

BOOK REVIEWS

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Chronicling the West for *Harper's*: Coast to Coast with Frenzeny and Tavernier in 1873-1874

Claudine Chalmers. Charles M. Russell Series on Art and Photography of the American West. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. 272pp. Illus. Maps. Apps. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, \$45.00.

Harper's Weekly, first issued in New York City in 1857, became the best-known news journal in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century. Only *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* proved to be a significant rival. The importance of *Harper's* as a news-gathering publication grew to national prominence during the Civil War. With the completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869, it became a primary source of firsthand information on the exploration and settlement of the American West.

In a day before the development of photo-mechanical means of pictorial reproduction, *Harper's* documented life in the West through the medium of wood-engraved copies of the works of illustrators hired to depict activities on the rapidly settling frontier. Several of these artists attained immediate fame through the publication of their pictures. Others realized subsequent careers in their own right as portrayers of the American scene.

Two expatriate French artists, Paul Frenzeny and Jules Tavernier, traveled together by rail and stagecoach from New York City to San Francisco on assignment for *Harper's Weekly* in 1873-1874. They are known to us

today primarily as a result of this adventure. In the current publication from the University of Oklahoma Press, author Claudine Chalmers presents a catalog of one hundred of their works as they appeared in *Harper's*. Most of these works were seen only once in publication and have never been gathered together in a single volume. Annotated by the artists and critiqued again by Chalmers, these images constitute a unique chronicle of life in America in the 1870s.

Chalmers has divided the present text into chapters devoted to specific regions of the country through which the artists traveled. Beginning with a visit to a boarding house in New York City, the reader is introduced to the conditions of immigrant life in America and of traveling by rail across the United States. Of particular interest are descriptions of areas west of the Mississippi: the prairies of Kansas and the frontier towns of Missouri and Texas and the mining industry in Colorado. Also covered is the Texas cattle trade, as it is called, with depictions of roundups and cattle drives and camp life on the plains.

One of the more famous illustrations published by *Harper's* at this time is the engraving after Tavernier titled "Slaughtered for the Hide." Featured as the cover illustration for the 12 December 1874 issue of *Harper's* and on page 119 of the present compilation, this image has been reproduced in western literature more often than any other in the series. It depicts a man standing beside the freshly skinned carcass of a bison sprawled across the foreground. The man faces the viewer holding up the hide of the dead animal, as if

to have his picture taken. In the background, the figures of other skimmers can be seen. Within ten years of publication of the image, the once vast herds of bison on the plains of North America had disappeared forever.

Although the pictures produced for *Harp-er's* constitute the principal body of work by either Frenzeny or Tavernier now available for study, original drawings and watercolors exist today in public and private collections along the route of their former travels, notably at the Kansas Historical Society in Topeka and the Denver Public Library. A number of these images are reproduced in the present volume.

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Shooting Arrows & Slinging Mud: Custer, the Press, and the Little Bighorn

James E. Mueller. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013. 272pp. Illus. Notes. Biblio. Ind. Cloth, \$29.95.

The Battle of the Little Bighorn had all the ingredients of a big story. The United States Army had been soundly defeated by hostile Plains Indians; one of the country's best-loved heroes, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer, had been killed leading the troops; and the fight had taken place only days before the nation was to celebrate its centennial. Considering the controversy that soon swirled around the circumstances of the rout and lingering guilt over the mistreatment of Indian nations that had caused the war in the first place, it is easy to understand why newspapers of the day treated Little Bighorn as front-page news and why the battle remains the singular event of 1876 in the modern mind.

What is surprising about press coverage of the Little Bighorn is how quickly the battle was bumped off the nation's front pages for what editors—and, apparently, most Americans at the time—considered an even bigger story: the race for the presidency between

Democrat Samuel J. Tilden and Republican Rutherford B. Hayes. Equally surprising is that the Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Plains Indian wars of which it was a part played virtually no role in what would become one of the most controversial elections in American history.

James E. Mueller, a journalism professor and former practicing journalist, researched more than sixty newspapers representing seventeen states and the District of Columbia. He concluded that initial press coverage of the battle was essentially accurate and that a general consensus existed on the overall war in which "journalists almost universally acknowledged that the Indians had been wronged in some fashion" but nevertheless maintained that a nation at war must be supported (p. 209). The strength of Mueller's analysis comes in his examination of political partisanship as the newspapers sought to assign blame for Custer's defeat. Republican President Ulysses S. Grant was no friend of Custer, who was a Democrat, as were many southerners who resented military enforcement of Reconstruction. Mueller finds that Republican newspapers tended to blame Custer for the debacle, while the Democratic press accused Grant of supplying troops insufficient for the war in the West, arguing that soldiers could easily have been shifted from their duties policing the South. Partisan news organizations, then as now, often turned the news into an opportunity to bash the opposing party.

Each of Mueller's chapters examines the coverage of Little Bighorn from a different angle, such as the initial shock, assessing blame, and portrayal of Indian combatants. The large number of newspapers quoted, combined with multiple quotations from larger newspapers, leads to some confusion as it can become difficult to keep them all straight and ascertain any patterns. Nevertheless, Mueller explores the coverage of Custer's defeat in the context of other events of the day and offers evidence that what is remembered today as a legendary moment in American

history would not have ranked as the biggest story of the year in 1876.

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Love Letters from Mount Rushmore: The Story of a Marriage, a Monument, and a Moment in History

Richard Cerasani. Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2014. 193pp. Illus. Map. Ind. Cloth, \$29.95.

Richard Cerasani, searching for a family heirloom in the attic of his late parents' house, instead found a trunk filled with memorabilia from an important time in their lives. That discovery, which included letters, diaries, and photograph negatives, resulted in this beautifully designed book.

Arthur Cerasani and Mary Grow met during the summer of 1935 in New York State. He was the son of Italian immigrants, aspiring to a career as an artist; she was the daughter of a prosperous family descended from colonial ancestors. Despite objections from both families, they married a year later. By 1940, they were struggling to support themselves and two children as the Great Depression lingered. Early that year, Cerasani and Gutzon Borglum worked together on a small project, and Borglum asked Cerasani to come to the Black Hills of South Dakota to assist in completing the massive sculpture underway at Mount Rushmore.

Arthur Cerasani traveled to Mount Rushmore in March of 1940. For the next six months, except for a few weeks when Mary managed a trip to the site, the couple kept up a constant correspondence. This book, written by their son, blends text with excerpts from their letters and from Mary's diaries; several of the pages are reproduced as illustrations. The excerpts mainly address the couple's personal situation and dilemmas. Arthur expressed his dismay at the work

he was expected to do, his living conditions, his salary, his inability to pin Gutzon Borglum down about his future prospects, and—always—his grief at being away from his wife and sons. In her letters, Mary emphasized her affection and her loneliness, but she also lectured her husband about becoming self-reliant, ignoring gossip, planning ways to approach Borglum diplomatically, and doing whatever needed to be done. Arthur was often low in spirits; Mary once declared, "I don't believe in being unhappy, but I would be happier with you" (p. 97). The reflection of the strong bond between these two people with different backgrounds and different personalities, expressed through their own writings, is the strength of this book.

This volume is not a history of Mount Rushmore, and those who know little about the monument will find references to its inception and development too brief and too vague for a broad understanding of the historical context. However, there are new nuggets of information that will please both scholars of Mount Rushmore history and general readers with an interest in the subject. Arthur Cerasani's insights into the personalities of Gutzon Borglum and Lincoln Borglum and his descriptions of the living and working conditions of the workers on Mount Rushmore provide first-person observations. His discussions of the tensions in the weeks leading up to the shutdown of work on the mountain contain details about the end of the sculpture's developmental stage. The more than seventy-five photographs in the book are particularly important; nearly half of the Mount Rushmore-related images are from the author's personal collection and are published here for the first time.

Love Letters is primarily a personal story, but anyone who is interested in the history of Mount Rushmore will want to read and peruse this book.

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