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THE WEST THAT WAS



& THE WEST THAT IS

BY BRIAN W. DIPP

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THAT WAS



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THAT IS**

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The West that was, the historic West, translates for most scholars today as a victory for the revisionists in a 30-year debate over the importance of the West in America's past. Back in the 1890s Frederick Jackson Turner, a young professor at the University of Wisconsin, offered the classic interpretation of "The Significance of the Frontier in Ameri-

can History." He first presented his paper at a meeting of the American Historical Association in 1893; at the time, it aroused only polite interest, but its thesis gradually gained adherents and for over half a century served as a master explanation for American historians.

Essentially, Turner argued that the West had played the decisive role in shaping American development and creating a recognizable American type. On the frontier, the environment temporarily dominated inherited culture, modifying old habits and ways of thinking to conform to new wilderness realities; on each frontier, as settlement pushed westward, the same process was repeated. Consequently, European

Author of this thoughtful piece on the American West is Brian Dippie, professor in the Department of History at the University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Dippie is a sought-after lecturer on the West and westering. This article was developed from a lecture he delivered to commemorate an opening of "Treasures of the Old West," the exhibition of Gilcrease masterworks which was shown at six major American museums.

values were progressively diluted and different values emerged — individualism, self-reliance, a democratic spirit that would brook few restraints, materialism and practicality, a buoyant optimism — which, taken together, defined a new national type, the American.

In Turner's reading of United States history, the significance of the frontier was simply enormous. Whatever distinguished Americans as a people could be attributed to the cumulative experience of westering and, by extension, the purest American type had evolved furthest West. To understand American history, one had to understand Western history.

In 1955 Earl Pomeroy, long associated with the University of Oregon, framed a rebuttal to Turner's thesis that offered an alternative, radically different interpretation of the West's role in national development, what he called "a reorientation of western history." Over the past three decades, Pomeroy's revisionist thesis has replaced Turner's as the accepted historical interpretation.

Pomeroy essentially discounted the inflated claims made for the West's importance in national development, and instead argued that the West was merely an extension of the East, dominated by eastern values, eastern capital, eastern technology, eastern politics. The continuity of cultural forms, imitativeness in everything from state constitutions to architectural styles, a deep conservatism only intensified by the process of moving away from established centers, and a constant drive towards respectability and acceptance — these were the real characteristics evinced by the West historically.

The West's actual relationship to the East was that of a colonial dependency; it was not the harbinger of a brave, new social order, nor a pathbreaker, but a follower — and a willing one at that. Instead of dominating national development, the West was, in fact, a relatively insignificant historical backwater.

Historians have found much to admire in Pomeroy's reorientation. His version seems much closer than Turner's to the West that was. Consequently, the emphasis in Western history has changed from a narrative of heroic individuals mastering the wilderness to a study of impersonal forces and institutional controls that really determined what happened in America's expanding hinterland.

Instead of stalwart Dan'l Boones traipsing through immense forests and across vast solitudes, we have "explo-

ration and empire" and the federal government's decisive role in what was eminently a planned, nationalistic activity. Lewis and Clark might be "partners in discovery," but their senior-partner — indeed, their employer — was the government and it had charge of the whole operation.

Turnerians gave us intrepid, buckskin-clad mountain men, Jed Smiths, Jim Bridgers, and Kit Carsons, "this reckless breed of men" who "crossed the wide Missouri" and "gave their hearts to the hawks" — social misfits, perhaps, but romantic individualists, *free* trappers with all the mythic appeal of that term. Revisionists have characterized them as simply small businessmen seeking the main chance, as addicted to dollars and cents as most of their countrymen, and have emphasized instead the geopolitical dimensions of the fur trade, St. Louis merchants like the Chouteaus, New York merchants like the Astors, aspiring (and successful) entrepreneurs like Bill Sublette — and, always, the companies that monopolized the trade.

Turnerians give us pick and shovel prospectors and colorful bonanza kings; revisionists, the cold facts of British investment capital, technological innovations, corporate structures and political maneuvering that permitted penetration to the rich veins of ore far below the earth's surface and the streams where panners dreamed of the occasional nugget. Turnerians talk about fiddle-footed cowboys and the glory days of the open range, revisionists about "bankers and cattlemen" and the range cattle *industry*.

Instead of outlaws and gunfighters, sheriffs and hanging judges — Jesses and Wild Bills and Wyatts and Roy Beans — we are learning about the territorial judicial system and the West's relatively low per capita homicide rate. Instead of the Indian-fighting army engaged in an endless round of deadly encounters with Sitting Bull and Geronimo we hear about the army as road-builder and harbor-dredger; instead of forts as outposts in enemy country under 24-hour siege by war-painted Sioux we know now that they were coveted economic boons to nearby towns quite prepared to whip up Indian scares to get the army's payroll at hand and ensure a little prosperity for the local merchants. Instead of Custer's Last Stand we get federal Indian policy and the grand military strategy as carried out through the chain of command.

Most of all, revisionists remind us that the West did not end with the nineteenth century; there is a modern story of



William T. Ranney, "Daniel Boone's First View of the Kentucky Valley" (1849), 36 inches by 52½ inches, oil on canvas

“There to the West would yet
be found the Fountain of Youth, the Seven
Golden Cities of Cibola, Quivira,
the Country of Cinnamon,
the land of the Amazons, El Dorado,
the land of gold.”

irrigation, agribusiness, petroleum, tourism, sunbeltism, etc. that requires telling.

All of which is to say that history written in the Turnerian mode today is viewed as romantic, that in the Pomeroyan mode as realistic. Today, the historic West, the West that was, would seem to mean the revisionist interpretation; and, by implication, the individualistic, dynamic, heroic West of the Turnerians is a figment of the collective imagination, a fabrication, a myth.

When we speak of the mythic West, we usually mean the ideas and pictures that pop into most people's heads when the West is mentioned. It might be a showdown at high noon on a dusty street, John Wayne cavalymen topping a rise with guidons snapping and bugles blaring, warbonneted braves pouring over the hills towards them emitting bloodcurdling cries; honkytonk women with hearts of unalloyed gold, school marm's born to be left at the fadeout by bashful-but-strong cowboys with stetsons at a rakish angle and bandannas knotted at the throat, or countless other images derived from the movies and television. It may well be Matt and Doc and Miss Kitty.

We think in terms dictated for 80 years now by Hollywood. But the mythic West has deeper roots and broader implications. Definitions of myth are a dime a dozen, ranging from the hero tales of preliterate cultures to the ideological fallacies (and propaganda) of modern societies. A common-sensical definition for our purposes would be that a myth is "a notion based more on tradition or convenience than on fact; a received idea" — and, for good measure, this: "a myth is truer than truth."

In an excellent essay published in 1961, historian Loren Baritz argued that the West has always been freighted with a special significance. It was not just a direction or a place, it was an idea that always fled before you, elusive and tantalizing. You might quest after it, but you never quite attained it.

The artist George Catlin, who made his first excursion west in 1832 when he steamed up the Missouri in search of unspoiled Indians to paint, was struck by the West's elusiveness. It was everywhere and nowhere on his travels. "Few people even know the true definition of the term '*West*,'" he wrote, "and where is its location? — phantom-like it flies before us as we travel, and our way is continually gilded, before us, as we approach the setting sun." Two thousand

miles he pursued it up the Missouri, to Fort Union at the mouth of the Yellowstone, only to meet trappers just returned from the West, and watch keelboats and caravans setting out for the West. He had reached the land of the Crows and Blackfoot only to learn that the Flatheads were yet a far journey to the west. The Far West, he concluded, was "a phantom, travelling on its tireless wing."

Novelist A. B. Guthrie, Jr., who as well as any writer has captured the romantic allure of the mountain man in his epic *The Big Sky*, remarked on why the West was finally unattainable. "It is," he wrote, "an adventure of the spirit. . . . We know that, more than journey's end, it is the journey itself that enchants us."

Since the Ancient Greeks, Baritz explains, man has wondered on the West, investing it with the significance of his dreams. Zeus created Elysium, a home for heroes, far to the west, at the ends of the earth. There, "nature's bounty was endless, happiness was certain, and death was banished forever . . ." Ah, but getting there — that was the rub! Between mortal man and immortality lay untold perils, tests to weaken the resolve of all save the boldest. Dragons swam the tempestuous seas, sirens sang from the rocks, luring careless adventurers to shipwreck and watery graves, monsters popped up with alarming frequency. But the quester had to press on, past the Pillars of Hercules, past the lost Kingdom of Atlantis submerged on the ocean's floor, westward, ever westward to a land where the Hesperian nymphs guarded the golden apples of wisdom. And there the brave soul would find Elysium, and heart's ease.

To the west, then, myths ran their course. The literary critic Leslie Fiedler noted that "America was Europe's 'West' before it was America" — enjoyed a preexistence in mankind's imagination richer, one would think, than any reality. Presumably the discovery of the New World by Columbus marked the end of the ancient dream, the West of mythic potency. Writing in 1876, at a self-conscious moment in history as Americans celebrated the centennial of their independence, Herman Melville lamented the failure of the dream; "Columbus ended earth's romance; / No new world to mankind remains."

But long after Columbus, myths lingered on. There to the west would yet be found the Fountain of Youth, the Seven Golden Cities of Cibola, Quivira, the Country of Cinnamon,

the land of the Amazons, El Dorado, the land of gold. And westward through recorded history “the course of empire takes its way . . .” America, as the last act in man’s western imagining, would prove “time’s noblest offspring.”

The Melvilles might be pessimistic but through the nineteenth century the vast multitudes of Americans fervently believed with Missouri’s senator Thomas Hart Benton that they were the children of destiny. Since creation, Benton said in 1820, men had been disposed “to follow the sun”: “All obey the same impulse — that of *going to the West*; which, from the beginning of time has been the course of heavenly bodies, of the human race, and of science, civilization, and national power . . .” God’s chosen people were literally that.

Westering represented historical inevitability. “It is well known,” Jedidiah Morse explained in *The American Geography* (1792), “that empire has been traveling from east to west. Probably her last and broadest feat will be America.” Westering represented also the power of a man’s imagination to shape reality and vanquish space and every obstacle. Because it could never quite be reached, one continued on in search of Elysium; and thus about the West was always an aura of expectancy . . . and hope . . . and longing. Thomas Wolfe summed up this venerable tradition when he wrote: “The West for desire, the East for home.” There would be no final resting place on earth for heroes, then; it was indeed the journey that enchanted them.

Such ancient ideas about the West provide the overarching framework for that homelier, more familiar myth populated by free-roaming cowboys, steel-nerved gunmen and the rest, the Wild West. This myth that has held the public’s loyalty for nearly a century now is loosely located in time and place, a post-Civil War, trans-Mississippian phenomenon. Of course it embraces earlier folk — the mountain men, for example — and occasionally stretches into areas east of the Mississippi.

And there is a question as to how well the myth crosses the Rockies. Does it find a comfortable home on the Pacific shore, or is it somehow rooted in the arid lands, the plains and deserts? In the end, neither time nor place defines it as well as certain qualities associated with it, discrete but interrelated — violence, individualism, spaciousness, opportunity, and a sense of transience that translates into an ongoing, persistent nostalgia.

Violence raises a simple question: Why is the West “wild”?

In the myth, the West represents a state of nature, presocial, in which each person must fend for himself and Judge Colt is the only law. Josiah Gregg, reflecting on his years engaged in the Santa Fe trade in the 1830s, wrote:

. . . the wild, unsettled and independent life of the Prairie trader, makes perfect freedom from nearly every kind of social dependence an absolute necessity of his being. He is in daily, nay, hourly exposure of his life and property, and in the habit of relying upon his own arm and his own gun for both protection and support. Is he wronged? No court or jury is called to adjudicate upon his disputes or his abuses, save his own conscience; and no powers are invoked to redress them, save those with which the God of Nature has endowed him. He knows no government — no laws, save those of his own creation and adoption. He lives in no society which he must look up to or propitiate.

Out of the setting Gregg describes steps a revered American type, the utterly self-sufficient individual. He is attuned to the eternal verities, close to the land and the seasons, to the God of Nature as Gregg said, and instinctively knows the difference between right and wrong. He is the archetypal figure in the classic Western, the “man with no name” since out West it does not matter who you are, but what you are. He is the Virginian, or Shane, “who rode into our little valley out of the heart of the great glowing West and when his work was done rode back whence he had come . . .” He is master in a land without pettifogging lawyers and legal red tape, the rugged individualist needing no badge, higher than law because he is the law.

Violence and individualism fuse in his person, and because we believe in him and what he does, he legitimates violence. J. Edgar Hoover, himself part of the legal system but, in his popular guise as a maverick of sorts linked to G-Man law and order on a later frontier, in 1966 recalled how when he was an eighth grader he devoured Cooper’s *Leatherstocking* tales: “I remember how real the characters and experiences seemed to me, possibly because survival during the frontier days was largely dependent upon one’s initiative, resourcefulness and industry. These are precisely those qualities which have contributed so much to the formation of our American character.”

Or as Gene Autry, hero of two brands of American indi-



Carl Wimar, "Indian Encampment on the Big Bend of the Missouri River"
(1860), 25 inches by 49 inches, oil on canvas



“The Indians before him were ghosts in the making,
a vanishing race who in a few short years
would haunt the land they occupied.”

vidualism, frontier and industrial (the self-made businessman), put the matter in his theme song, "Back in the Saddle:"

I'm back in the saddle again
Out where a friend is a friend . . .
Ridin' the range once more
Totin' my old forty-four
Where you sleep out every night
Where the only law is right
I'm back in the saddle again.

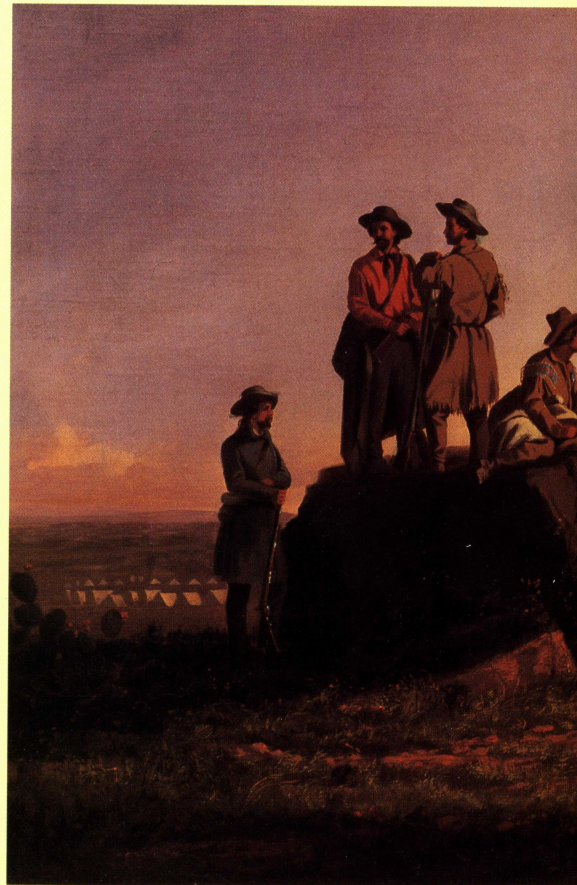
Spaciousness is a third attribute of the Western myth, linked to the vastness of the land and uncluttered vistas elevated into something more. "Big Sky Country" conjures up visions not just of room to roam, but of future possibilities. Wide open spaces translate as freedom, and space itself becomes the reservoir of tomorrow.

Daniel Webster, the prototypical Bay Stater so seasoned by the Atlantic's salt spray that he supposedly emanated hostility towards the West and America's western prospects, in an 1833 speech in Pittsburgh remarked: "The East is old, pretty fully peopled, and small. The West is new, vast, and thinly peopled. Our rivers can be measured; yours cannot. We are bounded; you are boundless."

And that precisely is what the Big Sky means in mythic terms: boundless opportunity, a home for heroes indeed. Individualism flourishes in the West because the setting itself demands it of men.

And so the American West, faithful to the ancient myths, remains the land of opportunity. In leaving the East and older, settled societies, one is escaping the past and moving into the future. Out West, one has the chance to start over in life, to be figuratively reborn. This is what Turner meant when he described the frontier as providing a "safety valve," a means of releasing pent-up frustrations and discontents through physical mobility.

"It is frequently asked why are those western people so peculiarly colossal in their notions of things and the prospects of our nation," an Albany editor wrote in 1845, on the eve of the explosion of expansionist energy that would make the United States a transcontinental nation. "Does not this inspiration spring from their extraordinary country? Their mighty rivers, their vast sea-like lakes, their noble and boundless prairies, and their magnificent forests afford objects which fill the mind to its utmost capacity and dilate the



John Mix Stanley, "Encampment in the Teton Country"
24 inches by 34 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches, oil on canvas

"T
the American
when
individual
challenge



Western myth fuses with
 Dream...an open situation
 All is possibility and an
 who rises to the
 will surely find his efforts
 crowned with success."

heart with greatness. To live in such a splendid country . . . expands a man's views of everything in this world. *Here everything is to be done.*"

Twelve years later, with the country's boundaries established, its Western future a reality, an essay in *Emerson's United States Magazine* put the larger meaning of the West into perspective for its readers:

The West has always been the land of hope and progress . . . the land not of the past, but of the future. Its treasures are ungathered, its chronicles unwritten, its songs unsung. Thitherward have ever turned the hopes, the desires, and the aspirations of humanity. . . . We are beginning to feel, as none others have done before us, the true import of this word, the West. It is a protest against the existing evils of society; as if one should say, Let me leave this place where mind is trammled, where I cannot develop all my powers as I would, and let me go where all this can be accomplished — let me go West. Those who are satisfied may stay in the East; but all who want *elbow-room* must seek the West.

For Americans, as for the Greeks, the West was the future, and hope; its ultimate location, the human heart.

The West still holds out the dream of opportunity. The Okies heading to California in *The Grapes of Wrath* are responding to the ancient dream, like Michael Gold before them. Growing up in a New York Jewish ghetto around 1900, Gold remembered the West as a sustaining dream more powerful than the depressing reality around him:

On our East Side, suffocated with miles of tenements, an open space was a fairy-tale gift to children.

Air, space, weeds, elbow room, one sickened for space on the East Side, any kind of marsh or wasteland to testify that the world was still young, and wild and free. . . .

My gang seized upon . . . a Delancey Street lot, and turned it, with the power of imagination, into a vast western plain.

Fittingly, Gold's boyhood hero was Buffalo Bill Cody, and he dreamed of a Jewish messiah "who would look like Buffalo Bill, and who could annihilate our enemies."

From this, we can see how the western myth fuses with the American Dream. They are one in their emphasis on equality of opportunity, presupposing an open situation



George Catlin, "View in the Grand Detour" (1852),
11½ inches by 14¾ inches, oil on canvas

"The West...was not just a direction
or a place, it was an idea that always fled
before you, elusive and tantalizing."

where all is possibility and an individual who rises to the challenge will surely find his efforts crowned with success. From these larger associations — the venerable idea of the West, the tradition of America as the land of opportunity — the particulars of the Wild West myth derive their consequence.

The cowboy, for example, is an unfettered individualist in a spacious land; violence flows from his situation, but justification follows on his natural virtue: we *trust* him. Best of all, he has escaped time itself. He need never grow up or settle down.

We won't, most of us, ever be cowboys, but we can live vicariously through him. Life getting you down? A mortgage? Debts? A wife who doesn't understand you, or a boss who doesn't appreciate you? Slip into your Levi's and your boots, mount your silver stallion, and ride away into the sunset, to a distant "land without end, a space across which Noah and Adam might have come straight from Genesis," as Owen Wister wrote in *The Virginian*, to a better world "where seldom is heard a discouraging word / And the skies are not cloudy all day." You, too, can be a cowboy in your mind, free, and brave, and good, and young again forever:

He rides the earth with hoofs of might,

His is the song the eagle sings;

Strong as the eagle's, his delight,

For like his rope, his heart hath wings.

(Owen Wister)

Woven into the very fabric of the Western myth is the pervasive sense that the West is disappearing, and with it, the opportunity it connotes. Consequently, the West is viewed retrospectively, a land of the future spoken of in the past tense, its symbol, appropriately, the setting sun. In the 1830s, as noted, George Catlin confessed his inability to even find the West; wherever he was, the West was across the next river or over the next divide. Thus he lamented it in advance. The Indians before him were ghosts in the making, a vanishing race who in a few short years would haunt the land they occupied and thought was theirs forever. He fantasized "a *magnificent park*, where the world could see for ages to come, the native Indian in his classic attire, galloping his wild horse, with sinewy bow, and shield and lance, amid the fleeting herds of elks and buffaloes," but realized that everything he saw was "under an equal doom," and so painted at a furious pace that posterity might know what would soon be

effaced from the land.

Just a year after traveling along the Oregon Trail and camping with a band of Oglala Sioux, Francis Parkman found that Fort Laramie, from the perspective of Boston, already seemed a misty fantasy, "less like a reality than like some fanciful picture of the olden time . . ." Soon the West he had seen in 1846 would be transformed, "its danger and its charm . . . disappeared together."

The next decade, in 1859, Richard Henry Dana, who had participated in the California hide trade in the mid-1830s, visited San Francisco. The bay which had been a "vast solitude" was now crowded with great ships; where deer had grazed on the shore, a bustling city of 100,000 stood. Disoriented by such change, the mind rejected what the eye saw. "I could scarcely keep my hold on reality at all, or the genuineness of anything," Dana wrote.

That sense of transience, of man's loose grip on the things around him, and of loss, all so dear to the romantic temperament, were at the core of the western myth. The West is America's Neverneverland, where cowboys can be boys until they die, where good always triumphs over evil, and people are cut to a larger measure. Here was a land to dream on, a land, as F. Scott Fitzgerald said of the New World, where "for a transitory enchanted moment" man held his breath, "face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder." Here, the ancient myths had come to rest.

Frank Norris, writing just after the turn of the century, grappled with what it all meant. Americans got up one morning in 1898, rubbed their eyes, read that marines had landed in Manila, and suddenly realized "there was no longer any West, and the equation of the horizon, the problem of the centuries for the Anglo Saxon was solved." The West had been chased over the Atlantic, across a continent and out the other side over the Pacific. Catlin's will-o'-the-wisp had never been captured, nor what it stood for "solved."

"It was westering and westering . . . Then we came down to the sea and it was done," the grandfather tells his grandson in John Steinbeck's *The Red Pony*. "No place to go, Jody. Every place is taken. But that's not the worst — no, not the worst. Westering has died out of the people. Westering isn't a hunger any more. It's all done. . . . It is finished." So he sits on a rocking chair perched on a porch above the booming



C.M. Russell, "Carson's Men" (1913), 24 inches by 35½ inches, oil on canvas

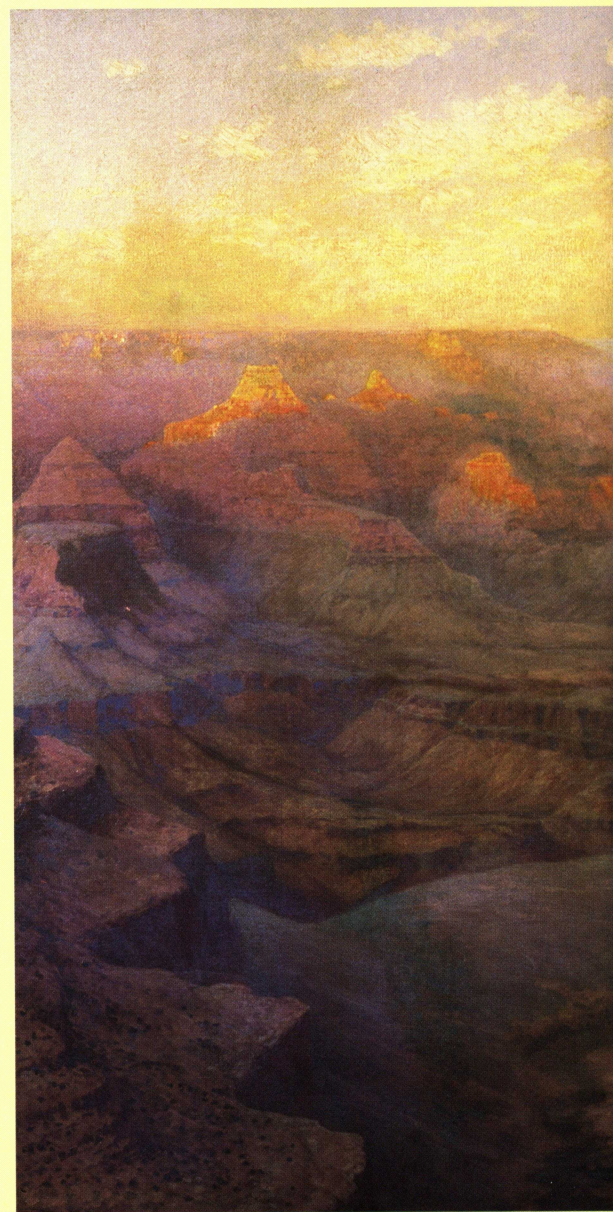


Pacific surf, rocking furiously in his frustration and despair. He had been betrayed. The West was a place after all, and not Elysium. It had been a dream, and reality was not enough.

But the old man's eulogy was as premature as Norris's assumption that the West's mystery had been solved. The myth remains, still vital, still alive in the West that is, and historians still have the task of trying to explain it.

Discussion tends to one of two approaches. Some historians have set out to separate fact from fiction, verifiable history from legend, exposing fallacies along the way. Their goal is the objective truth, its limitation inherent in two questions: What is left of Billy the Kid once the legend is stripped away? Why did he *ever* matter? The answers point to the approach taken by other historians who study the myth itself. How did it come about? What are its sources? Why does it have mass appeal? Has it changed over time? What needs does it fill? What can it tell us about Americans, their values, and how they see themselves?

Historians bent on answering these questions take their cue from a celebrated line in John Ford's 1962 Western, *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. The film is about the old (good man, bad man) and the new (a lawyer) and the West in transition — palpable nostalgia, in short. Entrusted with facts contrary to a cherished local legend and asked if he will publish them, a Western journalist quickly replies: "No, sir. This is the West. . . . When the legend becomes fact, print the legend." This prescription has validity, but the historian does not enjoy the journalist's discretionary powers. He can, however, reframe the prescription as a challenge: "This is the West. . . . When the legend becomes fact, *find out why*." Why is "the West that is"? ☹



William R. Leigh, "Grand Canyon of the Colorado" (1908)
32½ inches by 57 inches, oil on canvas



“Neither time nor place defines it as well as...
violence, individualism, spaciousness, opportunity,
and a sense of transience that
translates into an ongoing, persistent nostalgia.”

BY FRED A. MYERS

Few people remain of those who dealt first-hand with Thomas Gilcrease in the 1940s and 50s when he was amassing the collection that has become Gilcrease Museum. Recording the recollections of these persons now seems a worthwhile and fascinating assignment. It is hoped that a series of articles from these sources will result.

Following is a report of a conversation I had with Jimmy Graham in New York City early this past summer. Jimmy is the essential New Yorker — urbane, energetic, buddy of Peter Krindler of Club 21, privileged to have led a fascinating life. The interview took place in his art gallery, the Graham Gallery, 1014 Madison Avenue. Jimmie knew what the subject of our conversation was to be and had marshaled his recollections.

An Interview with Jimmy Graham



Jimmy Graham

Fred Myers, director of Gilcrease Museum, enjoys interviewing artists and other notables in the field of art who play important roles in the history of Gilcrease Museum.

FM: *Jimmy, after all these years I hope you can tell me about Tom Gilcrease and his purchases from the Graham Gallery. What are your memories?*

JG: Our gallery was open in those days six days a week from nine until five. My father and I lived at Bayside, Long Island, and would commute every day getting to Manhattan at nine or a half past. But we had a very reliable man who would open the gallery up at eight or eight-thirty.

FM: *That's early in the morning to open an art gallery.*

JG: All of them opened at nine then. We had at that time a back room, which was a special display gallery for prime bronzes and paintings. It was furnished with a very large overstuffed couch. We would walk in, my father and I, and Charles Reed, the man who would open up for us, would say, there's a client in there. After a while he got to know the clients, and then he'd tell my father and me, that's Mr. Gilcrease sitting back there. Mr. Gilcrease would come in the minute the gallery opened, go right back to this big couch and sit down there. He always impressed me as a very quiet man who dressed very simply; he dressed in dark clothes most of the time.

FM: *Suit and tie?*

JG: Yes, suit and tie.

FM: *Stetson hat or not?*

JG: No, not that I can remember. Amon Carter wore a Stetson hat but not Mr. Gilcrease. Anyhow, we would come in, and my father would join Mr. Gilcrease in the back room. My father and Mr. Gilcrease would sit there for a half hour.

Sometimes neither one of them would say a word.

What he bought from us mostly were Indian and western bronzes which at that time sold for very, very little — in the hundreds of dollars. So that was the basis of what I knew about Mr. Gilcrease. This went on eight or ten times to my knowledge. And it would always be the same way. He would always be there before us. I can't remember any time when he'd come in the middle of the day or something like that. He would always come across the street from the hotel and sit there and wait for my father. They really admired each other.

Then, of course, my father explained to me Mr. Gilcrease was from Tulsa, Oklahoma. I'd never seen his house. No dealers in those days traveled to see a client; they wouldn't even go up ten blocks here in New York to see something.

My father said to me, he's a very nice man. I think he's half Indian; he may be full-blooded, I don't know. He's never told because he doesn't talk to me about his personal life. My father said his idea is to collect great western things. And he said, I'm sure you'll like him. And I said yes I think I will. Well, after meeting him 10 or 12 times I did really become very fond of Mr. Gilcrease. And he seemed to talk to me more than he did my father.

He always bought everything. I never remember his turning down a single piece. This went on and, of course, our greatest disappointment was the loss of the Cole collection. We and Knoedler's had a chance to buy it. We offered it to Mr. Gilcrease as one of the two dealers that had it for sale, but it didn't work for us because we wouldn't finance it, not my father. (Mr. Gilcrease subsequently made other purchase arrangements for the 600-plus art items in the Phillip Cole collection. The Remingtons, Russells, and Seltzers he acquired now form the substance of the extensive Gilcrease Museum collection of these artists.)

Sometimes if we had two or three very good western bronzes my father would show Mr. Gilcrease only one or two, because even though they were \$2,000 or \$3,000 total it took us six months to a year to get our money. We knew Mr. Gilcrease was good for it; there was no question about that, but when you are financing a business in the height of the depression you didn't have that much money to go on. My father paid for everything. We never took anything on memorandum. We bought it, we paid for it. So when we sold it we really had to get paid soon. That was the way the financial arrangements went.

Later on when Mr. Gilcrease would tell my father, I went and bought today Columbus' letter to Isabella, or some other fabulous thing, I was so curious about a man who would do such a thing. I could understand him buying western art but for him to buy these fantastically rare things like a copy of the Declaration, or whatever it was, and things concerned with the discovery of America, it just completely amazed me. I



Thomas Gilcrease, photographed in front of Gilcrease Museum, during the years he was actively expanding the Gilcrease collection.

couldn't understand how a man without much formal education could have such great knowledge, because even J. P. Morgan wasn't buying things like Mr. Gilcrease was. I think he was absolutely unique in the things he bought. And, of course, I realized or rather knew, that his income was limited to revenues from oil wells and that he might be buying more than was prudent. But he was so nice that people would go along with this if they possibly could, would sell things on this basis that they would get paid eventually but that they would get paid.

My father many times told me how much he admired the man. I guess our business association with Mr. Gilcrease probably lasted ten to 15 years. And I just can't remember when our business association stopped, but probably at his death. The last years that I can remember him, his visits were few and far between compared to the early days.

In the early days I bet he came once a month. That I can remember very well. He came to New York once a month. Seemed to me that often. Possibly every two months but I would say, without any question, six or seven times a year.

FM: *Who else was buying western art at that time.*

JG: Well, actually I can't think of anybody else we could have sold the Cole collection to. Amon Carter and Sid Richardson had not come into the market yet. And they were the next group that started buying western art. There were odd sales made here and there but there wasn't any other real western collector. Mr. Gilcrease had the whole market to himself. I mean we or Knoedler had nobody else to offer that great Cole collection to except him.

FM: *So in a way he was in a very lucky position to be interested in that material at that time.*

JG: Absolutely. He had the pick of all the great western art that came up in those days. My father would really save things for Mr. Gilcrease he liked him so much. He got along with him so well. If he got an important bronze in he would keep it for Mr. Gilcrease.

FM: *Did your father buy things specifically requested in advance by Mr. Gilcrease?*

JG: No.

FM: *Mr. Gilcrease was really relying a lot on you to direct his attention to what was important?*

JG: Absolutely, that I remember, no question about it.

FM: *Do you think it worked that way with the booksellers as well?*

JG: Yes, I imagine. I don't think a man like that changed his tactics at all. I really don't think so. I just think he acted the same way with the booksellers, yes, I do.

FM: *He must have seen the acquisition of this type of thing, at least to some degree, as a kind of education of himself, a way to learn.*

JG: Well, that's what my father said about him. That's very interesting because my father said I can only think that he is a very natural, smart man. My father never would ask Mr. Gilcrease what's on your mind? My father would never do this. They would discuss, maybe, what the weather was out there or in New York or something like that. My father never found out what was in the back of that man's mind and why he was collecting as he was.

FM: *Now, since that whole collection has become a museum, you look at the breadth of the thing and you wonder if Mr. Gilcrease did have a general plan in mind in putting together the collection. He certainly never wrote anything down along that line, but when you look at what he put together, it's such a vast and well-rounded achievement. I just wonder if he really did have a general plan or whether he simply bought to the extent that the collection is a pretty comprehensive history of America.*

JG: I think you're probably right on that. Knowing as many of the important collectors of Americana as anybody does, I think that Mr. Gilcrease, certainly in his own mind, knew what he was doing. He definitely was not a haphazard buyer. The only thing I will say is I don't think he ever turned down an Indian bronze whether it was by a great guy or not. He just loved them so that he bought them. You understand what I mean?

FM: *I think that's also true of painted portraits of Indians.*

JG: I guess that to him it was first and foremost an Indian portrait or an Indian bronze. He bought it.

FM: *He pretty much accepted your price? Or did he try to negotiate?*

JG: As far as the price goes in those days you must remember there were not great prices on things. And I don't ever remember my father saying he negotiated with Mr. Gilcrease. I don't remember him ever saying the piece is a \$1,000 and I'll give you \$800 or \$900 or whatever. No, I never remember Mr. Gilcrease doing that.

FM: *Did you ever send objects down to Tulsa that he had not previously seen here in New York?*

JG: No. We never did that. We never sent anything out on approval. We dealers didn't do that in those days. We waited until the clients came in. We didn't send photographs or we didn't send things down. No. It was a different type of business. God it was so much better in those days.

FM: *How did your father get going in this racket?*

JG: My father got in the business because my grandfather came over here from Scotland in 1856, and he opened the place down on 14th Street. He sold art of all kinds; he sold iron stoves, he sold Turkish rugs. I have an ad downstairs showing what was in the stock of my grandfather's gallery. And then my grandfather turned the business over to my



Interested in traveling and in Indian sculpture, Thomas Gilcrease was naturally drawn to visit this Massachusetts bronze.

father and my father turned it over to me and my brother. We are the half owners of the business and now my nephew, Robin, has taken over — four generations.

FM: *Is there any other American art gallery that has that record?*

JG: No, we are the oldest. The closest to us is Knoedler's who came seven or eight years after ours was founded. And they opened down on Fifth Avenue. We are definitely the oldest art gallery in America.

FM: *Is Knoedler's still in the original family?*

JG: Yep, all still the original family.

FM: *Was your father the one who got started in western and Indian subjects?*

JG: Yes he was. My father liked these things too for some reason — didn't know that much about them, just liked them. Later on, after Mr. Gilcrease, Mrs. Dodge, Geraldine Rockefeller Dodge, came in to us and started to become a big buyer of bronzes. I mean a real big buyer. She came to us first because we'd had the experience in dealing with bronzes. Nobody else had. Paintings, yes. But bronzes, there was nobody else. Mr. Gilcrease had to come to us if he wanted them. There was no market for them besides that. But when Mrs. Dodge became a client of ours she bought many of our western bronzes. By that time Mr. Gilcrease had stopped buying, and she bought many of our great western bronzes and many others. If it wasn't for her I don't know whether we'd still be in business, because the woman would come in and buy; if we had ten bronzes she would buy all ten of them. She had varied taste.

We had to know, I had to know in the early days, I had to know all this stuff, because we only bought from estates. New York families knew us, and this is all in the height of the depression, and would call my father and say would you come up and buy some things but we don't want anybody to know. We'd go up and buy from the homes. They wouldn't just sell you an important American bronze. You had to buy everything. So I had to know what furniture was, I had to know porcelains, I had to know even jewelry in those days. But, of course, we didn't keep anything. When we bought an estate we would keep the bronzes for a certain customer but all the rest of the things we had to call in other dealers to buy within weeks so we could pay the people we bought from.

FM: *What about recasts of bronzes back then?*

JG: Not when Mr. Gilcrease was buying. I never remember anything or anybody talking about it. I would say perhaps 10 years after Mr. Gilcrease stopped buying, the foreman who had worked for Mr. Bertelli at Roman Bronze went and opened his own foundry over in Brooklyn. One day he came into our gallery and he said, look I have some Remington bronzes for sale. Well we knew he had been head of the



foundry of Roman Bronze so we figured he bought a couple. He said will you come over and look at some of them. We agreed to go over. We went into a studio of this foundry and here lined up against the wall there were 10 *Bronco Busters*, and 10 *Rattlesnakes* — all unfinished, they hadn't been patinaed yet. They had just been cast. We said to him what about these? He said when I left Mr. Bertelli I took all the molds and took measurements and all, and he said, I've made these exactly the way we made them at Roman Bronze. We looked at them, and we saw Roman Bronze was on them and also the number. Everything was identical and they were beautifully done. Some of them were sold. We weren't the first he'd shown them to. I defy anybody today to tell the difference between the ones that were made after. My father called Mr. Bertelli and told him what was going on. And he did have them closed up because of the fact that this man made a mistake — he used the words Roman Bronze on them. So under that they closed the foundry down. I would say that must have put 20 or 30 very good examples into circulation. That was in the 50s. I think that was the first reproduction that turned up, that was known anyhow. They were very quietly passed off.

FM: *Did Graham ever sell Mr. Gilcrease any Remington or Russell bronzes?*

JG: I don't think so.

FM: *Most came with the Cole collection.*

JG: That's correct. I would say so. I don't think we sold Remington and Russell bronzes until Amon Carter and Sid Richardson started to buy. I don't know how Mr. Gilcrease's taste was in those days. I hadn't been in the gallery long enough or I hadn't been in the business long enough to understand a man's real taste. But I would say about Mr. Gilcrease that he bought discriminatingly. He definitely had an idea of what he wanted and what he liked. I will always remember that fact.

FM: *I think that's true, because when you look at the collection as it now exists everything's not a masterpiece. But really it is the evidence of a man who knew what he wanted, and he bought things of a certain quality. You never came out to Oklahoma to see him then?*

JG: No. I never came out and my father never came out. I never came out until the museum was built. I think it was before you were director.

FM: *Mr. Gilcrease opened his own museum on the lawn of his house in the late 40s. He had moved his business to Texas in the 20s, and the Gilcrease Oil Company was headquartered in San Antonio. He first opened what collection he had to the public in a tall building there in San Antonio. He rented the top two floors. Then, for whatever reason, he decided he'd rather take it back to Tulsa which was his hometown. I think the nucleus of the present museum building opened in May of 1949. And, of course, the museum has grown tremendously.*

JG: What do you think of the western market now? You must have to follow it because you've got such a big collection. Do you think it's leveled off in the past couple of years?

FM: *Yes, but not all that much. Do you imagine that there is any written communication from Mr. Gilcrease in the files here at the Graham Galleries?*

JG: I can tell you probably not. I will do this. We've had a girl for the last six months go through everything that's left of our firm. I will tell her to be sure and look. But there may be, and I will call you and send it to you.

FM: *My guess is there's nothing or very little because Mr. Gilcrease's preference was not to put things in writing, but to deal on a one-to-one basis verbally.*

JG: That I would absolutely agree with you 100 percent — dealing verbally with things. We had to keep ledgers and books in those days and sales slips. That's the only thing we might have. We wouldn't have any letters.



FM: *Did your sales documents in that time indicate anything about the provenance of the various pieces?*

JG: No. That never meant anything. Nobody asked. They came to the art dealer in those days because it was the Graham Gallery, it was Knoedler, it was Hirschl and so on and so forth.

FM: *Typically you would have acquired your bronzes from estates from New York City.*

JG: Yes, here in New York City. We very seldom acquired anything anywhere else in the early days. If we did it came from Boston or Philadelphia. That was it. And that's where 90 percent of the customers were. He was a real stranger coming from Tulsa, Oklahoma, to buy in New York. Because the clients, 90 percent of them, were from the three big cities where the money was. And the same thing when we bought anything. That's where we would buy.

FM: *Isn't it sort of surprising there was that much interest in Indian subject matter?*

JG: Yes, very surprising.

FM: *There was a sort of a vogue in the 1870s, 80s, 90s. The Indian wars were the news. A very romantic episode. Then the Buffalo Bill Wild West Shows certainly helped. That was the media event of the time. He was one of the great promoters. But it is surprising to me thinking that all those Indian bronzes, Indian subject bronzes, came out of Philadelphia, Boston and New York. Of course, Remington worked here.*

JG: Quite a few of them that were doing those things at that time worked here. Borglum was up in Connecticut. I never liked Kauba. When I found out that he was a foreigner, that he never saw the subjects he was doing — not that he didn't do them well — I didn't think they were really American pieces. I only wanted to sell American subjects by American artists.

FM: *Tell me about the increase in interest in western art. In the last 20 years there's been a huge interest. What changed to bring that about?*

Cyrus E. Dallin, "Appeal to the Great Spirit" (1913),
21 inches by 14 inches, bronze

JG: I'll tell you what I think changed it. I think the great interest grew because I would say that 90 percent of the people buying it in the past 20 years have been from the Southwest. Maybe half of them from Texas alone. I think it was a matter of prestige. I think they went into the homes like Amon Carter's and saw Sid Richardson's collection and then the Carter Museum was built, but even before that I think it became fashionable. Instead of the Texas and southwest people hanging Picasso in their homes it became fashionable to have Remington and Russell. Also, hundreds and hundreds of articles by people like you, by other people that have western collections have come out saying that these fellows weren't bad painters, at least the best of them were good painters.

Another reason it grew so fast is the fact that this art was American history; the early artists — Bodmer, Catlin, Remington, and Russell — actually lived when history was taking place. I think people, after reading so much about it, realized that we have something in this country, maybe we should start buying our American art. I also think that the collectors could see how it increased in value. Many of these buyers were buying under the assumption that if they ever wanted to sell they could get a good profit or get their money back. Those two things influenced the buyers. First it became fashionable, especially through the Southwest, not in New York. New York was never a western market. Neither was Boston or Philadelphia.

It's just like the great impressionist collectors. Some of them don't like Picasso, but they have got to have an early Picasso in their collection to make it complete. Even if they don't like the artist. It's the same idea with Western art. I think that's what made it valuable.

I think your portrait by Thomas Eakins, the full-length of Frank Hamilton Cushing, I think that portrait is such a great bit of American art by one of the great, great artists of all times. That portrait, you can stack that up in my estimation against any portrait in the world of that period or even earlier. You take the great full-length portraits in the National Gallery in London, you can put it next to any one of them and it stands out. I mean that. I don't see how you can put a value on that portrait. I've just thought about that so many times. I have a color reproduction of it. I just think it's great.

FM: *Remember our Winslow Homer?*

JG: Unbelievable painting. I can imagine how a man like Mr. Gilcrease would buy the Cushing portrait because it came from Knoedler. I know because I saw it there. But for him, even in those times, for him to buy that Winslow Homer was really offbeat in a way. Because Winslow Homer in those days wasn't considered by American buyers a great, great artist.

FM: *I never thought about that — that the Homer, in the time it was bought, was a rather surprising purchase. It was probably a big ticket item — \$20,000 or \$25,000.*

JG: Maybe \$50,000 at the very top.

FM: *Maybe living way out there in Oklahoma was an advantage in putting together such a distinctive collection because Mr. Gilcrease didn't spend much time talking to other collectors.*

JG: No, I don't think he did.

FM: *It was not a matter of having to get an early Picasso. That wouldn't have figured in his thinking at all.*

JG: I don't think it did. I don't think anybody influenced him. I never heard him say he liked this collection of somebody else's. Never did he mention that. He didn't talk about these other things. We found out from other sources that he was buying these things. It was a small group of dealers in those days so you knew everything that went on and who the customers were.

FM: *Then it was really a pretty different situation, wasn't it, with Richardson and Carter because they were obvious rivals with each other.*

JG: Absolutely. I can remember very well Amon Carter coming in with Sid Richardson and we'd show them a Remington painting. It was very embarrassing because Sid would say I'll buy it, and Amon said you can't buy it, I'm buying it. They did buck up against each other. Of course, that pushed the market up. And other people came into it after that. I would think in my recollection that Mr. Gilcrease was first and then Carter and Richardson probably followed ten years later or something like that and kept it going, kept the market going.

FM: *You say that the opening of the Carter Museum was part of this impulse to continue the admiration of western art begun by the early collectors.*

JG: I think it had a great deal of influence on the continuation of the love for western art. So did your museum.

FM: *The story continues because careful scholarship in this field is really just beginning. It's one of the exciting things about the field at this point. An attempt is being made to put it into a bigger context, not just saying this is a western subject and doesn't relate to anything else. As you say, most of the artists lived here in the East. They knew what was going on. Remington certainly knew the art world here and the publishing business very intimately.*

JG: He was connected to all the big publishers here at that time.

FM: *What are your thoughts about the proliferation of western painters and sculptors now? People who are doing the Old West now?*

JG: I think in sculpture, which I think I know a little bit more about than I do painting, in sculpture there are a half a dozen good men. Really good men. In painting I think some of them have talent. They're good artists. They catch the feeling of the West, but I do think that the prices are going a little bit out of reason. I don't think it's just that I'm too old. At least I go to these exhibitions, but I must tell you I think the contempo-



Cyrus E. Dallin, "The Medicine Man" (1899),
17 inches by 5 inches, bronze

rary art is far out of range pricewise.

You can't beat success. You have the greatest example when that Wieghorst was sold to that man. That I didn't believe, I happened to be there at that time. That floored me.

FM: *Say, you need to look for a drawing that Wieghorst did for Will Rogers when Will Rogers was performing here in New York. This has to go back to the 30s. He drew this horse — a New York mounted policeman's horse — and gave it to Rogers at the theater. Rogers said there is something wrong with this. Do you know what it is? There's one thing wrong with this. Wieghorst said he didn't know. Rogers said have you ever seen a horse tied up like that and observed the ground around him. Wieghorst said you're right and he drew in the necessary little pile of horse do — steaming — and gave it to Rogers. Wieghorst himself told me this. Nobody now knows where the drawing is. We have a place for that in Oklahoma if you ever run across it.*

I'd like to hear more of your thoughts about how the art

business has changed since the time when Mr. Gilcrease was starting to buy. It sounds as if banks didn't enter in very much, nor the idea of appreciation or quick increase of the value of what was sold.

JG: It didn't. Banks didn't enter in very much. Of the big dealers operating at that time Lord Duveen was in the business and was the biggest and you looked up to him. He didn't enter into the field we're talking about at all. He stuck to his European buying. He had a fabulous building, fabulous business in those days. Then you had Knoedler. I believe Knoedler was pretty well financed; I'm not sure whether or not they ever went to the banks. I really don't know. Then you had the John Levy Gallery but they were dealing in European art, and Mr. Levy was financed by banks. He told me that. The other western dealer, Bartfield, came after this. He came later and he was on upper Madison Avenue and he didn't have a big operation so therefore it wasn't financed.

All the rest of the dealers lived a hand-to-mouth existence. Perhaps it was wrong. If my father had gone to a bank — we'd been in business so long — he could have borrowed the money without any question because our stock of merchandise was big enough to cover it. We could have made this transaction but it was his principle. Because his father never did it.

FM: *It was a formula for a four generation business.*

JG: Yes, that's right. We stuck it out didn't we? We're still here. You're right.

FM: *You certainly have a much larger buying public than you used to.*

JG: In our own business, we have people we have never heard of come in and spend large amounts of money, we don't even know what business they're in. And they come from all over the country — large amounts of money where in the old days you had 20 or 30 customers. That was your business. And the museums were not clients. The museums were getting all their collections from people who died. We didn't have a single museum as a client. We didn't go into the museums. We didn't try to sell to museums. It was such a different business. Not like today.

One final story about collecting western art in the good old days. Amon Carter used to stay at the Ritz-Carleton when he came to New York. He would have a whole suite of rooms, invite all his Texas friends, they'd play poker, they'd party — this went on for three days. Every weekend. Then he'd start Monday going around to dealers. But when he first came to town on Friday, he'd call the dealers and say what do you have there for me.



Cyrus E. Dallin, "On The Trail" (1910),
22½ inches by 4⅞ inches, bronze

We had just acquired from a New York trust company to sell for them Remington's *Coming Through the Rye*. We had it consigned to sell for \$5,000. Amon calls up and says what do you have of Remington and Russell. My father said he had a wonderful *Coming Through the Rye*. And did he have one?

Amon said it's 90 degrees outside and I can't get up there until Monday or Tuesday, until it cools off. (It was four blocks.) My father said, OK, Mr. Carter, we'll have it here.

A man named Henry Knight came in from Lexington, Kentucky. He had bought *Bronco Buster* from us and another one; he knew about Remington. He walks in and says to my father, what do you have. My father shows him *Coming Through the Rye*. Mr. Knight just flipped and said how much is it? My father said \$6,000. Mr. Knight said I'll take it. My father said there's only one thing, Mr. Knight. I have to call Mr. Carter because I told him I'd show it to him next week when it cools off. He said OK. So my father calls Amon.

Amon was in a very good mood. He said you're not selling it, you're just high pressuring me. You just want me to come up there. You can't do that to me. I don't do business that way. If you have a chance — I don't believe you have a chance to sell it — if you have a chance, sell it.

So, anyhow, it cooled off on Tuesday, and ten o'clock in the morning, Mr. Carter walks up with his entourage behind him, walks in and says where's the bronze? My father said well it's still here. So he takes Mr. Carter back to look at it.

Mr. Carter loved to buy, but if he knew a thing was worth \$1,000 and you said \$500, he'd still offer you \$250. Horse trading. My father told him it was \$6,000 and Amon (I almost fell over in a dead faint) said I'll take it. My father said, I'm sorry, Mr. Carter. I asked you and I told you that Mr. Knight from Lexington, Kentucky, came in and he gave me \$6,000 for it and it's his; I'm shipping today. Amon hit the ceiling. And he said to me young man go in there and call up that man.

I called him up and I said, Mr. Knight, Mr. Carter is here and he's very upset, he wants to give you \$8,000 for the bronze. Mr. Knight said you tell Mr. Carter it's not for sale. When I told him it wasn't for sale, then he really hit the ceiling. He got up to \$20,000 but he couldn't have it. Mr. Knight hung up on me. Mr. Carter said to my father you can't do this to me. I will never come back in to your gallery again and stormed out. It's true he never came back — for about six months. ☹

FREDERICK ARTHUR VERNER AND WILLIAM DE LA MONTAGNE CARY

BY JOAN MURRAY

TODAY WHEN PAINTERS ARE INFLUENCED by heroes of the New York painting scene like Julian Schnabel, they don't confess or even acknowledge their sources. They do not have to. The influence, so-called, may sometimes even look like theft, but the result is usually regarded as a tribute to a master. In this world, minor influences, say of the work of a less well-known painter, are not mentioned.

Early painters of the Canadian West used their sources in a similar snatch-and-grab way. In one case, that of Canadian painter Frederick Arthur Verner, who was born in a small town near Toronto in 1836, sources like books and magazines seem to have been all he knew of the Indians for many years. In 1856, he sailed to England to pursue the study of art but after a short stint at a mediocre British academic art school, Leigh's Academy, he joined the 3rd West Yorkshire

Militia Regiment in search of a more exciting career. In 1860 and 1861 he joined the British Legion force which was organized to aid the Italian patriot Guiseppe Garibaldi, and arrived with the British forces on the Volturno, (where he painted a comic portrait of himself for his family), before returning to England and to his regiment. In the latter part of 1861, he decided to study painting again.

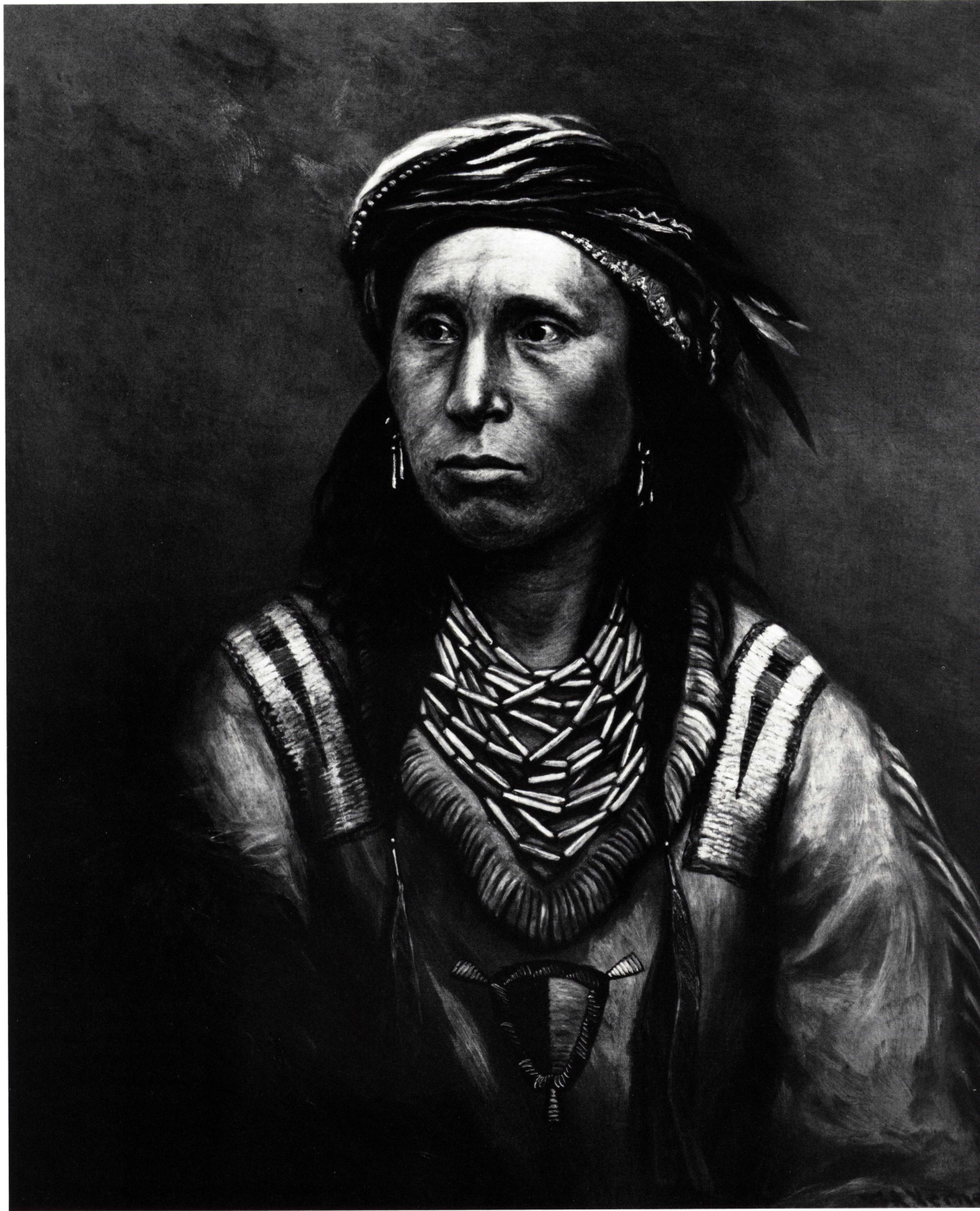
Living in England had its difficulties. He had always wanted to paint. From his earliest years, he had liked to draw; he covered the fly-leaves of books and the walls of the old school house with drawings. He was always disappearing beneath the table to sketch, a relative recalled. When he was 15, he copied a contemporary engraving in a sketch. A first attempt to exhibit at the local agricultural fair was accompanied by disaster, when he fell out of the farmer's cart that was taking him to the fair



Frederick Arthur Verner, "Self Portrait," 45.1 centimeters by 38.1 centimeters, oil over photograph. This painting is in the collection of The Pagurian Corporation, Ltd., Toronto.

Joan Murray, director of The Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario, Canada, is also an organizer of art exhibitions, writer of books and magazine articles about art and artists.

Among her many books is *Frederick Arthur Verner: The Last Buffalo* (1984). A visitor to Europe, Scandinavia and the Far East, Murray also found time to visit Tulsa to see the Gilcrease collection and to follow up her researches on Verner.



Frederick Arthur Verner, "Ta-ne-ze-pa" (Sioux Dandy) (1962), 76.2 centimeters by 63.5 centimeters, oil on canvas, from the collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary. Verner apparently copied the face for his Sioux Indian portrait from a work by William de la Montagne Cary in the Gilcrease collection, which is shown at right above. At right below is Verner's "Detail of Indian Costume," a sketch for the shirt front of Ta-ne-ze-pa, Sioux Dandy. This 1862 sketch, 12.3 centimeters by 10.4 centimeters, graphite on paper, is in the collection of the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.



where he intended to exhibit. "The rude farmer gave his nags the whip and they started suddenly throwing the artist and pictures out of the back, the frames, glass and canvases being all smashed and the artist somewhat injured in body and heartbroken in spirit." There was no exhibit that year for him, he said in 1909, recounting the incident to an Oakville paper.

Soon, however, he learned to exhibit professionally. At the age of 16, in 1852, he displayed his work in Upper Canada's Provincial Exhibition, alongside other painters, including the well-known Canadian Indian painter, Paul Kane. The young Verner won the "discretionary prize" in the monochrome drawing category. Showing with Kane probably encouraged him to seek the older painter's acquaintance. Accounts of Verner's life have it that at this time Verner knocked on Kane's door — only to have the older man shut the door in his face.

Like many young painters, Verner aimed for veracity. One of his first works was a facsimile painting of a United States dollar bill, so realistic that his father proudly exhibited it to bewilder friends. In 1856, he painted a local mill on the east bank of The Sixteen on Dundas Street in Oakville. The work, said to be Verner's first oil by an authority on the early days of Oakville, Hazel Mathews, looks naive, but the mill, the train rushing through the background, and the tiny trees are all carefully drawn.

In England Verner decided to explore the vein with which Kane had become famous: the Indian. Returning to his earlier habit, he used magazine illustrations for sources, but always added something of his own — usually fancier dress. When the source was only small and black and white, he added size and color.

In Verner's day the best-known Indian painter was the great lyricist American, Albert Bierstadt. His way of portraying Indian daily life as an idyll set in a tranquil mountain landscape irradiated by a golden light provided Verner with an ideal. To this he added his own concept of the family as a happy haven (he had eight younger brothers and sisters). He also used lesser talents among the illustrators as models for detailed scenes, like Felix Octavius Darley. In 1863 Verner made a large and stiffly painted copy of Darley's 1860 line engraving in *The Illustrated London News* of *North American Indians Holding Council on the Fate of a White Prisoner*. He also looked at the work of John Mix Stanley, particularly his chromolithograph of an *Indian Telegraph* (1860, Detroit Insti-



Frederick A. Verner, "Buffalo Stampede" (1865), 19 inches by 28 inches, oil on canvas



tute of Arts) which he sketched in a watercolor of his own around 1862 (National Gallery of Canada). Particularly important for Verner were reproductions of the buffalo paintings of William Jacob Hays. Verner may have seen them on view in the huge International Exhibition in London in 1862. (Hays' *A Herd of Bisons Crossing a River Bottom on the Upper Missouri*, was also illustrated in *The Illustrated London News* of that year.) In 1865 Verner copied William Jacob Hays, *The Stampede*, in his own *Buffalo Stampede* (Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art).

The works are strikingly similar although Verner's buffalo come from the other direction. What he added was to become his own contribution to the field in later years — a lyric, atmospheric effect which makes the picture more of a poem. In the far distance is evidence of a fire from which the bison flee in terror.

In England, he began to work out a favorite subject of Kane's, the Indian portrait, for himself. He found what he could in a book by George Catlin, *North American Indians*, "written during eight years' travel (1832-1839) amongst the Wildest Tribes of Indians in North America," as the subtitle said. Two important portraits by Verner of *Ne-bah-quah-om* (*Big Dog*), *Chippewa* (*Ojibway*) Chief "who offered himself and his band of warriors to the Canadian Government to fight the Sioux in their raid on Minnesota in 1862" as Verner wrote on the back, and *Ta-ne-ze-pa* (*Sioux Dandy*) (both in the Glenbow Museum in Calgary), in their use of the picture space and their pose, recall Catlin's illustration of *Stu-mick-o-sucks*, *Buffalo's Back Fat*, *Head Chief*, even to the decorations on the shoulders of the Indian's buckskin dress. For his faces, he sought greater detail. The set expression of the Indian's eyes suggests that for *Ne-bah-quah-om* he used a photograph. So does the name which actually exists, although it translates from the Ojibway as "night wanderer," not as "Big Dog." Verner drew the costume of *Ta-ne-ze-pa* from life, then made adjustments, as one can see from his pencil sketch in the National Gallery of Canada. The face of the Indian came from a hitherto unknown source — a sketch of a Sioux Indian by William de la Montagne Cary now in Gilcrease Museum.

Verner probably discovered Cary's work, as he did so much else, in reproduction. Since his teens Cary (he was born in 1840) had contributed to the "English Art magazines," as he wrote in a short account of his life in the Gilcrease's archives. Presumably he illustrated for the *Illustrated London News*, among others, though so far I have not located the etching Verner saw.

Cary's life parallels Verner's. Both made voyages of discovery to the West. In 1861 Cary set off from New York City for



Frederick Arthur Verner, "Indian Encampment with Wigwams and Canoes" (1887), 47 centimeters by 85.2 centimeters, watercolor on paper, laid on board, from the collection of The Pagurian Corporation, Ltd., Toronto.



Frederick A. Verner, "Ne-bah-quah-om (Big Dog), Chippewa Chief" (1862), 91.4 centimeters by 71.1 centimeters, oil on canvas, from the collection of the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

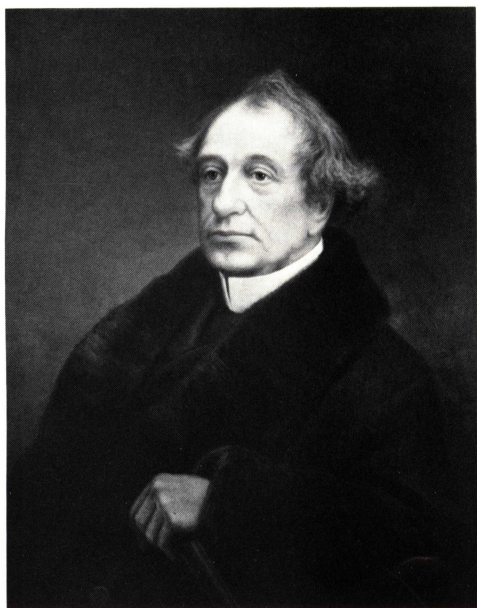


St. Louis, and from there to Fort Benton, to study the Indians (in his case the Blackfoot) from life. From there he went across the Rockies to the Pacific. More than ten years later, in 1873, Verner made a similar voyage. It took him to Winnipeg, and the Ojibway.

The sketches Verner made and dated on this trip show that he was one of the first painters in Canada to attend and record a decisive historical event — the North-West Angle Treaty in 1873, Indian Treaty No. 3, which determined for Canada the disposition of 55,000 critical square miles and helped structure the settlement of the Canadian West. The sketches of wigwam scenes among the Ojibways, which Verner drew and dated at the meeting place, served him as a touchstone to which he often returned later. They are the foundations of most of the paintings of his maturity, and he mined them increasingly in passing years, in the process transforming them into “pretty subjects” — as he described them to a prospective buyer in 1889. He used these precious sketches from life, as he had earlier used material from other artists, as a way of getting at reality. His paintings look more spontaneously drawn from life than his carefully drawn on-the-spot sketches.

Verner drew upon Cary's sketch and not the reverse because Cary's sketch has more detail: his Sioux Indian is mounted, and at ease in the saddle. Probably Verner omitted the horse because it did not fit his sort of work. He never painted the horse, even in his Indian villages. Portraits were more his line. In later years he painted others, among them a profile study of an Ojibway belle, *Wa-pa-Sto-ka* in 1873 (private collection, Toronto). Family tradition has it that his series of Indian portraits numbered a dozen and was offered to the federal government. Perhaps there was some talk of a commission, or perhaps the portraits were meant to lead to such work.

Around 1890, paradoxically, Verner finally did receive a commission. The subject was Sir John A. Macdonald, the father of Confederation, and the sponsor, Manufacturers Life of Canada, of which Macdonald was the first president. But Verner did not find the subject sympathetic. His painting of Macdonald's stiff, bored face hardly rises above the photograph he probably used as a source. His painting of *Ta-ne-ze-pa*, based on Cary, was different: romantically handsome, with a strange, pre-possessing sort of pride — Verner at his best. ☹



Frederick Arthur Verner, “Portrait of Sir John A. Macdonald” (c. 1890), 91.4 centimeters by 71.1 centimeters, oil on canvas, from the collection of the National Gallery of Canada.

GILCREASE BOOK REVIEWS

BY MILDRED LADNER THOMPSON

ADMIRERS OF WESTERN ART will welcome *Edward S. Curtis, The Life and Times of a Shadow Chaser* by Barbara A. Davis (Chronicle Books, \$45).

This stunning book consists of a 100-page illustrated biography followed by a 150-page "photo gallery" with more than 200 examples of Curtis's work. Thirty percent of these photographs have never before been published.

The master plan for Curtis's *The North American Indian* was set forth in 1907 when the first volume, which bore an introduction by then-President Theodore Roosevelt, promised a work of 20 volumes "picturing and describing" the Indians of the United States and Alaska.

During the following 30 years, "Curtis kept a schedule that would have killed other men," his biographer writes. "He ruined his health, gave up his family life, and assumed crushing debts. During the course of the project he took more than 40,000 photographs, wrote four books and supervised sixteen others, collected more than 350 traditional Indian tales, and made more than 10,000 recordings of Indian speech and music, a staggering body of work. But in 1948 he knew it was all in rare-book rooms, museums and warehouses, far from the general public he had hoped to reach.

Those familiar with Thomas Eakins' portrait of Frank Hamilton Cushing in the Gilcrease collection will find two Curtis photographs of the eccentric ethnologist fascinating.

In spite of incursions into the world of entertainment with his popular lectures known as "picture musicales" and his movie, "In the Land of the Headhunters," filmed in an artificial village constructed by Kwakiutl craftsmen, Curtis' true love was his record of American Indian life.

Jailed and hauled into court for failure to pay alimony in 1927, Curtis admitted to the judge that *The North American Indian* would be completed at a deficit. Asked why he was continuing with it under such circumstances, the broken Curtis replied, "Your honor, it was my job. The only thing I could do which was worth doing. . . . A sort of life's work."

* * *

Another aspect of life in America is explored in *The American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* by Marshall B. Davidson and Elizabeth Stillinger (Alfred A. Knopf, \$50).

EDWARD S. CURTIS



The book contains descriptions of 17 fully-equipped rooms in the museum ranging from one taken from the Thomas Hart house in Ipswich, Massachusetts, built before 1674, to the living room of the Francis W. Little house, built in Waysata, Minnesota, between 1912 and 1914 by Frank Lloyd Wright. With each room appears a small black and white graphic emphasizing which objects are subject to descriptions in the text, as well as colored photographs.

The bulk of the book, however, is devoted to descriptions of furniture, silver, pewter, ceramics, glass, sculpture and paintings, prints, drawings and watercolors. Each category is arranged according to periods in American cultural history.

Davidson, a former curator of the American Wing, will be remembered for his previous book, *The Drawing of America*, which includes a number of works from the Gilcrease collection. His thesis in the earlier book is that spontaneous drawing is more indicative of the spirit of a nation than the more studied work of the palette painter. To illustrate his point, he has used examples of the work of William Cary, O.C. Seltzer, Frederic Remington and Thomas Eakins.

Antique fanciers should treasure this beautifully produced guide to the American Wing.

* * *

Canadian naturalist Ramsay Derry has prepared *The World of Robert Bateman* (Random/Madison Press Book, \$50), concerned with the work of the Canadian wildlife artist.

Bateman was a teacher of geography and art when he was influenced at a 1962 Andrew Wyeth exhibition with the abstract form within the representational style of Wyeth's painting. While living in Africa, he began painting the wild life subjects for which he is now widely known. His skill as a naturalist is obvious in his renderings of a wide spectrum of creatures from the tiny hermit thrush to the giraffe and wildebeest of Kenya.

The exhibition, "The World of Robert Bateman," with both new and retrospective works, will open the fall season at Gilcrease. Both are for the nature lover.

Gilcrease Magazine readers will delight in yet another book review column by Mildred Ladner Thompson, who spends much time these days traveling and writing about traveling for the Tulsa WORLD.

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FRONT COVER:

Emanuel Leutze, "Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way," 30 inches by 40 inches, oil on canvas. This painting, now in the Gilcrease collection, is a sketch for Leutze's large mural located in the west stairwell of the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C. The painting in the capitol was executed in fresco; a second oil study of this subject is in the National Museum of American Art in Washington.

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All the illustrations in this issue are of works in the collection of the Thomas Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art except where otherwise noted.

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"The World of Robert Bateman"



Robert Bateman, "Proud Swimmer: Snow Goose" (1986), 11 inches by 24 inches, acrylic

An exhibition of new and retrospective paintings by the leading wildlife artist of the twentieth century, Robert Bateman, will open September 21 at Gilcrease Museum. The members' preview and wall sale will be on Saturday evening, September 20, and on Sunday, September 21, Robert Bateman will lecture at the museum at 2:00 p.m. Bateman paints both North American and African birds and animals, sometimes working on a painting over a period of years. His work is strongly influenced by the paintings of Andrew Wyeth and his own lifelong interest in nature. Some of the works in this fall exhibit will go on to the Smithsonian where the next exhibition of Bateman's works will be held, beginning in January, 1987. Limited edition prints of Bateman paintings and books about the artist will be available in the Gilcrease Museum Shop.