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CREATURES OF THE PLAINS AND PRAIRIES

G O D S L E E P S
I N M I N E R A L S ,
A W A K E N S I N P L A N T S
W A L K S
I N A N I M A L S

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Creatures

OF THE PLAINS AND PRAIRIES

Where the Web of Life is Woven of Grass



ON THE PRAIRIE THE PHRASE "LIVING EARTH" IS
NEITHER A METAPHOR NOR A ROMANTIC NOTION

A contemporary naturalist looks at the interrelatedness of all beings in the great
grasslands of the North American continent.

Douglas Chadwick Wildlife biologist, author and researcher



Of Bears and Rabbits

ANIMALS IN TRADITIONAL NATIVE
AMERICAN ART AND LITERATURE

In the Native view, the animal world often mirrors human society.

Animals are powerful and mysterious entities on their own terms, and
may interact with humans in ways both complex and intimate.

Jason Baird Jackson
Curator of Anthropology, Gilcrease Museum



Medicine Dogs of the Plains



HOW THE "NEW HORSE TECHNOLOGY"
OF THE 19TH CENTURY CHANGED THE
LIVES OF PLAINS INDIAN TRIBES

The relationship between horses and humans has changed cultures throughout
the world. When it came to the North American plains, it profoundly altered
the lives of tribes who embraced the mysterious "god dog."

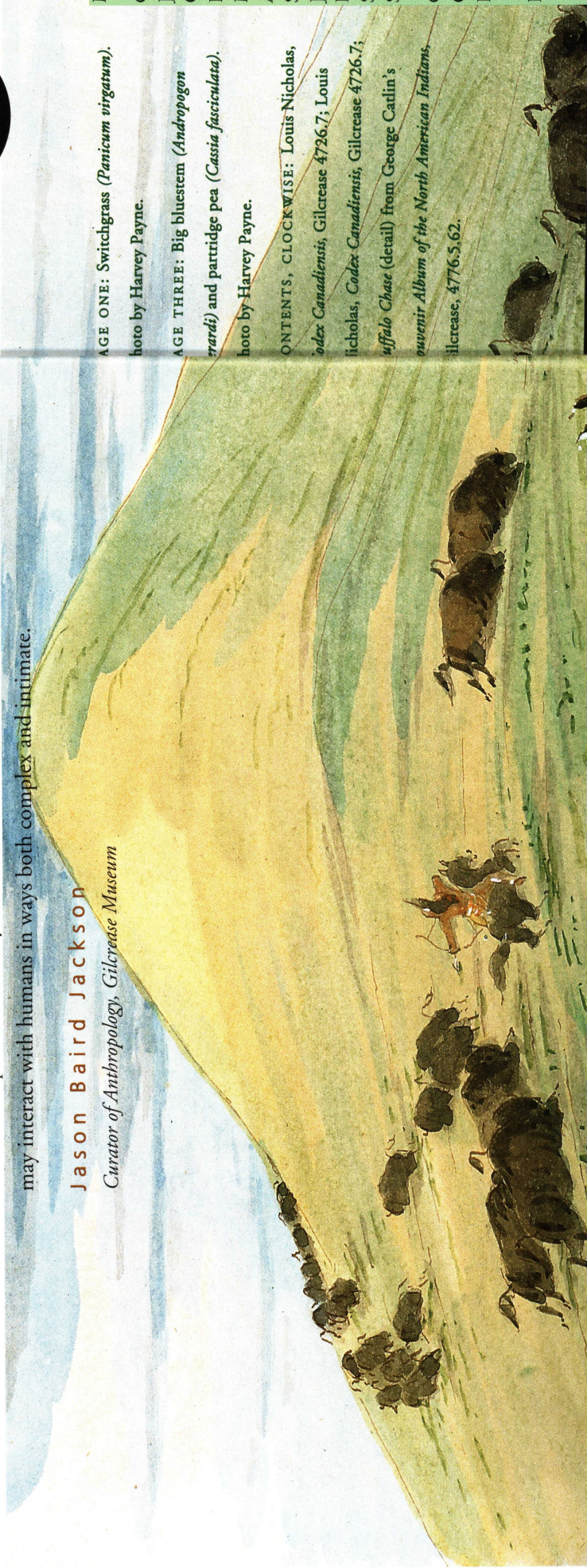
David Dary Professor of Journalism, University of Oklahoma

Bison on the Prairie



From the edge of extinction the plains bison is returning. Nearly extinguished in the 19th
century, the shaggy icon of the prairie has increased from fewer than 300 wild bison to
perhaps 200,000 now at home on the range.

Harold P. Danz First Executive Director, American Bison Association



AGE ONE: Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*).
photo by Harvey Payne.

AGE THREE: Big bluestem (*Andropogon
arardi*) and partridge pea (*Cassia fasciculata*).
photo by Harvey Payne.

CONTENTS, CLOCKWISE: Louis Nicholas,
Index Canadensis, Gilcrease 4726.7; Louis
Nicholas, *Codex Canadensis*, Gilcrease 4726.7;
Buffalo Chase (detail) from George Catlin's
Souvenir Album of the North American Indians,
Gilcrease, 4776.5.62.

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Where the Web Of Life

is Woven of Grass

Douglas Chadwick is a wildlife biologist who studies ecosystems from the Congo to the Arctic, seeking to understand and interpret them from a conservationist's point of view. In addition to numerous scientific publications and books on endangered American wildlife, he has published work in *Audubon*, *National Geographic*, *National Wildlife*, *Nature Conservancy Magazine*, *Life Magazine* and elsewhere. This article is adapted for *Gilcrease* from an Audubon publication.

Chadwick has worked extensively in the field with mountain goats, grizzlies, and black-footed ferrets. Currently he is engaged in an intensive study of whales and marine ecosystems. He lives near the shortgrass prairie of Montana.

Harvey Payne contributed the photos accompanying this article. Payne is an attorney and wildlife photographer who makes his home in Pawhuska, Oklahoma. His nature photography has appeared in numerous publications. He is director of the Nature Conservancy's Tallgrass Prairie Preserve.

ONCE, PRAIRY EARTHS—those incredibly fecund chocolate and black soils strewn across the plains—grew about 60 million bison and a similar profusion of pronghorn, deer, and plains-dwelling elk; smaller grazers, among them ground squirrels, pocket gophers, prairie voles, grasshopper mice, and several billion prairie dogs; a suite of predators that included Plains Indian hunters, as well as plains wolves, plains grizzlies, swift foxes, coyotes, black-footed ferrets, bobcats, ferruginous hawks, burrowing owls, and prairie falcons; plus a spectrum of other creatures, from prairie chickens to prairie rattlesnakes. Claimed by settlers and monopolized for livestock and crops, those same soils grew Canada and the United States into prosperous nations.

Prairie is what all of Kansas and much of Oklahoma used to be. It's what some 400 million acres of North America was, from the Rockies to the Mississippi and Saskatchewan to Texas: Leaves of grass. An untamed garden. Big animals grazing against an infinite horizon. Great Plains. Prairie.

Here was the continent's largest continuous ecosystem, and the one most characteristic of the United States. Today it is the rarest and most fragmented, the one in gravest danger of vanishing altogether. Insofar as not a single patch contains its original migratory fauna, it is already, to a troubling degree, functionally extinct.

DOUGLAS CHADWICK

CLEARLY, THE PRAIRIE IS ANYTHING BUT THE MONOTONOUS
MEADOW SOME PEOPLE IMAGINE IT TO BE. AS FOR ITS FABRIC—
THE GRASSES—YOU’LL FIND MORE THAN 100 SPECIES OF THEM. . .

northern Oklahoma. They may be soft to tread on, but these hills bent nearly every steel plow blade that tried to turn their sod. The largest protected tract of tallgrass in the United States is the nearly 40,000-acre tallgrass-prairie preserve established in Osage County, Oklahoma, by the Nature Conservancy.

“Bear in mind,” cautioned Don Kaufman, a Kansas State University mammalian ecologist, “that no one alive now has ever seen a complete U.S. prairie ecosystem, and no one alive back when all the native wildlife was still around ever viewed the prairie as an ecosystem. So we have no way of knowing for sure how a tallgrass prairie is supposed to work.”

Lacking any natural example that they can sit back and document, naturalists concerned with restoring prairies have opted for aggressive investigation, burning grassland at various intervals, stocking some areas with bison or cattle, and leaving others unburned or ungrazed or both.

Walking through a prairie sunrise in the Flint Hills, I think that one thing a prairie is always good for is feeling embraced by sky. The sky’s seam with the earth glows with ripening seed heads and berries and is full of birds.

The pothole lakes and other water of the prairie region are good for producing half the waterfowl on this continent. They also support



TALL WINECUP
(*CALLIRHOE DIGITATA*)

throng of shorebirds migrating along the Central Flyway. The prairie itself is a critical breeding habitat for a number of other birds, including longspurs, bobolinks, lark buntings, upland sandpipers, and mountain plovers. In recent decades, however, grassland-dependent species have declined between 25 and 65 percent, the most dismal record for any avian group in North America. Habitat elimination.

Parting green stalks, I probe the thatch of dried grass beneath until my fingertips rest on woven cups bearing eggs, some so blue they might have been the seeds of the sky. Purple poppy mallow, or winecup. Dickcissel nests. Butterfly milkweed. Catclaw sensitive briar, folding at my touch. Grasshopper sparrow nest with two sparrow eggs and two from cowbirds, which originally evolved the strategy of leaving their eggs in other species’ nests in order to keep moving with the migratory bison herds. Moth mullein. Leadplant. Meadowlark eggs in a shallow grass tunnel.

Range scientists refer to weeds and wildflowers as forbs. While other biomes have a definite flowering season, usually in spring, the tallgrass prairie is more generous. It is good for offering a new set of blossoms in varied hues every week from April through September. Every tallgrass prairie also has its woody plants—ground cherries, prairie plums, prairie wild roses, currants, sumacs, and dogwoods. And every tallgrass prairie has its box elder, hackberry, and juniper or oak trees shading streambanks and spreading up moist hill-sides.

Clearly, the prairie is anything but the monotonous meadow some people imagine it to be. As for its fabric—the grasses—you’ll find more than 100 species of them in addition to the three prominent tallgrasses I mentioned earlier. There are cool-season grasses, adapted to start growing in autumn and, come spring, to



BURNING AT THE
TALLGRASS PRAIRIE
PRESERVE IN OSAGE
COUNTY

A WIDOW DRAGONFLY ON
STEM OF BIG BLUESTEM
(*ANDROPOGON GERARDI*)



OHIO SPIDERWORT
(*TRADESCANTIA*
OHIENSIS)

shoot up before any others. Then come the warm-season grasses, which include most of the taller species and which employ a different chemical pathway for the uptake of carbon dioxide, so they can respire even after the leaf pores have closed to conserve water during hot weather. Beneath them are shade-tolerant grasses such as Scribner's panicum, able to flourish even as other plants monopolize the sunlight.

And the whole proverbial sea of grasses shimmering out there in the prairie winds actually consists of just the grasses' branches. The main stems, the rhizomes, run horizontally below the surface, where they are better protected from drying, grazing, trampling, fire, and frost.

Tough, fibrous roots descend from the rhizomes. For the first eight inches, they are so densely interwoven that settlers built houses of bricks chopped from this living mat, the sod layer. Few seeds are able to establish themselves here; competition for space and food is too fierce.

But the grasses can reproduce vegetatively, with new clumps of branches—which look like separate plants to us—sprouting from rhizomes as the old clumps give out. Through such clones an individual grass plant may live for centuries, as long as trees in an old-growth forest.

Below the sod, other roots continue downward for anywhere from 12 to 20 feet, those from a single tallgrass spreading through an area the size and shape of a teepee. If placed end to end, they would run for miles, with the roots of one tallgrass plant developing as many as 14 billion fine root hairs. Where they end, a secondary network of still finer threads of symbiotic fungi known as mycorrhizae begins. In return for some carbohydrates from the grass, mycorrhizae increase the root system's activity by about five times, probing soil crevices too minuscule for even root hairs to reach. Drawing in scarce minerals, they promote the grass's growth and also bolster its survival during hard times such as drought.

Prairie grass is much more than meets the eye.

Now imagine, within this subterranean jungle, tribes of mites, insect larvae, earthworms, and microscopic, worm-like nematodes, the most abundant multicellular animals of the prairie. Together, they nearly match the weight of whatever large creatures are grazing overhead on the same acreage, and because the little beasts' metabolic rates are substantially higher, they have by far the greater biological effect.

In their myriad roamings, tunnelings, and turnings, these invertebrates break apart clays; pass enormous quantities of dirt through their guts; granulate the soil; enrich it with urea, amino acids, and other nitrogenous wastes readily absorbed by plants; aerate it; and fashion pathways for root hairs and fungi to follow.

Lightning—flashing from the thunderheads that stampede across prairie skies—transforms atmospheric nitrogen into soluble compounds that are carried to the ground in raindrops. Cyanobacteria, the ancient, single-celled life-forms previously labeled blue-green algae, transfer more nitrogen from the air to the soil. Other types of microbes

**CREATING AND STORING FERTILITY, THE
POTENTIAL FOR GROWTH, IS WHAT A PRAIRIE IS
ALL ABOUT.**

see to the final stages of decomposition. They might go on to use up most of the nutrients being released, but bacteria-devoting nematodes keep them in check. Fungal threads wrap round and round soil particles, encapsulating carbon in a form that can stay stable for centuries. Fungi-devouring herds of nematodes keep the mycorrhizae in balance while depositing yet more excretions into the humus. And on the process goes, generation upon generation.

The question of what good prairie is might not even be raised if people grasped one concept: Those soils didn't just happen to be lying there. The silts and sands spread across the plains by rivers and winds through the eons were ordinary sediments. The chocolatey-rich soils of which they became part were inventions of the ecosystem. Bioproducts. These are the *prairyerths*.

Not to take anything away from Yankee ingenuity and drive, but our emergence as a super-power had an awful lot to do with the underlying super power of those erths manufactured through complex interactions of the organisms constituting the native prairie. Prairie power is why we in the United States pay less of our income for food than the citizens of almost any other nation. And why we export food to most of those nations. And why we then pay our farmers not to grow still more. Some economists even argue that overproduction in the heartland, stimulated by formation of the Farm Credit Bureau during the 1920s, led to the catastrophic drop in commodity prices that triggered the Great Depression.

Prairyerths also help explain why, on an increasingly hungry planet, we Americans now enjoy an unmatched hoard of material goods and have the luxury of being able to debate how much of our natural heritage we ought to conserve.

The phrase "living earth" is neither a metaphor nor a conservationist's romantic notion, not here. A full 75 to 85 percent of the prairie's biomass is underground. Developing after the last ice sheets retreated, some 10,000 years ago this ecosystem has been capturing

... BISON—WHICH CREATE MICROSITES THROUGH THEIR
WALLOWING, RUBBING, PAWING, AND PATCHY PATTERN OF
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GREATER DIVERSITY CAUSE THE OVERALL SYSTEM TO
BECOME MORE STEADY AND THUS MORE PRODUCTIVE OVER
TIME.



PRAIRIE CONEFLOWER
(*RATIBIDA COLUMNIFERA*)

HANDSOME BLAZING
STAR (*LIA TRIS ASPERA*)



energy from the sun and packing it away underfoot, primarily in the form of carbon, ever since.

Creating and storing fertility, the potential for growth, is what a prairie is about.

We may think we know enough about nature to rearrange it for our benefit. Yet the central argument for maintaining biological diversity—the full, natural array of species and all the processes associated with them—is that we do not know which are most vital to the functioning of the community, much less which might one day prove vital to us. The only certainty is that it would be dumb not to save all the parts. Or, rather, all the DNA sequences.

Why keep some plant that is so obscure only a handful of academic dweebazoids can even identify the thing? Because in its genes may reside the code for synthesizing a compound that will revolutionize the paper industry or the success rate for organ transplants. What good is this slimiest of creatures oozing along underfoot? Well, maybe that's the one that will show us how to detoxify a certain chlorinated hydrocarbon in the water supply.

Consider the purple coneflower, scientific name *Echinacea angustifolia*. Both Native Americans and settlers used the plant as a cure for the common cold. After falling off in use during the heyday of our infatuation with wonder drugs, this herbal cure has become common again, especially in Europe. The species contains substances with proven anti-inflammatory and painkilling properties. It appears to stimulate the immune system in general. Other compounds identified in *Echinacea angustifolia* kill insects by disrupting their development.

As lovely as it is medicinal, the purple coneflower is also widely cultivated as an ornamental.



RED-TAILED HAWK
(*BUTEO JAMAICENSIS*)

Boneset, or feverwort, another forb in the prairie pharmacy, has long-chain polysaccharides with immunostimulant properties of their own. It, too, is employed as a home remedy against flu. The prickly poppies I see blooming around me among the grasses were used to treat warts at one time; the prairie larkspur repelled mites and lice. Western ragweed was the choice for contending with colds, cramps, and the pain of childbirth among some tribes. The leaves and blossoms of prairie goldenrod treated sore throats, while the roots eased toothaches. The list continues through a striking bouquet.

And, as a rule, every plant has several insect species linked to it. A little chemical factory in its own right, each insect is in turn essential to the survival of an assortment of smaller life forms, like the life-giving nematodes, and so on down the pyramid of creation. You can put a teaspoon of soil under a microscope and tell right away whether it came from a prairie or a farm field, or even from a “restored” prairie seeded with most of the plants that belong there.

For that matter, corn, wheat, oats, rye, barley, millet, rice, sorghum—the cereal grains that are the staples at humanity’s table—are grasses themselves. Prairie products. Though millennia have passed since we first tamed them, we continue to need wild strains with traits that can be introduced into domestic varieties in order to keep them vigorous and a step ahead of evolving crop diseases.

Researchers at the Land Institute, based in Salina, Kansas, want to go a step farther and fashion new crops from prairie native such as Illinois bundleflower and eastern grama grass. Most grains grown at the moment are annuals, which require farmers to break the soil structure every fall or spring for planting. The institute’s idea is to shift toward deep-rooted perennials. By selecting those with natural pest resistance and high seed output and then planting them in a mixture, farmers could begin rebuilding prairierths instead of flushing them down-stream to the sea. It is a way out of the spiral of expensive chemical addition. Ideally, growing hardy native perennials would also leave farmers less at the mercy of drought and might slow the alarming pace at which many plains states have been drawing down the aquifer beneath them for irrigation.

Ranchers are trying out another native species these days—the bison that our forefathers came so close to obliterating. Bison don’t need to stick as close to water as cattle and sheep do. You don’t have to ferry hay to bison through the long winter months, either. These three-quarter-ton-plus beasts with a top speed of 35 miles per hour can paw through deep snow; doze it aside with their great, shaggy heads; handle predators without their caretakers’ use of traps of poisons; and produce plenty of good, lean meat without constant infusions of hormones and antibiotics.

**AND AS A RULE,
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SMALLER LIFE
FORMS . . .**

SHOWY EVENING
PRIMROSE (*OENOTHERA
SPECIOSA*) WITH MOTH



The most efficient use of a prairie as livestock range would probably be to reinstate all the original hoofed stock, as their foraging habits naturally complement one another. Bison mow down grasses, paying little attention to forbs. Pronghorn favor forbs and the resprouting grasses. Mule deer take a mixture of grasses, forbs, and woody plants within the prairie, while elk are drawn to the brushier sites.

MONOCULTURES OF ANY KIND TEND TO BE UNSTABLE—vulnerable to disease, unfavorable weather, and world markets. Anytime you put all your eggs in one basket, or all your fields in, say, oats, you take on a fair measure of risk.

The converse, that greater variety and complexity create greater stability over the long run, is broadly accepted as true. Yet solid proof for the diversity-stability relationship has been hard to pin down, if only because our knowledge of ecosystems remains so incomplete.

Ecologists themselves were beginning to question the theory. Shoring up that theory is another thing the prairie has been good for lately.

Studies in grasslands have demonstrated that the more variety a prairie contains (as measured by the total number of species present), the better it can withstand drought and the faster it rebounds.

Meanwhile, long-term research has revealed how integral a part of the tallgrass realm grazing animals are, for they reinforce its ability to support a variety of vegetation. For example, David Hartnett found that bison—which create microsites through their wallowing, rubbing, pawing, and patchy grazing—increased plant diversity in pastures by 19 to 54 percent; cattle stocked at moderate densities increased plant diversity by 2 to 24 percent.

Small disturbances leading to greater diversity cause the overall system to become more steady and, thus, more productive over time. If you can get your mind around that, you’re onto a school of ecological thought that transcends old ideas about what constitutes climax vegetation and how animals affect plants. And while we may not yet fully understand this, we should understand enough to see that all a community’s inhabitants can fit together within this concept of dynamic stability—and that within it there is room for all.

In every corner of the globe, people seem at odds with their life-support systems, cutting them down, squaring them off, draining them of species and flexibility. Yet from the prairie—and those who look into it—comes a clear, constant message: Saving nature in all its splendors variety is the only way to go if you plan on going the distance.

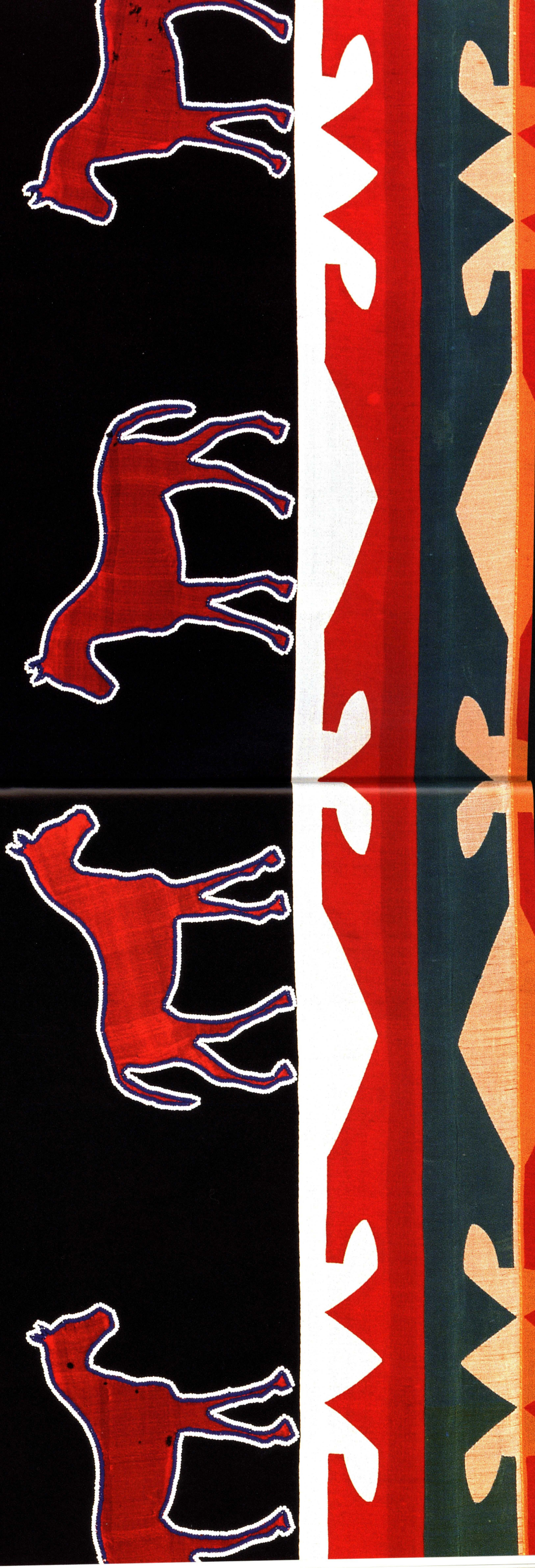
Of Bears and Rabbits

Animals in Traditional Native American Art and Literature

When speaking English, Native American people cover a lot of ground with the word “story.”

An “Indian story” might be a sacred account of creation, a tale of a funny incident that occurred at last week’s powwow, or a novel by a Native writer. Folklorists and anthropologists differentiate between myths (ancient sacred stories), legends (stories of the past that are possibly true) and folktales (fictional stories), but these distinctions are not often made in Native American communities. Among Indian people, listeners can usually take a tale for what it is worth and evaluate it for themselves. Like stories, “art” similarly has a wide range of meanings. Native American art spans the distance between a beaded belt buckle and a Jerome Tiger painting.

J A S O N B A I R D J A C K S O N



In Native American art and storytelling, animals have always claimed a prominent place. Ancient rock art and pottery frequently contain images of animals, as do the oldest tales told by Native American storytellers. Connecting their work to tribal and more generally Indian themes, contemporary Native writers and poets, painters and sculptors also draw on animal imagery. Their appreciation of the place of animals in the natural world is one aspect of the tie between Native art and life. Another is the way in which Native people perceive the animal world as at times mirroring the social life of human communities. In general, whether in secular folktales or sacred stories and art, Native American traditions reveal a great appreciation for the importance and mystery of non-human life forms. In Native American visions of the world, both plants and animals possess powers and responsibilities greater than what is readily apparent on first observation. This sensibility is central to the achievements of Native American literary and visual arts.

Museums with traditions of collecting and studying Native North American art do more than preserve groups of things. Ideally, objects enter museums accompanied by stories. These stories might be about artists: Who made it? How was it crafted? What did it mean to the person who created it? Or they might be about community life: How is an object used? What role does it play in the life of the group from which it comes? Ideally, museums also collect stories that help them care responsibly for cultural objects. This includes not only practical information on the preservation of materials, but also insight into the ways museums can be sensitive custodians of culturally important items.



ABOVE AND DETAIL ON
PREVIOUS PAGES:

RIBBONWORK SHAWL WITH HORSE DESIGN

THE OSAGE are among the most widely regarded practitioners of the technique of ribbon appliqué decoration. This shawl suggests the importance that the horse assumed in Plains Indian tribal traditions since its reintroduction to the New World at the time of European exploration. Horses are important gifts formally bestowed during Osage ceremonies. Shawls such as this one are worn by women on such occasions.

Osage or Ojoe (?), ca. 1950;
wool, ribbon, beads;
Gilcrease 9727.7



BEAR EFFIGY BOTTLE, DUCK EFFIGY BOWL

CERAMIC VESSELS incorporating animal forms are a hallmark of the Mississippian societies that inhabited the Southeastern United

States as far north as the Ohio Valley and present-day St. Louis, Missouri, from about 700 to 1500.

This tradition of sculpture was preserved in the woodcarving that tribes descending from

Mississippian peoples continue to practice. Wooden bowls similar in form to this duck effigy were used in ceremonial feasts by the tribes of the Midwest.

Bear effigy bowl: Mississippian period, ca. 700-1500 (Cross County, Arkansas), ceramic;
Gilcrease 5425.1359

Duck effigy bowl: Mississippian period, ca. 700-1500 (Tipton County, Tennessee), ceramic;
Gilcrease 5425.1950



Sometimes stories enter museums as treasures in and of themselves. Museums can preserve not only objects and art, but also historical documents, sound recordings, photographs, field notes, and other materials that can open windows on other times, places, and cultural traditions. In this portfolio, we bring together images of Gilcrease Museum collections with traditional stories from Native American narrators. All are first the fruit of American Indian expressive traditions, and second, documentary products of the kinds that anthropologists and Native peoples can develop together. Both images and stories reflect the centrality of the animal world in Native American art and culture.

MARK EVERTS'S STORY OF RED BEAR

THE FIRST OF THESE TWO STORIES represents the kind of archival record that often accompanies objects when they enter museum collections. Mark Everts, a traditional Pawnee man, maintained a long-standing friendship with Robert Ellison, a Tulsa oil man with an active interest in western American history. During the 1930s, the men exchanged letters and visits, and Everts provided a large number of Pawnee objects to Ellison. These materials, together with the two men's correspondence, were donated by Ellison's estate to the Mathers Museum at his *alma mater*, Indiana University, in Bloomington. The letters Everts wrote to Ellison contain a number of traditional Pawnee stories that he felt helped make the objects he gave to Ellison meaningful. These stories have not been published, but they are a valuable addition to what we know about Pawnee belief and they assist us in appreciating the place of animals in Pawnee art.

TORTOISE SHELL
LEG RATTLES

RATTLES SUCH AS THESE, made of tortoise shells, are used in the ceremonial dances of many Southeastern tribes, including the Creek, Seminole, Cherokee, and Euchee. They are worn by women during all-night dances that take place at tribal ceremonial grounds. The technique of preparing the tortoise shells for use is complex, requiring many days of work.

Creek, Seminole, Cherokee, or Euchee (Yuchi), ca. 1940, Gilcrease 9327.43

Mark Everts titled the tale that follows “The Story of Red Bear.” It combines two traditional Pawnee bear stories in one narrative. The external story is the tale of the relationship between a bear and a neglected wife—a widespread tale among the tribes of the eastern Great Plains. As in other Pawnee versions of this story, the encounter between the wife and the bear provides the wife’s husband with access to bear power, and is the origin of the style of bear claw necklace worn by Pawnee men (see page 22). Inside this story, the bear tells his own tale of an encounter with a man who attempts to take advantage of him. This encounter explains how the bear’s claws became black and his fur became reddish brown.

Because the story was contained in a written letter by Everts to Ellison, the narrative style of oral delivery is missing. The wording and paragraph breaks are as Everts set them down, although spelling has been standardized and certain words for clarification have been added within brackets.

The Story of Red Bear

This was in the spring time. A squaw was going to plant some corn. The tool she used, a hoe, was made of a shoulder of horse bone tied with buffalo strings. While she was making her garden, there was a thicket near by, in which there was a Bear in the thicket. As she was busy at her garden, this bear turned himself into human and started towards where she was working. In order not to frighten her, he made [a] hacking cough. Then the woman turned to see who it was. She saw this Bear, although he was like a human. This Bear had his face painted red and black.

The Bear told her that he felt sorrow for her, because she does all the work, while her husband lays around. The Bear told her not to be afraid of him, because he was not a human being, but was a Bear. When she saw that he was a Bear, she was a little afraid of him, but she remembered what he told her, not to be afraid.

The Bear said that he would make the garden for her, so he started in, cleaning out brushes and weeds by using his claws to pull, while the woman was planting.

In the evening, she would go home during the night and she would get some dried meat and pound it to take next day to where she was planting her garden. Her husband noticed that she always prepared her food after she comes home, to take [the] next day.

Every noon they would eat what the women brought, that is, the Bear and the woman. Bear would say to her,

“You know now that I am a Bear, but at the same time that I want to help you make this garden. I know now that your husband is noticing you, that you always bring this food out. Since your husband is noticing that you always bring food out here, I want you to tell him about us.”

The Bear said:

“You see me as I am, look at my claws, they are black. These black claws were painted by a human being. I was going east one day, when, all at once, I saw [a] man sitting on the ground. When I saw him, he also saw me. He said:

“Come over here and sit down.”

When I sat down by him, I noticed there was, laying in front him, Indian turnips. There was only one left when I sat down, where he told me to sit down. He was surprised to see me. He pretended that he was going through a ceremony which he was not going through. So when we sat a little while, he said to me:

Hoes made of shoulder bones were used by all of the Plains agriculturalists. “Buffalo strings” refers to animal sinew, used as thread, cord or string.

From a letter written by Mark Everts to Robert Ellison, December 4, 1936. Contained in the collections of the Mathers Museum of World Cultures, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Used with permission.



BEAR CLAW NECKLACE

AMONG THE PAWNEE and neighboring tribes, bear claws are powerful symbols which, as the Story of the Red Bear reveals, are surrounded by traditional narratives and complex beliefs. The plains grizzly bear is a subspecies that is now extinct, having been decimated by hunting and loss of habitat during European American expansion on the plains.

Paunee, ca. 1880, bear claws, otter fur, rawhide, beads; Gilcrease 8427.812



"I want you to go with me across the stream to the other side." So we started off. He had in his hand the Indian turnip which he thought I thought that he was going to use in the ceremonies. After we got across the stream, across which I had to carry him on my back, he told me to:

"Make a fire and to go out and kill a deer so we can eat." I went and killed a deer and brought it. I skinned the deer by using my claws to take the hide off, after which I cooked it for him. He told me to rake the hot coals with my claws, after which they turned black. After we ate the deer, he said to me:

"Now go bring me some water to drink, bring it in the paws of your hand."

During all of this time, he wanted to see if my claws were burnt off.

When the Bear went to stream to bring the water to him, he saw himself in the water, that is, the Bear did. When the Bear saw himself in it, he said to himself:

"I am able to take care of myself instead of having him ordering me around."

So, the Bear started putting some blue clay on his face, the color which represents war paint. When he finished putting on the blue clay paint, he went back to where this man was waiting for his water. The Bear walked towards him. When the man saw the Bear, with blue clay on his face, he knew that he was mad. The man said to him:

"If you want anything, I will get it for you."

Because the Bear was mad for being ordered around by him, the Bear did not say anything to him and all he did was to advance towards him. He took the man by the arm and tore his limbs apart and killed him.

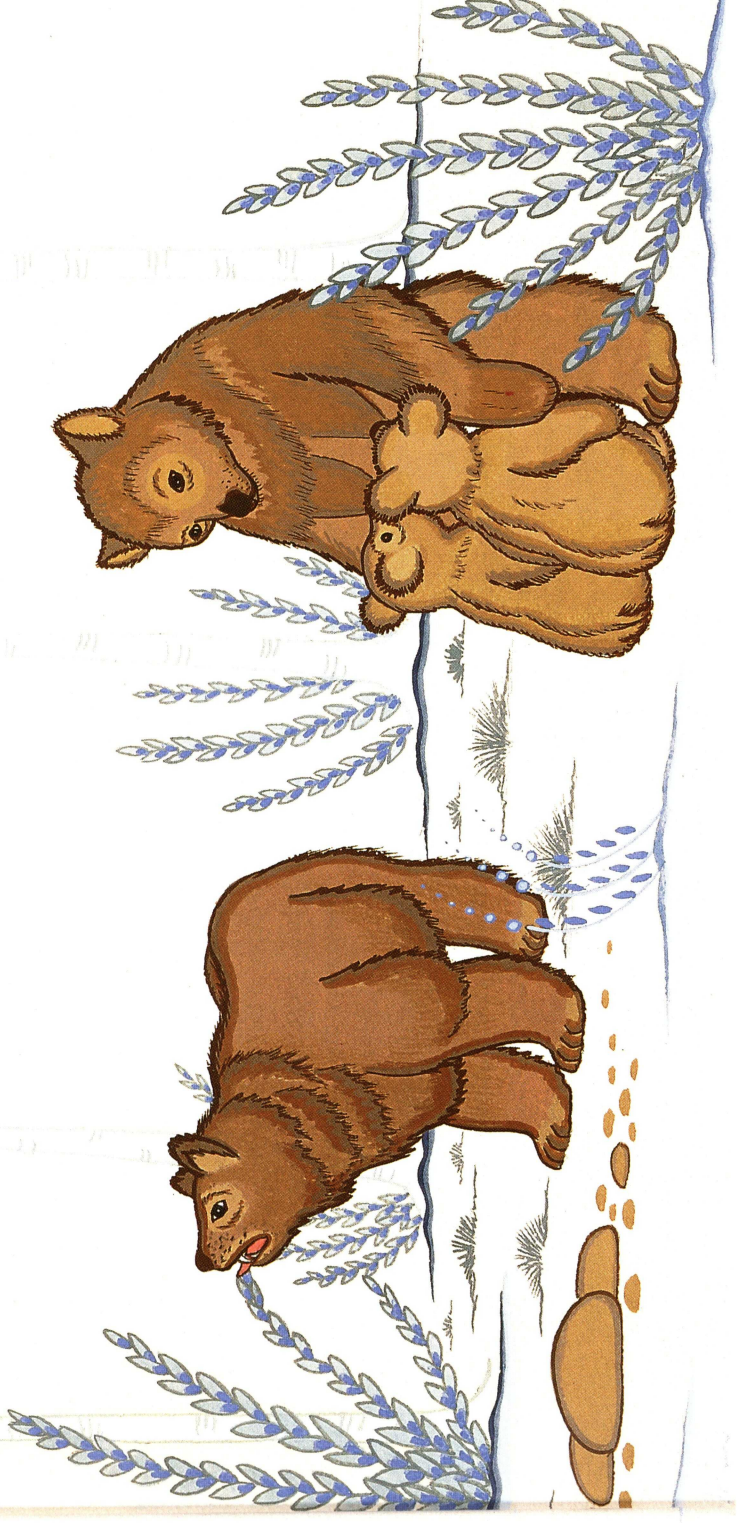
After the Bear killed him, the Bear thought:

"He was on my back when I brought him across the stream."

So the Bear went down stream to wash his back. After he finished washing his back, he came out of the water to the bank and started rolling himself on the dry red grass. That is why to this day that Bear is brown.

Later in the spring, as the growing season went on, the corn was ready to gather. The husband of the woman that the Bear was with, thought:

"I am going to find out why my wife takes food out to work."



Acee Blue Eagle (Creek-Paunee). Bears and Sacred Sun (detail); tempera on paper; Gilcrease 0227.583

So he went out to the garden one afternoon. He got behind a brush and looked towards the garden. When he looked, he saw the woman and man in the garden. So all he did was turn back and go home.

Some time after this another man happened to pass by the garden. He noticed some blue tracks in the garden. So he went and told some men at the camp that there was a Bear around, because of seeing Bear tracks in the garden. He called all the men together and told them about the Bear tracks. So they all started to hunt the Bear and surrounding him, they did find the Bear. They attacked the Bear, but the Bear got one of the men and killed him. Finally they killed the Bear.

The Bear knew that he was going to die, so he told the woman: *"When they kill me, take my left paw, and let your husband wear it on his head and take my claws out and let him wear them around his neck. Also let him have a branch of cedar, because that is where I make my home among the cedar trees."*

This ends the story of how the Bear has Black claws. This story is about the Red Bear. There is another story about White Bear.

Bears are the providers of cedar as medicine in other Pawnee stories. See George Bird Grinnell (1961).

That Rabbit ran back up there, and boy he set that whole place on fire.
Ohhhhhh, that grass was just a'burnin.
Boy, that old Rabbit was just a'jumpin up and doin the flips, you know.

It was going right towards that Alligator.
Boooy, that Alligator was layin there just a'sleepin away.
Begin to feel HEAT, you know.
But, still yet, he thought that was the sun, you know.

He layed there, you know.
And boy.
Kept on a'sleepin.
Boy, that Grass caught on fire where he was at.

Ohhhhhh, he tried to get out of there.
Boy, it just scorched him, you know.
And boy, his skin just ruffled up where he got so hot, you know.

And, then finally that old fire went out.
Oh, that old Rabbit came runnin down there.
He asked that Alligator:

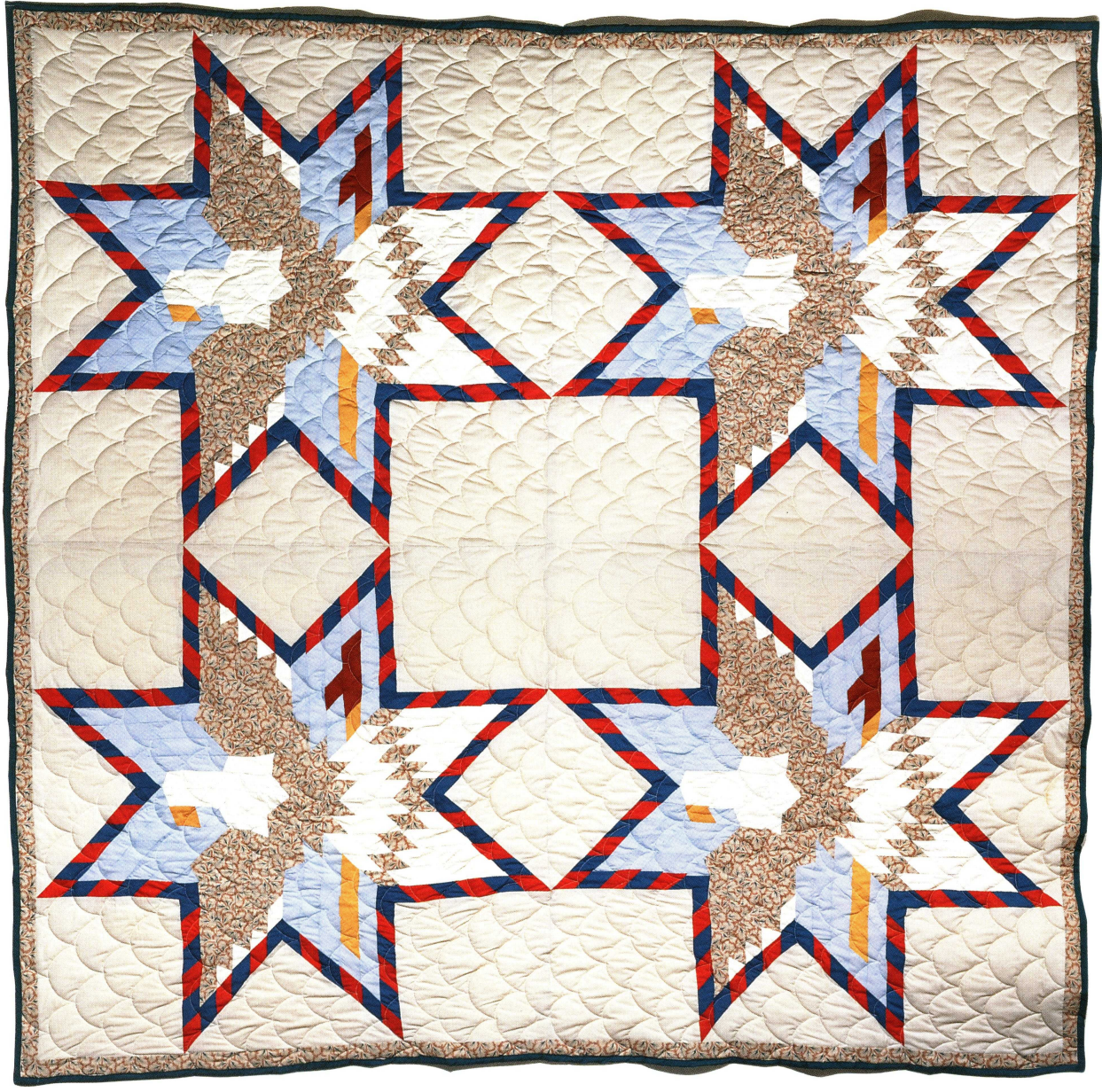
He said: *[Mr. Cahwee gives Rabbit's voice compassion and the intonation of a question.]*
“Are you alright?”



BEADED CUFF WITH ELK DESIGNS

AMONG MANY TRIBES on the Northern Plains and adjacent areas of the Plateau, elk have a special place in traditional belief. Elk are closely associated with male romantic prowess. A man's success in the arts of courtship was attributed to possession of elk power. The display of elk images in clothing, such as on this cuff, could be interpreted as a statement of the wearer's pride in this area.

Northern Plains Culture Area, 1930, beads, cloth; Gilcrease 8427.989



PATCHWORK QUILT

AMONG THE EUCHEE (Yuchi), quilts are important life cycle symbols. A quilt is often made for a newborn child and quilts are important objects used during traditional funerals, being placed over the casket before burial and placed with the deceased at interment. Julia Winningham, the maker of this quilt, knows several designs that feature animals important to the Euche, including turtles and eagles.

Julia Winningham, Euche (Yuchi), 1997, cotton cloth; Gilcrease 90.210

The story of the Red Bear is about the powers animals possess and can transfer to humans. Red Bear assists the wife with her practical work and bestows some of his bear powers to her husband. This power is manifest in the form of a bear claw necklace and bear paw turban decorations and in the provision of cedar, a powerful medicine plant. An object such the Pawnee bear claw necklace held in the Gilcrease collections is more meaningful and powerful when we can appreciate the rich set of beliefs and associations that are part of its cultural context. Among the Pawnee, the powers that men obtain and use in their lives are closely associated with personal experiences and encounters with animals. Traditional medicine was based on curing practices taught to humans by animals. Throughout this century, Pawnee elders, working with a number of different anthropologists, have compiled a rich literature describing and interpreting traditional Pawnee religion and culture. The centrality of animals is one of the most striking features of this tradition.

Mose Cahwee's story is concerned less with power and more with the humor and jokes characteristic of human social life. Rabbit frequently shows his cruel sense of humor, but in many Southeastern Rabbit stories he also gets his due when his animal companions turn the tables on him. As with other North American tricksters, Rabbit's antics have unanticipated consequences that shape the world we experience today—alligators get



BEADED VEST WITH SONG BIRD DESIGNS

WHILE EAGLES are often viewed as the symbol of American Indian manhood, songbirds frequently appear in the vision stories and dream experiences of warriors. Personal experiences with songbirds, who often teach men their songs and medicine techniques, are often recorded in the dress regalia men wore on special occasions, such as in this vest.

Plateau Culture Area, 1930, beads, cloth; Gilcrease 8436.1770

rough hides, opossums lose the hair on their tails, skunks get stripes on their backs, human beings obtain fire. While accidentally putting the world into the form that we experience today,

Rabbit and his victims also reflect what is proper and improper behavior in human social life. Like the Pawnee, the Yuchi also possess sacred stories about animals and power. The songs used in the Feather



Willard Stone (Cherokee)
Tense Jackrabbit,
walnut; Gilcrease 1127.20

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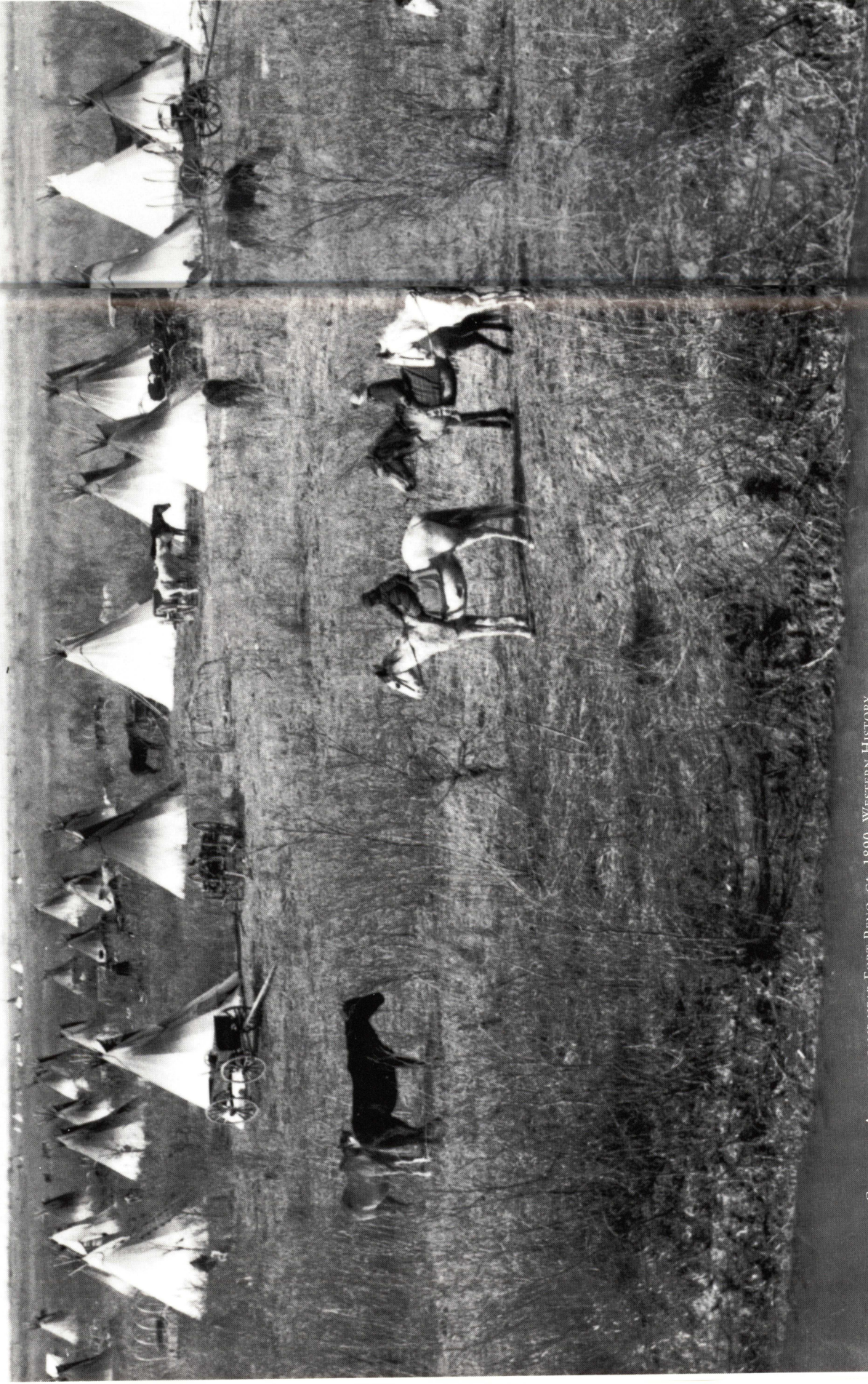
Jason Baird Jackson studied for his undergraduate degree at the University of Florida and received his Ph.D. in anthropology from Indiana University. Formerly a research associate at Gilcrease, he was named Curator of Anthropology in 1998. He curated the major exhibition *Children of the Sun: Euchee Indian Culture and Tradition*, which opened at the museum in August.

Dance, an important part of the Yuchi Green Corn Ceremony, were taught to the Yuchi in ancient times by White Crane. The Euchee Green Corn Ceremony also includes a dance that portrays an encounter between the Yuchi and some monstrous lizards. Today many animals, especially birds, continue to have special significance in Yuchi religion, art, and storytelling (see, for example, the quilt on page 27).

Other essays in this issue of the *Gilcrease Journal* take special notice of the natural world in light of the last several hundred years of human experience in North America. Such a view contrasts nature in two ways, against that which is human—culture—and against that which is beyond scientific understanding—the *supernatural*. Both of these distinctions are less relevant to Native North American experience, where narrative and visual arts reflect world views not patterned on such European categories. In traditional Plains and Southeastern Indian understandings of the world, humans and animals can enter into social relationships that place particular responsibilities on both parties. Animals possess powers humans lack and they have abilities, such as speech, that traditional European thinking has reserved only for mankind. In most Native American traditions, not only do animals precede human occupation of the earth, but it is their activities, not those of man, that have defined the forms and shapes of life in the world. A sense of the power and meaning of animal life, together with the ability to appreciate worlds and world views different from our own, is a prerequisite to fully appreciating the richness of Native American arts.

Medicine Dogs of the Plains

HORSES IN PLAINS INDIAN LIFE



CHEYENNE-ARAPAHO CAMP NEAR FORT RENO, CA. 1890. WESTERN HISTORY

COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES.

WE WERE ANXIOUS TO SEE A HORSE OF WHICH WE HAD HEARD SO MUCH. AT LAST, AS THE LEAVES WERE FALLING, WE HEARD THAT ONE WAS KILLED BY AN ARROW SHOT INTO HIS BELLY, BUT THE SNAKE INDIAN THAT RODE HIM GOT AWAY. NUMBERS OF US WENT TO SEE HIM, AND WE ALL ADMIRERD HIM. HE PUT US IN MIND OF A STAG THAT HAD LOST HIS HORNS, AND WE DID NOT KNOW WHAT NAME TO GIVE HIM. BUT AS HE WAS A SLAVE TO MAN, LIKE THE DOG, HE WAS NAMED “MISSTUTIM” (BIG DOG).

—Saukamappe (Piegan), speaking to fur trader David Thompson, 1878

THAT THE HORSE, WHICH LITERALLY LIFTED THE INDIAN OFF HIS FEET, BROADENED HIS CONCEPTS OF AREA AND DISTANCE, SHORTENED HIS CONCEPTS OF TRAVEL TIME, ALTERED HIS OPINIONS OF THE DIFFICULTIES OF MOVING CAMP AND MAKING A LIVING, AND THAT IT QUICKENED THE TEMPO OF HIS LIFE AND MADE THAT LIFE MORE EXCITING, CANNOT BE DENIED, THOUGH WE LACK PRECISE TECHNIQUES FOR EVALUATING THE

PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLUENCES OF THE ACQUISITION AND USE OF HORSES UPON THE INDIANS.

—John C. Ewers, 1955

PLAINS INDIANS came to look upon the horse with an almost religious awe as each succeeding tribe first caught sight of the animal. The Sioux called horses “medicine dogs,” the Comanches “god dogs.” Other tribes used similar words suggesting the creature’s power and mystery.

Horses arrived in the Western Hemisphere with the Spanish. When, after his first voyage from Europe, Christopher Columbus reported that he found no horses, seed stock was transported across the ocean to Hispaniola during his second journey. On January 2, 1494, Columbus’s men unloaded twenty-four stallions and ten mares on the north coast of Hispaniola near present Cape Haitien, Haiti. They and

DAVID DARY

their progeny were destined to change the face of the continent and to bring about a revolution comparable in impact to that of the Industrial Revolution nearly three centuries later.

The task of transporting horses by sea was not easy. It took about two months for the small, light Spanish caravels to sail from the Iberian Peninsula to the Canary Islands 900 miles away, and thence the 2,500 miles across the Atlantic to the West Indies.

Horses were carried in stalls on the decks of ships, since there was little room below. In prolonged calms, when water ran short and the fodder had been consumed, many horses died and were cast overboard or butchered and their flesh added to the crew's meager gastronomical fare. The area where calms were frequently encountered—about 30 to 35 degrees north and south—became known as the “horse latitudes,” because of the many horses cast into the sea. Such losses convinced the Spaniards that their settlements in the New World had to be self-sufficient.

The horses that survived the long ocean journeys prospered on Hispaniola. As the Spanish became firmly entrenched in the West Indies by early in the 16th century, a young man with a strong will set out to conquer New Spain in the name of God, country, and gold, not necessarily in that order.

He was Hernan Cortes, who brought the first horses to what is today Mexico—and these were the memorialized sixteen: eleven

LINO SANCHEZ Y TAPIA

Left to right:

Ranchero de Texas

watercolor on paper; Gilcrease
4016.336, plate XXXV

Caporal de Hacienda

watercolor on paper; Gilcrease
4016.336, plate XXXII

Soldado Mexicano Presidencial

watercolor on paper; Gilcrease
4016.336, plate I

Charro Mexicano

watercolor on paper; Gilcrease
4016.336, plate XXXI



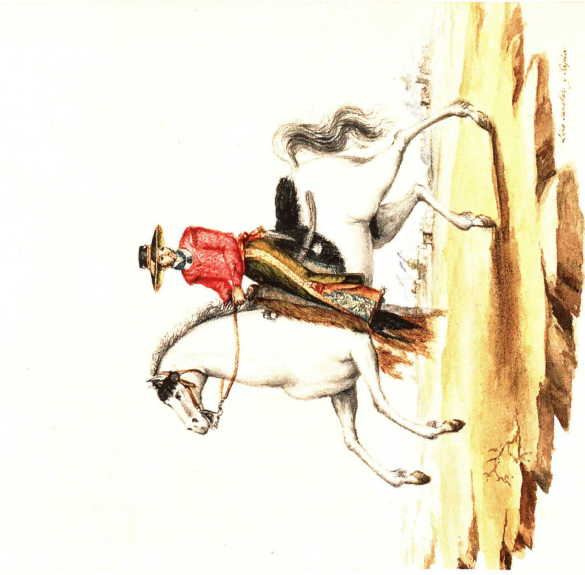
Ranchero de Texas



Caporal de Hacienda.



Soldado Mexicano Presidencial.
Soldat des pretios du Etat Intemus du Mexique



Charro Mexicano.

stallions and five mares. When they landed in Vera Cruz in 1519, the species had come full circle in the New World. Horses had returned to the continent where the species is thought to have originated, but from which they had long since vanished.

However, unlike the first horses that had once roamed North America, those introduced by Cortes and his followers were Andalusian, descended on one side from the grays and roans of Old Spain and on the other from Moorish horses which arrived in Iberia with the conquering Moslem invaders.

Horses had long been an intricate part of life in the Old World, especially in Spain, where they had been bred for centuries. The Spanish horse was well-known for its speed and quality a thousand years before Taric el Tuerro led his forces into Spain. Horses not only provided transportation but were vital to soldiering.

Although the Moorish horses which were ancestors of the Spanish Andalusians did have some Asiatic blood from Syria, Egypt, and Arabia, the horses brought by Cortes to the New World were not Arabian, as some have suggested. They had been bred by Spaniards in the basin of Guadalquivir in the provinces of Cadiz, Huelva, Sevilla, Malaga, Jaen, and Cordoba. By 1492, when the Moors were expelled from Spain, the Spaniards were riding the small, swift, and hardy Andalusian horses, but they had adopted Moorish saddles with short stirrups and the Moors' Arabian style of riding and fighting.

LINO SANCHEZ Y TAPIA
Quicapú
watercolor on paper; Gilcrease
4016.336, plate XVIII



Lino de
Tapia

Quicapú

Капоосъ: Индигенесъ оригиналесъ десъ фронтьересъ Ду Канада, эмигрантъ
Дордъ Ду Тенасъ.

LINO SANCHEZ Y TAPIA
AND THE BERLANDIER
COLLECTION AT
GILCREASE

JEAN LOUIS BERLANDIER
(before 1805-1851), a Swiss-born
botanist, was a member of the Mexican
expedition sent in 1827 to determine
the boundary between Mexico and the
U.S. in the Sabine-Red River region.
With him was Lt. José María Sánchez y
Tapia, an artist-cartographer. Original
versions of Berlandier's accounts of his
travels are in the Gilcrease collection.

The watercolors shown on pages 32,
33 and at left are signed by Lino
Sánchez y Tapia. Many are designated
after originals by Lt. Sanchez or by
Berlandier. Lino Sánchez y Tapia may
have been a relative of Lt. Sánchez and
was probably employed by Berlandier
as a scientific illustrator after Lt.
Sánchez's death in 1834.

Cortes and his followers had a strong advantage on horseback. The Indians feared the "Big Dogs," and some believed the man and beast were one. The horses the Spaniards rode were mostly stallions, believed to be more powerful than mares. Spaniards judged a horse's strength by the size of its *huevos*, or testicles, and the volume of its neigh. Because it was then Spanish custom to leave stallions uncastrated, and because there were many strays, wild horses became so plentiful in New Spain by about 1550 that a horse could be had for the trouble it took to capture and break the animal.

By about 1600, as Spaniards introduced missions in what is now Texas and New Mexico, many Indians on the southern plains were obtaining horses. The animal acted as a tonic for the tribes that embraced it. With the horse came speed, mobility, a new elaboration of style, and much more.

Old documents contain numerous references as to when horses were "first" reported among the various tribes by white observers. Writers like Robert M. Denhardt, Francis Haines, Frank Gilbert Roe, J. Frank Dobie and others have used such documents in trying to trace the spread of the Spanish horse northward. Unfortunately, as most writers acknowledge, the majority of first reportings are no more than records of first sightings. They do not tell us when and how the various tribes obtained horses.

Many authorities agree with historian W. W. H. Davis (*The Spanish Conquest of New Mexico*, 1869) that horses were used by Indians in conflicts with Spaniards by 1650. The animals changed hands between tribes until eventually groups from Texas northward into southern Canada had horses, but exactly when and how each Plains tribe obtained them is still a matter of conjecture.

Initially Indians preferred horses that were already broken for riding to the wild mustangs that could be had for the catching. Later, as the Native American horse culture became established, they caught and broke wild mustangs.

As Indians acquired horses, they were quick to realize the combined potential of horse and rider and to master the equestrian arts. The Blackfoot, Crow, Teton, Kiowa, Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Comanche Indians became great horse and buffalo Indians.

"For plains Indians, horsemanship became the epitome of all manly virtues, an art to be learned as soon as a child could walk," wrote Robert Denhardt in his 1947 book *The Horse of the Americas*. He added, "Stirrups were not in general use on the horses of plains Indians. Standing on the right side of an animal, one hand holding the mane and the rein, the other grasping a weapon, the Indian vaulted on his horse at a bound, and then woe to his enemy, man or beast."



WIFE OF BLACK HORSE WITH
DOG TRAVOIS, CHEYENNE.
WESTERN HISTORY
COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF
OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES.

The impact of the horse on the culture of the Plains Indian was tremendous. James Mooney, writing in the 1898 *Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology*, put it strongly: "Without the horse the Indian was a half-starved skulker in the timber, creeping up on foot toward the unwary deer or building a brush corral with infinite labor to surround a herd of antelope, and seldom venturing more than a few days' journey from home. With the horse he was transformed into the daring buffalo hunter, able to procure in a single day enough food to supply his family for a year, leaving him free to sweep the plains with his war parties along a range of a thousand miles."

HENRY F. FARNY
Fording the Stream, 1905
oil on canvas; Gilcrease
0127.1224



HORSE TRAVOIS, NORTHERN CHEYENNE. WESTERN HISTORY COLLECTIONS, UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES.



In particular, the horse had a profound effect on all Plains tribes who hunted bison. As the Sioux chief Red Cloud said of this creature, "His meat sustained life; it was cut in strips and dried, it was chopped up and packed in skins, its tallow and grease were preserved—all for winter use; its bone afforded material for implements and weapons; its skull was preserved as great medicine; its hide furnished blankets, garments, boats, ropes, and a warm and portable house; its hoofs produced glue, its sinews were used for bowstrings and a most excellent substitute for twine." This plenitude was obtained with much increased ease by a Bowman on a horse.

And the horse itself represented bounty beyond mobility. Among horse cultures such as the Blackfoot, horses were distinguished according to their training or natural abilities as buffalo or war horses, winter hunting horses, common saddle horses, travois horses, pack horses, pole-dragging horses, race horses, studs, brood mares, and lead mares



FREDERIC REMINGTON
*An Episode of the
 Buffalo Hunt*, 1908
 oil on canvas; Gilcrease 0127.2308

within grazing herds. An elaborate and closely guarded cult of horse medicine developed. Some washed their hair in the blood of the horse believing it would bring strength. Horsehair was twisted into rope and horse hide made into clothing, tents, saddles, and shoes. The skin of the horse's foreleg was transferred to an Indian's own leg as a puttee, and the skin of the hock was made into a boot. Horses meant power and wealth, with "wealth in horses," for some observers, being measured by the number of horses owned beyond those required for subsistence.

Even guns, when Indians acquired them, did not immediately displace the powerful combination of a horse with a bow and arrow. Muskets were difficult to load on horseback. Arrows could be fired more quickly, and in experienced hands from close range were easily as accurate. Not until repeating rifles were introduced during the 1870s did Indians begin to choose them over bows and arrows.

Beyond its physical impact, the horse also exercised considerable influence on Plains Indian thought. Having horses allowed hunters more leisure in which to develop the complex, colorful Plains culture which came to full flower early in the 19th century. It was during this period that spectacular religious rites and war games were developed.

FREDERIC REMINGTON
The Horse Thief, 1907
 bronze; Gilcrease 0827.50



Some authorities believe the horse gave Plains Indians a new desire for war. Others contend that the animal simply enhanced the ability to carry on quarrels that had existed long before Native tribes acquired horses. There is no question, however, that the horse figured importantly in wars as well as in the uneasy armed truces whose frequent surprises, forays, raids, and reprisals characterized what was ostensibly peace.

The horse also became an objective in raids, not just an instrument of them. Stolen horses meant immediate new wealth, and possession of them came to be admired as a proof of manhood. Among the Plains tribes, horses were not tribally owned but were the possessions of individuals. When a horse's owner died, his animals were adorned with bells, glass beads, and feathers, and led solemnly in procession. Sometimes the dead man's horses were picketed to his grave or sacrificed. At other times, the horse's mane and tail were cropped—as was the hair of a widow—as a show of grief.

Acquiring the horse enabled Native Americans of the plains to construct larger homes and to more easily transport them. The earlier use of dogs as beasts of burden had limited the size and weight of transportable loads. After the spread of horses, Plains lodges grew to twelve to fifteen feet in height, providing more inside room for family, visitors, and storage of possessions. The horse also enabled the transport of incapacitated people on the horse-pulled travois.



CHARLES M.
RUSSELL
The Buffalo Hunt,
1900
oil on canvas; Gilcrease
0137.2243



FACING PAGE

FREDERIC REMINGTON
Indian Warfare, 1908
oil on canvas; Gilcrease
0127.2307

SOME INDIANS on the fringe of the plains never became “horse Indians,” as Frederic Remington (1861-1909) wrote in *Century Magazine* in January, 1889. The Apaches, for example, stole mounts from other Indians and from the Spaniards, and used them to raid more sedentary tribes and to battle such tribes as the Comanches, but the devotion of the Apaches to the horse was never very deep or permanent. Living in harsh country best traversable with the stealth of a mountain lion or coyote, many Apaches were as inclined to eat a horse as to ride it. Likewise, the horse did not capture the loyalty of Puebloans. Although they were among the first to learn of its value, they continued their horseless life style in permanent communities with adequate supplies of food and water. For them, horses were primarily trade items. Although we have developed a stereotypical image



a. Great Comanche Village 800 Buffaloes seen across the river. 164.
b. Comanche War Party on Wild Horses. 167.
c. Pawnee Village (Rocky Mountains) 600 Wigwams, thatched with Prairie Grass 173.



GEORGE CATLIN
Catching the Wild Horse
oil on canvas; Gilcrease 0126.2174

FACING PAGE

GEORGE CATLIN
Page from the Catlin sketchbook

pen, ink and watercolor on paper;
Gilcrease 4776.6.140

of 19th-century Native life whose icon is the horse, the real picture is a good deal more complicated. The differing relationships that various tribes evolved with the horse were colored by differences in physical environments, histories, and life styles, and also by the enormous differences among various tribes' values, beliefs, tastes, and attitudes.

Most authorities agree that the development of the horse culture reached its highest or culminating point in its development during the 19th century on the plains of the American West. Visual chroniclers of the plains such as Frederic Remington chose the horse as subject because of "his wonderful picturesqueness." The horse, the artist observed, "graces the Western landscape, not because he reminds us of the equine ideal, but because he comes of the soil, and has borne the heat and burden and the vicissitudes of all that pale of romance which will cling about the Western frontier."

Remington seems to have believed that the Indian contributed to the hardy character of the horse on the plains. "The Indian learned not to combat nature, but to observe her moods and prepare a simple means of escape. In the summer his ponies were allowed to eat the very greenest grass found, but he put up no fodder for winter and relied on the bark of the cottonwood tree as food for his horses. Often he is driven to dire extremity to bring his stock through the winter."

The most proficient horsemen among plains Indians probably were the Comanches, although the Kiowas may have shared that honor. Artist George Catlin (1796-1872), who spent nearly eight years traveling in the West, admired the Comanches of the southern plains as unequalled in horsemanship. He noted their ability to drop to one side of a running horse, exposing no more than the sole of a moccasin to an enemy, while shooting from under the horse's neck.

Catlin also marveled at the ease with which the Comanches caught wild mustangs. About 1838, Catlin traveled with thirty Indian guides, a war party of ninety Comanches, and a troop of cavalry near the Red River, the present border between Texas and Oklahoma. He observed Comanches capturing horses, and wrote in his *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians* (London, 1841):

FACING PAGE

GEORGE CATLIN
*Souvenir Album of the
North American Indians*

Crow
watercolor on paper; Gilcrease
4776.5.28

GEORGE CATLIN
*Souvenir Album of the
North American Indians*

Buffalo Chase
watercolor on paper; Gilcrease
4776.5.64

GEORGE CATLIN
*Souvenir Album of the
North American Indians*

Buffalo Chase
watercolor on paper; Gilcrease
4776.5.60



The usual mode of taking the wild horses is by throwing the lasso whilst pursuing them at full speed, and dropping a noose over their necks, by which they are “choked down.” The lasso is a thong of rawhide, some ten or fifteen yards in length, twisted or braided, with a noose fixed at the end of it.

The Indian, having roped a wild horse, instantly dismounts, leaving his own horse, and runs as fast as he can, letting the lasso pass out gradually and carefully through his hands, until the horse falls for want of breath, and lies helpless on the ground. He keeps his lasso tight upon its neck until he fastens a pair of hobbles on the animal’s two forefeet; then he loosens the lasso (giving the horse a chance to breathe), and fixes it around the under jaw, by which he gets great power of the affrighted animal, which goes to rearing and plunging when it gets breath. [Again the Indian advances, hand over hand, up the rope holding the horse by the jaw. He may throw the plunging animal down again more than once.] Finally he is able to place his hand on the animal’s nose, and over its eyes; and at length to breathe in its nostrils, when it soon becomes docile and conquered; so that he has little else to do than to remove the hobbles from its feet, and lead or ride it into camp. This “breaking down” or taming, however, it not without the most desperate trial on the part of the horse, which rears and plunges in every possible way to effect its escape, until its power is exhausted, and it becomes covered with foam; and at last yields to the power of man, and becomes his willing slave for the rest of its life. Great care is taken not to subdue the spirit of the animal, which is carefully preserved and kept up, although they use them with great severity, being, generally speaking, cruel masters. . . .

Several others of these animals were caught in a similar manner during our march. They were by no means very valuable specimens, being rather of an ordinary quality. The finest of these droves can never be obtained in this way, as they take the lead at once when they are pursued, and in a few moments will be seen half a mile or more ahead of the bulk of the droves they are leading off. There is not a doubt that there are many very fine and valuable horses among these herds; but it is impossible for the Indians or other hunters to take them, unless it be done by “creasing” them, which is often done, but it always destroys the spirit and character of the animal.

FACING PAGE

Crupper (horse decoration)

Crow, ca. 1920

leather, beads, wool; Gilcrease
8427.651



INDIANS IN THE MILLER BROTHERS 101 WILD
WEST SHOW. WESTERN HISTORY COLLECTIONS,
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES.



“Creasing,” referred to by Catlin, was then a common practice on the plains whereby a wild horse hunter would fire a rifle ball through the top of a horse’s neck just in front of the withers, about a foot from the ears. It would temporarily paralyze but not permanently injure the animal. Catlin tried “creasing,” but killed the horse he was attempting to capture with a friend.

Before they acquired horses, Indians on the plains enjoyed foot races. After they obtained horses, Indians added horse racing to their list of entertainments. Colonel Richard Dodge recalled in 1877 that once when he was visiting Fort Chadbourne in Texas, a group of Comanche Indians under Mulaquetop were camped nearby. They were frequent visitors to the post.

One day some officers who owned several fast purebred horses talked Mulaquetop into a horse race. The officers thought their third-fastest horse could easily beat any Indian entry over a 400-yard track. The Indians were soon betting robes and other items valued by the soldiers at between sixty or seventy dollars against flour, sugar, and other supplies from the post of like value. At the appointed time a large crowd of soldiers and Indians gathered at the track. As Dodge later wrote in *Our Wild Indians*,

The Indians ‘showed’ a miserable sheep of a pony, with legs like churns; a three-inch coat of rough hair stuck out all over the body; and a general expression of neglect, helplessness, and patient suffering that struck pity into the hearts of all beholders.

The Indian rider weighed about 170 pounds and looked big and strong enough to carry the poor beast on his shoulders. He was armed with a huge club, with which, after the word was given, he belabored the miserable animal from start to finish. To the astonishment of all the whites, the Indian won by a neck.

Another race was proposed by the officers, and, after much ‘dickering,’ accepted by the Indians, against the next best horse of the garrison. The bets were doubled; and in less than an hour the second

Braided rope

Crow, ca. 1920

horsehair, rawhide, beads, wool, dewclaw; Gilcrease 8626.3

Quirt

Plains Culture Area,

ca. 1910

wood, rawhide, beads, leather; Gilcrease 8426.768



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Dary is the author of nearly a dozen books on the American West, including *The Buffalo Book* (Swallow, 1974) and *Red Blood and Black Ink* (Knopf, 1968), both national book club selections, and *Cowboy Culture* (Knopf, 1981), winner of a Wrangler Award from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

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race was run by the same pony, with the same apparent exertion and with exactly the same result.

The officers, thoroughly disgusted, proposed a third race, and brought to the ground a magnificent Kentucky mare, of the true Lexington blood, and known to beat the best of the others at least forty yards in four hundred. The Indians accepted the race, and not only doubled bets as before, but piled up everything they could raise, seemingly almost crazed with the excitement of their previous success.

The riders mounted; the word was given. Throwing away his club, the Indian rider gave a whoop, at which the sheep-like pony pricked up his ears, and went away like the wind, almost two feet to the mare’s one. The last fifty yards of the course was run by the pony with the rider sitting face to his tail, making hideous grimaces and beckoning to the rider of the mare to come on.

It afterwards transpired that the old sheep was a trick and straight race pony, celebrated among all the tribes of the south, and that Mulaquetop had only just returned from a visit to the Kickapoos, in the Indian nation, whom he had easily cleaned out of six hundred ponies.

As Catlin had observed, Comanches were extraordinary horsemen.

Horses changed the face of the plains. Like revolutionary technologies in any age, “medicine dogs” altered the way people lived within and perceived their world. The horse became an intimate part of the sensory world of plains dwellers; its gait paced the new rhythm of their lives, and its empowering presence was understood and celebrated on many levels. As the Navajos sang,

*My horse has a hoof like striped agate;
His fetlock is like a fine eagle-plume;
His legs are like quick lightning.
My horse’s body is like an eagle-plumed arrow;
My horse has a tail like a trailing black cloud.*

*The long rainbow is in his mouth for a bridle,
And with it I guide him.*

Bison on the Plains

IN THE SUMMER OF 1893, Katherine Lee Bates, an adventurous professor of English from Wellesley College, traveled west to see the Chicago World's Fair, then onward to Colorado, where she made her way to the top of Pike's Peak. From that lofty perch, she surveyed the endless expanse of plains to the east and the rugged Rockies to the west. Inspired by all that she had seen, she wrote a poem which was published in the Congregationalist, a church publication. The words of Katherine Lee Bates were later combined with the music of Samuel Augustus Ward's "Materna," a familiar hymn of that day, and the result became one of our most treasured patriotic songs, "America the Beautiful."

Exhilarated by her glimpse of the Great Plains, Bates had yearned to capture in poetic verse the beauty of this American icon, whose "fruit-ed plains and amber waves of grain" had replaced the formerly abundant tall and short prairie grasses. This was our last inland frontier, and it represented the grand adventure.

H A R O L D D A N Z

CHARLES M. RUSSELL
Running Buffalo, 1918

oil on canvas; Gilcrease 0137.2266





A speech delivered by Representative Robert C. Winthrop of Massachusetts on January 3, 1846, regarding termination of joint occupation of Oregon, called upon the United States to claim “the right of our manifest destiny to spread over this whole continent.” With Manifest Destiny as its bellwether, an unsettled nation soon claimed all of the lands from “sea to shining sea.” This did not portend well for the bison or the native peoples of the plains.

The first wagon train of immigrants set out for the Pacific Coast from Independence, Missouri, in May 1841, beginning a vast migration that would forever change that North American wilderness area, referred to as the high plains, which stretched from the Missouri Valley to the Rocky Mountains, and from Canada to Texas. The Great Plains were often a harsh and unforgiving adversary to prairie travelers and they were eager to cover as much ground as possible each day; still they could not help but take notice of a seemingly endless variety of birds and mammals, and especially the countless herds and incredible numbers of bison.

GEORGE CATLIN
*Souvenir Album of the
North American Indians*
Buffalo Bull

watercolor on paper; Gilcrease
4776.5.54

BOUNTY FROM THE
BISON

In the *Bureau of American Ethnology Bulletin* No. 159, John C. Ewers listed more than eighty non-food uses of the buffalo among one Plains tribe, the Blackfoot. Among the uses were:

CLOTHING: Winter robes, caps, moccasins, leggings, mittens, shirts, coats, dresses, capes, belts, breechclothes, and headresses.

FURNISHINGS: Lodge covers, doors, and linings; bed covers, ornaments.

WEAPONS: Shields, bow backings and strings, arrowhead and feather wrappings, powder flasks, warclub hafts and covers, knife sheaths.

TOOLS: Arrow straighteners, fleshing tools, meat and berry pounder hafting, emergency kettles, water buckets, spoons, cups, ladles, fly brushes, glue, thread, skin softening agents, pipe-polishing medium, paint-mixing medium, quill flatteners, paint brushes.

GEAR: Saddle coverings, parfleches, bags and pouches, hobbles, riding gear, ropes, pole hitches, horse blankets, horse watering troughs, horsehoes.

TOYS: Sleds, ball stuffing, hoop and pole game gear.

CEREMONIAL: Sun Dance altars and lodge rafters, rattles, masks, winding sheets for the dead, various ceremonial headresses.

The American bison is usually referred to by its more common name, “buffalo,” and although it is in the same family, Bovidae, as the Cape buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) and the Indian or water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*), it is not a true buffalo but rather a bison. Its closest living relative is the European bison or wisent (*Bison bonasus*). Species Bison bison contains two subspecies, the wood bison (*Bison bison athabascae*) and the plains bison (*Bison bison bison*). Wood bison are now found only in Canada, in very limited numbers, and have been designated an endangered subspecies. Even though the plains bison once was close to extermination, it has never been declared a threatened or endangered subspecies.

No other animal has been so closely associated with the plains and prairies of America as the bison. Traveling in herds that might contain up to 125,000—or perhaps as many as a million—animals, North American bison are estimated at their peak population to have reached over sixty million. Massive herds constantly on the move were closely followed by attentive wolves, coyotes, and scavenging birds. Seasons dictated herd behavior. Winter with its blizzards, cold winds, and limited forage was a time of deprivation and a test of endurance for the bison. In the heat of summer, from late June through early August, belching bulls weighing up to a ton engaged in combat for the favor of receptive cows and maturing heifers. After mating and a gestation period of some 275 days, little reddish brown calves would appear. Their birth, along with the sprouting blanket of rejuvenated bluestem, buffalo, and other grasses, announced the beginning of a new bison year.

Early explorers recorded their astonishment at what appeared to be an almost unlimited number of bison. They reported that “. . . The country was one robe. . . . The plains were black and appeared as if in motion. . . . [that the bison were] as numerous as the locusts of Egypt.” An example of the awe inspired by the great herds is found in the comments of John Kirk Townsend, a physician and ornithologist. “Toward evening, on rising a hill, we were suddenly greeted by a sight which seemed to astonish even the oldest amongst us. The whole plain, as far as the eye could discern, was covered by one enormous mass of buffalo (1905, 161).”

These glorious and monumental herds which comprised the bulk of the American bison population were predominately located within the Great Plains of the United States. With their nucleus located in the approximate center of the country, bison herds were in process of expanding their range toward both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts when the Europeans began to settle within the eastern coastal areas. At its maximum historical range, bison habitat extended north into Canada as far as the Great Slave Lake, southward to mid-Mexico, east over the Allegheny Mountains and approached the eastern seaboard.

After 1840, the demise of the great bison herds on the plains was following its own course of Manifest Destiny. The occasional taking of bison for sport or for food vastly accelerated as more and more people spread westward and these unwelcome and frequently wasteful events did not go unnoticed by the Plains Indians.

Roman Nose, noted warrior and chief of the southern Cheyennes, was one of a number of tribal leaders concerned over the pernicious ways of white immigrants and settlers. He stated his position at a council held near Fort Ellsworth, Kansas in 1866: “We will not have the wagons which make a noise [railroad steam engines] in the hunting grounds of the buffalo. If the palefaces come further into our land, there will be scalps of your brethren in the wigwams of the Cheyennes. (Johnson 1909, 380).” Conflict between the Plains Indians and the white invaders was inevitable. What is surprising is that it was not more prevalent and violent than it was. For Plains Indians, the bison meant everything necessary to life, from physical necessities to spiritual well-being.

Meat was, of course, the first consideration, but other parts of the bison had their own functions and uses. Hides were used for clothing, bedding and tepees; bones for tools and weapons, skulls for religious ceremonies; organs, horns, and hooves, and the dried dung were used for fire fuel. Following the herds, Indian tribes hunted bison based upon conditions of need and want. Fall was the preferred time for hunting the animals; they were then fat and at their peak of health, and the meat gathered would be needed during the winter months.

Next to bison, horses were most critical to the continuance of free-ranging Plains Indian life. The horse carried possessions from camp to camp, and, adorned with painted symbols and special gear, became a war horse. Most importantly, however, horses permitted the Plains tribes to follow the bison and to hunt them successfully. Prior to acquiring the horse from Spanish colonists, tribes were only semi-nomadic, depending upon bison drives or jumps to kill the animals. In the drive, bison were piloted into a gully, a canyon, or some other trap having inescapable sides, and then slaughtered. The jump resulted in basically the same outcome for the bison except that they were driven to their demise over steep riverbanks or cliffs.

The bison was devised by nature for a grassland environment. Almost free of disease, bestowed with great strength, agility, keen hearing and a sharp sense of smell, it was once claimed to have but one weakness—below-average eyesight. There are those who hold that the bison also possesses below-average intelligence, but it has been my observation that the creature is poor neither of sight nor of mind. It is possible today’s bison have learned to depend more upon vision than smell. I believe that the bison has shown itself the equal, if not the



CHARLES M. RUSSELL

*The Attack on the
Wagon Train, 1904*

oil on canvas; Gilcrease 0137.902

superior, of any other member of the Bovidae family. It is, however, finally a herd animal, with all the advantages that come with being part of a herd—but also with the tragic frailty that consigns an animal to remain with or blindly follow the group, even to its death.

The construction of railroads through prime bison habitat offered travelers quick, inexpensive transport to the West. But for the bison it would mean near extermination; and for Plains tribes it meant the eventual demise of a life style. The completion of the Union Pacific forever divided the plains bison into two great herds, a northern and a southern herd. Although the northern herd enjoyed nearly twice as

GEORGE CATLIN
*Souvenir Album of the
North American Indians*

Buffalo Dance

watercolor on paper; Gilcrease
4776.5.70

much land as did the southern herd, it was estimated that in 1871, the southern herd was actually twice as large as the northern herd. The number of bison that were left within these two herds after the Union Pacific Railroad passed through the plains in 1867 can only be estimated, but it has been suggested that the figure would not have exceeded fifteen million (Roe 1970, 492).

Slaughter of the remaining large bison herds began slowly. Even by the early 1870s large herds still roamed the southern and northern plains. In May, 1871, Colonel Richard Irving Dodge was driving a light wagon toward Ft. Larned in central Kansas, for twenty-five miles of this trip it was through "one immense herd, composed of countless smaller herds, of buffalo then on their journey north (Hornaday 1889, 389)." When William T. Hornaday, who was then superintendent of the National Zoological Park, learned of this encounter, he contacted Colonel Dodge and, based upon herd logistics furnished by Dodge, estimated herd size to be not less than four million animals (1889, 391). The plains bison, however, was living on borrowed time, as the railroads made exploitation by hunters and hide skimmers easier and more economical.

Active hide hunters numbered in the thousands, perhaps as many as 20,000, at the height of the bison slaughter (Collinson 1963, 78). Following herds with their wagons and skimmers, it was not unusual for some of the larger outfits to kill hundreds of animals in a day.

Individual records were equally impressive. One hunter killed 204 in a single stand, another 5,855 within a three-month period (Gard 1960, 128-129). The massacre did not involve only hide-hunting whites and aristocratic "sportsmen"; it included a few unscrupulous Indians apparently as anxious as white hunters to profit from bison. Although the herds were diminishing rapidly, they still eagerly bartered bison hides and tongues for trade goods and whisky.

When the Northern Pacific Railway was completed in 1880, the remnants of the northern herd immediately came under assault. In October 1883, Sitting Bull and a thousand warriors from his camp at the Standing Rock agency descended upon the last thousand head. Every animal in the herd was killed (Hornaday 1935, 101).

Public apathy toward the bison slaughter was not universal. Some early observers issued vehement warnings, and when extermination seemed imminent there was a stream of protests. Between 1870 and 1876, several bills to protect the bison were introduced by members of Congress. On June 23, 1874, during the last days of the Congressional session, both houses passed a bill for the animal's protection, but President Ulysses S. Grant pigeonholed it, and it died for lack of presidential action. A primary political concern at the time was not the future of the bison, but control of Plains Indian tribes. Grant's

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Secretary of the Interior, Columbus Delano, had addressed this concern in the previous year's *Annual Report of the Department of the Interior*, concluding, "I would not seriously regret the total disappearance of the buffalo from our western prairies, in its effect upon the Indians, regarding it as a means of hastening their sense of dependence upon the products of the soil and their own labors."

Colonel Richard Dodge, the then well-known western military commander, had no particular grievance against the bison, but he still directed his troops to "kill every buffalo you can, [as] every buffalo gone is an Indian gone." General Philip Sheridan praised the bison hunters. "Send them powder and lead, if you will; but for the sake of a lasting peace, let them kill, skin and sell until the buffaloes are exterminated. Then your prairies will be covered with speckled cattle and the festive cowboy, who follows the hunter as a second forerunner to an advanced civilization." (Cook 1907, 113)

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ANIMALS ONCE HAD
RUN FREE.**

Harold P. Danz was the first executive director of the American Bison Association (now National Bison Association) and a long-time National Park Service employee. He holds a Masters degree from the University of Northern Colorado and a Ph.D. from the University of Colorado. His book *Of Bison and Man* was published in 1997 by the University of Colorado Press. He has also written a number of articles on bison and recently completed a manuscript on the cougar, *Felis concolor*, which will be published by the Ohio University Press.

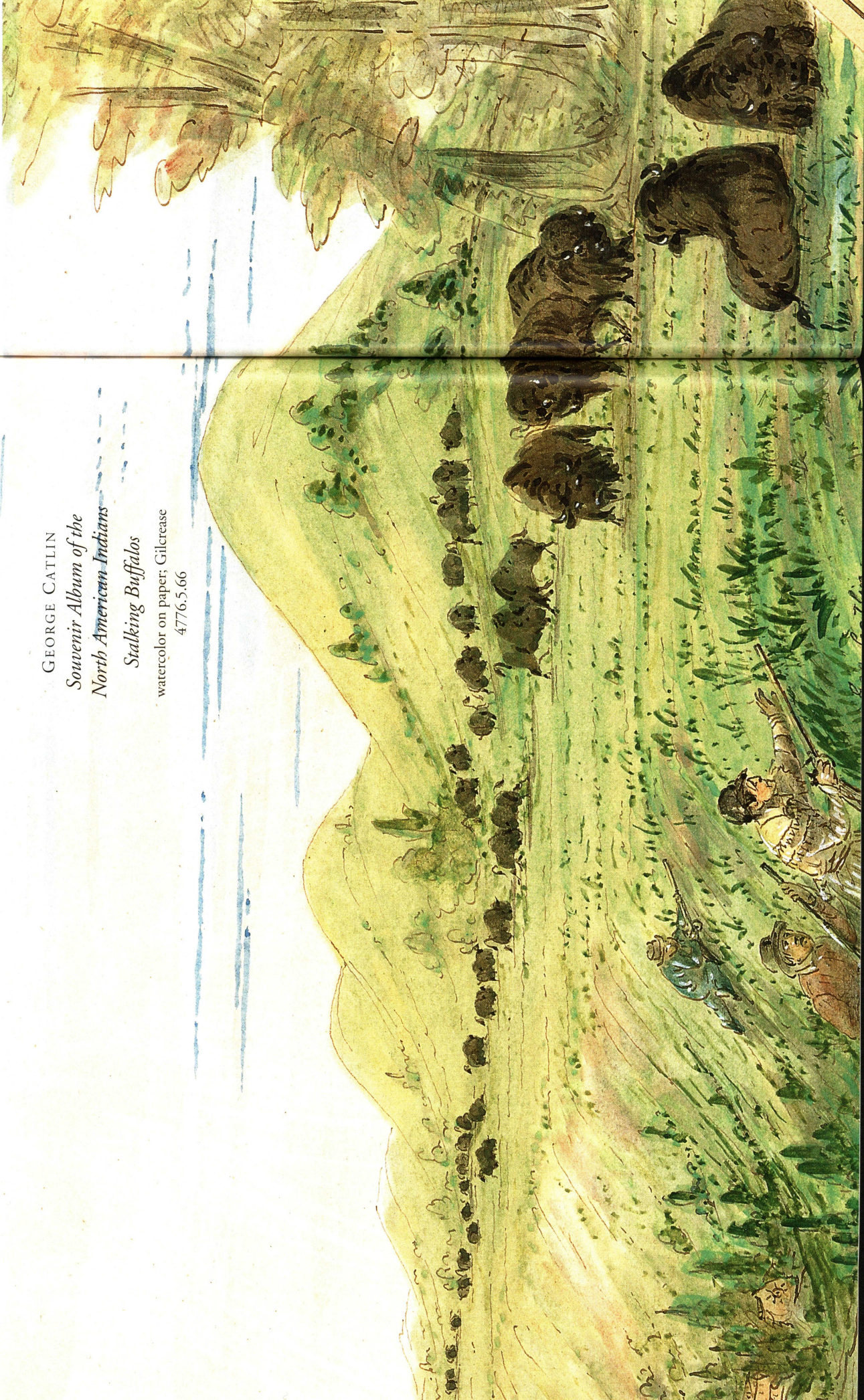
Eventually, all that remained of a sea of bison were bleached bones. Alas, not even these were allowed to remain where the animals once had run free. Entrepreneurs methodically collected and shipped the bones to St. Louis and points further east where they were used in manufacture of fashionable sales items, ground for fertilizer, or converted into the bone char used to refine sugar. It was claimed that between 1868 and 1881 over 310,000 tons of bison bones made their way from the western plains to markets in the East. "Bone picking," as it was called, began in 1868, reached it peak in the 1870s and continued until 1891, nearly a decade after the decimation of the herds. (McCreight 1939, 39)

When the frenzy of the hunt finally ended, the last hides had been shipped, and the skeletons of the once magnificent herds were ground to dust, there were fewer than 285 wild bison left in the United States and about 550 in the vicinity of Canada's Great Slave Lake. (Hornaday 1887, 525). There also were a few captive animals, 256 to be precise, preserved in private herds and zoos.

GEORGE CATLIN
*Souvenir Album of the
North American Indians*

Stalking Buffalos

watercolor on paper; Gilcrease
4776.5.66



One of these private herds, owned by Austin Corbin, was located in the Blue Mountain Forest and Game Preserve in New Hampshire. Journalist Ernest Harold Baynes visited the preserve in 1904, became intrigued by the Blue Mountain herd and its historical mystique, and wrote several articles about it for a Boston newspaper. Urging the establishment of permanent herds by the Federal Government, Baynes contacted a number of prominent people, including President Theodore Roosevelt, in search of support. On December 8, 1905, fourteen like-minded bison proponents met in the Lion House of the New York Zoological Park. As a result of this meeting, an American Bison Society was established, with William T. Hornaday president and Baynes secretary. Shortly after, President Roosevelt accepted the Society's invitation to become honorary president.

While Baynes attempted to generate governmental interest in saving the bison, circumstances were unfolding in Montana that would have significant impact on the still-struggling United States bison population. One of the largest private herds assembled in the late 1890s was the Allard-Pablo herd, on the Allard ranch along the Flathead River. Because of the untimely death of Charles A. Allard in 1895, his estate was obliged to dispose of the ranch and his equal share of the bison. Michel Pablo moved his share of the herd to Flathead reservation land, and by 1906 it was said to number 600 animals. Aware that he was soon to lose grazing rights on the reservation land, Pablo appealed to the United States government for an alternate site but was unsuccessful. He then sought permission from Canada to graze his bison across the border, but received an astounding offer from the Canadian government that instead of grazing rights, they would buy

his whole herd at the rate of \$200 per animal! Having few other choices, Pablo was obliged to sell. It took six years to deliver all of his bison, which by 1912 came to more than 700 animals.

One of the first actions of the newly established American Bison Society, or ABS, was to support an earlier recommendation made to Congress by Hornaday concerning funding of a bison enclosure within Oklahoma's National Wichita Forest Reserve. Congress responded by providing, in 1907, enough funds to enclose 8,000 acres. To provide seed stock for this new National Bison Range, Hornaday then shipped fifteen choice animals from the New York Zoological Park to the reserve. With the support of Montana Senator Joseph M. Dixon, the ABS sent Congress a bill proposing the establishment of a bison reserve in Montana. Stung by the loss of the Pablo herd to Canada, Congress quickly passed this legislation and President Theodore Roosevelt signed the bill into law on May 23, 1908. Thus, a new National Bison Range near the town of Moiese in western Montana was created, but it did not as yet have any bison. Congress asked the ABS to come up with the bison, which they did by soliciting more than \$10,000 from the public and using the funds to purchase a total of thirty-seven bison to stock the newly created range.

In 1913, the ABS donated six bison to start a herd on the Fort Niobrara reservation in north-central Nebraska, and fourteen bison to establish a public herd within the Wind Cave National Game Preserve.

A number of individuals, it could be argued, were more instrumental than the ABS in saving the bison species for future generations, although their reasons were perhaps not as praiseworthy. These were the harbingers of a new agricultural industry, the quixotic and sometimes crusty individuals who captured, bought and sold, and raised bison for either fun, profit, or adventure—people such as Scotty Philip, Charles Jesse “Buffalo” Jones, Charles Goodnight, Gordon W. “Pawnee Bill” Lillie and Michel Pablo.

Some of the early gatherers of private herds aimed to exploit the sure value of the bison as a public curiosity. Others put together herds for the purpose of interbreeding the animals with domestic cattle in order to develop a superior crossbreed. The remainder simply wanted to be bison ranchers, to raise bison for meat, and to claim the distinction of owning the historic animals. Over the years, bison ownership has proven to be an attractive investment. Bison eat and drink less than cattle, they are hardier, they require less care during calving, and their meat brings higher prices. It is also considered by some to be nutritionally superior. The largest single owner of bison in the world is Ted Turner, the communications and television magnate, whose numerous landholdings are home to more than 10,000 animals.

In addition to National Wildlife Refuges and Parks, bison can be



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WILLIAM J. HAYS

*A Herd of Buffaloes on the
Bed of the River Missouri,*
1860 (*detail*)

oil on board; Gilcrease 0137.533

found in a number of state, county, and city parks, and in increasing numbers on tribal and conservancy lands. The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve near Pawkuska, Oklahoma, has committed approximately 30,000 acres of grassland forage to support an eventual herd of 1,100 to 1,700 bison.

Current estimates suggest a U. S. bison population of close to 200,000. The animals exist in every state in the union, including Alaska and Hawaii. The new industry that developed around them contributes to their viability, as animals that people can eat as well as nurture are less likely to become extinct.

Strong winds still blow across the Great Plains of America, and spring rain and sunlight encourage the prairie flowers to bloom, sharing their promise of a new season. If we listen carefully, we can almost hear a sound like faraway thunder, the sound of a hundred thousand bison returning to the plains. They will perhaps not gain the numbers that once darkened the landscape in every direction, but they are here again.

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