

# A Publishing Project to Remember

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**A handsome set of three** bound volumes containing biographies and some 120 large, richly colored portraits of American Indians from the 1820s and 1830s is a stellar holding in the MHS Library. Thomas L. McKenney's and James Hall's *The History of the Indian Tribes of North America: with biographical sketches and anecdotes of the principal chiefs*. . . has a complicated history that will fascinate collectors, history buffs, and art viewers alike.

Shown here is a 15" x 20" hand-colored lithograph of Hoowanneka, or Little Elk, a Winnebago who "appeared in the costume in which he presented himself before the President of the United States, at Washington, in 1824." Described as a man with "some reputation as a speaker," he was "among the first who became convinced that his nation had been seduced by specious promises" into fighting for the British in the War of 1812.

The images reproduced in the volumes are descended from oil portraits of prominent Indian leaders who were brought to Washington, D. C., to sign treaties around the time of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. The originals were made for the first museum in the nation's capital, the Archives of the American Indian, at the behest of McKenney, the first head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

McKenney worried that American Indians would become an extinct race because of federal policies. Accordingly, he commissioned well-known Washington artist Charles Bird King to paint life portraits and copy another 80 original watercolor portraits made by James Otto Lewis, who had attended treaty signings in the Midwest in the 1820s. Most of the original paintings burned in the Smithsonian fire of 1865, but copies of the priceless early images survive in printed form in McKenney's books.

Most likely McKenney's idea for a lavish publishing project began taking shape in 1830 after he was fired from his government job by Indian-fighting President Andrew Jackson. McKenney, who became a newspaper

publisher in Philadelphia, worried that Jackson would deny him access to the King portraits in the museum and hired New York artist Henry Inman to paint copies of them. He also enlisted James Hall, a jurist and author from Ohio, to write biographies to accompany each portrait. Hall based his long introductory essay and biographical sketches, which range from one paragraph to 20 pages in length, on material supplied mostly by McKenney. (Hall, it would turn out, also provided crucial financial support to complete the extravagant publication project.)

McKenney next selected a printer, Samuel F. Bradford, and a lithography company, Cephias G. Childs. Albert Newsom was chosen to translate Inman's copies to lithographic printing stones.

The publication history of McKenney and Hall's magnum opus proved complicated, as well. Bradford quickly went bankrupt, but his successor, Edward Biddle, managed to publish the first edition of the first volume in 1837 (although the title page reads 1836). This was sold to subscribers in parts, six biographies and six portraits at a time. Over the next 15 years, three more publishers would be involved, each of which printed its own title pages for the three volumes. At least five lithography companies and partnerships were also involved.

The Minnesota Historical Society library is fortunate to own two complete folio sets of McKenney and Hall's *History of the Indian Tribes*. Its imprints include the original publisher, Biddle, and another version from Campbell and Burns of London. In addition MHS also owns five oil portraits painted by Henry Inman from the Charles Bird King oils, some of which were copies of Lewis's watercolors. □

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