



## George Catlin

George Catlin traveled the North American continent from 1830 to 1838 chronicling native people and their ways of life in paintings and prints. His adventures resulted in more than six hundred portraits and scenes of rituals, hunting, and daily life from more than fifty Native American groups.

<b>Grade Level:</b>	Adult, College, Grades 3-5, Grades 6-8, Grades 9-12, Grades K-2
<b>Collection:</b>	American Art, Native American Art
<b>Culture/Region:</b>	America
<b>Subject Area:</b>	Visual Arts
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## NATIVE AMERICAN INDIAN AND WESTERN EXPANSION OF THE UNITED STATES

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People have lived in North America for around 15,000 years ago. Permanent settlement by Europeans, in contrast, is barely 500 years old, following Columbus's renowned 1492 voyage. Columbus was seeking a short sea route to the Orient, or "Indies," when he made land in the New World. Thinking he had reached his original destination, he coined the term "Indians" (in English translation) for the people he encountered.

While Europeans were intrigued with the origins and histories of Native Americans, they also feared them. Misunderstanding and conflict between Europeans and native populations put their stamp on American history long before the first permanent English settlement in North America and continued until the United States spanned the entire continent.

Tensions between Native Americans and the comparatively populous European settlers reached new heights during the Revolutionary War. In 1778, the newly formed United States entered into the first of its approximately 400 treaties with Native American tribes. A tribe would typically agree to keep peace with settlers and to recognize the jurisdiction of the United States government over its lands in exchange for cash, goods, and medicine—as well as federal military protection. Under the United States Constitution, treaties with Indian tribes were as legally binding as agreements with other nations, a policy that continued until 1871—though many treaties were entered into under false pretenses or were broken.

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By 1790, the United States government had claimed all Indian territory east of the Mississippi River, establishing tribal reservations and selling land to settlers. Federally appointed Indian Superintendents governed reservation lands and granted licenses for trade with and residence among native people. Eventually all Indian affairs were placed under the War Department.

The Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804 – 1806 began charting the Louisiana Purchase, which was the most important event of Thomas Jefferson's first administration. Jefferson believed that a land-and-water passage between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans would aid the United States in trade. Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were commissioned to explore the new territory. They traveled about 8,000 miles, in the process conducting the first government survey of what is now the northwestern United States. Beginning near St. Louis, they journeyed up the Missouri River, across the Rocky Mountains, and along the Columbia and other rivers to the Pacific coast. They returned to St. Louis with maps of their route and the surrounding regions; specimens and descriptions of plant, animal, and mineral resources; and information about the cultures and languages, as well as goods and artifacts, of native peoples of the West. Lewis and Clark established peaceful contact with most of the tribes they encountered. By 1810, the Northwest, American Fur, and Hudson's Bay companies had established thriving fur-trading posts along the frontier. When Lewis and Clark's expedition journals were first published in an edited version in 1814, the American public got its first reliable view of life beyond the Mississippi River.

The young nation faced further conflict with native tribes during the War of 1812, when tensions between the United States and Great Britain erupted. Many Native Americans sided with the British, hoping to expel American settlers. Although neither the United States nor Great Britain could claim victory in the war, Native Americans were left without an ally in the fight to save their lands. The conflict also led the United States to aspire to build a more unified nation, to seek an "American Identity." After the War of 1812, art and culture in the United States began to reflect American experiences. Native Americans became the subject of idealized and romanticized visions of life in a pristine society. Modern scholars have noted this discrepancy between this popular depiction and destructive government policy: "While they were fascinated with Indians and often aspired to live like them, Americans also rejected them as too primitive to live alongside, banishing them to reservations and killing them with diseases and bullets." (Moore, p. 46)

Waterways were the true highways of America in 1830. Direct trade between Native Americans and whites was common throughout the West, though relations tended to be uncertain. When George Catlin reached St. Louis in 1830, it was the Gateway to the West: a busy river town of nearly 8,000 people, headquarters for fur companies, traders, trappers, hunters, adventurers, and for the Army of the West and Northwest. (Sufrin, p. 22)

The 1830 Indian Relocation Act—championed by President Andrew Jackson and enacted just prior to George Catlin's travels along the frontier—compelled southeastern tribes to move west of the Mississippi River. The Act was essentially designed to free more land for white settlement. Relocation was either voluntary or forced. Army and militia patrols supervised the tribes' westward journey. It is estimated that between 1830 and 1840 the government relocated more than 70,000 Native Americans, thousands of whom died along what came to be known as the Trail of Tears.

Burgeoning western expansion a generation after the Louisiana Purchase found Americans pushing beyond the territorial boundaries into lands claimed by Mexico and Great Britain. "Squatters" simply moved past privately owned land and set up homesteads on unsurveyed federal territory. Manifest Destiny, phrase coined in 1845 in an article on the annexation of Texas, came to encompass the belief in the inevitable territorial expansion of the United States: the right to rule North America from the Atlantic to the Pacific according to the will of God. Drove of wagon trains heading west along the west beginning with the Great Migration of 1843 embodied this theory. Native Americans were expected either to assimilate or be forever marginalized.

## WHO WAS GEORGE CATLIN?

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Hardly the picture of a frontier explorer and adventurer, George Catlin weighed 135 pounds and stood 5'8" tall. What Catlin lacked in physical presence, he more than made up for it in a tenaciousness. Catlin had to reject the expectations imposed by family and friends before he could follow his own dream. Catlin later recalled of his decision to travel in frontier lands among Native Americans. "I opened my views to my relatives and friends, but got no word of encouragement or help. I tried fairly and faithfully, but it was in vain to reason with those whose anxieties were ready to fabricate every difficulty and danger that could be imagined, without being able to understand the extent of importance of my designs—and I broke with them all—from my wife and aged parents—myself my only adviser and protector." (Sufirin, p. 22) Scholars today, as did critics in Catlin's day, find it difficult to characterize the man, and it is true he showed many sides throughout his life and career. He was an artist, writer, historian, and reporter; an explorer, trailblazer, anthropologist, and geologist; a crusader, businessman, opportunist—and a Romantic.

As a youth growing up on a farm along the banks of the Susquehanna River in Broome County, New York, Catlin led a contented life. His mind was, no doubt, filled with stories of excitement and danger along the frontier, in large measure from the his parents' and grandfathers' experiences during the Revolutionary War. Catlin's mother and her father, who had fought against Native American allies of the British, were survivors of the Wyoming Valley Massacre of 1773; thereafter, Catlin's mother had briefly been held captive by the Iroquois. Though George Catlin had little experience with Native Americans prior to his travels as an adult, he did become acquainted with an Oneida, named On-O-Gong-Wa (Great Warrior), who camped with his wife and daughter for a time on the Catlin family farmland.

Essentially self-trained, Catlin faced a great deal of competition in the field of portraiture. Many critics agree that the larger portraits revealed technical inconsistencies.

Perhaps George Catlin's decision to become an artist first revealed his resolve. His father had been a successful lawyer before health concerns caused him to quit his practice. In keeping with his family's wishes, George followed in his father's footsteps, attending law school and opening a practice with his brother. It was only when George's greater interest in art overcame his commitment to practicing law he took on his life's challenges. George's beginnings as a miniature portraitist were somewhat encouraging but lacked the potential for greatness that he craved. Thus, he turned to full-size portraiture. This shift seemed to have garnered some support from his family, as his father wrote in a letter of March 26, 1821: "I am pleased that you have at length resolved to attempt portraits, though you had convinced me last fall that miniatures were as valuable. Most painters of eminence have worked at portraits and history." (McCracken, p. 22)

Essentially self-trained, Catlin faced a great deal of competition in the field of portraiture. Many critics agree that the larger portraits revealed technical inconsistencies. (Dippie, p. 8) Though he had a full schedule of commissions in Philadelphia, Catlin gained little acclaim and faced discouraging reviews. "He needed to branch out and create his own niche or else be forever forgotten as just another failed portraitist." (Moore, p. 125) The turning point in his career may well have been his commission for a group portrait of the Virginia Constitutional Convention in Richmond. The inattention to proportion and awkward crowding of this painting seem to reveal Catlin's exasperation with his work.

"One day in Philadelphia, while [Catlin] was casting about for a higher purpose in life than portraiture,

inspiration visited him.” (Dippie, p. 10). The artist saw a group of Native Americans who were on their way to Washington, D.C. Catlin himself described the scene. “A delegation of some ten or fifteen noble and dignified-looking Indians, from the wilds of the ‘Far West,’ suddenly arrived in the city, arrayed in all their classic beauty—with shield and helmet—with tunic and manteau-tinted and tasseled off, exactly for the painter’s palette. In silent and stoic dignity, these lords of the forest strutted about the city for a few days, wrapped in their pictorial robes, with their brows plumed with the quills of the war-eagle. ... Man, in the simplicity and loftiness of his nature, unrestrained and unfettered by disguises of art, is surely the most beautiful model for the painter—and the country from which he hails is unquestionably the best study or school of the arts in the world...and the history and customs of such a people, preserved by pictorial illustrations, are themes worthy the life-time of one man, and nothing short of the loss of my life shall prevent me from visiting their country, and becoming their historian...I set out on my arduous and perilous undertaking with the determination of reaching, ultimately, every tribe of Indians on the Continent of North America, and of bringing home faithful portraits of their principal personages, and full notes of their character and history. I designed, also, to procure their costumes, and a complete collection of their manufactures and weapons, and to perpetuate them in a gallery unique, for the use and instruction of future ages.” (Catlin, Letters and Notes, cited in McCracken, p. 24)

The prevalent notion of Native Americans as a romantic and noble race destined to disappear under the advance of American society was in keeping with Catlin’s own view prior to his travels. Catlin himself asked that his work be considered not for its artistic merit, but as a document of a bygone times. For Catlin, “the idea of a vanishing race would unify his work, lend poignancy to portraits and hunting scenes alike, allow him to transcend the literal and be an artist rather than a mere reporter. And it gave urgency to his mission to visit the remote tribes before civilization first debauched and then destroyed them.” (Dippie, p. 17)

While in Philadelphia, Catlin brought his Romantic bent to Charles Willson Peale, one of “the most important scientific minds in America at the time,” who with his artist sons was “undertaking the task of documenting and recording species of birds, geographical data, and plants in the ‘new world.’” (Moore, pp. 123 – 125) Catlin’s frequently visited the Peale’s famous museum on the second floor of Independence Hall, where he saw “displays of the natural world and Native American West. There were stuffed mammals, birds and fish of North America, as well as rock and mineral specimens, insect and plant life. [Catlin] studied the Indian clothes, weapons, and crafts gathered by the Lewis and Clark Expedition. ... He saw his first sketches of the West, done by an artist on Major Stephen Long’s journey up the Platte River to the Rockies in 1819 and 1820.” (Sufrin, p. 14)

Catlin had an innate ability to forge friendships and associations with people in high positions. An early example was the relationship he developed with William Clark almost 30 years after the latter’s famous expedition with Meriwether Lewis. Clark at 70 was the United States Superintendent of Indian Affairs and Governor of the Missouri Territory. No one could legally travel, trade, or trap along the frontier without the superintendent’s permission. This legend imparted a great deal of knowledge about native tribes, and he owned the most important map of the American West then in existence. Originally drawn from sketch maps made on the expedition, the map had been constantly updated as mountain men and explorers visited Clark in St. Louis. Catlin studied this map in preparation for his travels and took inspiration from artifacts Clark had compiled over his years of contact with nearly every major Indian nation. (Sufrin, p. 26 – 27) It was Clark who arranged for Catlin to paint portraits of the St. Louis elite and to begin painting Native American when their delegations passed through town. And Clark who brought Catlin on his first trip into the frontier.

Catlin witnessed to several firsts, including first steamboat trip—on the *Yellow Stone*—up the Missouri River.

The trip was risky, because “snags lurking below the surface on the muddy water could easily rip the hull open.” (Moore, p. 133) The artist’s presence on the army’s expedition to make first diplomatic contact with tribes of the southern Plains is another example of the artist’s remarkable ability to be an eyewitness to historic events. Catlin’s later travels in South America and the North American west coast up to Alaska were no less precarious, if not as historical. Though he never spoke a native language, Catlin was quick to participate in a buffalo hunt or observe sacred tribal ceremonies. He also kept careful notes detailing what he observed. He constantly painted, and collected such objects as tepees, tomahawks, peace pipes, saddles, dishes, bridles, arrows, leggings, war bonnets, knives, and clothing. He even went as far as to document his paintings with “Certificates of Authentication,” signed by Indian agents or others who were witnesses to his work. A typical entry reads: “No. 131–Blackfoot, The Eagle Ribs (Pe-toh-pe-kiss). I hereby certify that this portrait was painted from life at Fort Union, mouth of the Yellowstone, in the year 1832, by George Catlin, and that the Indian sat in the costume in which it is painted. signed, John Sanford, United States Indian Agent.” Today, Catlin is considered a pioneer in American ethnography (the study of specific cultures). Although his journals were quite detailed, the vast territory he covered and the often jumbled sequence of his travel notes makes it difficult to trace his experiences. In *Letters and Notes*, Catlin “asks his readers to grant him artistic license in his accounts and to pardon any narrations that seem exaggerated.” (Domingue, p. 19)

After returning to the East, Catlin went to great lengths to present his *Indian Gallery* to the world. While popular at first, he also faced the public’s apathy surrounding westward encroachment upon native tribes. Many also doubted the veracity of Catlin’s stories and depictions. When he discovered that having Native Americans present at his exhibition increased attendance, he capitalized on his observation. In 1837, Catlin’s invited his acquaintance Running Fox and 20 of his tribe, who were visiting New York City, to the exhibition. He publicized their appearance and doubled admission price to \$1. Almost 2,000 people attended the exhibit. “After that, if possible, he always had Plains tribesmen wherever he exhibited.” (Sufrin, p. 107)

George Catlin never realized his early dreams, but remained a dreamer and adventurer until the end of his life. He trained no followers, yet the images he created influenced a generation of American perception of the West and remain important historical documents today.

The same year, Catlin began his seemingly endless goal selling Congress his collection as the core of a national museum. Catlin remarked, “I had encouraging assurances of its success,” and that Daniel Webster declared the artist to have portrayed Native Americans “with more accuracy and truth...than in all the other drawings and representation on the face of the earth,” and stated that the preservation of the collection would be an important public act. In the end, Congress rejected the purchase. This may have been in no small part due to his sympathetic view toward Native Americans, which was clearly contrary to the evolving government policy. Catlin expressed his beliefs plainly in 1841: “...if I have spoken...with a seeming bias, the reader will know what allowance to make for me, who am standing as the champion of a people, who have treated me kindly, of whom I feel bound to speak well, and who have no means of speaking for themselves.” (*Letters and Notes*, cited in Moore, p. 133)

When American interest in his *Gallery* waned, Catlin—accompanied by his wife, Clara, and their two young daughters—transported the entire eight-ton exhibition to Europe. The next decade brought dizzying extremes: financial success, artistic appreciation, celebrity, and eventually, heartache and bankruptcy.

London received his exhibitions enthusiastically at first, and Catlin toured with his show, which featured Native American performers. He financed the publication of his monumental work *Letters and Notes*, but the incredibly expensive volumes did not sell. By 1843, a third daughter and a son had been born. Two years later, while Catlin was exhibiting in Paris, Clara died of pneumonia, and the next year, his two-year-old son died of typhoid fever. That same year, some of his Ojibwa performers contracted smallpox; two of them died. The political upheavals of 1848 and diminishing attendance brought Catlin to bankruptcy in 1852, when he sent his daughters to live with relatives in the United States. He didn't see them again until 1870. Catlin's adaptations of "Wild West Shows" for entertainment have been sorely criticized: "It was that subtle switch from artist, explorer, and ethnographer to showman and promoter that would bring sadness and ruin to his life." (Sufirin, p. 107)

The serendipitous sale of the *Indian Gallery* to Joseph Harrison, an American industrialist, wiped out Catlin's debts and restored his inimitable spirit. He recalled: My "occupation gone, and with no other means on earth than my hands and my brush, and less than half of a life, at best, before me, as will all that is human and mortal, my thoughts tended towards Dame Fortune. ... In this state of mind, therefore, into one of the eccentric adventures of my chequered life I was easily led." (*Last Rambles*, p. 52) This final "eccentric adventure" led him initially to South America in search of gold, only to find himself painting and writing once again among the native peoples, in South America and along the the west coast of the United States.

After his "last rambles," Catlin painted in Europe again for some years before he returned to the United States in 1870. His work had been largely forgotten. He made the prophetic statement: "I have devoted fourteen years of my life, and all my earthly means, in visiting these scattered and remote people, and with my toils and privations, I have had my enjoyments...My works are done, and as well as I could do them under the circumstances. I have quoted no one; but have painted and written the things that I saw and heard, and of nothing else. My works will probably be published in full (too late for my benefit), but for the benefit and instruction of others who come behind me." (*Last Rambles*, p. 357)

George Catlin never realized his early dreams, but remained a dreamer and adventurer until the end of his life. He trained no followers, yet the images he created influenced a generation of American perception of the West and remain important historical documents today. And, though perhaps going into his travels with a romantic notion of the noble savage, Catlin's firsthand experience led him to create a body of work sensitive to his sitters as individuals, not only as romanticized types. "Catlin's best portraits retain their power to astonish. They show individuals, not merely exotics in colorful costumes. Catlin captured personality...Hairstyles and accessories aside, his faces are those of ordinary human beings..." (Dippie, p. 437)

### **Catlin's Creed**

I love a people that have always made me welcome to the very best that they had.

I love a people who are honest without laws, who have no jails and no poorhouses.

I love a people who keep the commandments without ever having read or heard them preached from the pulpit.

I love a people who never swear or take the name of God in vain.

I love a people "who love their neighbors as they love themselves"

I love a people who worship God without a Bible, for I believe that God loves them also.

I love a people whose religion is all the same, and who are free from religious animosities.

I love a people who have never raised a hand against me, or stolen my property, when there was no law to

punish either.

I love and don't fear mankind where God has made and left them, for they are his children.

I love a people who have never fought a battle with the white man, except on their own ground.

I love a people who live and keep what is their own without lock and keys.

I love a people who do the best they can. And oh how I love a people who don't live for the love of money.

(Catlin, Last Rambles p. 354-355)

## MYTHOLOGY OF THE AMERICAN WEST

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In the 16th and 17th centuries, artists' representations of Native Americans captured appearances but lacked accuracy and were unsympathetic to the vast differences among tribes. "Indians" spoke hundreds of different languages and followed countless lifeways. They referred to themselves not as one cohesive group but as individual tribes and nations. Nevertheless, native people from city dwellers to nomadic groups were lumped together in the American vision of the noble, uncivilized, savage of the wilderness.

As George Catlin aptly assessed in his *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians* published in 1841: "The world knows generally that they are mostly uncivilized, and consequently unchristianized...they are nevertheless human beings, with features, thoughts, reason, and sympathies like our own; but few yet know how they live, how they dress, how they worship, what are their actions, their customs, their religions, their amusements, etc., as they practice them in the uncivilized regions of their uninvaded country, which is the main object of this work." (vol. 1, p. 5)

George Catlin thought of the West as "a spiritual refuge, an Eden of innocence and splendid beauty. And its inhabitants, the Indians, as primitives untouched by the vices of civilization, the finest example of natural law."

It would not be accurate to say that Catlin captured the "uncontaminated" cultures of Native Americans. (Moore, p. 23) For the arrival of European settlers brought new way of life to many native tribes. Many European innovations brought change, but the horse, especially, motivated some tribes to leave village life and agriculture to follow the massive herds of buffalo. Bison became the staple of the new "Plains Indian" way of life. After being forced westward, still more tribes adopted the Plains way of life. The increasing number of tribes on the Plains came into conflict with one another as well as with white settlers. This conglomerate was the "Plains Indian" culture that George Catlin ventured into, native tribes-touched to a greater or lesser degree by European culture-that still maintained many of their own unique ways.

Early in the 1800s, The Age of Reason was losing ground to Romanticism. People came to value feeling rather than reason and to prefer passion, individuality, and spontaneity over discipline, order, and control. Writers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau looked to the virtues of wilderness to recapture beauty and innocence. This shift in thinking had an enormous effect in creating the mythology of the American West.

Increasingly, society glorified the frontier and nature. Ralph Waldo Emerson and other American philosophers praised nature as a source of truth and beauty available to all people, rich and poor alike. The American novelist James Fenimore Cooper popularized the Romantic ideals of Native American culture in his *Leather-Stocking Tales*, five novels about Natty Bumppo, a frontiersman-the last uncorrupted white man. *The Last of the Mohicans*, the most popular book of the series, portrays the loyal and courageous Indian way of life in an adventure set in the forests of eastern North America during the French and Indian

War (1756 – 1763). Natty Bumppo and his noble Indian friends live a life of freedom close to nature. The settlers bring civilization and social order, but they also selfishly or thoughtlessly misuse the wilderness.

With an outlook stemming from Romantic sentiments, George Catlin thought of the West as “a spiritual refuge, an Eden of innocence and splendid beauty. And its inhabitants, the Indians, as primitives untouched by the vices of civilization, the finest example of natural law.” (Sufrin, p. 15) Artists of this era frequently depicted Native Americans in the classical poses of ancient statuary glorifying Greek and Roman gods. Painters such as Thomas Cole depicted fanciful Greek temples in American forests. Catlin stated that he had “for a long time been of the opinion, that the wilderness of our country afforded models equal to those from which the Grecian sculptors transferred to the marble such inimitable grace and beauty; and I now am more confirmed in this opinion, since I have immersed myself in the middle of thousands of tens of thousands of these knights of the forest; whose whole lives are lives of chivalry, and whose daily feats, with their naked limbs, might vie with those of the Grecian youths in the beautiful rivalry of the Olympian games.” (Moore, p. 20)

The early 19th-century view of Native Americans quickly eroded in the second half of the century. In the face of white expansion, Native Americans were disdained as barbarians and as a dangerous threat to civilization. In 1871, Congress concluded that tribes were no longer separate, independent governments, freeing the United States from the need to make treaties with them. By the end of George Catlin's lifetime, his frontier had vanished. Buffalo herds had been devastated, replaced by cattle ranches and homesteaders. The railroad now stretched from coast to coast. The government moved many tribes onto reservations and hoped, to little avail, that they would take up farming.

The census of 1890 declared the frontier became “nonexistent,” in that there no longer existed a line beyond which lived fewer than two European Americans per square mile. By this time, The Native American people, who are thought to have numbered some four and a half million at the time of European contact in 1492, numbered fewer than 240,000. As Catlin witnessed, some groups such as the Mandan were literally wiped out by European diseases. It would not be until the beginning of the 20th century that Native American population began to rise again, the first time since 1492.

One myth still prominent is that Native Americans are all one people with one culture. Actually, each group has its own customs, religious beliefs, food, crafts, folk tales, types of shelter, and social structures, traditional or not. In bringing to light the unique and varied histories of some of these peoples, George Catlin's work stands as a monument to the people he painted, capturing a moment in their time during the 1830s.

## ARTIST TIMELINE

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### **1796**

Born July 26 in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

### **1800**

The Catlin family moves to a farm estate in Broome County, New York. George shows an early interest in drawing and art.

### **1817-1818**

George and his brother attend the Law School of Tapping Reeves and James Gould. George begins to paint portraits and miniatures of family members.

**1820**

Opens law practice in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. At the same time, gains a local reputation as an amateur portrait painter in miniatures.

**1821**

Decides to become a painter, despite having no formal training in art. Exhibits work for the first time at the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts.

**1823**

Moves to Philadelphia to pursue a career as a portrait painter. Becomes quite popular. Market Street studio sign reads "George Catlin, Miniature Painter."

**1824**

Accepted into the Philadelphia Academy of Art (known then as the Academy of Fine Arts). Portrait of New York Governor DeWitt Clinton is called "the worst portrait that New York possesses." Paints Niagara Falls, the Erie Canal, and the West Point parade grounds.

**1826 – 1827**

Moves to New York City. He paints his first portrait of a Native American, the Seneca orator Red Jacket.

**1828 – 1829**

Exhibits at the American Academy of Fine Arts. Marries Clara Gregory. Paints a delegation of the Winnebago tribe in Washington, D.C. In September, his brother Julius—with whom he had dreamed of exploring the West—drowns. Paints the Seneca, Oneida, Mohegan and Tuscarora on their reservations; becomes disillusioned, and feels the "wild, free Indians west of the Mississippi would offer a better subject." (Sufrin, p. 20)

**1829-1830**

Paints the Virginia Constitutional Convention in Richmond, Virginia (now in the collection of the Virginia Historical Society), and a miniature of Dolly Madison. Seeks appointment as either Indian Agent or professorship of drawing at West Point.

**1830**

Clara stays with her father in Albany. Catlin travels to St. Louis, meets General William Clark. Makes his first trip with Clark past the frontier; paints the Delaware, Iowa, Kickapoo, and Shawnee. In early fall, travels to Ft. Leavenworth, at the time the most remote army post on the Missouri River.

**1831**

Works through the winter to finish painting canvases begun in the field. Makes plans in St. Louis for his next major trip up the Missouri River.

**1832**

Begins 2,000-mile voyage on the steamboat Yellow Stone to Ft. Union in present-day North Dakota. Sets out on foot with a small group for the newly built Ft. Pierre, where the Missouri and Teton Rivers join. Paints the Blackfoot, Crow, Cree, and Sioux. Observes Mandan culture and the sacred O-kee-pa ceremony.

**1833**

Works on paintings begun on the Missouri River trip. Shows work in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Louisville, and New Orleans. Spends the winter in New Orleans with Clara.

**1834**

Arrives at Ft. Gibson near present-day Tulsa. Paints Cherokee, Choctaw, Creek and Osage. Accompanies the army dragoon mission to establish contact with Comanche, Kiowa, and Wichita. Catlin and most of the troops contract a fever, 151 of the men die. Catlin recovers, rides 540 miles alone on horseback to St. Louis. Rendezvous with Clara, travels to New Orleans and Pensacola, Florida. Paintings are well received.

**1835**

In Minnesota paints Chippewa (Ojibwa) and Sauk and Fox. Learns of the fabled Pipestone Quarry, considered to be sacred ground.

**1836**

Despite being forbidden entry by native tribes, Catlin is the first white man to study the Pipestone Quarry. Collects specimens—later designated a new mineral, which is named Catlinite.

**1837**

Exhibits his (incomplete) Indian Gallery, art and artifacts, in Albany and Troy. Opens in New York City and is a hit. Catlin openly criticizes the encroachment of white civilization on Native Americans. In November publicizes Native Americans as part of exhibition audience and raises ticket price. His first daughter is born in late December. Tries to sell the Gallery to the United States Congress. Paints Seminole Chief Osceola in prison the day before Osceola's death.

**1838**

Indian Gallery tours Mid-Atlantic and New York, is not a financial success. Catlin announces plans to take the exhibit to Europe. Catlin's second daughter born.

**1839**

Departs for England in December.

**1840**

Indian Gallery opens in London to great success. Has an audience with Queen Victoria. The exhibit is seen by 32,500 people. Late in June, Clara arrives with their two daughters.

**1841**

Begins using models in Indian costume and white actors to recreate traditional dances, songs, and war rituals in Tableaux Vivants, or "Wild West Shows." Catlin's third daughter is born in August. Finances and publishes *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*. Receives critical acclaim, but the two-volume set costs a staggering \$3,000 dollars. Exhibition attendance is falling.

**1842**

Catlin faces dwindling success and the first signs of money trouble. Moves the exhibit to the Mechanics Institute in Liverpool.

**1843**

Tours England with "Wild West Show." Promoter Arthur Rankin convinces Catlin to hire a Ojibwa to perform authentic traditional dances. Catlin returns to London. The Ojibwa perform for Queen Victoria and notables such as Charles Dickens. For the first time, Catlin is accused of exploitation. Catlin's son, George Jr., is born.

**1844**

Publishes *The North American Indian Portfolio*. Exhibits in London once again after hiring members of the Iowa tribe to dance.

**1845**

Moves the Indian Gallery to Paris; meets Baron von Humboldt, George Sand, Victor Hugo. King Louis-Phillipe allows use of a gallery in the Louvre for the show. Facing dwindling popularity and income, Catlin stores his collection tours begins touring with just the performers. Clara Catlin dies of pneumonia in July.

**1846**

The exhibition tours Belgium. Eight Ojibwa performers become ill with smallpox; two die. This tragedy convinces Catlin to cease staging "Wild West Shows." Works on paintings commissioned by Louis-Phillipe. Once again fails to sell the Indian Gallery to the Congress. George Jr., 2-1/2, dies of typhoid in the summer.

**1848**

Turmoil and political revolution overtake Paris while Catlin is working on LaSalle commemoration commission for Louis-Philippe. Catlin is never paid for his work. He and his daughters flee Paris for London. Publishes *Eight Years' Travels and Residence in Europe*, which sells poorly. Catlin is growing deaf.

**1849**

William Fisk paints portrait of Catlin now in the collection of the Smithsonian, Washington, D.C.

**1852**

Facing bankruptcy, Catlin tries again to sell his collection to Congress. The deciding vote against its purchase is cast along party lines. Catlin sends his daughters to live with relatives in the United States. Creditors seize collection; Catlin spends a brief time in debtor's prison; Joseph Harrison, Jr., a Philadelphia industrialist, acquires the entire Indian Gallery in exchange for paying all of Catlin's debts.

**1853-1854**

Catlin travels under an assumed name to South America looking for gold. Travels from Tierra del Fuego to Panama and across the continent, sketching, painting and writing everywhere. Continues journeys along the North American west coast as far as the Aleutian Islands, crosses the Bering Sea to Siberia. Finishes trip crossing Rockies and Great Basin before sailing to the Yucatán.

**1855-1860**

Returns to London, then to Berlin, and on to the West Indies, Venezuela, and up the Uruguay River in Argentina. Then there is no record of where he is or what he does for over a year.

**1861-1870**

Back in England, publishes *Life Amongst the Indians*, a book for young people. Settles in Brussels to write more books and to paint, lives as a recluse for ten years. Paints scenes of the American West, South America and the West Coast from memory, notes, and sketches: creates new body of work, his *Cartoon Collection*.

**1867**

Publishes *O-kee-pa*, descriptions of the Mandan religious ceremony.

**1868**

Publishes *Last Rambles Amongst the Indians*, an account of his travels in South America and North America west of the Rockies.

**1870**

Publishes *The Lifted and Subsided Rocks of America*—geological theories. Exhibits the *Cartoons* in Brussels. Departs for New York late in the year after an absence of 30 years. At age 74, he has not seen his daughters for more than 15 years.

**1871**

Catlin's new collection is poorly received by the public and the press in New York. Joseph Henry, Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, invites Catlin to show his *Cartoons* in Washington, D.C. Congress shows little interest in purchasing his work.

**1872**

In October, Catlin becomes seriously ill; moves to Jersey City, New Jersey where he is cared for by his daughters. On December 23, Catlin dies in Washington, D.C. at the age of 76.

**1879**

Joseph Harrison's widow presents Catlin's original *Indian Gallery* to the Smithsonian Institution. Much of the collection is damaged from poor storage conditions. Approximately 450 paintings survive today.

**1912**

Catlin's heirs sell the *Cartoon Collection* to the American Museum of Natural History, New York.

**1965**

Paul Mellon, who had acquired the set of the *Cartoon Collection*, donates 351 paintings to the National Gallery of Art and 24 to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.