefully calculated theatrical compositions of seemingly endless but actually quite limited extent. Likewise, Olmsted created Central Park from whole cloth, moving tons of earth and rock, completely altering patterns of drainage, and hauling in trees, bushes, and sod. By routing cross-town traffic below grade and planting the perimeter of Central Park with dense stands of vegetation, Olmsted controlled the termination of every sightline, and, at least until the advent of skyscrapers, made the city "disappear."

Both Bierstadt and Olmsted were more concerned with overall effect than with individual details. They worked with the elements of landscape to achieve, as Olmsted wrote in 1886, "the qualities of breadth, distance, depth, intricacy, atmospheric perspective, and mystery."⁹ Bierstadt presents a hermetically sealed vision of natural perfection in paintings like *Sierra Nevada Morning*. Not a twig is out of place in this silent Eden, and, for all its apparent depth, the view is completely enclosed by trees and mountains. We see no signs



Photographs, supposedly the most truthful of all artistic images, can illustrate the degree to which our ideas of wilderness nature have been affected by art.

of civilized culture here—but culture, of course, in the form of highly studied artistic composition, is what the painting is all about.

Americans like their wilderness experience to be mediated, whether by technology, in the form of steamboats and trains, or art, in the form of literature that teaches them how to appreciate the landscape and pictures that recreate it according to familiar esthetic conventions. And they also like to take wilderness in moderate doses. As Hamlin Garland asserted in *The Forester's Daughter: A Romance of the Bear-Tooth Range* (1914), a wild natural setting was "a splendid place for a summer vacation, but a stern place in wintertime, and for a lifelong residence. . . not inspiring." It was not until 1901, when the Santa Fe Railroad completed a line to the south rim and Fred Harvey became its innkeeper, that the Grand Canyon became a destination for nature lovers. And it was really only in the late 1920s and 1930s, after roads and tourist services in the National Parks were dramatically improved and automobile travel became available to millions of Americans, that "wilderness" truly became a national passion.¹⁰ Today, some National Parks are as densely populated in the summertime as the cities and suburbs their visitors have fled.

By the same token, Americans' professions of love for pure wilderness are probably made without an awareness of the degree to which their appreciation is conditioned by works of art which have themselves determined modifications in the wild landscape. Just as Olmsted, during the brief period of his active involvement with Yosemite, outlined a plan and recommendations that reflected his esthetic preferences, so have all the National Parks been shaped, at least in the parts seen by most tourists, to conform to an image of the wilderness composed for us by artists. In 1925 Stephen T. Mather, the first director of the



ABOVE

WILLIAM HENRY JACKSON
Our Trail West in Galatin Cañon

Photograph

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 4536.84.5

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WILLIAM HENRY JACKSON
Roches Moutonnées, near the Mountain of the Holy Cross

Photograph

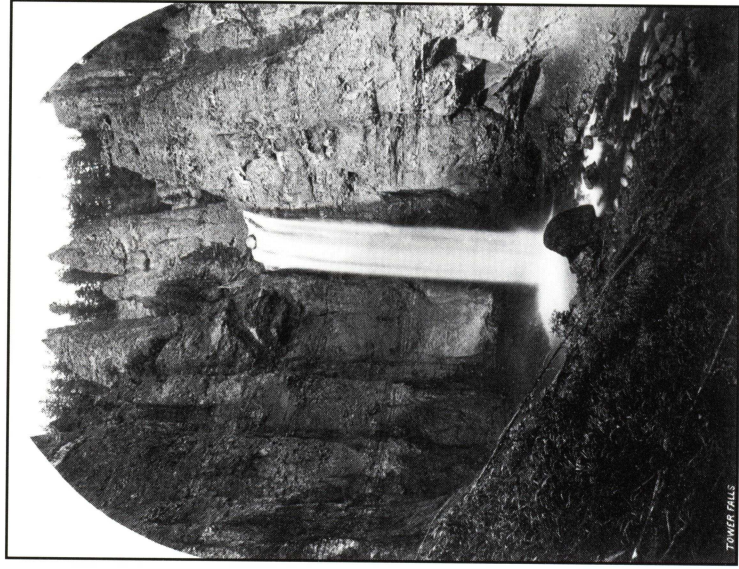
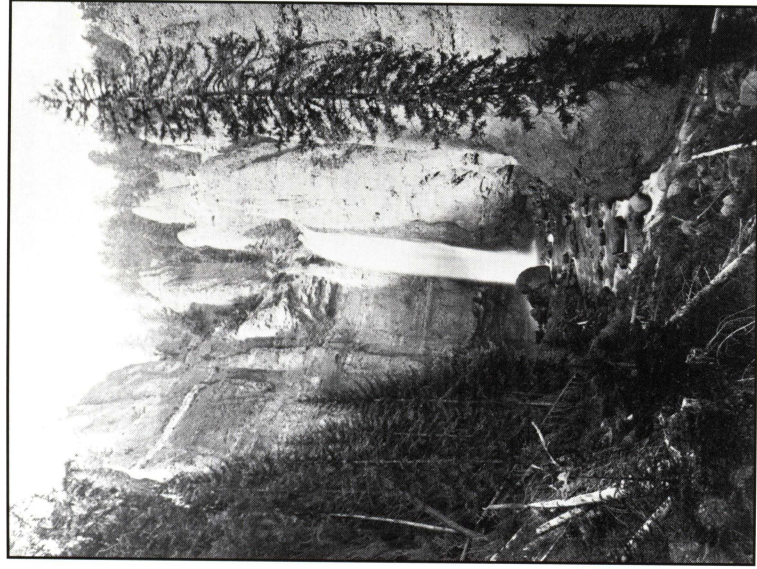
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 4536.84.47

National Park Service, went so far as to describe the parks as "national museums of our American wilderness" and approved the promotion of the parks as "primeval galleries of American scenery."

The photographer, like the painter, has a great deal of latitude in his choice of subject and point of view, and the choices he makes can affect our decision as to whether the wilderness is beautiful or repellent.

William Henry Jackson is famous for his early photographs of the West, which were widely marketed in the late 19th century. Most of his subjects are certifiably spectacular sites, but some are less conventionally scenic. "*Roches Moutonnées, near the Mountain of the Holy Cross*, for example, depicts a rocky mountainside littered with fallen trees. *Our Trail West, Galatin Cañon*, is likewise not centered on a famous landmark. It is an apparently casual glimpse of the dense forest with a floor cluttered with rocks and underbrush in a way that clearly demonstrates why the wilderness was considered such a nuisance by travelers.

Two of Jackson's views of Tower Falls in the Yellowstone possess the same magnificent central motif, although their compositions differ significantly. In the view shown above on this page, a hillside covered with dead trees and tangled undergrowth competes for attention with the falls, which are set so far back in the view that they seem puny in comparison with the enormous misshapen



tree in the right foreground. By contrast, the other photograph, shown below, contains far fewer distractions from the dramatic rock formations from which the cataract, now the focal point of the composition, emerges. Jackson enclosed this simpler, stronger composition within an arched frame, alluding, as did Thomas Moran in his watercolor of the falls, to the shape of a church window, thus reinforcing the notion of wilderness as sacred territory.

Moran's *Tower Falls* contains elements included in both of Jackson's photographs, and it is a more effective picture than either of them. Using the artistic license that he considered not only the prerogative but the responsibility of

WILLIAM HENRY JACKSON
Two Views of Tower Falls

Photographs
GILCREASE MUSEUM
ABOVE, 4536.84.16
BELOW, 4536.84.17

FACING PAGE
THOMAS MORAN
Tower Falls
Watercolor

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0226.1457



the painter, Moran incorporated two points of view into his composition, something that a photographer was not at liberty to do. The viewer of *Tower Falls* simultaneously looks down at the beautifully stippled rocks in the foreground and up at the “towers,”

which loom like natural skyscrapers beneath a dramatic stormy sky. Here we see quite literally how important the choice of vantage point, as well as the skill of the painter, is to our appraisal of a wilderness landscape.

As was the

case with Albert

Bierstadt, who

chose Yosemite as

the subject of

many pictures,

Thomas Moran’s

career was closely

linked to the

creation of a

National Park.

Moran’s

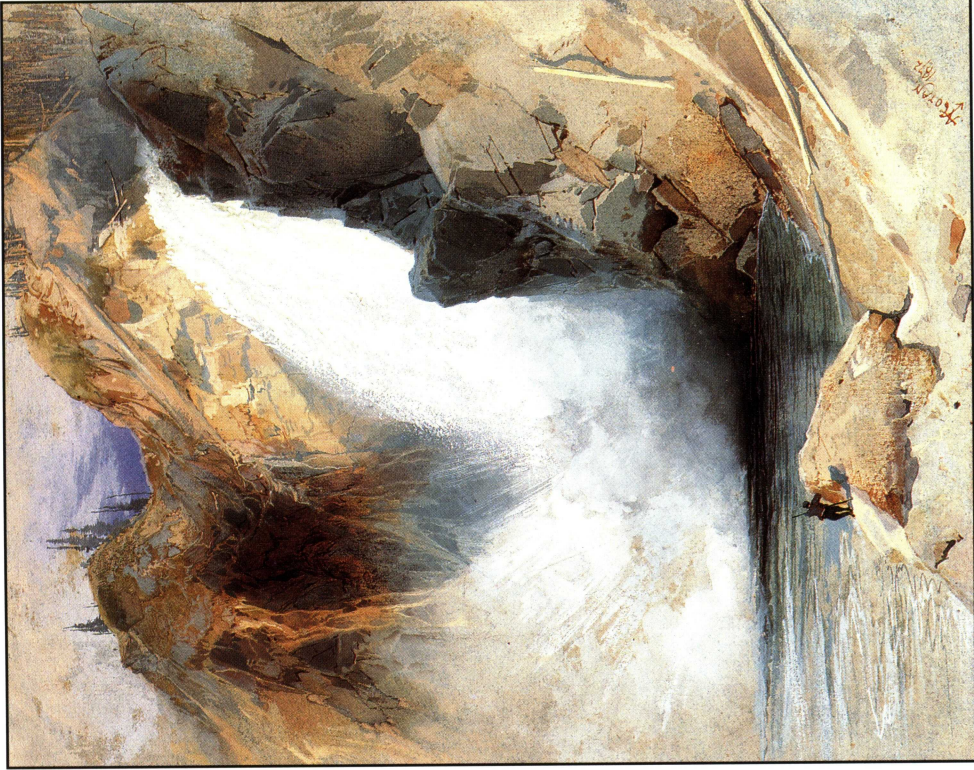
identification with

Yellowstone was so

complete that he added a “Y” to his signature

monogram. His experience there was typical of late

19th-century encounters of urbanites with the wilderness. Moran’s first trip, made with Ferdinand V. Hayden’s expedition of 1871, improved his health, toughening up his fragile frame. It was partially underwritten by a loan from Jay Cooke, a financier of the



wrote of Yellowstone Lake, “How can I sum up its wonderful attraction! It is dotted with islands of great beauty, as yet unvisited by man, but which at no remote period will be adorned with villas and the ornaments of civilized life.” Soon, he thought, “the march of civil improvements will reclaim this delightful solitude, and garnish it with all the attractions of cultivated taste and refinement.”¹¹

Cornelius Hedges reported on his experience at the

Upper Falls of the Yellowstone in the *Helena Daily Herald* on October 15, 1871. “I fancied I could see in the dim distance of a few seasons an iron swing bridge with bright, happy eyes gazing wondrously upon this beauty of nature in water colors.” The wilderness, no matter how glorious, could always stand a little improvement.

Moran, perhaps the greatest painter of the wilderness West, crowned 19th-century America’s march toward full appreciation of wild landscape. The love affair has continued, although not without a few twists along the way. With the establishment of the Tallgrass Prairie preserve, recognition has been given to a wilderness region that contains no spectacular mountainscapes, waterfalls, or canyons. George Catlin’s proposal for a “nation’s park” on the Great Plains has finally been realized, although it does not include the Indian hunters that he envisioned.

In recent years, leading conservationists have downplayed the scenic qualities of wilderness regions, emphasizing instead their importance to the overall ecology of the planet. In doing so, they have put a new spin on our 19th-century ancestors’ promotion of nature’s power to promote physical and spiritual renewal. But, as conscious as we all are of environmental issues, it would probably be safe to say that most Americans still head to the wilderness to enjoy the view.

In America, one could almost say that nature is our culture, so great a role has it played in our literary, artistic, and even political expression. Nature has been assigned every sort of value, good and bad, dangerous and healthful, holy and profane. In their paradoxical attitudes toward nature, Americans have revealed a desire to have things both ways. We have not changed much since 1901, when Liberty Bailey of Cornell University wrote, “It is becoming more and more apparent that the ideal life is that which combines something of the social and intellectual advantages and physical comforts of the city with the inspiration and peaceful joys of the country.”¹²

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NOTES

1. Adamson, 14.
2. Roper, 397.
3. Foshay, 94.
4. *Ibid.*, 82.
5. Schmitt, xix.
6. Roper, 285.
7. Huth, 136.
8. *Ibid.*, 149.
9. Zaitzevsky, 74-75.
10. Huth, 196-198.
11. Runte, 43.
12. Schmitt, 4.

Dominion of Grasses



THE GREAT PLAINS are built from sediment washed out of the

Rockies over millions of years, mixed with rubble from continental glaciers and windblown deposits of silt, sand,

and clay known as loess. Resting on the former bed of a shallow inland sea, the Great Plains slope gradually downward for 800 miles from the feet of the mountains to the

Mississippi Valley. The Rockies helped form the prairies in another sense as well. Ever since the mountains began rising some 60 million years ago, they intercepted the flow of moist air from the Pacific and dried out the interior, favoring the dominion of grasses over trees. - DOUGLAS CHADWICK

ROBERT HAVELL
Pinnated Grouse, or Prairie Hens

Oil on canvas
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.2323

OVERLEAF: SAMUEL COLMAN
Wagon Train

Oil on canvas
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.1522



THREE DISTINCT BELTS OF PRAIRIE developed. In the immediate rain shadow of the Rockies lies the shortgrass prairie, scraped by wind and dominated by the most drought tolerant of prairie grasses, buffalo grass and blue grama; they rise little more than six to twelve inches high. The easternmost third of the Great Plains, watered by an average of 30 inches of rain annually, yields tallgrass prairie characterized by Indian grass, switchgrass, and above all, big bluestem; in a good year they tower six to twelve feet high, growing half an inch or more a day. Between is the mixed-grass prairie, with elements of both the shortgrass and tallgrass belts, combined with midsize grasses such as little bluestem, needlegrass, side oats grama, and wheatgrass.

Together, they once formed the greatest grasslands on earth...

- DOUGLAS CHADWICK

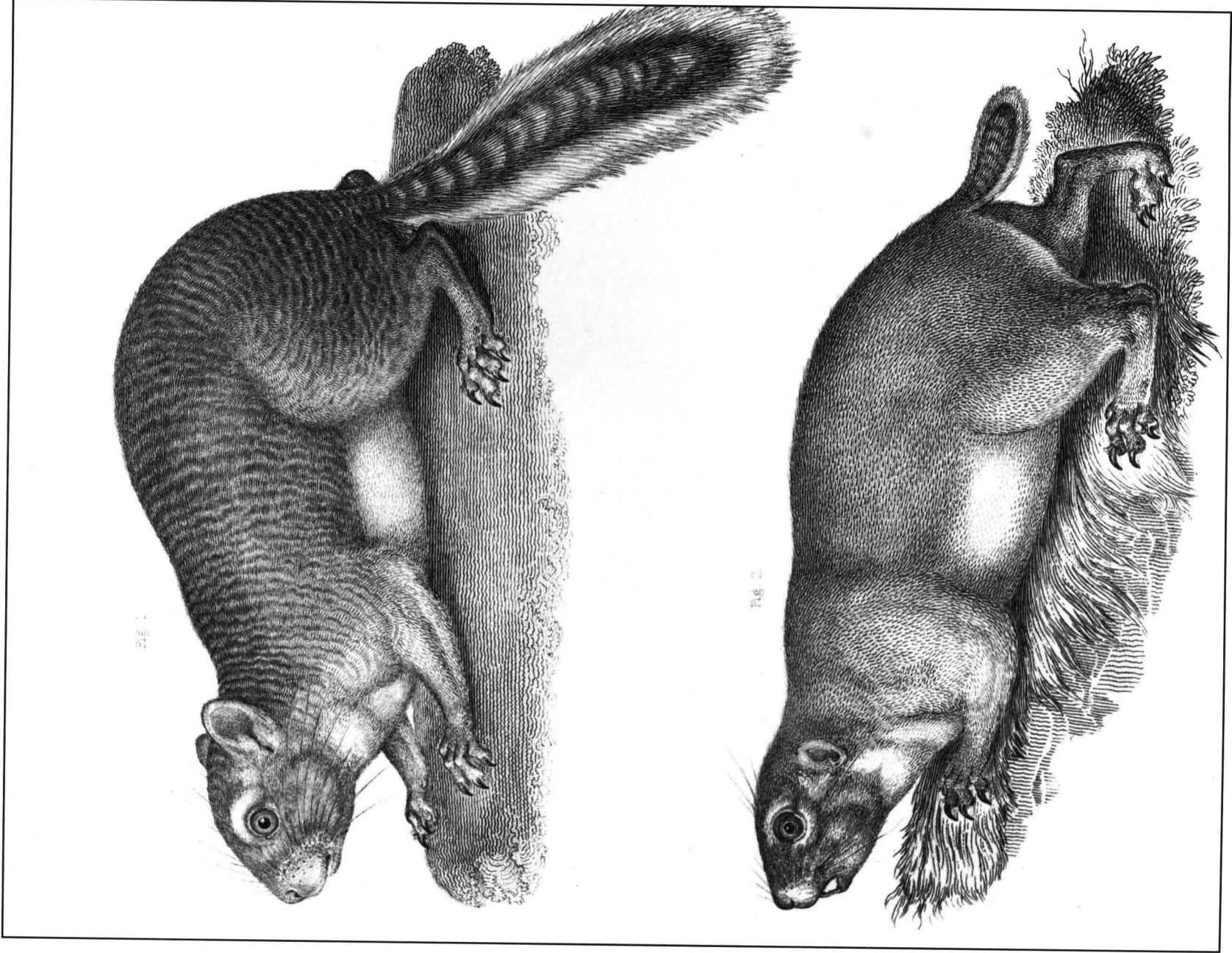


Fig. 2.

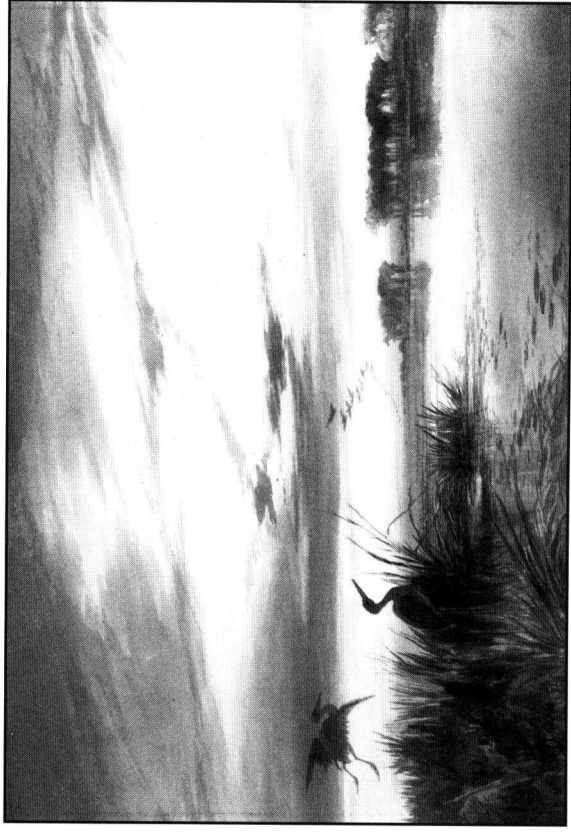
UNDERGROUND, where the temperature stays mild and there are convenient apartments in the form of the prairie dogs' turning bays and various chambers. Listening chambers near the burrow entrance. Dry chambers, built to escape floods from heavy rains. Nest chambers.

The largest prairie dwellers hang out around prairie dog towns as well. That's where I looked to find bison and antelope in spring and early summer. Vegetation on soils aerated by prairie dog digging and fertilized by their droppings is among the first to green up, and the rodents' habit of clipping it short so they can see better keeps plants in the nutritious stage of early sprouting for some time.

I, too, found myself strongly drawn to these natural metropolitan areas and could soon interpret many of the dozen different calls black-tailed prairie dogs make. Members of the same

extended family, or coterie, would greet one another with an exchange of kisses followed by grooming, then stand up on two legs and survey their surroundings. While the pups wrestled with their littermates, somersaulting among scarlet globe mallow and star lilies, long-legged burrowing owlets looked on from the top of abandoned mounds with unblinking eyes like jewels set in a statue. When bothered, the owls clacked their beaks; when scared, they fled down the hole and hissed a perfect imitation of a rattlesnake's warning rattle. - DOUGLAS K CHADWICK

J. H. RICHARD
*Ground Squirrel and
Short Tailed Prairie Dog*
Woodcut, published in PACIFIC RAILROAD
REPORTS, Volume x, 1859
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 2526.3578



THOMAS MORAN
Sound of the Heron
Wash on paper
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0216.909



ROBERT HAVELL
Wood Ducks
 Oil on canvas
 GILCREASE MUSEUM, 01262320

OF A THOUSAND examples, my favorite single description comes from George Catlin, who traveled across the frontier to paint the portraits of American Indians. In his journal he describes a night he spent while riding north from Fort Gibson to the Missouri River in order to escape an epidemic. His camp was “in one of the most lovely little valleys I ever saw, and even far more beautiful than could be imagined by mortal man,” he writes, “an enchanting little lawn of five or six acres, on the banks of a cool and rippling stream, that was alive with fish; and every now and then, a fine brood of ducks, just old enough for delicious food and too unsophisticated to avoid an easy and simple death. This little lawn was surrounded by bunches and copses of the most picturesque foliage, consisting of lofty bois d’ arcs and elms, spreading their huge branches as if offering protection to the rounded groups of cherry and plum trees that supported festoons of grapevines with their purple clusters that hung in the most tempting manner over the green carpet that was everywhere decked out with wild flowers of all tints and various sizes, from the modest wild sunflowers, with their thousand tall and droopy heads, to the lilies that stood, and the violets that crept, beneath them. . . . The Wild deer were repeatedly rising from their quiet lairs, and bounding out and over the graceful swells of the prairies which hemmed it in”. If this passage had a little number at the start of each sentence, it could be Genesis; it sticks in my mind as a baseline, a reminder of where we began. – BILL MCKIBBEN

---OUR SANCTION TO BE A WEED species living at the expense of every other species and of the earth itself can be found in the injunction god gave to newly created Adam and Eve in Genesis 1:28: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.” Whether or not God meant it in quite that way, and whether or not men translated Him correctly, many used these words as justification to make the earth serve human purposes alone. But what we are working toward, what with luck we may eventually attain to, is an outlook that was frequently and sometimes eloquently expressed by the first inhabitants of this continent. The Indians stressed the web of life, the interconnectedness of land and man and creature. Chief Luther Standing Bear of the Oglala Sioux put it this way: “only to the

white man was nature a

wilderness and only to him was the land ‘infested’ with wild’ animals and ‘savage’ people. To us it was tame. Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery.”

- WALLACE STEGNER

GEORGE DE FOREST
BRUSH

Crossing the Prairie

Oil on panel
GILCREASE MUSEUM,
0126.1188



GEORGE CATLIN

Village of the Minatarees on Knife River Above the Mandans

Oil on canvas

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0176.2137



IT TOOK US TWO HUNDRED YEARS from Jamestown and Plymouth Rock to Americanize our perceptions, loyalties, vocabulary, and palette so that we could begin to see America clearly, and take pride in it. New ideas from Europe, especially the interest in nature that came with the Romantic movement, helped that pride along. But what made America the natural garden of those ideas, what most metamorphosed Europeans into something new, was what Europe had long lost and what America was made of: wilderness.

--- THE NEW WORLD was such a blinding opportunity to Europeans, and lay there so temptingly, like an unlocked treasure house with the watchman sleeping, that nobody thought of limits, nobody thought of preservation, until generations of living in America and “breaking” its wilderness had taught us to know it, and knowing it had taught us to love it, and loving it had taught us to question what we were doing to it. All of that is the background of the environmental movement. - WALLACE STEGNER

FRANK TENNEY JOHNSON
The Overland Trail
Oil on canvas
GILCREAE MUSEUM, 0127.1092



OLAF C. SELTZER
The First Furrow
Oil on canvas

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0137.814

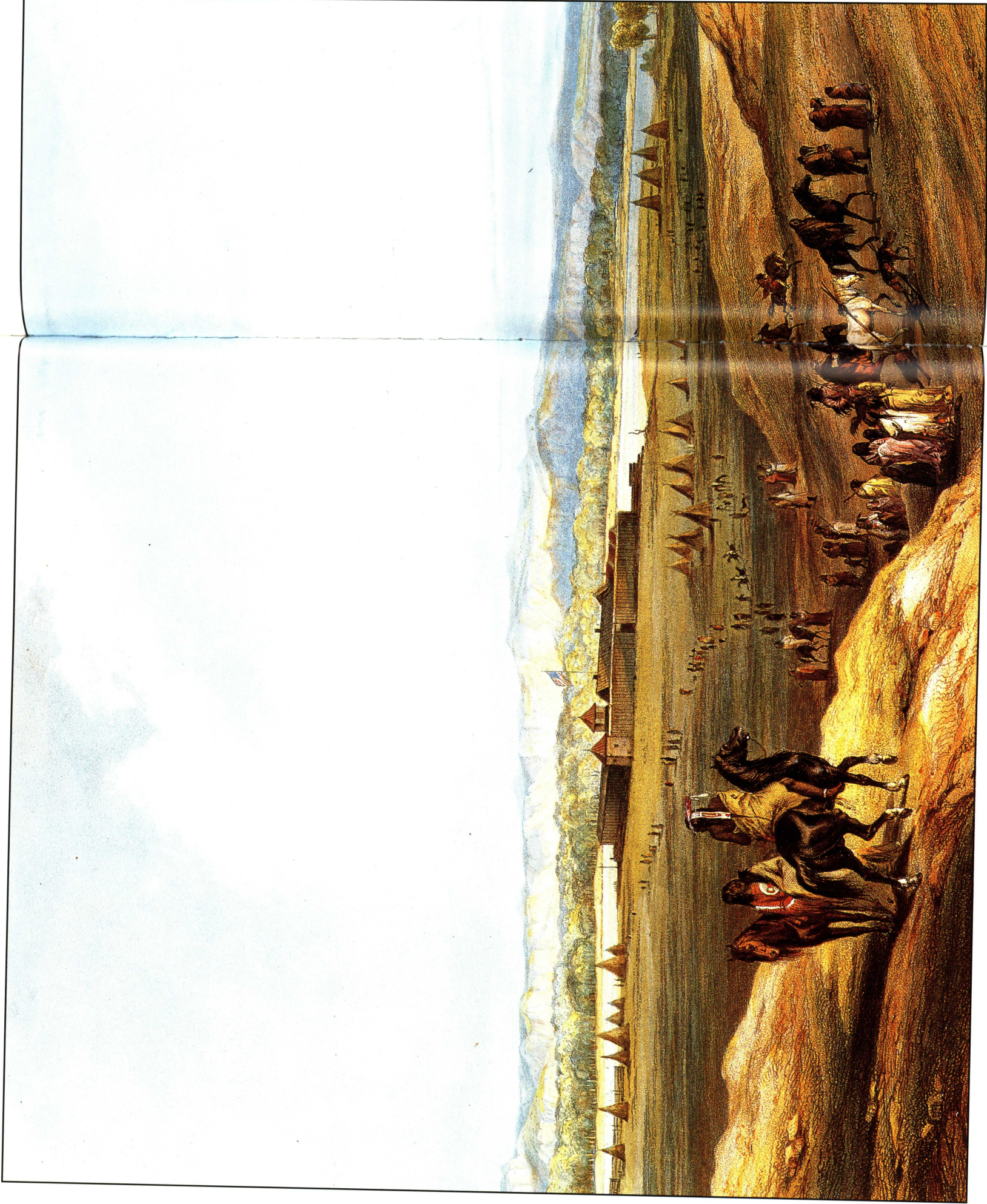


WEEDS, contrary to what the romantics assumed, are not wild. They are as much a product of cultivation as the hybrid tea rose, or Thoreau's bean plants. They do better than garden plants for the simple reason that they are better adapted to life in a garden. For where garden plants have been bred for a variety of traits (tastiness, nutritiousness, size,

aesthetic appeal), weeds have evolved with just one end in view: the ability to thrive in ground that man has disturbed. At this they are very accomplished indeed.

---SOME OF THESE WEEDS were brought over deliberately: the colonists prized dandelion as a salad green, and used plantain (which is millet) to make bread. Other weed seeds, though, came by accident—in forage, in the earth used for shipboard ballast, even in pants cuffs and cracked boot soles. Once here, the weeds spread like wildfire. According to Alfred W. Crosby, the ecological historian, the Indians considered the Englishman a botanical Midas, able to change the flora with his touch; they called plantain “Englishman's foot” because it seemed to spring up wherever the white man stepped. (Hiawatha claimed that the spread of the plant presaged the doom of the wilderness.) Though most

weeds traveled with white men, some, like the dandelion, raced west of their own accord (or possibly with the help of the Indians, who quickly discovered the plant's virtues), arriving well ahead of the pioneers. Thus the supposedly virgin landscape upon which the westward settlers gazed had already been marked by their civilization. —MICHAEL POLLAN



AFTERWARDS, the company increased its small trade in Indian skulls, always one of the favorite curios of the plains. Other tribes occupied the empty villages of the Mandan and Hidatsa, and then moved on. The earth lodges fell down and eventually disappeared, except for shallow round depressions in the ground, where the floors used to be. Today, empty fields where the villages once stood are still faintly marked with clusters of these depressions; from a distance, the fields look like a smallpox survivor's face. At Fort Union, the cemetery where some of the Assiniboin smallpox victims were buried, was partially dug up in the early 1950s, before the state and then the Park Service took over the fort site. Highway contractors, needing fill, took away truckloads, and the bones of Assiniboin smallpox victims mixed with the gravel used to pave the county roads. - IAN FRAZIER

KARL BODMER
Fort Union on the Missouri
Handcolored aquatint engraving
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 4576.91.62

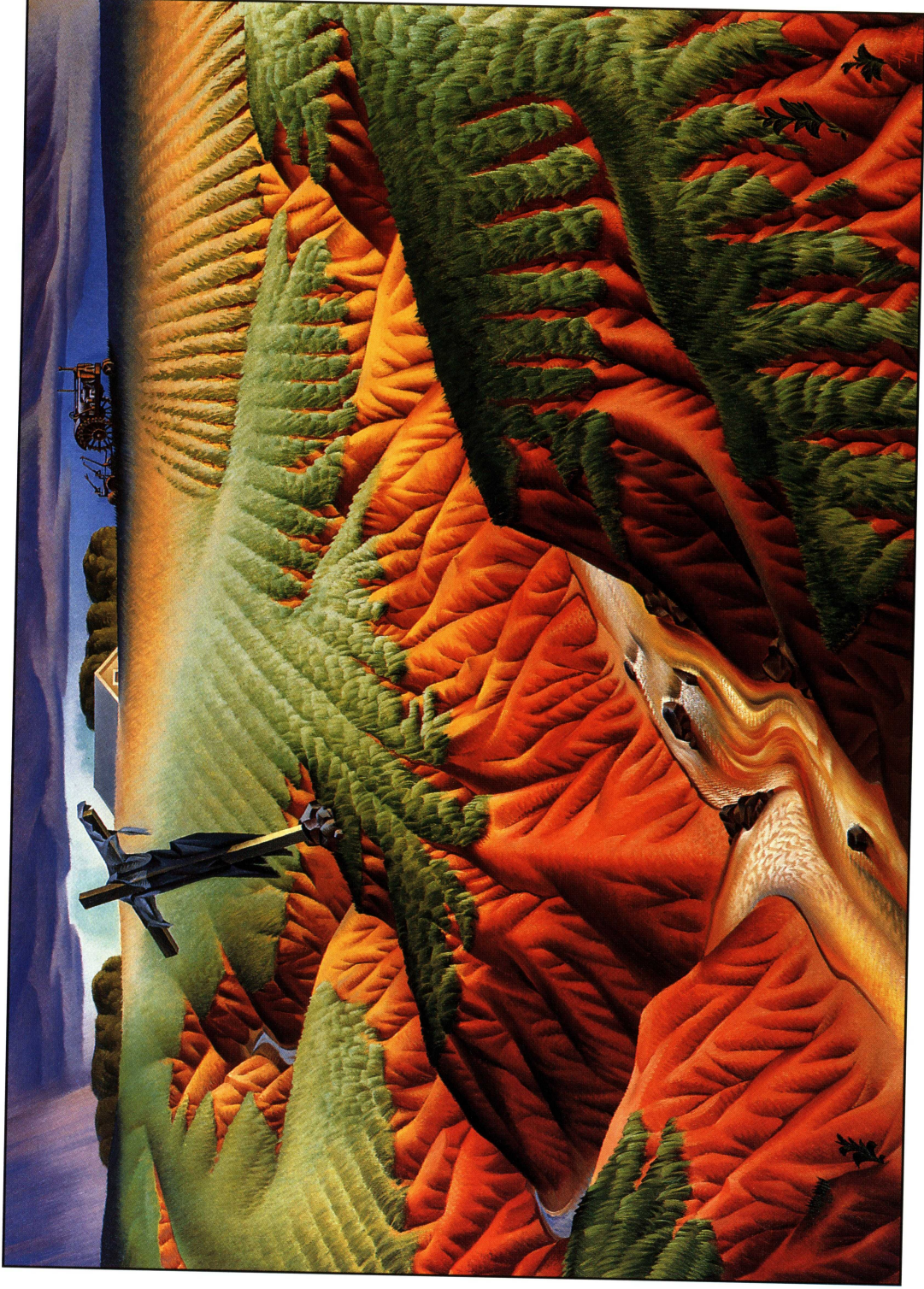
BY 1886, cattle were overcrowding the range. That summer was dry; the winter that followed was so bad that accounts of it tend to be hour-by-hour: at about ten o'clock in the evening of January 9 the temperature began to drop, it dropped forty degrees in two hours, the wind picked up from the north, snow started to fall, it fell all night, when dawn came you couldn't see any but the faintest light, etc. One snowstorm followed another. In bad weather, buffalo usually faced into the wind until they found a hollow or a valley for shelter; cattle, with thinner coats, tend to travel with the wind. In the winter of 86-87, storms took cattle hundreds of

miles. Some ranchers never found their herds at all. Most found them far to the south, piled up five and six deep in ravines, buried in drifts, drowned in rivers. Sixty percent of the cattle in Montana died. Throughout the rest of the plains, the winter killed hundreds of thousands more. Ranchers sent their cowboys out to skin and bring back the hides.

- IAN FRAZIER



Ila McAfee
Longhorns Watering On Cattle Drive
 Oil on canvas
 Gilcrease Museum, 0137.537

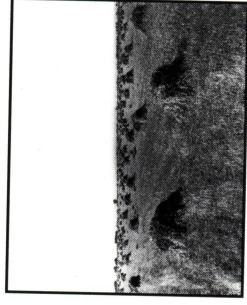


ALEXANDRE HOGUE

Crucified Land

Oil on canvas

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0127.2000



THIS IDEA OF NATURE is hardy. Our ability to shut the destroyed areas from our minds, to see beauty around man's degradation, is considerable. A few years ago I spent some days driving around Arizona in a van with a man named Lyn Jacobs, one of a small number of environmentalists

fighting a difficult battle to restrict the grazing of cattle on public lands in the West. The cows, which range over 70 percent of the federal land in the America West under a leasing program that does not pay for itself and each year requires tax subsidies, produce about 3 percent of America's beef. And by their constant grazing, the cattle convert the rangelands into barren pastures. Where there are streams they cave in the banks; where there are wildfowl they trample their nests. In their wake they leave stands of cheatgrass and thistle in place of the natural long-stemmed grasses. But the West has been a pasture so long that practically no one notices. People just assume that grass there can't grow more than a foot high. One morning, Jacobs and I drove along a ranch road that ran just parallel to the Grand Canyon about fifteen miles from the south rim. It was a glorious day, the sky a polarized blue, and though you couldn't see the canyon you knew with heart-stopping precision where it was, for the clouds dropped over its edge, their bottoms obscured like icebergs. "That's the problem," Jacobs said, stopping the van. "When you look at Western panoramas, you don't look down — your eye is trained to think this desert is normal. You tend to look at the mountains, and the blue sky above them, and the clouds." —BILL MCKIBBEN



JOHN JAMES AUDUBON
Pair of Cooper's Hawks

Oil on canvas

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 0126.2321

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The excerpts in “Dominion of Grasses” were taken from the following works. We thank the publishers for permission to reprint them here.

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Reprinted by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc.)

McKibben, Bill. *The End of Nature*. New York: Random House, 1989. (Excerpts from *The End of Nature* by William McKibben copyright ©1989 by William McKibben. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.)

Pollan, Michael. *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*. New York: Laurel (Bantam Doubleday Dell), 1991. (Excerpts reprinted by permission of Grove Atlantic.)

Stegner, Wallace. *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs, Living and Writing in the West*. New York: Penguin Books, 1992. (Excerpts from *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs* by Wallace Stegner copyright ©1992 by Wallace Stegner. Reprinted by permission of Random House, Inc.)

In addition, we recommend the following titles to readers interested in contemporary literature of the plains.

Duncan, Dayton. *Miles from Nowhere, Tales from America's Contemporary Frontier*. New York: Viking, 1993.
Galvin, James. *The Meadow*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992.
Kittredge, William. *A Hole in the Sky, A Memoir*. New York: Knopf, 1992.

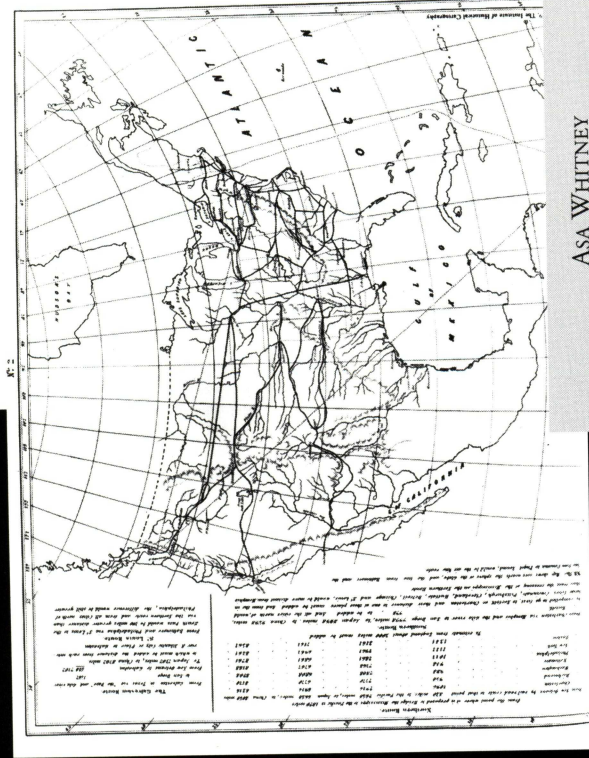
EARLY MAPS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN PLAINS

DURING THE GREAT DRIVE of the American people to the Pacific, the vast area lying between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains was, for the better part of the 19th

century, a zone of passage rather than a region of settlement. “Crossing the plains” became an epithet for what to many was a tedious but necessary part of a long journey to the dramatic Rockies, the exotic Southwest, or the bucolic Pacific Coast. In the romanticism that gripped America during the years between the opening of the 19th century and the Civil War, the supposedly featureless plains were largely devoid of the symbols that lured Americans — both spiritually and physically — to other areas. Although much progress was made in the mapping of the region between 1800 and 1860, there was little understanding of the plains environment at the time of

settlement following the Civil War. The settlers themselves were uncertain about what the plains really were, perhaps because the great empty spaces presented too few visual images that were familiar or concrete. Where there is little to focus on, the mind's eye may behold a great deal and, not knowing what it sees, see only what it knows.

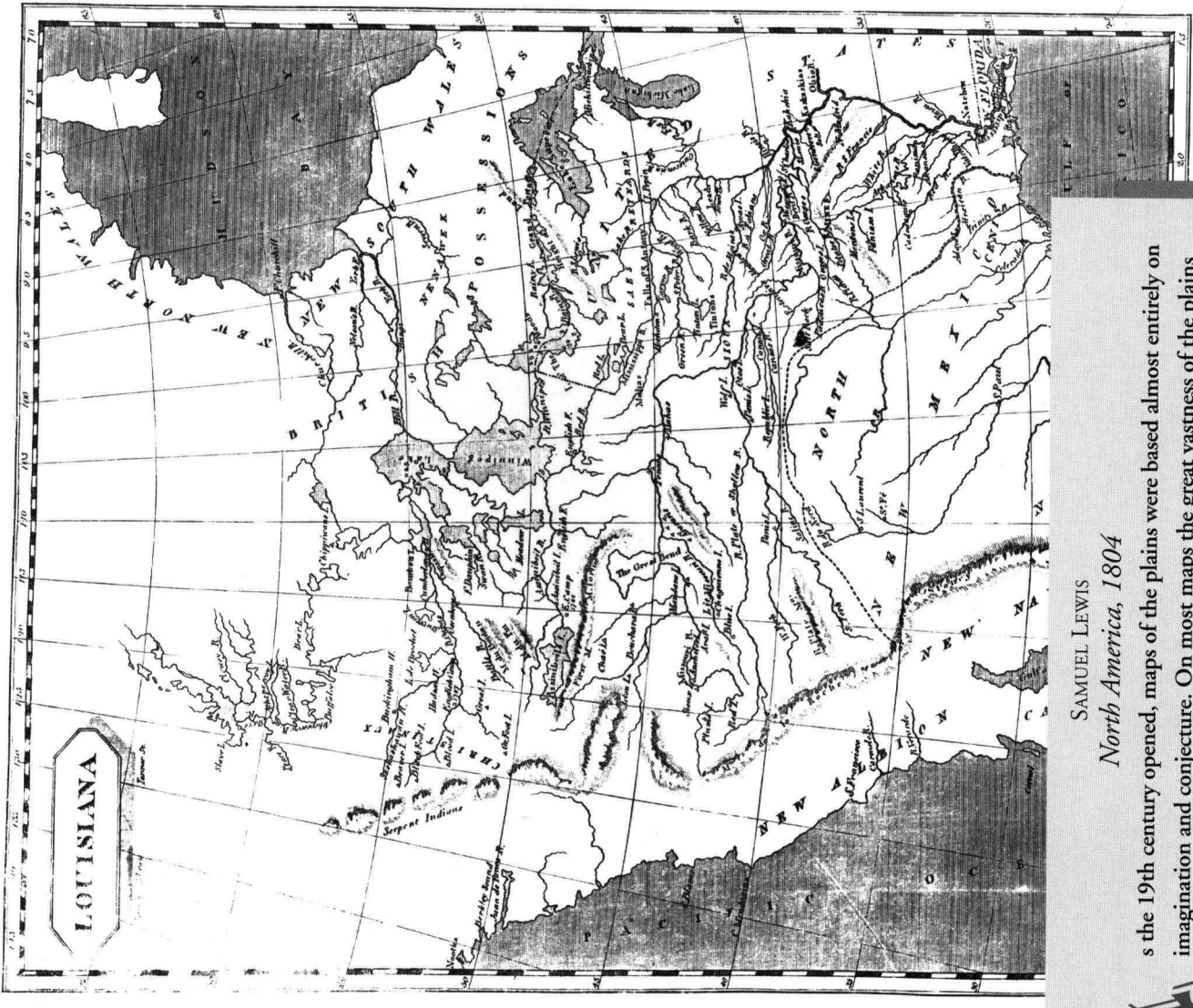
Such was the case with those who mapped the plains prior to the Civil War. Trappers and travelers, merchants and missionaries, soldiers and surveyors — they were not always charting what they found, but what they wanted to find. Their work was a mapping of the geography of hope and expectation rather than the geography of reality — a mapping of patterns of promise.



ASA WHITNEY

New Yorker Asa Whitney's 1849 book, *A Project for a Railroad to the Pacific*,

limned the prospective rail routes across the plains. Dominating Whitney's map are the straight lines of what he hoped would become iron roads, linking forever the American territory east and west of the plains crossing.



SAMUEL LEWIS
North America, 1804

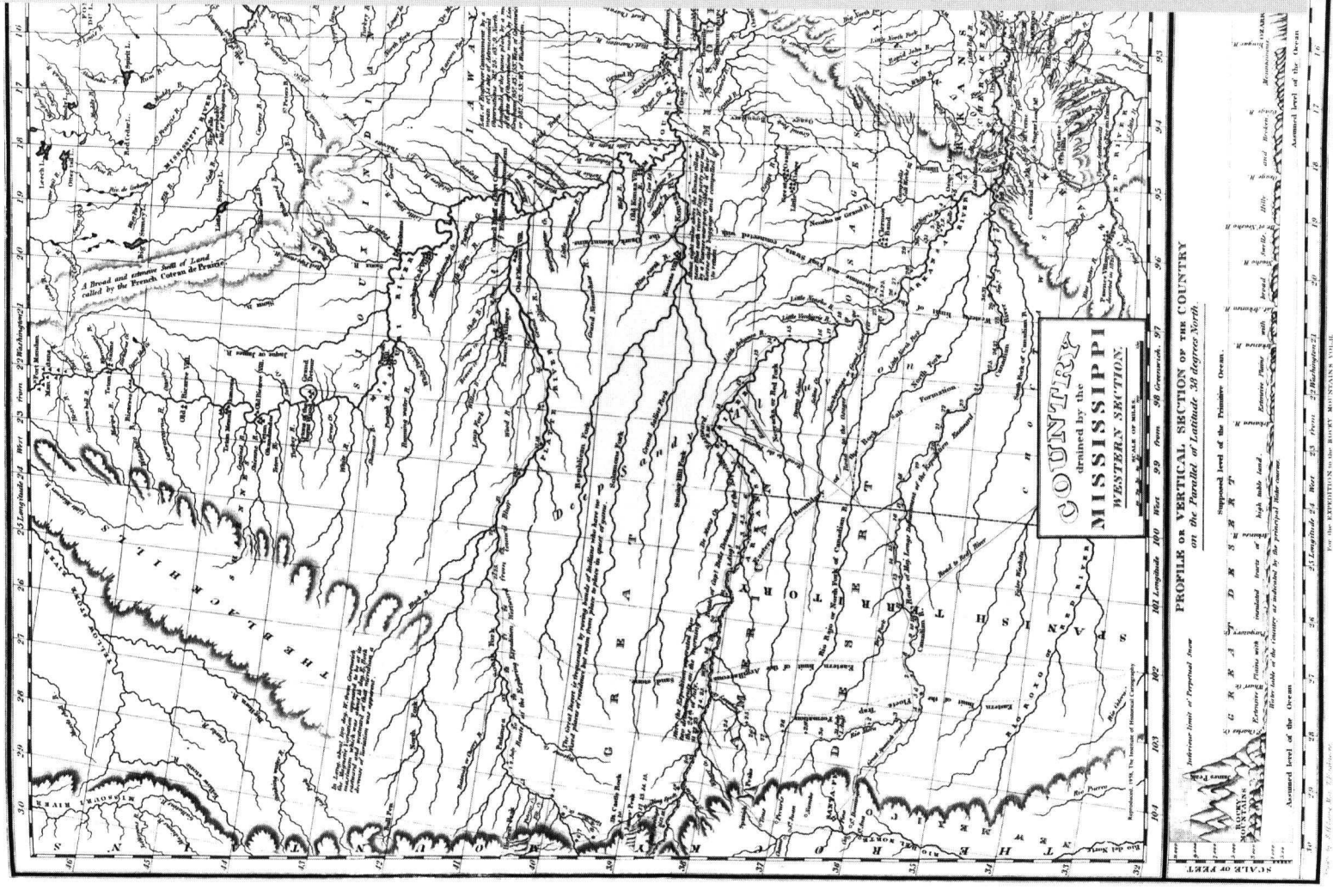
As the 19th century opened, maps of the plains were based almost entirely on imagination and conjecture. On most maps the great vastness of the plains was exaggerated. In this classic example, the Philadelphia engraver Samuel Lewis shows the plains as an immense open region stretching from the Mississippi to a range of mountains near the Pacific Coast.

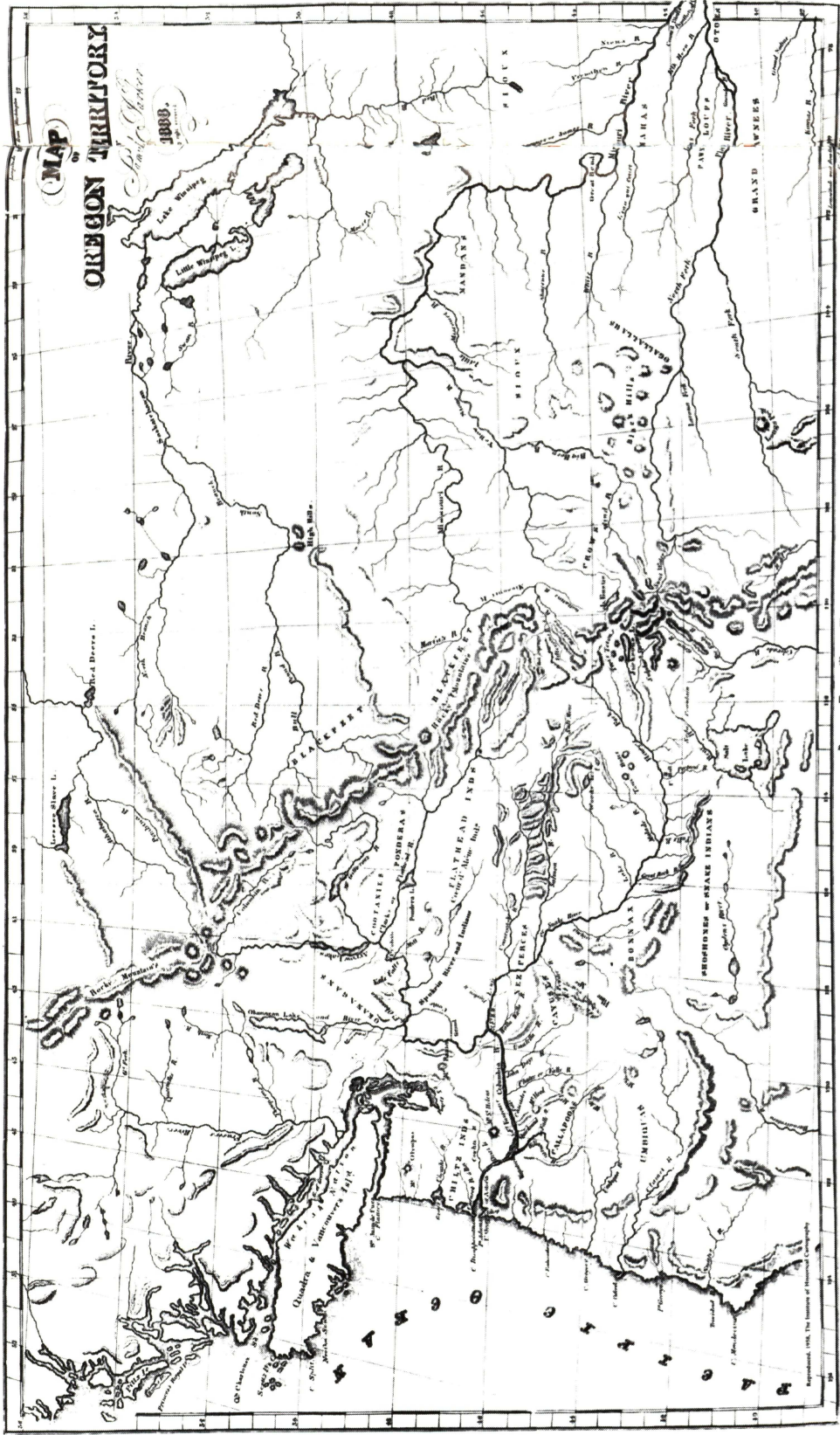
STEPHEN LONG
*Country Drained by the
Mississippi, Western Section,
1823*

GILCREASE MUSEUM, 2426.228

Two major explorations undertaken during the first decade of the 19th century resulted in maps of the plains: Lt. Zebulon Pike's journey to the upper Arkansas, and the expedition of Capts. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark up the Missouri. Pike's map correctly reduced the east-west dimensions of the plains to their proper proportions but introduced other errors. Clark's maps were the most accurate record of the northern plains for decades.

Stephen Long compiled this map in 1823 after his exploration of the central and southern plains. It corrected the long-held confusion, deriving from Pike, of the upper Red River with the Canadian fork of the Arkansas. Like most maps of the plains, however, it reflected the disjunction between mapping what was seen and seeing what was mapped; as had other mapmakers, Long labeled the area between the Platte and the Red River "The Great American Desert."



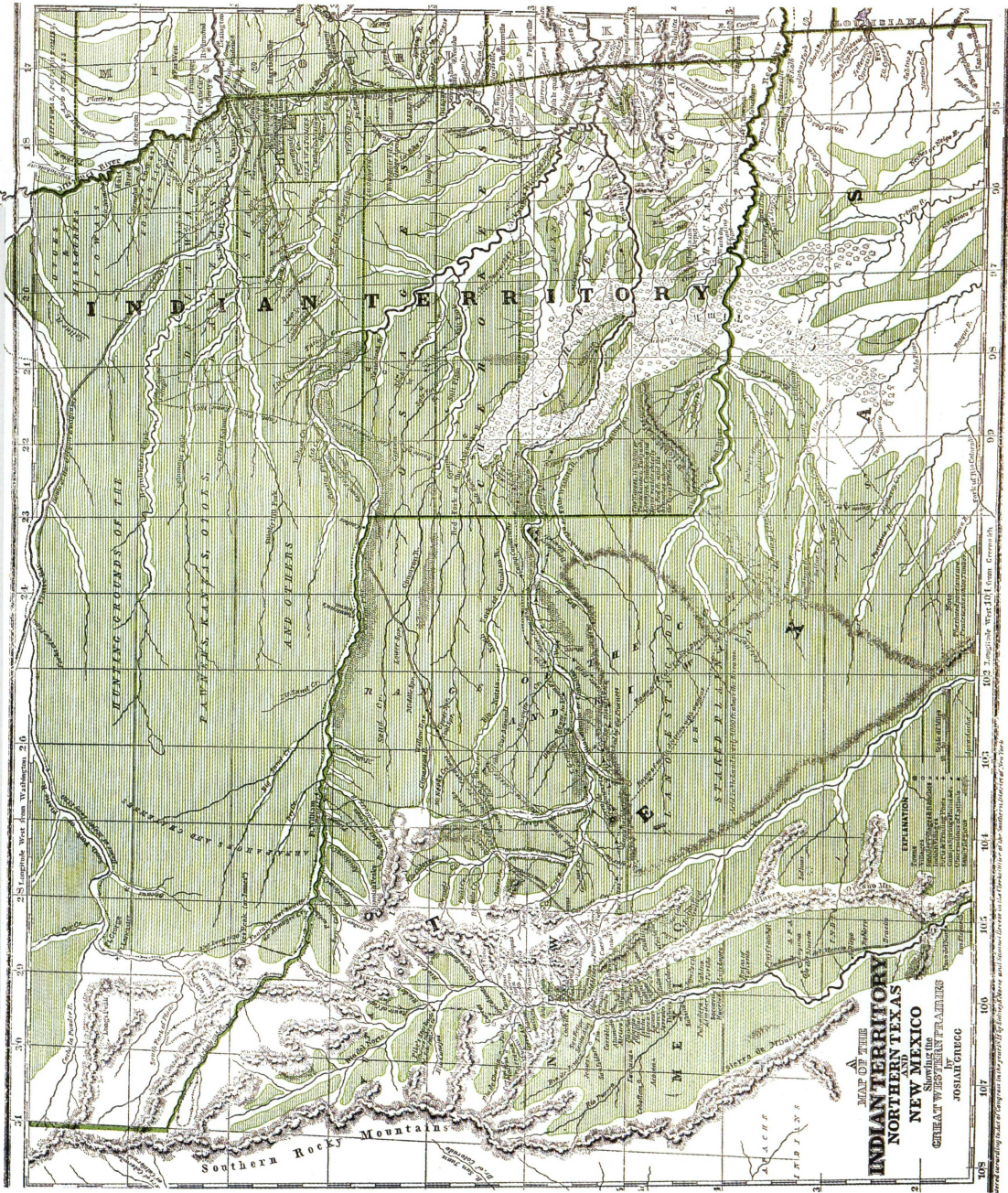


SAMUEL PARKER
Map of Oregon Territory, 1838

In 1838 missionary Samuel Parker drew a large map of “Oregon Territory” that represented the northern plains with a fair degree of accuracy. As on virtually all other maps of the era, however, the Black Hills stretched far out of proportion toward the south and east, a significant error in that Parker’s map was widely read, especially by potential migrants, many of whom would soon be crossing the plains.

JOSIAH GREGG
A Map of Indian Territory, 1844
 GILCREASE MUSEUM, 3926.802

The most important of Josiah Gregg’s maps was the 1844 “Indian Territory” map. Showing a multitude of wagon roads, identified by their discoverers or primary users, and depicting “prairie” and wooded country, the 1844 map is also marked by a stippled pattern that may represent sandy areas adjacent to the watercourses. In the western plains, the Gregg map shows many settlements, divided by symbols into forts and trading posts; Indian villages; and Spanish towns, villages, and “ranchos.” Conveying the impression of a well-populated region, the map must have whetted the interest of prospective traders on the trail to New Mexico.





WILLIAM EMORY
Detail from U. S. and Their Territories Between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean, 1857
GILCREASE MUSEUM, 2426.100

F mory's magnificently detailed 1857 map of the "US and their Territories Between the Mississippi and the Pacific Ocean" was highly accurate and presented data as obtained through scientific observation rather than speculation.

John L. Allen's commentary on early maps of the plains and prairies is presented in full in *Mapping the North American Plains: Essays in the History of Cartography* by Frederick C. Luebke, Frances W. Kaye, and Gary E. Moulton, ©1987 by the University of Oklahoma Press.

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