

THE BIRMINGHAM ANTHROPOLOGICAL SOCIETY

PRESENTS

"STONES AND BONES"VOL. IIJUNE 1957ISSUE 6

Our June meeting which had Mr. Halsey Townes, President of the Birmingham Coin Club, as principal speaker was an outstanding affair. Mr. Townes discussed the coinage of the world in a very general fashion and the coinage of ancient Rome particularly. His extremely well organized talk was illustrated with several charts and drawings and his familiarity with, and understanding of his subject was communicated to his audience in his own warm and friendly fashion. May he join us again.

GEORGE CATLIN'S INDIAN PAINTINGS

Those of our group (and others) who saw the American Indian paintings of George Catlin at the Birmingham Art Museum last year were fortunate indeed. Anyone who missed these pictures surely missed a real treat. We should all thank Mr. Howard, Curator of the Art Museum, for having had this opportunity of seeing some of the best portraits and scenes of Indian extant.

In recent years there has been a renewal of interest in the work of this artist. No doubt this has been brought about by several things. One of these has been the revival of interest in the old West brought about by television. Another is the fact that small art museums over the country are able to secure the loan of many pictures that were not available previously. We suspect that much of this interest has sprung from the work of such groups as ours in arousing the interest of the general public. Many things and many people have contributed, each in its own way, to the overall picture.

Catlin first painted pictures of the Iroquois on the reservations of western New York. He later painted the Tuscarora, Oneida, and Seneca Indians. He was not satisfied with the tame eastern Indians. He wanted to see and paint the semi-barbaric Western Indian that he had heard so much about in talking to the "mountain man", scouts, and traders.

In early 1830 he went to St. Louis, where he fell in with Clark, of the famous team of Lewis and Clark. Catlin realized that in a few years the Indian and his way of life as lived when the white man came would be but history. He feverishly began to paint one picture after another of many of the Indian leaders, chiefs, and medicine men. No doubt many of the disparaging things said about the Indian by the white man were true, or at least, had some basis of truth in

them. In all of Catlin's portraits you will note a strength of character, albeit a sternness possibly not found in any other race. The Indian was not given to laughter, especially in front of the white man, or a stranger. Possibly he didn't have much to laugh about. Almost all of Catlin's subjects were chiefs or head men. To be a chief an Indian must not only be a brave warrior, but must be a leader in every respect. He must be imbued with wisdom and character. Such were the men whom George Catlin portrayed. He was not satisfied with putting the likenesses of Buffalo Bull's Back Fat, The Light, Four Bears, Rushing Eagle, Osceola, Black Moccasin, and many others on canvas. On his trip west, every moment that he could spare, he was either painting or sketching. Sometimes he would quickly draw a rough sketch to be completed later. Many of his paintings showed the Indian at his best, in hunting, dancing, playing games, horseback riding, or any of the many things in which the Indian excelled. Medicine men and religious rites came in for their share of Catlin's portrayal of the Indian as he lived at that time.

The Indian must have had some kind of a love-life, but if he did, Catlin, as well as the other artists and writers, have given us little enlightenment on the subject. Maybe this facet of the Indian's life was to be left for Longfellow. Indeed, we owe a debt of gratitude to George Catlin, in whose work the Indian lives on in books and memories.

Our July meeting is an open one. Everyone is urged to bring their artifacts, choicest of course, and tell the where, when, why, who and how about them. We should discuss plans for the August Picnic at this meeting, and any Fall business such as Fair work. Plan to have a good talk session and bring all your ideas.

OUR TELEVISION SHOW

We have every right to be quite proud of the reception our television program is accorded. Mr. Bill Ballard, Co-Producer and Director, assures us that he has been advised that many persons have expressed enjoyment and pleasure. Letters have been received from Attalla, Talladega, Wetumpka, Montgomery, Gadsden, West Blockton, Alabama City, Harpersville, Decatur and Birmingham. Our members have also reported much interest among their friends.

Mr. Daniel Josselyn has written a very readable and instructive paper called "The Archaeological Story of Alabama Indians". This will be printed and distributed to all persons who are interested enough to write in for same to our program

"Stones and Bones". It describes the various general culture periods and discusses ways for the amateur to get more enjoyment from collecting. Mr. Josselyn has done a thoroughly professional job. Members - you too - might write in for it.

Our next few programs are listed below. Remember the time, 8:30 P. M. every Thursday, Channels 2, 7 and 10.

- 4 July Mr. Samuel Mosley, Secretary of the "Alabama Archaeological Society", an amateur collector of long and good standing, and incidentally to feed his family a Chemical Engineer at Chemstrand, has a topic called "Slash and Burn". From the start of his show which will have a mortar and pestle grinding corn, he will progress through the area of Indians as farmers. Here he will tell of the start of farming, village life, the travel, trading and religion of these early farmers. The development of and the types of food that were perfected and brought to maximum use by the Indians of Alabama will be his major theme.
- 11 July Mr. Lewis Larsen, Archaeologist for the Georgia Historical Society, will tell of the Southern Cults that developed the "Southern Pyramids". His discussion will concern the mounds of the southeast, the people who built them and their way of life.
- 18 July Mr. Steven Wimberly, former State Archaeologist and author of many papers and reports on Alabama Archaeology, is going to tell us about "Indian Pot Luck". His presentation will encompass the three to four thousand years of pottery making and the characteristics of the various culture periods, as well as how and of what they are made.
- 25 July Dr. Joseph Volker, Dean of the University of Alabama Dental School, and an outstanding man in his field, will tell us of many normal and unusual facets in the physical and anthropological areas of archaeology. His familiarity with modern techniques in his field is readily transferrable to other uses. Dr. Volker is an appealing and most interesting speaker.
- 1 Aug. Mr. James Wilkinson and Mr. Joseph Dale are going to have a merry time telling about the historical Indians in their presentation of "Beads, Skins and Firewater". Both of these gentlemen have been avid students of early history since their youth. Mr. Wilkinson is an Engineering Inspector with the City of Birmingham, and Mr. Dale is a restaurateur who has fine food in Huntsville, Birmingham, Montgomery and Atlanta. Their enthusiasm is barely matched by their collections.

And the following programs will be of equal fascination, guaranteed. Tell all your friends to watch and do everything you can to further archaeology and anthropology here in Alabama. Remember the story of the single candle flame. We may by our efforts do considerable for our state.

BOOK REVIEWS

THE OREGON TRAIL, Francis Parkman, Little, Brown & Company, Boston, 1872.

In 1846 Francis Parkman had just completed his college career and stood in the frontier town of St. Louis, ready to begin a year's adventure living among the Indians and trappers along what was to become noted as the "Oregon Trail".

Parkman's Boston background and his extensive formal education coupled well with an adventurous heart and a burning interest in American Indians to give us one of the best accounts of life among the Plains Indians. The author had already published one book entitled The Conspiracy of Pontiac, which was based largely upon research and interviews, but Parkman longed to live among the Indians and see their habits and temperament first hand. This book contains an account of the adventures accompanying the realization of this dream.

The trip about which the book is written consumed all of the year 1846. The following year Parkman assembled his notes and wrote out his adventures at length. One can easily discover from reading that the account was set out by a man who had an intense interest in Indians as they lived in their natural state. Parkman lacked the cynical and often bloodthirsty attitude seemingly held by the frontiersmen, emigrants and trappers of that day.

The pathos and grief that was the lot of Indians driven from their homelands by the white settlers is vividly described by Parkman in his sketch of a wandering band of Delaware Indians near Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, whose day to day existence bore all the marks of a wretched and downtrodden people.

Speaking somewhat with the tone of a prophet, Parkman describes a group of emigrants watching a sad and forlorn band of Delaware Indians pass by. "They watched with squinted eyes, not realizing that within the space of a few years the people who filled their gaze would be swept from the face of the earth."

The story moves on through all the beauty and quiet that was the great plain in the summertime. The lush grass, the bounding game and the fierceness of summer storms are painstakingly pictured as the setting for most of the adventure. Against this background the author describes the life and customs of the Indians

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with whom he lived - mostly Dakota Indians. The ageless skill with which they took their food and shelter from the plains and mountains and moved their wives, children, dogs, lodges and other earthly possessions in an easy flowing stream of life is truly amazing.

Having obtained an admirable command of the English language, Parkman is able to set his thoughts in an interesting style as he viewed the civilizations not yet swept aside by the hand of the white man. The character studies of his few white companions are in themselves material well worth reading.

Almost all of Parkman's adventure took place while he was suffering from a digestive disease which weakened him to a point where, at one time, he was not able to sit astride his horse. In the face of this and other adversities, he still managed to see and know the Plains Indians along the Oregon Trail.

"There are two ways of being happy: We must either diminish our wants or augment our means--either may do--the result is the same and it is for each man to decide for himself and to do that which happens to be easier."

Benjamin Franklin

GUESTS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME!

Meeting first Friday, every month at the Birmingham Public Library, 7:30 P. M., unless otherwise announced.