

The LIFE and TIMES of OLAF C. SELTZER, 1877 to 1957

MONTANA HERITAGE SERIES

NUMBER TEN



METICULOUS MONTANA FRONTIER ARTIST

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"JERK LINE FREIGHTER". Oil. One of the few Seltzer prints in existence. All rights reserved by General Mills, Inc.

OLAF CARL SELTZER, 1877-1957

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A catalogue of the largest one-man Seltzer show ever assembled, Historical Society of Montana, Summer, 1960.

HERITAGE SERIES, NUMBER TEN

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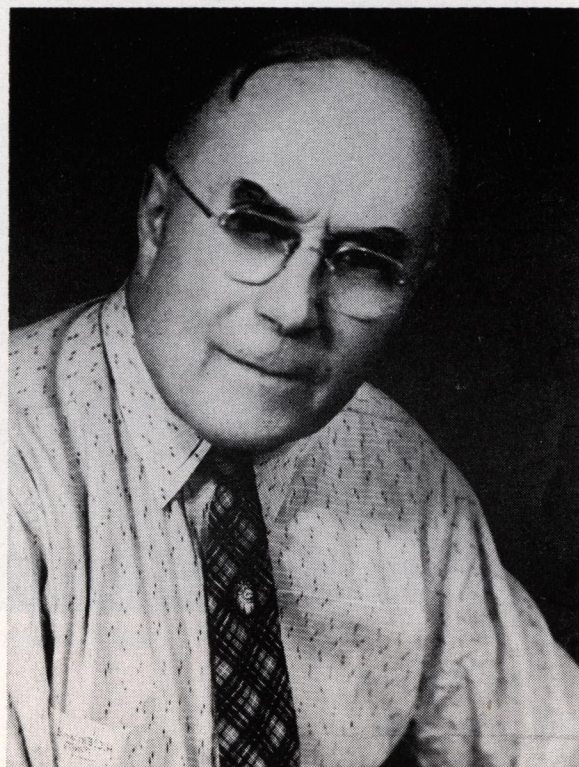
"FIRST MEETING OF MASONS IN MONTANA TERRITORY, 1862," massive oil mural presented to Helena Lodge No. Three by Jesse Stem Stoner, now in Masonic Library, Helena. For more details see footnote 13, page 19.

His paintings stand as epic scenes, reconstructed with the eye of the historian . . . His colors are true to the clear air of the high country . . . This was one of the West's great artists.

JAMES T. FORREST, Director
Gilcrease Institute of History and Art
Tulsa, Oklahoma

2. "THE BRAND INSPECTORS". Oil painting owned by Carl C. Seltzer of Great Falls.





O. C. SELTZER: METICULOUS MASTER OF WESTERN ART

by Michael Stephen Kennedy



87. "PEACE PIPE". Oil. Owned by Chester McNair, Great Falls, Mont.

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During the past half century this brilliant Danish draftsman lived in the shadow of his friend, the Montana cowboy artist, Charles M. Russell; now his true talent begins to emerge . . .

In the final decade of the 19th Century there arrived in the raw but booming Montana town of Great Falls, a young Danish emigrant of prepossessing mein and rather singular purpose. During the next twenty-eight years he studied, sketched and prepared himself for the ultimate production of one of the most prolific of all western art and illustrative collections. For the final thirty-seven years he devoted his full time and talent to art.¹ Yet, even today, Olaf Carl Seltzer is relatively unhonored and unknown—except to a limited coterie of western art collectors and admirers—and those few who are intimately familiar with the huge, excellent collection at The Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art at Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Retrospectively, the Historical Society of Montana is now attempting to generate some of the honor and recognition long denied this dedicated, able artist. Olaf Seltzer's largest one-man show is now taking place in two major galleries of the State Museum at Helena. It is regrettable that it comes almost three years after his death. Yet, tens of thousands of persons from all points of the compass will see this exciting display of 144 art works during the months of June and July, 1960.

We also honor Seltzer on the cover of this publication, and by many reproductions of his work here, as well. Those privileged to see this major showing will be surprised and impressed, we are quite certain, no matter what their tastes or interests may be.

James Taylor Forrest, Executive Director of The Gilcrease Institute, in one of the keenest critiques on the work of O. C. Seltzer, has stated:

"His paintings stand as epic scenes, reconstructed with the eye of the historian. The message is always straightforward, his colors true to nature. Seltzer was one of the best draftsmen to work in the West at any time, although this draftsmanship has led some critics to claim a stiffness. Actually this is not so; he simply would not distort action or anatomy in order to achieve dramatic effect. His colors are generally true to nature—although to viewers not accustomed to the clear vaporless air of the high country his palette seems overly strong. This is especially true of his watercolors; yet they are gems of perfection in detail and in color harmony. Perhaps only future generations can tell accurately, but it would appear that this is one of the West's great artists."²

¹ It was typical of Olaf Seltzer, when the manpower shortage became acute during World War II, that he returned to his old trade as a machinist at Malmstrom Air Force Base. Yet, despite his age, he continued to work at his easel and he also taught a manual training course, also related to the war effort, at Great Falls High School from 1943 to 1945.



73. "THE JERKEY". Oil. Owned by Dr. E. D. Hitchcock, Great Falls, Mont.

As a top-flight portrayer of the western scene, Seltzer's name must certainly be bracketed with a growing and all-encompassing list of some 50 artists, the best known of these, approximately, being: Bodmer, Borein, Cary, Catlin, John Clymer, Eggenhoffer, Farny, Frenzeny, Stan Galli, Hansen, Hays, Peter Hurd, Will James, W. H. Jackson, Frank Tenney Johnson, Tom Lea, Lindneux, Leigh, Lion, Mathews, Alfred Jacob Miller, Mollhausen, Mulvany, Paxson, Remington, Rogers, Russell, Santee, Schreyvogel, Sharp, J. H. Smith, Sohon, Stanley, Von Schmitt, Henry Worrall and Zogbaum. These men cover the span of major painters and illustrators associated most illustriously and intimately with portraying the West, past and present.

From the standpoint of virtuosity, range of subject matter, vitality, force, authenticity, and great productivity, Olaf Seltzer is entitled to stand in the front rank with the greatest of these—my own "Big Four"—Catlin, Miller, Remington and Russell. His professional productivity was longer than any of them—a decade longer than Remington and several years more than Russell. All four have been widely publicized and their work reproduced in millions of popular and widely-known editions. All four have received full-length book treatment, many of them definitive works, concerning their life and art. Seltzer does not have a single book about his life or art—either critical or favorable. For this reason he is comparatively unknown and unsung, not only among laymen, but among too many of the authorities and "experts" as well. Time perhaps may alter some of this—as it did with Alfred Jacob Miller, who waited a century to be "discovered"—but it is doubtful. The "Big Four" were all dynamically glamorous personalities. Seltzer was an introvert, who

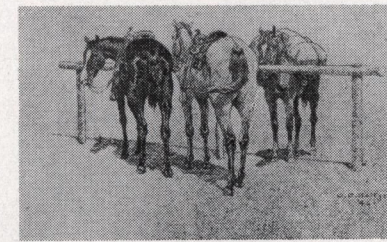
² This and other material utilized either as direct quotes or with the author's paraphrasing, appeared originally in *The American Scene*, excellent quarterly publication of the Gilcrease Institute in Vol. 2, No. 2, Summer, 1959. We are indebted to the research and writing of James T. Forrest, the loan of original art, photographs and other courtesies extended by Mr. Forrest and his splendid staff at Gilcrease.

backed away from publicity, generally from people, and always from self-aggrandizement. Because he lived all of his western life in the tall shadow of Charles M. Russell—in the same town and contemporaneously—it was almost as if he lived and painted in another place and time, so oblivious were publicity sources, generally to his art.³

Even a microscopic examination of all known facets fails to reveal any other underlying reason for Seltzer's work being so overtly disregarded, except the fact that Charles M. Russell completely overpowered and dominated Seltzer's long and productive life as an artist. The blame is neither Russell's nor Seltzer's. Neither man made it so, or wished it to be that way. It was simply compounded by the chemistry of circumstances and was beyond the control of either. There is no evidence to indicate that Russell was ever much aware of this; and until CMR's death, Seltzer apparently was not too much troubled by the fact, although he was vitally aware of it. Olaf probably thought everything would change when the Montana Master died, but it did not change in 1926, nor has it to date.⁴



12.



57.

This artist was born at Copenhagen, Denmark, on August 25, 1877, son of Carl and Julia (Neilsen) Seltzer, both natives of that city. His father was a cigar maker. Until he was fourteen, Olaf attended the public schools of Copenhagen. From childhood he showed marked ability in draftsmanship and design, and when only 12 or 13 years of age he was admitted (apparently as a special student) to the Technical Institute of Copenhagen, where his associates were all men and women years older than himself.

Meanwhile, his father had died. A sister of his mother, who had emigrated to the United States and was living at Great Falls, Montana, where her husband worked at the old silver smelter, urged them to come West. Julia Seltzer readily decided to join these relatives and took ship for the United States, accompanied by son Olaf who was then approximately 14 years old.

³ The *Great Falls Tribune*, July 11, 1923, states: "... had it not been for the shutdown in the Great Northern car shops two years ago, he feels that he would still be a machine foreman instead of an artist of growing reputation. Having painted in his spare time since boyhood, he turned seriously to painting for a livelihood when he found himself temporarily out of employment. Although he can return to the ... railroad at any time, the artist has become so absorbed in his now full-time occupation of putting Montana and the spirit of the west on canvas that he does not consider a resumption of his former work." The article goes on to state that Seltzer and Russell spent a number of weeks together the previous summer in Glacier Park, with Seltzer making a number of field sketches for work he is now finishing; also that Brown and Bigelow (of St. Paul) had made the artist an offer for reproducing his work as art reprints "particularly attractive to easterners ... since tourist travel has become the vogue."

⁴ "Seltzer and Russell worked side by side for many years as a team. Seltzer spent his spare hours in Russell's studio, or together they went out into the hills to study nature and make their sketches close to the beautiful outdoor scenery that later Seltzer was to portray, exclusively, in his paintings. The two men posed for each other, exchanged ideas and suggestions, and gained immeasurably through mutual association. Beginning in 1921, Seltzer worked entirely on his own, and since that time has devoted himself almost exclusively to his painting. Russell, who once said that Seltzer was one of the two best watercolor artists in the world, died in 1926."—*Great Falls Tribune*, Oct. 1, 1937.



68.



78.



69.

Arriving on the Atlantic seaboard, the new settlers traveled the great distance west to the newly admitted State of Montana (1889) and reached Great Falls without untoward incident. This was in 1892. That year and the next, Olaf found a romantic dream of adventure had already come true when he was employed by several horse outfits; among them the large Lobenheimer-Hartman Company who used the 4, and H.H. brands, respectively. He also rode for the Hanson outfit whose brands were circle L and diamond F. It is interesting to note that Seltzer started his western experience working for horse outfits, while Charles M. Russell, although he always worked with horses as a wrangler and nighthawk, never worked with a horse outfit (he herded sheep first, and then spent most of his time, for a dozen years, with cowmen and cattle outfits).

On October 6, 1893, Olaf Seltzer went to work as an apprentice machinist in the Great Northern Railroad shops at Great Falls. After serving the usual apprenticeship, he became a locomotive and railway repairman. It is as inexplicable why he should change jobs here as the fact that he worked diligently as a machinist for the next 28 years, although his great passion was for art. Of course, his love for creativity led him to continue some art efforts in his spare time. He did not seriously attempt painting, however, either in water color or oils, until after the spring of 1897, when he met Charles Marion Russell.⁵ From that time until his death in 1926, Russell was a friend of Seltzer's (although it is unfortunate that he cast such a huge shadow).

Russell did not fancy himself as qualified to teach, nor did he like to teach, but he was willing to make such efforts because he liked the serious immigrant boy who showed such marked aptitude as a draftsman. This intimate association continued into the early 1900's. Whenever the opportunity permitted, young Seltzer was to be seen in the company of Charles Russell. After a few more years of careful observation of the Master, as well as many personal experiments conducted by the tedious method of trial and error, Seltzer attempted his first full-scale water colors and oils, gaining in confidence as he mastered the new mediums and as he found how well his skill as a draftsman served him. This was about the time of Seltzer's marriage at Helena in June, 1903. Russell's advice, according to those who know, was continuously valuable. The two artists remained closely associated—more so than is commonly believed—until 1921, after which C.M.R.'s presence in Great Falls became less frequent because of his declining health. They remained firm friends until the death of Charles Russell in 1926.

Meanwhile, Seltzer was gaining self confidence (and some customers) and approaching the near-perfection in detail and technique that is the hallmark of his later canvases. He researched and read constantly in the Great Falls public library to be certain that his subjects benefitted from authentic detail and

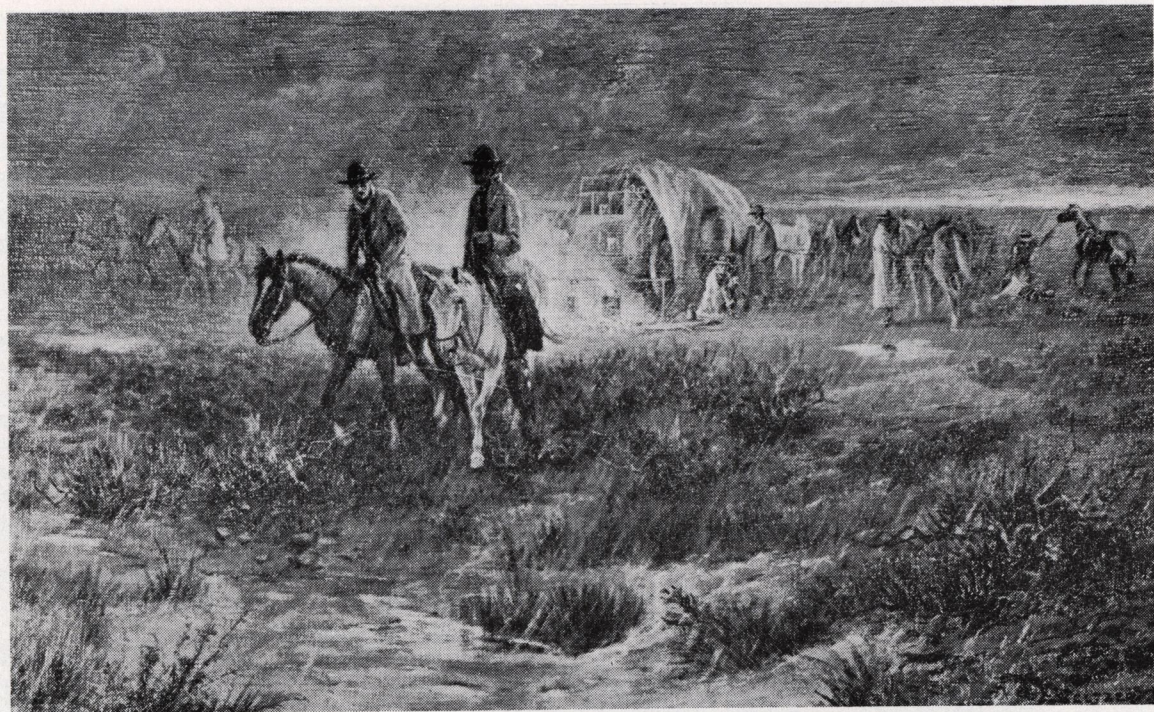
⁵ According to James Forrest, "In 1897, Seltzer rode over the narrow gage rail line from Great Falls to Lethbridge, Alberta, where he was encouraged by Fred Downer, who had admired his sketches, to try painting in oils. A kit of paints and material was in time shipped up the line from Great Falls and Olaf made his first oil painting—an Indian war party on the trail in the Sun River Valley. From this first effort, Seltzer proved to be at home in oils as well as in watercolors; in all he was to paint nearly 2,500 paintings during his lifetime."



19. "HERALD OF THE ROBE TRADE". Oil. Owned by Gilcrease Institute of History and Art, Tulsa, Okla.



122. "MOVING CAMP". Oil. Owned by Mrs. Verne Casey, Great Falls, Mont.



historical fact. Yet many of these paintings were not western subjects. They were widely diversified: Family paintings of his favorite cat and dog, scenes of Egypt and the Continent, some modern, some from the far centuries of the remote past took form under his brush.

One might surmise that this was a subconscious effort to get away from the shadow of Russell. When there was a mass lay-off of workers in the Great Northern car repair shops in 1921, Seltzer finally had no choice but to turn to his long-hidden talents and to try and make a competitive living selling his art. He was amazed—and pleased—that this began to prove possible. And so, about 1921 or 1922, as his work was finally attracting some favorable comment in local circles⁶ and some commissions were

⁶ Forrest in *The American Scene*, Vol. 2, No. 2: "In a letter to a patron Seltzer said 'I worked particularly hard on the Missionary and the Ursuline Nun and I am glad I did not fail. I am at this time working on the Pioneer Mother, and when I tell you I am sweating blood, I am putting it mildly, for I am surely not a painter of the She-kind of folks.'"



56. This oil painting with a European setting, owned by Richard Flood, is typical of the surprising number of non-western scenes produced by Seltzer. One might conjecture that in depicting such far-away scenes, the Danish artist was subconsciously moving away from the large shadow of C. M. Russell. In truth, however, these were probably the results of his European heritage.

- ← 17. "A WET MORNING ON THE CIRCLE". Oil.
Owned by Gilcrease Institute of History and Art, Tulsa, Okla.

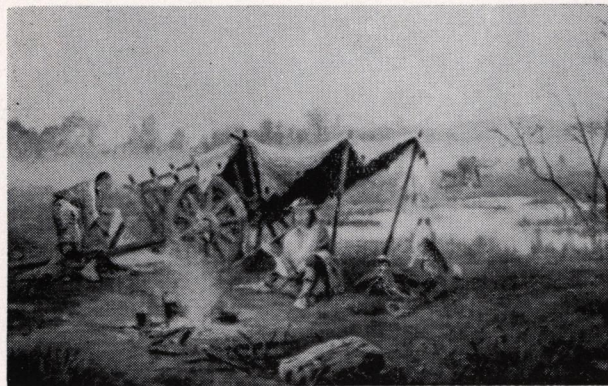
directed to him, this self-taught artist who had never studied in a school of art, finally retired as a machinist to devote full time to painting. In the same year, because of the growing demand and public popularity of western canvases, Mr. Seltzer decided to concentrate his attention on the local historic scene, so long pre-empted by Russell.

During the years 1926-27, Seltzer lived in New York, where the opportunity to study the great paintings displayed in the metropolitan galleries had a beneficial effect on his own work. Dr. Phillip Cole, of Tarrytown, New York (whose father had been a Helena, Montana, physician) who had acquired a sizeable fortune through ownership of tire valve patents at a time when the automobile was beginning to capture the nation's imagination, then owned an amazing assortment of Western Americana, including the largest private Russell collection—and one of the finest of Remington's—in existence. Cole became passionately interested in Seltzer's art⁷ and commissioned him to execute, eventually, approximately 275 paintings. Amelia Earhart and her husband, George Palmer Putnam, also learned of Seltzer's skill. Among other things they had him execute designs for the envelopes to be carried on her round-the-world flight. Two dozen of these were commissioned, including one for the President of the U. S. and another for the Postmaster General. One of these was a figure of Mercury, god of speed, atop a globe and closely pursuing a symbolic aircraft. This unusual Seltzer is in the present exhibition at Helena.

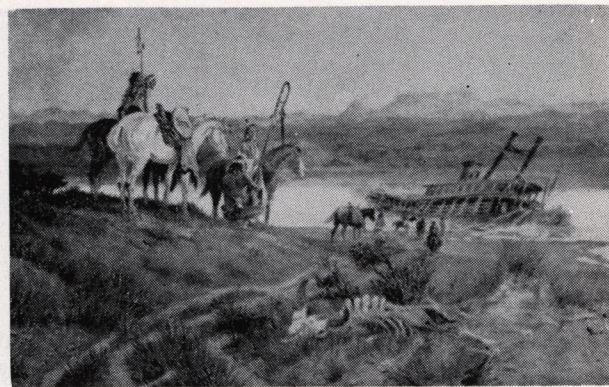
Many other commissions followed from the profitable market for the artist's work which then opened to him in New York. One of these was a drawing for the New York *Herald-Tribune* to celebrate a horse show in Madison Square Garden. This work elicited considerable favorable comment among eastern horse lovers.

Seltzer returned in 1927 and continued to make his home in Great Falls. He made numerous trips to New York and other

⁷ One of the oddities in the great Gilcrease collections and which placed a physical strain on the artist's eyes from which he never quite recovered, were miniatures commissioned by Dr. Cole. There were more than 100 of these for each of which Cole wrote a detailed description. All depicted important events in Western history. Of these, James Forrest says: "Unfortunately, Seltzer's vision was weakened by this work and during his later years he could paint only short periods of time during the morning hours. The miniatures (only 5x6 inches) are so sharp and clear that they can be photographically enlarged three times their size and still be in good detail." They include such scenes as the Lewis and Clark expedition, Chief Joseph's surrender, Buffalo Bill's duel with Yellow Hand, Yellowstone Kelley on the trail in 1869, Portugee Phillip's spectacular Christmas ride, Roadagent's hideout, Sacajawea, Trumpeter Martin bringing the first message to Custer, the stabbing of Crazy Horse, Fort McKenzie massacre, the duel between Kit Carson and Capt. Shuman, John Colter's escape from the Blackfeet, and many more of equal drama and historic import—a monumental contribution to the graphic arts of the Old West.



23. "THE RED RIVER CART". Oil. Owned by Gilcrease Institute, Tulsa, Okla.



88. "WRECK OF THE CHIPPEWA". Oil. Owned by Chester McNair, Great Falls, Mont.

eastern cities, however, after that time and did much work for eastern buyers, particularly Dr. Cole.⁸ His Great Falls studio finally had become somewhat familiar to some western art lovers.

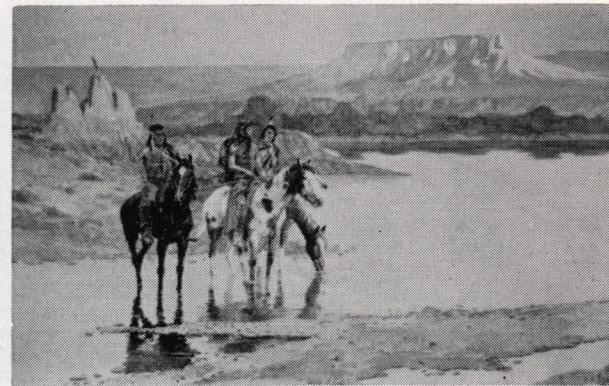
According to the *Encyclopedia of Northwest Biography*: "Mr. Seltzer's work is distinguished by his mastery of line, his pleasing attention to detail and inherent rectitude of taste as a colorist. His fine draftsmanship qualified him to achieve the jewel-like perfection of the miniature and many of his early canvases were on a small scale, often embodying an Oriental or Continental background, painted in with infinite detail. Much of this fine work had to be done under a powerful glass. As a result Mr. Seltzer's eyes suffered, and when his western canvases began to achieve their great popularity he abandoned his work on a smaller scale. It is as an artist of the West that he is best known, and there is hardly a State in the Union that has not at least one Seltzer western. O. C. Seltzer, as he signs his numerous canvases, came to Montana not too late to meet many of the old range riders and pioneers, to hear their stories and to capture many of the scenes of the passing

⁸ He painted an outstanding Transportation Series which included the always present Indian travois, the Red River cart, a jerk-line outfit, several versions of the stagecoach, wagons, early locomotives and trains, ox-teams and ox-carts, various river craft including the Missouri River "Smoke Boat".

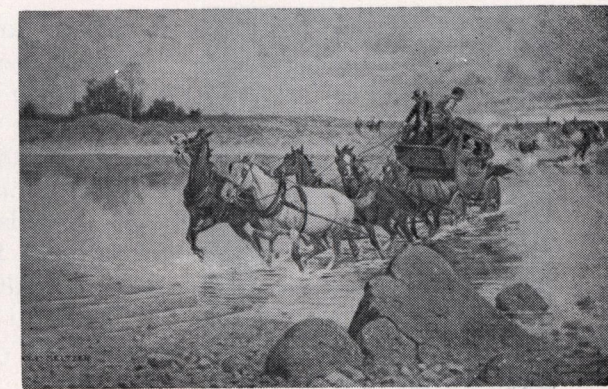
50. "THE MEDICINE MAN". Oil. Owned by the Great Falls Clinic.



46. Indians at Waterhole, 1911 watercolor, owned by Ruby F. Frost, Seattle.



28. "A DANGEROUS GRIZZLY." 1940 oil, owned by Kermit E. Rasmussen, Harlem, Mont.



3. "ATTACK AT THE FORD". Oil (1950). Owned by Carl C. Seltzer of Great Falls, son of the artist.

range country. His association with Russell naturally affected his work. He did not copy Russell, but he was of course decidedly influenced as to style by his close association with him . . . In his day, Russell was called a follower of Remington. In turn, Seltzer has followed a similar pattern, but his canvases have a distinctive quality that is neither Remington nor Russell, but his own. He is without doubt the foremost artist of the so-called Russell school."

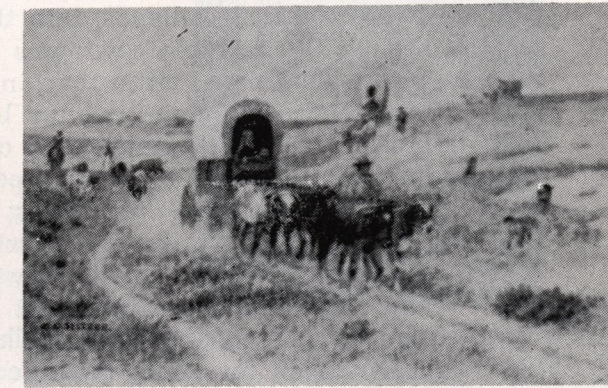
To understand Seltzer's inspiration and background for his later paintings one must understand the vital impact of the time and place, particularly during his first 20 years' residence in Great Falls.

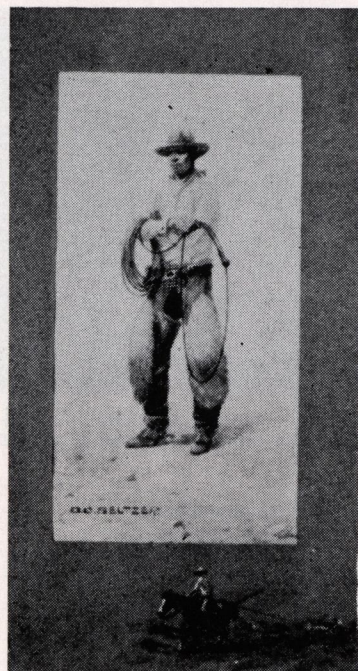
Montana had burst from a drama-packed Territorial period of gold rushes, Indian wars and great cattle drives, into colorful Statehood, only three years previous to Seltzer's 1892 arrival in Great Falls. The lively town itself had been platted from a buffalo prairie just a decade earlier by the ambitious sheepman, Paris Gibson; and it had then (in 1892) been incorporated but four years, with Gibson serving the rawboned citizenry as Mayor. Cattlemen, who dominated the surrounding area, were amazed at the temerity of this "sheepherder."

16. "THE PASSPORT", oil painting depicting the Crees crossing the Montana-Canadian border, owned by the Gilcrease Institute.



110. "THE PIONEERS", watercolor depiction of Mrs. Jack Toole's family crossing the prairie, owned by the Jack Toole Family, Shelby, Mont.





102. "THE COWPUNCHER". Watercolor. Owned by the Great Falls National Bank.

Nearby Fort Shaw, built to protect the early settlers against the marauding Blackfeet, was abandoned as a military post in 1892. And the still-shiny tracks and trains of Jim Hill's Great Northern Railroad (which had reached Great Falls and hurriedly pushed on to Helena and Butte) finally had crossed the new State, roaring Westward. The gold spike of the other transcontinental railway, the Northern Pacific, had been driven with great hoopla at Gold Creek less than nine years before; and the last of the vast herds of wild buffalo were only exterminated in 1884. (But the young artist would see their endless bones dotting the prairies for many years thereafter).

Officially, the freewheeling days of the Cattlemen's open-range bonanza had ended with the hard winter of 1886-87. But the impressionable Danish youth, handling his horseherds in 1892-3, knew that a man could ride hell-bent-for-leather all summer long seeing cattle everywhere he went as he circled the area from the Sun River range to Dupuyer, to the Shonkin, across the wildness of the Missouri badlands, into the virgin Judith Basin and back through the rawhide cowtowns of Ubet, Geyser, Spion Kop and Belt—seeing more cattle than in all of Europe. The barbed wire fences were still few and far between. Large encampments of Indians often frequented the outskirts of Great Falls. Sometimes they were abject and poverty-ridden, like the itinerant bands of Chippewa-Cree Metis; but occasionally the still-proud Blackfeet, Gros Ventres and Assiniboine also moved their spirited pony herds near the smelter town. It was four years after he became a Montana resident that Seltzer read of portions of the huge Blackfeet and Fort Belknap Indian Reservations being thrown open for white homesteader's settlement.



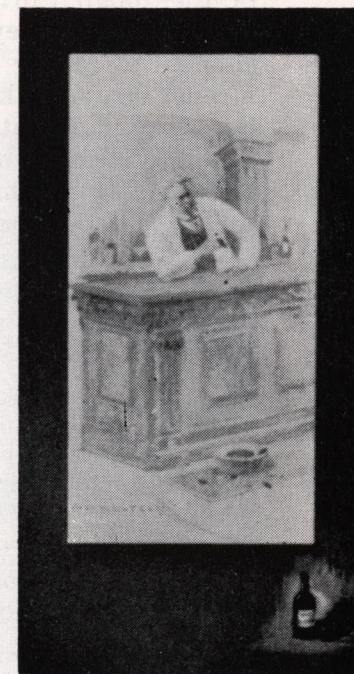
77. "THE SHEPHERDER". Watercolor. Owned by Dr. E. D. Hitchcock, Great Falls, Mont.

One did not have to be an immigrant or an eastern pilgrim to appreciate the drama of countless frontier incidents that Olaf Seltzer heard by word of mouth or read avidly in the pages of the local paper. Typical was the spate of story stuff, for example, of the late-booming mining camps of Landusky and Zortman in the Little Rockies to the north. They were re-enacting, for a later audience, most of the brashness, bloodshed and color of Bannack, Virginia City and Last Chance Gulch some 25 years earlier. In August, 1893, after Olaf had left his cowboy life to work as an apprentice machinist in the G. N. railroad shops, he read of the discovery by Landusky and Orman of the rich August Mine.

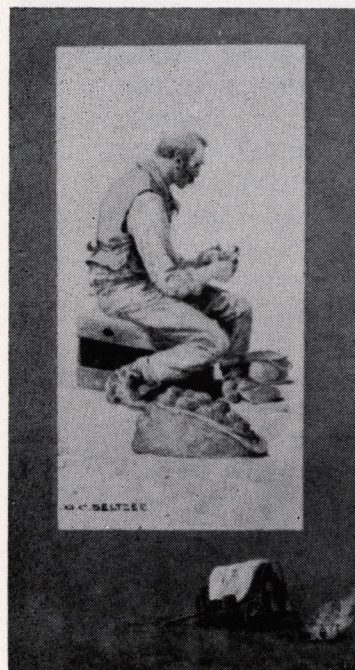
Powell "Pike" Landusky, for whom the town near the mine was named, was colorful enough for any artist's canvas; a violent product of a violent time. He gained his nickname in tough Alder Gulch during the 1860 gold strike because he boasted that he "came from Pike County, Missouri, by God." He backed it up with big fists, and a gun if necessary, to gain reputation as one of the toughest rough and tumble fighters in a rawboned region. In 1868 Pike Landusky had given up mining and ridden to the mouth of the Musselshell to trap and trade with the Indians. Captured by a war party, he defiantly beat one of the captors with a frying pan; then whipped off the warrior's breechclout to continue the lashing. The awed Brules withdrew hurriedly, leaving two ponies behind. Later at his post, "Lucky Fort," Pike was shot by a Piegan. His jaw terribly shattered, he simply tore out the loose fragment containing several teeth and threw it away. His maimed face thereafter matched his reputation for frontier fortitude.



103. "THE PROSPECTOR". Watercolor. Owned by the Great Falls National Bank.



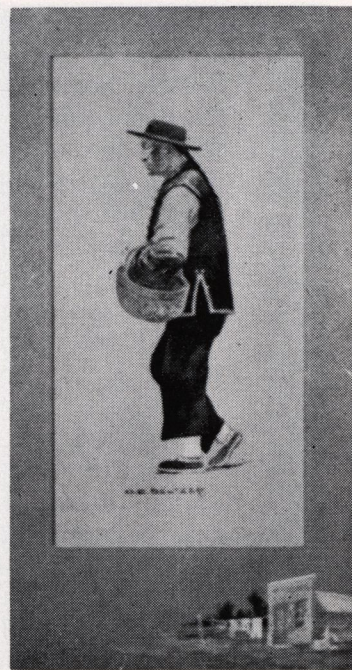
100. "THE SALOON KEEPER". Watercolor. Owned by the Great Falls National Bank.



107. "THE COOK"



101. "THE BLACKSMITH"



106. "THE CHINK"

Owned by the Great Falls National Bank

When Olaf Seltzer read that Bob Orman and Landusky had discovered a rich new gold quartz mine in the Little Rockies, the previous stories Seltzer had heard and the research he had done, told him, too, that this was only a part of the continuing episode. Five miles south of the new August mine was the notorious ranch of the tough Curry Brothers, Harvey—better known as Kid—Johnny and Loney. They matched, notch for notch, the gunslingers of earlier repute. Pike Landusky had built a saloon for a rebel character known only as "Jew Jake," well publicized earlier around Great Falls because of a shooting scrape with a Deputy Sheriff which cost him his leg. Jake added to his lustre thereafter by using a Winchester rifle for a crutch. His saloon was a hang-out for the Curry gang.

In 1894 Johnny and Kid Curry were arrested and placed in the custody of Landusky. Loney, a self-styled lothario, had been making quite a play for one of Pike's stepdaughters, despite his objections. Landusky took advantage of handcuffs to taunt and beat the Curry boys before their release. There was bad blood between them.

Soon thereafter the camp began preparations for a gala Christmas shindig. Johnny Curry lent his new log barn and Loney whipped an orchestra into shape for the dance. A Mason & Hammond organ was hauled in by sled. A stagedriver, known only as "Lousy" had been instructed to buy gallons of oysters. He shocked the epicureans by ordering canned ones out of Minneapolis, instead of luscious fresh ones shipped in on ice.

On the evening of December 27, as the celebration was waning, Kid Curry rode into town and entered Jew Jake's saloon. Only a handful of men were present including Pike, wearing a

heavy, long buffalo robe coat. Without ado, Curry strode over to Landusky, took advantage of the impeding coat, and proceeded to beat him unmercifully. Pike finally got up from the floor, broke free and pulled his gun, but it had a new tight mechanism, whereas the Kid's did not. The Kid calmly blew out Landusky's brains. The Curry gang left the country pronto.

Seven years later, after holding up banks and trains in Wyoming with the Hole-in-the-Wall Gang, Kid Curry held up a Great Northern passenger train at Exeter Siding, west of Malta, and took \$80,000 in legal but unsigned tender. A huge posse chased Curry into the badlands but he escaped and his final activities and end—including his part in Wyoming's Johnson County Cattle War—have been an enigma to writers and historians ever since. As for Johnny, he was eventually killed by a quiet rancher, Jim Winters, who resented intimidation. He and Pike Landusky are buried in the same vicinity. The great G. N. train robbery is ably depicted by Olaf Seltzer (and reproduced in color on the cover of this issue). This was the stuff of history still being made in Montana while Seltzer was adjusting to the life of the region. Little wonder that he never suffered from a dearth of subject matter in his later years of painting and illustrating the countless nuggets of western history.

As with most artists, no exact count has ever been kept of Seltzer's art output—but it was prolific. Both Russell and Remington produced paintings and illustrations numbering in excess of two thousand, and Seltzer matched and probably exceeded their output. As for variety of subject matter, he covered a huge chunk of western life and events. A higher percentage of his work, it appears, than either Russell or Remington was executed in oil or watercolor (see footnote 5). The latter two did far more pen and inks than did Seltzer; they also did sculpting and modeling and bronzes—which OCS did not. An idea of the preponderance of Seltzer subjects done in the two major media, oils and watercolors,



51. "THE COMING OF THE WHITE MAN". Oil. Owned by the Great Falls Clinic.



123. "THE INTRUDERS". This oil painting owned by Mrs. Verne Casey of Great Falls, is a fine example of the skill with which Olaf Seltzer succeeded in translating the western scene into precise and almost photographic focus.

is the Gilcrease collection, which includes 144 oils and 90 watercolors. In the current exhibition in Helena, for example, it happens accidentally that all of the major pieces are in these two media: 65 being oils and 52 watercolors; or 117 out of 144 are thus classified.

As for subject matter, the meticulous Dane appeared determined to cover every minute facet of the Old West, as well as the changing West that he observed during his earlier years in Montana. The Helena exhibition gives an idea of his wide range of subjects, which broadly, can be defined as paintings relating to buffalo (6), other wildlife (8), cowboy life, trail-driving, range and cattle subjects (23), Indian life (35), Indian Wars (5), hunting and adventure (5), emigrants (2) desperados (3), transportation (freighting, stagecoaches and riverboats) (4), horses (16), plus at least one or more on railroading, homesteading, scouting, fur-trading, sheep ranching, Canadian mounted police and mining. In one vast sweep of a standardized format series—watercolor studies with small but important related vignettes on the matting—he painted almost every type of frontier character that the West ever knew.⁹ No one knows the full extent of his coverage here, but it was prodigious. This series ranges from such expected standard and romantic types as cowboys and cavalymen, Indian warriors and cattle kings, scouts and mountain men—but he didn't overlook, or slight, such routine unsung persons as roustabouts, Chinese coolies, sheepherders, gunsmiths, barmaids, ministers, blacksmiths, shopkeepers, honky-tonk girls, miners, millers, harness-menders, and the many other men and women who toiled in the West, either. If this series could be assembled and reproduced in one publication it would constitute a graphic Baedeker of the men and women who pioneered and won the West.¹⁰

As an introvert, and because he was neither so widely publicized and interviewed as Remington; or possessed of such a flair for expression in both poetry and prose as Russell, it is much

⁹ Forrest describes these as "Characters of the Old West . . . Brilliant sketches [of the] frontier gambler, the bull-whacker, the rustler, the horse wrangler, the bar keep, the western judge, the sluice box miner, a blacksmith forging a branding iron, a lonely cowboy watching the dust rise from a milling herd, a miner protecting his holding from claim jumpers . . . all executed with an understanding of the people represented; they are not stereotyped characters."

¹⁰ It is not certain whether Brown and Bigelow produced much of his work as prints, although he did deal with them. In the 1930's The American Lithographic Company reproduced some of his paintings. There are few Seltzer prints available.



15. "THE DISPUTED TRAIL". This fine oil painting is from the incomparable Seltzer collection owned by the Gilcrease Institute of History and Art at Tulsa, Okla. This is one of 10 paintings loaned by the Institute for the Historical Society's Seltzer show this summer.

more difficult to reconstruct, by research, Seltzer's inner thoughts and personal or artistic philosophy, except as they emerge, on the surface, simply by a study of a great number of his paintings.

But in the decade before his death, Seltzer became intimate and less reserved in the presence of one man, a young art collector and dealer in Indian artifacts, Dick Flood of Idaho Falls, Idaho. He talked and corresponded with Flood on a rather extensive scale; and fortunately, Flood (who had, and still has, an overwhelming belief in Seltzer's art) kept notes and retained all of this correspondence. I am indebted to Richard Flood. He allowed me to study all of his Seltzer letters and memoranda, and the notes he himself made based on many talks and statements from Seltzer.

Yet even from the Flood papers it is difficult to arrive at many direct quotes, or to draw out of the subjective shell of Olaf Seltzer any really detailed or revealing facts. One does observe that the artist hid an unusually kind and sentimental nature behind a rather gruff, brash exterior; he loved his family, his pets, his adopted land and its colorful heritage with abnormal passion. He was unusually objective, realistic, tolerant and democratic regarding people, customs, institutions and society. The closest Olaf Seltzer ever came to being vitriolic, as far as I know, was in one rather long letter to Flood in which he wrote:

"Much of this so-called 'Art' of today is but mummeries of certain deranged individuals who cannot draw or model. They are trying to pass off 'delirium tremors monstrosities' as a mysterious kind of art. These insane art efforts . . . are a disgusting travesty on the ideals of true art. While it is looked upon as old-fashioned, I still believe that a painting should resemble—remotely at least—the subject which it purports to represent."

He was more prone to analyze C. M. Russell than he was to illuminate or analyze his own feelings, philosophies and work. Here are some of his statements concerning Russell:

"Charlie's best period was the 15 years between 1905 and 1920; his efforts during that time being of unbounded wealth, full of vitality, vigor and artistic treatment, with a power of production seemingly inexhaustible . . . [his



85. "LOOKING FOR A CAMPSITE". Oil. Owned by Dr. E. D. Hitchcock, Great Falls, Mont.

work] declined rapidly after 1920 . . . he sacrificed romance for cold, technical facts which made his later subjects dry and uninteresting . . ."

" . . . A ceaseless struggle for the attainment of popularity (yet with all his faults as an artist—for Russell's paintings lacked detail and finish) he must be ranked as one of the foremost painters in his particular class: clever, original and observant, with a style both colorful and unique . . ."

"Sometimes a clear conscience merely indicates a poor memory."

"Human phenomena is public property. A . . . genius does not steal, he only conquers. Everyone arrives in his due turn and at his hour, seizing what those before him left; and according to his lights, putting [this] into new forms and combinations."

"I received great inspiration from Russell. I borrowed from him. As his immediate contemporary I perceived the direction of his genius and benefitted both from his good and bad points . . ."

"The year 1920 was the start of the finish [of C.M.R.]. In 1921 I was with him seven weeks and was able to make personal observations which showed me he was slipping badly. From this time on to his death in 1926 he was but a hollow husk, a mere shell of his former self, either as man or artist . . ."¹¹

¹¹ We are deeply indebted to Richard Flood, Box 1233, Idaho Falls, Idaho for his untiring assistance in the production of the article. For many years Mr. Flood has not only been an admirer of O. C. Seltzer, but he was a trusted confidant, friend of the family, collector and dealer in Seltzer art, as well. His assistance in assembling the 1960 retrospective exhibition of Seltzer work in the Galleries of Western Art at the Montana Historical Society in Helena are a tribute to his ability, cooperation, and generosity.



26. "THE SCOUTS". Oil. (1941). Owned by Kermit E. Rasmussen, Harlem, Mont.

Thus, while Seltzer defies an introspective personal study, he gives to the record many substantial, new, and trenchant observations on his master and nemesis, Charles M. Russell.

But this I do know: Olaf Carl Seltzer's art is fully worthy of the widest recognition and acclaim. The suggestive painted details so brilliantly done by Russell in an easy light manner, were meticulously and laboriously spelled out by Seltzer. The action — even to the point of distorted anatomy — which gave Russell so much acclaim, were captured in slow-motion camera sequence by Seltzer. Russell's subtle mountains, hazy prairies and suggestions of wind-swept sage, were brought into bold, almost photographic focus by Seltzer. In effect, they complemented and supported each other. The West was fortunate that both artists were there together.¹²

Thank God for the unreconstructed, uncommon genius of Russell, the rebellious but inspired Master of the Western scene! Thank God, too, that he had a counterpart—a silent, sincere, devoted disciple—yet an artist with his own deep conscience, his own ideas and his own disciplined techniques—a master¹³ in his own right; the meticulous Montana Dane, Olaf Carl Seltzer!

¹² "The second largest collection of Seltzer's better oils (aside from the Cole Collection, N. Y.) is owned by Mr. William H. Marks of Seattle. During several summers in the late nineties, Marks spent many hours with Russell and Seltzer, taking packhorse trips into the wilds of the mountain regions in Montana. In 1936 Mr. Marks loaned a number of his Seltzer paintings for an exhibit in the Washington Athletic Club of Seattle. The pictures shown were "Blackfoot Scouts", "Sheepcamp on the Marias", "The Trail Boss", "The Range Mother", "Prowlers of the Prairie", "Crow Scout" and "The Bronco Buster"—*Great Falls Tribune*, Oct. 11, 1937. Nine years earlier, in the *Helena Independent* it was stated that "several of his [Seltzer's] finest paintings . . . are in the collection of Sid Willis, the Great Falls collector [Mint Saloon]. Mr. Willis has what is considered by many to be the finest collection of western paintings, the work of Russell and Seltzer, in existence. He has been offered \$75,000 . . ."

¹³ Undoubtedly one of the artist's masterpieces is the 9x15 feet oil in the Masonic Grand Lodge Library at Helena, Montana, researched and painted in 1937-38. This depicts the first syncretic Masonic meeting on Montana soil, somewhere on the Mullan Road near the Continental Divide of the Rockies west of present Helena, where N. P. Langford, a man named Charlton, and another whom history has forgotten, in the words of Langford took time off from the rigors of the Fiske Expedition of 1862, "the only three Masons in the company, impressed with the grandeur of the mountain scenery and the mild beauty of the evening, ascended the mountain to its summit and there, in imitation of our ancient brethren, opened and closed an informal lodge of Master Masons." This large work, probably his largest, has received great acclaim and has been viewed by thousands since its unveiling in 1938.



1. "THE FALLEN MONARCH". Painted by Olaf Seltzer in 1935, this fine oil is owned by his son, Carl C. Seltzer of Great Falls. Here the artist has achieved great depth and beauty in depicting the mountain scenery of Western Montana. It is one of the major oils included in the largest one-man showing of Seltzer art ever held, now at the ground floor galleries of the Historical Society of Montana.

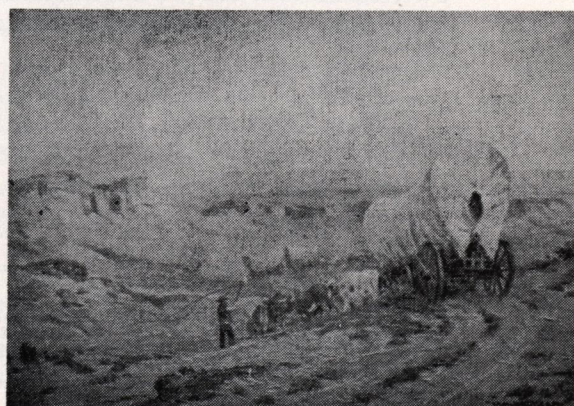


10. This little pen and ink, called "PRAIRIE PROWLERS" is from the collection of Carl Seltzer.

6. This fine watercolor, entitled "THE TRAIL BOSS" is reminiscent of a favored C. M. Russell theme. It is from the Carl Seltzer collection.



22. Called "THE SIX WHEELER", this small but fine Seltzer oil is from the Gilcrease Institute collection.



34. Olaf Seltzer produced two magnificent oil paintings of Hereford cattle for Jack Hoover of Butte. This one shows a mountain ranch in the background. A companion oil, also in the huge Seltzer show at the Historical Society's ground floor galleries this summer, depicts a grazing scene.



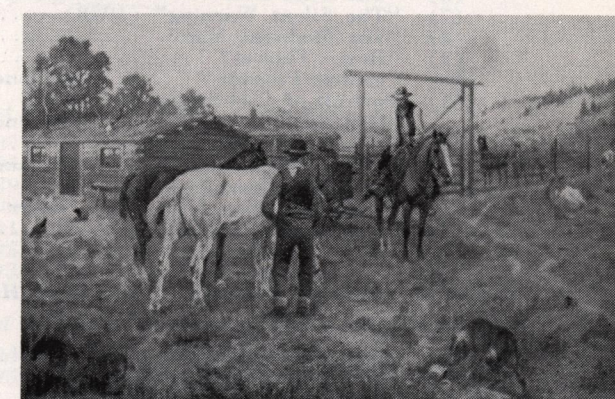
121. "INDIAN SCOUTS", oil painting owned by Mrs. R. M. Graham of Great Falls.



24. "CROW SCOUTS AT SUNRISE", oil, owned by the Gilcrease Institute of History and Art, Tulsa, Okla.



52. "THE FOOTHILL NESTER" one of the fine O. C. Seltzer oils owned by the Great Falls Clinic.





(Nos. 65, 66, and 67 are Seltzer's watercolor studies of C. M. Russell loaned by Richard Flood. All rights reserved by owner and none to be reproduced without his written consent).

The Art of Olaf Carl Seltzer 1877-1957

Exhibited by The Historical Society of Montana, Helena
During the Months of June and July, 1960

The items exhibited with names of donors,
numbers and media follow:

Owned by Carl C. Seltzer, Great Falls, Mont. (The artist's son):

- (1) "The Fallen Monarch" (1935).....oil
- (2) "The Brand Inspectors".....oil
- (3) "The Attack at the Ford" (1950)....oil
- (4) "The Scouting Party".....water color
- (5) "Two Streaks of Rust".....water color
- (6) "The Trail Boss".....water color
- (7) "The Silent Warning" (1928).....oil
- (8) "The Medicine Man".....oil
- (9) "Horse Thieves".....oil
- (10) "Prairie Prowlers".....pen and ink
- (11) Portrait of Carl Seltzer on
"Red Bird".....pen and ink
- (12) "Roping on the
Triangle Bar".....pen and ink
- (13) "First Solo Flight Across
Pacific (envelope).....water color
- (14) "Kid Curry Holdup".....oil

Owned by Gilcrease Institute of American History and Art, Tulsa:

- (15) "The Disputed Trail".....oil
- (16) "The Passport" (Crees crossing
Mont.-Canada border).....oil

- (17) "A Wet Morning on the Circle".....oil
- (18) "The Iron Trail".....oil
- (19) "Herald of the Robe Trade".....oil
- (20) "The Chuck Wagon".....oil
- (21) Illustrated letter to
Dr. Phillip Cole.....water color
- (22) "The Six Wheeler".....oil
- (23) "The Red River Cart".....oil
- (24) "Crow Scouts at Sunrise".....oil

Owned by Kermit E. Rasmussen, Harlem, Mont.:

- (25) "The Trouble Hunters" (1938).....oil
- (26) "The Scouts" (1941).....oil
- (27) "Fools Fire" (1938).....oil
- (28) "A Dangerous Grizzly" (1940).....oil
- (29) "The Hub, Harlem, Mont.".....water color
- (30) Three illustrated letters
and envelopes.....water color
- (31) C. M. Russell and O. C.
Seltzer (1914).....photograph

Owned by E. V. Sheppard, Harlem, Mont.:

- (32) Antelope.....water color

Owned by Jack Hoover, Butte, Mont.:

- (33) Herefords, grazing.....oil
- (34) Herefords, mountain ranch.....oil

Owned by Ruby F. Frost, Seattle, Wash.:

- (35) Old Colonial Man.....oil
- (36) "Cattle in Meadow".....oil
- (37) "Indian Mother".....water color
- (38) Three Colonial Men With Parrot.....oil
- (39) "Horse Roundup".....water color
- (40) "Indian Scouting Party".....water color
- (41) C. M. Russell Portrait
(1909).....pen and ink, water color
- (42) Indian With Horned Staff
(1915).....water color
- (43) "Painting the Signs on the
Cliff" (1912).....water color
- (44) Cat Portrait.....water color
- (45) "Medicine Man".....water color
- (46) Indians at Waterhole (1911).....water color

Owned by William Spencer, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (47) Mounted Indian With Shield.....oil
- (48) Buffalo and Wolves.....oil

Owned by The Great Falls Clinic, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (49) "The Rear Guard".....oil
- (50) "The Medicine Man".....oil
- (51) "The Coming of the White Man".....oil
- (52) "The Foothill Nester".....oil

- (64) Mounted Cowboy (1906).....water color
- (65) "The Buckskin Kid, Monte
and Gray Eagle" (1886).....water color
- (66) "C. M. Russell With Red
Bird" (1902).....water color
- (67) "The Cowboy Artist with
Nee-Nah" (1917).....water color
- (68) Northern Indian With Rifle.....water color
- (69) Dancing Indian With Spear.....water color
- (70) Mounted Indian With Shield
and Lance (1913).....oil
- (71) Cowboy Ready to Shoot
Antelope.....water color
- (72) Buffalo Shoulder Bones (2).....oil

Owned by Dr. E. D. Hitchcock, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (73) "The Jerkey".....oil
- (74) "White Quiver" (Blackfeet Indian).....oil
- (75) Standing Indian (buffalo-
jacket vignette).....water color
- (76) "Dance Hall Girl".....water color
- (77) "Shepherd".....water color
- (78) "Stagecoach Driver".....water color
- (79) "Road Agent".....water color
- (80) "Outpost of Napoleon".....oil
- (81) Illustrated Letter to Dr.
Hitchcock (1931).....water color
- (82) "Story Told in Pictograph".....water color
- (83) "Painted Rock".....oil
- (84) "Lookout on the Half Circle P".....oil
- (85) "Looking for a Campsite".....oil
- (86) "Toiler of the Foot Hills".....oil



This pencil sketch and all
those on page 24 are the
property of Seymour S.
Bernfeld and may not be
reproduced without his
written consent. See item
134.

Owned by Richard Flood, Idaho Falls, Ida.:

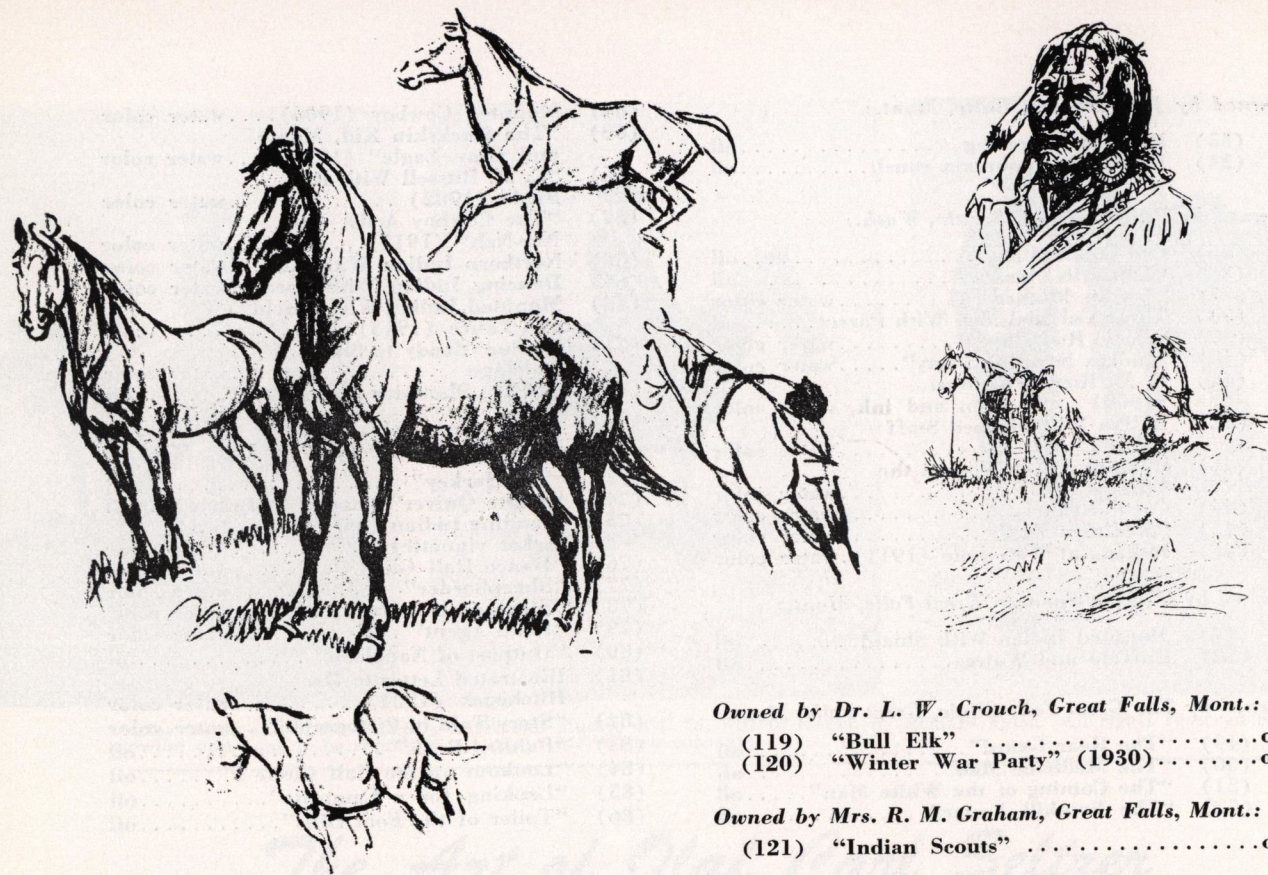
- (53) Southwest Indians (1917).....oil
- (54) Indian Lookout.....oil
- (55) Old Country Inn.....oil
- (56) Old Country Boy With White Horse.....oil
- (57) Horses at Hitching Rail.....pen and ink
- (58) Illustrated News Item.....water color
- (59) Mounted Mexican.....water color
- (60) Illustrated Letter to Louis
D. Lighton (1940).....water color
- (61) Indian Portrait.....water color
- (62) Horse in Front of Saloon
and Postoffice.....water color
- (63) Mounted Indian in Sunset.....oil

Owned by Chester McNair, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (87) "Peace Pipe".....oil
- (88) "Wreck of the Chippewa".....oil
- (89) Indians Spying on Village.....oil
- (90) C. M. Russell on Horseback.....oil
- (91) Cavalier Man.....oil
- (92) Seated Colonial Man with Clay Pipe.....oil
- (93) Two Mounted Indians.....water color

Owned by Mrs. J. H. Keating, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (94) Jacket with Cowboy Painting.....oil
- (95) Illustrated Letter and
Envelope.....water color



Owned by James F. Livingston, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (96) "The Bison"water color
- (97) "The Medicine Man".....water color

Owned by Mrs. Gail W. Burleigh, Lewistown, Mont.:

- (98) Elk Hide With Painting.....oil

Owned by The Great Falls (Mont.) National Bank:

- (99) "The Wolfers"water color
- (100) "The Saloon Keeper".....water color
- (101) "The Blacksmith"water color
- (102) "The Cowpuncher"water color
- (103) "The Prospector"water color
- (104) "The Bull Whacker".....water color
- (105) "The Placer Miner".....water color
- (106) "The Chink"water color
- (107) "The Cook"water color
- (108) "The Halfbreed"water color
- (109) "The Stage Driver".....water color

Owned by Mr. and Mrs. Jack Toole, Shelby, Mont.:

- (110) "The Pioneers"water color
- (111) "First Settlers at Our Ranch".water color
- (112) Autograph Book of Beverly Toolewater color
- (113) Illustrated Letter, Toole Ranch Sceneswater color
- (114) Illustrated Letter, Hereford Cattlewater color

Owned by Mrs. James Midboe, Shelby, Mont.:

- (115) "Spring Crop"water color
- (116) "Our Horses"water color
- (117) "Our Horses"water color

Owned by Mrs. R. B. Durnin, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (118) "Success of the Hunt".....oil

Owned by Dr. L. W. Crouch, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (119) "Bull Elk"oil
- (120) "Winter War Party" (1930).....oil

Owned by Mrs. R. M. Graham, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (121) "Indian Scouts"oil

Owned by Mrs. Verne Casey, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (122) "Moving Camp"oil
- (123) "The Intruders"oil

Owned by Pearl Hussman, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (124) "The Scout" (1915).....water color
- (125) "The War Party".....oil
- (126) "The Sentry"oil

Owned by David Smith, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (127) Horse studiespencil
- (128) Illustrated Letter.....pen and ink, water color

Owned by Donald Ross, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (129) "Black Tail Deer".....oil

Owned by Harold Hickman, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (130) "The Bronco Buster".....oil

Owned by The Loren LeFevres, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (131) Wolf and Buffalo Skull.....water color
- (132) Deerwater color

Owned by The R. K. Wests, Great Falls, Mont.:

- (133) French Revolution Scene.....oil

Owned by Seymour S. Bernfeld, New York City:

- (134) Seven Sketches (on napkins).....pencil

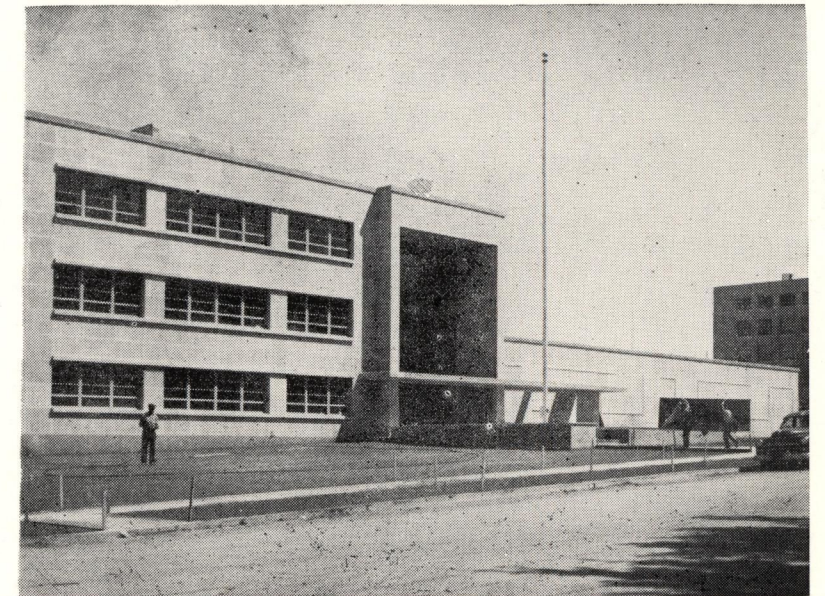
Owned by Mrs. O. C. Seltzer, Great Falls.
(The artist's widow):

- (135) "Our Pet"oil

Owned by Abbie Fredrikson, Colorado Gulch, Mont.:

- (136) Indian Braves Watering Horses.....oil

In Enduring Form MONTANA'S HISTORIC DRAMA



This beautiful limestone building in Helena houses one of the nation's truly dynamic historical societies. And because it is dynamic, it is continually being changed and enhanced. Here are thumbnail sketches of some of the current activities at the Historical Society of Montana.

- THE FORMAL MUSEUM: The full span of Old West history comes alive for persons of all ages in 57 major displays and 14 epic dioramas and natural habitat groups. Most recently completed: two major dioramas depicting the Texas Trail drives and the Hard Winter of 1886-87 which ended the open range era, and the large central diorama showing the Homestead Era with all its hardships and the tenacity of those who endured it.
- THE INFORMAL MUSEUM: Completed in 1960 are spacious new mahogany display cases which house the large and significant Johns gun collection. More than 500 firearms important in winning the West are displayed in this new ground floor museum, along with Indian artifacts and items significant to the Frontier West from the museum's vast collection.
- THE RUSSELL GALLERIES: The formal C. M. Russell Room contains one of the world's great collections of the oils, watercolors and bronzes produced by the Cowboy Artist. New acquisitions and loans are constantly enhancing the collection. The informal Russell Room contains not only personal memorabilia about the artist but a sizeable collection of his priceless original wax and clay models, too.
- THE ART GALLERIES: The Gallery of Contemporary Art on the main floor and the two Galleries of Western Art on the ground floor always contain original art worth seeing. The work of such Western artists as O. C. Seltzer, Ace Powell, E. S. Paxson, Lea McCarty, William Standing and many celebrated masters of this and other lands are hung in these galleries throughout the year.
- THE HISTORICAL LIBRARY: One of the country's most complete reference and research collections is housed on the second floor of the building. Old West books, documents manuscripts, newspapers and photographs are available to the serious researcher as well as to the general public.



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