Mutual Infatuation: Rosebud Sioux and Cincinnatians

Susan Labry Meyn

As early as 1832 George Catlin, the famous painter of Indians, stated that Cincinnatians no longer thought of themselves as living on the frontier. Many felt that “Our town has passed the days of its most rapid growth, it is not far enough West.”¹ Like Catlin Cincinnatians yearned for the Far West, “untamed” country that fascinated (and still fascinates) “civilized” society.

Some sixty years later, in the summer of 1896, officials at the Cincinnati Zoological Society brought the West to the East in a series of educational programs illustrating frontier and pioneer life — actually historical plays, advertised as “The Only Genuine and Legitimate Wild West Show and Congress of Rough Riders of the World In or Near Cincinnati This Season.”² The spectacular event lasted three months and featured eighty-nine Sicangu Sioux men, women, and children, who after signing the federally approved contracts with the zoo’s official representative, Assistant Manager Fred E. Nevin, left their homes on Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota and traveled south to Valentine, Nebraska, to board a train for Cincinnati. Two boxcars transported their tepees and horses.³ The Sicangu camped at the zoo and participated in reenactments of legendary western battles, an attack on a stagecoach, war dances, Indian pony races, and scenes zoo officials thought typical of Cincinnati one hundred years earlier. When Cincinnatians visited the zoo that summer, they traveled vicariously through time and space. Curiously, no one seems to have thought it unusual that Plains Indians portrayed Eastern Woodland Indians.

Fortunately some Cincinnatians wrote about, sketched, and photographed the Sicangu that summer. One young photographer, Enno Meyer, made friends with several Sicangu who corresponded with him after their visit. Meyer’s collection of photographs, glass negatives, Indian artifacts, and letters are in the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History.⁴ The ex-president of the Cincinnati Camera Club, Thomas H. Kelley took additional photographs which illustrate an unpublished manuscript written by James Albert Green, a longtime trustee on the board of the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County.⁵ Rookwood artists, who often used photographs of Indians as a source of inspiration for their painted pottery, had access to a third group of pictures taken by an unknown photographer.⁶ Other Cincinnatians documented the Indian visit in newspapers and in correspondence with officials in Washington, D.C. Decades later Bessie Hoover Wessel, a local artist, acquired Meyer’s glass negatives and used them as a guide for her oil paintings.

Susan Labry Meyn, a doctoral candidate in interdisciplinary studies at the University of Cincinnati, has presented programs on this event at Rosebud Reservation.

Rookwood artists who used photographs of Indians as a source of inspiration for their painted pottery had access to a group of pictures taken by an unknown photographer. (CHS, Photograph Collection)
Artists like George Catlin and Karl Bodmer painted images that have left indelible impressions of the "pure," untamed West. Their depictions of the Plains Indian in long fringed leather garb astride a horse pursuing buffalo on the run became synonymous with the "real" thing. Stories about Kit Carson and David Crockett and their near-death adventures on the frontier reinforced the stereotype. Author Ned Buntline's dime novels made Buffalo Bill a national hero, whetting everyone's appetite to see it "really was."

Smart speculators like Buffalo Bill capitalized on this image and included live Plains Indians in their programs. Indians traveled far and wide with circuses, wild west shows, and medicine shows. They participated in national and international fairs and expositions. Their flowing feathered headdresses, imprinted on minds and pennies, typified the Indian. The idea of the Far West spread its charms over the nation and the Cincinnati Zoological Society. The
Society, like other speculators, was unconcerned about costs, believing that the 1896 Sicangu Sioux program depicting life on the frontier would increase gate receipts.

One newspaper reporter approved of the Society's entrepreneurial spirit claiming, "It is a grand illustration of the enterprising policy of the present management — a policy which, if kept up, will not only place the Zoo upon a safe basis, but make it one of the most profitable amusement institutions of the United States." The Society said that "the attractions offered by the animals alone were hardly sufficient inducement to the public to bring the receipts up to the amount of running expenses, quite ignoring the expense of annual repairs to the buildings, etc., permanent improvements and the replenishment of animals, they determined to inaugurate other attractions." The Society had good reason to speculate because the first Indian encampment at the zoo in 1895, combined with the other cultural attractions, had done precisely this.

In 1895 Cincinnatians had been offered a kaleidoscope of events including the first Indian encampment — a Cree village at the zoo. A band of Cree had been abandoned by the Beveridge Montana Wildest West show in June. When the show owner fled, some of the poverty-stricken Cree remained on the former show site in Bellevue, Kentucky, across the river from Cincinnati. The Cree's refusal to leave caused consternation and stress for both Kentucky officials and the Cree. The zoo solved the problem by inviting the Cree to camp near their beloved buffalos and bears.

The Cree village was not the only ethnological attraction Cincinnatians saw at the zoo. The 1895 program included an Oriental village with Arabian, Kurdish, Armenian, and Egyptian families camping in their ethnically diverse tents. In his report of January 1, 1897, John Goetz, Jr., President of the Zoological Society, boasted that the extra attractions in 1895 increased receipts by more than $25,000. This unprecedented success led to future ethnological...
William S. Heck, the zoo’s general manager, Sol Stephan, and other zoo officials brought world’s fair style entertainments and ethnological exhibitions to the Queen City. (CHS, Printed Works Collection)
The Cree encampment brought an acculturated West to Cincinnati. The Cree wore pseudo-Plains clothing in untraditional ways and decorated themselves with feathers that fell from some of the birds at the zoo. Their hair styles, with short front bangs, were not typically Sioux. Despite this, Henry F. Farny and John Rettig went to the zoo to sketch them. In addition Cincinnati artist and photographer Enno Meyer, who frequently photographed the animals and buildings at the zoo, took pictures of the Indians, documenting a little known event in Cree history and one almost forgotten in the zoo’s history.

After settling in at the zoo, the Cree staged a typical wild west show appearing in war dances, medicine dances, scalp dances, and the “Wonderful Sun Dance.” Additional frontier portrayals included the burning of a prisoner at the stake and the massacre of the inhabitants of a frontier cabin. Cincinnatians also witnessed Cree activities in other sections of the city. When Hidden Bird, a Cree man, died his funeral mass at St. Xavier Church aroused much curiosity. The cortege walked solemnly through the city's streets to St. Joseph Cemetery where he was buried.

A July 7, 1895, Enquirer headline told Cincinnatians that admission receipts would be used in “transporting these Waifs of the West back to their homes in Far-Off Montana.” The article urged local citizens to rush to the zoo and bid farewell to the Cree, who were to the zoo officials relief, finally leaving on July 15. Hundreds of Cincinnatians responded by attending the zoo’s wild west show and other ethnic events, thereby prompting one newspaper to compare the programs to the Columbian exposition: “What the World’s Fair Was to Chicago the Zoo Is to Cincinnati!”

At the time, zoo officials did not consider these human or anthropological exhibitions extraneous to its mission. The following year, 1896, John Goetz, the President of the Cincinnati Zoological Society, justified the zoo’s decision to illustrate life on the Plains with a living Indian village. In the Annual Report of 1896 he wrote: “The exhibition of wild people is in line with zoology, and so, when we exhibit Indians, or South Sea Islanders, or Esquimaux, or Arabians, or any wild or strange people now in existence, we are simply keeping within our province as a zoological institution.” Zoo officials thereby aligned themselves with other promoters.

Although the Cree encampment had been a large undertaking, the three-month Sicangu Sioux visit in 1896 took months of preparation and represented a tremendous commitment for the
Zoological Society. They sought and eventually obtained federal permission for the Sicangu Sioux to come to Cincinnati. To guarantee the safety and well being of the Sicangu, the Society had to post a $10,000 bond.13 In addition it had to underwrite the transportation and care of the Indians’ horses, thereby increasing the financial obligations of the Society.

Obtaining government approval for the Indians to leave their reservation proved difficult. On April 11, 1896, Heck wrote his first letter requesting Indians from “Western Reservations” for the purpose of exhibitions.14 On April 16, he wrote to Hoke Smith, the Secretary of the Interior, stating that he knew that William F. Cody had an arrangement by which he secured Indians for his show. Heck said that the Zoological Garden, “having been founded and maintained by philanthropists as an educational institution — as a field of object lessons for the study of Natural History” would be a natural place to “illustrate during the summer season, the various races of men.”15 He offered John G. Carlisle, Charles P. Taft, and Jacob H. Bromwell as attestors to the high character of the Society.16 Bromwell and Taft followed through and helped the Society obtain permission “to show an Indian tribe.”17 After receiving official permission “to engage the services of, not to exceed one hundred, Indians,” Heck inquired about salaries and wrote the Indian agents at Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota. Albeit, he noted that the final decision rested with the Executive Committee.18 On May 11, J. George Wright, the Indian Agent at Rosebud, wrote Heck regarding the salaries. The average salary, Wright said, was “$25.00 per month for each individual male Indian; $10.00 and $15.00 per month for each woman, and $5.00 per month for each child. Chiefs or head men would probably demand $30 or $35.00, or possibly $50.00 per month.” Wright told Heck that the Indians would bring their “native costume, feathers, etc.” and that he, Heck, “would have no trouble whatever in controlling [sic] these Indians, provided strict discipline was maintained, and they not [sic] permitted to obtain liquor under any circumstances.”19 The Society decided to “engage the services” of the Indians and Heck forwarded the required $10,000 bond to Smith, the Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs.

Heck told Smith that Fred E. Nevin, a representative of the Zoological Society, would start for Rosebud Reservation on May 31.20 On June 11, Charles E. McChesney, U.S. Indian Agent at Rosebud Reservation, wrote to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs.21 I have the honor to transmit herewith fifty-nine Articles of Agreement between Fred E. Nevin, duly authorized representative of the Zoological Society of Cincinnati, Ohio, and sundry Indians of this agency. These agreements cover 89 persons, who left this agency for Cincinnati, Ohio, today.22

In addition to paying each Sicangu an agreed upon salary the Society promised,

to supply the said party of the second part with proper food and raiment, except one suit of Indian clothes to start with, and moccasins, head-dress, etc., and to discharge all their traveling and needful incidental expenses from the date of leaving said Agency until their return thereto, and to protect the said party from all immoral influences and surroundings, and to provide all needful medical attendance and medicine, and do all such other acts and things as may be requisite and proper for the health, comfort and welfare of the said party of the second part, and to return them to the said Agency within the time specified by the Interior Department from the date hereof, without charge or cost to the said party of the second part or to the United States. The party of the second part agrees to keep sober and obey the rules and regulations of the Zoological Society of Cincinnati, O., failing to do so he will be returned to Agency, forfeiting salary due him.23

The contract was paternalistic and placed a serious financial responsibility upon a relatively small institution. Goetz justified his decision in the Annual Report when he said that the Board of Directors believed that the $25,000 earned in 1895 “could be kept up and probably exceeded.”24 The Board was banking on the fascination of Cincinnatians to offset any deficits.

After agreeing to participate in the zoo’s educational program, the Sicangu posed for an official photograph by John A. Anderson, who documented numerous other Sicangu activities. The men looked
splendid in their Plains Indian finery; many astride their horses with women and children seated on the ground in front. By Saturday, June 20, Queen City residents knew that genuine, legitimate Indians were at the zoo, living in a "picturesque village" where aboriginal life could be seen first-hand. The Board of Directors felt that this event "gave a rare opportunity of showing the character and mode of life of the Indian tribes" to Cincinnatians.

Valentine McKenzie, a Sicangu who was educated at Carlisle Indian School, served as interpreter when the contracts were signed and when local newspaper reporters toured the encampment. The Indian village was located in the northeastern portion of the zoo's garden, near present day Forest Avenue and Dury Street. "The village is diversified by hill and dale, and plain and valley. The tepees, whose sides are covered with rude pictures, showing the Indian's passion, if not his talent, for drawing, are distributed with a charming disregard for symmetry and distance over the grounds."

During their initial adjustment to Cincinnati's summer and to living under the inquisitive eyes of the visiting public, Sicangu presented two educational frontier shows daily. The site of the entertainments, one at 3:00 p.m. and the other at 8:30 p.m., was the amphitheater south of the lake. (Today, this is the parking area near the present-day elephant house.) After the zoo closed for the evening, the Indians would begin rehearsing Indian shows. The goal of the entertainments [best described as wild west shows] was to illustrate the stirring scenes connected with pioneer and frontier life, albeit, not always accurately or realistically. The expanded entertainments included reenactments of well-known, stereotyped, events in Indian-White relationships: the Massacre of Wounded Knee, the Battle of Little Big Horn, an attack on a frontier stage coach, and the proverbial burning of the prisoner at the stake. The U.S. soldiers were represented by a company of the First Regiment of Infantry from the Ohio National Guard. These sensational dramatic attractions, complete with electric and pyrotechnic lighting and red-fire effects were the highlights of the zoo's program; but the zoo's officials added others.

One addition featured Sicangu horsemen and a band of "revengeful Bedouins" on horseback thundering together around the arena in "a grand combination drill of horsemen from the wild West and the wild East." Now, the show staged in the zoological gardens of a mid-western river town, resembled Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World. Even Major John Burke, the general manager of Buffalo Bill's show felt compelled to compliment the zoo's program.

But, the zoo had competition. Even though the government discouraged Indians from participating in shows without contracts, Indian agents had no authority to prohibit them. Defying the authority of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, approximately twenty Indians surreptitiously left the Cheyenne and Arapaho Indian Agency in Darlington, Oklahoma, on June 23, 1896, on the 6:00 a.m. train for Cincinnati and another wild west show organized by Major Gordon Lilly, "Pawnee Bill."

Pawnee Bill's Wild West Show, at Chester Park on the north side of Spring Grove at Platt Avenue, rivaled the events at the zoo. Every special frontier show the zoo planned, Pawnee Bill imitated and advertised one week later on the same page that described the zoo's activities. Pawnee Bill left Chester Park in mid-July but the park's management continued to give the zoo competition. The zoo's "Historical Cincinnati" program was copied and renamed "Cincinnati One Hundred Years Ago" complete with another elaborate set replicating Fort Washington. It is uncertain who portrayed the Indians. Frustrated zoo officials repeatedly claimed that their Indians were the only ones acquired "honorably" through a bond agreement with the government and with signed contracts with the Sicangu. They boasted that their Indians, fresh from South Dakota, were members of the Great Sioux Nation and embodied the Indian qualities described by James Fenimore Cooper. Thus, Cincinnatians also enhanced the myth of the Wild West.

Each week the highlights of the Wild West changed trying to lure local residents to see the former frontier in action. However, when the zoo officials decided to reenact the Ghost Dance and the
Massacre at Wounded Knee there was disagreement among the Sicangu. In his manuscript Green explained that “An Indian has very little imagination and it took a long time to get the idea of what was wanted into their heads.” The real reason, however, may well have been that many of the Sicangu vividly remembered the 1890 tragedy and the last days of their Nation. One newspaper claimed that some of the visiting Sicangu had actually participated in the battle. Finally with the assistance of interpreter Valentine McKenzie, a compromise was reached and the Indians made the appropriate costumes for the presentation. Green stated that “after they had once or twice rehearsed the Battle, they took most kindly to it and gave the performance with a vim and energy that was startling.”

Ghost dance shields, replicating those used by participants in the movement, were part of the traditional attire. In one photograph a Sicangu is shown holding his shield, a prop he or someone else created for the reenactment. Enno Meyer acquired a nearly identical shield that is in the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History’s Collections. The programs continued to change and Indians were busy making props.

“Historical Cincinnati,” a very innovative entertainment, portrayed scenes and incidents that had occurred in the Cincinnati area more than 100 years earlier. The Sicangu, wearing Plains clothing, became Eastern Woodland Indians, and staged a sham battle before gigantic scenery depicting Fort Washington. The thrilling climax was the attack on the fort and its defense by brave frontiersmen. Zoo officials embroidered Cincinnati history when they asked Indians to storm and attack Fort Washington because the fort was never attacked in a serious manner — and never by Plains Indians. The only significant Indian attack in the vicinity of Cincinnati was on Dunlap Station on the Great Miami in 1791. Incidents in the lives of famous frontiersmen, such as

Goes to War, brother of Iron Shell, was one of the Indians photographed by Thomas H. Kelley to illustrate the James A. Green manuscript. (CHS, James A. Green Manuscript Collection)

In contract number 36 the Cincinnati zoo agreed to pay Little Bald Eagle $40.00 a month. (CHS, James A. Green Manuscript Collection)
Daniel Boone, Simon Kenton, James Smith, and Colonel Crawford, were also illustrated. The playwrights at the zoo together with the Sicangu enlivened and embellished Cincinnati history. Even though the Sicangu were busy participating in two programs daily, they, like other tourists, enjoyed the pleasures of shopping for souvenirs. "They delighted in visiting the city proper and finally the spectacle of an Indian, all togged out in his native finery, going solemnly and stolidly down the streets carrying his purchases done in the regulation brown paper parcels, became so frequent that not even the small boy turned his eyes to follow." They learned to shop in the largest and best stores and purchased intelligently; they were fond of colored shirts, silk Windsor ties, and red blankets. On August 20, The Enquirer let everyone know what Chief Iron Shell's daughter wore while shopping and what she purchased — large cotton handkerchiefs, beads, a feather duster, some sticks of peppermint candy, a red and yellow work basket, and a majolica beer mug. The returning travelers had unusual stories and anecdotes to tell as well as unique souvenirs to show to the welcoming delegation of relatives at the train station in Valentine, Nebraska. One reporter stated that everyone celebrated with a "great pow wow" and that the Sicangu who went to Cincinnati held "their heads as high as cameleopards."

Even though the reporters and others in Cincinnati described Sicangu activities in great detail, there was one story that none of the Cincinnati journalists writing in English reported. But, a German newspaper, the Tagliche Abend-Presse, and The Kentucky Post told all. Somehow the Sicangu discov-
erected, probably by someone reading the local press to them, that on January 31, 1896, a few months before they arrived in Cincinnati, a young woman named Pearl Bryan had been murdered. Her headless body had been found on Lock Farm near Fort Thomas, the military post, in Campbell County, Kentucky. This brutal act came to be known as the “murder of the century.” Numerous mistrials, resulting in no conviction, were held during the period the Sicangu were in Cincinnati. On July 15, the Indians went to view the site of the murder and asked to see the murderers. This request was refused. Instead they were taken on a tour of police headquarters and city hall and introduced to Cincinnati Mayor John A. Caldwell. Thus, zoo officials upheld their part of the federal contract which promised “to protect the said party from all immoral influences and surroundings.”

The contract between zoo officials and the Sicangu also specified that the zoo authorities would be responsible for “proper food.” At first this did not appear to be a problem, because the authorities had been told, presumably by the Indian agent, that a simple diet of meat and potatoes would satisfy the Indians. The chefs employed by the zoo opted for inexpensive meat “cut from pretty close behind the horns.” What the chefs did not realize was that the Sicangu were accomplished hunters and butchers so they soon demanded the choicer cuts of sirloins and porterhouses. “Then they wanted more vegetables and expressed a preference for cabbage. Later they wanted blackberries and watermelons while nothing in the bake-shop came amiss.” There is no doubt that Cincinnatians and Cincinnati chefs learned about Indians that summer.

In addition to participating in the daily wild west shows and frontier plays and maintaining a public campsite, the Sicangu frequently posed for photographers. Enno Meyer photographed the Sicangu lounging on the grassy knolls at the zoo, resting comfortably on the park benches located there, standing casually under trees, or seated on the stone walkway. The men enjoyed their leisure hours, as Meyer’s photographs attest, and usually spent them relaxing and talking.

This, however, does not present a complete picture of their activities because the Sicangu also participated in special events at the zoo. They paraded in a spectacular grand entry when the McKinley Club opened the Republican campaign at the zoo. Campaign buttons were popular souvenir items, even among the Sicangu, and when T.H. Kelley took a picture of Goes to War, he was wearing his McKinley button pinned beneath his United States Indian Police badge. At least five other Indians posed.

Zoological officials rewrote Plains history when they decided to include in their wild west educational events a play that showed the Sicangu Sioux storming Fort Washington. (Sketch from the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden Archives)
The Sioux enjoyed and later treasured the photographs Meyer took. In their correspondence with him after the visit the Indians asked for additional photographs of one another. (Picture courtesy of the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History)
Families, as well as single people, camped for three months at the zoo's garden in 1896 and allowed Cincinnatians to stroll through their "living" village. This woman displayed her Navajo third phase "Chief's Blanket" for Meyer and others. (Picture courtesy of the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History)
for Kelley’s portrait photographs. Some Indians traveled downtown to Meyer’s studio where, according to William Meyer, Enno’s nephew, they had their pictures taken which probably accounts for the plain background seen in many of Meyer’s images. Someone else took candid photographs of the Sicangu and gave them to the Rookwood photograph collection.

This treasure trove of information, combined with the documentation in the National Archives, shows that the Zoological Gardens planned an unusual program that summer. Nonetheless, in spite of the Zoological Society’s high expectations, its 1896 speculative endeavor failed to generate the anticipated funds. President Goetz admitted that the “expense of exhibiting these Indians . . . exceeded by several thousands of dollars our receipts.” He blamed the nation’s economy, but felt “the real and principal cause of our loss this year was the unprecedentedly rainy season.” He said that it rained forty-six of the one hundred days of extra amusements and when it was not raining, the sky was “cloudy and threatening.” To make his point he prepared a table comparing the attendance and receipts of 1895 with those in 1896 for twenty-four of the rainiest days of the season. “On these twenty-four rainy days, the total attendance was 25,490 and the receipts were $5,670.65; the total attendance for the corresponding days of 1895 was 77,180 people . . . and the receipts were $14,724.50 . . . .” Another disadvantage was streetcar facilities which did not provide easy access to the Zoological Gardens. No doubt Pawnee Bill’s show, imitating the zoo’s programs, also attracted some of the zoo’s potential clientele. Chester Park’s shows
must have been somewhat successful because the management was still advertising its Cincinnati frontier program in late August. In addition, the monthly salaries of the Sicangu added to the expenses. The amount for each man was noted on his contract (59 men, hence 59 contracts); women and children probably received a small salary, in the range Agent Wright had recommended. The contracts in the National Archives list: two men at forty dollars a month, Valentine McKenzie at thirty dollars a month, and the rest at either twenty-five or fifteen a month. At that time, the salaries must have been a tremendous financial commitment because in 1903 the customary starting wage for a keeper at the zoo was forty dollars a month. All of the expenses agreed to in the contracts, plus the reasons Goetz gave, resulted in a tremendous deficit for the 1896 season. This burden was not relieved by the 1897 season and the Zoological Garden went into receivership the following year.

Even though the deficit was enormous, Goetz continued to believe that ethnological villages should be scheduled because they had "vast educational value" and were a "profitable investment." How did the Sicangu and other Indians feel about participating in these so-called educational programs? Fortunately, some Sicangu corresponded with Meyer after their visit. In addition to asking him to tell "Farnning" [sic] and "Sharp" hello, they requested copies of Meyer's photographs of their friends or relatives (pictures of women were popular), asked for Heck's address, colored ribbons, and eagle tail feathers from the birds at the zoo. Two Sicangu asked whether another visit to Cincinnati was being (or might be) planned. In December 1896, in May 1898, and again in August 1898, Good Voice Eagle asked Meyer when the zoo was going to schedule another show. Good Voice Eagle said that Arthur Little Stallion also wanted to know. They were anxious to have a commitment because they were destitute. Good Voice Eagle said that he was not able to answer one of Meyer's letters because he had no money and could not buy a stamp. Good Voice Eagle was not exaggerating about the hardships he or other Indians experienced on the reservations. Historian Francis Prucha wrote that the last third of the nineteenth century when Indians were impoverished and enduring radical changes was the most critical in the entire history of Indian-White relations. Escaping the depressing environment and earning money must have been a relief for the Indians. For years the Sioux expressed concern over the fact that railroad companies and cattle ranchers hungrily sought their land. Eventually, with the passage of the Dawes Severalty Act in 1887, government officials were able to rob the Sioux of millions of acres. During this period, economic and spiritual depression were pervasive on the Plains reservations. Participating in wild west plays was probably a respite.
Indians who joined the shows realized that they often had to endure the insensitive comments of whites and that frequently the entertainment program was little better than a midway spectacle. At times even the government’s scientifically correct anthropological exhibits planned for world’s fairs and expeditions degenerated into tasteless displays. For the Columbian Exposition, the government gave permission for Indians to participate in a living anthropological village illustrating how the Indian appeared when America was discovered, in an exhibit replicating an Indian industrial boarding school, and in Buffalo Bill’s spectacular wild west show. It’s hard to believe that Indians did not recognize the government’s lack of consistency. They knew that being an actor in one of these performances was hard work. Without a doubt it took a secure personality and strong integrity to withstand the public’s curiosity and relentless questions day after day.

Earning a monthly salary was not the only reason Indians chose to sign on. Some offered other explanations. Black Elk, who was an Oglala Sioux holy man, said that he enjoyed participating in the scenes planned by Indians more than those planned by whites. He gave his reason for joining Buffalo Bill’s tour of Europe. “... I thought I ought to go, because I might learn some secret of the Wasichu (white people) that would help my people somehow.” Luther Standing Bear, a Sioux who traveled to England with Buffalo Bill, described the fatigue one felt after presenting two shows daily and the problems associated with moving a large camp from one site to another and erecting their tepees in “wet and muddy weather.” He complained that white spectators were not really interested in knowing how things really are. They only wanted to see a stereotype. Yet, wild west shows served a purpose, enabling the Indians to observe white ways unchaperoned, without the paternalistic guiding hand of the Great White Father or an Indian agent.

When eighty-nine Sicangu consented to participate in an educational program in Cincinnati, they committed themselves to an event that brought the romantic western frontier East. The Sicangu’s presence in Cincinnati infatuated numerous residents who left a legacy of important historical information in scattered places. This documentation enables the Sicangu to reclaim a forgotten historical event for their own archives and tells Cincinnatians that for three months in 1896 Queen City residents were allowed to relive, in mythical fashion, the frontier days that they already felt nostalgic about when George Catlin visited the city in 1832.

I would like to thank the Sicangu, particularly Lorraine Walking Bull, Seth Big Crow, Simon Broken Leg, Emil Her Many Horses, Ollie Napesni, Sherry Red Owl, Jerry Kills in Water, and Francis Paul Two Charger and his wife, Marie Kills Plenty-Two Charger for assisting with the identification project. Mike Her Many Horses, an Oglala, graciously shared his considerable knowledge about old photographs and wild west events. The administration and staff of Sinte Gleska University and Charles Hill, the former Director of the Lakota Archives and Historical Research Center on Rosebud Reservation were invaluable. On my most recent trip in June 1993, Marcella

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Women and children participated in the educational program and wore their best blankets for Meyer’s photographs. The blanket on the right, a second phase “Chief’s Blanket” woven by Navajo women, indicated that its wearer was a wealthy woman with considerable status. (Picture courtesy of the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History)
Cash, the Archivist at the Center, Assistant Archivist Terry Gray, and Marlene Whipple, the Director of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe Elderly Nutrition Program, suggested creative ways for me to elicit additional information.

The Sicangu are able to enjoy all of Enno Meyer's photographs because R. Howard and Janet C. Melvin, and Monte P. and Mary Louise Melvin donated duplicate 8x10 prints to the Lakota Archives and Historical Research Center, the official repository for Sicangu history at Sinte Gleska University on Rosebud. The Melvins' encouragement and enthusiasm helped bring this article to fruition.

The Museum of Natural History funded my 1993 trip to Rosebud. Librarians, Anne B. Shepherd at the Cincinnati Historical Society and M'Lissa Kesterman and Claire Pancero, in the rare book department at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County, made my task easier. David Ehrlinger, the Director of Horticulture at The Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden, and William Meyer, Enno Meyer's nephew, clarified numerous fine points. Marci Cassidy, Hilda Gilbert, Lory Greenland, and Susan Hughes, Cincinnati Museum of Natural History volunteers, served as research assistants and valuable critics, and Judith Daniels edited the manuscript.

3. Charles E. McChesney to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, June 11, 1896, Letters Received 1896 #22637, Record Group 75; National Archives, Washington, D.C., Note #22637 is stored with #20489. *The Republican* (Valentine, Nebraska), June 19, 1896, p. 1.
4. The Enno Meyer collection is the result of two separate donations, one from R. Howard and Janet C. Melvin, and Monte P.
and Mary Louise Melvin, the other from Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Wessel, who located and donated the glass negatives. The Sicangu are able to enjoy all of Enno Meyer's photographs because the Melvin Family donated duplicate 8x10 prints to the Lakota Archives and Historical Research Center, the official repository for Sicangu history at Sinte Gleska University on Rosebud.

5. Cincinnati Historical Society, James Albert Green manuscript collection; Mss G797u Box 2. Green submitted his manuscript to Harper and Brothers. There is no date on either the manuscript or the refusal from Harper, but the date is definitely 1896 because the names Green mentioned are the same as those on the contracts in the National Archives. In the folder is an envelope dated 1895, but this is not the date of the visit.

6. Cincinnati Historical Society, Rookwood Photograph Collection, SC 148, Box 6, Source Material.

7. Cincinnati Museum of Natural History Ethnology Collection, Bessie Hoover Wessel file. There is a photocopy of the invitation to the exhibition held at Closson's gallery in the file.


12. Twenty-Second Annual Report of the Zoological Society of Cincinnati for the Year 1896 [sic] p.6. The year of the report is incorrect; it should be 1895.

13. The Enquirer, June 20, 1895, p.6.

14. The Kentucky Post, June 17, 1895, p.6; June 14, 1895, p.6.

15. The Enquirer, July 11, 1895, p.6.


18. The Cincinnati Post, March 29, 1944, p.15; I am indebted to David Ehrlinger, the Director of Horticulture, at the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Garden for sending me a copy of this article.

19. Herbert Welsh to Morgan, June 4, 1891, Letters Received 1891, #20312; Morgan to Herbert Welsh, June 13, 1891, Land-Vol 109, Record Group 75. Commissioner Morgan sent Welsh the replies of the various Indian agents to an Indian Office circular calling for information on the effects of wild westing. Charles E. McChesney at Cheyenne River Agency to Thomas Morgan, November 15, 1899, #33536.


22. Ibid., p.713.

23. Ibid., 1892, p.1131; 1893 p.1145; 1894 p.1122; 1896 p.1092.


27. The Enquirer, July 4, 1895, p.5.

28. The Enquirer, June 22, 1895, p.5.


34. Heck to Carlisle, April 11, 1896; Heck to Lamont, April 11, 1896; Letters Received 1896, #15220 [both letters]; Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

35. Heck to Smith, April 16, 1896; Letters Received 1896 #15237; Record Group 75; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

36. Ibid.

37. Bromwell to Browning, April 22, 1896; Letters Received 1896 #15327; Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Twenty-Third Annual Report of the Zoological Society of Cincinnati, for the Year 1896, 1897. p.10.

38. Heck to Smith, Acting Commissioner of Indian Affairs, May 2, 1896, Letters Received 1896 #16705; Record Group 75; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

39. Wright to the Zoological Society, May 11, 1896, Outgoing Correspondence for Rosebud, 1878-1910, Book 25; Record Group 75; National Archives, Kansas City Branch.

40. Heck to Smith, May 30, 1896; Letters Received 1896 #20489; Record Group 75, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

41. McChesney to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, June 11, 1896. Letters Received 1896 #22637. The letter and the contracts are stored with #20489. Record Group 75; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

42. Ibid.


44. Henry W. Hamilton and Jean Tyree Hamilton, The Sioux of the Rosebud: A History in Pictures (Norman, Oklahoma, 1980), P.196. Even though the caption under the photograph reads 1897, this is incorrect because there was no Indian exhibit at the zoo that year. This photograph is also reproduced in Paul Dyck's book as Plate 21. Brule: The Sioux of the Rosebud, Flagstaff, 1971. The captions are different in the two books because they are derived from different sources. See: Meyn, op. cit. p.26, note 3.

45. The Enquirer, June 20, 1896, p.6.


47. The Enquirer, July 26, 1896, p.19.


49. The Enquirer, June 20, 1896, p.6.

Even though the contracts in the National Archives give the English names of the Sioux men who traveled to Cincinnati, it is still difficult to identify precisely who was who because Meyer did not label many of his photographs. This man, however, had his Indian name, Blokaciqa, tattooed on his upper left arm. He was also known as Arthur Belt and Little Stallion, and corresponded with Meyer after he returned to Rosebud.

(Picture courtesy of the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History)
61. Rookwood Photograph Collection. Even though the photograph is undated, it is 1896 because the child wearing the beaded vest is shown in an identical sketch in the zoo's archives and the vest is in one of Meyer's photographs, AI 126.001.

62. Personal Communication, George Horse-Capture to Meyn. Horse-Capture agreed that the ghost dance shield, CMNH A13391, in the Meyer collection was most probably a prop created for the zoo's plays.

63. The Enquirer, August 12, 1896, p.10; August 16, p.19.


65. Green, unpublished manuscript, p.3.

66. Ibid., p.4.


70. Op. cit. See original contract note #41. Even though zoo officials tried to protect the Sicangu, Sol Stephan, reminiscing thirty-five years later, claimed that some of the Sicangu left surreptitiously at night and obtained liquor from a local “saloon-keeper.” The Cincinnati Times-Star, January 2, 1931, p.8.

The man on the left is Robert Jackson, a scout and interpreter, who performed with the Cree in the wild west plays at the zoo’s garden in 1895. The other man is not identified. (Picture courtesy of the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History)