

Between Science and Art



Samuel Seymour, *Self-Portrait*, detail from his *Hills of the [Floetz] Trap Formation* (28–29 July 1820), watercolor over graphite on paper, 14.5 × 21 cm., Yale Collection of Western Americana, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Two artists — Samuel Seymour and Titian Ramsay Peale — were hired by the Long Expedition to provide a visual record. As shown here, an expedition illustrator often made field sketches, which were later revised into the images that the public would see through official accounts or exhibits.

Titian Ramsay Peale's Long Expedition Sketches, Newly Recovered at the State Historical Society of Iowa

by Kenneth Haltman



IN MID-SEPTEMBER 1819, a small company of "scientific gentlemen" bound the next year for the Rocky Mountains under orders from the U.S. War Department made camp for the winter several miles below Council Bluffs along the west bank of the Missouri (across the river and slightly north from the present-day Iowa city of that name). They had traveled down the Ohio and up the Mississippi from Pittsburgh in the *Western Engineer*, an experimental steamboat designed by their commander, Major Stephen Harriman Long of the newly formed Army Corps of Topographic Engineers. The *Western Engineer* now lay moored offshore, a floating storehouse for their crates of fragile scientific instruments (including sextants, telescopes, artificial horizons, and a microscope) and an extensive library of reference books. The team of civilian scientists settled into snug log cabins they and their military escort had hurriedly built against the coming winter in the shelter of the bluffs along the river, within sight of Fort Lisa, a Missouri Fur Company trading post. Come spring, they would embark upon the first systematic field reconnaissance ever undertaken west of the Mississippi.

Despite wide recognition by editorialists and politicians, as well as by scientists, of the desirability of cataloging the flora, fauna, and mineral resources of the vast territory that had been acquired by the United States through the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, much of the interior, and principally the river systems of the plains, had yet to be explored. The Long Expedition, as it has come to be known, was the first organized attempt by the federal government to take stock of this new territory since the return of Lewis and Clark in 1806. On that earlier expedition, the work of science had been left to the two military commanders. Lacking the specialized training to comply with Jefferson's request for detailed description, they produced only amateur results.

Cognizant of this, Major Long in choosing his command included a number of the nation's leading scientists, selected on the advice of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia. William Baldwin, who was to have served as the expedition's physician and botanist until his death that fall; Edwin James, who



Charles Willson Peale, *Maj. Stephen Harriman Long* (1819), oil on canvas, 61.6 × 51.4 cm., Independence National Historical Park.

This portrait of expedition leader Stephen Long was painted by renowned artist Charles Willson Peale — whose son Titian accompanied Long's expedition.

replaced him in both capacities; Thomas Say, the expedition's distinguished zoologist; and Augustus Edward Jessup, who (until his resignation that winter) was to have served as its geologist, were all men superbly trained to study the western habitat and to accurately report their discoveries back east.

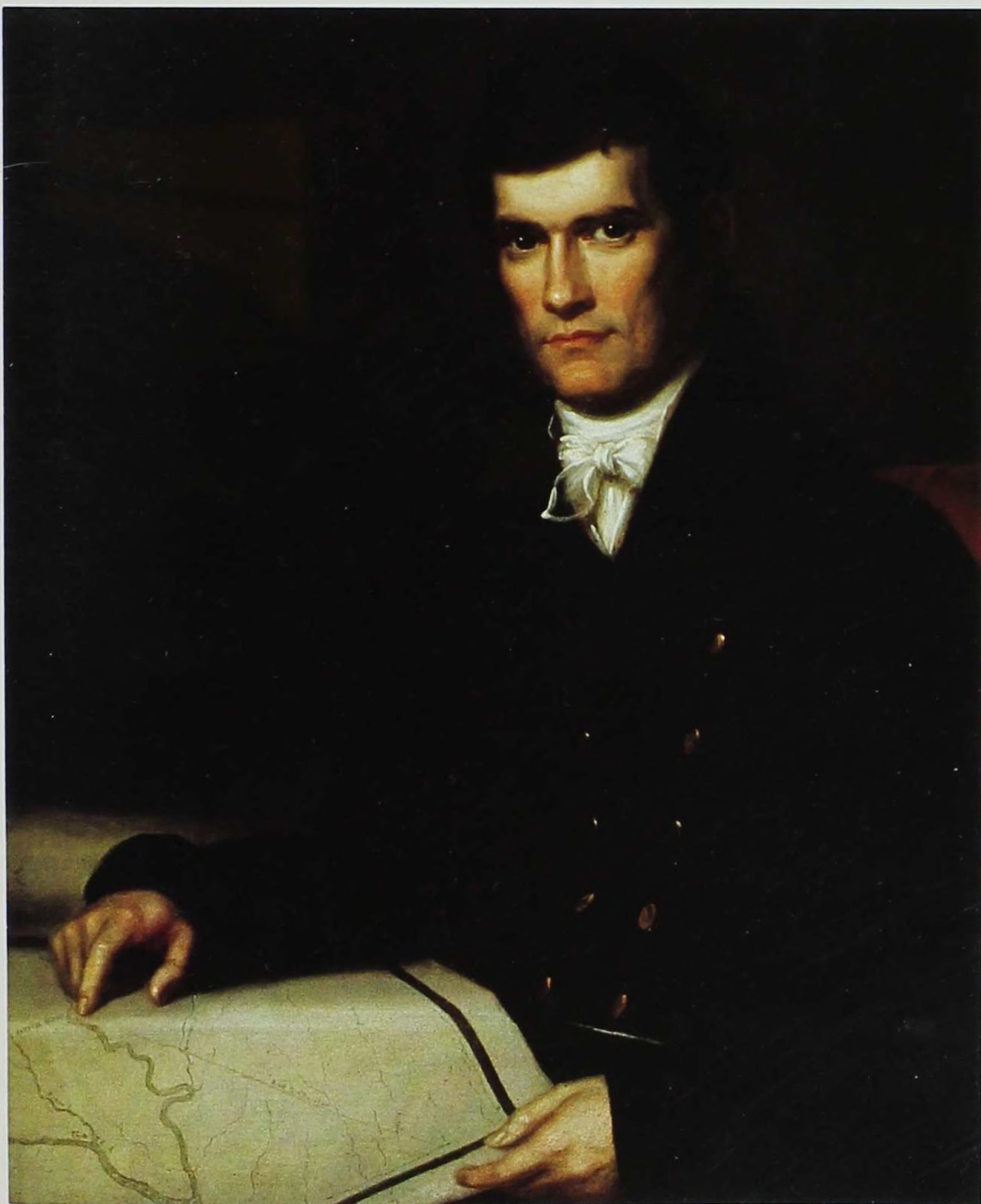
As Secretary of War John C. Calhoun (as well as Long himself) had noted, not only had Lewis and Clark lacked proficiency in the natural sciences, they had lacked the necessary artistic training to produce detailed and accurate sketches as illustrations of their observations in the field. Such images, they knew, might better have served the cause of science by helping, for example, to describe previously undocumented specimens too cumbersome or delicate to transport home. But Calhoun and Long were interested in more than propagating scientific knowledge for its own sake. They were also aware of the value such documentary images might have in encouraging congressional and public support of present and future expenditures on exploration. Long hoped to publish a multi-volume account compiled from

the journals he asked each member of his scientific team to keep, while any specimens collected were to be held for study and eventual exhibition in the Philadelphia Museum alongside the specimens collected by Lewis and Clark, deposited a decade earlier.

In this way, in planning for the Long Expedition, elaborate care was taken to satisfy the several constituencies eager for specific intelligence regarding the territories that lay far beyond the western frontier. They included scientists, both amateur and professional; members of the political class; businessmen with an interest in western expansion; and, last but not least, ordinary citizens whose appetites had been whetted for scientific knowledge (and whose eyes had been turned west) by the popular press.

BECAUSE PEOPLE desired not only to *know* but also to *see*, the organizers of the expedition found it expedient to provide for a visual record. President Monroe himself is thought to have approved the hiring of not one but two artists to supply the required illustrations: Samuel Seymour, a middle-aged, British-born watercolorist, hired to furnish sketches of "distinguished Indians" and "groups of savages" as well as western landscapes; and, as natural history illustrator (also serving as assistant naturalist), Titian Ramsay Peale. About Seymour little is known. Of the 150 sketches he produced, fewer than two dozen survive. Some of these, chosen to illustrate the official *Account* of the expedition published in 1822 and 1823, have become recognizable icons of western exploration.

Peale's life and his expeditionary artwork, on the other hand, though less familiar, are much better documented. Only eighteen years old when the *Western Engineer* raised anchor in Pittsburgh in May 1819 — he would celebrate his nineteenth birthday that fall near Council Bluffs — Peale descended from a highly visible Philadelphia family. He was the youngest son of Charles Willson Peale, painter, scientist, and proprietor of the nation's first natural history museum, the Philadelphia Museum (also known after its founder as the Peale Museum),



Charles Bird King, *John C. Calhoun* (ca. 1818–20), oil on canvas, 91.4 × 71.8 cm., The Chrysler Museum.

Secretary of War John C. Calhoun recognized that accurate images of what the Long Expedition discovered would encourage congressional and public support of future expeditions. Here, Calhoun's forefinger points to the area labeled "Council Bluff" along the Missouri River; near there, the Long Expedition wintered over in 1819/20.

located in what is now Independence Hall.

From the time of his birth in 1799 Titian Peale had been surrounded by the nation's foremost artist-naturalists and, after 1809, as fate would have it, by the artifacts gathered in the northern Rockies by Lewis and Clark. By his late teens he had gained a solid reputation as a taxidermist and a local renown for the delicacy and precociousness of his specimen drawings. The museum housed a gallery of portraits by the elder Peale and by a number of Titian's many older siblings, both sisters and brothers. It was thus appropriate that his official responsibilities on the Long Expedition should involve both science *and* art.

His instructions were to assist the senior naturalists in collecting specimens, which he was then to preserve for shipment back to Philadelphia for safekeeping. As was typical of the scientific practice of the day, he was to supplement these physical specimens with detailed drawings. From these more formal descriptions, museum displays and eventual paintings could later be made. In early March 1819, Long had put in an order with Beck and Stewart's emporium in Philadelphia for a wide assortment of pencils, colors, brushes, and sketchbooks of good quality Whatman paper measuring approximately 5 × 8 inches. Small and light enough to be carried easily in the field, these sketchbooks were well suited for taking notes and making sketches in all conditions.

It appears that Peale made good use of the supply of sketchbooks. We can gauge the scope of his expedition activities from the accession records of the Philadelphia Museum. On the same day in March 1821, some 123 field studies in his hand (of which 33 represented insects, 23 mammals, 13 plants, 27 birds, 9 fish, 12 reptiles, and 6 shells) entered the museum collection, along with 58 preserved zoological and ornithological specimens to which these studies closely corresponded.

NEWLY DISCOVERED WORKS indicate that Peale's productivity on the expedition was far more catholic than even this extended inventory would suggest. Only a few years ago

a Peale descendant brought to light five complete sketchbooks containing over 80 previously unknown western images. State Historical Society of Iowa staff recently uncovered six additional Peale images related to the expedition, five sketches and one finished watercolor (see pages 82–83), bringing the total of his *known* Long Expedition images to 235 or thereabouts.

These latest additions to the historical record have changed our understanding of Peale's work in crucial ways. For one thing, it now seems clear that he was as concerned as his colleague Seymour with the representation both of western landscape and of human figures in that landscape, Native Americans in particular. More than this, Peale's work can now be seen to have been marked by two very different styles of vision, the one more immediate and associated with preparatory sketches executed in the field, the other more formal and conventional, learned in the museum setting in which he grew up and characteristic of his most highly polished field sketches and the careful watercolors he completed after them.

IT IS IMPORTANT in considering the meaning of this expeditionary production that we recognize what has become a commonplace of contemporary museum studies and art history: An image, even when seemingly most factual, is *never* objective in any simple way, but inevitably tells as much about the interests, and the prejudices, of its maker as it does about the world it represents. This seems especially useful to bear in mind when looking at images by an artist sent west in the employ of the federal government to chronicle and celebrate the adventure of imperialism while simultaneously chronicling and celebrating the similarly expansionist adventures of Enlightenment science.

The West Peale drew and painted — and arguably the West he saw — was a contested terrain informed by preconceptions and by vested interests. We know from his letters and journal entries that Peale himself felt deep ambivalence regarding the region. The West meant an opportunity to participate in the ordering of the world through Enlightenment



Charles Willson Peale, *Titian Ramsay Peale II* (1819), oil on canvas, 62.2 × 51.4 cm., Private Collection.

Just before Titian Ramsay Peale departed on the Long Expedition, his father painted this portrait of Titian. Already the young Peale had proved his skill in taxidermy and specimen drawing in his father's Philadelphia museum.



Fig. 1. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Bison Hunt* (15–25 February 1820), graphite on paper, 12.7 × 20.1 cm., American Philosophical Society.

Based on a hunting trip along the Boyer River in Iowa, this sketch (above) and watercolor (below) were the first images of western bison hunts by a white artist.

Fig. 2. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Bison Hunt* (15–25 February 1820), watercolor over ink on paper, 14.15 × 23.3 cm., American Philosophical Society.



science, but also a chance to escape into disorder and adventure, far from the control of a domineering father such as Charles Willson Peale. Titian Peale's proficiency in natural history, indeed, seems to have stemmed as much from his love of hunting and the open as from any love he had for work in a museum serving the greater glory of scientific progress.

It is not that Peale's technical skills were in any way deficient — he was in fact at the cutting edge of the science of his day — but rather that his sketches reveal a more personal agenda at work. Specimen studies and landscapes, captured in field sketches as fragments of a world, were typically arranged in his finished works in patterns that suggest the importance to Peale of questions of power and territorial control. Neither the preparatory sketches nor the finished works are necessarily the more accurate. But the spontaneity of Peale's initial views seems to acknowledge and embrace a personal response made less visible in later paintings through a process of studious revision.

In a sense this movement from hurriedly made field notes into far more calculated works of art intended for public display typified the workings of the expedition in general. Consistently, the private perceptions of the expedition as a struggle against odds, which we find in journals kept by its members, were subsequently edited in published accounts into heroic public statements of environmental order marked by optimism concerning the possibility of conquest. In this respect at least, Peale's vision coincided with and reinforced the expedition's public ideology — with its suggestions that the containment of the West was, in fact, as "natural" as it was inevitable. Nonetheless, his sketchbooks reveal both doubts about the possibilities of white control and personal ambivalence regarding viewer access to a wilderness on whose essential *inaccessibility* his status as heroic westerner relied.

The assessment of Peale's expedition work to follow, though it draws upon an extensive study of his art and life, is based on a simple underlying premise: To usefully compare the early and late states of his images, we must first understand his purposes and intended



Fig. 3. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Sioux Lodge Captured by Ottos* (May 1820), ink over graphite on paper, 12.8 × 20.2 cm., Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Ramsay MacMullen, M.A.H. 1967.

Peale's sketch is the earliest recorded image of the Plains "skin lodge" or traveling tepee.

audience in each case, with some sense of the intellectual and artistic conventions at play. Nearly two hundred years after the Long Expedition, viewers today face the challenge of making sense of these long-lost works, both through aesthetic appreciation and close interpretation.

AS WE KNOW from his own journals and letters and the official published expedition *Account*, in the fall and early winter of 1819, Peale was principally engaged in collecting geological, zoological, ornithological, and botanical specimens. With sketchbook and supplies in hand, he tramped through woods and prairies and along the river, tracking game, setting traps, and fishing through holes cut in the ice of the Missouri. Hunting was a favorite activity of Peale's, and his February hunting trip to Boyer Creek (the Boyer River in present-day Iowa) yielded the first images of western bison hunts by a white artist (figures 1 and 2). That winter Peale also produced the earliest recorded images of the Plains "skin lodge" or traveling tepee (fig. 3).

The recently recovered sketches now augment this written and visual record of Peale's

activities on the expedition. For example, four of the sketches uncovered at the State Historical Society of Iowa — *Indians at Council Bluffs*, *Omahas and Ottoes*, *Heeteeka and Big Soldier*, and *Three Omahas*, each probably dating to early fall (figures 4–7) — tell us that Peale was recording his encounters with members of tribes who had come to Fort Lisa to trade.

These sketches, loosely organized on the page by posture or theme, seem to document random encounters. In *Indians at Council Bluffs* (fig. 4), for instance, Peale records the full-length portraits of three men — two standing, wrapped in blankets or hides, and a third seated cross-legged much closer to the picture plane or the extreme front edge of the image. Alongside are bust portraits of two other men, one of whom, drawn larger in scale and at a right angle to the others, wears a peace medal

on his bare chest. In *Omahas and Ottoes* (fig. 5), two men with their backs half turned to the viewer serve to demonstrate a dance position on the left side of the sheet, while the two men to their right are, again, much larger in scale, and seem to be convincing psychological portraits of individuals, one of whom stares out of the image directly at the viewer, his features highlighted in red wash.

ALTHOUGH NONE of the expedition's scientists were explicitly assigned to study Native American cultures, zoologist Thomas Say actually contributed most of the ethnographic passages in the *Account*. He proved to be a keen observer, and some of Peale's sketches



Fig. 4. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Indians at Council Bluffs* (October–December 1819), watercolor over graphite on paper, 12.5 × 20.1 cm., State Historical Society of Iowa.

Peale probably sketched these Native Americans (shown in figures 4–7) as they visited nearby Fort Lisa to trade or as he wandered through their villages. These four sketches are among the six newly discovered images by Peale in the State Historical Society of Iowa. Faint watermarks were clues for matching them to the sketchbooks.



Fig. 5. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Omahas and Ottoes* (October–December 1819), watercolor over graphite on paper, 12.5 × 20 cm., State Historical Society of Iowa.



Fig. 6. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Heeteeka and Big Soldier* (October–December 1819), watercolor over graphite on paper, 12.5 × 19.5 cm., State Historical Society of Iowa.



Fig. 7. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Three Omahas* (October–December 1819), watercolor over graphite on paper, 12.5 × 20 cm., State Historical Society of Iowa.

appear to depict the same subjects about which Say was writing. But just as Say's science in this case was "unofficial," so too was the art Peale made in its support. Peale, for his part, may simply have been following the advice he had been given by his brother Rembrandt in a letter, suggesting that he bring home images of "Indians in their warrior dresses" and "accurate drawings of their habitations." Nevertheless, Peale's ethnographic images (figures 4–7) and similar ones apparently removed from the same sketchbook, are perhaps his most original and important "specimen studies."

Painting Indians, it will be recalled, was officially the province of Peale's colleague Seymour; but this overlap in production between the two men can be explained by the fact that in the early nineteenth century, Indians as subjects of depiction were understood as belonging equally to scientific illustrators and to picturesque artists who traveled the globe in search of exotic subject matter. The two modes of description shared a vision of Indians as "natural" objects of scrutiny. Some of Peale's

sketches convey details about ornament and dress and communicate an essential individuality. In other studies, and in finished works based on them, such particulars as these give way to ideal forms calculated to strike a chord in Eastern audiences accustomed to viewing Native Americans stereotypically as savages characterized by a stoic nobility reminiscent of ancient Rome.

A simple comparison suggests this range of approach nicely. Consider first Peale's study of two men, identified — most probably by a later owner of the study — as Kansa or Oto (fig. 8). This sketch presents much realistic-seeming detail, for example, scalp locks, buckskin leggings, and a bearclaw necklace. The men are shown seated, one in three-quarter profile and the other viewed from the front; both are pensive and awkward, an attribute of the drawing's style as well as of their pose. The eye locates the men's position in space only with difficulty because very little ground plane has been provided. Although they are thus depicted "out of context," they do convey, especially in the case

of the figure on the right, a strong sense of individual character.

In figure 9, on the other hand, Peale depicts two men who seem only "generically" Indian — not real people in authentic dress but rather representations of a type, and a Roman type at that. Their contemplative posture is strikingly similar to that in the former sketch (hand on chin, elbow on knee), but here it conveys neither ethnographic detail nor individual character but romantic cliché. The two Indians, furthermore, have been artfully arranged to frame an expanse of open prairie — a convention common in nineteenth-century painting, and here used to provide white viewers a point of logical access to a virgin wilderness proclaiming its openness to being entered and controlled.

In his more elaborate images, Peale practiced a style of formal pictorial composition innovated in the family museum, where each display was a carefully arranged visual "text"



Fig. 8. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Ottoes* (May 1820), graphite on paper, 12.9 × 21.1 cm., Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Ramsay MacMullen, M.A.H. 1967.

This sketch conveys both ethnographic details of clothing and ornamentation, and an individuality in pose and expression. Compare it to figure 9 (below).



Fig. 9. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Contemplative Indians* (1820), graphite on paper, 13 × 20.2 cm., Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Ramsay MacMullen, M.A.H. 1967.

Compared to the men in figure 8, these Native Americans are depicted in a similar pose (elbow on knee). Yet here Peale positions them to "frame" the landscape and direct the viewer's eye towards the open expanse.

designed to be read easily by visitors. In the museum, natural history specimens were ordered and classified in neat rows with painted backdrops showing the environment where each had been collected. In a number of his expedition images, Peale made unknown or exotic subject matter comprehensible to viewers by setting specimens similarly in carefully constructed landscapes.

An example of this is *Konza Village* (fig. 10; "Konza" was a nineteenth-century spelling for "Kansa"). In this drawing, which dates to late summer 1819, we overlook a permanent encampment of mud lodges from a vantage point on slightly higher ground. Peale has structured the image so as to place this village and its inhabitants in a neatly ordered natural world, revealed to us in successive horizontal planes. The composition of the picture organizes our appreciation of the world it represents. From a vaguely articulated foreground, we first look down upon a cluster of circular lodges where two figures are visible,

one indoors and one out, both perhaps women. A third figure atop the furthest lodge gazes with us, deeper into the composition still, across an extended open plain on which riders, perhaps male hunters, are galloping on their horses. Beyond, open plain yields to a line of trees (and perhaps a hidden river) followed by low hills, all encompassed within the extended embrace of a rising sun. The Kansa, Peale suggests, gaze out upon their world much as white viewers do, but with this difference: The white vision (that is to say, white understanding) is unbeknownst to the Kansa — and it subsumes the vision of the Kansa.

PERHAPS THE MOST LITERAL, visually persuasive assertion of white cultural control over the western landscape in Peale's expedition artwork can be seen in his finished watercolor *Engineer Cantonment with Western Engineer*



Fig. 10. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Konza Village* (21–24 August 1819), graphite with ink on paper, 13.1 × 20.9 cm., Yale University Art Gallery, Gift of Ramsay MacMullen, M.A.H. 1967.

Thomas Say, the expedition's zoologist, reports in the *Account* that this Kansa village comprised as many as 120 lodges. Peale's drawing appears to have been made from the roof of the largest, in which the expedition passed the night.

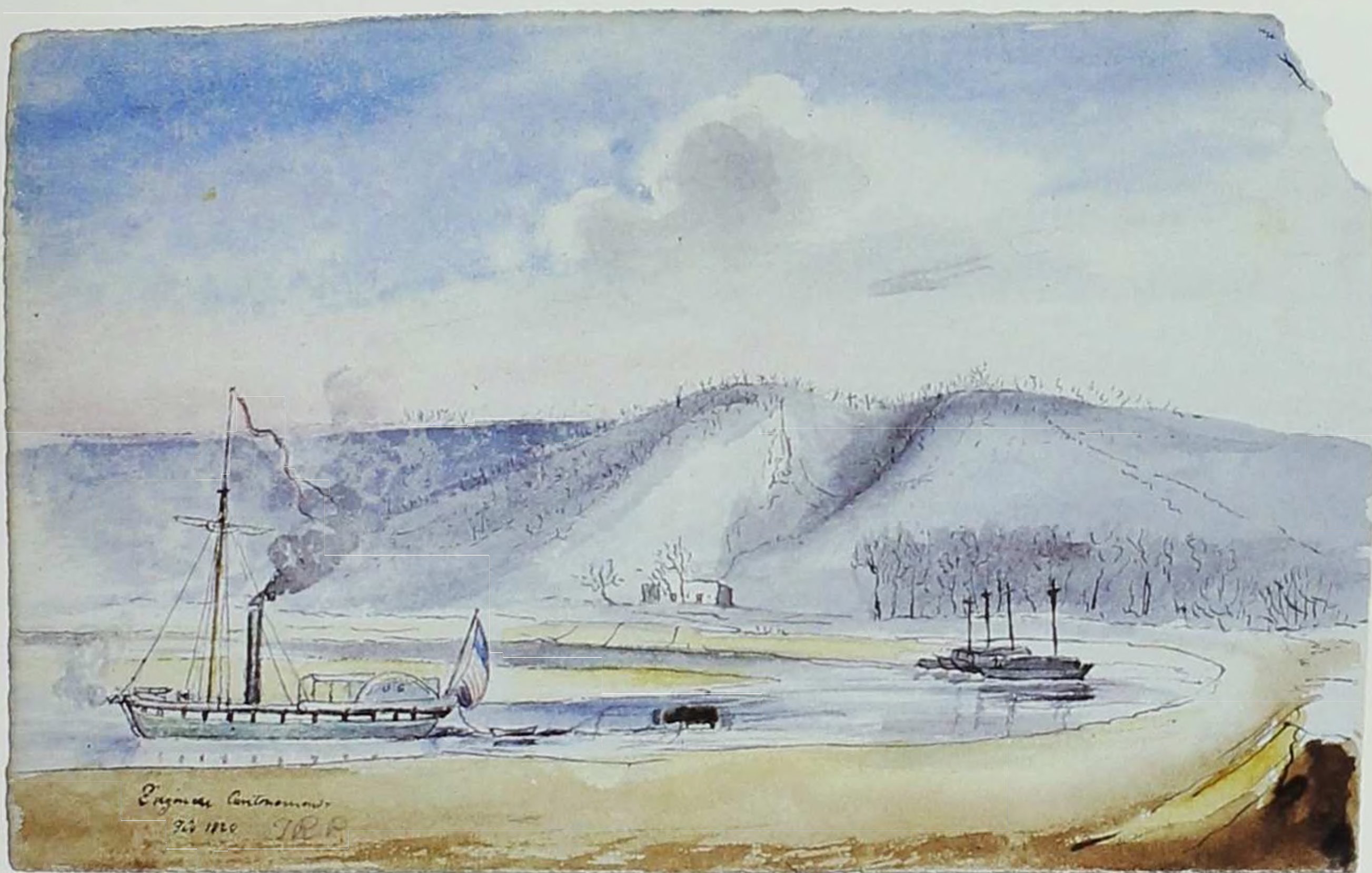


Fig. 11. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Engineer Cantonment with Western Engineer* (ca. 1822), watercolor and ink over graphite, 12 × 19.2 cm., American Philosophical Society.

Created for the public and the government after the expedition was over, this composite watercolor depicts the steamboat *Western Engineer* heading upriver in February 1820 — an unlikely scene because the boat was moored and dismantled until late spring.

(fig. 11). We stand on the west bank of the Missouri River facing roughly south. The rectangular building at distant midground center is the trading post Fort Lisa. Our backs are to the expedition camp itself (the “cantonment”) from where this view must have been taken. At near midground left, the steamboat *Western Engineer* rests in the shallows, steam up, its American flag unfurled. At further midground right, a half dozen small-masted boats are tied along shore, possibly iced in. The bluffs are nearly bare of trees, and those we see are without leaves. From Peale’s inscription in the sand at lower left we know the season more exactly. It is February 1820 — the very dead of winter.

The only signs of life, in fact, are aboard the *Western Engineer* itself. A cloud of black smoke pours from a tall, cylindrical stack at midship. A red banner flutters from the top of the ship’s mast. An American flag hangs from its transom. These gestures might symbolize

confident control, establishing the human measure of the land. Perhaps more fundamentally, the touches of red in the steamboat’s flag are, like its plume of black smoke, visual reminders of the ship’s heart of fire, the steam engine, burning away invisibly below deck.

In 1819, steam power was widely considered the force that would reshape the continent, fueling both factory production and a revolution in transport. One of the first steamboats built, the *Western Engineer* was specifically designed to ascend the shallow waters of the Missouri. It had been hailed by the press as the very embodiment of progress. Peale is known to have done at least two earlier drawings of the boat, one a small ink drawing with what may be Cincinnati in the background (fig. 12, now at the American Philosophical Society) and the other (fig. 13) a larger field study found among the State Historical Society of Iowa sketches. Each is essentially a portrait of the *Western*

Engineer alone, intended to capture the steamboat's likeness.

In comparing the finished watercolor (fig. 11) with its preliminary sketches (figures 12 and 13), we behold a typical example of Peale's process in transforming personal studies into works intended for public consumption. Beginning with immediate impressions and factual notation, Peale would translate rather than directly transcribe these into a far more aesthetic composition inscribed with rich symbolic meaning.

For instance, whereas the steamboat's American flag appears in the sketches, its presence there is merely factual. In the watercolor, by contrast, the flag — and, because of the flag, the steamboat itself — serve as signs of an heroic nationalism. We know, in fact, from the London edition of the *Account* that neither boat nor flag *could* have appeared as they do in Peale's painting in February 1820. The *Western Engineer* had been moored and dismantled for the winter, not to be reassembled until late



Fig. 12. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Western Engineer* (1819), ink and wash over graphite on paper, 7.3 × 8.9 cm., American Philosophical Society.

The lettering on the port wheel of the steamboat in figures 12 and 13 is changed in figure 11. The buildings in the back are probably Cincinnati. The expedition had traveled down the Ohio to the Mississippi, then to the Missouri.

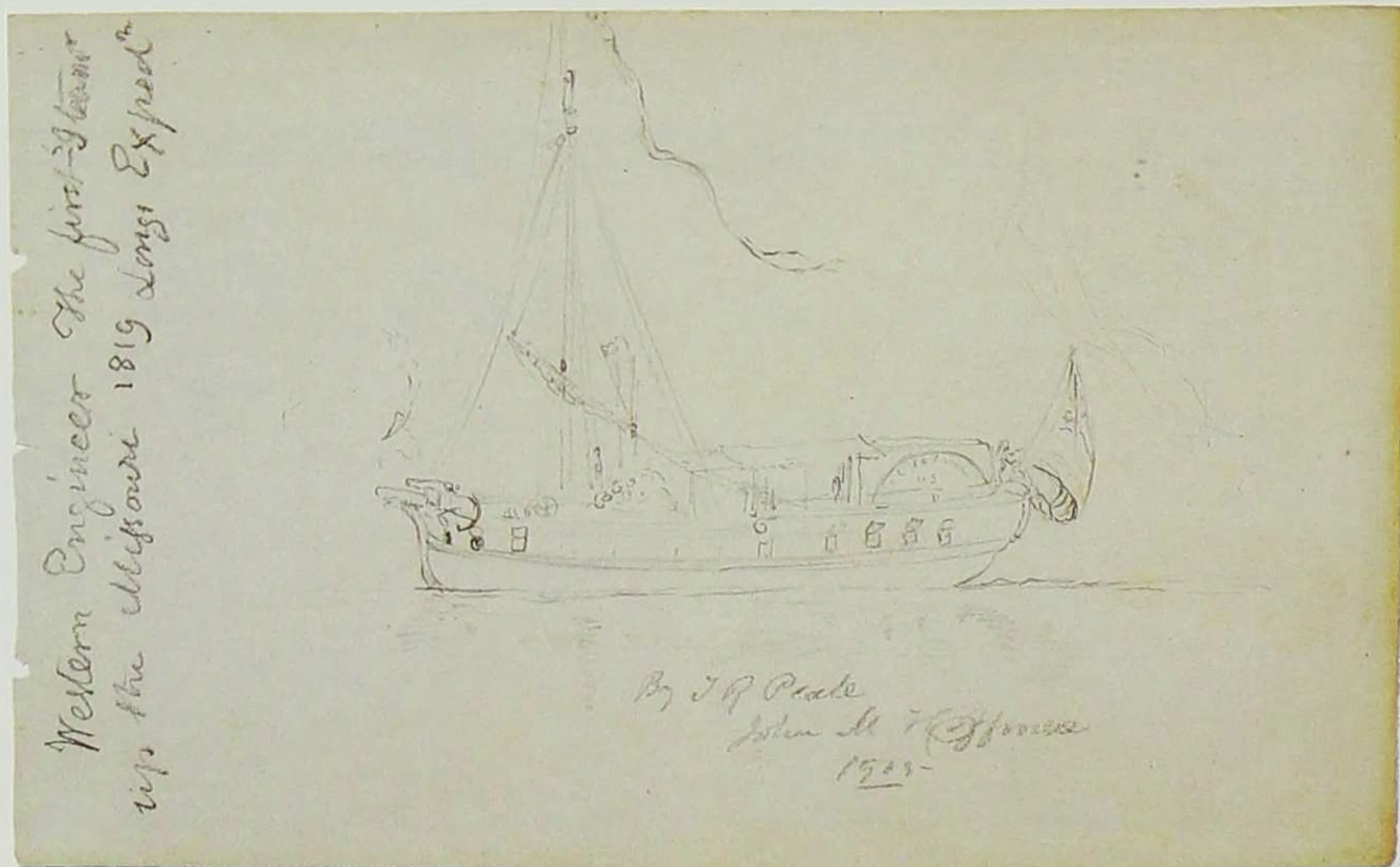


Fig. 13. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Western Engineer* (1819), graphite on paper, 12.4 × 20 cm., State Historical Society of Iowa.

A field sketch of the steamboat. The serpent figurehead appears here and in figures 11 and 12.



Fig. 14. Titian Ramsay Peale, untitled study of *Engineer Cantonment* (February 1820), watercolor and ink over graphite on paper, 13.3 × 21.2 cm., American Philosophical Society.

A frozen landscape without the *Western Engineer* is what Peale more likely saw in February 1820, while the steamboat was moored and dismantled. Below the large ink blot is the fur-trading post Fort Lisa.

the following spring. Peale may have chosen to place the boat in this winter landscape with steam up and flag flying in order to appeal to the desire of his viewers (including, perhaps most importantly, his employers in the War Department) to read the presence in the West of white Americans as confident, even as quietly triumphant.

THE TENOR of this fiction-making can be better gauged by looking to the original, untitled field sketch of the *landscape* with which Peale began (fig. 14). Comparing this pencil study with the watercolor *Engineer Cantonment with Western Engineer* (fig. 11) reveals the dramatic nature of the revision Peale achieved through the addition of color and subtle manipulations of vantage. In figure 14, he began with

a bleak view of a barren wilderness outpost in winter, imbued with an overwhelming sense of frozen isolation. A squat fort sits in the middle distance. Neither this building nor the boats along the shore assert their presence in the landscape with any force. The viewer is left nowhere to stand and has nowhere to go.

But the emotional impact of the later watercolor (fig. 11, probably completed back in Philadelphia more than a year later) is altogether different. The presence of the steamboat in its foreground serves as invitation to the viewer to imagine entry into picture space as possible. Peale underscores this quiet suggestion of vicarious participation with a visual pun. Look back at his two sketches (figures 12 and 13) of the steamboat alone: the inscription on the cover of the port wheel facing us, just to the left of the flag, consists of two parts: the monogram initials of the United States surrounded by letters spelling the name J. C. CALHOUN. In

the watercolor, this text has been reduced to the letters U S, which stand out clearly, and without punctuation, against a blue hemispheric field, suggesting to nineteenth-century viewers in the East that this steamboat, shown establishing an outpost in the wilderness, was there on their behalf. "We see the future," Peale invites them to conclude, "and it is US."

We must not allow this watercolor's calm simplicity to in any way obscure the power of its symbolism. The boat is both an engine of material conversion *in* this landscape, and a symbol of the intellectual conversion *of* this landscape from an unknown to a known environment. This historical and cultural conversion had been taking effect slowly, implemented by white and métis traders over a period of more than a century. The Long Expedition would now dramatically accelerate this process. The steamboat was an eastern dynamo sent west, burning its way into the wilderness, devouring trees as fuel and converting nature into European-American culture.

SYMBOLIC OF TECHNOLOGY and industry, the steamboat itself was adorned with a symbol of power: a serpent's head mounted on its bow, visible in all three of Peale's images. This figure-head, presumably designed by Long, was not merely decorative but functional. Peale

described it in his journal as "a large Serpent through the gapping [*sic*] mouth of which the [steamboat's] waste steam issues. [I]t will give no doubt to the Indians an Idea that the boat is pulled along by this Monster."

The *St. Louis Enquirer* of June 19, 1819, described the effect more colorfully: "The bow of the vessel exhibits the form of a huge serpent, black and scaley, rising out of the water from under the boat, his head as high as the deck, darting forward, his mouth open, vomiting smoke, and apparently carrying the boat on his back. . . . To the eye of ignorance the illusion is complete, that a monster of the deep carries her on his back smoking with fatigue, and lashing the waves with violent exertion."

Carrying along a boatload of scientists and artists and their books and equipment on its back, this serpent serves to figure the expedition itself as an intruder in the garden, an intellectual machine determined to overcome any resistance in ingesting and processing Nature (which, of course, in the last century *included* Indians). Immediately following his written description of the boat, Peale chose, appropriately enough, to inventory its considerable arsenal. In addition to its "four brass 2 $\frac{7}{8}$ inch howitzers, two on swivels, and two on field carriages" and a quantity of small arms, the steamboat was equipped with a "brass four pounder" mounted in the bow, just above the serpent's head.

Surely Stephen Long intended his well-

After the adventure

Despite its scientific and symbolic successes, the Long Expedition's trek out to the Rockies and back in the spring and summer of 1820 was not all that its organizers had hoped for. Due to funding cuts and a late start, the expedition was forced to make do with inadequate supplies and to travel quickly. There were logistical errors made as well — the Canadian River was mistaken for the Red River — and, in the end, deserters among the military escort made off not just with the best horses and supplies, but with five precious notebooks filled with careful scientific observations.

The *Account* of the expedition, published in two text volumes and an illustrated atlas in 1822 and 1823, received largely positive

reviews. But it also suffered from a tragic lack of funding, so that in the end only two of Peale's expedition illustrations (and six of Seymour's) were included.

Peale himself returned to Philadelphia, where he played a leading role in the family museum, until his appointment in 1836 to perhaps the most elaborate exploratory venture of the century, the Wilkes Expedition to the South Seas. Serving as one of several naturalists, he filled many more sketchbooks with pencil drawings and watercolors.

Peale spent the last decades of his colorful, productive life as an examiner in the Patent Office in Washington, D.C.

— Kenneth Haltman

armed and well-equipped *Western Engineer* to inspire awe and respect not only from native peoples encountered on the expedition but from the British as well, competitors for the very lucrative fur trade in the region. Peale's audience, on the other hand, was composed of Americans back east. He completed his composite watercolor after the expedition was over, when it came time to organize the public record. What this meant for Peale was displaying not his earlier, relatively sober pencil and ink sketches of either steamboat or western landscape, but rather a composite image — in which the steamboat, symbol of the future, heads off into the future under a full head of steam with US aboard. This image was calculated to inspire viewer confidence (and to encourage viewer complicity) in an imperialist impulse to carve up vast chunks of the western wilderness.

PEALE'S WATERCOLOR *Engineer Cantonment with Western Engineer* offered his viewers a vicarious participation in the expedition's project of defining and controlling the natural world through intellectual understanding. But despite his professional sympathy with both the ideology of containment implicit in the conventions of specimen drawing and museum display, and with the expansionist policies of the War Department, Peale's work also evidences what I take to be a more personal ambivalence regarding public access to the West.

Sometime shortly after he completed *Engineer Cantonment with Western Engineer*, Peale painted a second watercolor version of the same view, one he left untitled but that we might reasonably call *Engineer Cantonment with Deer* (fig. 16, next page). The painting is one of those only recently uncovered in Iowa — certainly the most consummate of his works held by the State Historical Society, and among the most consummate of his works known. Much remains the same in the two images, and much has changed. It is no surprise that Peale, as a skilled taxidermist and avid hunter, should have chosen to feature a deer in this landscape where he lived and



Fig. 15. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Yellow Headed Blackbird* (May 14, 1820), watercolor over graphite on paper, 18.8 × 22.7 cm., American Philosophical Society.

Watercolors (such as this one) and museum dioramas in the family museum in Philadelphia were based on Peale's field sketches, which showed groupings of species in natural surroundings.

worked for the better part of a year. As natural history illustrator on the expedition, he sketched and painted many specimen-in-landscape studies on which later museum dioramas would be based, and in 1822 or thereabouts he completed several dozen graceful watercolors after them, including his *Yellow Headed Blackbird*, which you see here (fig. 15).

Engineer Cantonment with Deer has something in common with these works as well, with its suggestion of environmental context both explaining and explained by wildlife posing with a calm expectancy within. Yet several factors here suggest more personal meaning. For one thing, Peale painted his specifically *scientific* watercolors like *Yellow Headed Blackbird* on stiffer, whiter, larger sheets of paper; *Engineer Cantonment with Deer*, as evidenced by the work's unfinished left edge, was done directly in an expedition sketchbook, suggesting that it was not intended for a public audience. In his animal series, moreover, creatures were intended to represent their species, and so were pictured in family groupings. But this deer appears alone.

If we compare the two watercolors — *Engineer Cantonment with Western Engineer* and *Engineer Cantonment with Deer* — what strikes one immediately is the exactness of the substitution of deer for steamboat. The curve of the animal's breast corresponds precisely, in position and contour, to the curve of the American flag flying from the ship's stern. Both ship



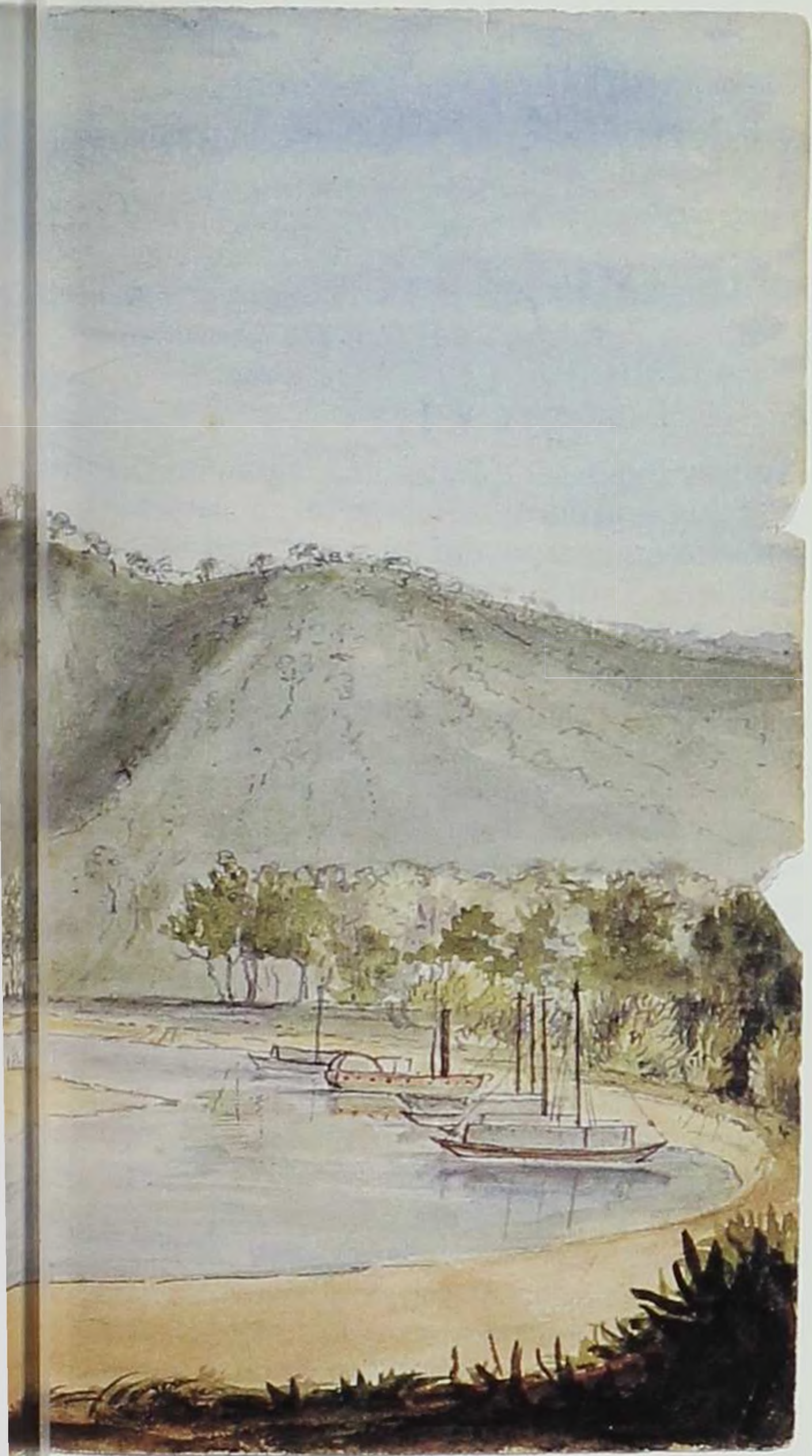
Fig. 16. Titian Ramsay Peale, *Engineer Cantonment with Deer* (1822), watercolor over graphite on paper, 12.1 × 20.2 cm., State Historical Society of Iowa.

A newly recovered addition to Peale's body of work, this watercolor suggests a more personal vision of the West than what the young artist was hired to produce.

and deer appear in profile, animate but still. Aside from the obvious change in subject matter — from technology to zoology, from steamboat to deer — winter here has turned to spring or early summer, and the trees have leafed out. Peale's palette has become more temperate.

I believe this second version of the view from the expedition camp provided Peale a symbolic opportunity to register his own ambivalent response to the very process of "opening" the West in which he himself had played a role,

albeit a minor one. There is good evidence that the deer, which he has substituted in this image for the steamboat, is one that he had shot himself, perhaps here along the river. As is typical of Peale's specimen studies, this deer stands posed as one might pose a taxidermic mount, and this is no coincidence. Peale's work as a painter relied quite literally on his work as a taxidermist, which itself relied quite literally on his work as a hunter. In other words, what Peale represents in this public portrait of a deer



is the record of his own handiwork, a form of self-portraiture, evidence of his own skillful transformation and appropriation of a "real" deer as an act of individual accomplishment. We might, in fact, read Peale's watercolor *Engineer Cantonment with Deer* as a form of symbolic self-assertion offered as an artisanal

counterweight to the corporate, technological vision of the future represented by the steamboat's engine of conquest.

THE DEER, in other words, stands here for Peale's desire for identity in two worlds — the one, a technological eastern United States, the other, a pre-industrial western frontier; the one professional, the other personal; the one disciplined, the other free; the one public, the other private. It is this ambivalence Peale appears to have struggled with throughout the expedition. Assigned to document an unknown territory and to illustrate its economic potential to eastern viewers, he seems to have enjoyed its *undeveloped* qualities — its danger and adventure — far more than the anticipation of the arrival of the very civilization he had fled in coming west in the first place. If the deer in some sense symbolizes Peale's aspirations as a subsistence hunter, the steamboat represents extractive industry, the dramatic approach of a market economy ever nearer its source of supply with steam up and American flag flying.

Science and art on the Long Expedition were two essentially complementary means of making sense of the unknown, both a region (the West) and an experience (historic change). Titian Ramsay Peale contributed importantly to both endeavors precisely because his work was marked so strongly by his *personal* response to what he saw. From the images he left us we can learn much about the natural and human environments of the Missouri River valley and what is now western Iowa early in the last century. If we read them carefully, we can also learn how this world was first seen and then imaginatively transformed by one precocious young man from the East who, like many others to follow, saw fit to project his own desires upon the land. □

NOTE ON SOURCES

The vast majority of Peale's sketches from the Long Expedition are held in the collections of the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia and Yale University Art Gallery in New Haven. For further information, readers are referred to the two-volume *Account of An Expedition from Pittsburgh to the Rocky Mountains*, compiled by Edwin James and published in Philadelphia by Carey & Lea in 1822 (with an illustrated atlas issued early in 1823), and to the following secondary works: Jessie

Poesch, "Titian Ramsay Peale, Artist-Naturalist" (M.A. thesis, Delaware, 1956); Roger L. Nichols and Patrick Halley, *Stephen Long and American Frontier Exploration* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1980); Roger B. Stein, "Packaging the Great Plains: The Role of the Visual Arts," *Great Plains Quarterly* 5 (Winter 1985); Amy R. W. Meyers, "Sketches from the Wilderness" (Ph.D. diss., Yale, 1985); and Kenneth Haltman, "Figures In A Western Landscape" (Ph.D. diss., Yale, 1992).