

Notes and Documents

A RINDISBACHER WATER COLOR

Grace Lee Nute

SEVERAL DESCRIPTIONS of Peter Rindisbacher's paintings, reproductions of some of them, and biographical data on the artist have appeared from time to time in this magazine. Within the past year many water colors of the Minnesota country by this Swiss artist have been on special display in the Round Tower Museum at Fort Snelling through the courtesy of the United States Military Academy at West Point, which owns eighteen originals.¹ Therefore, it is pleasant to add that an original water color by Rindisbacher is now owned in Minnesota. It has been acquired by a St. Paul man, Mr. Ernest R. Reiff. As the accompanying reproduction shows, it depicts one of the artist's favorite scenes, a buffalo hunt on the Dakota prairies.

In 1821 Rindisbacher, a lad of fifteen, migrated with his family to Lord Selkirk's colony in the Red River Valley between Pembina and the junction of that river with the Assiniboine. Thus he grew to manhood surrounded by Indians and half-breeds. How carefully he studied them and the countryside is obvious to anyone who examines the details of his paintings for data on Cree, Chippewa, and Assiniboin dress, habits, weapons, animals, and dwellings. Hence his paintings have more than art value. They are replete with information for the historian, the anthropologist, and the geographer.

Rindisbacher may well have attended some of the seniannual buffalo hunts of Red River half-breeds on the prairies, for at least six of his known paintings relate to buffaloes. Moreover, at least three of them, including that owned by Mr. Reiff, almost certainly show

¹ For accounts of the artist and his work, see Grace Lee Nute, "Peter Rindisbacher, Artist," and "Rindisbacher's Minnesota Water Colors," and Alice E. Smith, "Peter Rindisbacher: A Communication," *ante*, 14:283-287, 20:54-57, 173-175. Notes on the exhibits of Rindisbacher paintings in the Round Tower Museum appear *ante*, 22:434, 23:94.

Missouri River scenery in the background. The half-breeds customarily went to that region on their expeditions. Mr. Reiff, who is well acquainted with the area at the junction of the Cheyenne and Missouri rivers — still largely unchanged from Rindisbacher's day — feels certain that it is that region which serves as background in his picture. The painting itself, however, probably dates from the St. Louis period in Rindisbacher's life, after he left the Red River Valley, for it is larger than his early paintings, being eighteen by thirty inches, and more finished in nearly all respects. He doubtless worked from an early sketch and may even have revisited the prairies by going up the Missouri by boat.

It has long been known that Rindisbacher, like so many artists of his day, used one theme for several pictures. Probably one such picture was painted and achieved considerable fame. Then patrons requested similar items for their own collections. However that may be, it is certain that Rindisbacher painted three pictures on the subject of a buffalo hunt by Indians in what seems to be the Missouri River country. One appears in reproduction as the frontispiece of volume 1 of Thomas L. McKenny and James Hall's *History of the Indian Tribes of North America* (Philadelphia, 1855). A second is to be found in an original water color at West Point, which was recently on display with others in the Round Tower. The third is Mr. Reiff's. All vary only in small details, such as clouds, flowers, the length of an Indian rider's headpiece, the exact location and size of buffalo herds, and the like. Probably a skilled artist could detect data that would indicate the order in which the three were painted.

According to statements by the previous owner of Mr. Reiff's water color, Miss Alyes N. Agnew of Washington, D. C., it has been in the hands of her family since it was presented by Rindisbacher to her great-grandfather, Benjamin West Tingley of Philadelphia, while on a visit to St. Louis. As the artist died in St. Louis in 1834, it is obvious that the painting was produced before that year. Tingley's parents did not err in naming him for a great colonial artist. He became a famous collector of his day, as did so many of his Quaker business associates and banking partners. It is not strange,

therefore, that a struggling young artist on the extreme frontier about 1830 presented him with one of his choicer pieces. Though dealers and critics refer to it as a water color, it is obvious that Rindisbacher had his own unique formula for mixing his pigments. The result often leads the uninitiated to believe that what he is beholding is a lithograph. Careful examination, however, reveals brush marks and a pigment that can be washed off with comparative ease. The original frame and glass are still on the picture, if family tradition is correct. At least the frame is very old and the glass has the imperfections and interesting tints of an early period.

A display of this picture in the Round Tower is planned for the near future, after all eighteen of the West Point water colors by Rindisbacher have been exhibited.

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF MIDDLE WESTERN FARM NOVELS

Compiled by John T. Flanagan

The following list of Middle Western farm novels written during the last six decades makes no pretense to be complete. It does include, however, most of the work of the better-known authors who have essayed to write rural fiction, and as such it may have value for the interested reader. The locale of these stories may be defined roughly as that part of the United States west of the Allegheny Mountains, north of the Ohio River, and east of the Rockies.

ALDRICH, BESS STREETER, *A Lantern in Her Hand*. New York and London, 1928.

———, *Song of Years*. New York and London, 1939.

ALLISON, JOY, *Billow Prairie*. Boston and Chicago, 1892.

BEERS, LORNA DOONE, *Prairie Fires*. New York, 1925.

———, *A Humble Lear*. New York, 1929.

———, *The Mad Stone*. New York, 1932.

BOYLES, KATE and VIRGIL D., *The Homesteaders*. Chicago, 1909.

BROMFIELD, LOUIS, *The Farm*. New York, 1933.

CANNON, CORNELIA, *Red Rust*. Boston, 1928.



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