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Julius Seyler and the Blackfeet: An Impressionist at Glacier National Park. By William E. Farr.

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treaty, was largely ineffectual and never comfortable as Indian commissioner. Forget, a faithful liberal, did little to advance policy but did effect the complete reorganization of the western Indian administration, which resulted in greater centralization in Ottawa. The first commissioner, Provencher, turned out to be dissolute and corrupt. He was not alone—Reed and Graham also had odors of scandal around them. In sum, these men were, as the book's title implies, agents of the state: no more, no less. Though apparently active, forceful men, they were, in reality, passive agents ultimately guided by the structure and superstructure that enveloped and propelled them into the roles that they were assigned to perform.

Titley has made a fine contribution to our understanding of Canadian Indian policy and its crucial role in the settlement of the west. His attention to detail and allowing archival material to speak for itself are superb. His writing is accessible and entertaining. One minor point: a map of western Canada showing the Numbered Treaties would greatly aid a nonfamiliar reader. The book disappoints only in one major respect; Titley could have pressed his own analysis and assessment of these men more thoroughly and completely. In the end, he neglects to answer his own question directly—where do individuals and structure intersect?

*Hugh Shewell*

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**Julius Seyler and the Blackfeet: An Impressionist at Glacier National Park.** By William E. Farr. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009. 259 pages. \$45.00 cloth.

*Julius Seyler and the Blackfeet* is a book that at once piqued my interest and caused me deep disgust, not because of anything that the German impressionist painter Julius Seyler from Munich painted about the Blackfeet during 1913 and 1914, nor was it over anything that is written about the Blackfeet or Seyler's relationship with them. To the contrary, I could not put the book down once I began to read its celebrated pages and marvel at the photographs of Blackfeet people that my father or grandfather assuredly knew as friends. However, because I have such deep-seated psychological revulsions centered on the time Seyler was living in East Glacier Park, Montana—when Seyler was in my hometown—I questioned whether I was the appropriate person to write this review. Let me explain.

During the late 1940s, I was growing up as a child on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation, a scant three and a half decades after the time that Seyler was a

visitor to our little town of East Glacier Park, where he painted his impressions of the Blackfeet Indians in what Farr describes as a late-impressionist style of painting. True to form, and like so many before and after him, Seyler's paintings are romantic nostalgic parodies of a time long gone, even for 1913 and 1914. The great buffalo herds of the plains were distant memories in that area of the world, having long since been destroyed by the white man, who reduced them through massive systematic slaughter to a few hundred animals. The white man also reduced a once proud and exuberant Plains Indian culture to confinement on Indian reservations throughout the West, to become fenced-in beggars and Bureau of Indian Affairs wards of the government—a government that controlled every nuance and facet of their waking lives from birth until death and sometimes before and after, a system that preferred Indians be drunks and alcoholics rather than free men. I was born into and lived on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation at the tail end of that nineteenth-century historical drama; lived on those wide-open prairies, or what was left of them on the reservation; and believe that it is against this historical backdrop that Seyler's book must be reviewed and appreciated.

I speak from experience. I can remember living on handouts from the Glacier National Park Hotel during the early 1950s as a starving child, going to the back door of the hotel's kitchen and begging for leftover food—potatoes, rice, partly eaten steaks, fish, bread crumbs, and ice cream—for myself and my siblings that rich white tourists would leave on their plates to go to waste, sustenance that their fat bellies and bloated egos of self-importance were unable to consume. The Glacier Park Hotel was owned by the Great Northern Railway Company out of St. Paul, Minnesota, and the steel tracks that brought it to Montana are situated no more than one hundred feet behind my mother's small four-room cabin (which is still standing, an empty shell of wonderful family times gone by between Highway 2 and the railroad). I had no idea at the time that Seyler existed or had once visited my hometown, much less that the Great Northern Railway's president, Louis W. Hill, invited him to Glacier National Park to see the Indians.

We lived immediately on the west side of a deep ravine that separated us from the main town of East Glacier Park. That gash in the landscape was carved by hundreds of thousands of years of glacier-melt water. An ancient creek still runs at the bottom of that ravine, which served to isolate my family from the world of Julius Seyler and people like him, not only geographically but also historically by race, language, social class, politics, nationality, art, culture, economics, spirituality, and just about every other way you can imagine. My father and mother may have even met Seyler or at the very least saw his tall, ungainly frame walking the single main street of East Glacier. You see, I am a Cree Indian who lived and grew up in Blackfeet Indian territory,

and in my mind's eye, people like Seyler and the Blackfeet were denizens of other worlds; they could have been from another planet.

The Blackfeet whom Seyler painted were already fated to beggary at the turn of the century in Montana and Alberta, and the Great Depression of the Dirty 30s was but a few years away. The confinement of the Blackfeet onto reservations in Canada and the United States would only multiply their hardship. The Great Northern Railway would pay fifty cents a day to those Blackfeet who would stand beside the railroad track in East Glacier Park and greet the arriving passenger trains. Official greeters they were, before there ever was such a Wal-Mart term, dressed in traditional garb complete with war bonnets and smiling faces, shaking hands with people who came from the big cities back East to the newly created Glacier National Park (est. 1910). These Piegan greeters had no idea that the tourists they welcomed had traveled all that distance to see them, the last of the wild savages, and the Wild West with all its majestic rugged splendor, crystal-clear gushing glacial streams, and plentiful wildlife. I can imagine Seyler being greeted by these Blackfeet in the same way as he stepped off the train in 1913.

As I child I played among the horses and tipis belonging to many of the old men or their grown children who met those trains. They were still meeting those trains and dancing for those city slickers more than three decades after Seyler left. Their photographic images appear in this book. I watched them dancing for the tourists, selling trinkets for pennies or telling their Blackfeet Indian stories in sign language at campfire gatherings, or singing their ancient songs and camping in tipis on warm summer days in the pines at the fringes of the Great Northern Railway's tourist parking lots. What began as mere curiosity by one side turned into a full-time seasonal occupation for the other side. Ironically, these greeters were never allowed to rent rooms, eat in the dining rooms, or become the guests of the Great Northern Railroad's "Big Hotel," as we called it. Those honors were reserved for "civilized" people, those of middle- to upper-class European and American heritage, those well-healed artists such as Seyler. The greeters were the "savages" that drew in the crowds by the millions, and by association I was one of the savages, but as a child what did I know? Now you see my revulsion.

On the flip side, and putting all that unfortunate memory aside (for who among us has a choice of whom or what we are born as), this book is an attractively produced work of considerable historical importance not only as a biographical portrait of the German painter Seyler but also as a local document of the Blackfeet of Montana. It is sure to be a good seller on the bookshelves of the present-day Glacier Park Hotel in East Glacier Park, especially because it has within its splendid pages some very clear sepia and black-and-white photographs of the Blackfeet Indians of that long-ago era,

dressed to the nines in their finest attire. *Julius Seyler and the Blackfeet* contains photographs of what are the early stages of the hotel in East Glacier Park, of what it looked like when it was first being built before it was expanded to its present size. These are images that even present-day citizens of the little village of East Glacier Park and the nearby Blackfeet Indian town of Browning have never seen. It is those photographs, more than one hundred in all, of the old people and the hotel, sprinkled among the images of paintings, drawings, and photographs, that will be of most interest to the local populace; for many of those Old Ones photographed have great-great-grandchildren still living on the reservation. The paintings of Seyler are interesting as historical artifacts as well, and although he was an accomplished painter, his style of painting was more neo-impressionist, derived from that original movement in which French artists Paul Cézanne and Claude Monet set that trend, changing the face of what painting was to become for decades. Farr describes Seyler's style of painting as late impressionism sliding into expressionism, and in the book the imagery is comprised of portraits, landscapes, drawings, sketches, and studies for future paintings of Blackfeet Indians as models whose interpretation never quite reached the storied strata of individualism.

The text and photographs in the book are researched to the *n*th degree and as a biographical treatise, or portrait, the research is impeccable. This author loves his subject matter, and he takes us not only on a visual journey but also writes in a style that makes this book read more like a novel in some places, an art historical treatise in other places, and an art book and anthropological opinion in another place all rolled into one, which makes this pleasantly packaged book an easy and fascinating read. This is the work of a master researcher, storyteller, and wordsmith, and in spite of what I personally feel about German people's surrealistic attitudes and fascination with, especially, Blackfeet Indians even today, I found this book a joy to read and ponder. As you may appreciate, the book works on levels other than what the author may have intended, more for me than it would for anyone from outside the world in which I grew up. Many pages are filled with personal anecdotes and narratives telling about Seyler's early family and personal life; his marriage to Helga Boeckmann, a St. Paul, Minnesota, Norwegian-American student who went to Munich to study art; his travels; his life as an artist and art teacher when Adolf Hitler rose to power; his life as a young man growing up in Munich as a speed skater; later time spent in Paris, Provence, Avignon, and Marseilles in Mediterranean France visiting sights frequented by Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Gauguin, and Cézanne; and being adopted by a Piegan spiritual leader named Big Moon, who bestowed the Blackfeet name of Boss Ribs upon Seyler (every German boy's dream). The name Boss Ribs belongs to a family still living in Browning, so the name that was given by Big Moon was not original. Typically,

when an Indian elder gives a person a name, that name usually carries with it an original meaning that no other person may use. It seems that Seyler was cheated out of owning an original Indian name, the one and only Indian name; but no matter, Big Moon knew what he was doing.

Seyler was the contemporary of German author Karl May and apparently was no stranger to May's fanciful depictions of Indians in the guise of old Shatterhand, as was Adolf Hitler, although that is my assertion and not Farr's—it only stands to reason. One entry has Seyler feeling himself being transported back in time, a reference to the gritty impoverishment of the Indian reservation life he found himself involved in, where he would rather be on the wide-open, unspoiled Great Plains with only Indians for company and no other culture or race of people to be seen for thousands of miles in all directions. German artists and writers—what can you say about them, but that they have always found Indians to be great subject matter for study, romance, nostalgia, and sentimentality. Here it may have been as much for Seyler to get away from the worldly troubles in Germany, as it was wanderlust. The French impressionists movement, as well as Monet and Cézanne, were practically as dead as the buffalo by this time.

Farr notes that other painters who were around at the time that Seyler was in East Glacier Park included Montana Western artist Charles M. Russell; the German-born artist Winold Reiss; the self-styled naturalist, author, and “wild Indian” sculptor Frank Linderman, who traced his family tree back to New York (they arrived in 1690); and portrait painter William G. Kriehoff. Although Farr does not say so, Frederick Remington was not far away. With this book, Farr and Seyler make their debut among that group of Western image-maker historians in Montana. Against the backdrop of World War I, Seyler felt that he was treated as someone who was not the same as other white visitors who came and went each summer to and from Blackfeet country. He spent more time with his Blackfeet friends than the run-of-the-mill visitor, and because he painted and drew the Blackfeet, he felt a special connection to them and thought they felt that connection to him as well (a common enough story among Western artists, which was not always true). Some Blackfeet absolutely detested Western artists, and some still do. Farr writes that Western artists were practically stumbling over each other as they attended the July Blackfeet Indian celebration in Browning during 1911 (or thereabouts), so evidently the rush was on among white artists to paint, sculpt, and refashion the image of the destitute reservation Indian into something America and the world could love and live with, even if the imagery had to take on the retinue of the phantasmagorical. In my world, reality always trumps romance when it comes to real Indians; however, Western artists and

European artists can afford the luxury to dream and invent their own worlds through art.

*Julius Seyler and the Blackfeet* has endnotes; a long and extensive bibliography with historical citations from archival sources, books, articles, theses, and leaflets—all included as factual evidence of excellent scholarly research; and an index. Farr wisely included sufficient honest and meaningful art critiques of the painting style of Seyler and even something of a critique by Charlie Russell, who did not like Seyler's work, something that this reviewer sees as essential to any good art book about any kind of art. However, suffice it to say that Seyler was apparently a better landscape painter than a painter of Indians. One painting in particular that seems inspired is *Sunset over St. Mary* (72), which echoes the painting of the romantic English sunset "painter of light" Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775–1851), better known in England simply as Turner. Many of Seyler's Indian works in this book are more in the nature of illustrations than innovative in concept, design, quality, and original thought. However, not knowing the full breadth of his life's work, it is difficult to tell if some of these were studies to be completed later as paintings. Even so, there is no cutting-edge artistic originality here. Regardless, I find this artist to be important to the genre of Western art just the same. The only pity is that I have run out of space in which to give the reader more information, so by all means, buy the book and find out for yourself why this is true. One last word, the painting for the wrap-around cover might have been better considered.

*Alfred Young Man*

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**Life on the River: The Archaeology of an Early Native American Culture.** By William R. Hildebrandt and Michael J. Darcangelo. Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2008. 120 pages. \$13.95 paper.

*Life on the River* describes what was learned from an archaeological project that took place at a Wintu habitation site occupied during late prehistoric and early historic times. The Wintu are a Native American tribal group that lived, and still live, in the upper Sacramento River valley. The site was given the Wintu name Kum Bay Xerel, meaning "shady oak village," although it was not recorded as being one of the Wintu villages occupied during the early historic period. As the authors indicate, the Wintu people moved into the upper Sacramento River valley about 1,500 years ago, and at the beginning of the historic period, they occupied a series of villages within the watersheds of