

George Caleb Bingham, the Missouri artist, 1811-1879. January 30-March 7, 1935, the Museum of Modern Art, New York

Author

Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.)

Date

1935

Publisher

Printed by W. E. Rudge's sons

Exhibition URL

www.moma.org/calendar/exhibitions/2936

The Museum of Modern Art's exhibition history—from our founding in 1929 to the present—is available online. It includes exhibition catalogues, primary documents, installation views, and an index of participating artists.

ARCHIVE

MMA

38a



GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM

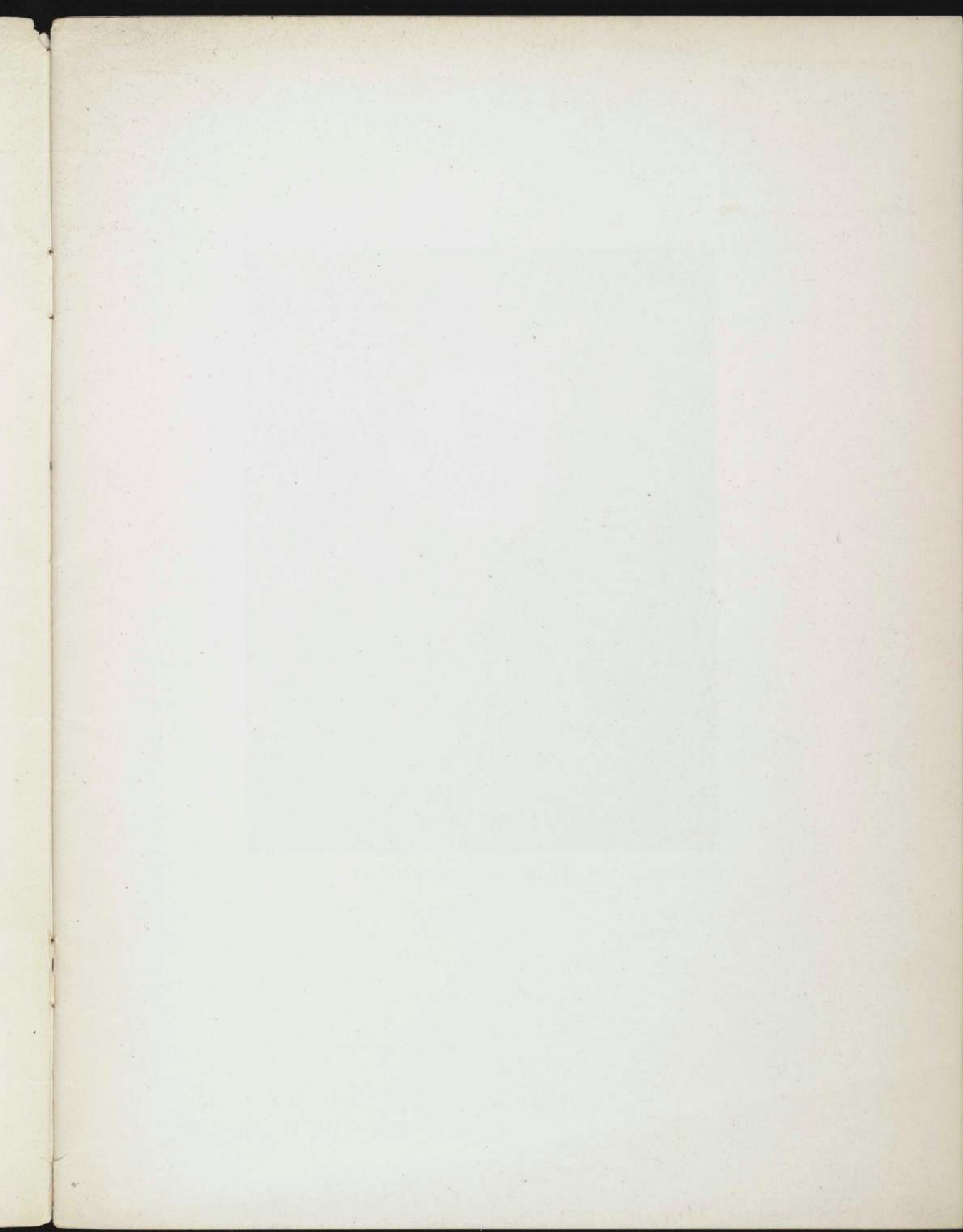
The Missouri Artist
1811-1879

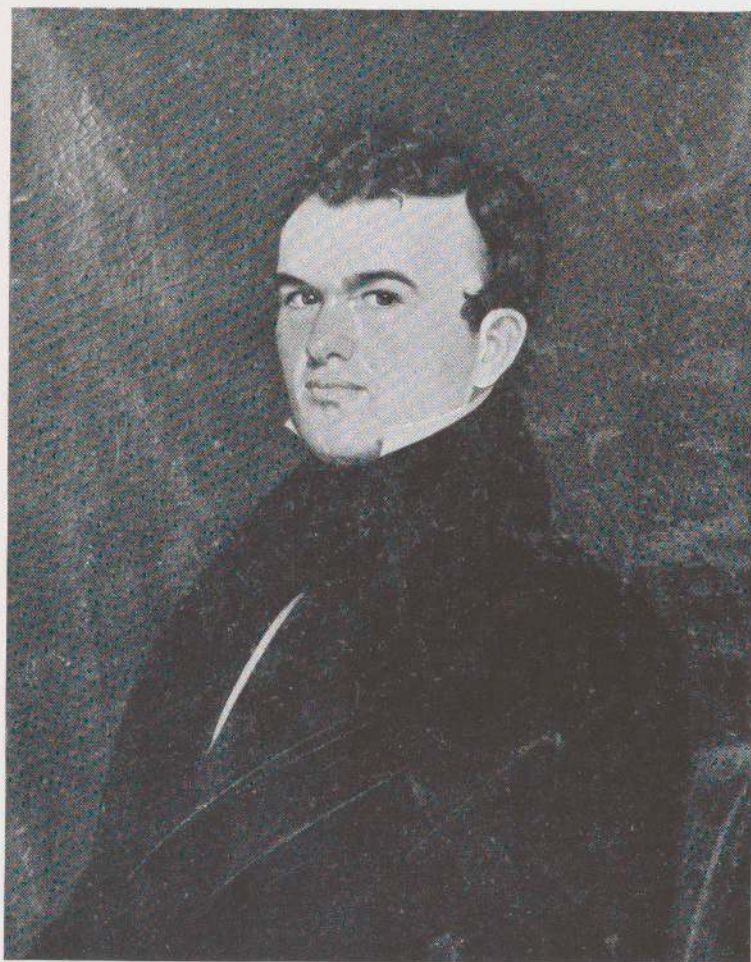
The Museum of Modern Art

LIBRARY

THE MUSEUM
OF MODERN ART

Received: *ARCHIVE*





GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM, SELF PORTRAIT, 1835

GEORGE CALEB
BINGHAM

The Missouri Artist
1811-1879

January 30 - March 7, 1935

The Museum of Modern Art
NEW YORK

Table of Contents

Drawing by <i>George Caleb Bingham</i>	cover
Self Portrait by <i>George Caleb Bingham</i>	frontispiece
Preface by <i>Alfred H. Barr, Jr.</i>	5
George Caleb Bingham, 1811-1879, by <i>Meyric R. Rogers</i>	7
Bingham's Historical Background in Missouri by <i>James B. Musick</i>	13
Bingham's Technique and Composition by <i>Arthur Pope</i>	15
Chronology	17
Bibliography	18
Catalog	19
Plates	21

Foreword and Acknowledgment

The work of George Caleb Bingham, whose career centered about the year 1850, is definitely earlier than the period with which the Museum is ordinarily concerned. In the past the Museum has held exhibitions of the work of Homer, Ryder and Eakins, of 19th century American Folk Art, of early Chicago skyscraper architecture, and next year it plans to honor the great 19th century American architect, Henry Hobson Richardson, on the 50th anniversary of his death. Such exhibitions may be interesting because they illumine the historical tradition of American art. They were not, however, planned as ventures in 19th century archaeology but because in different ways the work shown and the personalities behind the work are pertinent to our own times.

During the past fifty years the name of George Caleb Bingham has been known principally to antiquarians. A full generation before Homer and Eakins he painted the "American Scene," making a vivid record of life in the Mississippi Valley. He lived abroad for several years and returned almost untouched by European fashions but he was equally free of any trace of cant or nationalistic posturing. He led an honorable public life, was a leading citizen of his state during the Civil War and Reconstruction, and even won a political campaign by one of his paintings. But Bingham was first of all an artist who in his best work was good enough to call to mind great names and fine painters of the past—Bruegel the elder, Teniers, Louis Le Nain, Wilhelm von Kobell—and good enough to merit the careful study of those American painters of the present who follow the road which he pioneered.

On behalf of the President and the Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art the Director wishes to thank the following:

For the generous loan of works of art to the exhibition:

The Board of Education, Kansas City

City Art Museum of St. Louis

C. W. Lyon, Inc., New York

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

Mr. C. B. Rollins, Columbia, Missouri

Estate of G. B. Rollins, Columbia, Missouri

St. Louis Mercantile Library Association

The State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri

Washington University, St. Louis

William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City

For their coöperation in assembling the exhibition: Mr. Harry MacNeill Bland of Robert Fridenberg, Inc.; Mr. William F. Davidson of M. Knoedler & Co.; Mr. Paul Gardner, Director of the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art; Mr. W. L. R. Gifford, Librarian of the St. Louis Mercantile Library Association; Mr. W. M. Ivins, Jr., for a time Acting Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Mr. Edwin C. Meserve, President of the Kansas City Board of Education; Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr.; Mr. C. B. Rollins; Mr. Floyd C. Shoemaker, Secretary of the State Historical Society of Missouri; Mr. Harry Wehle, Associate Curator of Paintings, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Mr. Herbert E. Winlock, Director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Mr. J. H. Zumbalen, Treasurer of Washington University, St. Louis

For their contribution of articles to the catalog: Mr. James B. Musick, Professor Arthur Pope, Mr. Meyric R. Rogers

For the loan of plates used in the catalog: The American Magazine of Art; Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis

Special thanks are due Mr. Charles H. Morrill, President of the St. Louis Mercantile Library Association, for his assistance in raising money as partial underwriting of the catalog. Contributions to this fund were made by four directors of the Library, Mr. William G. Pettus, Mr. Theron E. Catlin, Mr. Hugh McK. Jones, and Mr. Charles H. Morrill

Very special thanks are due Mr. Meyric R. Rogers, Director of the City Art Museum of St. Louis, who has done so much to further the rediscovery of Bingham's art, and who has most generously assumed a large share of the work of assembling the exhibition.

ALFRED H. BARR, JR., *Director*

Trustees

A. Conger Goodyear, *President*

Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., *First Vice-President*

Stephen C. Clark, *Second Vice-President*

Samuel A. Lewisohn, *Secretary and Treasurer*

William T. Aldrich

James W. Barney

Frederic C. Bartlett

Cornelius N. Bliss

Mrs. W. Murray Crane

Frank Crowninshield

The Lord Duveen of Millbank

Philip Goodwin

Mrs. Charles S. Payson

Duncan Phillips

Nelson A. Rockefeller

Paul J. Sachs

Mrs. John S. Sheppard

Edward M. M. Warburg

John Hay Whitney

George Caleb Bingham

1811-1879

This brief account of Bingham's life must omit a multitude of facts and episodes which are necessary to create a life-like portrait of one of Missouri's great citizens. Fortunately practically everything that is known about this truly remarkable personality can be found in Miss Rusk's excellent account.¹

Bingham was born in Augusta County, Virginia, on March 20, 1811. His father, Henry Vest Bingham, was of Scotch parentage and his mother, Mary Amend, of German descent. The family emigrated to Missouri in 1819 and settled in the old town of Franklin in Howard County. Four years later, after a period of comparative prosperity followed by adversity, Henry Vest Bingham died leaving his widow and children nothing but a small farm in Arrow Rock Township, Saline County.

During the period of struggle that followed young Bingham was apprenticed to a cabinet maker and also helped in the work of the small farm. A love for drawing and sketching with whatever materials lay to hand probably led to an early meeting with Chester Harding who had journeyed to the frontier to paint the portrait of Daniel Boone. Bingham's intellectual curiosity seems to have been considerable for in addition he began to study theology and law. But renewed contact with Harding finally turned the scales in favor of the arts. Probably using a few surplus materials left behind by Harding, he began to paint portraits about 1830, and received considerable patronage from his neighbors.

Four years later with the help of his life-long friend, James S. Rollins, a young lawyer of Columbia, Missouri, he was able to journey to St. Louis. He lived there in extreme poverty but kept up his connections with Harding and met the most cultivated people of the city, many of whom became his friends and patrons. Shortly after the St. Louis visit he married and established himself in a house built with his own hands at Arrow Rock. In 1837 he visited Philadelphia and worked for a while in the Academy. Here he had an opportunity of studying the works of Stuart, Sully and Neagle. Upon his return from the East he took an active part in local and state politics. Throughout his life Bingham took his duties as a citizen very seriously and was constantly active in the political arena.

Bingham's biographer divides his career of over forty years as a painter into three periods. The first, of only seven years' duration, is that of his first achievements in portraiture, previous to his visit to Philadelphia. It is presumed that during this period

¹George Caleb Bingham, *The Missouri Artist*, by Helen Fern Rusk, Ph.D. Published by The Hugh Stephens Co., Jefferson County, Mo., 1917. 135 pages and illustrations. The writer wishes to acknowledge his overwhelming debt to this publication for practically all the facts in this article.

he depended entirely on his own native resources except for brief contacts with Chester Harding. Two portraits in the exhibition belong to this time, the early self portrait and that of Mrs. Anthony W. Rollins. Discounting the greater skill of his later work, the self portrait is one of Bingham's strongest characterizations in spite of such obvious failings as the drawing of the ear. In studying this canvas one is forcibly reminded of the work of David and Ingres and even of the early Velasquez of 1620. Can it be possible that some stray French portraits of the School of David had wandered via New Orleans into the Missouri wilderness to be seen by the young painter? The portrait of Mrs. Anthony Rollins, presumably some two years later, has much of the same severity and penetration but more painteresque charm.

The visit to Philadelphia gave Bingham the wider technical experience necessary to the development of his native gifts and the equipment to pursue successfully the career of a portrait painter. The decade that followed was given over to this fairly lucrative employment. This was the period of the Washington studio and early political enthusiasms.

Bingham's work is difficult to place accurately because of his failure, save in rare instances, to date or sign his paintings. According to contemporary record the most significant work of his second period, 1837-1856, began to appear about 1845. These genre paintings, which are his most important contributions sociologically as well as artistically, have been ascribed to the indirect influence of Neagle, but they seem to have developed naturally from that intense interest in the life and welfare of his fellows which inspired Bingham's political activities. The presence of a keen and painstaking observation leavened with humor is seen very clearly not only in the paintings of this early period but also in the sketches and studies for them which have been preserved in the volume belonging to the Mercantile Library Association of St. Louis. Photostatic copies of some of these drawings are shown in the present exhibition.

The transactions of the American Art Union² are a valuable guide to the work of this period. The first of Bingham's paintings purchased by the Union was apparently the *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri*, now belonging to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It is difficult, however, to determine absolutely the identity of many of his recorded paintings, since Bingham had a habit of making exact or near replicas

²"This American Art Union was an organization incorporated by the Legislature of New York, which had for its purpose the promotion of Fine Arts in the United States, the encouragement of native artists and the diffusion of American art through the country. Membership was obtained upon the payment of five dollars, and this fee was used to pay for engravings of one or more American paintings and to purchase as many works of art as possible in both painting and sculpture by native or resident artists. (The Art Union bought only pictures exhibited at its gallery, 497 Broadway, New York, and approved by a committee.) Each member received at least one engraving in the year, and every five-dollar share he owned also gave him a chance of obtaining works in painting and sculpture which were distributed by lot. Editors of the leading papers all over the country were made honorary secretaries, and shares could be purchased through them. In 1849 the membership numbered more than ten thousand, and the Union was planning a distribution of Cole's *Youth*, the second in his series of the *Voyage of Life*, and also a volume of etchings illustrating Irving's tale of the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. The engraving of the *Jolly Flatboatmen* by the Union, therefore, insured for it a wide circulation which created interest all over the country in the work of the young 'Missouri Artist'." Rusk, *Bingham*, pp. 33, 34.

of his work for which the same titles were used. The problem is further complicated by differences between the engraved representation and the actual painting, and variations in titles between the two. It is also obvious that many of the actual paintings mentioned in the transactions of the Union have been lost sight of, though the name of the original owner is recorded. Miss Rusk has been at great pains to construct a chronological list of Bingham's work as far as the facts can be singled out, but in the presence of the above difficulties the results can be considered hardly more than approximate.

The *Fur Traders Descending the Missouri* like other works of the same genre has remarkable atmospheric quality which seems to be less a convention than evidence of Bingham's keenness of observation and feeling. This quality is particularly true to the soft brilliance of the humid atmosphere which is today characteristic of the Missouri Valley when untainted by coal smoke. The *Fur Traders* together with *Raftsmen Playing Cards* was probably painted by 1850. *Watching the Cargo* is signed and dated 1849 and Miss Rusk quotes a contemporary newspaper which refers to *Shooting for the Beef* as under way in 1850. It is possible that the painting owned by the Mercantile Library, *The Jolly Flatboatmen No. 2*, painted about 1857, is a later revision of a painting done in this earlier period. The lithograph of *The Jolly Flatboatmen* represents a painting of about 1846 of which at least two versions were painted. In studying these paintings one is reminded of the early work of Winslow Homer, less in detail, perhaps, than in spirit. Indeed Bingham's work during the decade 1845-1855 seems in many ways more competent artistically than the early work of his more famous compatriot.

In 1851 Bingham painted *Daniel Boone Coming Through Cumberland Gap*, also called *The Emigration of Daniel Boone With His Family*, which was lithographed by Regnier and published by Goupil et Cie. The treatment of the subject is thought to have been derived from the account given in Marshall's *History of Kentucky*. An examination of the picture will show the "ghosting" of the first painting, apparently confirming the opinion that the picture was considerably repainted after the lithograph had been made, perhaps before 1853 when it was exhibited in St. Louis to be disposed of by raffle. Technical considerations, however, point to a later date, for the print shows a different treatment of the landscape in a somewhat higher key. Though the painting is, of course, an imaginary composition there is evidence in the sketches that the most important figures were carefully studied from posed models.

The artist's keen interest in political life was expressed in the early '50s in a series of works depicting typical phases of a campaign. The three most important paintings of this series were presented to the Mercantile Library of St. Louis in 1862, having been purchased from the painter by John H. Beach, then President of the Library Board. The fourth, described by a contemporary as "a small cabinet piece," was the earliest of the series, painted by 1851. The original canvas has been lost but the com-

position has been preserved in the lithograph called *Canvassing for a Vote*, included in the exhibition.

The first of the Mercantile Library series, titled *The County Election*, was probably finished in 1852. It was followed by *Stump Speaking* which is signed and dated 1854. Then came *The Verdict of the People*, or *The Results of the Election*, which was probably completed late in the same year or early in 1855. The first two paintings were reproduced in engravings by Sartain and by Gautier respectively, but the lithographed edition of *The Verdict of the People* was never issued because of the destruction of the stone. In many respects the painting in these canvases is by no means inferior to English genre of the late eighteenth century and even to the work of many of the Dutch "Little Masters" of the seventeenth century. It is much to be regretted that in several instances these paintings show the effects of unskillful repainting, which has recently been removed.

This second period came to an end with Bingham's trip abroad. The portrait of Dr. Benoist Troost must have been executed shortly after his return. Though conventional in handling, this work is outstanding among his later portraits and is remarkable for the vigor and originality of the characterization. There can be little doubt that Bingham was much interested in the personality of this sitter.

From this time on Bingham's energies were absorbed more and more by political questions and the service of the State, and his painting suffered in consequence. A strong Union sympathizer, he early enlisted in the Northern ranks but served through most of the war as State Treasurer, an office of grave responsibilities. These services were followed by many local governmental duties. In the midst of this active public life it was hardly possible for Bingham, advancing in years, to continue his artistic development.

The *magnum opus* of this post Civil War period, *Order No. 11*, represented in the exhibition by the lithograph, shows in comparison with the paintings of the election series a distinct inferiority of conception and execution.³ None of the figures has the vitality found in his earlier work, and the definite polemical purpose of this painting resulted in a somewhat melodramatic sentiment which pervades the whole picture.

During all this time Bingham was actively engaged in portrait painting by which he earned the major portion of his income. Most of these works seem somewhat perfunctory and lack the vitality of the portrait of Dr. Troost. One exception is the bust portrait of his life-long friend, Major James S. Rollins, painted as a sketch for the full length portrait ordered by the Major's friends for Missouri University in 1871.

³The picture was painted in post-mortem protest against the severity of an order issued by General Ewing, the local commander of the Union forces in 1863, which decreed the evacuation of certain border territories between Missouri and Kansas within a period of fifteen days from issuance. The manifold injustices of this order so moved Bingham that upon Ewing's refusal to withdraw it he swore that he would make Ewing forever infamous by means of his pen and brush. It is said that the exhibition of this painting through Ohio during Ewing's campaign for the governorship, combined with fiery pamphlets from Bingham's pen, really brought about his defeat.

The portrait of the sculptress, Vinnie Ream, was painted in 1876. Though cast in a conventional mode and lacking incisive qualities it is one of the best portraits of Bingham's last period, in spite of the fact that he was never very successful in his portrayal of women.

Bingham occasionally painted pure landscape. A trip to Colorado in 1872 is known to have inspired some canvases of mountain scenery and there are also records of earlier compositions. The *Landscape* belonging to the City Art Museum of St. Louis may very plausibly be the canvas noted by Rusk as referred to by a newspaper in 1846 under the title *Landscape with Cattle*. The *Storm* shows decided technical affinities with the landscape of the *Daniel Boone* as emended sometime after 1851. These are the only paintings of pure landscape definitely assignable to Bingham which the writer has been able to examine.

The exhibition would be incomplete without the set of colored engravings and lithographs illustrating the eight items which are known to have been engraved after Bingham's paintings. These prints evidence the interest which the paintings aroused in their own day. *The Jolly Flatboatmen*, about 1847, was apparently the only print issued under the auspices of the American Art Union. The rest were published mainly by Goupil et Cie., for subscribers whom Bingham secured, and after 1852 when the American Art Union was forced to suspend its activities. According to authority⁴ the lithograph of *The Verdict of the People* was to have been published by Goupil et Cie. in 1870. The stone had been finished and two proofs sent to Bingham for approval when the establishment was wrecked by a shell during the Siege of Paris. The example exhibited is, therefore, one of only two copies in existence. The coloring of the entire set is probably Bingham's though in many examples the color was added at a later date. The exhibition is indebted to Mr. C. B. Rollins of Columbia, for the loan of this series.

As we glance over the outline of Bingham's life we are astonished by the variety of his talents, interests and achievements. We are reminded of another instance of the blending of high creative ability in the arts with conspicuous talent in other directions. Living in America about Bingham's own time was Samuel F. B. Morse, whose great attainments as a painter have been over-shadowed in the public mind by his invention of the telegraph. Bingham's contributions are perhaps less spectacular but may be considered of comparable value. He was essentially a humanitarian, a close student of the life around him and an ardent participant and leader in it. His life-long activity in the politics of his state left a record for able and disinterested public service all too rare both in his time and in ours. His outstanding accomplishment as a painter of genre was inspired by his interest in his fellows and by an insight into the significance of their lives and occupations which has been denied to many of his contemporaries and successors in the field of American painting.

⁴Rusk, Bingham, p. 62.

Bingham's direct, simple records of his own day seemed merely quaint and commonplace to the generations that followed, so preoccupied were they with Continental elegance and fashion. In consequence his works have been practically lost to sight for half a century, though they were much admired during his lifetime. This contemporary recognition, however, had little to do with the technical and aesthetic virtues which we discover in his work today, after our tastes have been whetted by the visual and verbal polemics of the last decade. It was his subject matter which won the approval of his contemporaries and which bored his successors. The recent somewhat self-conscious concern with the American scene has created an atmosphere favorable to a better understanding and appreciation of Bingham's contribution, both as artist and observer.

MEYRIC R. ROGERS

Bingham's Historical Background in Missouri

Bingham's life spanned a period of dramatic and picturesque activity in the settlement and development of the vast Western regions which were added to the dominions of the United States by the Louisiana Purchase in 1803. The pageant which the painter saw began with the flood tide of immigration that bore his own family into the frontier region. He was able to observe at first hand the hardy tribe of river boatmen, and later the stately procession of steamboats, which in turn gave way to the railways. He saw the passage of successive waves of immigrants bound for every Western state from Texas to Oregon: Santa Fe traders, Mormons, fur traders, "forty-niners," Oregon immigrants, the Missouri volunteer cavalry which conquered New Mexico, and troops for the Mexican and Civil Wars. He was a participant in the violent political agitation which grew out of the slavery question, an officer in the Civil War which followed and a pillar of his state in the era of Reconstruction.

There was an epic quality in the irresistible westward surge of the Anglo-Saxon race. One must indeed go to the great racial migrations of the Dark Ages to find a worthy parallel. The vanguard of this great movement had begun to filter across the natural boundary set by the Mississippi River even before the acquisition of the territory in 1803. The accepted type of this first immigration, which was composed rather of hunters than of settlers, is Daniel Boone. Irked by the "overcrowding" of his hunting grounds in American territory, he crossed the Mississippi about 1797. But the full current of the westward movement did not set in until after the War of 1812. One of the first regions to feel the rush of immigration was the Boone's Lick country in Missouri which was early reported to be prodigiously fertile. Settlers, among them the Bingham family, swarmed into this region from the East and South.

Dense forests and impenetrable swamps made the natural highways of the region the numerous streams, particularly the Missouri and the Mississippi. Soon a procession of flatboats and keelboats were dropping swiftly downstream with the produce of the settlements, and a somewhat smaller procession returning with supplies, propelled slowly upstream by the laborious methods of cordelling, "bushwhacking" and poling. This traffic grew to large proportions before it was supplanted by the swifter steamboat. Timothy Flint, a Presbyterian minister who came to the territory in 1816, has described it very entertainingly: "In the spring, one hundred boats have been numbered, that landed in one day at the mouth of the Bayan (Bayou Pemisco), at New Madrid. . . . The surfaces of the boats cover some acres. Dunghill fowls are fluttering over the roofs, as an invariable appendage. The chanticler raises his piercing note. The swine utter their cries. The cattle low. The horses trample, as in their stables. There are boats fitted on purpose, and loaded entirely with turkeys,

that, having little else to do, gobble furiously. The hands travel about from boat to boat, make inquiries, and acquaintances, and form alliances to yield mutual assistance to each other, on their descent from this to New Orleans. After an hour or two passed in this way, they spring on shore to raise the wind in town."¹

These hardy western boatmen were indeed a riotous and picturesque crew, well qualified to "raise the wind." A whole legend has sprung up around the bellicose personage of Mike Fink, one of the most celebrated of these inland navigators. He is said to have proclaimed himself in words which combined braggadocio and fact: "I'm a Salt River Rorer! I'm chuck full of fight and I love the wimmin!" He was so expert with the rifle that in matches for beef, such as Bingham has painted (No. 7), he was always awarded the "fifth quarter," that is, the hide and tallow, on condition that he keep out of the competition.

Though it caused the passing of the roistering, swearing, fighting race of boatmen, the introduction of steamboats did not diminish the romance of river navigation, but rather brought a new picturesqueness to the river scene. The first steamboat panted into St. Louis at a snail's pace in 1817, but it was not until 1819 that anyone ventured the swift treacherous current of the Missouri with its bobbing "sawyers" and shifting channel. By 1840 steamboats dominated the river traffic. In 1859 the first railroad reached St. Joseph, Missouri, from the East. With it began a new era which witnessed the virtual extinction of the Missouri River trade.

Until the late 1840's most of the political activity in Missouri had centered around the financial policy of the country. But the Mexican War (1846-1848) brought to feverish life an old question which soon dominated the political arena—the problem of slavery. The Missouri Compromise of 1820, by which the state was admitted to the Union as a slave state, had settled the question for the time being in Missouri itself. But the attempt in Congress to exclude slavery from the Mexican cessions contrary to the Missouri Compromise began a train of events which ultimately shook the Union to its foundations. Civil strife and bloodshed took place along the Missouri-Kansas border long before the War of Secession. Bingham, who was a Whig and a staunch advocate of the Union, was soon in the thick of the political maelstrom.

His first painting to deal with a political subject, the *Stump Orator*, was painted in 1848. It was the forerunner of a remarkable series of political genre which show Bingham's deep interest in recording the intense political excitement which gripped Missourians of his day.

JAMES B. MUSICK

¹*Recollections of the Last Ten Years . . . in the Valley of the Mississippi*, by Timothy Flint, Boston, 1826.

Bingham's Technique and Composition

If one were to see only a small portion of one of Bingham's paintings, perhaps a bit of drapery and a little landscape, in which the nineteenth century character of the subject matter was not apparent, the quality of the surface might easily lead one to think it French work of the seventeenth century. Examining the whole picture from this point of view, one finds the paint put on in a firm deliberate fashion, often over a red ground, producing a clean transparent character that distinguishes it sharply from the usual painting of the middle of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the painting is evidently carried out on the basis of a clearly thought-out design and with reference to careful drawings in the regular Renaissance way, entirely distinct from the imitative manner of painting directly from nature which had been rapidly coming into vogue in Europe at this time. It reminds one of the general manner of painting employed by Poussin in his more classical pictures, although its contemporary subject matter suggests rather a comparison with the paintings by the brothers Le Nain.

As a matter of fact Bingham's paintings down to 1856 represent almost the last gasp of the great tradition of Renaissance figure painting, just as the work of the itinerant portrait painters (Bingham's self portrait and that of Mrs. Anthony Rollins belong definitely to this general manner) represent the last phase of the Renaissance tradition of portrait painting. All this painting was of course provincial: it lacked much of the suavity and grace of cosmopolitan work but in good hands it achieved an extraordinary vigor.

Not only in quality of surface but also in composition Bingham's paintings belong in the Renaissance tradition. If one were to consider merely the general arrangement of a picture like the *Verdict of the People*, one might say that it was done by some follower of Poussin. Bingham must have got his lessons in composition from engravings after Renaissance-Baroque masters, for there is constant use of pictorial forms derived from sixteenth and seventeenth century painting. In the *Verdict of the People* one finds a screen of architecture brought across the upper left portion to the central vertical axis of the picture, leaving the upper right portion for distant background, in the manner inaugurated by Giorgione, Titian and Palma and continued by Poussin and Claude and other painters of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This screen is used also in the *Stump Speaking* and its companion *The County Election*. In the *Raftsmen Playing Cards* there is a pyramidal building up of figures in the traditional Poussin-Raphael manner. At the same time there is in most of these pictures an arrangement in three-dimensional space to suggest a series of planes parallel with the picture plane; and the main action is thrown back into a second plane framed by foreground figures in the usual fashion of Baroque painting.

But what gives Bingham's painting particular interest is that he does not use these forms in a mechanical fashion; into the framework of his general scheme he masses and groups his figures with great skill, at the same time keeping the action convincing from a naturalistic point of view. To be sure, the man leaning forward in the foreground and the negro with the wheelbarrow in the *Verdict of the People* are a little stiff; and in some of the other paintings, as in the *Jolly Flatboatmen*, the nearer figures seem somewhat artificially placed to keep them from interfering with the main action of the painting—there is a suggestion of amateur acting and stage management at times. But this provincial stiffness is forgiven when we examine the pictures more thoroughly, for the straightforward technique and the patent ability in composition are completely disarming.

All the pictures which I have mentioned show extraordinary skill in the distribution of the many figures which each contains. One can think of few painters who have handled this particular problem so well. Bingham knew how to use light and shadow to clarify the grouping of the figures. In the *Verdict of the People* the main mass of figures at the left is brought out in light against a moderately darker background, while the mass of figures on the right is thrown into shadow against light beyond; the central axis is accented by the group slightly separated from the rest of the foreground action and yet belonging to it; one proceeds from large masses down to smaller groups in a perfectly clear and orderly manner. Ability to handle large numbers of figures in this way is one of the rarest things in the history of painting. Some contemporary renderings of the American scene seem rather poverty-stricken in comparison with Bingham's orderly procedure and fertility of invention.

Curiously enough, after Bingham went to Düsseldorf in 1856 he seems to have succumbed to nineteenth century methods, and most of his paintings after this time lack the distinctive qualities which make his earlier work interesting.

ARTHUR POPE

Chronology

- 1811 Born in Augusta County, Virginia, March 20
- 1819 Family emigrated to Franklin, Missouri
- 1820 Met Chester Harding
- 1823 Father died. Family moved to farm at Arrow Rock, Saline County
- c.1827 To Boonville as cabinet maker's apprentice. Study of law and theology.
Met Harding again and received first instruction in painting
- 1834 Met Major Rollins in Columbia. Began painting portraits
- c.1835 To St. Louis
- 1836 Married Miss Hutchison and settled at Arrow Rock
- c.1837 To Philadelphia to study at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts
- 1840-44 Portrait painting in Washington, D. C.
- 1844 Return to Saline County, Missouri
- 1845 Registered in American Art Union from St. Louis. First records of genre
and landscape painting
- 1846 Engraving of *The Jolly Flatboatmen* published by American Art Union.
Unsuccessful candidate for State Legislature
- 1848 Wife's death. Elected to State Legislature
- 1849 Visit to New York. Portrait painting in Columbia, Missouri. Married
Miss Thomas
- 1853-54 Spent year in Philadelphia
- 1856-59 Europe. Settled at Düsseldorf
- 1859 Returned to Columbia, Missouri
- 1861 Enlisted as private in U. S. army. Appointed Captain in Volunteer Re-
serve Corps
- 1862 Appointed State Treasurer. Moved to Jefferson City
- 1865 Term as Treasurer expired. To Independence, Missouri
- 1866 Unsuccessful candidate for Congress
- 1870 Moved to Kansas City
- 1872 Landscape painting in Colorado
- 1873 In Texas, Kentucky, etc.
- 1874 Became president of Kansas City Board of Police Commissioners
- 1875 Appointed Adjutant-General of Missouri
- 1876 Granted leave of absence for his health. Second wife died
- 1877 Elected professor of art at University of Missouri
- 1878 Married Mrs. Mattie Lykins
- 1879 Died in Kansas City, July 7

Bibliography

- Parsons, Mrs. Helen R. MISSOURI'S GREATEST PAINTER. *Public Library Quarterly* (Kansas City), July 1901
- Simonds, May. A PIONEER PAINTER. *American Illustrated Methodist Magazine*. Vol. VIII, Oct. 1902
- Anonymous. GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM, AN EARLY PAINTER OF MISSOURI. *Art World*, Vol. III, Nov. 1917, pp. 94-98
- Rusk, Fern Helen. GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM, THE MISSOURI ARTIST. 135 pages with illustrations and chronological list of paintings. Jefferson City, Mo., The Hugh Stephens Co., 1917. The standard monograph on Bingham.
- Anonymous. GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM. *Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis*, Vol. IX, Oct. 1924, pp. 57-62
- Rollins, C. B. SOME RECOLLECTIONS OF GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM. *Missouri Historical Review*. Vol. XX, 1926, pp. 463-84
- Wehle, Harry B. AN AMERICAN FRONTIER SCENE BY GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM. *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, Vol. XXVIII, July 1933, pp. 120-22
- Rogers, Meyric R. AN EXHIBITION OF THE WORK OF GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM. *Bulletin of the City Art Museum of St. Louis*, Vol. XIX, Apr. 1934, pp. 13-27
- Childs, Marquis W. GEORGE CALEB BINGHAM. *American Magazine of Art*, Vol. XXVII, Nov. 1934, pp. 594-99

Reference to Bingham may also be found in the files of the *Bulletin*, 1849-51, and the *Transactions*, 1845-49, of the American Art Union, New York

Paintings

An asterisk before a catalog number indicates that the item is illustrated by a plate which bears the same number. Not all the listed items are illustrated. In the dimensions of the pictures the height is given first.

- | | |
|---|------------------|
| *1. SELF PORTRAIT, 1835, <i>frontispiece</i>
Collection City Art Museum of St. Louis | 28 x 22½ inches |
| *2. MRS. ANTHONY W. ROLLINS, 1837
Collection C. B. Rollins, Columbia, Missouri | 29 x 24 inches |
| *3. FUR TRADERS DESCENDING THE MISSOURI, by 1845
Collection The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York | 29 x 36 inches |
| *4. RAFTSMEN PLAYING CARDS, 1847-50
Collection City Art Museum of St. Louis | 28 x 36 inches |
| 5. DR. OSCAR F. POTTER, 1848
Collection City Art Museum of St. Louis | 25 x 20 inches |
| *6. WATCHING THE CARGO, 1849
Signed, lower left: G. C. Bingham 1849
Collection The State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia | 26 x 36 inches |
| *7. SHOOTING FOR THE BEEF, 1850
Signed, lower left: G. C. Bingham 1850
Collection C. W. Lyon Inc., New York | 34 x 49½ inches |
| *8. FISHING ON THE MISSOURI, 1851 or before
Signed, lower left: G. C. Bingham 1851
Collection William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art, Kansas City | 28¾ x 35⅞ inches |
| *9. DANIEL BOONE COMING THROUGH CUMBERLAND GAP, 1851
Collection Washington University, St. Louis | 36½ x 50 inches |
| 10. THE COUNTY ELECTION, 1851-52
Collection St. Louis Mercantile Library Association | 36½ x 50 inches |
| 11. STUMP SPEAKING, 1854
Signed, lower left: G. C. Bingham 1854
Collection St. Louis Mercantile Library Association | 42½ x 58 inches |
| *12. THE VERDICT OF THE PEOPLE, 1854-55
Collection St. Louis Mercantile Library Association | 46 x 65 inches |
| *13. THE JOLLY FLATBOATMEN (No. 2), 1857
Painted in Düsseldorf
Collection St. Louis Mercantile Library Association | 47½ x 69½ inches |
| *14. DR. BENOIST TROOST, 1859
Collection The Board of Education, Kansas City | 40½ x 30 inches |
| 15. LANDSCAPE WITH CATTLE, after 1859?
Collection City Art Museum of St. Louis | 39 x 48 inches |
| 16. THE STORM
Private Collection | 25 x 30 inches |

- | | |
|---|----------------|
| 17. MAJOR JAMES S. ROLLINS, 1871
Collection Estate of G. B. Rollins, Columbia, Missouri | 30 x 25 inches |
| 18. MISS VINNIE REAM, SCULPTRESS, 1876
Collection The State Historical Society of Missouri, Columbia | 40 x 30 inches |

Prints

From the Collection of C. B. Rollins, Columbia, Missouri

- | | |
|--|---|
| 19. THE JOLLY FLATBOATMEN
Engraving washed with watercolor
Engraved by T. Doney; published by the American Art Union; entered 1847 | 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (copy cut to edge) |
| 20. IN A QUANDARY
Lithograph washed with watercolor
Drawn on stone by Regnier; published by Goupil et Cie.; entered 1852. Dedicated to Major James S. Rollins | 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches |
| 21. THE EMIGRATION OF DANIEL BOONE WITH HIS FAMILY
Lithograph washed with watercolor
Drawn on stone by Regnier; published by Goupil et Cie.; entered 1852. Dedicated to "The Mothers and Daughters of the West" | 18 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches |
| 22. CANVASSING FOR A VOTE
Lithograph washed with watercolor
Drawn on stone by Regnier; published by Goupil et Cie.; entered by Knoedler 1853 | 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 18 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches |
| 23. THE COUNTY ELECTION
Engraving washed with watercolor
Engraved by John Sartain; published by Goupil et Cie. 1854. Copy signed engraver's proof | 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 30 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches |
| 24. STUMP SPEAKING
Engraving washed with watercolor
Engraved by Gautier; published by Fishel, Adler and Schwartz, New York; entered 1856. Dedicated to "The Friends of American Art"
<i>Note:</i> Original publication said to be by Goupil. This may be a later reprint | 22 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 30 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches |
| 25. THE VERDICT OF THE PEOPLE
Lithograph washed with watercolor
Lithographer probably Regnier; to have been published by Goupil et Cie. about 1870. Stone destroyed. This copy one of two proofs submitted to Bingham | 21 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 30 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (copy cut to edge) |
| 26. MARTIAL LAW (ORDER No. 11)
Engraving washed with watercolor
Engraved by John Sartain; published by George C. Bingham & Co.; entered 1872. Dedicated to "The Friends of Civil Liberty." Proof copy. For an explanation of the subject matter see note on page 10. The original painting, not included in the exhibition, is reproduced on the opposite page | 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 31 inches |

Reproductions of Drawings

27. Ten photostatic copies made from an album of original drawings in the collection of the St. Louis Mercantile Library Association. Eight of these drawings are studies for figures in paintings in the exhibition. One of these drawings is reproduced on the cover of the catalog

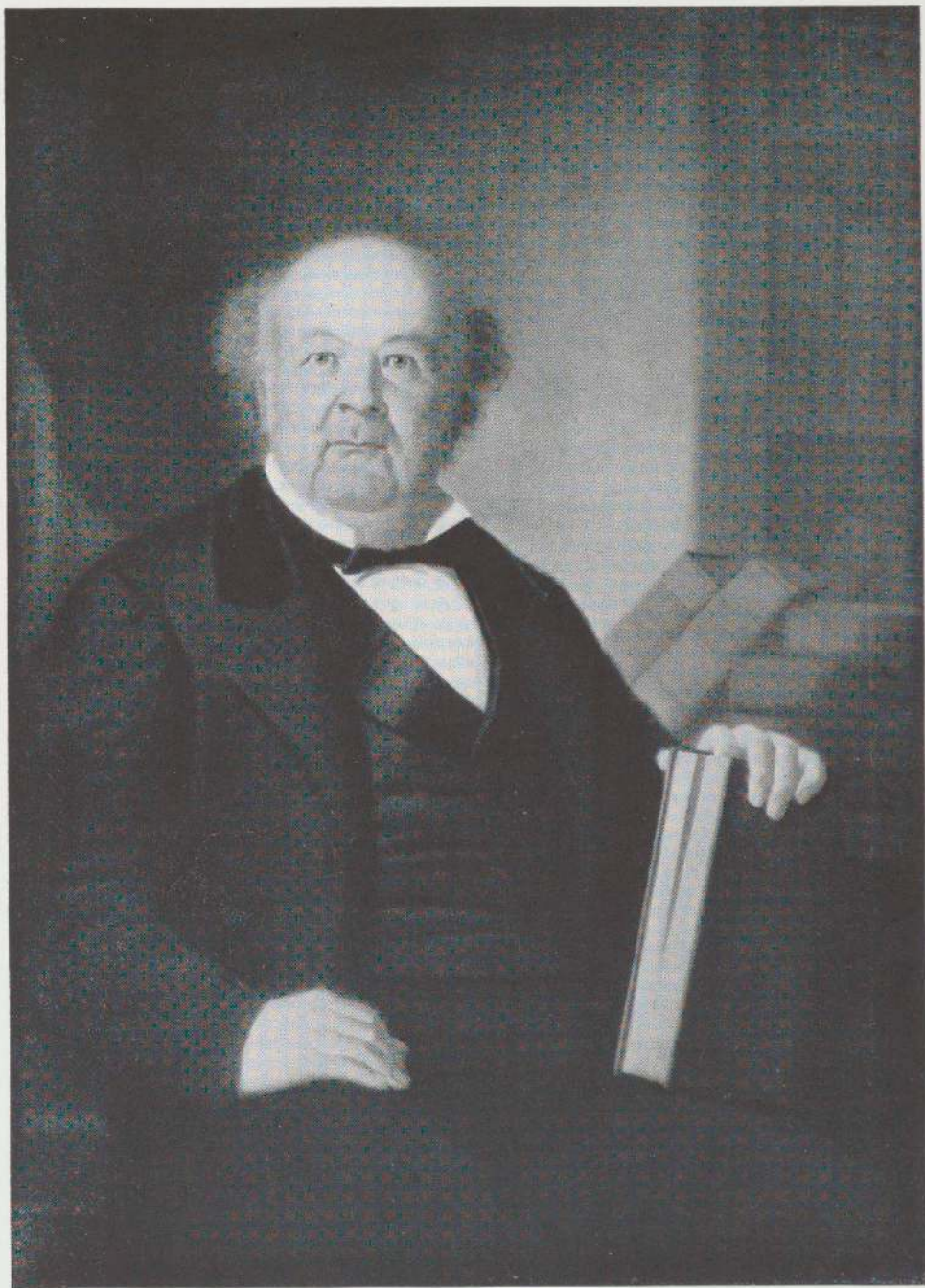
Plates



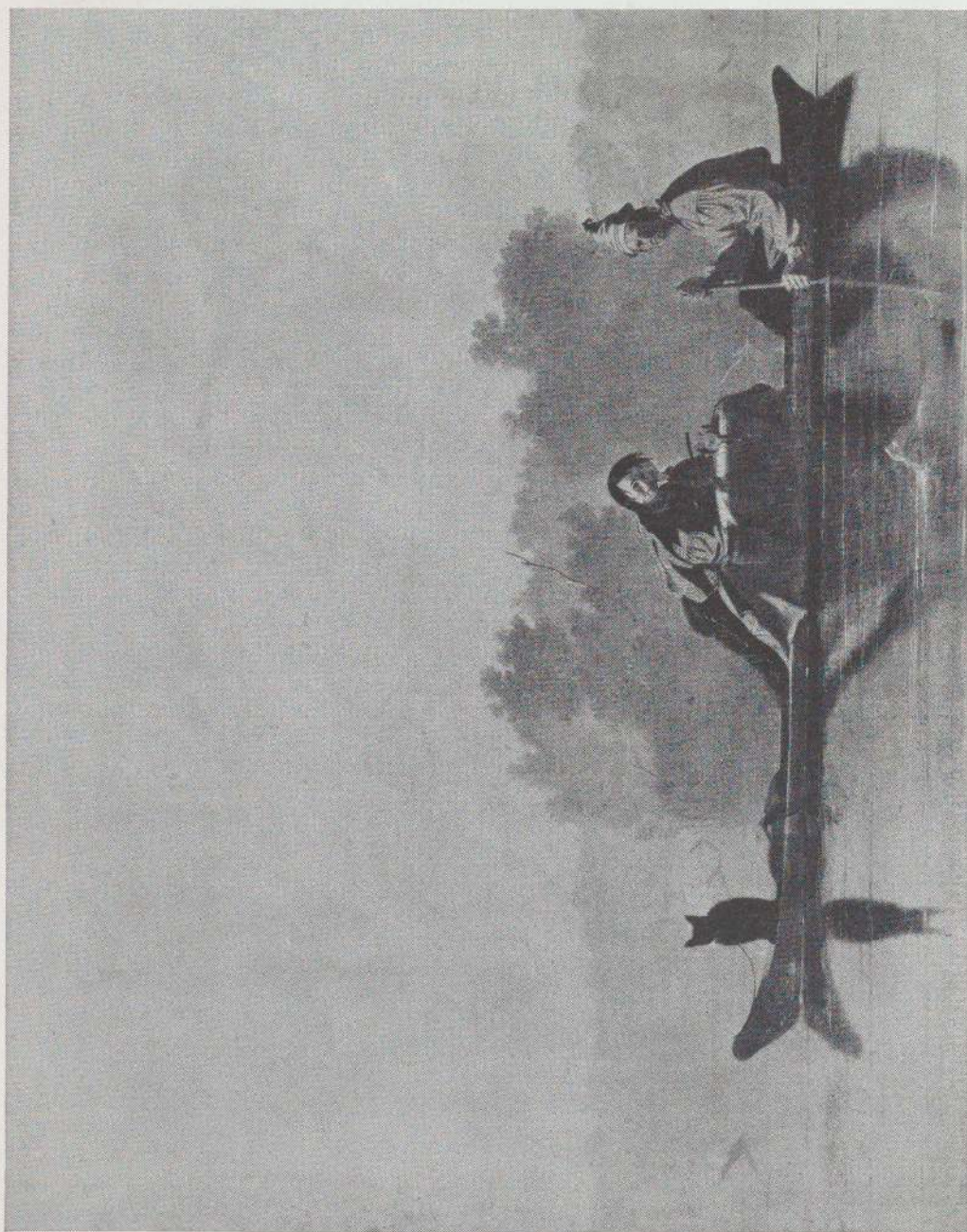
ORDER No. 11, 1865-68. *Not in catalog. See No. 26*
Estate of G. B. Rollins, Columbia, Missouri



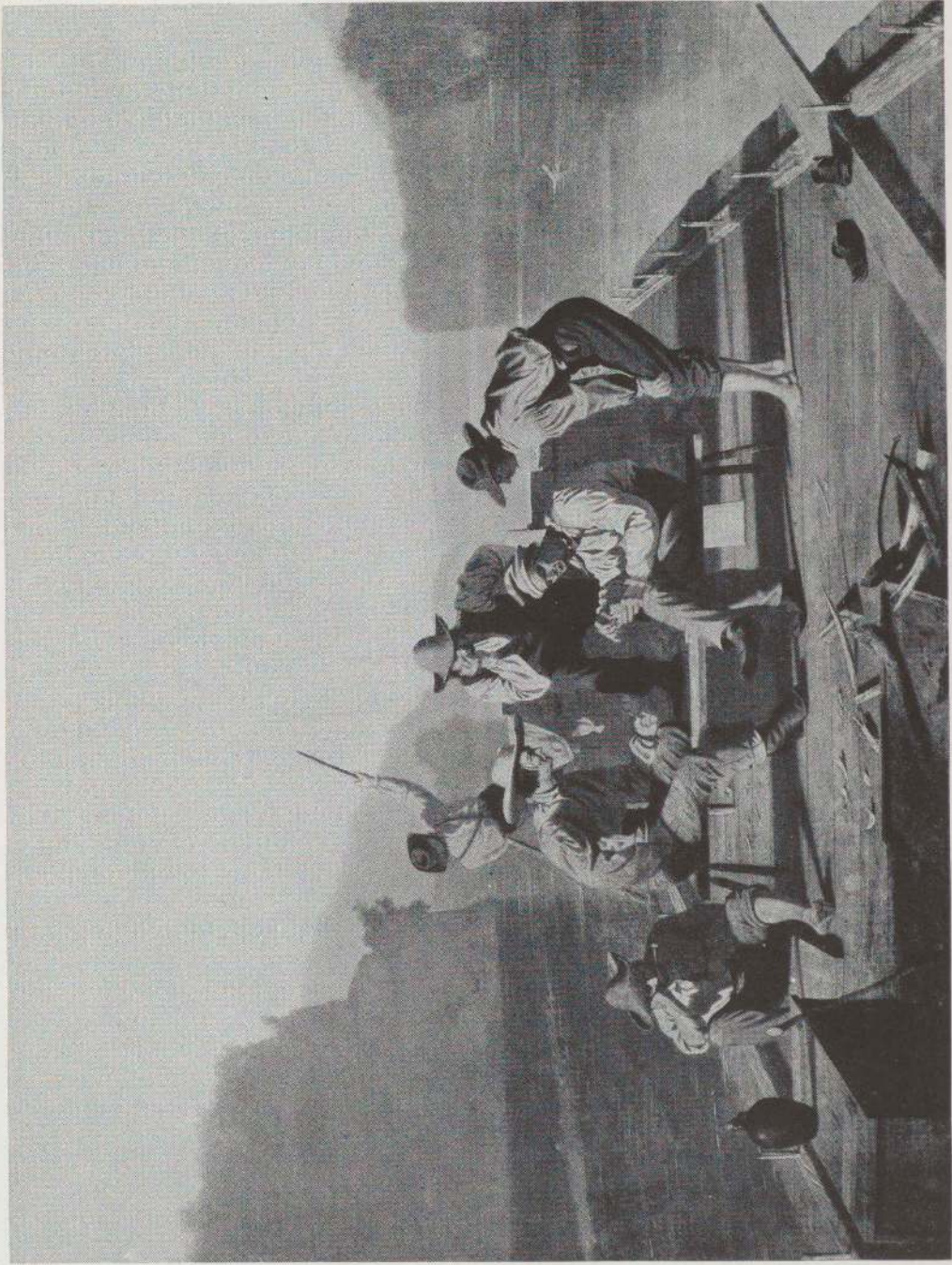
2. MRS. ANTHONY W. ROLLINS, 1837



14. DR. BENOIST TROOST, 1859



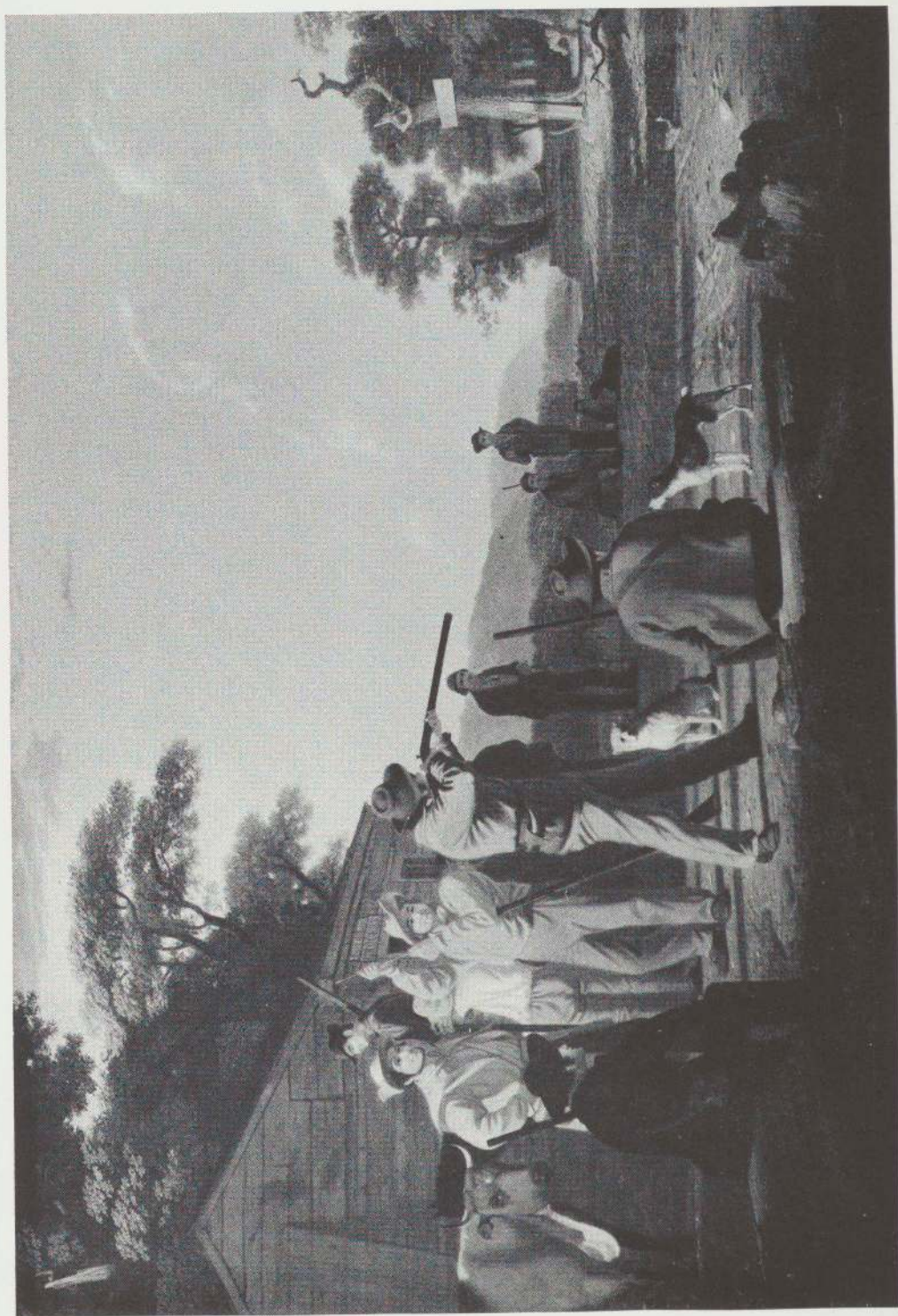
3. FUR TRADERS DESCENDING THE MISSOURI, by 1845



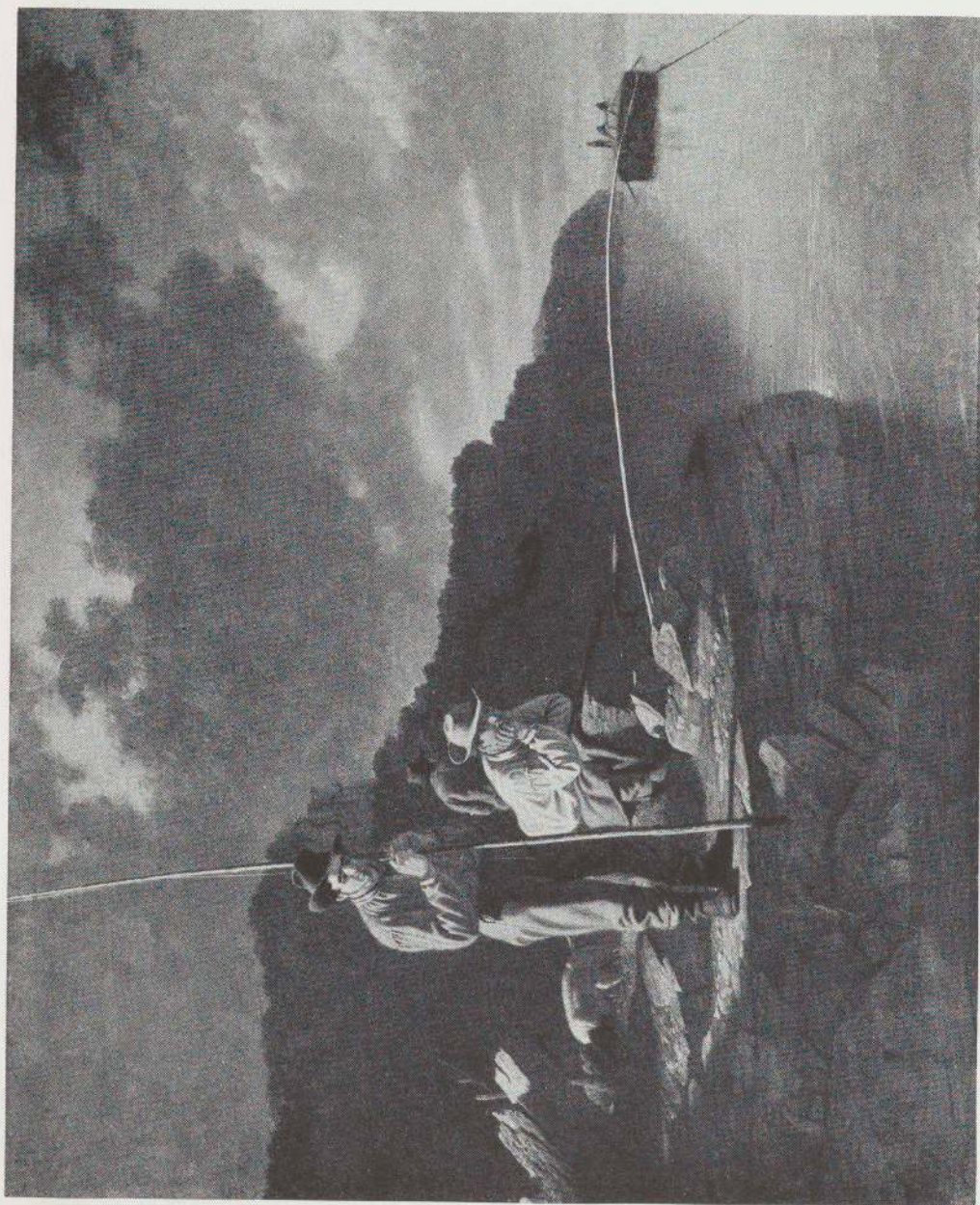
4. RAFTSMEN PLAYING CARDS, 1847-50



6. WATCHING THE CARGO, 1849



7. SHOOTING FOR THE BEEF, 1850



8. FISHING ON THE MISSOURI, 1851 or before



9. DANIEL BOONE COMING THROUGH CUMBERLAND GAP, 1851



12. THE VERDICT OF THE PEOPLE, 1854-55



13. THE JOLLY FLATBOATMEN (No. 2), 1857

Fifteen hundred copies of this catalog were printed
for the Trustees of the Museum of Modern Art by
William E. Rudge's Sons, New York, January, 1935

The Museum of Modern Art



300061879

