

## **Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming**

### **Section 2, Pages 31 - 60**

A series of research correspondence from the Robert Taft collection relating to frontier artists. Robert Taft (1894-1955) was a professor of chemistry and author on the subjects of photography and art. The artists included here are George Catlin, Henry Caylor, Carl Christian Anton Christensen, Samuel Colman, Vincent Colyer, George Victor Cooper, Eanger Irving Couse, H. F. Cox, Charles Craig, Henry H. Cross, Edwin A. Curley, Frank H. Cushing, Felix Octavius Carr Darley, Theodore R. Davis, Charles Deas, and Edwin W. Deming.

Date: 1930-1955

Callnumber: Robert Taft Coll. #172, Box 20

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## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

Pipe dance (2)  
Plate 32  
Buffalo dance  
Plate 56  

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Plate 68  
Buffalo dance +  
Tortures of Mandans  

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Dance of the Chiefs  
Plate 100  
Plate 102 Bear dance

## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

[illegible]



## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

Catlin (3)  
the classic West  
 "the country whose fascinating  
 spread a charm over the mind  
 almost dangerous to control  
Where is the West?  
 pursuits.  
 p 262 vol 1 -  
 describes Seen dance  
 of Sioux - an evening  
 of immense size - in center of



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[illegible]

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of which was a pale "  
 (4)  
 & thus by Remington  
 by he did not attempt  
 to picture the  
 actual sun-dance.  
 (date was, by inference,  
 1875)  
 Frederick Schwatka  
 The Century Magazine  
 March  
 Vol 39, ~~pp 1884~~ 1890  
 pp 753 - 759.



## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

[illegible]



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⑤  
"the grandest sun -  
dance within the  
memory of the silent  
warrior" - In June  
15<sup>th</sup>, saw witnessed it.  
Star Spatted Tail &  
another agency 40  
miles to west.  
"looked not unlike  
circus tent, the top  
of which has been  
ruthlessly torn away by  
a cyclone."

## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

[illegible]



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Mallett Joshua Shaw 1776-1866  
d. Burlington, N.J.  
N.Y. Times IX, 10, 1 Nov 17, 1895  
~~had~~  
Newhome galleries  
Indian Hunting  
Buffalo by Joshua Shaw  
E.C. Coates exhibited  
western scenes in N.Y.  
as early as 1839  
History of Phila  
Scharf & Westcott, Phila,  
1884, vol 2, p. 1054  
Commissioned to accompany  
exped. of Mr. R. in 1820 &  
make sketches of scenery  
p. 1059 no folio prints of  
Shaw "Picturesque Views  
of Am. Scenery"



## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

Crayon, vol 5, p 207, 1858  
mentions painting by  
Joshua Shaw "Indian  
Hunters in the Everglades  
of Florida" "an excellent  
specimen of the painter"

Shaw mentioned by Hodge  
in introd. to 1933 McKinney  
& Hall

Mawer  
my Times June 1, V, p. 12, 13  
(1930) Mawer used Bodmer's  
work from copy in Astor  
Library in making current  
best prints.

Mawer in West late in  
life.

Obit of Mawer in  
A A A 29: 1932: 427  
(1832-1932)

"The best shot" engraved  
by Mawer for Curry  
& I us in 1858 - see  
also H W Sept 14, 1867  
(see note 1629),

→ John Sartain who knew  
Shaw as early as 1830 says  
that for 25 years Shaw was  
the best landscape painter in  
the West.

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View of Astoria - Oregon  
Country Illus  
London News vol 3,  
Feb 25, 1842 (1843 according  
to serial no.), p 121  
may have been taken  
from  
E. Belcher Narrative  
of the Voyage of H. M. S.  
Sulphur just published  
p. 40, 41  
group of Osage Indians  
Catlin's large London News  
vol 3, Dec 23, 43



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*Stanley, some  
val #336*

*also  
376  
377*

"Health for Happiness" Broadside #338 \$25.50



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Catlin's gallery - NY Daily  
Tribune, Nov 13, 1871, p 5 C1  
Oct 20 - Nov 13

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Journalism Press, University of Kansas

No. 11

DATE April 10 1941

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## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH  
HISTORY GROUP BUYS  
ARTIST CATLIN MSS.  
[December 19, 1948]

Director Calls Indian Painter's Letters 'Rare as Hen's Teeth.'

Rare letters of George Catlin and a manuscript on American Indian medical lore by the nineteenth century painter and student of Indian life, are included in a significant new acquisition of Catlin papers by the Missouri Historical Society, announced yesterday by Charles van Ravenswaay, director.

Van Ravenswaay said the letters are "rare as hen's teeth" and that the society's augmented collection is unusual among those of libraries and museums.

Most unusual item in the collection, acquired by Van Ravenswaay from Bradford Wickes of Washington, D.C., a great-grandson of Catlin, is the medical manuscript titled "A Cure for Influenza." The eight-page paper, which was never published, describes Indian treatment for the disease as Catlin observed it in his years of living with tribes following 1832.

Six letters in the group are in Catlin's hand, and six are by his wife. They were written to the Catlins' families from the various European countries the artist and his wife visited from 1840 to 1870 in a vain effort to gain support for their campaign in behalf of the Indians.

One of his letters tells of a reception by Queen Victoria, and events of a special showing for her of Catlin's paintings of Indian life. The artist, who was born in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., in 1796, died penniless in 1872.

New details on Catlin's procedures in recording the life of the vanishing Indian are revealed by a catalogue of the exhibition which contains notations and corrections by the artist, Van Ravenswaay said. "His marginal notes supply the identities of some of his subjects and the date and place of the paintings," he explained.

The society also owns several Catlin letters to friends and books on fur trading days containing references to his work. The new papers will be shown at the society's quarters in Jefferson Memorial, Forest Park, in a show of recent acquisitions beginning next Feb. 1.

Van Ravenswaay said negotiations for the purchase began last month when he attended a meeting of the National Council for Historic Sites and Buildings in Washington, and was introduced to Wickes in a bookshop. The amount of the purchase was provided from the Bixby Book and Manuscript Fund, established by the late W. K. Bixby.



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**PATCH**

Contracting Co. The latter firm  
is excavating the 17-acre site  
midtown Manhattan along the  
East river.  
Builders estimated that the  
secretariat building will be ready  
for occupancy by late summer or  
fall of 1950.

**100 CASH**  
For Your Old  
**SINGER SEWING MACHINE**  
Round Bobbin Drop Head  
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e Rotary \$5 for Wheeler Wilson  
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ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

December 13, 1908

### A Painter's Dramatic Life

Distinguished Biography of the American Artist George Catlin

**PURSUIT OF THE HORIZON, A Life of George Catlin.** By Loyd Haberly. (MacMillan, 237 pgs., \$5.)

ANY reviewer is reluctant to use the word "distinguished" in describing a book, but Mr. Haberly's biography of George Catlin, fills that description. Written with an ease and skill which is very good to read, unhampered by the irritating, unimportant details so beloved by less able biographers, the story moves swiftly along, dramatic, warmly human, and at times amusing and pathetic.

The combination of Mr. Haberly and his subject seems particularly fitting. The author is a versatile genius, a poet among many other things and a craftsman of distinction who has respect and understanding for the craftsmanship of others.

George Catlin, a nineteenth century American artist, devoted his life to preserving the appearance and the customs of the American Indians as he saw them before they had been broken in spirit, and hurried into the DP camps of the nation's westward expansion years. But even more than artistically recording a rapidly disappearing race, Catlin devoted his life to presenting their case to a disinterested and unsympathetic world. Through exhibitions of his paintings, through lectures, and through his many fascinating books, he told over and over again "the other side" of the Indian story; the tragic story of a primitive people being destroyed by civilization.

\*\*\*

**F**OR a man of less character, such an unequal struggle would be stark tragedy. So, in a sense it was with Catlin, but somehow his determination, his belief in the need for what he was doing, gives his life an heroic cast. Born in Wilkes-Barre in 1796—where "the endless mountains leaned to the west, wolves howled in the forest moonlight, and the Susquehanna was the only road," his earliest recollections were those of the frontier. He became an artist almost by accident, and was largely self-taught, as were many of his able contemporaries. Rather than submit to the economic necessity of supporting himself by painting portraits, he chose instead, from the beginning of his career, to record the native Indians. He married, but his wife and children were incidental to the driving obsession of his life. He came West, St. Louis knew him well at various times, and he extended his



search for subject matter along the upper Mississippi and into the wide reaches of the Western plains.

Returning to the East with his paintings and notes, he began his campaign to interest the Government in the cause of his Indian friends. Exhibitions, lectures, pleading with political leaders, and all the rest, followed. Then he took his collection to England where he met with initial interest, and then heartbreak. In Paris he again struggled against poverty and waning public interest. Year followed year, and the aging artist became almost a self-imposed exile, hoping against hope to gain the funds to support adequately his family, and to aid the Indian cause. Finally he went to South America where he wandered through the jungles, unconscious of personal danger, recording there the natives as he had previously done in North America. Old and broken, he returned to the United States where, in 1872, he died penniless.

\*\*\*

**L**ONG discredited by his jealous contemporaries, it is recognized today that Catlin's paintings and his writings, are

reliable. Few have had an opportunity to see his work, for the museums which own most of it have it stored in inaccessible attics and basements. "Perhaps," Mr. Haberly says, "if we had paid him vast sums for his pictures we would praise them and show them on the ground floors of our galleries. But he does not need our praise. Indians of a hundred lost tribes praise him from the shadows for preserving the only living likeness of what they were."

CHARLES VAN RAVENSWAAY.



## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

### Raphael Lemkin

an American and Yale  
laughed At When He  
l in 1933, but Refused  
s of His Struggle.

D. L. STOKES

ment of the Post-Dispatch.

WASHINGTON, Dec. 18.

tury of atomic fission, Dr. Raphael  
of Yale University, has at last  
ar crusade of poverty, ill health,  
go (Dec. 9), in Paris, the General  
unanimously adopted a world-wide  
cious or political mass murder.  
tion and coined what is now the  
nocide," which he created from

genocide. The second broached a  
scheme without precedent, that of  
trying the horde of Nazi offend-  
ers, not as millions of individuals,  
but en masse. Lemkin had hit  
upon the short-cut of arraigning  
"criminal organizations," united in  
guilt by a "common plan," or con-  
spiracy. He accompanied Jackson  
to London for a conference of  
four months at which the indict-

ment was  
framed for the  
pioneer interna-  
tional military  
tribunal.

Both of Lem-  
kin's ideas ap-  
peared in the in-  
dictment. Prosecu-  
tion of crim-  
inal organiza-  
tions was made  
a central fea-  
ture. A genocide  
clause was in-  
serted over  
doubts of the  
British, who ob-  
jected that the  
word was not to  
be found in the  
Oxford Diction-  
ary.

Returning to  
America, Lem-  
kin watched the  
long, slow length  
of the trial from  
an observation  
post in the War

L. LEMKIN

Department. Growing more and  
more uneasy, he traveled to



### Minnesota's Humphrey New Lib

Continued From Page One.

toward the end of the campaign  
at St. Paul, which is related to  
Humphrey's Minneapolis by a  
river named Mississippi. Corre-  
spondents traveling with President  
Truman noted that he made a bet-  
ter than ordinary address at St.  
Paul that night, but they went  
away talking about the young  
firebrand named Humphrey who  
had preceded the President on the  
show.

"It's unfair to ask anybody to  
follow that fellow," was the con-  
sensus.

A Flood of Information.

Interviewing Hubert Horatio  
Humphrey Jr. is quite an expe-  
rience, with the reporter miscast  
in the role of the little Dutch  
boy who stuck his finger in the  
broken dike to hold off the rag-  
ing flood waters.

The interview proceeds this  
way:

"Father's folks were Minne-  
sota. Dairy farmers. Dad gradu-  
ated in pharmacy and started his  
first store in Granite Falls, Min-  
nesota. He moved to South Dako-  
ta and married mother. Mother  
was born in Norway; her parents  
brought her to South Dakota; her  
father was a Norwegian sea cap-  
tain.

"I was born in Wallace, South  
Dakota, in 1911. In 1915 we moved  
to Doland, S. D., where I grew up  
and was graduated from high  
school. I was active in debates,  
basketball, football, Boy Scouts  
and the Epworth League. I went  
to the University of Minnesota  
from 1929 until 1931 when I had  
to check out on account of the  
depression and return to work in  
my father's store.

"Dad was Mayor of Doland and  
a member of the City Council. He

"We always had a good time,"  
he assured the interviewer. "Al-  
ways had a good time."

Knew Russell Long.

Having tasted of the arts and  
pharmaceutical sciences in Minne-  
sota and Colorado, Humphrey,  
wife and baby were off to Louisi-  
ana State University for a mas-  
ter's degree. There, at Baton  
Rouge, they were to know Rus-  
sell Long, who was to become jun-  
ior Senator from Huey Long's  
home state, and "Chop" Morrison,  
destined to be anti-Long Mayor of  
New Orleans.

To keep the wolf from the door  
and provide the groving fam-  
ily with hamburger, Humphrey  
taught in history even as he  
studied. And then he completed  
the grand circuit by returning to  
Minnesota for graduate work  
toward his doctor's degree.

Earlier, Humphrey and soda-  
jerked toward higher education.  
Now he worked on the side for  
the Federal Works Projects Ad-  
ministration, and in no time ad-  
vanced from one of the lowest  
paid jobs to one of the highest,  
which wasn't very high at that.  
Then came the day in April,  
1943, when H.H.H. allowed himself  
to be drafted as a Democratic  
candidate for Mayor of Minne-  
apolis—"drafted in a men's room,"  
by a committee of five, headed by  
himself, as he bluntly assured the  
electorate.

When the electorate let him  
down lightly, Humphrey and his  
family had to eat, hamburgers or  
less. He made a precarious living  
as a radio commentator, industrial  
relations consultant, and as head  
of the political science department  
of Macalester College, St. Paul.

"I told the college president  
I had to start teaching and  
eating immediately," Humphrey



## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

### TRAMP ROYAL

WILLIAM McFEE's first book was *Letters from an Ocean Tramp*, published at London in 1908. We have a remarkably fine copy of this first and scarcest McFee, first edition and first binding (cloth), with the lettering "Cassell & Co." at the foot of the back strip. During the First World War the author was an officer in the British Navy, serving mostly in the Mediterranean, afterwards was chief engineer with United Fruit for whom he commuted between New York and the Spanish Main and kept a fever chart for his cargo of bananas. Ashore, he settled in Connecticut's Westport. Further fact—the chief is English, not Scottish, although Mr. McFee himself informs us that the name is Irish. Fine first of his first book, in first binding—\$50.

### BRAHMAN DECKHAND

AMERICAN collectors should not neglect *Two Years Before the Mast* simply because it happens to be a high spot of American literature and hence more immediately the concern of the first edition brigade. Richard Henry Dana set sail from Boston round the Horn for California in the brig *Pilgrim* in 1834, returning two years later with a fine personal narrative that in 1840 first appeared in print, published at New York. Afterwards he became a distinguished lawyer and during the Civil War performed the price-less, if unglamorous, service of persuading the Democratic Supreme Court of the United States to sustain the North's right to blockade Southern ports and seize neutral vessels for violation.

The first edition of *Two Years Before the Mast* is a 16mo, our copy being bound in old, black calf, which is now worn. Ours is the earliest state, with perfect type in the copyright notice and on

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in black letter and roman at London in 1570. Our copy has the title page in type-facsimile, probably done early in the 19th century, but otherwise it is an excellent copy of a book famed for its 116 Hogarthian woodcuts, as well as for the broad-grained satire that made it one of the most popular books of its time. It was one of the very first printed books to deal with contemporary events and persons, rather than with old German battles and French knights. In Barclay's translation, or adaptation rather, the *narrenschiff* became an English ship of English fools, so that the work is invaluable as a picture of English manners as well as a literary monument half way between Chaucer and Spenser. It was first printed two years after Columbus discovered America. Perhaps booksellers should destroy rather than sell Brant's *Ship of Fools*, because there's treason in it. At the very outset is described "the first foole of all the whole navie," who turns out to be a book collector. The familiar illustration for this canto shows the bibliophile peering through his horn-rims at his incunables, which in those days were, of course, collected by the speculators in Modern Firsts. Our copy of the folio of 1570 is bound in old scored calf, neatly re-hinged, with gilt edges. Cheap, as an apology for the facsimiled title—\$40.

### CATLIN AND HIS COLT

UNTIL recently the set of six drawings which George Catlin made for the Colt Fire Arms Manufacturing Company was known to us by title alone. We had never owned a set, and we remember seeing only one listed by another dealer. These drawings were lithographed in the 'sixties by the English firm of J. M'Gahey, and were distributed by the Colt Company as advertising. It was a

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## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming



AT GOOD-  
SPEED'S

*Catlin on the Susquehanna . . . page 16*

bright idea for Colt to draw upon Catlin's talent, for two or three decades earlier Catlin had ascended the Upper Missouri and lived among "forty-eight of the wildest and most remote tribes," where the butt of his gun nearly took root on his shoulder. His pictorial record of this sojourn is well known and in particular his *North American Indian Portfolio* (London, 1844) is evidence of his ability to depict the wild men, animals, and scenery that would appeal to men likely to purchase Colt's repeating rifles and revolvers. By the same token, the collector of Western Americana who finds a place for Catlin's *Indian Portfolio* on his shelf will surely wish to have the Colt set too. These six lithographs are, by all evidence, very rare and this is the only set we have offered in forty years of book and print selling.

In style, spirit, and size (17 by 23 inches, plus full margins) the six lithographs of the Colt set are natural companion-pieces to the thirty-one lithographs of the *Indian Portfolio*. In coloring the Colt set is less brilliant, having been made from but three tint blocks—sepia, blue, and black. Of the six lithographs, three have North American subjects (two dealing with the Far West and one with the Susquehanna River of Pennsylvania) and three depict scenes in South America. The captions of the prints are as follows:

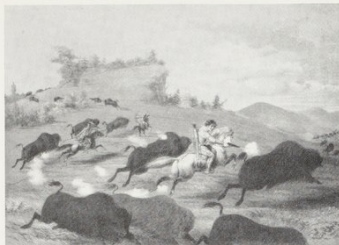
*Catlin the Artist and Hunter Shooting Buffaloes with Colt's Revolving Rifle. He says:*

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## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

### THE MONTH



"I gave five shots to the right and left"

"With my two hired men, Ba'iste and Bogard, I took a position where a numerous herd of Buffaloes were crossing a Ravine, and being unobserved, I shot down eight or ten in succession, leaving the carcasses for the wolves to devour." (Plate 11 of the *Indian Portfolio* shows Catlin and the same pair of Canadian companions engaged in the same work and probably in the same location—a range of bluffs near the mouth of the Cannon-Bull River.)

Catlin, the Artist, Shooting Buffalo With Colt Revolving Pistol. He writes: "I gave five shots to the right and left, four of which were fatal to the heart and all in less than half a minute."

Water Hunting for Deer, A Night Scene on the Susquehanna, Penn. Catlin writes: "I was on the water all night with my Colt's Revolving Rifle, and in the morning soon looked up seven of my victims; several others were wounded, but made their escape."

Catlin, the Celebrated Indian Traveler and Artist, Firing his Colt's Repeating Rifle Before a Tribe of Carib Indians in South America. "It having been reported by one of my party that I had a medicine-man gun which would fire all day without reloading, the men, women and children assembled in front of the chief's lodge to get a sight of it,—when I found it necessary to make an exhibition and arranged to get at a suitable distance, where I took my position in front of the crowd, rapidly discharging all the chambers, and cocked the piece for a continuation, but the chief advanced and assured me that they were all satisfied and I'd better save my powder and balls, as I might want them on a very long journey."

Catlin, the Artist and Sportsman Relieving One of His Companions from an Unpleasant Predicament During His Travels in Brazil. "This man strayed from the encampment, and alone, attacked a troop of 200 or more Piccaries, which having expended his powder, he was compelled to retreat into a fallen tree, crying 'Murder.'"

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Catlin ran to his rescue with his Colt's Revolver, which after knocking off three of the riders of the besieging party suddenly, the rest took to their heels, only leaving the dead upon the field.—"

AT GOOD—  
SPEED'S

A Mid-Day Halt on the Rio Trombador, Brazil. "While the Artist Catlin and one of his Attendants were Preparing Their Meal, the Former Discovered a Large Leopard Playing with the Legs of Another of His Party, a Spaniard who was fast asleep under some small Palms, Catlin crept to the foot and got his Colt's Revolver, when he shot the leopard between the eyes, causing instant death, and he adds, 'This was one of the most satisfactory shots I ever had.'"

With the set of six Catlins we also acquired the large folio lithograph by Schierholz, "View of Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufactory, Hartford, Conn.," and the 9" by 17" "Armory of Colt's Patent Fire Arms Manufacturing Company" lithographed by Kellogg of Hartford. The group of eight—\$250.

### THE CATLIN OCTAVOS COLORED BY HAND

AMONG the several works on the American Indians written and illustrated by George Catlin, the one that is, along with the huge *Portfolio*, indispensable to Injun-hunters is the two-volume octavo, *Illustrations of the Manners and Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians, with Letters and Notes Written during Eight Years of Travel*, etc., etc.\* There are many editions of the octavo work, with its several hundred illustrations, its popularity warranting a new edition within the past decade or so. Of all the octavo editions, the most desirable is that particular Bohn edition which Thomas W. Field describes as No. 260 in his *Essay Towards an Indian Bibliography*. Field's note reads: "A number of copies (often announced to have been but twelve) have the etchings colored. The first which were offered to the public were sold at a high price on account of the supposed rarity, but it is said that a large number of copies with colored etchings were found by Mr. Bohn in an out-house, and they have consequently become somewhat more common. They are still, however, held at nearly ten times the price of the plain copies." Sabin, writing prior to 1870, then believed that only twelve copies were made ("colored after the fancy of the artist who did the work") and at that time he valued the set at \$60.

We have this Bohn edition (his tenth, London, 1866). The illustrations are printed from tint blocks to which water color has been added by hand. The two large octavo volumes are bound in contemporary morocco, which is rubbed, but in our opinion is to be

\* Also titled *Letters and Notes of the Manners, etc.*

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## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

THE MONTH preferred to a new binding because the spines are specially gold-tooled with a portrait of an Indian and with crossed tomahawk and calumet. The scientific historian, Humboldt, called Catlin "one of the most admirable observers of manners who ever lived among the aborigines of America." His octavo work with the colored plates—\$112.50.

### HAIN FOR INCUNABLES

If you don't own Ludovic Hain's guide to incunabula, be advised that you may now buy a thick-paper copy, the two 12mo volumes bound in four, in old calf. Hain's *Reportorium Bibliographicum*, Stuttgart, 1826—\$45.

### CUNARDER ON ICE

To collectors of American prints the story of "the *Britannia* in the ice" is an old one, but perhaps we may be excused for briefly paraphrasing and quoting the account of the circumstances which Dr. Samuel Eliot Morison gives in his *Maritime History of Massachusetts*. A transatlantic steamship line was the dream of Boston merchants as early as 1825, but the reality had to wait for the year 1839, when Samuel Cunard founded the North American Royal Mail Steam Packet Company and chose as his western terminus the port of Boston rather than New York. In evidence of their gratitude for the plum, the Bostonians leased to Cunard a wharf and docks in East Boston rent free. On June 2, 1840, the first Cunarder, the *Unicorn*, entered the harbor. Dr. Morison writes: "Boston had hardly recovered from the banquets given in her honor when the *Britannia* steamed in, bearing Mr. Cunard himself, and a new set of festivities commenced. A fortnightly schedule of side-wheelers was soon established, greatly to the disgust of New York, which had only one transatlantic steam packet to Boston's four. In January, 1844, when Boston Harbor froze out to Fort Independence—an event that comes hardly once a generation—the local merchants, to escape the jeers of New York, had a channel cut for the *Britannia* to get to sea."

In the same year of 1844, the Boston lithographic firm of Bouvé & Sharp produced a well-remembered print in commemoration of the epic ice-cracking of the Yankee traders. The picture was drawn on stone by A. de Vaudricourt after the sketch by J. C. King. The legend at the base of the print reveals that the channel or "canal" chopped through the ice was seven miles long and 100 feet wide

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## Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

### This Example of 'Art Serves Commerce' Linked Together the Names of Two Men, Both Famous in Annals of the Frontier

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

RECENTLY a New York art gallery held the first public exhibition of a collection of paintings of unusual historic interest. Not only were these canvases the work of George Catlin, the famous painter of Indians, but associated with them is another man's name, well known on the frontier. He was Col. Samuel Colt, inventor of the six-shooter which played such an important role in the winning of the West.

The linking of the names of these two frontier notables came about in this way: At the beginning of the Mexican war a detachment of American dragoons was ambushed by a Mexican patrol and the only man who escaped was a Captain Thome who shot his way to freedom with a brace of Colt revolvers.

When Gen. Zachary Taylor heard of this, he was much impressed and asked for more information about these weapons. Capt. Sam Walker of the Texas Rangers, who was guarding Taylor's lines of communications and who had influenced Colt to develop a .44-caliber revolver in addition to the .36-caliber which he had been manufacturing, told the general that the only thing wrong with the revolvers was that there were not enough of them.

Thereupon Taylor sent Walker to Washington to make known to the President the need of his soldiers for more weapons of this sort. The result was an order on Colt for 1,000 of his guns, which he at once supplied. More than that, Colt, who was an early-day "super-salesman," put over as clever a publicity campaign as any modern press agent could have devised.

"It was not the sales of his revolvers to the army that made Sam Colt," writes Jack Rohan in his "Yankee Arms Maker: The Incredible Career of Samuel Colt" (Harper and Brothers). "It was the manner in which he capitalized the victories of the Americans over numerically superior forces. The revolvers he sold at Resaca de la Palma, Monterey and Buena Vista were few and far between. But those few, when Sam Colt got to spreading the story around the world, accounted for the defeat of the Mexicans. And the latter, glad of any excuse for their humiliation, cheerfully corroborated his claim!"

Soon after the close of the Mexican war came the discovery of gold in California. Emigrant trains began streaming across the Western plains, heading for the new diggings in California or for the rich lands of the Oregon country. The result of this epic migration was the inevitable clash with the Indians who had already learned to fear and hate the land-hungry white men.

Sam Colt, the Yankee arms-



Catlin, the Artist, Shooting Buffalo With a Colt Revolving Pistol—"I gave five shots to the right and left, four of which were fatal to the heart and all in less than half a minute."

pictures of village and hunting scenes, of Indian games and ceremonies, of the scenery of the plains and mountains. Although Catlin went among the Indians on this peaceful mission, it was still a dangerous business. So "just in case"—he went armed, and the guns which he carried were made by Sam Colt.

Catlin's "North American Indian Portfolio," published in London in 1844, was proof of his ability to make the kind of pictures of wild life in the West that would appeal to men likely to purchase Sam Colt's product. So he commissioned the artist to paint some pictures for him in which Colt guns would be prominently displayed in scenes illustrating their usefulness in hunting or Indian fighting. The result was a dozen such canvases, painted between 1834 and 1837, which Colt used for display and from which lithographs were made for advertising promotion.

After they had served that purpose, the paintings were hung on the walls of Colt's residence, "Armstrong," in Hartford, Conn. Later they were relegated to an unused room on the third floor of another Colt home in Newport, R. I. It was only recently that they emerged from this obscurity and were placed on public exhibition in the New York gallery, there to be hailed as a rediscovered "find" of American "primitive" art.

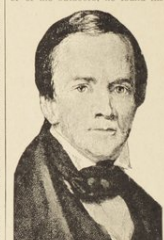
For with the passing years the fame of George Catlin has grown. Before his death he presented to the Smithsonian institution more than 500 of his paintings. Some of these were destroyed or injured in a fire which swept the institution in 1865 but the remainder of the collection now housed there is valued at more than \$1,000,000. There is no way of estimating what the paintings which he made for Colt are worth but some may be obtained from this fact:

Some time in the sixties the English firm of J. J. McGehey made lithographs from the six paint-

ings and mounted them in a book used at \$250 it is safe to estimate that the original paintings are worth easily ten times that amount.

No doubt George Catlin would be surprised if he could know what a high value is placed upon his work today. Born at Wyoming, Pa., in 1796 the son of a lawyer-father, his boyhood, according to his own statement, "was whiled away, apparently, somewhat in vain, with books resolutely held in one hand, and a rifle or fishing pole firmly and affectionately grasped in the other."

His father was ambitious for him to become a lawyer, too, so he obediently studied for that profession and began practicing in Philadelphia. But, being a lover of the outdoors, he found his



GEORGE CATLIN

office duties irksome. He began painting as a recreation but had no idea of making it his life business.

Then one day on the streets of Philadelphia he saw a party of Indians who were en route to Washington for a conference with the "Great White Father." He was delighted with their picturesque dress and their splendid physiques and then there was born in him a determination that "the history and customs of such people preserved by pictorial illustrations are themes worthy the lifetime of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life shall prevent me from visiting their country and of becoming their historian."

Although Catlin was married by this time, neither the opposition of his wife nor arguments of other relatives could dissuade him from his purpose. He set out for the Indian country and lived among the Indians for eight years during which time he sketched or painted 2,000 full-length figures, made 33 portraits in oil and gathered together a collection of Indian costumes "and other manufactures from the size of a wigwag down to the size of a quill or a rattle."

With these pictures and curiosities which he had acquired at such a cost of time, work and danger he traveled throughout the United States and exhibited them in all of the leading cities. Everywhere he went he attracted crowds. Then he crossed the Atlantic and exhibited in England, Belgium and France where King Louis Philippe was so much interested in his work that he proposed to buy the entire collection for the French nation. Then came the Revolution of 1848 and, fortunately for America, the sale fell through.

Catlin returned to the United States and later visited South America and Central America to paint the Indians of those countries. Although his last years were spent in poverty, he presented to the Smithsonian his entire collection, so that future generations of his fellow-Americans might enjoy the record of an era that was rapidly passing. He died in Jersey City, N. J., on December 22, 1872, at the age of 76.



Catlin, the Celebrated Indian Traveler and Artist, Firing His Colt's Repeating Rifle Before a Tribe of Creek Indians in South America.

maker, was quick to realize the opportunity which this situation offered him and his product. By demonstrating the superiority of his revolver and the repeating rifle, which he had recently invented, over the Indians' bows and arrows he could sell large numbers of his weapons to the westward-faring emigrants. Although advertising was still in its infancy, Sam Colt knew that "it pays to advertise" and he also knew that one of the best ways to put across an advertising message was through the medium of pictures.

Two decades earlier an artist named George Catlin had ascended the Upper Missouri and lived among "40 of the wildest and most remote tribes," making paintings of everything that would illustrate the life and the country of those tribes—portraits of the chiefs,

ings and these lithographs were distributed by the Colt company as advertising. Last year Goodspeed & Bouton, the noted dealer in rare books and prints, offered for sale a set of these six lithographs, plus two others which were pictures of Colt's manufacture and armory, and placed a price of \$250 on the eight.

In commenting on these prints Goodspeed said: "Until recently the set of six drawings which George Catlin made for the Colt Fire Arms Manufacturing company was known to be by title set and we remember seeing only one listed by another dealer. These six lithographs are, by all evidences, very rare and this is the only set we have offered in 40 years of book and print selling." If the lithographs are val-

Special Feat. No. 4—4044



Robert Taft correspondence related to frontier artists, Catlin - Deming

Boston, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 1838

Dear Sir, I received your letter of the 27<sup>th</sup> inst. in due season, but, owing to the uncertainty of my future engagements, which at that time were not definitely fixed, I have delayed answering until the present moment. I have duly appreciated the very kind and complimentary invitation contained in your letter, and would gladly visit your city with my collection if it were possible to spare the time to do so. My other arrangements render it out of my power at present to visit your place, and I am compelled to decline your kind proposition.

Please accept assurances of  
Esteem & respect

Yours &c Geo. Catlin.

J. L. Hayes Esq.



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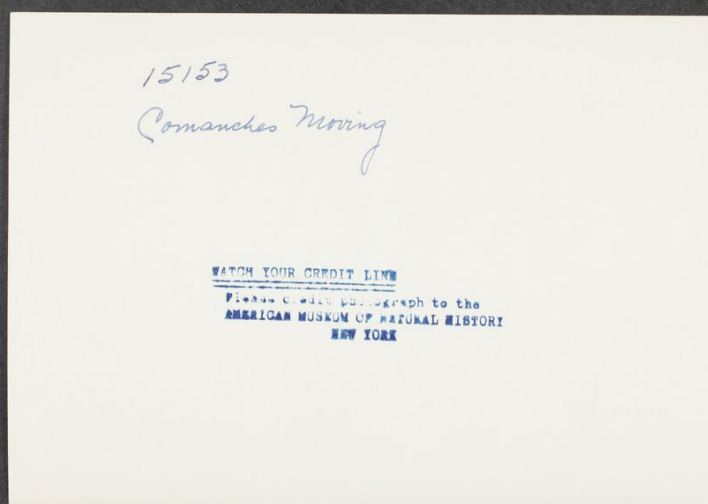


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