

GEOLOGY

# Wild West is Painted

## Pioneer Photographer-Painter Portrays Historic Scenes for New Interior Department Museum

By RONALD L. IVES

**W**ILD WEST days live again in realistic paintings just unveiled in the new Department of the Interior Museum in Washington, D. C.

These are no modernistic impressions of what the pioneer west may have looked like. Buffalo Bill himself would recognize them as accurate portraits, and professional geologists agree that they are scientifically accurate.

It is natural that they should have a photographic faithfulness for the artist is 95-year-old William H. Jackson, pioneer photographer of the West. The first photographs of Yellowstone Park, taken away back in the 70's when one camera was a pack-mule load, were the work of this same artist Jackson.

As a young fellow he kept his restless steps always in front of the field party; and even now in his old age he can take the grandsons of his old comrades out and "run them ragged" on the trail of good pictures. Frontier scenes such as those in these new paintings were deeply etched in his retentive mind during days spent "waiting for weather"

on the wind-cursed peaks of the Rocky Mountains, and in the long hours spent over hand-sensitized wet plates in the days when only a strong man could carry a portable camera.

Those were the "good old days," when photographic plates were as big as window panes, and a camera crew was five men, with five strong mules to carry the equipment. Sometimes a military guard was necessary to keep the local Sitting Bull at bay while the photographer sensitized his plates, exposed them, and developed them on the spot. You couldn't get film at the corner drug store in those days—besides, the corner drug store was many hundred miles from the places Jackson had to photograph.

In the murals can be seen the arid plains of Nebraska, during a cattle drive in the early days, when people rode on horses or in covered wagons. Another shows the Powell party camped on the Green River, near the Wyoming-Colorado line, during their memorable expedition through the Colorado canyons from Green River, Wyoming, to the present site of Boulder Dam. Members of the

Wheeler Survey party, camped in the mesa lands of the Southwest, can be identified in another of the murals, and the discovery of the Norris Geyser Basin of Yellowstone by the Hayden Party is shown in a fourth. A camp in the wilds of Middle Park, Colorado, shown in another of the murals, is so accurately depicted that the spot from which the area is seen can be located within a few feet. The town of Granby, Colorado, now stands on this old campsite.

Painted with all the painstaking care of an old master, these murals can be inspected at very close range. All the details are there, in their proper relations, yet at a distance the scenes still look as they should, with no distortion or undue emphasis. The characters in the paintings can be identified without difficulty, and are true portraits of the pioneers who mapped the country when

### IT'S REAL

*Members of the Hayden Survey in the Upper Geyser Basin, in Yellowstone Park, in 1871, find that the reported wonders are actual things, and not the dreams of "bushed" fur trappers. This painting by William H. Jackson shows the scene. Note the photographer in the middle distance, putting a "portable" camera of that time in operation.*



the trip from Denver to Granby took five days of fighting snow and loose rock, with the danger from Indian arrows ever-present.

As historical documents, these murals are good. As paintings, they are a pleasant relief from the modern surrealist and impressionistic tendencies. Unlike many modern paintings, they do not shock the onlooker into seeing them, and they may be profitably studied. In all probability, the Jackson murals will still be admired when most modern art is forgotten, for they are good work by any standard.

### Not an Accident

But for all his skill with a brush, Capt. Jackson is first and foremost a photographer, and like many photographers, he didn't enter his profession by accident. He was born in 1843, in Keeseport, N. Y., and just before the Civil War he decided to become a photographer. The call to arms interrupted his career for a few years, but his photographic training stood him in good stead during his service with the Union army. An accurate observer makes a good soldier in any army.

Mr. Jackson, usually called Captain by his many friends at the Explorers Club, does not tell of his Civil War service. All that can be learned of it is that his work was good. The war, to him, was an interruption of his chosen career.

The call of the newly-opened lands in the West attracted Capt. Jackson soon after his discharge, and he went over the old Oregon Trail to California. Returning, he drove a herd of horses to Omaha, and soon was an official photographer during the construction of the Union Pacific Railroad. His pictures faithfully recorded most of the construction of what was then the world's greatest engineering feat, but he missed the driving of the golden spike at Promontory Point. He was too busy elsewhere—getting married.

### Wild Tales Confirmed

Wild tales of a place in the new territories, called "Colter's Hell" attracted the interest of geologists. Nobody would believe the tales told years before by Colter, a fur trapper who had once run through the region, naked, with a tribe of howling Indians at his heels; and the stories of Jim Bridger, another fur trapper, sounded too wild to be true. When Nathaniel P. Langford reported a region resembling that described by Colter and Bridger, a government party was sent out to investigate



### FIRST PHOTOGRAPH

*This picture looks modern enough, but it was taken by William H. Jackson back in the days when a rifle was a necessary part of a tourist's equipment, and is the first ever taken of the canyon that is so often photographed.*

and in that party was William H. Jackson, with his camera.

Jackson's accurate photographs, showing on paper the wonders described by Colter and Bridger, and Langford's brilliant pleas to the Senate, soon convinced government officials that Yellowstone was truly a land of wonders and in 1872 President Grant set the area aside as a preserve that became our first National Park.

### Portfolios for Senators

The portfolios of photographic prints of Yellowstone, made at the time, by Jackson, one for each senator, are still, despite the lapse of 65 years and the advance of the photographic art, worthy of careful inspection. Limited by slow lenses, and slower, hand-mixed and hand-applied sensitive emulsions, Jackson turned out pictures that still win prizes in competition with the best that modern equipment and technique can produce.

Only last fall, at the annual exhibition of pictures held by the Explorers Club, two of Captain Jackson's pictures won prizes for their pictorial and technical excellence. The prize-winning prints were made some years before the exhibition judges were born!

When the Yellowstone surveys were completed, the Hayden surveys conduct-

ed by Dr. F. V. Hayden for what is now the U. S. Geological Survey, moved southward into the Rocky Mountains. William H. Jackson went with them as a scout, and was especially commissioned to go in advance of the party to pick out good points from which to conduct the surveying operations. During the years that he was with the Hayden Party, Jackson took the first photographs of much of the Rocky Mountain region, and proved that the legendary Mount of the Holy Cross, in Colorado, was an actual peak. His first photograph of the peak, taken when Colorado was a newly-admitted state, now hangs in a place of honor in the office of the Colorado Mountain Club. Dozens of other good pictures of this striking peak are in existence, but Jackson's is admittedly the best one known.

### Photographer Met Artist

While touring the west with his cameras, Jackson met another tourist who wished to make records of the wilderness. This man was Thomas Moran, whose oil paintings of the Grand Canyon and other western scenes now hang in the U. S. National Museum in Washington. The two artists met several times, and Jackson's portrait of Thomas Moran, photographed by Jackson and retouched by Moran himself, is one of



### STILL ACTIVE

*William H. Jackson, still active in photography and painting in his ninety-fifth year, was snapped with a modern camera in the dark rooms at the Smithsonian Institution, in Washington, recently. Looking like a well-preserved man of sixty-five, Captain Jackson handles photographic and artistic materials with a skill that astounds younger experts.*

the best contemporary pictures of the famous artist.

After the Hayden surveys were completed, Jackson established a business in Denver, and spent his time taking pictures of the Western and Southwestern scenic wonders, many of them "first" pictures. His lenses recorded the first pictures of the cliff ruins at Mesa Verde, and many other Colorado scenes.

But somehow, life in the frontier town of Denver was too tame for the photographer, who felt the lure of "something lost beyond the ranges" and became an official photographer for an international railroad commission. His travels took him all over the world. He crossed Siberia in a horse-drawn sleigh in the days before the Trans-Siberian Railroad was built, recorded the life of convicts, and took valuable pictures of the tribes in the Amur valley. Harper's

Weekly published many of them, using the newly-discovered halftone process.

In 1898, his world travels finished, Captain Jackson went to Detroit, where he continued in business until 1924. Soon, his early experiences became history, and he was elected research secretary of the Oregon Trail Association, a position which he still holds. His accurate observations were of such interest that he produced a book, "The Pioneer Photographer" in cooperation with Howard R. Driggs. Suddenly, at the age when most men are ready to retire, Jackson found himself in demand as an illustrator and lecturer. His drawings and photographs illustrate several of the books of the Oregon Trail Association, and many of his friends prize beautifully-executed paintings of the more rugged western mountain areas.

Honors came slowly to Captain Jackson, but his work was of such merit that it attracted attention, both for its historical value and its technical quality. Elections to societies followed, and today Captain Jackson is a member of a number of famous clubs, including the Explorers and Adventurers' Clubs in New York, the Cosmos Club of Washington, and many others.

Only a few years ago, at the age of 92, he was invited to accompany the best climbers of the Colorado Mountain Club on an exploration trip to the Elk Mountains, which he had photographed more than six decades before. He accepted, accompanied the skilled young climbers on the trip, and held up his end of the job in a party of the grandsons of his contemporaries!

### Method Simple

Jackson's method of getting a good picture is very simple, yet few photographers use it. You use the best equipment that you can get, work with care, pay special attention to detail, and if it doesn't come out right, you go back and take it over! Needless to say, Captain Jackson didn't have to go back very often to take pictures over. The older processes required development on the spot, and the resulting picture could be inspected within a few minutes of its taking. Then, unless the 20 x 24 inch glass plate was broken in the hundred-mile haul to the railroad, the picture was gotten, and gotten permanently. Some of the six-decade-old plates from the Hayden Surveys are still in excellent condition, attesting to Captain Jackson's careful attention to the details of fixing and washing his plates. Errors or skimping in these processes don't show up for several years. A less careful

man could have "gotten away" with skimped work for a long time. William H. Jackson didn't skimp.

Enjoying excellent health, Captain Jackson walks around New York City with the long and rapid strides of a plainsman, avoiding taxicabs with the same skill that was once so useful in dodging falling rocks and Indian arrows in the Rocky Mountains. He has no rules for maintaining his health. As he states, he eats and drinks as he pleases, but friends observe that his pleasures are moderate—he stops eating when he has had enough, and makes his visits to the bar short and not very frequent.

### Never Lonely

Unlike many men who have outlived their generation, Captain Jackson is not a lonely man. Somehow, among people who do things, who have hopes, and sometimes dream, age means nothing, and Captain Jackson still has hopes and dreams—he still sees much work to be done, and does it. When he was mapping the Wild West there was no eight hour day. Survey parties worked from before dawn until they dropped, with no expectation of overtime pay. There was a job to be done and they did it. Now, in the modern age of short working hours, Captain Jackson still works on a job, not for so many hours a day.

In the evenings, when the day's painting is finished, he does not sit by the fire and dream of days that are past. Usually he has to choose between two or three invitations to go somewhere. Several evenings a week find him at the Explorers Club, where he takes an active and efficient part in the affairs. Is a lecture on pioneer days needed? Captain Jackson can give it, and it'll be a good one. Does someone need help with photographic problems? Captain Jackson can give that, too. He doesn't use the "six-bits words" of some of the younger experts, but his advice is sound and it works.

Unlike a lot of old-timers, Captain Jackson keeps up with his art. Today, he still takes pictures, good ones, with the small modern cameras, but, as he once remarked, "I don't feel that I'm taking a picture when I use anything smaller than an eleven by fourteen camera."

Last spring, when the University of Colorado informed several hundred young seniors that they were "educated gents, B.A.," a brisk old gentleman marched in line with them, and received an official medal of recognition. The man was William H. Jackson, who

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photographed the Colorado Territory before it was a state, crossed the mountains before the railroad came, and saw buffalo herds on what is now the rich agricultural country of the high plains.

After the ceremonies, he rode in a fast automobile over the same trails that once felt the steel tires of his ox cart, and revisited the cities that were built at the "end of steel" when he was photographing railroad construction. Half of Captain Jackson's life has been spent beside the rushing streams of the mountain country, and for years he slept in his blankets by lonely campfires in the ice-carved valleys of the West, but he is equally at home in the cow camps of the modern West, and the formal affairs of the East.

Last August, after a fall down a fifteen-foot concrete stairway, he made his first "business" visit to a hospital, and after five weeks in bed in Cheyenne, where he had camped before there was a city, he walked out, under his own power, with his broken bones set and his health restored. They must have built them tough in 1843. Most men half his age would spend more time than that recuperating.

Recently, the Ford Museum in Dearborn, Mich., acquired some thousands of Captain Jackson's carefully-saved glass plates, which were field records at the time they were made, and are now irreplaceable historical records. The Denver Public Library keeps a number of his prints on file in their historical section, and every few months some newspaper publishes a few of them. Only by looking at the date in the caption can anyone tell that these are not modern work, and good modern work at that.

Next summer, according to present plans, Captain Jackson will go out into the wilds of Colorado again, and re-photograph the Mount of the Holy Cross, near Leadville, at the same site from which he snapped it sixty-five years ago.

*Science News Letter, March 19, 1938*

### PATON RANCH

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### EVENINGS ARE A PROBLEM

*Husband comes home tired and wants nothing more than to stay there but wife has been in all day; she wants to go out. Result: an evening of argument. Many couples throughout America are fighting this battle almost daily.*

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life of the family is often a necessary and a fairly simple step toward ironing out marital difficulties.

The third factor in almost every unhappy home is a sexual maladjustment.

"This turns out," Dr. Popenoe explains, "to be due to one or both of two causes; either mere ignorance of elementary facts about the anatomy, physiology and psychology of sex, that should have been learned by every child as a matter of course at the high school age; or else the results of some early emotional shock, some warping, thwarting, frustration, or deviation from the normal course of emotional development.

"In other words, it is almost never an inborn difficulty—it is merely an educational problem, the consequences of wrong training or no training at all. It can be remedied."

A great deal of difficulty grows out of failure to act on the well-known fact that men and women do not think and act alike.

"Men are continually in hot water because they ignore the well-known peculiarities of feminine psychology—because they forget anniversaries, for instance.

"But women are probably the greatest sufferers, because they have too of-

ten been taught that the differences between the sexes do not amount to much."

Better education in the high schools in the field of sex psychology is urged as a preventive of friction between husband and wife by Dr. Popenoe. He also advocates a special preparation for marriage, including an impartial study of the personalities of engaged persons so that if, for example, two very bossy individuals marry they will at least be forewarned.

*Science News Letter, March 19, 1938*

There are ten Indian tribes in New York State.

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