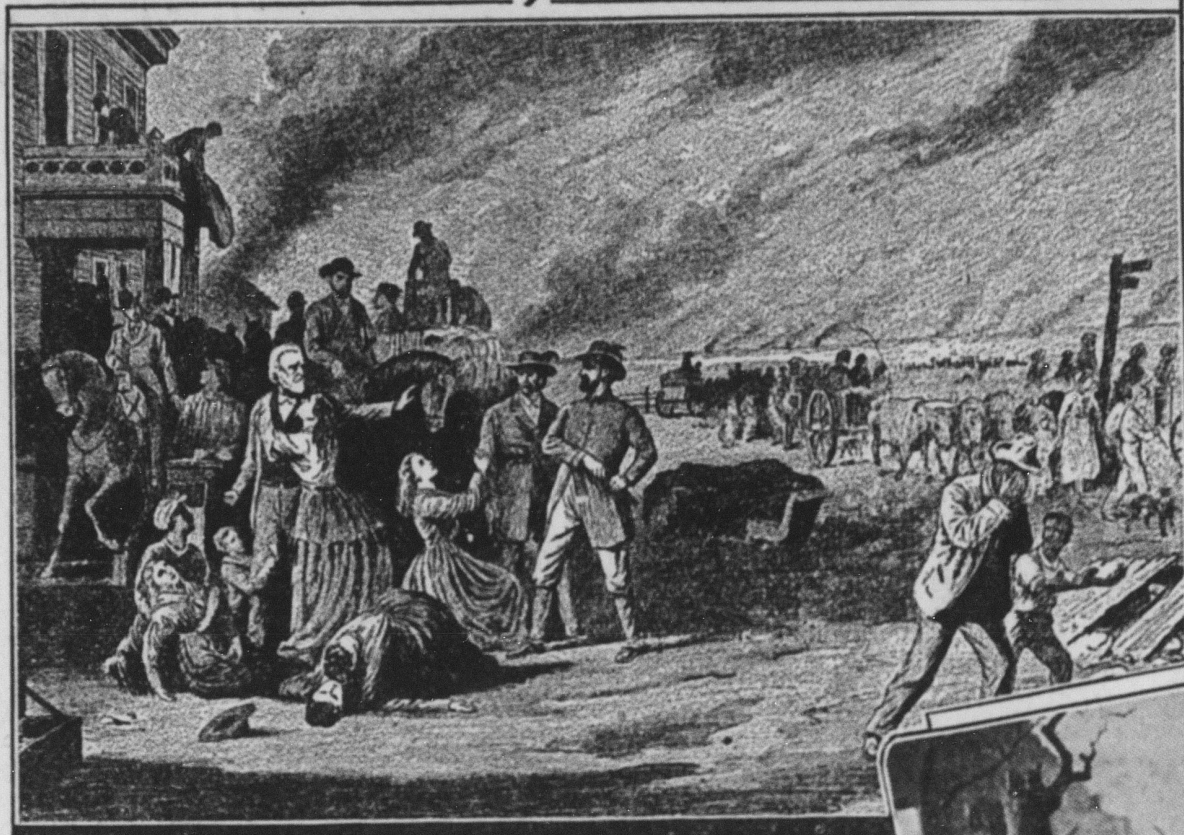


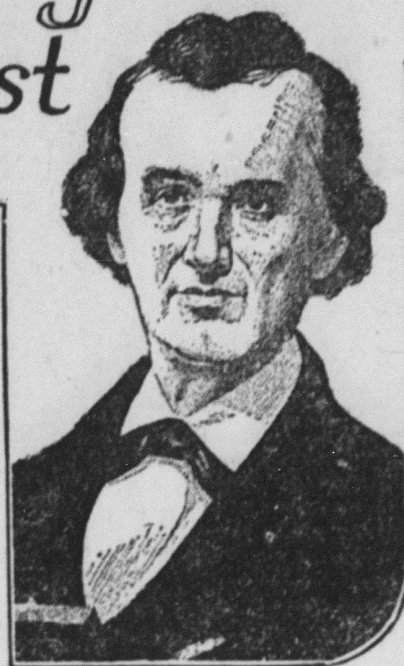
George Caleb Bingham, Painter of America's Past



"Order No. 11"



"The Stump Speech"



George Caleb Bingham—
Self Portrait



"Emigration of
Daniel Boone and His Family"



"The Jolly
Flatboatmen"

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

FOR nearly a century he has been known as "the Missouri artist," a characterization which rather definitely limited the scope of his fame. During his lifetime he enjoyed a certain measure of recognition as one of the leading painters in the West. The American Art union chose several of his pictures for reproduction as colored lithographs and their wide circulation made his work familiar to most Americans. But because he never signed his paintings, the name of the man himself is comparatively unknown. Thousands who visited the Missouri exhibit in the Hall of States at a Century of Progress exposition in Chicago in 1933 saw for the first time an original of one of his most famous paintings and for the first time connected with it the name of George Caleb Bingham.

But a wider recognition, tardy though it has been, has come at last to "the Missouri artist." It started several years ago when a citizen of that state took an option on Bingham's home at Arrow Rock and suggested its purchase by the United Daughters of the Confederacy as a shrine to the Southern cause. Three years ago another Missourian, scion of a family intimately connected with the painter's career, declared that Bingham might well be called "Missouri's forgotten artist," for all the honor which it had paid him, and announced his intention of starting a movement to revive interest in the man and his work. In 1933 there was a loan show of Bingham paintings in the Kansas Art Institute and last year the director of the St. Louis Art museum gathered from various parts of the country a representative group of his pictures which were on exhibition there for several weeks.

Another signal honor came last month when the Museum of Modern Art in New York city gave a show of Bingham's work. Time Magazine, featuring the story of this exhibition in its department on art, declared:

"Critics fell over themselves with such phrases as 'a modern Delacroix,' 'last of the Renaissance tradition,' 'rival of David and Ingres.' Only cautious bang-haired Royal Cortissoz sounded a note of doubt in the general acclaim for George Caleb Bingham: 'There is no distinction of style about his work. He was a mildly competent, mildly interesting practitioner, whose local legend may well be revived as a matter of pious courtesy.'

"Mildly competent his work may be, but the elaborate canvases of George Caleb Bingham described early life on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers far more ably than the much-touted Currier & Ives lithographs. Bingham was one of the few painters in the world who was a practicing politician all his life, and he remains today one of the few Missouri artists ever to gain national fame."

The paradox of his being both an artist and a practicing politician, however, is only one of the many interesting facts in his career. Bingham was born on a plantation in Augusta county, Virginia, March 20, 1811. When the boy was eight years old Henry Vest Bingham, his Scotch father, lost all his money and moved his family of a wife, seven children and their grandfather to the little frontier town of Franklin in Howard county, Missouri. From his earliest years the boy dabbled with pencil and paint brush. He made his own paints, using axle grease, vegetable dyes, brick dust mixed with oil and even his own blood, obtained by cutting the ends of his fingers. A year after the arrival of the Bingham family in Franklin a fortunate circumstance aided the boy's artistic ambition. Across the Missouri river at Boonslick Daniel Boone had settled and up the river from St. Louis came the artist

Chester Harding, to paint Boone's portrait. It is probable that the boy watched the painter at work, saw the likeness of the famous Kentucky pioneer grow on the canvas and view with envious wonder the finished product. It is more certain that Harding saw some of the sketches with which the boy had adorned the fence, the pump and the walls of the chicken house on his father's farm and gave him some much-needed encouragement.

When Bingham was twelve his father died and Mary Amend Bingham, the thrifty, resourceful German housewife, took her brood of children to a little farm in Salline county, the only thing left them after her husband's death. At the age of sixteen Bingham was apprenticed to a cabinet-maker in Boonville, learned something about wood carving and made wood panels on which he painted pictures. He also began the study of law in his spare time and even took up theology with the idea of possibly becoming a Methodist minister.

Fortunately for him and for American art, however, Chester Harding again came to Boonville, noted the progress the boy had made and strongly advised him to concentrate on a career as an artist. More than that, he gave young Bingham lessons and by the time he was nineteen he had definitely decided upon painting as his life work. Borrowing \$100 from a friend he used it for more instruction by teachers in St. Louis. In 1838 he went East to study in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and there his career began to blossom into full flower. He met many artists and had the opportunity of seeing many paintings. Not only did he see the portraits by such masters as Gilbert Stuart but he also saw descriptive or story pictures, technically known as genre painting, which appealed to him strongly and in which he began experimenting. He also continued his portrait painting and did pictures of all the celebrities he met—Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, Van Buren, Calhoun, Buchanan and John Howard Payne, composer of "Home Sweet Home."

Returning to Missouri six years later Bingham started on his career as a genre painter. The fur-trading era was drawing to a close, as were other phases of frontier life, and America owes a debt of gratitude to George Caleb Bingham for preserving on canvas so much of it before it was gone forever. About this time he painted his first version of "The Jolly Flatboatmen" (there were several later versions), one of his best-known pictures.

The next thing to which the versatile Bingham turned his attention was politics. In a hotly contested election he won a seat in the Missouri legislature by three votes but his career as a law-maker does not seem to have interfered seriously with his painting. He continued to turn out scenes of life on the river and it was these paintings which first became widely known through the lithographs of the American Art union. One result of his political career in Missouri was to turn his attention to painting pictures of that phase of pioneer life, and in "The Stump Speaker," "Canvassing for a Vote," "County Election" and "The Verdict of the People" we have an invaluable record of the stirring days when people took their politics more seriously than they seem to do now.

By this time Bingham was making enough from his painting to enable him to go to Europe

to study. After his return he painted some of his finest portraits. Later he made another trip abroad but this time his stay was a short one and in 1860 he was living in Kansas City and again taking a prominent part in the politics of the state. Despite his Virginia nativity and the strong Southern sympathy in Missouri, the outbreak of the Civil war found Bingham a staunch Northern sympathizer and a captain in the United States Volunteer reserves. So there is a paradox too in the proposal to make the Arrow Rock home of this Unionist a Confederate shrine. But that proposal is more understandable if there is taken into account the fact that one of his pictures, the famous "Order No. 11," was a fierce polemic against an injustice suffered by the Confederates in Missouri at the hands of some of Bingham's fellow-Unionists. In 1863, while Bingham was state treasurer, Quantrill and his guerillas made their famous raid on Lawrence, Kan., and massacred many of its defenseless citizens.

In retaliation for this, Brig. Gen. Thomas Ewing, Jr., who was in command of the military district of the border with headquarters in Kansas City, issued his "General Order No. 11" calling for the concentration of all residents of the border into certain military centers and the delivery of their harvested crops there. Those who could prove their loyalty to the Union cause would be given permission to remain within the limits of the military stations but all "rebels" were to be driven out of the district. All of this had to be accomplished within 15 days.

It was one of the most drastic military orders ever issued during the Civil war. Bingham made a trip from Jefferson City to Kansas City and protested vehemently against its issuance. But Ewing was obdurate and the order was executed ruthlessly and in many cases with unnecessary brutality. Whereupon Bingham took a vow that "he would make the author of that order infamous to posterity with his pen and brush."

At the close of the war, Bingham moved to Independence and there began painting "Order No. 11." After it was finished he borrowed \$5,000 from his friend, James S. Rollins, to have the painting engraved on steel. He had printed 5,000 copies which he sold and for many years after the Civil war these steel engravings hung in hundreds of Missouri homes to keep alive the hated memory of Thomas Ewing and his cruel "Order No. 11."

Ewing had returned to his home in Ohio after the war and in 1877 he was a candidate for governor. Whereupon Bingham went to Ohio, taking his painting with him and exhibiting it in all the larger cities. He gave lectures on it and wrote articles for the newspapers addressed to the voters, denouncing Ewing and calling upon them to keep such a man from becoming the chief executive of their state. The result was that Ewing was defeated. Bingham had kept his vow, although he did not live long to enjoy his triumph. He died in 1879 and is buried in the old Union cemetery in Kansas City.

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End of the Earth Seen According to Prophecy

According to Dr. Fritz Zwicky, a physicist associate of Dr. Robert A. Millikan, discoverer of cosmic rays, the Bible prophecy that "the earth shall melt with fervent heat," is strictly scientific and is the destined end of our whole solar system. None of us now present need feel alarmed about it, as it may not occur for many millions of years, possibly billions. But once in a thousand years some sun—to us only a point of light in the sky—has suddenly blazed up and then gradually disappeared. This is believed to be the result of an explosion, releasing the interior heat, estimated in our own sun to be an intensity of 30,000,000 degrees. In the case of our sun that would mean the instant conversion of all the planets and all upon them, if any, into gas and the disappearance of our entire solar system. That is what happened to such suns and solar systems, if they had any, which thus ended their careers during the past eons of time.

Such exploding suns are known as supernovas, an ordinary nova being a new star, not new in fact but new to our vision. Doctor Zwicky says that astronomers are in expectation of such a phenomenon occurring near the Virgo universe by 1937, and are keenly on the watch for it. It is a tentative theory that cosmic rays are created or released by exploding suns and if this phenomenon actually occurs on time much more about that ray may be learned.

Of course, the year in which we observed it would not be the date of the actual explosion, since for us to see it now would require that it happened many thousands of years ago, so long does it take for light to reach the earth from such mathematical distances. The mere discussion of such an event and mention of the great lapse

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