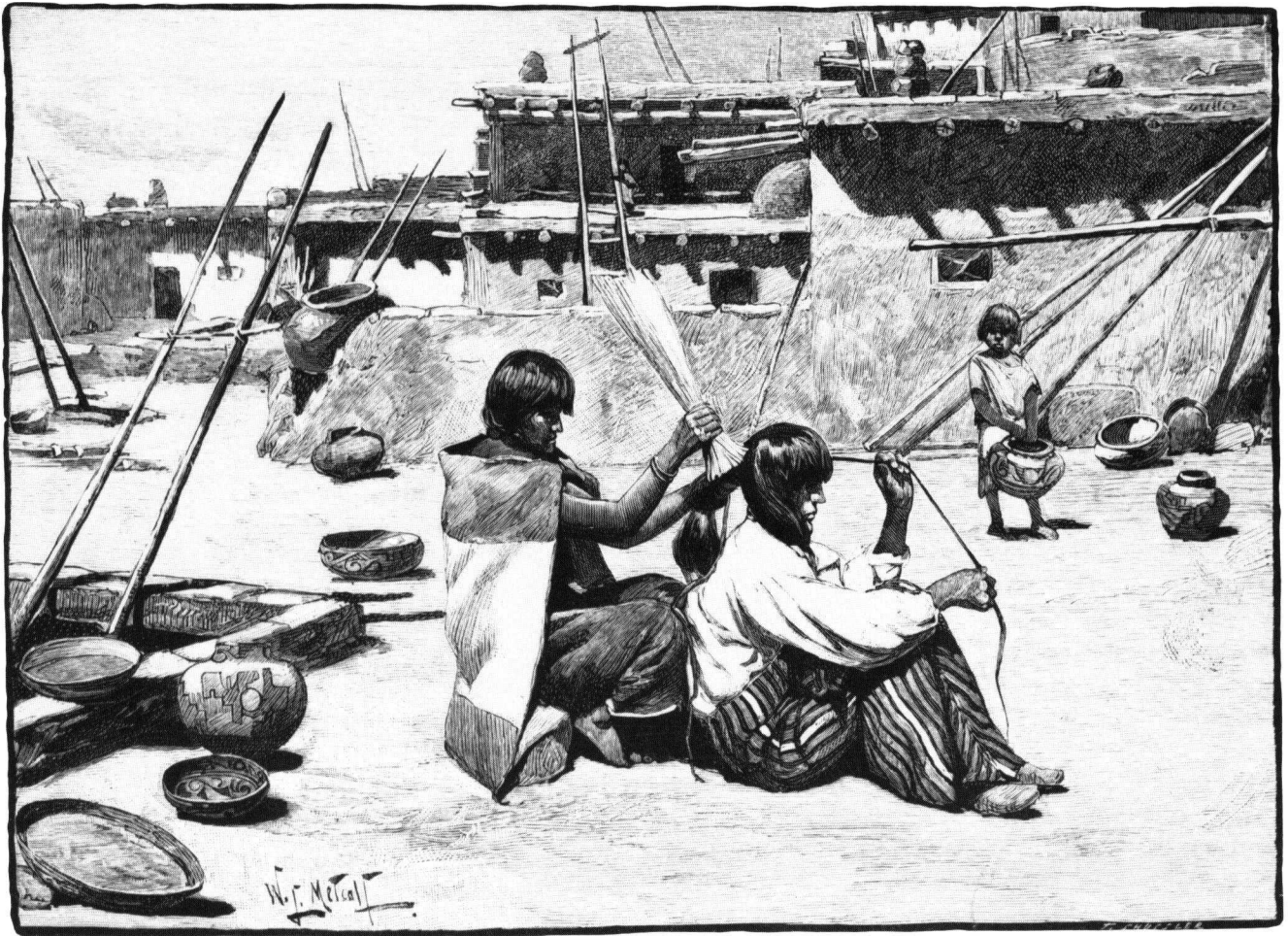


GILCREASE

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ILLUSTRATORS



Cover: W.L. Metcalf, Zuñi Courtship, 1883, engraving, from Century Magazine for a three-part article, "My Adventures in Zuñi," written by Frank Hamilton Cushing.

Above: W.L. Metcalf, Zuñi Courtship, 1882, tempera on paper, 9 3/4 by 13 1/4 inches.



OF THE WEST

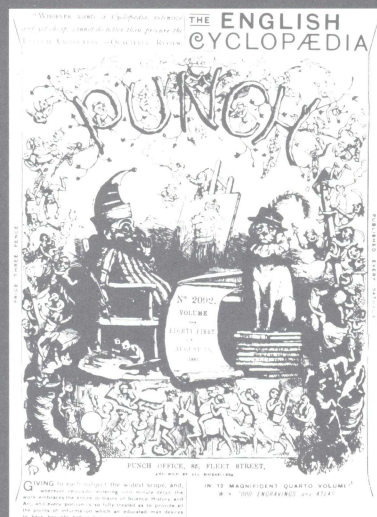
BY PAULA HALL

The "West" has served as an inspiration for artists since Europeans discovered America and has varied by geographical definition, depending on the date and time. But in the last half of the 19th century, exploration and development of lands beyond the Mississippi River and the emergence of a strong American publishing industry provided some of the greatest avenues for artists and illustrators to record the western movement.

For centuries, artists were employed primarily by patrons. An artist's source of income often depended upon capturing and adhering to the artistic pleasures of his employer. With the development of a strong

American publishing industry in the 19th century, however, the chief employer of artists was no longer the individual collector or patron, but rather, editors and publishers seeking visual accounts of activities taking place in the new frontier.

The public's insatiable desire to learn more about the American West created an explosion of books and periodicals. Prior to the Civil War, there were few successful periodicals published in the United States. Imported British magazines, such as *Punch* and *The Illustrated London News*, were reading choices of the day. But as the Civil War began to unfold in late 1860, American news weeklies began to dominate the

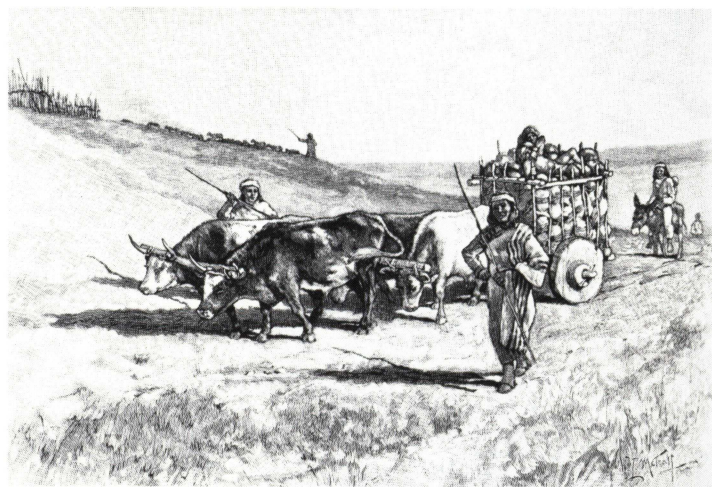




publishing scene, providing readers with written and pictorial reports of the war.

As the publishing arena shifted from England to the United States, many new weekly and monthly periodicals were launched. *Harper's Weekly*, introduced in 1857, was described as a "family newspaper" to help distinguish it from the *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, offered to the public earlier as an aid for selling books published by The House of Harper. *Atlantic Monthly* and *Scribner's* were introduced by other book publishers in the late 1850s. *Century Magazine* was introduced in 1881, a result of a dispute among *Scribner's* editors.

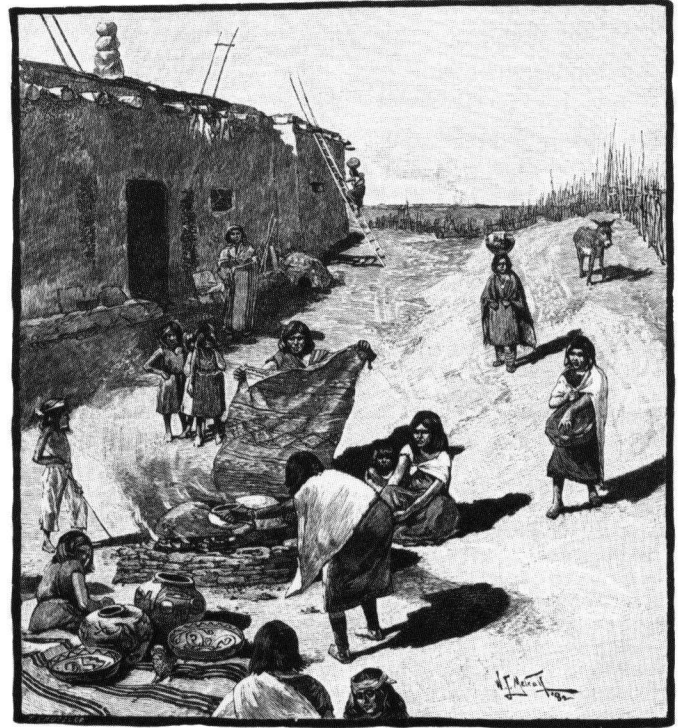
More periodicals followed, including *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Saturday Evening Post* and *Colliers*, as the growing American middle class was eager to spend money for good reading material. Advancements in printing technology, including the advent of the rotary press, made it possible to reach a wider market. The completion of the first coast to coast railroad made easier access to a vast new country about which American readers were eager to learn. The artistic and



Above: W.L. Metcalf, *Returning from the Field*, 1882, engraving, from *Century Magazine*.

Right: W.L. Metcalf, *Returning from the Field*, 1881, tempera on paper, 11 3/4 by 17 3/4





Left: W.L. Metcalf, *Pottery Firing*, 1882, tempera on paper, 14 $\frac{1}{4}$ by 13 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Right: An engraving of *Pottery Firing* published in *Century Magazine* in 1883.

pictorial exploration of the western domain soon became the most popular subject for magazine publishers.

Editors sought artists for tours of western discovery. Illustration, which until this point had been limited by the small number of publishers and poor reproduction methods, was now a lucrative field for artists. The artists of this period were part of what art historians often call the “golden age of illustration.”

Many illustrators of this time received critical acclaim for their work, with Frederic Remington, Charles Russell, William R. Leigh and N.C. Wyeth being some of the notables whose work appeared in publications near the close of this publishing era in the early 1900s. Their careers as illustrators had profound effects on their later endeavors in painting and sculpting. Through illustration, they became known to a wide audience. But there were many artists and illustrators whose works had been sought by editors and well-received by the American reading public, only to be forgotten as publishing moved onto more

advanced pictorial methods of reproduction.

Willard L. Metcalf was one such artist whose work never reached the level of recognition that many of his illustrator contemporaries realized. Despite an article published at his death in 1925 by the *New York Times* which referred to him as “the foremost American landscape painter and a leader in art,” Metcalf’s work as an illustrator did not lead to a more recognized career as a fine artist. Illustration was strictly a financial expedient for Metcalf as he laid plans to travel to Paris to study.

Born in 1858 in Massachusetts, Metcalf spent his childhood in Searsmont, Maine, where he acquired an appreciation for the beauty of the land. From an early age, Metcalf was said to have pursued a career as an artist. He attended the Lowell Institute and received a scholarship in 1876 to the Boston Museum School of Fine Art. He later studied with physician/sculptor William Rimmer. In 1880, Metcalf was commissioned to help illustrate a new edition of Thomas Bailey Aldrich’s poems and his career as an illustrator began.

Thomas Eakins, Frank Hamilton Cushing, 1895, oil on canvas, 90 by 60 inches. For this portrait painted in a Philadelphia studio, Eakins reportedly posed Cushing as if he were still living in Zuñi. The background suggests that Cushing is in one of the sacred underground rooms that the Zuñis called kivas.



In the spring of 1881 Metcalf traveled to the Southwest with reporter Sylvester Baxter to record the traditional lifeways of the Zuñi Indians before they disappeared forever. By July 1881, Metcalf stood on a rooftop at the Zuñi Pueblo in New Mexico with Frank Hamilton Cushing, an anthropologist-ethnologist from the Smithsonian Institution. Since Cushing's arrival at Zuñi in 1879, he had investigated native cultures and was preparing a series of articles, "My Adventures in Zuñi," to appear in *Century Magazine*.

What began as a two-month fact finding mission led Cushing to four and a half years of living and observing the Zuñi culture from the inside. Through a long process, Cushing became a full member of the tribe, mastering the language, customs and rituals of the Zuñi. He was eventually appointed First War Chief, a position of importance within the tribe.

Metcalf also immersed himself in Zuñi life but still carried his great desire to travel to Paris. He shared a European point of view about painting the West with other artists of his time who tended to romanticize the situation, individual or activity. Although he had not yet trained in Europe, his Boston training perhaps influenced his tendencies to "Americanize" the Indian in his illustrations. Through his own admission, however, painting a figure convincingly was not his strength or interest. Metcalf ignored the poverty, disease and other unpleasantnesses of Zuñi life and chose to capture figures and activities as related to the landscape. As shown in his illustration *Returning from the Field*, published in *Century Magazine*, Zuñi farmers in a somewhat dignified procession, return with their crop in a crude cart, with stone wheels, pulled by a team of oxen.

An excerpt from Cushing's *Century* article published in December 1882, described a similar scene:

"When the frost first crackles the corn leaves in the valley of Zuñi, it is, to the dweller in that desert land, what the first April shower is to husbandmen of New England. For in Zuñi, autumn is spring-time. It is the time of soft breezes and hazy beauty of sky, not the days of blazing sun, driving sand-blasts and dust-hidden clouds and distances. You may stand on the topmost terraces of the old pueblo and see the busy harvesters bringing in their last crops. . ."

Despite Metcalf's plan to move on to Paris, he continued his work with Cushing. He befriended the Zuñi who trusted him. Like Cushing, he learned their language and studied their culture. In return, Metcalf was allowed to paint the Zuñi, who previously had prohibited portraits of themselves, believing that with the likeness came a loss of power.

In late February 1882, Metcalf accompanied Cushing and a delegation of six Indians to Washington, D.C., and Boston. He did not intend to return to Zuñi, hoping instead to raise additional money for his trip to France through an auction sale of his work completed in New Mexico. The sale was not a success and he returned to the Southwest that summer, joining Cushing on another expedition to Oraibi, a Hopi pueblo culture located in central Arizona.

Cushing contracted a severe illness during a grueling winter trek across this barren land. The party was forced to move from the area during the severe winter months to escape Indian hostility the party met with while in the Oraibi area. Doctors advised Cushing to go to the southern mesas that spring of 1883 and Metcalf accompanied him. Metcalf followed Cushing with no promise of pay, suggesting the depth of his loyalty to Cushing.



Metcalf returned to the East in May 1883, but not before completing illustrations for another article by Sylvester Baxter. Metcalf had now earned almost enough money for study in Europe. His three-year adventure in the pueblos in New Mexico and Arizona had not altered his goal to study abroad. He sailed in September 1883, for Paris. Although he returned to paint in the East five years later, Metcalf did not return to the American West.

Unlike Metcalf, a second illustrator of Cushing's *Century* articles on the Zuñi, Henry F. Farny, was devoted to the American West as a source for his painting subjects. Although he spent most of his time working in his Cincinnati studio, he made many western journeys in search of material, particularly from 1880 until 1900. Recognition of his work rests largely on his western scenes of this period.

Born in Ribeauville, Alsace, in 1847, Farny came to the United States after his family was forced to flee France following the 1848 revolution. Farny's first conceptions of Indians, or misconceptions, came from the tall tales of local lumberjacks in the Pennsylvania forests where he grew up. He learned not to fear Indians from first-hand encounters with neighboring Senecas. These childhood visits sparked an interest in Indian culture that followed Farny throughout his career.

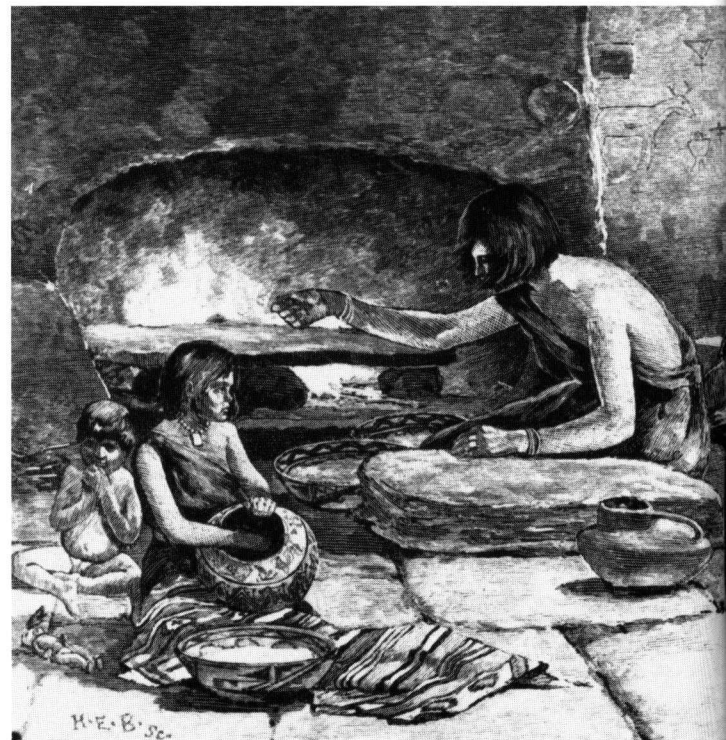
As an 18-year-old, Farny served an apprenticeship as a lithographer with Gibson & Company in Cincinnati and later sold illustrations to *Harper's Weekly*. In 1886, he went abroad for art training, first in Rome and later with Hermann Herzog near Dusseldorf. He returned to Cincinnati in 1870, earning his living by painting portraits, circus posters, handbills and an occasional illustration for *Harper's*.

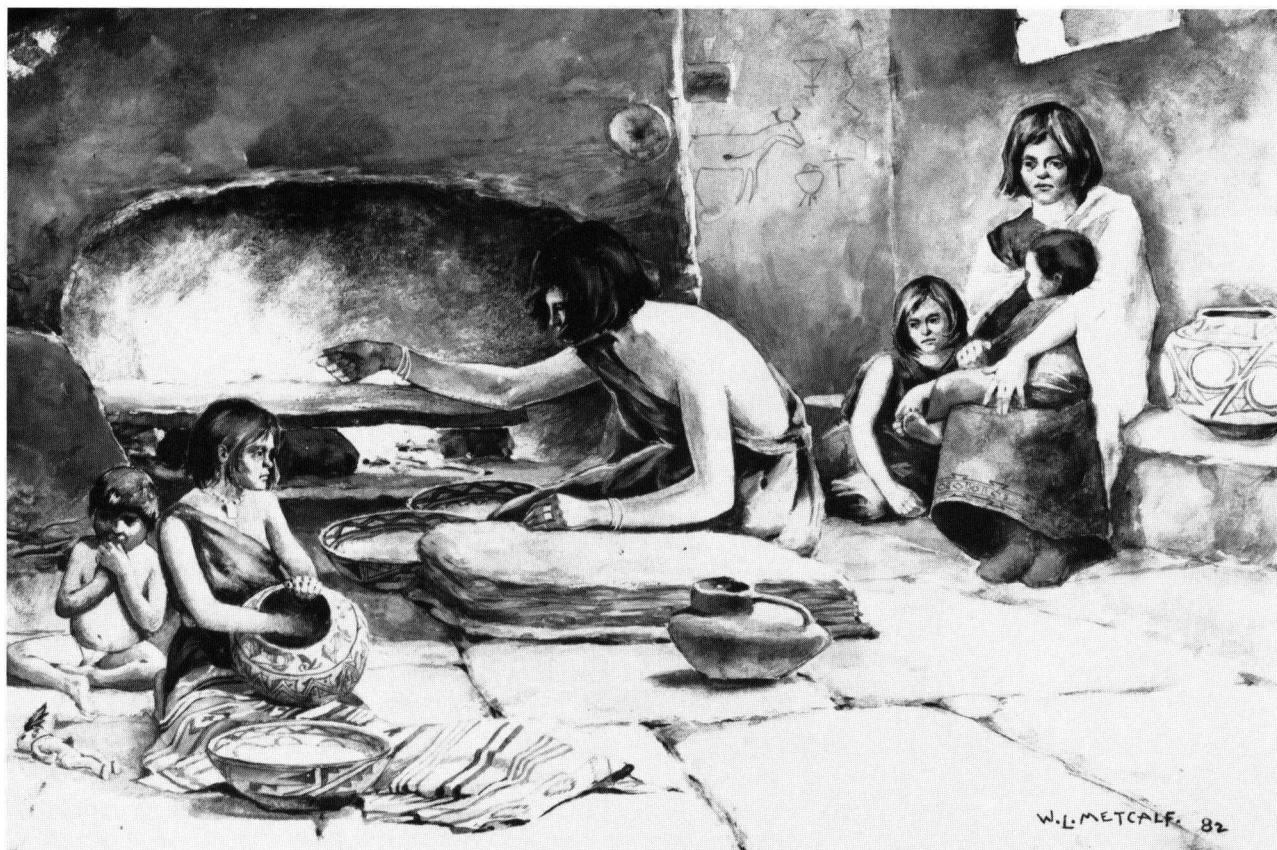
In the late 1870s, he was commissioned, along with Walter Shirlaw, Howard Pyle and Peter Moran, to illustrate the celebrated McGuffey readers. Together they produced 200 illustrations of which Farny was said to have produced 72.

Farny began to amass a large collection of Indian artifacts in pursuit of his true art interest. By August 1881, he was on his first trip west to Dakota territory. Farny's first finished work resulting from this trip was *Toilers of the Plains* which sold immediately and was reproduced several years later in *Harper's Weekly*.

Farny first received wide attention through his Indian portraits and drawings which appeared in Cushing's articles in *Century*. Cushing had made extensive notes and rough sketches and employed photographer, John K. Hillers, to record the Zuñi. Upon Cushing's first return to Washington, D.C., in 1882 accompanied by Metcalf and six Indians, Farny collaborated with Cushing to produce several illustrations for three articles.

Though Farny had never traveled to the Southwest at this point, the illustrations produced for Cushing's articles give the appearance of being based on first-hand experience. Using sketches and photographs as the basis for his work was not new to Farny. From his first trip to the Dakotas, Farny established his artistic style. He never painted on tour, instead returned to his studio where he rearranged motifs gathered from on-





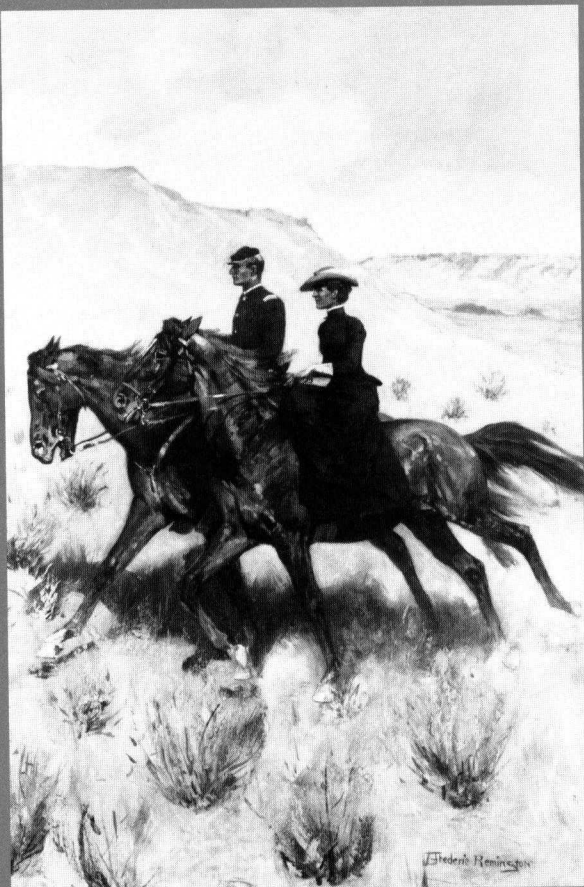
Above: W.L. Metcalf, *Making Hé-Wé (Paper Bread)*, 1882, tempera on paper, 7 by 9 1/4 inches. Left: An engraving of *Making Hé-Wé* published in *Century Magazine* in the final installment of Cushing's article in May 1883.



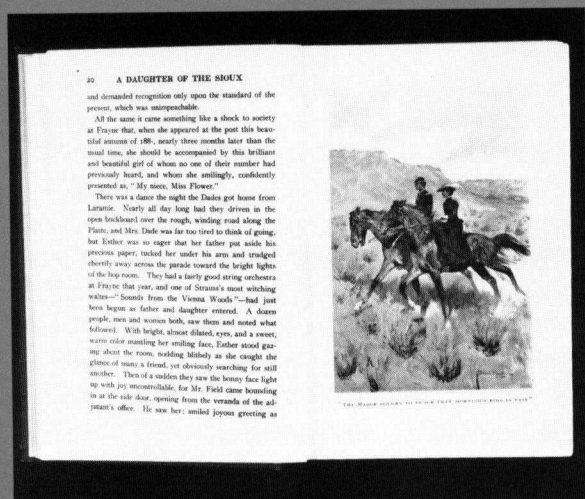
the-spot sketches and photographs. He also utilized his collection of Indian artifacts which was constantly being enlarged.

While his paintings appear realistic, Farny did not choose to depict the actual current conditions of the Indians. By 1881-82 many Indians were confined to reservations, often in pathetic circumstances. Like Metcalf, he chose instead to present a more edited version of reality. His paintings and illustrations showed a certain nostalgia for the vanishing Indian culture. His romantic subjects are depicted in a realistic and sometimes historical style.

In his painting, *The Tower of the Shadows and the Road of the Red Door*, Farny successfully portrays the Zuñi pueblo design which Cushing chronicles in his article: "Imagine numberless long, box-shaped, adobe ranches, connected with one another in extended rows and squares, with others, less and less numerous, piled up on them lengthwise and crosswise, in two, three, even six stories, each receding from the one below it like the steps of a broken stair flight – as it were, a



Frederic Remington, *The Escort*, ca. 1903, oil on canvas, 40 1/2 by 27 1/2 inches. Remington produced more than 2,700 drawings and paintings, many for magazine articles and books. *The Escort* appeared in the book "A Daughter of the Sioux" by General Charles King, a romantic, frontier novel published in 1903.



gigantic pyramidal mud honeycomb with far outreaching base, – and you can gain a fair conception of the architecture of Zuñi . . .”

Cushing's final article in *Century Magazine* appeared in May 1883. Farny continued illustrating for numerous publications until about 1890, when he turned his efforts toward painting imaginative Western scenes.

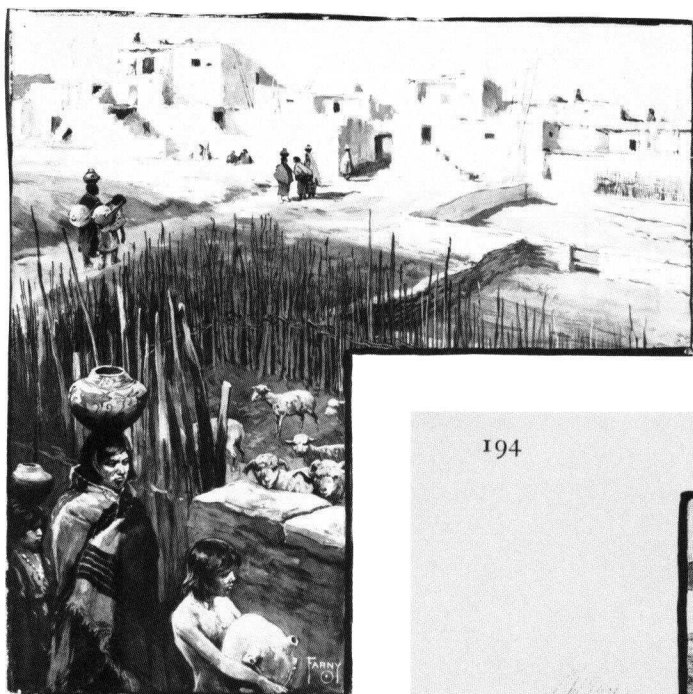
Farny had become aware of the art of Frederic Remington, the most successful western artist of Farny's generation and an inspiration for Farny to pursue some of his more dramatic images. In depicting Indians, Farny remained sympathetic. He was particularly successful in conveying the immensity and solitude of the country in which the Indians lived.

Although Farny fared much better than Metcalf in his move to abandon illustration to pursue a career as a painter, no artist would make the move more successfully than Remington. Remington's first success as an illustrator came with the publication of his work in *Harper's Weekly*, February 25, 1882. However, acceptance of his work was initially slow in coming and his next illustrations did not appear in publications until 1886.

Remington eventually established a reputation as a fine writer, as well as an accomplished sculptor. He was recognized as an authority on United States military action and native life in the West. By the time of his death in 1909, most serious Remington observers had no doubt that Remington had achieved success as a painter, an illustrator, sculptor and historian. Although he lived a brief 48 years, Remington produced more than 2,700 paintings and drawings, plus a number of bronze sculptures, numerous books, articles and stories during a 25-year period.

By the end of the 19th century, the Trans-Mississippi West had established its boundaries, with only Oklahoma, Arizona and New Mexico remaining territories. The transformation of a huge, virtually unexplored land had been accomplished, forming one union. During the last two decades of the century, the volume of literature on the West grew greater, as did the number of illustrators. But by the close of the century, photography was making its mark on the publishing scene.

Despite the decreased demand for illustrations by the publishing industry in the 20th century, magazines and periodicals still remained a valuable medium for



Left: Henry Farny, *Pool of Zuñi and Water-Carriers*, 1882, tempera on paper, 11 by 11 inches. This example illustrates Farny's collaboration with *Century Magazine* to produce work with the text portion of the story in mind. Below: Published page of *Century Magazine* shows engraving of *Pool of Zuñi and Water-Carriers* and the magazine's embellishment of Farny's illustration.

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MY ADVENTURES IN ZUÑI.

POOL OF ZUÑI AND WATER-CARRIERS.

short trousers, were chasing one another about the terraces, wrestling, screeching, or pelting any stray dog that came around, while a few imitated the older people by sitting in silent expectation.

After a brief interval, a priest, with plumed head and trailing white buckskin mantle, gravely stepped in through a tunnel under the houses, scattering on the ground, as he came, sacred meal from a vessel which he held in one hand, while with the other he waved a beautiful wand of macaw plumes. He was followed by some twenty dancers elaborately

costumed from head to foot. Close-fitting plumed wigs covered their heads, and black, long-bearded, yellow-eyed masks, with huge rows of teeth from ear to ear, red tongues lolling out between them, gave frightful grinning expressions to their faces. Their half-nude bodies were painted black and yellow, while badges of buckskin were crossed over their shoulders, and skirts of the same material, secured at the waists with elaborately embroidered and fringed sashes, depended to the ankles. Their feet were incased in green and red buskins, and to the legs were bound clanging rattles of tortoise-shell and deer-hoofs. Their necks were decorated with

this phrase, ducking his head and grinning, to convince the other Indians that he was carrying on a lively conversation with me.

At last, gaining my wished-for position on the edge of the terrace, I came face to face with nearly the whole population of Zuñi. The music had ceased, and the dancers had temporarily retired, but all over the upper terraces were young men in groups and pairs, jauntily mantled in red, green, blue, black, and figured blankets, only the upper portions of their painted faces and occasional patches of their silver-bedecked persons being exposed. Here and there an elaborately plumed straw hat surmounted one of these enveloped statues.

illustrators of the West. Charles Marion Russell's first illustrations appeared in *Harper's Weekly* at the close of 1889, making his artistic story belonging to the western scene after 1900. William R. Leigh had received considerable recognition as an illustrator of national magazines during the final years of the 1890s. N.C. Wyeth had just arrived in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, in 1902 to study with Howard Pyle. Attracted by the potential of illustrating the cowboys and Indians of the West, Wyeth made his first trip to the West in 1904.

The true golden age of illustration continued through 1917. However, widespread acceptance of photography and technical advances of commercial halftone reproductions heralded the end of the era. Illustrators of the new century would not see the unprecedented demand for illustrations by the publishing industry, as their 19th century counterparts had experienced. The golden age had been a showcase for illustrators and they provided an important link to the nation's development. They afforded the American public with its first total image of a diverse country blending into a single nation.

If judging these illustrations produced for the popular press on artistic value alone, many would not withstand a critical eye. Others have been recognized as paintings which have stood the test of time and remain valuable assets to the art world. Whether based on fact or legend, these illustrators provided a look at the American dream of that time – to expand and develop the West. Their contribution helped to form the American public's view of the movement West. ◡

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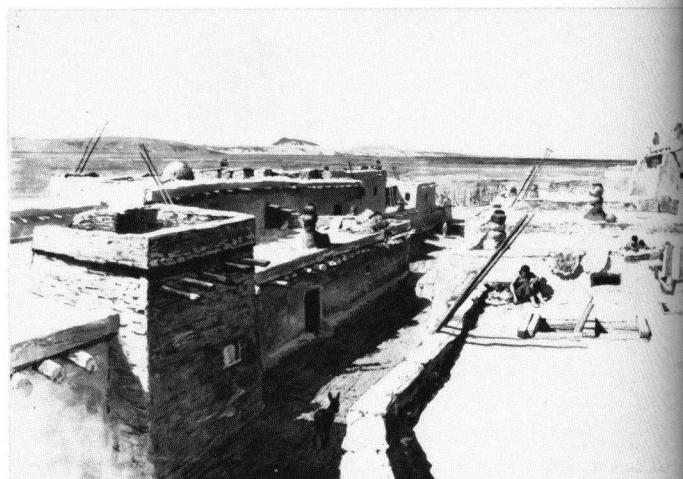
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BEYOND WOOD ENGRAVINGS

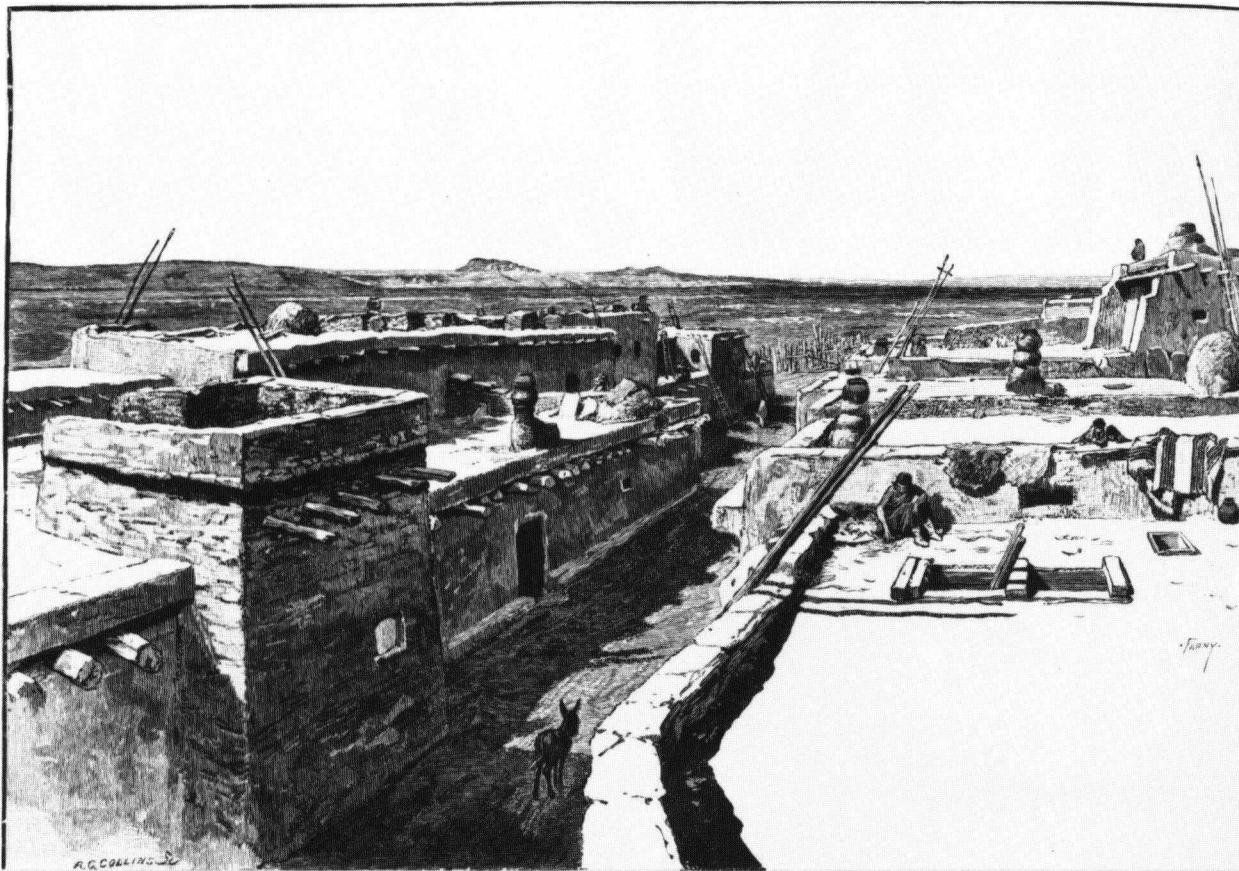


Henry F. Farny, *The Tower of the Shadows and the Road of the Red Door*, 1882, tempera on paper, 12 by 18 inches.

Technological advances made near the end of the 19th century in the publishing industry had a great affect on the American illustrator and possibly hastened the development of illustration as popular art.

The rotary press was introduced which enabled publishers to produce large editions more rapidly and at lower costs. However the most significant advancement to the illustrator was the improvement made in pictorial reproduction.

Until the 1880s, all pictorial reproductions in books and periodicals were accomplished through boxwood engravings. Boxwood, a finely grained wood imported from Syria, was sliced about one-inch thick to conform to the depth of the type and then highly polished and whitened to accept pencil or pen lines. Tracings of illustrations were rubbed, in reverse, onto the block. Using a pencil, pen or brush and ink, the main broad shadows were laid. Because boxwood is a relatively small tree in diameter, a large illustration might require



The engraving of Farny's illustration published in Century Magazine in 1883 provides a comparison of the original to the final print. Engraver R.G. Collins added his signature in the left-hand corner.

a composite of several blocks. After the broad strokes were completed, the composite block would then be taken apart for the finer details to be drawn.

An engraver, using a short-handled graver, would then remove the wood not covered with a mark, cutting between the lines to create the white areas on the printed form. When the block was inked, only the parts untouched by the graver received the ink, while the recessed portions removed by the tools remained white. A drawing made with sharp pen strokes was obviously easier to engrave. Tonal areas, various shades of gray, were translated onto the block with delicate, thread-like lines in order to leave sufficient space between to receive the ink. The engraver's job was extremely arduous. A full page illustration could take as long as a week to engrave.

Artists knew the importance of a good engraver, recognizing that his reproduced illustration was only as good as the craftsman translating the work to the wood block. An engraver sometimes shared the credit on the

illustration by signing his name next to that of the artist.

Engraving improved throughout the 19th century, but remained an expensive part of publishing. When photography was introduced into the printing process in 1880, things began to change.

Creating a photographic negative of the illustration allowed the reduction or enlargement of the original design for reproduction. Using an electotype process, a metal relief plate could be created mechanically from the negative, eliminating the need for wood engravers.

During the 1880s, publications experimented extensively with a halftone method of photo-engraving to produce the middle or "half" tones between black and white. By 1890, halftone reproduction had advanced to the point that engraving departments could be dispensed with altogether.

With the new halftone process, a preference for realistic pictures emerged and a new school of illustrators and photographers began to meet the public's demand. ◡

Early cowboy dress and equipment can be viewed in the Cowboy Gallery at Gilcrease Museum which includes paintings, sculptures and artifacts documenting the development of this romantic figure in history. All the artifacts, paintings and drawings shown in this article are from the Gilcrease Collection.



VAQUERO

The First American Cowboy

BY PAULA HALL



Everyone has a vivid image of the American cowboy. He is one of America's favorite heroes. Rugged and handsome. Fearless and honest. Strong and silent. The characterization has been formed and reinforced through novels, plays, magazine stories, movie scripts and television shows. He has

been lied about, joked about, but most often glorified.

Just a mere phrase uttered with a husky tone can conjure the images formed over decades of hearing, seeing and reading about this man in history.

"When you call me that, smile."

After nine decades, this quote from Owen Wister's novel entitled *The Virginian*, published in 1902, stands as one of the most remembered statements of a cowboy





James Walker, *Vaqueros In A Horse Corral*, 1877, oil on canvas, 20 by 36 inches.

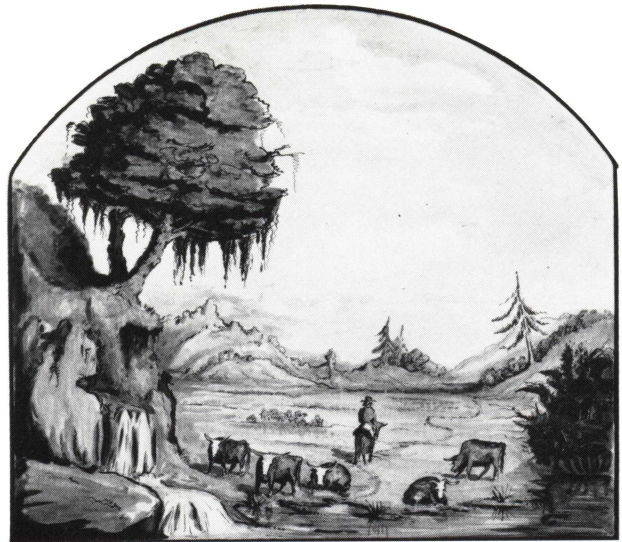
character, rivaled only by more contemporary characters such as those portrayed by actor John Wayne. Illustrated by western artist Fredric Remington, Wister's book provided a central character who found an emotion in the American public never before revealed.

Wister, a Philadelphia lawyer with an aristocratic background, was enamored with the West, as were the majority of Americans of his time. Following his first trip to the West in 1885, Wister began writing stories of western settings which were published by popular magazines of the day, such as *Harper's Monthly*. He gave up his law practice and 17 years later authored *The Virginian*, one of the most-read American novels

ever published. During the next five decades, more than 1.8 million copies were sold and it remains a popular western novel even today.

Although Wister's characterization of this man of the West added new dimensions to the cowboy legend, the true origins of the cowboy began long before Wister's character emerged. As early as the 16th century, herdsman working cattle on foot were referred to as cowboys. The Western mounted cowboy, immortalized by Wister, was similar to these early herdsman in name only.

To understand the development of the American cowboy, whether the image is based on historical fact



J. Ross Browne, Santa Marguerita Valley, ca. 1845-1849, pen and ink on paper. Browne was an expeditionary artist who painted views of California during his travels from 1845 through 1849.

or legend, a look into the earliest days of America is required. In 1494, when Christopher Columbus returned from Spain to the New World for a second time, he sailed into present day Cape Haitien, Haiti, and brought with him 24 stallions, ten mares and a number of cattle. They were the first such creatures in the Western Hemisphere.

As the Spaniards became firmly established in the West Indies, the practice of stock raising was introduced to each of the new settlements. When Hernando Cortes invaded new land to the south in search of gold and other precious metals, he brought the first horses to what is today Mexico. Cortes' conquest of the Aztecs in Mexico, brought with it the two main ingredients of the cowboy's way of life – cattle and horses.

Cattle were plentiful in New Spain (today's Mexico) by 1540 and Cortes and his men realized that they could remain superior as long as they kept the horse from the Indians. Following the conquest of Mexico, only Spaniards were permitted to own and ride horses. Gradually as the herds began to grow, it was necessary for the Spaniards to watch their cattle. Most viewed this as beneath their dignity. Even the padres of the Spanish missions shunned the duties and devised a plan to keep them from this distasteful work. They chose to teach their new converts – Indians, Negroes and other non-Spaniards – to ride horses and to look after cattle. The vaquero, the Mexican cowboy, was born.

The early vaquero was far from the romantic picture later painted of the cowboy. He was considered nothing more than a poor laborer on horseback. In time, his dress became a blend of clothing worn by Spaniards





and of the natives of New Spain.

The hat of the vaquero, which changed very little during the first half of the 16th century, was made principally of black felt, broad-brimmed with a rather low crown. The higher, rounded crown version was adapted later during the following century. The traditional *barbiquejo*, chin strap, was worn loosely under the lower lip, or under the chin while riding. Unlike similar hats worn by wealthy Spaniards, which were decorated with silver and gold cord and often tassels, the vaquero's *sombrero* was usually plain. Under their hats, many vaqueros wore bandannas tied over their heads.

By the late 16th century many vaqueros had chosen leather for their *chaqueta*, or jacket, and their knee breeches, or *sotas*. Below the short pants, the vaquero wore *botas*, leather leg coverings which spanned the area from below his knee to the instep of his foot.

The vaqueros usually wore buckskin shoes and often went barefooted, especially in warmer weather. The cowboy boot was nearly three centuries away. A pair of large iron spurs would be strapped to whatever footgear the vaquero wore, or even to the ankles of bare feet. To the vaquero, the spurs were a badge of his calling and although uncomfortable to walk in, they were an integral part of his attire. The rowels at the end of the spur were large, often up to eight inches in diameter.

One of the most important items of the vaquero's costume was his cloak: the *poncho*, *serape*, or *capa*. Its design and construction revealed the rank of its owner. The elite vaquero wore great circular capes, usually of dark blue or black broadcloth, often decorated with gold or silver braid. The less affluent wore the *serape*, the familiar long rectangular garment with a slot in the center for his head.

Equipment used in "working" the cattle developed as the herds grew larger and the demands of the job dictated revisions. In the early part of the 16th century, vaqueros would use long, iron-tipped poles or lances, similar to ones used in Spain, to separate and check the cattle. The hocking knife, or *luna*, with a steel blade about a foot long was also at hand, carried in his scabbard held in place by ornate garters. Eventually hocking knives were banned in the 1570s after thousands of cattle were killed for their hides and tallow which had become more valuable than the meat they provided. New laws were enacted by the Mesta, a



The Spanish Caballero

J. Ross Browne, The Spanish Caballero

stockmen's organization of the time, to prevent this large slaughter of herds.

The *lazo*, a rope with a slipknot, replaced the hocking knife as the vaquero's primary working tool for cattle. Unlike the popularly known cowboy technique of circling the rope in the air above them and then throwing the loop over the horns of cows, vaqueros would put the loop in the end of his lance and then race after the cow. The loop was lowered over the horns of the cow and tightened by pulling back on the lance.

The ropes used by the early vaqueros appear to have been braided from strips of untanned cowhide, stretching 15 to 20 yards long.

The vaqueros spent many hours developing their roping skills, improving their horsemanship and training horses. During their off-duty hours, these working cowboys invented games to challenge and develop their skills. As a result of their consuming interest in complicated maneuvers, pieces of equipment were either adapted or developed to meet their needs.

Saddles progressed from the early Spanish war saddle, brought to New Spain in the early 1500s, to a more satisfactory design needed for the exacting work required by the vaqueros.

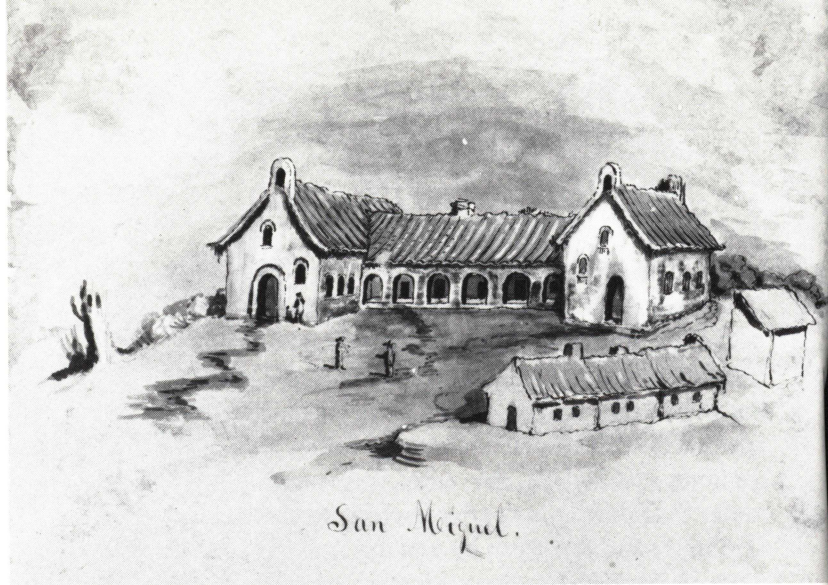
Developed during the mid-1500s, the new Mexican saddle, *silla vaquera*, had a low, fairly comfortable cantle that made mounting or dismounting easy and a horned pommel that made riding secure. The horn was not strong enough for very extensive roping and often the early vaqueros tied their ropes to their horse's tails while working stock. The rope, *reatas*, when not in use, was tied to the right side, behind the cantle.

By the end of the 16th century, the basic form of the modern stock saddle had been developed. The stirrup straps had been lengthened to allow a better knee-grip while riding and the horn was sturdier and covered with heavy rawhide. The Mexican wood stirrups were designed to replace the hard-to-get European metal ones.

The Spanish horseman's first two centuries in America, 1525 to 1725, was a period of transition. The Mexican vaqueros shed the European styles and customs to adopt the characteristics and equipment necessary to work in the new Western world.

By the late 1600s, there was regular cattle movement from the northern ranches southward toward Mexico City. The ranching frontier eventually extended into what is today Northern Zacatecas, Durango, South and Eastern Coahuila and along the Rio Grande. Perhaps the most significant settlement was that headed by Juan de Oñate, who established a temporary colony in 1598 in the Rio Grande valley near today's El Paso, Texas.

A wealthy silver mine owner, Oñate had been contracted by the Spanish crown to colonize the valley and introduce Franciscan missionaries to convert the Pueblo Indians. He brought about 130 families to the vicinity and over 7,000 head of cattle and livestock for the colony. The animals were eventually driven by Oñate's vaqueros to northern regions in New Mexico for food and



J. Ross Browne, San Meiguel



James Walker, Wild Horses, 1877, oil on canvas, 14 by 24 inches.



J. Ross Browne, The Belle of the Fandango





breeding stock. It was the first introduction of the vaqueros into what would become the American Southwest.

California, like Texas, was far from the seat of Spanish authority in Mexico City. Although it was claimed by the Spanish, they made no serious effort to occupy California until other foreign nations were attracted to the area.

In the late 1760s, a Franciscan monk, Father Junipero Serra, and a Spanish soldier, Jose Ortega, led the first expedition to found a chain of Catholic missions in upper California. They were accompanied by the Spanish-appointed governor of the Californias, Don Gaspar de Portola.

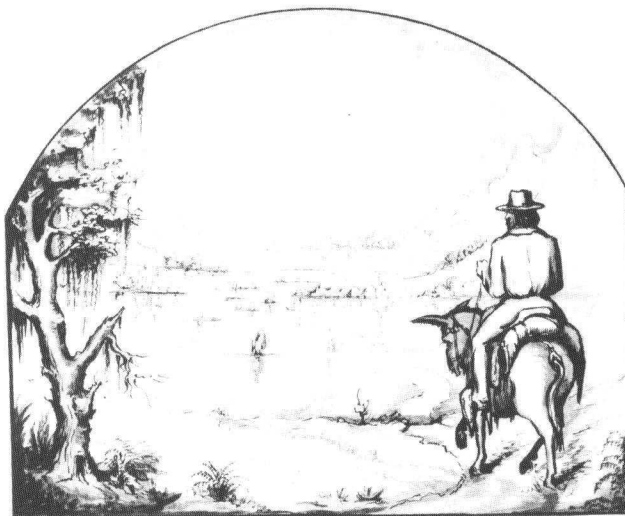
The Portola expedition set out from Baja California, where only a few colonial settlements had been attempted earlier, with a small herd of cattle, horses and other livestock. Along with this expedition rode the first vaqueros into Alta, California, in 1769.

Soon after arriving in California, the Spanish soldiers constructed a fort at San Diego and the padres began to establish missions. Before his death, Father Serra built nine of the 21 missions that were eventually completed in California from San Diego to Sonoma.

Much like the development of the Mexican vaqueros and those working to establish themselves in the Texas environment at the same time, the California vaqueros' costumes, mounts and equipment were adapted to the new land. Big slabs of leather, *armas*, which traditionally hung from the side of the saddlebow, reaching down to protect the rider's thighs and feet from the cactus fields of Mexico and Baja California, were discarded. The new ranges the vaqueros encountered had little need for this heavy and clumsy protection. In California, the vaqueros modified the *armas* to create *armitas*, lightweight chaps made of buckskin that would hang from a belt around the waist and extend down the front legs to below the knees. Still later, variations would include *caparejos*, leather breeches that fully encircled the vaquero's legs.

By mid-1800, the North American cowboy had been developed. A blend of the Mexican vaquero, along with the California and Texas versions, he represented a curious mix of characteristics that continued to change and develop, as did the West. These original westerners represented a fusing of Indian customs, Spanish horsemanship, Rocky Mountain trapper frontier knowledge and survival techniques developed by those who weathered the move from East to West.

The special skills and working tools of the cowboy, unlike his multi-sided personality, are firmly planted in



J. Ross Browne, *Mirage in the Salinas Valley*

the Mexican vaqueros' heritage. Though altered, refined and modified to fit American ideas and conditions, the basic design is traced to these historic men of New Spain.

It is still a debate as to how the word "cowboy" began. *Vaquero* is a word coming from the Spanish *vaca*, or cow. When or how "cowboy" was adopted is not known. Its usage apparently began in the neighborhood of the Red River soon after the Civil War, gradually growing in popularity as it followed the spreading cattle industry.

Although the era of the "real" cowboy in the American West has vanished, the cowboy culture still glows brightly in the minds of Americans. There were no cattle in Owen Wister's story of *The Virginian*. Perhaps his success at romanticizing the cowboy, with little attempt to accurately portray the true cowboy life, is a testament to how the public wants to perceive a beloved hero. The cowboy symbolizes the free life, closely tied with an environment that no longer exists. Whether presented in fact or through legend, the cowboy continues to be a mystical allure for the American public. ☹

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REINTERPRETING IMAGES

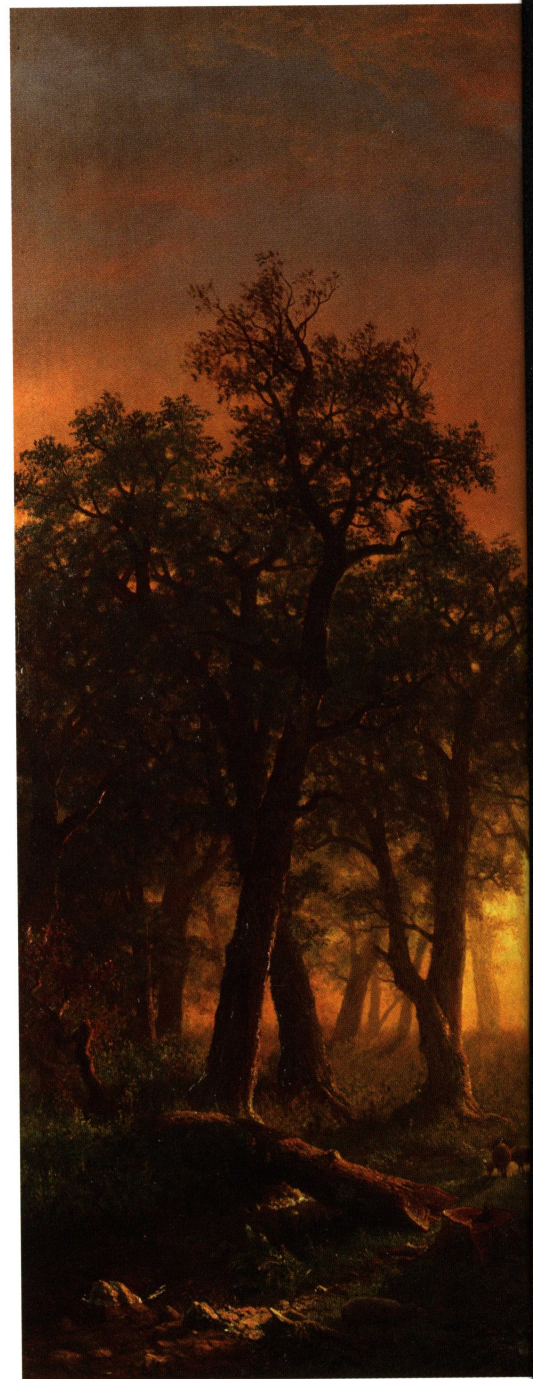
"The West as America" has been organized by the National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. The exhibition contains works from 76 lenders across the United States. Gilcrease Museum is one of the largest lenders to the exhibition.

The exhibition will be on display at the National Museum of American Art in Washington, D.C., March 15 through July 7, 1990.

*The following article written by William Truettner, curator of painting and sculpture, National Museum of American Art, is part of a publication about the exhibition. Truettner is the author of *The Natural Man Observed: A Study of Catlin's Indian Gallery* (1979), as well as articles on American art for several national magazines.*

BY WILLIAM TRUETTNER

Works of art don't always mean what they seem to say. The West as America exhibition has been organized by the National Museum of American Art with that idea in mind. A variety of images in the exhibition appear to explain how the American West evolved from a wilderness unexplored by white people to a region they settled and developed.



OF THE FRONTIER 1820-1920



Albert Bierstadt, Emigrants Crossing the Plains, 1867, oil on canvas, 60 by 96 inches, from the National Cowboy Hall of Fame Collection, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

In the past these images have been read as a narrative of westward expansion, as a way of telling the viewer what it was like to ride a wagon west, to experience the first view of broad plains and high mountains, and to finally settle on new land, build a home, and begin farming or ranching.

This image narrative had a special dimension most viewers also accepted. Overland migration and activities that preceded and followed it were made to seem as if they were a fulfilling adventure. There was, of course, nothing left to chance in the way artists depicted this "adventure." They skillfully conveyed the westward movement as a measure of white people's conception of progress. The pictures in this exhibition tell us that Indians were gradually made into useful citizens; that river boats, wagon trains, and finally railroads eased the problem of travel; that communities were established, became respectable, and ultimately prospered; and that the abundant natural resources of the West could be exploited for everyone's benefit. We learn from these pictures not only what happened, but that the westward movement was a complete triumph. Today, with a growing number of historians disputing that assumption, we have come to doubt our former understanding of western scenes. The doubt rests not on a sure knowledge of what did happen, but on evidence sufficient to show that it did not happen the way pictures suggest.

Consider, for example, *Emigrants Crossing the Plains*, painted in 1867 by Albert Bierstadt. Families travel in spacious wagons, filled with household possessions and trailed by flocks, along a level road conveniently crossed by a small stream, toward the setting sun. The



journey has the feeling of a biblical passage that will end up in land as fertile as that the Israelites found in Canaan. But overland migration, we know from journals of those who undertook such journeys, was difficult and dangerous, with no guarantee of prosperity at the end. Wagon trains were attacked by Indians and outlaws, they crossed formidable terrain, emigrants died of hunger and thirst, and they often ended up in situations no better than they had left. At best we can assign Bierstadt's picture to a wishful thinking category; it makes overland journeys seem like a happy pilgrimage to a new land.

Other images, in their eagerness to portray an ideal West, sometimes hint at problems that actually were there. *Crow Creek Agency, Dakota Territory*, located beside the Missouri River on a Sioux reservation, was painted in 1884 by William Fuller, a local carpenter. On the surface, Crow Creek Agency appears to be an



William Fuller, *Crow Creek Agency, Dakota Territory, 1884*, oil on canvas, 24% by 51% inches, from the Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas; acquisition in memory of René d'Harnoncourt, trustee, 1961-1968.

appropriate setting for bringing together Indians and whites, suggesting that the two cultures could peacefully merge. But the more we study the picture, the more compelling is the neat and prosperous order of the white buildings, in contrast to the random arrangement of teepees. A few white people conduct agency business while the Indians stand around their teepees as if they had nothing to do. What is the picture about? Is it simply a record of what Crow Creek Agency looked like in 1884? Does it say that Indians and whites lived happily together at the Agency, which would put it in the wishful thinking category of Bierstadt's wagon train picture? Or does it finally say that Indians should give up their traditional ways and become civilized, because white settlements are more efficient and prosperous, and therefore superior to, Indian villages?

This exhibition maintains that the last interpretation is the one that places *Crow Creek Agency* in the most

telling historical context. It further argues that the Bierstadt and Fuller paintings are not so much records of activities or places as they are a means of persuading people that westward expansion was good for the nation and would benefit all who participated in it. And finally, the exhibition contends that western scenes actually masked the problems created by westward expansion in the same way that the Bierstadt and Fuller paintings operated to obscure the more difficult aspects of westward travel and Indian/white relations.

To quickly expand this last idea, we must remember that westward expansion was not a peaceful process: it was fostered by military engagements (the Mexican War, Civil War, and Plains Wars), and it was governed by economic incentive — usually the need to exchange used-up land for a fresh plot. Perhaps the greatest myth that the Bierstadt picture conveys is that there would always be a fresh plot, or Promised Land, at the end of



Albert Bierstadt, *Giant Redwood Trees of California*, 1874, oil on canvas, 52½ by 43 inches, from *The Berkshire Museum*, Pittsfield, Massachusetts; gift of Zenas Crane.



William S. Jewett, *The Promised Land – The Grayson Family*, 1850, oil on canvas, 50½ by 65 inches, from the Berry-Hill Galleries, New York, New York.

the trail. Thirty years after this picture was painted, however, most of the arable land in the West was already divided into farms or ranches.

Images portraying Indian/white relations in the 1880s were equally an illusion. Indians contained on reservations were no more understood by the federal government than they had been on the Great Plains, contesting the advance of white settlers. As wards of the government, Indians had to be fed, clothed, and sheltered, and convinced that assimilation was the only way they could be saved. But many Indians resisted assimilation, clinging defiantly to their tribal heritage. The atmosphere of peaceful coexistence between Indians and whites that the Fuller painting projects is, therefore, another myth, directly contradicting what was happening on most Indian reservations in the 1880s. But to white people, searching for ways to solve the “Indian problem,” Fuller offered what seemed to be a reassuring vision.

“The West as America” exhibition contains six sections, divided thematically so that the images in each can be viewed with the same critical approach we have applied to the Bierstadt and Fuller paintings. One section consists of a group of historical paintings that serves to introduce the theme of national expansion by connecting it to precolonial and colonial images. Paintings such as the *Founding of Maryland* by Emanuel Leutze justified the founding of subsequent colonies, in this case west of the Mississippi, by linking them to a process of nation building that was begun in the 17th century. But like the Bierstadt painting, the *Founding of Maryland* is historical fiction; we are asked to believe that life in the New World began as a secure, harmonious gathering of white Christians and Indians. One cannot help note that the Indians, even if friendly, are treated by Leutze as a bit less equal than whites. Indians provide whites with bounty from the land and sea, as if they had already acknowledged a subservient role.



George Caleb Bingham, *The Verdict of the People*, 1854-55, oil on canvas, 46 by 65 inches, from *Boatmen's National Bank*, St. Louis, Missouri.

westward, but that still accounts for the way in which most Americans perceive frontier history. It was a West of the “good old days,” that drew from those days a conception of Americans as resolute, freedom-loving people. Paintings such as Remington’s *Fight for the Waterhole*, however, must be seen as part of the world of those who purchased them — wealthy industrialists uneasy about social change in the urban East. The industrial era they had created required the importation of foreign labor, which frequently reacted to miserable living and working conditions by challenging the owners of industry. Substitute immigrants or laborers for Indians in *Fight for the*

Waterhole and one has revealed a very different kind of frontier than the one these paintings have been thought to represent. Western art, after all, was mostly produced in the East to satisfy the demands of patrons who wished to promote the West for a variety of reasons. But a work of art operates with infinite discretion to persuade the viewer that a higher purpose is involved. In this way, art provided resolution of the conflict that attended national expansion. We may challenge the morality of this “higher purpose” now, but to those who lived through the expansionist era, it seemed a valid means of justifying the consequences of nation building. ▵

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