THE OIL PORTRAIT of Chief Little Crow that graces the cover of this issue of *Minnesota History* was purchased recently by the Minnesota Historical Society and added to its growing collection of historical paintings. The portrait was painted in 1895 by Frank Blackwell Mayer (1827-1899) in his studio in Annapolis, Maryland, from an on-the-spot sketch he made at Traverse des Sioux while visiting Minnesota in the summer of 1851. When Mayer first sketched him in full regalia and with ceremonial pipe, Little Crow was chief of the Kaposia band of the Mdewakanton Sioux, or Dakota. The ancient village of Kaposia was at the present site of South St. Paul.

Little Crow was an onlooker at Traverse des Sioux when the Upper Sioux (Sisseton and Wahpeton) signed a treaty on July 23, 1851, selling millions of acres of rich Minnesota land to the United States and agreeing to live on a small reservation along the Minnesota River. Two weeks later (on August 5) Little Crow himself was the first to sign a similar treaty at Mendota by which the Lower Sioux (Mdewakanton and Wahpekute) ceded their southern Minnesota lands except for a reservation downstream from that of the Upper Sioux. Eleven years later Little Crow reluctantly led the 1862 uprising of his people in Minnesota that brought banishment of the Sioux from the state. In July, 1863, Little Crow was killed by hunters near Hutchinson, Minnesota, while he was on a horse-stealing foray.

The Little Crow painting was one of a pair of oil portraits Mayer produced of Indians in 1895. The other was of Sisseton Chief Kaghe Madoka, called "The Male Raven," whom Mayer also sketched in 1851. Both portraits were purchased by Mayer's friend, C. M. Mathews, for $35 each.

Although the portrait of Little Crow manifests a slightly Anglicized treatment relative to either the original sketch or the copy of it made in 1897, it is no less important for this, because it serves to underline Mayer's consistency of attitude toward the Indian as a human being despite the intervening years of bitter Indian wars. Mayer always gave full consideration to the personality and dignity of his sitter, whether the person was red, black, or white, male or female, renowned or little known.

Both portraits are friendly, respectful, individualized renderings. These are aspects worth taking due note of, for in Mayer's mind the image of the American Indian never degenerated to the notion that this aboriginal was the embodiment of an evil spirit. Mayer understood his times and clearly recognized the consequences of the fact that the territorial prerogatives of the Indian stood in the way of settlers and the onrushing iron horse. He fully comprehended the hopes, dreams, and, ultimately, the greed that propelled those who placed their destinies in the railway West and resulted in their manipulation of the image of the red man in such a way as to sanction his annihilation. In this maneuver Mayer's sympathies were fully with the Indian. Mayer's fine portrait of Little Crow illustrates this fact, as it reflects the chief's full stature as a human being.

Frank Mayer's birth year happened to coincide with that of the American railroad. "I was born on 27th December, 1827," he wrote in 1876. "The existence of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad having the same date, I

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Mrs. Page, an expert in the field of nineteenth-century American art, is writing a book on Mayer. For Antiques (February, 1976) she wrote an article that concentrated on Mayer's non-Indian works. A graduate of Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, she lives in Washington, D.C., where she is a member of the District's Commission on the Arts and Humanities. She has family roots in Minnesota.

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A FORERUNNER of the cover portrait of Little Crow (below) is the drawing (right) from a Mayer "Album" in the Rare Book Division, the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden foundations.

easily recall my birth." His father, Charles Frederick Mayer (1795–1864), was among the founding fathers of the railroad and remained a trustee until his death. His first cousin, Charles Frederick Mayer, Jr., namesake of Frank's father, was president of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad from 1858 to 1896.¹

The year 1827 also witnessed the election of Andrew Jackson, whose aggressive leadership of the common people resulted in the formation of the rival Whig party. Charles Mayer, Sr., was one of Baltimore's first Whig representatives in the Maryland state legislature. One of the central concerns over which the Whigs and Democrats made political issue was the Indian question. The consequences of the Indian Removal Act of 1830 caused the Whig leader, Henry Clay, to give a speech on behalf of the Cherokees which, as described by modern historian Samuel Eliot Morison, "drew tears from the eyes of his confreres."²

The speech, of course, did nothing to halt the removal of the Indians. It did, however, affect sizable sections of public opinion to sympathetic attention, "magnifying the Indians into romantic heroes," as one historian put it.³ Nowhere was this more true than in Baltimore. For example, the library of Frank Mayer's uncle, Brantz Mayer (1809–1879), contained at least two books on Indians, written by friends of the Mayer family.⁴

IN BALTIMORE, the fastest growing city in America between 1790 and 1830 thanks to the commerce flowing through its harbor, the dream of western expansion by means of "internal improvements" had taken deep root by the early 1820s. Because the city's port was located at midpoint along the East coast on a direct line to the West, ambitions ran high among her enterprising citizenry. As a result, the nation's first rail system was initiated and launched in Baltimore.⁵

This expansionist fervor also goes far toward explain-
ing why Baltimoreans were among the most enthusiastic supporters of the Mexican War. Brantz Mayer was appointed secretary to the United States legation in Mexico in 1841, and Frank Mayer’s first earnings were for a pencil portrait of General Zachary Taylor. After the war, Brantz wrote a book, *The Complete Viceroyal History of Mexico* (1850), for which Frank did the illustrations. The $450 he received for these financed the artist’s trip to Minnesota in 1851.8

Frank Mayer had long nurtured a desire for such a trip. In this, he followed strong family influences as well as Baltimore traditions. His father, Charles, had traveled west to St. Louis as a youth. Uncle Brantz had gone as far as Mexico in company with Lewis Brantz, partner of Brantz’s father and Frank’s grandfather, Christian Mayer. On the other side of the family, Frank’s surrogate grandfather was particularly influential, as a letter to Eliza Blackwell, Frank’s mother, attests. Dated May 1, 1836, when Frank was nine years old, it was from Dr. James Smith, in whose family Eliza was raised while her widowed father, Captain Francis Blackwell, sailed the seas as a merchant captain. Written while Smith was traveling on the Ohio River below Wheeling, Virginia, the letter advises:

Tell dear Frank that I have brought him a genuine Indian hatchet of stone taken up by our hands on one of those Indian mounds: of the origin of which we have no knowledge, and of their use we can only conjecture that they were made as burial places for their dead or fortifications [from] which they could defend their fellows against [attack]. This relic is an old one and of no value as a hatchet in our day, but it will be a Worthy Presentation, and should Frank keep it until he reaches 4 Score and 10 years (which I pray he may, adding daily to his store of knowledge), he will be better pleased with it than I can expect him to be at his present age.

Other developments calculated to excite the young man’s imagination resulted from a trip West in 1837 by one of Uncle Brantz’s peers, artist Alfred Jacob Miller (1810-1874). Frank was ten when his family received word of the impending expedition in a letter from Miller to Brantz, dated St. Louis, April 23, 1837:

I have much gratification in informing you that I am at present under an engagement, to proceed with Capt. William D. [William J.] Stewart (an affluent gentleman), on an expedition to the Rocky Mountains. I speak candidly and truth-etically [sic] when I say, that I wish you were with us — it’s a new and wide field . . . for the poet and painter — for if you can weave such beautiful garlands with the simplest flowers of nature — what a subject her wild sons of the West present intermixed with their legendary history. I expect to depart from St. Louis on Tuesday next 25 inst and join Capt. S. above Fort Independence. I am told by the gentleman who transacts his business that the fitting out this year has cost him above $20,000. I shall be happy to show you my sketches when I return.10

What a stir must have been caused in the mind of young Frank Mayer when, a year later (in July, 1838), Alfred Jacob Miller exhibited “18 paintings of picturesque life in America with geography to dazzle the imagination.” He hung them in his studio where all were invited to come and see.11

Several years later, in 1843, Captain Stewart, a Scots aristocrat and adventurer, again went West. This time he was accompanied by a peer of Frank Mayer’s, a young

9Smith to Eliza Blackwell, May 1, 1836, Mayer Papers, Maryland Historical Society.
10The letter is in the Mayer Papers, Maryland Historical Society.
11*Baltimore Sun*, May 1, 1895.
medical student, Stedman R. Tighlman, who also took his sketchbook. Tighlman, aged eighteen, was a classmate and best friend of a fellow Baltimorean, artist Richard Caton Woodville (1825–1856). Both young men were two years older than Mayer. Stewart's party took off in May, 1843, and, on its return to Baltimore the following December, created a sensation with all the costumes, trappings, and authentic paraphernalia it collected.  

BY NOW, Mayer's own fancies of a trip West accompanied by “pen and pencil” were firmly formed. The next step was to find a means of fulfilling his wish. His first inquiry, apparently about an expedition going out from St. Louis to the Rockies in the spring of 1846, went to Flora Byrne, Dr. Smith's daughter now living in Missouri. Flora doted on Frank, whom she regarded as a nephew. As they grew older, they shared common sympathies and, in particular, a generous sense of humor. “My dear Frank,” she wrote from her new home, Byrham Wood, on November 2, 1845:  

it is our opinion the trip [to the Rockies] would be hardly desirable for you. I saw a young man last week . . . who joined [John Charles] Fremont's expedition last summer, but who returned after getting 200 miles from Independence. He told me the labour was so great and the hardship so severe that he begged with four others to be returned home. He is a strong able-bodied man, a western man in fact, while you, dear Frank, have been reared in comfort and with your constitution, such hardship might be ruinous to you rather than beneficial. You could hardly support the fatigue of wading through mud knee deep, helping to pull wagons out that have been stalled, and walking a mile for firewood before you can rest at night. But as your wish is to see the Indians in their native state, we would like you to come to us in the spring, rough it here a little on our prairies, ride about on horseback, eat fat bacon, and then go with some pleasant acquaintances up to Racoon Forks 200 miles on horseback, where you will be in the midst of the Indians . . . and then you can, if you choose, take a steamboat to St. Peters, the head of navigation, and enjoy a full sight of these sons of the forest. All will renovate your system and give you quite enough of western life.  

Though Frank Mayer was not so delicate a youth as Aunt Flora imagined, the death of his older half brother, Henry, from homesteading in upper New York on the last day of February, 1846, had served to increase the family's caution over his physical well-being. By January 24, 1849, Flora was issuing an almost hysterical warning to Frank's mother: “For God's sake, Eliza, do not let Frank or Charley [Frank's younger brother] be touched by this gold mania.”  

No doubt she had learned of Frank's trip to Washington, D.C., the previous November and of the subsequent inquiry he made to the celebrated artist-naturalist, John James Audubon, to join the latter's forthcoming expedition to California. Mayer's own account of his Washington trip is found in his personal journal:  

November 1st. Arrived in Washington at 1 p.m. and went with Belle McCulloh to see the interesting collection of new inventions, curiosities, etc. of the Exploring Expedition. After dinner went to see Gov. [William L.] Marcy, Secretary of War, to apply for a situation as artist to some Government Expedition to California. Gov. M. is a heavy man and appeared . . . to have eaten too hearty a dinner, as he talked in a rather utilitarian style of art and artists and told me that none would be required on this expedition, its object being strictly military. 1 afterwards called with Mr. McCulloh on Judge [John Y.] Mason, the Secretary of the Navy, a very gentlemanly man, who behaved politely, but gave me the same answer. Placed an application on file in the office of the Topographical Bureau. 

Whatever request he made of Audubon was similarly dismissed. “The company for California is filled up,” Audubon wrote on January 27, 1849, "and with respect to any addition I am unable to give anyone the privilege as it would occasion delay.”  

Notwithstanding these rebuffs, Mayer's persistence would finally bear fruit. As he waited for payment for the illustrations he did for his uncle's book on Mexico, he received another $100 as assistant librarian to the Committee on the Gallery of Fine Arts at the Maryland Historical Society, founded in 1844 by his father, uncle, and other prominent members of the Baltimore community. In this role, Mayer helped to mount the society's third annual exhibition of paintings, which apparently was so well received that the annual report for that year issued the stern warning that the gallery must not be  

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13 Matthew C. Field, Prairie and Mountain Sketches, xxiv, edited by Kate L. Gregg and John Francis McDermott, collected by Clyde and Mae Reed Porter (Norman, 1957); Francis Grubert, Richard Caton Woodville, an Early American Genre Painter, n.p. (Washington, D.C., 1967).  


allowed to usurp the library. Perhaps it was for this reason that Mayer relinquished the job at the end of 1850. The same report, however, contained a note on Indians that must certainly have inspired Mayer:

The aboriginal inhabitants of this great continent are fast yielding to the more powerful race now peopling their ancient domain. The time indeed is not distant when few will remain to instruct us in their customs, arts and polity. The greater the necessity for now rescuing from oblivion every memorial of a people so soon to be extinguished or blended with those who are so superior to them in numbers if not in intellectual endowment.

Armed with renewed spiritual ardor, Mayer journeyed once more to Washington. On February 14, 1851, he finally was able to record some progress:

Visited Washington for the purpose of procuring a situation, if possible under a commission... appointed to treat with the Sioux Indians. The appointment having been made I am determined to undertake the trip at my own expense, as the intercourse with the Indians and others, and the sketches I shall make will amply repay me for any expenditure I shall make. Judge Ridgeway introduced me to Capt. S[eth] Eastman of the U.S.A., at present engaged in arranging and preparing the illustrations to [Henry R.] Schoolcraft's book on Indian antiquities, etc. He was exceedingly polite and furnished me with many useful letters and gave me all the information and advice which I desired. His sketches of scenes in all parts of the country are beautifully drawn and surpass his finished pictures.

Thereupon, Mayer immediately sat down and wrote to Alexander Ramsey, first governor of Minnesota Territory, in an effort to consolidate his plans regarding the upcoming treaties of Traverse des Sioux and Mendota. He also received helpful information from Charles Lanman, a fellow artist and author whose career included being War Department librarian and personal secretary for Senator Daniel Webster. Lanman wrote Mayer:

I thank you for your sketch, which is a decided acquisition to my collection... I had a pleasant interview with your uncle [Brantz], and gave him for you, a copy of [Joseph N.] Nicolllet's map and a couple of Reports. The Indian Office gentlemen inform me that the Sioux Council will take place on or about the 20th of June next. As your route, my advice would be to go from Fort Snelling to Sandy Lake, across the portage to the St. Louis River, and down that very beautiful stream to the most splendid of all lakes - Superior. Your dress? It should be coarse, dirt, colour, and warm. Go well supplied with drawing materials, for you will see much that will interest you, and you cannot well supply yourself westward of Cincinnati. Provide yourself with a good green or red blanket, for should you not have occasion to camp out, it will be useful on board the steamboats. As to baggage, take just as little as possible.

On May 2, when Ramsey was in Washington making the final arrangements for the treatment rendezvous, Mayer gave the governor a letter of introduction on his behalf from I. Morrison Harris of Baltimore. It declared that the "Mayer family holds the highest social position, and his Father Chs. F. Mayer Esq. is one of the most eminent members of our Bar." This meeting between Ramsey and Mayer initiated a lifelong friendship.

Five days later, Mayer left Baltimore on the trip he hoped would enable him to become "another Dr. Syntax of poetic memory, in search of the Picturesque." Mayer was never able to accomplish "the dearest wish of his life" — that of seeing his journal published with accompanying sketches. Yet, as Bertha Heilbron wrote in her introduction to her edition of Mayer's original journal, "Perhaps no other observer, with the exception of [George] Catlin, has left so interesting a record in two mediums of the Indian life of the Middle West." Mayer's delineations manifest his special quality of felicitous and scientifically accurate observation, as well as his considerable talent as both artist and scribe. Clark Wissler, late curator of anthropology for the Museum of Natural History in New York, noted on receiving Mayer's complete and slightly revised version penned just after he painted his portrait of Little Crow, "the journal [constitutes] one of the most valuable records written about American Indians."

Mayer journeyed to Minnesota by way of Missouri, where he visited Aunt Flora. On June 8 he "took passage & went aboard the Steamer 'Excelsior' up for St. Paul, and Snelling[,] a distance of near eight hundred miles from St. Louis." He arrived at St. Paul June 15, 1851.

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19 Lanman to Mayer, April 5, 1851, Mayer Papers, in Maryland Historical Society.
20 Heilbron, With Pen and Pencil, 5.
21 Baltimore Sun, May 1, 1851 (Dr. Syntax quote); Mayer to Henry Rowe Schoolcraft from Paris, November 21, 1864 ("dearest wish" quote), in Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C., Heilbron, With Pen and Pencil, 5; Mayer folder in Museum of Natural History, New York (Wissler quote).
22 Heilbron, With Pen and Pencil, 86, 91.
A FEW DAYS later, Mayer received an invitation from Dr. Thomas S. Williamson, who had been a physician and missionary to the Minnesota Sioux since 1834, to visit him at his residence at Little Crow's village, Kaposia. Mayer had brought a letter of introduction to Williamson, who, because of his long association with the Sioux, was known to have acquired a wide knowledge of their customs. According to Heilbron, Williamson gave the artist the benefit of his experience, even making numerous notations and corrections in his own handwriting in the original Mayer diary.

The artist was introduced to Little Crow as the "friend of Captain Eastman, U.S.A.," which, Mayer noted, "was evidently a recommendation to his regard." Many years later he described his first impression of Little Crow:

The Chief is a man of some 45 years and of a very determined and ambitious nature, but withal exceedingly gentle and dignified in his deportment. His face is intelligent when conversing and his bearing that of one accustomed to command.

(In the original version, as cited in Heilbron's account, Mayer had noted that Little Crow's bearing was that "of a gentleman." The Indian wars evidently had caused some change in attitude, or at least syntax.) Mayer continued his account of Little Crow:

He declined sitting to me until he was dressed in a manner more becoming to his rank, he being then clothed in nature's garb, with the exception of his breechcloth. The recent death of a favorite son was the reason he assigned for the negligent appearance at other times.

On June 30, treaty commissioners Luke Lea, United States commissioner of Indian affairs, and Governor Ramsey and their small company of white men arrived on board the Excelsior at the site of Traverse des Sioux, "on a lovely prairie which rises gently from the Minnesota river." The site was a short distance north of present-day St. Peter. Almost immediately on July 5, Mayer rendezvoused with Little Crow, who now was splendidly fitted out in his chieftain's attire. Mayer described the situation in his 1897 journal with full attention to colorful details:

Little Crow [being] attired in state, fulfills his promise to me. It was the oddest studio I ever worked in, seated in the prairie in the full sunlight, this savage chief opposite to me and his companions lying in a circle around watching the gradual development of the resemblance, which they pronounced 'Washtay' Good!

The day was clear and bracing and the spot where we sat was the highest point of the prairie, and commanded a fine view of the surrounding country, through winding river, the distance hills studded with groves, the Indian village with its struggling line of teepees and the busy camp around us. The headdress of my sitter was peculiarly rich; tiara or diadem garnished with porcupine and ribbon work rested on his forehead, and a profusion of weasel tails, which are of a snowy whiteness tipped with black, fell from it to his back and shoulders. Two small wooden horns emerged on either side from this mass of white; and ribbons and a singular ornament of strings of buckskin, tied in knots and colored gaily, descended in numbers from this headdress and fell over his broad back and shoulders.

The other portion of his dress partook too much of the character of an imitation of our own costume to be harmoniously appropriate.

The pipe he held was a rich one and the stem handsomely ornamented. The colors

THE SECOND PORTRAIT of an Indian that Mayer painted in 1895 was this one of "The Male Raven," a Sisseton chief whom the artist also sketched at Traverse des Sioux in 1851. The original is in the Washington County Museum of Fine Arts, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Heilbron, With Pen and Pencil, 100n.

Heilbron, With Pen and Pencil, 125. Mayer Journal (1897), in Museum of Natural History, New York. The description of Little Crow is from the latter source. It differs in minor ways from the original journal.

Heilbron, With Pen and Pencil, 148.
AN OIL SKETCH of the signing of the treaty of Traverse des Sioux on July 23, 1851, was painted by Mayer in 1885 as part of his effort to obtain a commission to do a large mural of the subject for the Minnesota State Capitol. He was not able to obtain the commission and sold this sketch to the Minnesota Historical Society, which still owns it. The Millet painting in the present Capitol was based on Mayer's work.

of the breech cloth, etc. vary with the skin of which they are made, its natural coloring being retained, or they are colored of various (tones)
white is a favorite and tan an exceedingly neat effect combined with the copper coloring of their skin.26

Mayer produced numerous drawings at the treaty sites and also wrote accounts of the treaty sessions beginning on July 18 and of the actual treaty signing on July 23 at Traverse des Sioux and on August 5 at Mendota. Of his momentous experience as a youthful eastern gentleman witnessing an important event in the pioneering West, he summarized:

I shall long remember with pleasure my residence among the two thousand assembled at Traverse des Sioux. Every day produced some novelty and enabled me to fill my sketch-book with many beautiful and interesting hints of savage life and appearance.

The greatest variety of picturesque subjects rendered a choice difficult, and, for the first time in my life, I was nigh to be surfeited with the picturesque. Beside what my pen and pencil have preserved, my memory will long retain a [spirit] which neither can represent. The delay which

Mayer was badly mistaken in his assumption that his Indian sketches and journal would provide him with an extensive source of highly marketable artistic material. If he had set to work on a book immediately, he might have achieved a measure of fame and fortune in the 1850s. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, for example, published his A Song of Hiawatha in 1855, having been inspired by the very book which contained two of Mayer's Minnesota
sketches in its final edition — Henry Rowe Schoolcraft's *History and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States* (1851-1857). But Mayer did delay, largely in the interest of achieving sufficient skill as a painter to justify his aim. By the time he had accomplished this his plans of being an artist of Indian subjects and lore were placed in serious jeopardy by historical events.

Chief among them were the Civil War and the uprising of 1862 in Minnesota of Mayer's "contented" Dakota, who possessed "great kindliness of manner." Because of the Minnesota Indian war, led by Little Crow, and thirty years of Plains Indian warfare that followed, the red man fell out of favor in the organs of public opinion and the hearts of the American people. It mattered not that the corrupt treaty system and other abuses of manifest destiny had provoked the Indians into warfare. Just when Mayer felt he had achieved the aesthetic competence to justify his projected portraits and pictures of the peaceful, domesticated, and dignified Indian, there was no longer a market for such subjects. Three oils and six water colors were all that Mayer produced in this vein from the time he returned from Minnesota in the fall of 1851 to the time he left for Paris in the fall of 1862. Instead, throughout the early 1850s he concentrated on doing crayon portraits of Baltimoreans for which he found a ready demand. At the same time he furthered his training by taking painting instructions from Ernst Fischer, a German artist from Dresden.

Of the water colors mentioned above, two were for Schoolcraft's book. These were published in 1857 with no reference to Mayer as the artist. Both were of subjects suggested by Schoolcraft, "The Feast of Mondawin," or "Indian Thanksgiving," and "Thunderbird Dance." Apparently Mayer was dissatisfied with the version of the dance which appeared in the book, as he made several studies of it. The best of these was never sold in his lifetime. The following year (1858) he painted, exhibited and sold his first successful cabinet oils of genre subjects. But Mayer still had not started an oil painting of Indian subject matter up to the eve of the Civil War.

By then it was too late for any extensive popular acceptance.

Perhaps it was because of Mayer's chagrin at this lost opportunity that his friend, sculptor William S. Rinehart, drew a "tomb" to Mayer's memory in the artist's sketchbook in 1868 while visiting him in Paris. It depicts Mayer as a jester-artist, propped against a tombstone on which is inscribed:

**FM.**

**GOOD INTENTIONS**

**LOST OPPORTUNITY**

**DIED OF INDECISION**

1868

In Paris in 1864 Mayer finally received a commission from S. B. Caldwell to paint "Indian Thanksgiving" for 1,250 francs. "I am now engaged on my 'Indian Thanksgiving,'" he wrote his artist friend, Alfred Jacob Miller, on March 5, 1864. "It is like a new life to work on something to be my own; and I have no higher ambition than to place my name near yours as a painter of Indians, for I think that your Indian pictures are the best of that kind yet produced." The painting was exhibited in Brooklyn, New York, in 1867 but is now unlocated.

Mayer made no further attempts to attain Indian subject commissions until his return to Baltimore from Paris in 1870. Then Mayer began to correspond with two
prominent Minnesotans, Alexander Ramsey and Henry M. Rice, in hope of receiving a commission to do a mural of the treaty of Traverse des Sioux for the Minnesota State Capitol. In his reply of July 7, 1871, Rice called attention to the "deep interest of Ramsey in the project but agreed with the former governor "in the impracticality at this time of raising enough [government money or interest] to warrant success."33

In 1885, when Indian wars in the West were winding down and after efforts had failed to get the Minnesota legislature to agree to a large-scale painting, a committee of the Minnesota Historical Society asked Mayer to do a preliminary oil sketch for the proposed mural of the Traverse des Sioux signing. He sent the sketch to the society in January, 1886, but the committee was unable to procure funds for the larger picture. The discouraged Mayer sold the sketch for $200 to the society, which still owns it. After the turn of the century and after Mayer's death in 1899, the treaty was selected as one of the subjects to be included among decorations for the new State Capitol. Architect Cass Gilbert commissioned Frank D. Millet to paint the picture. At Gilbert's suggestion, Millet followed the general design of Mayer's sketch in painting the mural, which now is one of the large works on the walls of the governor's reception room.34

In 1895, Mayer's friend, C. M. Mathews, commissioned him to do two Indian portraits, one of which is the Little Crow oil just purchased by the Minnesota Historical Society. After passing out of Mathews' hands, the painting was acquired by Marion B. Hopkins, who was born in West River, Maryland, only five years before the painting was executed. Hopkins, a graduate of Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore in 1912, received his doctorate in philosophy there in 1915. First employed as city chemist of Baltimore from 1916 to 1920, Hopkins subsequently became a worldwide chemical co-ordinator for the Exxon Corporation. Though his main residence while with Exxon was in Elizabeth, New Jersey, he also maintained a home in Drayden, Maryland. In what manner the painting transferred from Mathews to Hopkins is not known, but it has been suggested that Hopkins purchased the picture because he was "fond of picking up things at house sales."35 Hopkins kept the Little Crow painting until a few years before his death on April 9, 1976, when it passed into the hands of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Palingren of Essex, New Jersey. The society acquired it through the Berry-Hill Galleries, Inc., in New York.

In 1897, Mayer painted one more oil of Indian lore called "The Marching Forest." This, too, is now owned by the Minnesota Historical Society.

Mayer's last commission came from art collector Henry Walters of Baltimore, son of his old friend, William Walters, who had been a generous patron of Alfred Miller's. Walters not only gave Mayer a chance to do what he had long wanted to — produce a series of water colors based on his 1851 sketches — but he also commissioned the artist to revise his journal and accompanying sketchbooks. He completed the latter in 1897, at which time he began the water colors. Mayer managed to complete less than half of the sixty-three he planned. They are now owned by Goucher College, Baltimore. Unfortunately, the water colors are not of Mayer's usual caliber, nor that of Miller, for he undertook the fulfillment of his life's wish after his health had begun to fail and virtually as his dying act. On June 1, 1899, he picked up his brush for the last time and painted water color no. 30, "The Marching Forest," which he barely finished. Nearly two months later, on July 28, 1899, he died of dropsy at age seventy-two.36

Shortly after Mayer's death, his original diary and sketchbooks were acquired by a famous collector, Edward E. Ayer, and they are now in the Ayer Collection of the Newberry Library, Chicago. The transcript of the diary that Mayer made for Walters — more complete than the Newberry's version — was presented in 1936 to the American Museum of Natural History in New York. An "Album" owned by the New York Public Library contains numerous drawings that are more finished than those in Newberry's sketchbooks. One of them is a forerunner of the oil portrait of Little Crow.37

Because Mayer's Indian paintings are a rarity today, the Minnesota Historical Society is indeed fortunate to have such fine examples of this phase of the work of an excellent but still largely unknown and unheralded artist. And it is gratifying that the political climate is presently such as to make the nature of his depiction of Indian life infinitely more acceptable than it was a century ago.

33Rice to Mayer, July 7, 1871, Mayer Papers, in Minnesota Historical Society.
34Heilbron, With Pen and Pencil, 14-20; Mayer's Account Book, Baltimore Museum of Art.