

THE GILCREASE

MAGAZINE OF AMERICAN HISTORY AND ART



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FRONT COVER — Shell gorget found at Spiro Mound, the Middle Mississippian Ca. A.D. 1250 period. The engraved and carved ornament was worn suspended by a cord around the neck. The hand is a symbol used in decoration and characteristic of the Spiro people.

BACK COVER — Engraved conch shell from Spiro Mound. Shows detail of bird-man and other ceremonial symbols of the Spiro people.

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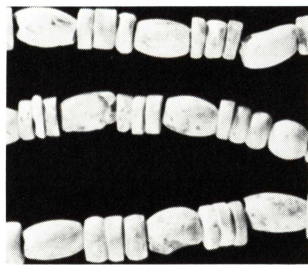
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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



Spiro



Everyday Life



Crossroads

Down through the centuries it seems that each generation of mankind has been addicted to an intense desire to gain knowledge of what life was like before their time, and what it will be like in the future.

As a result the search has gone on at a furious pace with tools ranging from picks and shovels to telescopes and space ships. Most of the probes into what life was like with our forefathers have unearthed a blending of archaeological and art treasures which, if nothing else, remind us that there really isn't very much new under the sun.

But, it continues to fascinate us all. The Grecian ruins, Tut's tomb, the mind-boggling Stonehenge in England, Egypt's and Mexico's pyramids, the ancient bronzes of China, the catacombs in Rome, the Easter Island idols, and numerous other archaeological discoveries have all revealed additional clues to what makes the homo sapiens of this planet function as they do.

Many of these clues can be found in the nature of artifacts in the Gilcrease Museum collection. Gilcrease Museum has an internationally famous anthropological collection of more than 41,000 works of various Indian cultures from ancient until recent times.

Part of the Gilcrease Collection includes artifacts from the Spiro Mound. These artifacts were taken from the mysterious burial mound used in the 12th Century at a site near Spiro, Oklahoma.

What was found in the Spiro Mound? What sort of people engraved conch shells? Where did they come from?

Some answers and many clues to these questions and more were revealed when the burial mound was opened 46 years ago. The desecration of the mound is a tragic story, but artifacts from the mound have also provided scholars and scientists a good insight into this "cult" center of the Middle Mississippian period of the late 12th and early 13th Century A.D.

The story on the Spiro Mound in this issue was prepared for us by Barbara Page, who is on the staff of the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology

at Harvard University. She is currently working as illustrator and research assistant for the Peabody Museum publication, *"Pre-Columbian Shell Engravings from the Craig Mound at Spiro, Oklahoma,"* by Philip Phillips and James A. Brown.



Genre painting (a realistic painting of an ordinary event), had its beginning with American painters in the early and mid-19th century period when suddenly these painters began to depict the everyday life of America.

There are over 2,000 paintings in the Gilcrease Collection that depict the everyday life of American Indians. But, it often comes as a surprise to some museum visitors to discover that Gilcrease also has many truly fine examples of the best American genre works of scenes other than Indian by such painters as William Sidney Mount, William Tylee Ranney, George Durrie, William Tolman Carleton, Edward Lamson Henry, and Eastman Johnson, who depict everything from a schoolroom scene to after church socializing.

Gilcrease Director Fred A. Myers, besides leading the activities of the museum, also finds time to write about our genre paintings in this issue.



Three Forks, North Fork Town, Fort Gibson, Boggy Depot. Probably not as familiar town names to you as New Orleans, St. Louis, Chicago, or San Francisco, but in the early and middle 1800's they were just as important to the settlers traveling west across our developing nation.

They were all names of forgotten crossroads of Indian Territory in Eastern Oklahoma. Fort Smith, Arkansas, on the border of Indian Territory, in the early 1800's was a strategic defense facility and a significant frontier trading center. The development of Ft. Gibson on the Grand River in Indian Territory brought steamboat river traffic into the territory from Ft. Smith by way of New Orleans.

The area was truly a crossroads for covered wagon trains heading west, the transcontinental stagecoach route, steamboat and later railroad traffic.

It was an exciting, romantic period in our nation's history. Spinning the story for us is Ernest F. Darling.



A good time was had by all. We're talking about the Annual Gilcrease Rendezvous held last May at the Museum, and in this case, the all was approximately 10,000 visitors during the two-day event.

Three pages of photographs of the event by Mark Haynes give you an idea of what happened. Plans are already underway for the next Gilcrease Rendezvous and reports are that it will be even better than this year's event. If so, then friends, it will be a barn burner!



It's July, the month we celebrate the birth of the United States of America. My daily walks through Gilcrease are vivid reminders of the skill, the effort, the sacrifice, the honor and the glory necessary to forge this country.

The national treasury allows me to see the original certified copy of the Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation. A letter written by Thomas Jefferson on July 1, 1776; letters from Benjamin Franklin, Diego Columbus, DeSoto, and Cortez. Thousands of works of unexcelled art, artifacts, rare books and documents which capture the development of America from the pre-Columbian era through the 19th century.

It's a new thrill for me each day to discover something new about this magnificent country of ours.

What a supreme blessing it is to be an American.

William J. Butler
Senior Editor



Carved shell gorget, Ca. A.D. 1250. The hand is a symbol used in decorations of the Spiro people.

Craig Mound at Spiro, Oklahoma



Artifacts Reveal 12th Century Culture

By Barbara Page

In 1935 a banner headline in the Kansas City *Star* proclaimed a find equal to King Tut's tomb had been discovered at Spiro, Oklahoma. Reports followed of a mound with a huge central chamber: a tapestried "Chief's Room" containing an altar with a shrouded skeleton lying before it; an urn filled with pearls; and the floor covered with artifacts of pottery, copper, shell and stone.

Eventually the romanticized tales adjusted to reality; Spiro has remained, however, the most famous Caddoan site in Oklahoma, known not only for the wealth of artifacts it produced but also for the controversy surrounding its initial excavation.

Joseph B. Thoburn of the Oklahoma State Historical Society had discovered and photographed the Craig Mound at Spiro in the winter of 1913. However, it and the other mounds in LeFlore County had been known to the local inhabitants for more than 100 years. By the 1930s

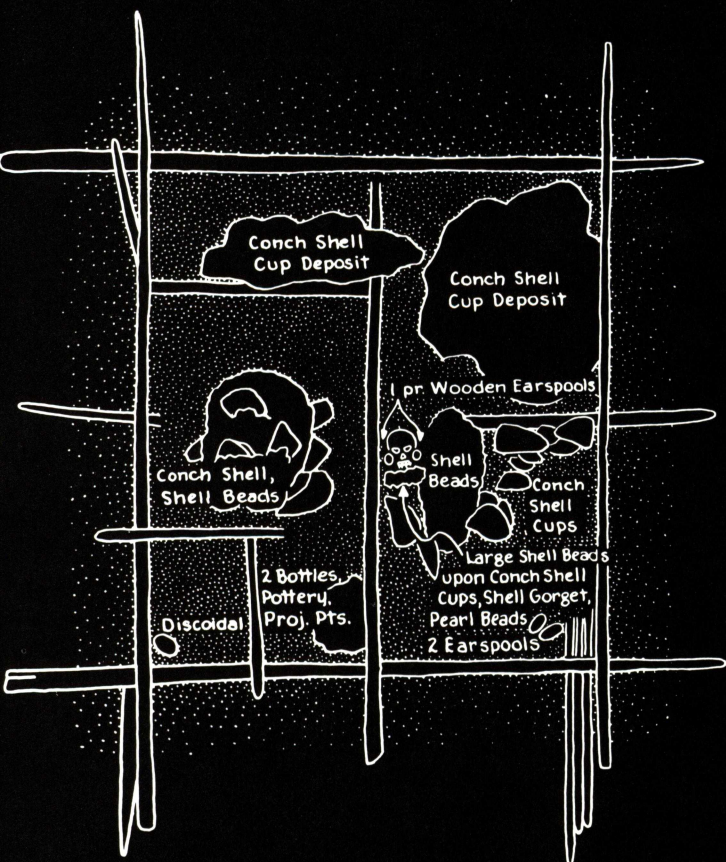
most of the people living in the area were descendants of the Choctaws and of their freed slaves who had been made members of the tribe and had received land allotments after the Civil War. These people knew the mounds contained burials and considered them sacred. Consequently the early owners of the property on which the mounds stood strictly forbade any tampering with them. Except for some slight superficial digging, the site remained virtually undisturbed until 1933.

Then the property changed hands with fateful results. The new owner granted a lease to the "Pocola Mining Company," an informal partnership of local men and outside diggers. For more than two years they brutally ravaged the huge Craig Mound, using methods more suited to mining than to archeology. At first they dug craters, searching for burials and isolated objects; but faced with the enormous 33 foot main cone, they gambled with tunneling and, unfortunately, hit upon the central



*These two ceramic vessels,
incised with artistic patterns,
were found in the Great Temple
Mound at the Spiro site.*





Detail drawing of the litter burial at Spiro.

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cavity. They eventually dug three tunnels, including one large enough to accomodate wheelbarrows. Their methods resulted in much breakage; and items of no interest, i.e. not saleable, were simply tossed aside.

As artifacts surfaced, whole or in pieces, they were disposed of immediately. Some were sold locally; others were carried off by dealers to be auctioned on the East Coast antiquities market. A wild fever took hold there; museums and private collectors vied with each other for part of the haul. As the glamour of Spiro increased and prices rose, unscrupulous dealers labeled artifacts from other sites with the Spiro name.

Back in Oklahoma, other relic hunters were moved to action resulting in another demolished mound, ripped up burials, scattered artifacts, and the looting of a pre-historic cemetery. This vandalism inevitably brought a reaction from the public. In the spring of 1935, an antiquities act was passed by the Oklahoma legislature which became one of the earliest state laws prohibiting the digging of archeological sites without a license. The Spiro lessees were given notice to stop immediately and

make an application.

Dr. Forrest E. Clements of the University of Oklahoma Anthropology Department had visited Spiro in 1934 and had been trying by various means to minimize the damage there by slowing the miners down. After long and difficult negotiations, he obtained a lease for the university, scheduled to start in the fall after the mining company's lease expired. Confident that the mound was safe at last, he left for a summer position in California.

With no one in authority actually on location and fueled by resentment over the "city slicker" law, the miners decided to ignore it and move fast. At this point they began work on the main cone. Throughout the summer they progressed with great speed. News of the tragedy did not even reach Clements until the fall. His own words best tell the story:

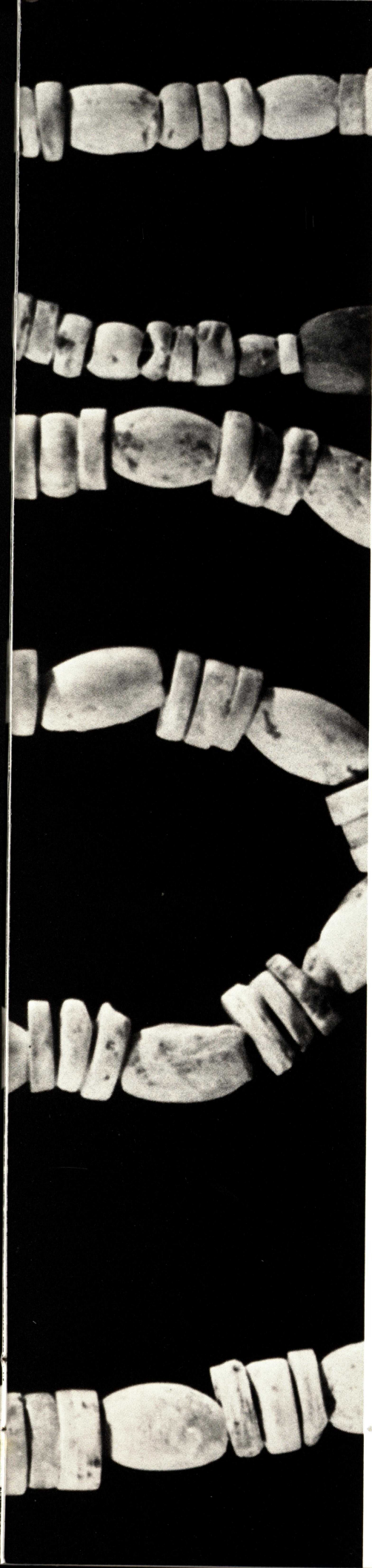
I shall never forget the shock and grief I experienced when, upon my return in the late fall, I learned that the digging had been resumed during the summer and had been allowed to proceed unmolested; that the great mound had been tunneled through and through, gutted in a frenzy of haste. I went to look at it. Sections of cedar poles lay scattered on the ground, fragments of feather and fur textiles littered the whole area; it was impossible to take a single step in hundreds of square yards around the ruined structure without scuffing up broken pieces of pottery, sections of engraved shell and beads of shell, stone, and bone. The site was abandoned; the diggers had completed their work."

As a final, spiteful gesture the miners attempted to dynamite the mound. The charge, however, produced only a sizeable crack in the cone. What was left was then available for scientific observation.

Under Dr. Clements' direction a systematic excavation was conducted at the site from 1936 through 1941. During the 1979 season, additional studies were performed, and the mounds were reconstructed. In addition, excavations have been conducted at sites of the same time period as Spiro. These studies of the mounds and their artifacts have yielded much information about the people who created them.

For more than 500 years, from A.D. 700 - 1350, a remarkable culture flourished in what is now Eastern



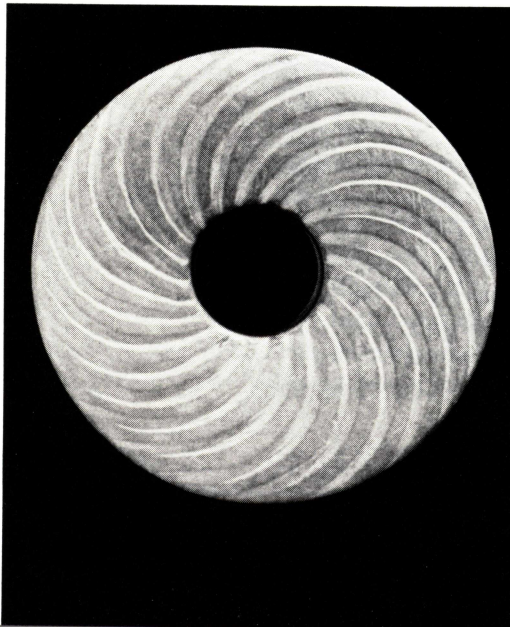


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Oklahoma. By the last 150 years of occupation, the society had the benefit of several centuries of a stable agriculturally-based economy. Trade was organized to the point where large amounts of raw and finished products were transported over long distances. Spiro, with its strategic position on the Arkansas River, was involved in exchange not only down river and to the north, but also with the Plains farmers to the west and with the other Southeastern centers to the east. The materials found at Spiro dramatically illustrate their trade network: pure copper from Lake Superior or the Southern Appalachian region; from that region also, mica, flint, marble, and other stone; buffalo hair and jackrabbit fur from the Plains; and conch shells from the Gulf Coast of Florida (and possibly from Northeast Mexican shores.) With these materials the Spiro people created the hoards of luxury items which were eventually deposited in the burials.

The Spiro people belonged to a "chiefdom" — a complex society with ranked social status. The closer one's hereditary relationship to the chief, the higher one's status in such a society. The privileged were honored at death with special treatment, and the mounds result from the highly complex ritual associated with the burials of these dead elite. Originally there was a village at Spiro; gradually, however, it was abandoned, and the site became a religious center for the scattered farming communities in the area with only a few people — perhaps caretakers or priests — actually living near the mounds.

There were three kinds of mounds at Spiro. One type



The shell beads, far left, and ear spool, left, are two of the hand carved ornaments worn by the Spiro people.

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was raised as a platform for a structure; the second was an earth cover for a destroyed building; and the third was what is called an accretional burial mound, one built up of increasing layers of burials, burial goods and earth. The huge Craig Mound, which contained the Great Mortuary and the majority of Spiro grave goods, was a combination of types.

The Great Mortuary, found at the base of the main cone in the Craig Mound, was built on the remains of an earlier one. Caddoan mortuaries were buildings in which the dead were allowed to decompose before final interment. After a period of use, the buildings were cleaned out and dismantled or burned, and their contents were placed in an accretional burial mound. The earlier mortuary in the Craig Mound was of this type. For some reason, the practice in the Great Mortuary differed. Although the building was dismantled, the burials and grave goods were left in place. A platform mound was built up over the remains of the Great Mortuary and a new mortuary was erected on top. This sequence probably occurred several times before the mound was abandoned.

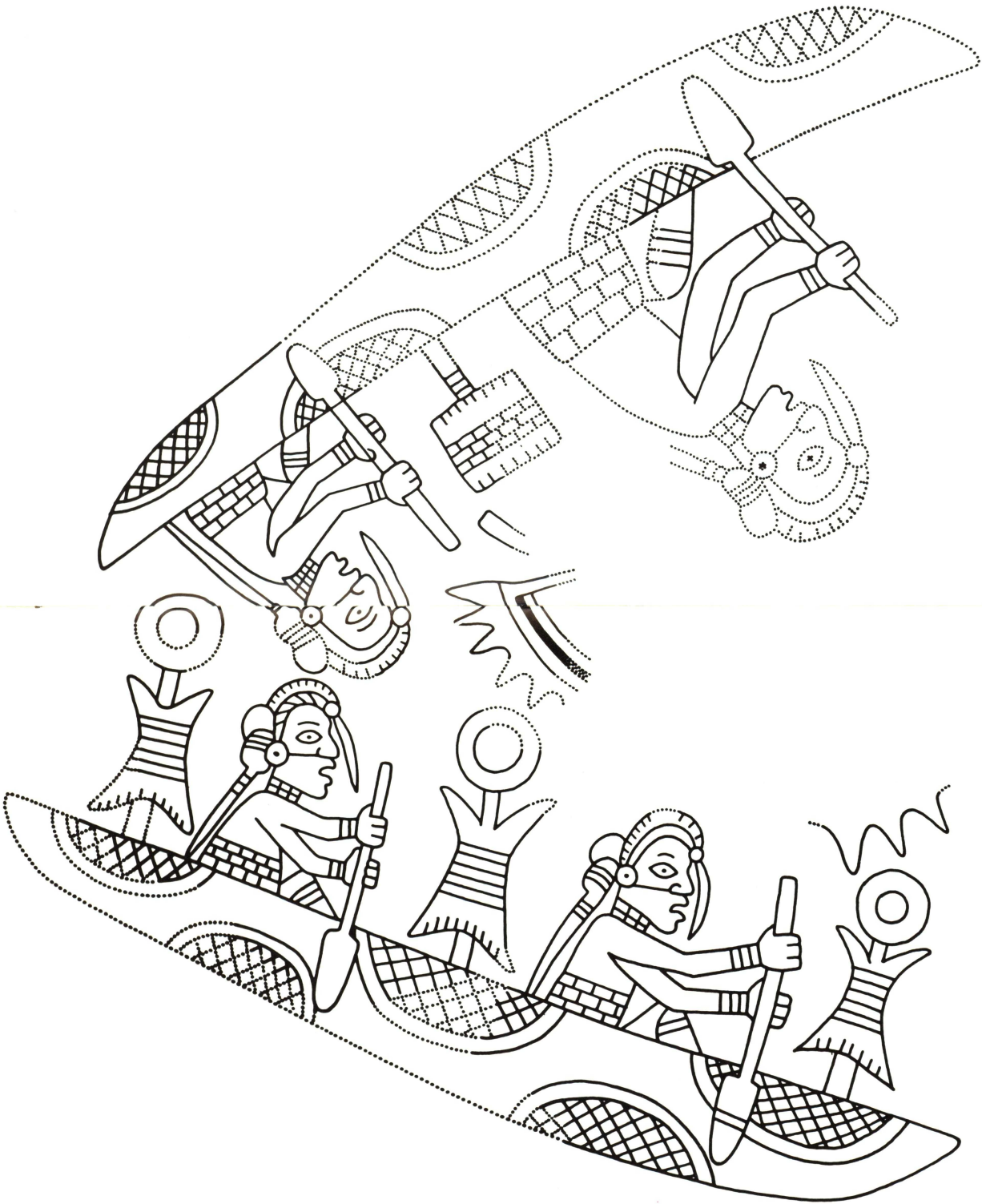
When the “Pocola Mining Company” tunnelled into the Craig Mound, they reached the remains of the Great Mortuary and, soon after, started to spread tales about the elaborate central chamber. From what archeologists can reconstruct, there was a small hollow cavity in the main cone caused by trapped air and the settling of the contents over the years. This would explain the almost perfect preservation of some of the fragile objects.

Within the Great Mortuary were several classes of burials. The simplest were bundles of bones in basketry chests accompanied by a few artifacts. In the next class, the bones were laid out in an extended position and surrounded by artifacts. The most elaborate were the litter burials, reserved for persons of superior status who in life were borne on the shoulders of others. Used as burials, cedar pole litters were heaped with luxury goods and the bones of the elite. One spectacular burial contained, in addition to other artifacts, well over 100 conch shell cups.

The grave goods found at Spiro fall into three broad classes. There are weapon-like objects: huge knives, axes carved from a single block of stone, and chipped stone maces — ceremonial rather than functional war clubs. Then there are ritual objects like the sheet copper plates (plaques), stone effigy pipes in human and animal



The shell fragment at left is part of an engraved conch shell found in the Spiro Mound. The canoers drawing below depicts a projection of the full shell illustration.



form, and small wooden effigy masks used, perhaps, as ear plugs. Third, there are perishable items such as baskets, textiles, and conch shells which were hollowed out and made into cups or dippers and covered with engraved designs. Of these artifacts the ones which reveal most about Southeastern religious beliefs are the copper plates and the engraved shell cups.

The copper plates are a testament to the consummate skill of the Spiroan artisans. Pure copper was pounded until it became a thin sheet and was then pressed over some kind of mold to raise an embossed design. The precise use of the plates is not known, but it is certain that they were held to be very sacred. Many were carefully repaired using tiny rivets. They were found in stacks and were crumpled as if they had been ritually destroyed. The stacks have been painstakingly separated, revealing that all the plates portray falcons (or hawks) and dancing falcon warriors, also represented on plates found at Etowah, the huge Southeastern site in Georgia. This falcon man — (priest? shaman? god?) — must have been very important in the societies of the Southeast. At Spiro he appears on many of the shell cups, and the large stone pipe called “Big Boy” undoubtedly shows him at rest. In all these representations, he wears a cloak of wings, tail feathers and a hooked nose mask. Just such a cloak and mask were found in one of the burials.

As with the copper plates, the use of the shell cups is unknown. Perhaps they were created for libations or for something like the celebrated “black drink”, an hallucinogen in use in Florida some 150 years later. The cups portray, or refer to, ceremonial practices rather than everyday proceedings with one possible exception — the canoers. However, even this cup has ritual overtones in the formalized design on the canoes. (It is tempting, of course, to say this cup illustrates the arrival of the shells themselves at Spiro, but it is just as likely that they came overland.)

In addition to the costumed falcon men and the canoers, human figures are also portrayed holding ceremonial staffs. One representation of two figures confronting a forked pole is repeated almost identically on 22 cups. It is often interpreted as an episode in the Busk or green corn ceremony, a Creek planting ritual. Other cups depict items of ceremonial regalia like maces, bows, and parts of headdresses.

Many of the cups are covered with geometric designs similar to motifs engraved on pottery found in sites across



These two engraved conch shells from the Spiro Mound show the Falcon dancers, or bird-man drawings on the shells.



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the Southeast. The Spiro artisans transferred ceramic designs from pot to shell, cleverly adapting the designs to the shell's asymmetrical form.

The conch shells were used to create not only cups but also gorgets, which were made by carving a round, shallow saucer shape out of the largest part of the shell, just below the shoulder. A gorget was furnished with suspension holes and was worn at the throat as depicted on many of the shells. Most gorgets were engraved on the concave side, but a few were carved in relief on the convex, creating a cameo effect.

While many of the cups portray human figures, even more show animals, snakes, and various human-snake-animal composites. These mythological inventions have fascinated archeologists and visual artists alike. Exactly what the snake with spider eyes, the snakes with wings and cat heads, or the intertwined snakes with human figures instead of heads meant to the Spiro people is not yet known.

Throughout the Southeast, the practise of mound building gradually ceased after A.D. 1400. At the end of its last period of use, the Craig Mound was neatly capped with a cone of earth and deliberately abandoned. There

was no sign of warfare or other external cause. The Spiro elite seem to have disappeared, but the reason is unknown. One theory advanced is that a climate change caused an eastward spread of the Plains. Perhaps these people switched from farming to buffalo hunting as their chief source of food; and the new nomadic lifestyle did not allow for the time-consuming manufacture of ceremonial goods.

The shell cups with their engraved designs could reveal much about Southeastern symbolic representation. Unfortunately the fragile cups suffered greatly as a result of the miners' handling. When one broke, no effort was made to keep the pieces together. As a result, fragments of the same shell have landed in many museums and private collections. Photographs do not adequately reproduce the designs. It is only recently, thanks to a new technique of making rubbings of the shell fragments and piecing them together, that many of the designs have been reconstructed and are in the process of being published. As scholars study them, it is expected that they will be able to unravel a few more of Spiro's unsolved mysteries. **1**



A monolithic axe (carved from one piece) was among the many artifacts uncovered in the Spiro Mound.

Paintings

OF

Everyday Life



“Interior of a Schoolroom,” oil by William Tolman Carlton.

By Fred A. Myers

A realistic painting of an ordinary event is called, in art historical jargon, a genre painting. Until the beginning of the 19th century few artists thought that painting such scenes was worth the effort. Everyday life was not sufficiently instructive in the way the established subjects of religion and mythology were. Nor did it sell as well as that staple of artistic production, the portrait.

In the early years of the 19th century, however, artists and their patrons began to wake up to the marvelous raw material for paintings that existed in non-literary nature. It is only then that we begin to get in large quantities such things as landscapes and marine

paintings, studies of birds, animals and sailing ships — and paintings of the undramatic events of everyday life. Such subjects are all part of a general interest in recording the real world rather than in illustrating the theoretic world of religion, or the imaginary world of mythology, or the morally instructive world of history. In other words, artists not only did not see the trees for the forest until about 1800, they did not seem to see the real people and their daily doings until they saw the trees. The mind set being ready, genre painting was born.

The Gilcrease collection includes perhaps 2,000 paintings that depict the everyday life of various American Indian peoples — the Catlin paintings, the



“Listening to the Shell,” oil by Eastman Johnson.

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Leighs, the Sharps, for instance. Such paintings are generally not described as genre paintings. The reason is that while the scenes depicted by such artists might be everyday for the Indians involved, the material was “exotic” from the Anglo artist’s point of view. This article then cavalierly ignores the Gilcrease Catlins, et al, in favor of drawing attention to a little known aspect of the collection — the mom-and-apple-pie 19th century genre works.

Typical of the best American genre paintings in the early part of the 19th century are the works of William Sidney Mount. While the collection does not include any works by Mount himself, it does include four works by one of Mount’s friends and disciples, William Tylee Ranney. Ranney’s painting “Pennsylvania Teamster” has all the early 19th century genre features. It depicts the real world: a wagon driver is struggling to get a balky horse to enter a stream and pull his part of the load in getting the wagon across the ford. While the scene is accurately observed, it is depicted in rather generalized fashion. It would be hard to recognize the driver in another context, if you saw him in town, for instance, in Sunday go-to-meeting clothes.

George Durrie was an artist who painted for the lithographic productions of Currier and Ives. His

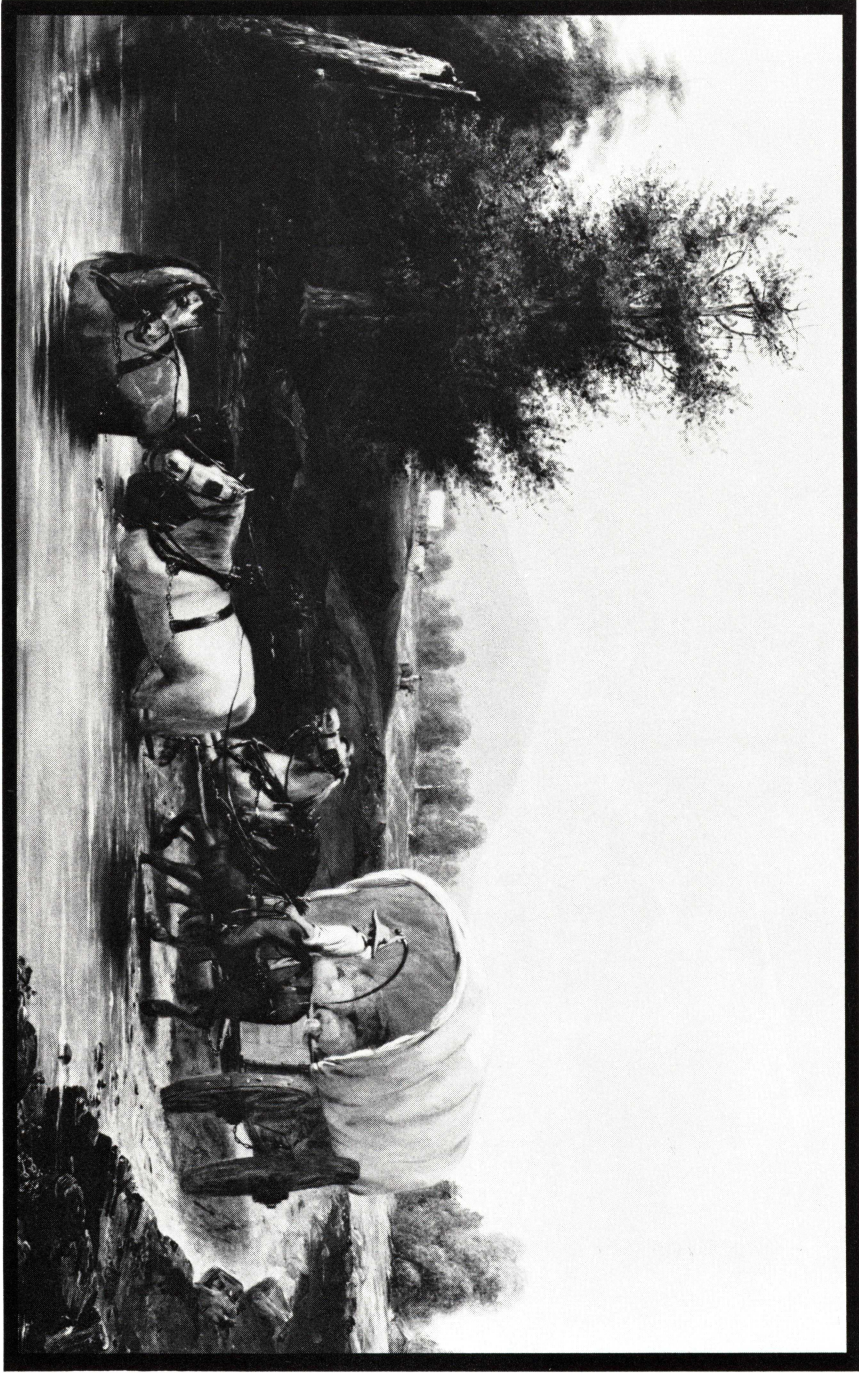
painting “Christmas Party” is full of the innocent charm embodied for a wide audience, then and now, in the Currier and Ives prints. Each figure, each sleigh is carefully observed and presented to you like an icon in direct but somewhat stiff fashion. This painting, and Currier and Ives works in general, are an expression of a placid period in American history when the typical citizen was a farmer or craftsman or wife of same.

The early and mid-19th century was a sunny period when tastes of patron and artist coincided. How could you be living in 1856 and not love William Tolman Carlton’s painting of a day in the life of a dame’s school? That was the date when Carlton recorded these schoolroom goings-on for his own and his public’s delight — this long-suffering gentlelady teacher, this erring or lazy student whose slate is being corrected, that surreptitiously shared apple, that attentive scholar whose ear is about to be tickled by a feather, that irretrievably spilt ink. What a delight then and what a delight such a painting continues to be even now 125 years later! It distills the experience of a simpler American time.

A great change in the American outlook in painting, and in nearly everything else, was occasioned by the



“Sunday Morning,” oil by Edward Lamson Henry.



“Pennsylvania Teamster,” oil by William Tylee Ranney.

Civil War: Gone were the homebred certainties of the past. People were leaving the countryside to find work in the burgeoning industries of the cities. It was then that the joys and trials of the crowded city were born into the American consciousness. The awakening American industrial giant suddenly created a world role for the United States. The Statue of Liberty welcomed great influxes of immigrants. America became the melting pot.

A change in the art world that coincided with this radical reordering of the old verities was that everyone now thought that if you wanted to be a proper artist you needed European training. There had always been a certain amount of European study by American artists. Benjamin West’s London studio seems, in the 18th century, to have had an open door policy, and West himself must have had infinite patience with the many young men from America who stopped by to see him all saying they wanted to learn how to be artists. However, such early 19th century American artists as Mount, Ranney, and Durrie developed their techniques without European studio training.

With the American consciousness of the rest of the world that came after the Civil War, however, many

major American artists who went to Europe for study became so Europeanized that they almost never came back — artists like Cassatt, Whistler, and Sargent. A more typical pattern was the two or three year pilgrimage to one of the old European culture centers, followed by a return to the U.S. and an attempt to be an artist on this pragmatic side of the Atlantic Ocean. By the 1870s nearly every American artist of any standing had acquired an indoctrination in the European academic art process.

Such American artists returned from Europe not only with polished art techniques but also with attitudes about culture and America that tended to break down the former solidarity of artist, typical citizen, and patron.

The clearest expression in the Gilcrease collection of this new set of values is the painting “Sunday Morning” by Edward Lamson Henry. Henry has all the skills to create in minute detail a panorama (the painting is large, measuring 34 by 62 inches) of Victorian respectability. His technique lavished attention on the various fabrics of the ladies’ dresses; no appropriate gesture escapes his attention. Sunday morning after church 100 years ago is brought to life. With all its impressive accomplishment, however, the painting has

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less of the breath of life than an earlier painting such as the one by Carlton. It is a knowing but lukewarm production.

Many of the American artists who studied in Europe, when they came home, had a hard time doing more than aping their European mentors. Any number of paintings by American artists, except for their American subject matter, could have been painted in Dusseldorf, or Munich, or Paris, so strong was the imprint of the artistic styles of those cities.

The best American artists of the period were able to internalize their European lessons while maintaining an identity of their own. Such an artist was Eastman Johnson who at his best rivals Winslow Homer, the American artist who most consistently raised genre to the highest artistic expression. Johnson did the usual European studying with the special twist of being particularly impressed by the painters of the Low Countries, Rembrandt chief among them. Rembrandt's humanity and such stylistic tricks as his dynamic use of beams of light are evident in the Gilcrease painting by Johnson called "Listening to the Shell."

Most impressive of the four Johnson paintings in the collection is the one titled "The Doll". It depicts a young mother fashioning a simple doll for her two daughters. Interestingly from the viewpoint of the Western emphasis of the Gilcrease collection, the domestic interior Johnson recreates appears to be a soddy. It is known that Johnson made two trips west, one as far as Superior, Wisconsin, the other to Kentucky, so he would have had opportunity to learn about that simple type of housing constructed by some of the early settlers of the Midwest.

Another interesting fact about the painting is that in the 100 or so years of its existence, the pigment that Johnson used to color the skirt of the nearest girl has grown transparent so that the bed that he painted first shows through the skirt as a ghostly presence. Such transparencies are typical of the paintings that Johnson painted as thinly as he did this one.

These historical details being as they may, Johnson's painting of "The Doll" is worth contemplation because it is a marvelous indication of the possibilities of genre in the hands of a superior artist. What he depicts for the viewer's instruction is not just an everyday incident, transitory as dressing a doll may be. The scene is about nurturing, about the warmth that human caring can bring to the humblest situation. Although the stated subject is a doll, the real subject of the painting is the artist's commentary on the human condition. ■



"The Doll," oil by Eastman Johnson.

"Attack on the Jerky," oil by Olaf Selzer.

Forgotten Crossroads of Indian Territory

By Ernest F. Darling

"If the confluence of the Grand, Verdigris, and Arkansas Rivers shall ever become important as a settlement, which the great and irresistible tide of Western emigration promises, a great town will probably be founded here."

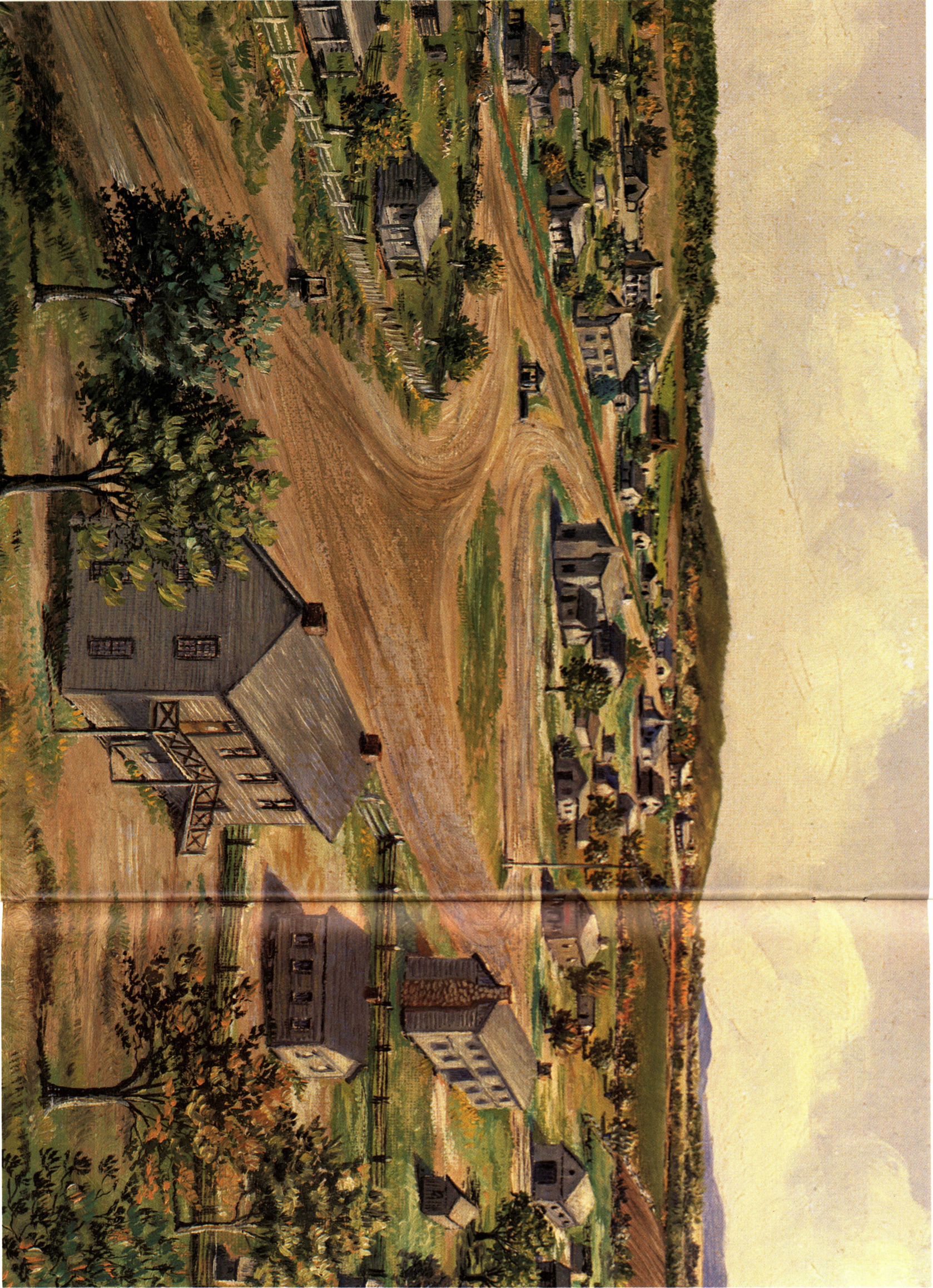


Along with this 1819 prediction, Thomas Nuttall, the eminent English natural scientist, went on to leave the earliest detailed description of the region around the Three Forks. He observed out-croppings of coal, the many salt springs, and especially the abundance of water — water for navigation and other industry.

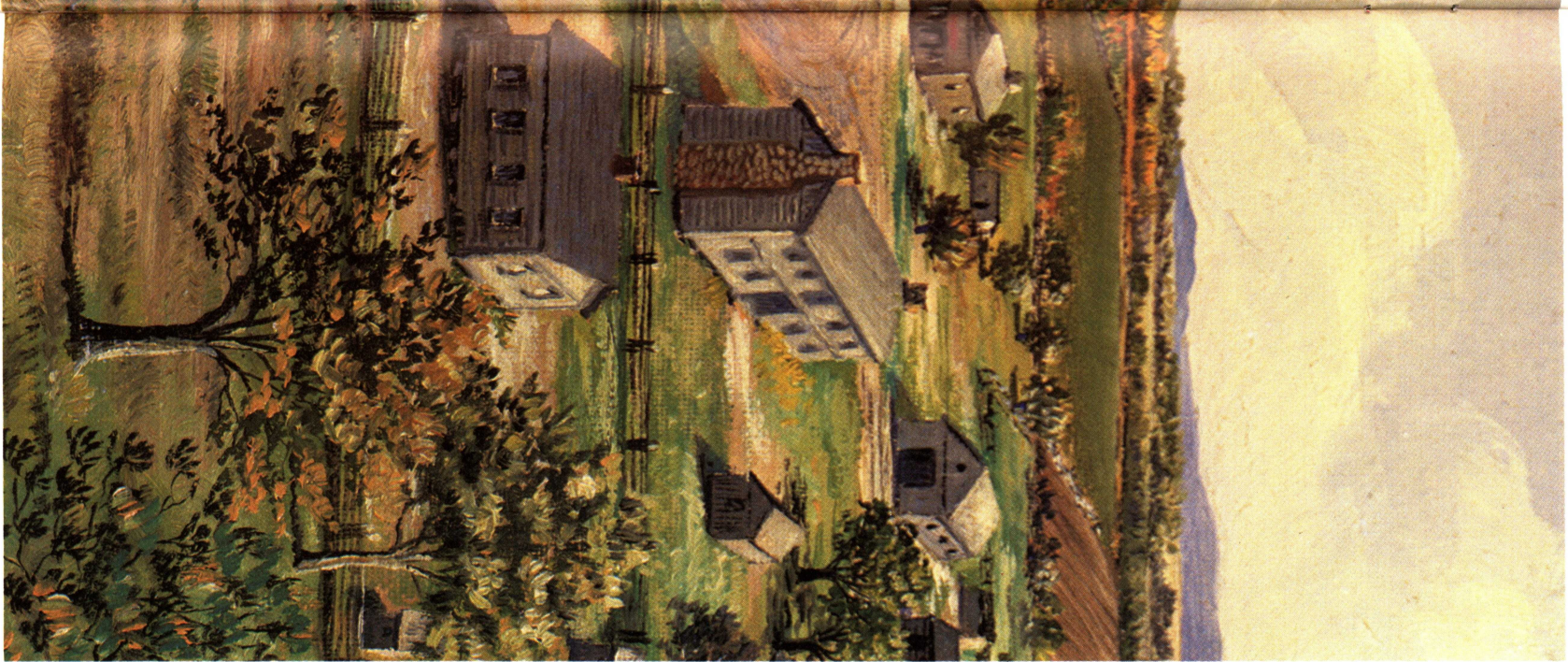
Nuttall was not the first to make favorable mention of the area. The year following Lewis and Clark's explorations of 1805 in the Upper Louisiana Territory, Lt. James Wilkinson of the Zebulon M. Pike Expedition came down the Arkansas River checking out the Southwestern part of the historic acquisition. In his

report he recommended that "the Forks would be very suitable for a garrison in the future."

By the 1830s a prominent commercial trailway had developed north and south across these streams and hills — the Old Texas Road — which linked the burgeoning Midwest with Texas and the far Southwest. On its southward course the Road first crossed the bur-unique convergence of three waterways; a few miles farther, another river, the Canadian, along whose banks evolved a southern route to Santa Fe and California; and before it reached the Red River it was joined by the first transcontinental mail-stage line. And for half a century the Old Texas Road was the



"Boggy Depot," oil by Vinson Lackey.



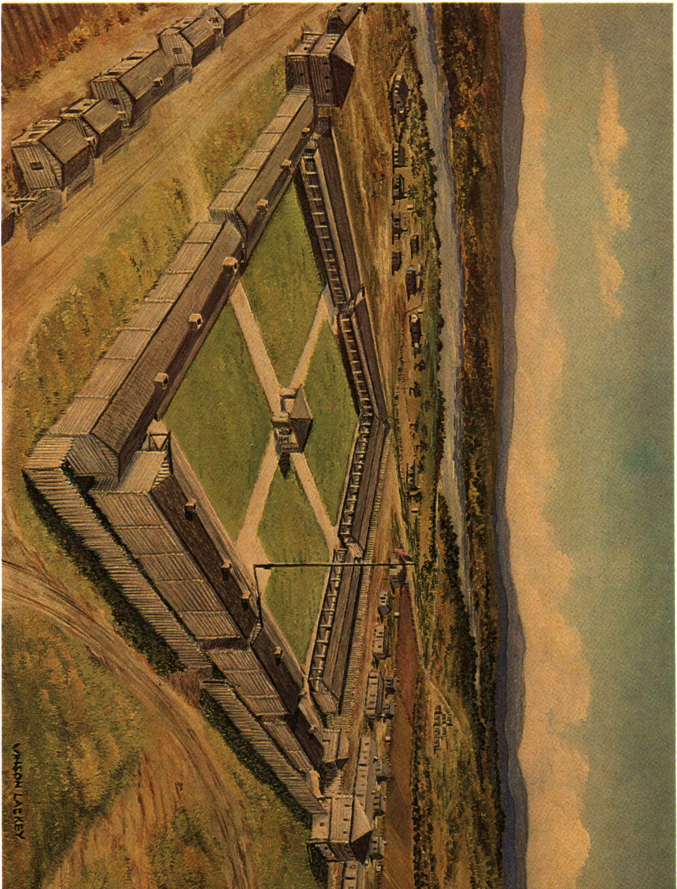
"Fort Gibson," oil by Vinson Lackey.

Crossroads . . .

main military artery on the frontier with a web of roadways radiating to all parts of Indian Territory and surrounding states.

Grant Foreman, the "Father of Oklahoma History," says quite convincingly, "it was a road of such great utility, importance, and interest; and is much within the realm of fact to state that for over 200 miles the extent of this great thoroughfare there are more historical locations, features, and associations of historical interest and significance than are to be found on any other highway of even much greater extent west of the Mississippi River."

The region held a natural attraction for both Indian and white man long in advance of civilization. The timbered hills and clear running streams provided a hunter's paradise. Before it was called Louisiana, Arkansas, or Indian Territory, the natives were crisscrossing the land with their warpaths, hunting paths, and trading paths. The most frequented one was the Osage Trace which began at the Forks and pursued its way into Missouri, and later to the French trading center at St. Louis. Such goods as buffalo hides, deerskins, beaver pelts, beeswax, and bear grease were bartered for whisky, guns, calicoes, and blankets. One item of this earlier-day trade not often mentioned was captured Indian and Mexican women and children, who were shipped down the Mississippi to the Caribbean Islands and Mexico City. Eventually this depravity was somewhat softened when the posts allowed relatives to ransom them.



VINSON LACKEY

Crossroads . . .

Since the Osages claimed a hunting and foraging domain scattered over most of Missouri, Kansas, Arkansas, and Oklahoma, they were the first big trappers in the area. These haughty tribesmen were the lords, and they kept the Pawnees, Caddos, and cringing Quapaws in a state of subservency.

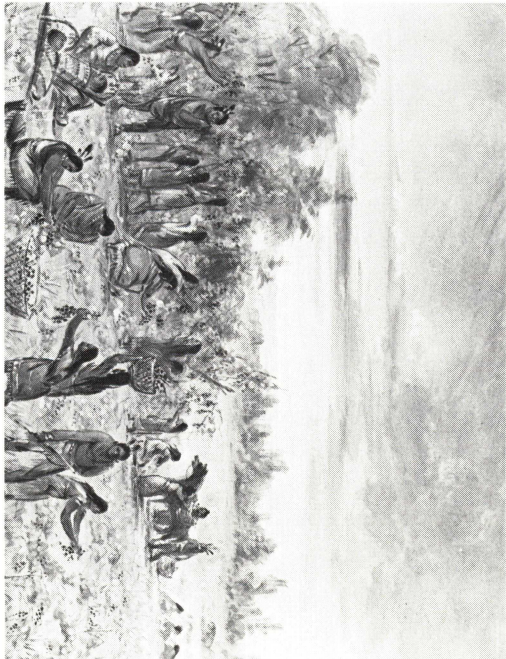
The Osages headquartered in Southwestern Missouri along a river which retains their name. They were among the earliest Western Indians to become addicted to the white man's culture, and St. Louis was their Mecca. Much of their trade goods came from the Ozark Mountain country, some from beyond the Red River, and the buffalo plains to the west. From these points canoes, travois, and back-packing squaws arrived at the Three Forks, then up the trace to market. Regular salt gatherings were undertaken by these

people to the salt springs along the lower Grand River, and farther west to the Great Salt Plains on the Salt Fork River. This enterprise not only resulted in an essential commodity, but an article of trade, too.

Whole families — men, women, children, dogs, horses, and assorted domestic baggage — would take to the well-worn trace. After material needs were met, the Osages usually turned to pleasure. Since the country abounded in wild game, hunting parties would be formed, and quite likely the younger warriors would set off on horse stealing raids into Texas. Among the Plains Indians this latter diversion was an honorable activity, horses being more coveted than captives or most other types of booty.

The first known European roadway within Oklahoma of which any record is available was one used by the Spanish priests and traders. This "Old Spanish Trail" ran from Natchitoches (Louisiana) to Nacogdoches (Texas), then across Red River near the mouth of the Washita and west to the Spanish settlements of the Rio Grande. For many years the deep tracks cut by Mexican ox carts and burro packtrains could be found in the Southwestern part of the state.

Commercial traffic remained minimal throughout the 17th and 18th centuries with the exception of a few French traders and hunters who left evidence of their passing on the names of such streams as the Poteau and Verdigris. These adventurers came in a type of canoe hollowed from a tree trunk, which could be paddled up stream 30 to 40 miles per day. As business increased, a heavier variation called a "pinogue" was constructed from two of these canoes lashed together and covered with a rough wooden deck; or perhaps a clumsy flat bottomed "bateau" was used and powered



"Caddo Indians Gathering Wild Grapes," oil by George Catlin.

by poling. In periods of sufficient water, the larger keel boat was used.

Beyond the plains there was some prospective trade with the isolated Spanish towns, as the New Mexicans found little incentive for dealing with the limited restrictions of the mother country. Spanish goods were quite inferior, intolerably high priced, and delivery impossible to depend upon. So, at a risk of severe punishment they dared trade with outsiders, chiefly French, until the Americans arrived with a better quality merchandise in the early 1800s.

At the beginning of the 19th century history making events of widespread effect began occurring. First, in 1803 came the acquisition of the great Louisiana Territory by the Americans. In 1819, on gaining Florida, the United States pushed for a final settling of Louisiana's boundary since Spain had been hinting that the Arkansas River was the southwest border. When the Red River was agreed upon, there came about a new and stimulating interest in the whole Southwest.

Also in 1819, the United States offered the western half of Arkansas Territory (Oklahoma) to the eastern Indians if they would emigrate there. Some saw the handwriting on the wall and moved, but it was not a popular idea and eventually the Army was ordered to escort them to the "Indian Territory."

The year 1821 brought Mexican independence from Spain, relaxing trade conditions in New Mexico, and permitting American colonists into Texas. In the next 20 years came Texas independence, followed by statehood, both calling for closer relations across the Red River.

The results of the Mexican War and discovery of gold in California before mid-century increased activity in the Southwest to an impatient pitch.

more localized series of events concerned the inter-tribal problems and warfare, brought on by resettlement and overcrowding in Indian Territory. To police the situation, the military frontier was advanced into the troubled land by creating a number of new forts, posts, and connecting roadways.

So it was that Ft. Smith, Arkansas Territory, received orders in 1824 to move its forces to the Three Forks. Not only was Ft. Smith a strategic juncture on the wall of defense stretching from Ft. Snelling in Minnesota to Ft. Jesup in western Louisiana, but a significant frontier trading center had developed there.

A trader's account book, dated 1820, Ft. Smith, and on display in the rare book section of Gilcrease Museum's research library, reveals how typical the border community was of the American frontier. Although the buffalo-hide backing is badly deteriorated, the pages are well preserved, and among the numerous entries of whisky, cherry bounce, and gunpowder, are found such staid items as "heel balls, looking

glasses, fine-combs, linsey, gimlets, and segars." With the establishment of Ft. Gibson at the mouth of the Grand River, the Arkansas River remained the leading source of movement for troops and equipment, displaced Indians, missionaries, and merchants of the surrounding country.

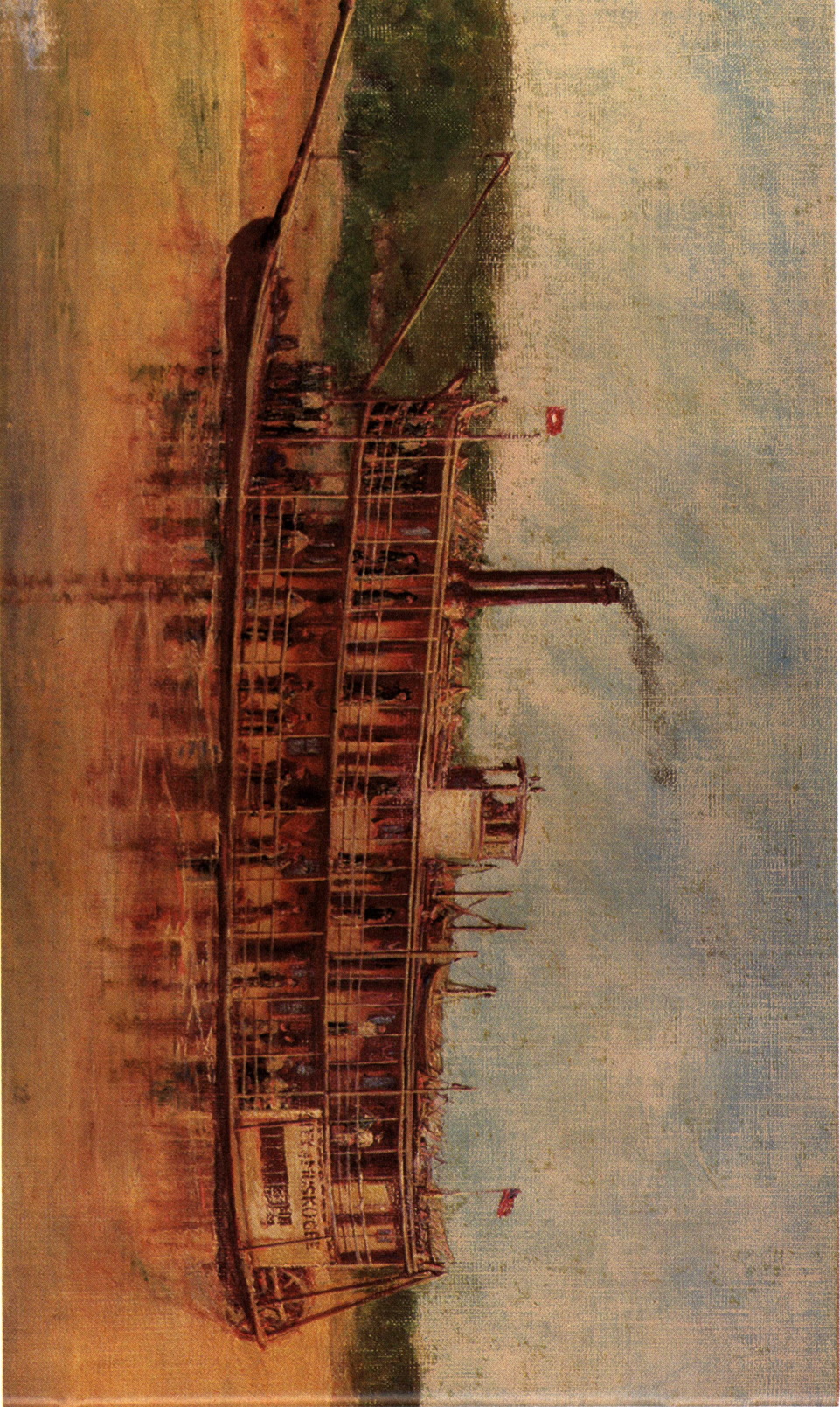
The first steamboat to arrive came that same year, the 60-ton "Florence," bringing 100 recruits to the post. Four years later the 117-ton "Facility" tied up at Three Forks, towing two keel boats laden with 780 Creek Indians from their former Alabama homes; and on returning the next year she carried more than her usual cargo of trade goods — the "self exiled," ex-governor of Tennessee, Samuel Houston.

River traffic continued to grow right down to the railroad period in 1871. In the preceding year a government engineer had reported, "Twenty steamboats now ply between Ft. Gibson, Ft. Smith, Little Rock, St. Louis, and New Orleans. Military freight alone received here amounts to \$5,000,000 annually."

Here at the head of navigation, Ft. Gibson was, during its heyday, the westernmost installation of the United States military, and played host to many eminent persons. Washington Irving paid a call in 1832, looking for excitement and possible literary material. His classic "A Tour on the Prairies" began at the fort,



"Encampment of the Travelers," on the Missouri River, color engraving by Carl Bodmer.



“City of Muskogee,” oil by J. Baker.

Crossroads . . .

and in Three Forks he visited with Houston and his Cherokee wife, Tiana, at their “Wigwam Neosho.”

Soon came the earliest authentic painter and historian of the Indians, George Catlin, who lived at the fort while doing portraits and studies. As a guest of the First Dragons on an excursion to Comanche country around the Wichita Mountains, the artist almost died of a ravaging malady which took many of the troops, including General Leavenworth.

Another artist on frontier life, John Mix Stanley, made a number of documentary paintings during a visit with relatives stationed here.

Many West Point graduates were sent to Ft. Gibson for their first service — not a popular assignment for various reasons, especially after it had acquired the ominous title, “Graveyard of the Army.” True, the sickness and death rate at the time was the highest in

the country. However, several names of those who did serve became famous. Jefferson Davis, later President of the Confederacy, was relegated to this outpost for duty by Col. Zachary Taylor because the young lieutenant was paying too much court to the Colonel’s daughter. (The persistent Davis finally won.)

In 1855 the Second Cavalry arrived from Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, led by Col. Albert S. Johnston, Lt. Col. Robert E. Lee, Major George Thomas, and Capt. John B. Hood — all to distinguish themselves in the Mexican and Civil Wars.

We have seen how the vicinity known as Three Forks had been an advantageous base and a natural crossroads from primeval times, and favorable recognition of its location continued. It was important enough

that President Jefferson made official notice in messages to Congress soon after the Louisiana Purchase concerning the earliest dream of using the area as a home for America’s unwanted Indians.

By now there had been a big change in the Osage Nation and reports of their reaction to Jefferson’s plan were not kind. Rivalry in the fur-trade business had caused Col. A. P. Chouteau to induce much of the tribe to split and move with him to the region, where they were continuing a life of hunting and fighting under their friend’s semi-feudal empire.

Irving’s word picture of the settlement in 1832 showed, “It consisted of a few log houses, the Osage Agency with Col. Choteau’s (sic) offices and magazine, presenting a motley scene. The hamlet was in a complete bustle, the blacksmith shop in particular with horseshoeing and lead melting for bullets, — a group of stately Osages in contrast to a gayly dressed party of Creeks.”

There also existed the Creek Agency, many wagon-repair shops, boat docks, ferries, and a number of trading posts, including Sam Houston’s, Nathaniel Pryor’s, and the noble Chouteau’s.

By 1830 the Osage Trace had become the upper section of the Old Texas Road. An Army officer on returning to St. Louis, reported that daily he “passed hundreds of emigrant wagons and trains of heavy ox-drawn freighters, and at Three Forks, traffic was backed up a mile waiting to be ferried across the Arkansas.” And these travelers could find welcome relief at any one of a sprinkling of primitive missionary stations in the Osage country, especially if they had run out of food, or been overtaken with illness. Hopefield, Union, and Asbury were on the Road with others throughout the Territory.

Three Forks, with her unmatched position as a hub for trade, Army supply distribution point, missionary work, and Indian administration center, retained its rank as other crossroads grew to prominence. When the Santa Fe trade became more competitive, many traders started coming down the Road as far as North Fork Town, there turning west on a new trail up the Canadian River, giving them two or three weeks’ jump on later starting caravans from Missouri. In 1839 Josiah Gregg, who had already made a name for himself in the business, passed through from Ft. Smith with \$25,000 worth of goods in 14 wagons, headed for Santa Fe and Chihuahua. Many ’49ers who didn’t relish the passage around Cape Horn came by river or overland and picked up this route at North Fork Town, of course, naming it the California Trail. Physical conditions were about the same as on the Santa

Fe, and the Comanches were no worse.

On south from North Fork Town rolled the covered wagons of the home-seekers from Pennsylvania, Illinois, and Ohio — all with bad cases of “Texas Fever.” Time and again they were halted by north-bound droves of half-wild mustangs and mules being driven to Missouri markets from as far as Mexico. Even before the Civil War there were some experimental drives of Longhorns up this same route.

When the white man’s war spread to Indian Territory, the Old Texas Road saw Creek and Cherokee refugees fleeing to Kansas, as Confederate Indian forces took control of the southern section. Then with freedom, many Negroes left Louisiana and Texas for Kansas, also.

At the next crossroads was Boggy Depot which straddled the Choctaw and Chickasaw boundary and where passengers on the first transcontinental mail line had their last chance for a decent meal in the next ten days. When the Post Office Department let the contract for the Butterfield Mail in 1858, the South demanded the eastern terminal originate in one of their cities, and the North had responded likewise. A compromise allowed the line to begin in Memphis and St. Louis, merging at Ft. Smith, then across Indian Territory, northwest Texas, and on to California. During the Civil War the Confederate Indians and Texans made Boggy their main military stronghold. It was also the home of Choctaw Chieftain Allen Wright, who suggested the name “Oklahoma” — home of the Red People.

Emigrants and others found again at Red River such luxuries which were scarce or nil on the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails — ferries. Colbert’s was most famous. Here the Chickasaw businessman used a gang of black slaves to pole large rafts and work at keeping steep banks cut down. As traffic increased, other ferries sprang up in the vicinity with connecting roads to the big Road. The Sloan Love Ferry advertised:

“Women and children of Texas emigrants toll free.” On climbing the south bank the wagon people got their first real taste of the raw and brawling West. Preston, Texas was about as sinful and disreputable as any frontier outpost. The place started as a military supply junction for a new string of forts established to protect commerce and settlers from Texas Indians, but soon was another gateway for illegal liquor and vice into the Nations.

As a navigation route, Red River was not blessed on the same scale as the Arkansas, mostly on account of a natural phenomenon known as the “Great Log Raft.” Brief knowledge of its physical geography ex-

Crossroads . . .

nature of the Territory. With the government's resettlement policy, almost all the land between the state of Arkansas and the western boundary of Louisiana Territory was parcelled out to the many and various tribes; the Cherokees, Choctaws, Creeks, Seminoles, and Chickasaws receiving by far the greatest part. These people, although they had adopted many practices of the whites, still were bent on clinging to the old ways of their forefathers and other tribal customs, thus the region remained a frontier — the Indian Frontier — long after white civilization surrounded it and moved on to the Pacific.

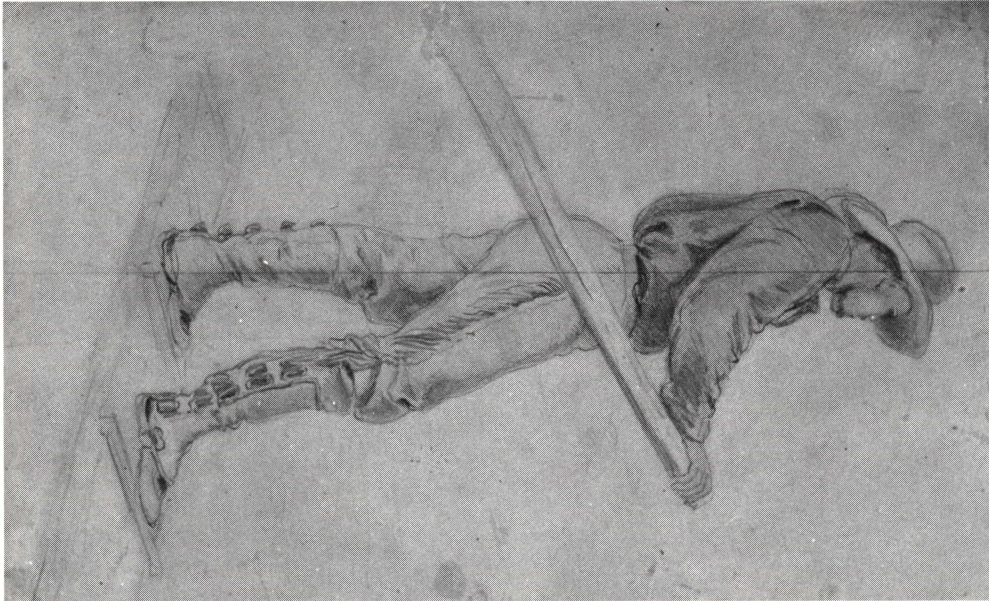
The Choctaws in particular discouraged travel by not building new roads, or repairing roads and bridges that existed. Even when the few hijackings and other thefts occurred, there was little interest taken to alleviate such activities. Soon after the close of the Civil War the Cherokees petitioned the United States to remove Ft. Gibson from the Territory, claiming (and rightly) that the post was a deterrent to their society and livelihood, that it was drawing whisky, gambling, and prostitution to the area. Not only was firewater flowing up the Arkansas River, but the old military road between Ft. Gibson and Ft. Smith was now known as the Whisky Road.

The economy of the crossroads began slipping when beaver hats and buffalo robes went out of fashion, also with the decreasing need of the military, and increasing opposition to immoral and illegal goods. The grand climax came when the "Katy" railroad crossed Indian Territory in 1872. The steel tracks almost paralleled The Old Texas Road, yet they by-passed each of the prominent frontier towns.

Three Forks made the most valiant stand, possibly because of its older and tougher hide. On at least three occasions prior to the Civil War disastrous fires practically wiped it out, then during that fighting, guerrilla action devastated the whole locality. What had been rebuilt later packed up and moved about three miles to the railroad when it came through, and struggled on under a succession of names — Coretta Switch, Rex, and finally, Okay — never achieving the promised glory.

North Fork Town fared worse. It too, had relocated on the railroad under a new name — Eufaula, where its spirit no doubt wavers between the old site, now on the bottom of Lake Eufaula.

A weed-grown cemetery is the outstanding evidence on Boggy Creek of where Texas emigrants stopped to rest, where the Choctaw National Council held some stormy sessions, and San Francisco bound stagecoaches halted briefly. 📍



"River Man at Tiller," from the sketchbook of William de la Montagne Cary.

plains why. Since the flood plain was formed by alluvial soils, and no rocky banks held the stream in narrow confines, the swift current during seasons of high water would often cut across the land, changing its course. When it raged over timbered prairie, whole trees were uprooted and swept away, piling up year after year on snags, forming rafts. The largest extended over 165 miles in northern Louisiana, blocking movement for all except small boats and pack-trains. The U.S. Army Engineers finally cleared the obstruction in 1840, allowing about 30 years of steamboat transportation.

What happened to these prospective metropolises? The same as happened to many other destined-for-greatness visions, with an exception or two. Probably the general reason had to do with the political



Thousands Enjoy

Annual Event



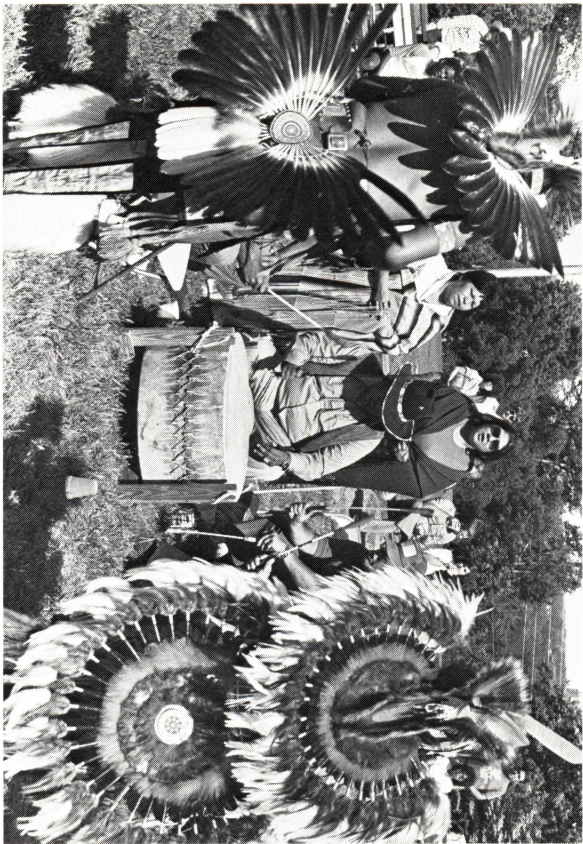
Far left, Woodrow Haney explains one of his Indian flutes during special ceremonies at the Gilcrease Rendezvous which honored the American Indians.

Above, lots of toe-tapping, good old Country and Western music was a major part of the two-day Gilcrease Rendezvous activities.



Left, muzzle loaders in frontier dress took part in the black powder rifle matches.

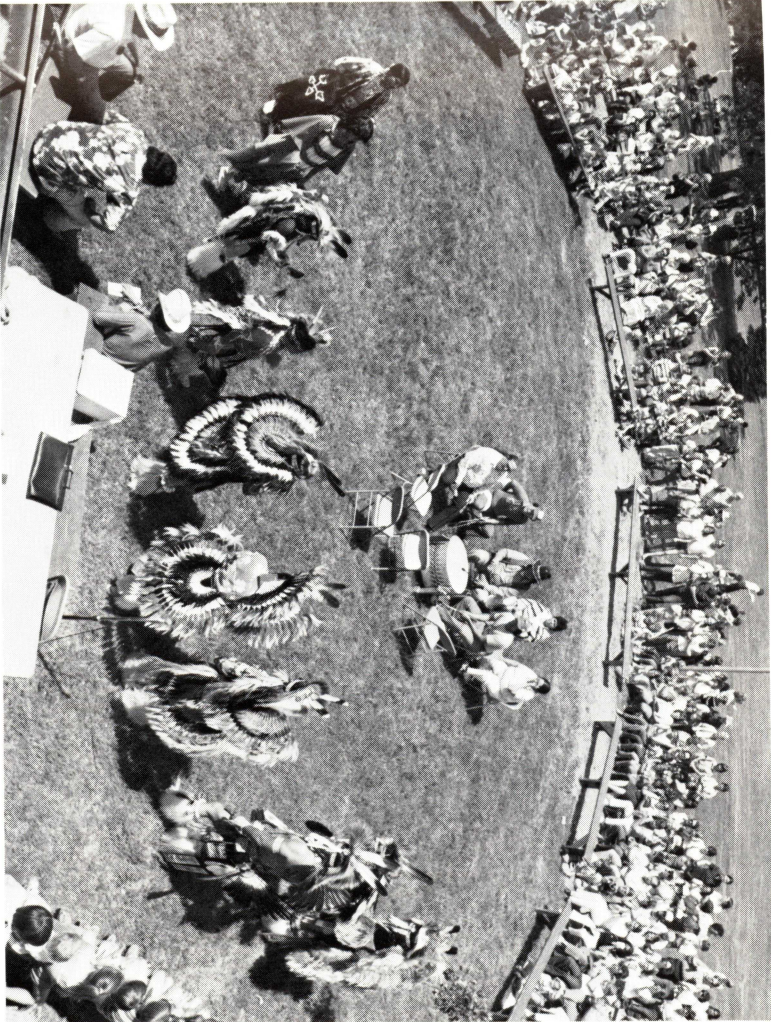
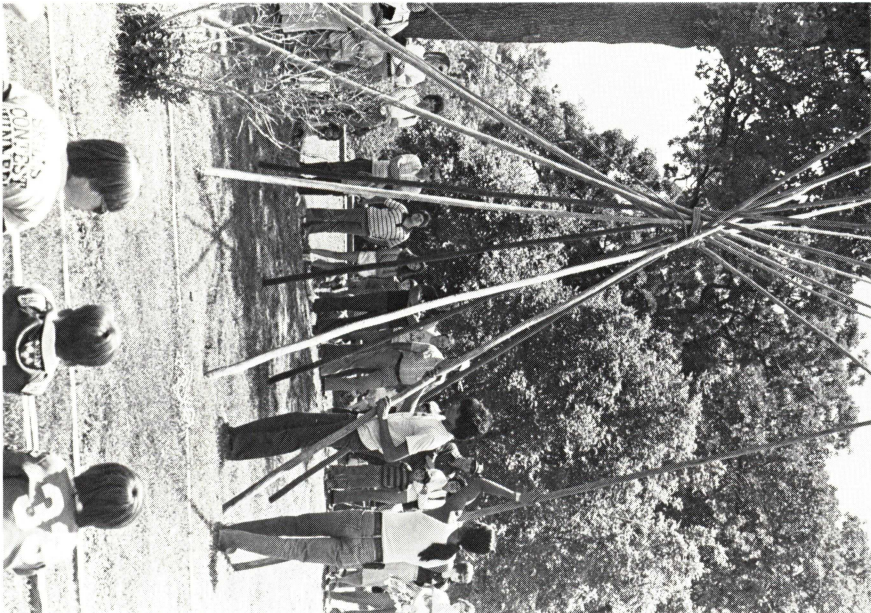
Rendezvous . . .



Above left, Indian singers, dancers and drummers demonstrated their traditional techniques on the museum grounds.

Above, square dancers twirled their partners round and round on the stage in front of the Gilcrease house during Rendezvous festivities.

Left, youngsters of all ages were enthralled as two young Indian men demonstrated how to construct an authentic Indian tipi.



Pat Wheeler chats with Brummert Echshawk, center, and Kenneth Arague, who both served as officials of the Indian ceremonies.



Top, Indian dancers in full tribal costume performed a variety of dances to the complete delight of the crowd.

Above, buckskins, Civil War uniforms, and calico dresses were the uniform of the day for the muzzle loaders.



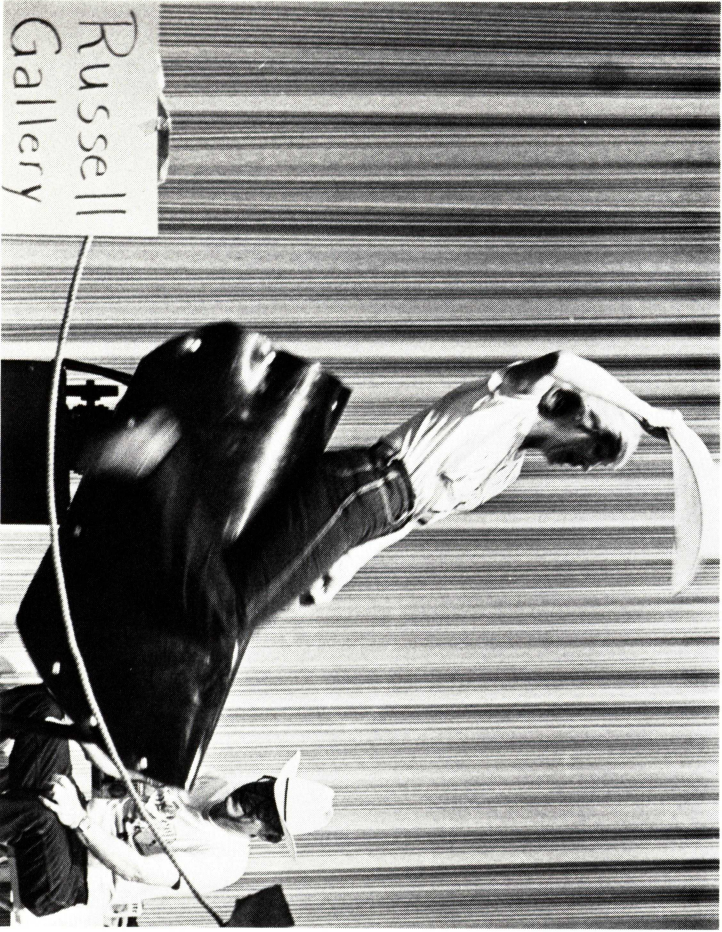
Right, Discoveryland Players presented a skit from the musical "Oklahoma" in the Gilcrease Auditorium.



PEOPLE AND PERSONALITIES



Mary Brett, left, and Maxine Zarrow admire the bronze sculpture rendered by Gordon Snidow on display at the opening of the Snidow exhibition at the museum.



Bronco buster Sue Dixon hangs tight on the mechanical bull during the skit presented by Gillies at their annual meeting. Looking on is Steve Devore.



Sherman Lee, director of the Cleveland, Ohio museum, enjoyed visiting the Gilcrease storage area. He was here as featured speaker at the museum board meeting.



Carole and Peter Van Straten pause during the Gordon Snidow exhibition opening.



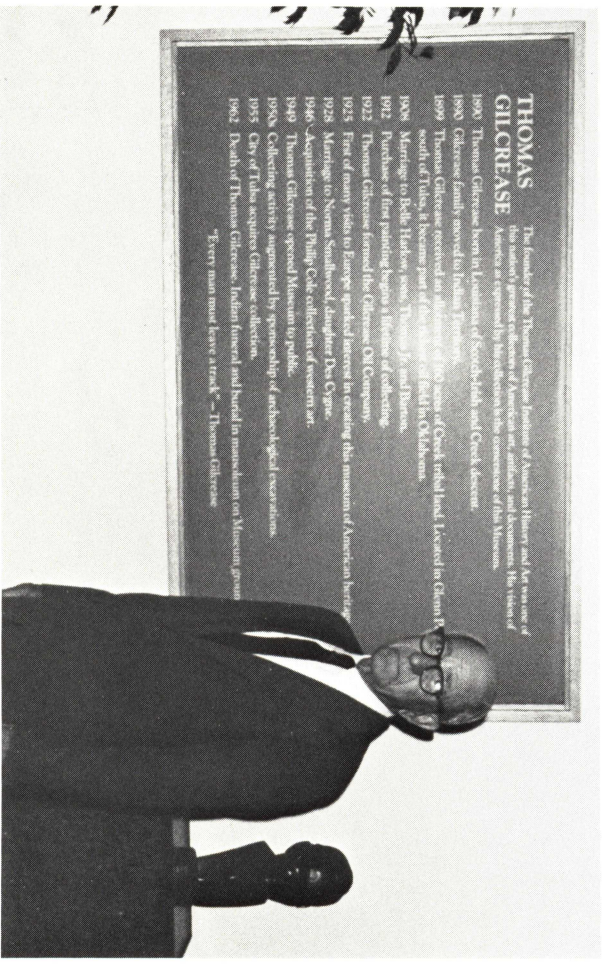
Roxana Lorton announces the winner of the Snidow drawing held by Jack Zarrow at the annual art auction and exhibition.



Gene Adkins was deeply engaged in conversation about art at the opening of the Snidow exhibition.



It was fun time at the annual meeting of the Gilcrease Gillies as Rosalie Summers, left, and Valerie Gwyn, right, join "Chief" Mary Ann Burdett.



A recent visitor to Gilcrease Museum was Barton Gilcrease, shown here in the new Briefing Center near the main entrance.

BOOK REVIEWS

By Mildred D. Ladner

Of special interest to Gilcrease patrons is *Rosa Bonheur - A Life and Legend* by Dore Ashton and Denise Brown Hare (Viking, Press, \$20.)

The first illustrated study of the French animal painter in 70 years, the biography traces RB's struggles for acceptance against the background of an impoverished family, whose eccentric artist father was actively involved in a series of socialist experiments during a period of political and intellectual ferment.

Bonheur's youth reflects her adjustment to this climate and her struggle for recognition as a serious painter. Deeply influenced by George Sand, she affected men's clothing like Sand, a practical measure for one who studied animal behavior.

After the success of *The Horse Fair* in 1859, Bonheur was dubbed "the French Landseer." Of particular interest to Gilcrease readers will be her enchantment with Catlin's work (she copied his prints) and her association with Buffalo Bill. Like many aficionados of the American West before and since her time, she painted scenes of buffalo and the western plains from her Chateau de By near Fontainebleau. The Gilcrease collection includes *Indian Encampment* and another small oil featuring an elk.



Josleen Wilson has compiled *The Passionate Amateur's Guide to Archaeology* (Macmillan, \$12.95), a state-by-state listing of digs and museums preceded by a cogent explanation of American pre-history.

Eight Oklahoma museums are listed and the author dubs Gilcrease "the most important art museum in Oklahoma," exhibiting "what many consider the finest collection of Western paintings in the world."

The single opportunity for amateurs listed for Oklahoma is the annual Spring/Summer field school sponsored by the Museum of the Red River.



Fine books on the Western theme continue to be released by the university presses. Among new arrivals:

Mountains without Handrails - Reflections on the National Parks by law professor Joseph L. Sax (University of Michigan, \$10 hardback, \$5.95 paperback), described by Wallace Stegner as "hardheaded and essential."

Traditional American Indian Literatures, compiled and edited by Karl Kroeber (University of Nebraska, \$5.95) describes and analyzes Native American narratives as literature rather than "primitive" tales.

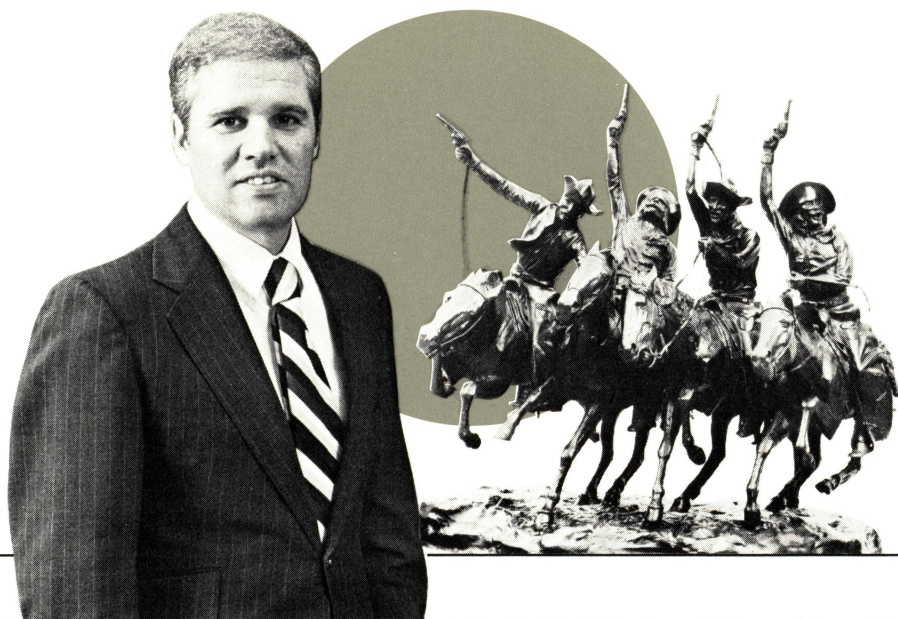
Wah'Kon-Tah: The Osage and the White Man's Road, the classic history of the Osages by the late John Joseph Mathews, now issued for the first time in paperback, and *Santa Fe - The Autobiography of a Southwestern Town*, by Oliver LeFarge, reprinted for the fourth time. Both are from the University of Oklahoma, priced \$7.95 and \$9.95 respectively.



Two recent works of fiction are worth noting. Max Apple has compiled *Southwest Fiction*, (Bantam Books, \$2.95) selecting 26 short stories by writers such as Ralph Ellison, Louis L'Amour, N. Scott Momaday, and Conrad Richter, and M & H Publishing Co. of Norman has reprinted Weldon Hill's delightful *Lonesome Traveler*, the story of an Eastern Oklahoma lad who starts out with a donkey cart to visit his mother in a New Mexico TB sanatorium.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

By Fred A. Myers



Once again this summer and fall Gilcrease Museum is going to display “Please Excuse Our Dust” signs. Plans being developed now will result in a modification of the front of the building beginning in late summer.

The crux of the modification is an ingenious way of gaining a large gallery by constructing only one new wall and a roof. Area gained will be approximately 3,500 square feet. Gilcrease cognoscenti can get an idea of the gallery’s size by visualizing the space of the existing Vista Room combined with the space of the Russell gallery. Persons not familiar with Gilcrease can get an idea of the size by imagining the floor space of a moderately large-sized tract house.

All that new space by constructing one wall — you might well ask how it can be done. It’s hard to explain but let me try.

Picture the full run from north to south of the existing front, i.e. the

east facade of the museum. Picture the portions of that facade made of ribbed concrete blocks, i.e. the gift shop and the auditorium. Now picture a new wall also made of ribbed concrete blocks, connecting the shop and the auditorium, a new wall constructed between the old building and the flag poles. Add a roof resting on the new wall and the three existing walls and a few necessities such as heat, cooling, and lights, and you have a big new gallery of “captured” space. It seems so simple it is a wonder we all didn’t think of doing this a long time ago.

The City of Tulsa is making \$250,000 available for the planning and construction. It is hoped that with this sum it will be possible to make several additional improvements, such as an expanded coat room and a revised traffic pattern throughout the museum.

The new gallery, which will be dedicated to Gena (Mrs. Barton) Gil-

crease, will be used to display special exhibitions, some drawn from the Gilcrease collection, some composed of borrowed material. It will accommodate even the largest special exhibitions that the Museum is likely to organize. Partitions and cases will make it possible to change the configuration of the space to felicitously display such diverse things as paintings and sculpture, baskets and moccasins. The location of the gallery right next to the front door will allow the museum to feature such exhibitions in a way that was not possible in the past.

All in all, the imminent building modification incorporates several real improvements and is a modest step toward the goal of adequate space in which to present all the marvelous treasures of Gilcrease.

Please excuse the inevitable turmoil. Even modest steps make dust. 

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