



PROJECT MUSE®

Rookwood and the American Indian: Masterpieces of American Art Pottery from the James J. Gardner Collection (review)

Carol Boram-Hays

Ohio History, Volume 116, 2009, pp. 129-131 (Review)

Published by The Kent State University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ohh.0.0063>



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/263140>

or human regions” (44–52). Of the seven summaries, only that of Appalachian (eastern) Kentucky does not highlight that region’s colleges and universities. To casual readers this could suggest that education is undervalued in the mountains, even though Morehead and Eastern Kentucky University are listed later in the book.

A larger omission is cumulative: great social movements—abolitionism, black rights, the women’s movement—are summarized here, but their “grass-roots” bases are minimized. Instead, individual courage and achievement are emphasized as the dominant engines of progress. Of course, remarkable individuals do shape history, but in this concise history heroic individuals seem to *create* collective reform and resistance rather than *emerge from* them. Eijah Marrs leads black troops into battle for the Union and later speaks for black rights (121). But the populist black “Union Leagues” in which he participated after the war to resist widespread white-on-black violence of Redemption-era Kentucky are missing. Coal miner Sam Hawkins struggles to provide for his family in Depression-era Letcher County (133), but there is no reference to the formative class and unionization struggles in 1930s eastern Kentucky coalfields. Muhammad Ali (178–79) refuses induction into the army, is vindicated by the Supreme Court, and regains his heavyweight title. But the context of the anti-Vietnam war movement and black resistance is omitted; here, Ali’s historical significance rests more on his reconciliation with his native Louisville rather than his contributions to the black power movement. Commercially successful country or mountain singers merit praise (155–58), but there is no mention of influential “message” singers such as Molly Jackson, Sarah Ogan Gunning, or Florence Reece. Wendell Berry, justifiably called “the greatest living Kentucky writer,” appears as a lone oracle imploring Kentuckians to protect their environment from industrial plunder (150). But Berry’s environmental advocacy is rooted in a broadly based grassroots citizens’ movement that gets no mention.

This book is a useful guide in a convenient and well-written format. The absence of some defining collective voices, however, arguably keeps it from being a completely satisfying introduction to the key dynamics of the Kentucky story, notwithstanding the structural limits of concision.

JOHN HENNEN

Morehead State University

Rookwood and the American Indian: Masterpieces of American Art Pottery from the James J. Gardner Collection. By Anita J. Ellis and Susan Labry Meyn. (Athens: Cincinnati Art Museum and the Ohio University Press, 2007. 312 pp. Paper \$30.00, ISBN 978-8214-1740-9.)

The image of the Native American has a strong and complex place in the

American imagination. Variably portrayed as savages, noble warriors, rebels, victims, and extensions of nature, Native Americans remain a source of mystery and romance to many. *Rookwood and the American Indian: Masterpieces of American Art Pottery from the James J. Gardner Collection* by Anita J. Ellis and Susan Labry Meyn, with a foreword by George P. Horse Capture Sr., is a fascinating look at how Cincinnati's European-American population negotiated their relationship with Native Americans. Ellis and Meyn examine the period from the founding of the city in the late eighteenth century through the end of the nineteenth century, when Native Americans became important subjects for the artists of Rookwood pottery. The book was designed to accompany an exhibition of James J. Gardner's collection of Rookwood pottery held at the Cincinnati Art Museum.

In the first section of the book, "Enduring Encounters," Meyn explores early Cincinnati settlers' contacts with Native Americans, archaeological investigations and collections of the mound builder cultures, and how, with the mounting defeats suffered by Native American cultures and the rise of live Native American exhibitions, the image of Native Americans eventually becomes romanticized. Interweaving discussions about the influences of contemporary trends in art and consumer products and developments in materials and technology, Anita Ellis explores the rise and fall of the theme of the Native American on Rookwood pottery in "Rookwood and the American Indian." Unfortunately, there are a few places where Meyn's and Ellis's discussions repeat each other. The final part of the text is divided into subsections devoted to each of the artists who decorated his or her works with images of Native Americans. These subsections begin with short biographies of each artist followed by lush, full-page photos of each piece of pottery in the exhibition. Every photo is accompanied by information documenting the marks on the piece and the source photo used by the artist to create the image of the Native American on the work. Discussions about the history of the vessel and/or the costume, tribal group, and sometimes a biography of the person represented are also provided.

The authors should be given much credit for assembling such a rich study of this complex topic. They give all sides of the story detailed and sensitive treatments. Especially impressive is the fact that they were able to track down the sources for all of the images featured on the works in the exhibition. The only topic about which I was left yearning for more information was how the source photos used by the Rookwood artists came to be created and how well these photos represented their subjects (although some of this information is included with the discussions about each work).

This examination of the range of conditions surrounding the production of these works of art add new layers of understanding to this art form

and the many societies of which it was part and makes *Rookwood and the American Indian* an absorbing read.

CAROL BORAM-HAYS

The Ohio State University and Columbus College of Art and Design

Long Journey Home: Oral Histories of Contemporary Delaware Indians. Edited by James W. Brown and Rita T Kohn. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. 448 pp. Cloth \$34.95, ISBN 978-0-253-34968-2.)

Long Journey Home is a collaborative effort among the members of the Delaware Tribe of Bartlesville, Oklahoma, and editors Brown and Kohn. The authors worked closely with Delaware community leaders to edit and organize the material into a broadly accessible collection. Each account stands alone, but collectively it transmits a story of cultural resilience. This volume grew out of an earlier project, *Always a People: Oral Histories of Contemporary Woodland Indians*.

The compilation is organized into four sections. The first is a selection of transcripts from the Indian Pioneer Papers held by the University of Oklahoma. It is unclear whether or not these are complete or abbreviated from the originals. In general, this section presents Delaware community life in Oklahoma at the turn of the last century. Many of these recollections are memories of Delaware childhood and youth. Enrollment, allotments, and their Delaware lineage infuse this group of interviews.

The second section is very brief and contains three interviews that were edited from original transcriptions also available at the University of Oklahoma. Two of the three interviews provide detailed information from a woman's perspective about ceremonials and gender-specific customs pertaining to puberty, marriage, and childbirth. One of the interviewees is Nora Thompson Dean, honored by the Delaware for her work in preserving the Delaware language and traditional knowledge.

The third section contains two edited interviews conducted in 1995. The first is a lengthy interview with Mary Townsend Crow Milligan. The depth of the interview provides richly detailed accounts of Delaware women in Oklahoma. Mary Crow's recollections reveal the ways in which Delaware women were instrumental in preserving their cultural legacy through social organizations and gatherings, passing on recipes and ceremonies, and teaching a new generation the ways of their grandmothers. These two interviews also convey how new demands on Delaware identity and culture inspired change and innovation and created new traditions in their community. Throughout the text Delaware women stand out as resilient pillars of their families and communities.