

The Frontiersman, n.d.

James W. Schucker, 1903–1988

oil on canvas

24 x 30 inches

Collection of the Bucks County Intermediate Unit #22, Pennsylvania



Biography

James W. Schucker was born in Mt. Carmel, Illinois, in 1903 and died in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, in 1988. He has explained that he moved to Bucks County mainly for aesthetic reasons, and he raised sheep on a farm in Haycock, Bucks County, in 1940. In 1957 he moved to Quakertown, where he taught private art lessons and worked as an illustrator and painter using watercolors and oils. He contributed illustrations to national periodicals and magazines such as the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Reader's Digest*, *American Magazine*, and *Colliers* in addition to the work he created for religious publications, children's books, and books on horses. Schucker also conducted advertising campaigns for companies such as Quaker State Motor Oil, Travelers Insurance Company, Seagrams Distillers Corporation, and Coca-Cola. He created a mural, 5½ by 48 feet, for the New York Botanical Garden and exhibited in Chicago, Illinois, and Hagersville, Quakertown, New Hope, and Doylestown, all in Pennsylvania.

Who's the hero here?

Look at the painting closely. Who is the figure closest to the viewer? Notice how he sits on the horse erect and tall, looking directly at us. What is he carrying? Now look at his horse. Is it leading or following the others? Let's look at some other clues. Describe the figure in the background. Does the American Indian seem to be leading the expedition as a scout? Now look at the man to the right of the leader of the group. Who is he looking at? Where is his horse going? Using these clues can you tell who the artist is portraying as the "hero" or leader of this group? Why? Schucker wanted to suggest that these three men were heroes because they were exploring new territory and frontiers. Exploration was viewed as an exciting adventure and an economic opportunity for many Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Where is the "Wild, Wild West"?

Sometimes artists paint actual locations or geographic sites. In the painting *The Frontiersman*, Schucker painted a landscape background showing long grasses and wildflowers as part of a natural environment found in woodlands throughout the United States. The artist lets each viewer imagine where this painting takes place. We can tell something about the general area if we know about the clothing worn by the American Indian in the background. This man is probably a member of an Eastern Woodlands people that lived throughout the East Coast region of the United States. Also, the clothing of the frontiersman suggests that he often lives out in nature, making his clothes from animal skins.



Do Pictures Tell Tales?

Yes, especially if the artist is a professional illustrator. James Schucker spent most of his career as an advertising artist for many famous magazines such as *Reader's Digest*, *Colliers*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *Colliers*. As an illustrator, Schucker's job was to make stories and words come alive through visual images. Sometimes he was told what kind of picture to paint, but other times he was encouraged to create pictures from his own imagination. One of his best friends was the famous artist/illustrator Norman Rockwell. Can you imagine a story that would go with the painting of the frontiersman?

Where is the Frontierswoman?

Throughout history most women stayed home, raised their children, and took care of the family homestead. Work roles were clearly defined within families and different cultures. It wasn't until the mid-twentieth century that American woman joined the work force as a consequence of a national shortage of male workers who were serving overseas during World Wars I and II. During the 1800s (the period portrayed in this painting) it would have been highly unusual to see women involved in hunting and exploration on the American frontiers. There were exceptions, of course, times when women did assume male roles due either to necessity or personal desire for adventure, but for the most part women contributed to the stability of American society by remaining at home and raising children.

How did the artist compose this painting?

When artists create paintings they usually have a plan in mind called the composition. By studying the painting closely we can discover many elements used by the artist to create an overall composition. First, look at the way Schucker uses lines, shapes, and colors. Sometimes you have to use your imagination to see an "implied" shape or line. Can you find an implied triangle made up of the three figures? Who is at the apex of the triangle? Now look at other elements such as value (link), focal point, proportion, balance, scale, perspective, movement, and repetition. How do these elements work together to make a painting? How does the painting make you feel? Has the painter succeeded in engaging our attention? What message is the artist giving to the viewer? Has Schucker created a successful painting in your opinion? Why?

Illustrations for stories were supposed to get you to read the story, and that was the aim of Schuckler's illustrations. He also did illustrations for commercial products, and even did some Pennsylvania Dutch designs like the one below, which he used in designing book covers.

Look at other examples of book illustrations used to encourage readers by Charles Hargens on the Bucks County Artists Database at www.michenerartmuseum.org.

One of the most famous frontiersmen was Buffalo Bill Cody. Learn more about him at www.bbhc.org. This is the website of the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, Wyoming.



Learn More

What stories can you tell from a painting? Try your best with the activity “A Picture is Worth 1000 Words,” below.

What is the correct term, Indian or Native American?

Indian was the name Columbus mistakenly called the native inhabitants of America when he landed in what he thought to be the Indies. The term Native American evolved in the 1960's and was thought to bring more respect for the Indian population. Objections to this term also arose, as it may have been invented for a government convenience and not out of respect for the peoples. Today, some prefer the term American Indian, and others prefer to be called by their specific tribe, and not by a general category at all. According to Christina Berry, a Cherokee writer and producer of the website *All Things Cherokee* says, “When you don't know the specific tribe simply use the term which you are most comfortable using. The worst that can happen is that someone might correct you and open the door for a thoughtful debate on the subject of political correctness and its impact on ethnic identity. What matters in the long run is not which term is used but the intention with which it is used.”

When were the Frontier times?

The frontier time changed from place to place as the United States expanded. The frontier was the area on the edges of the country. As more and more people moved west across the US, areas were settled. The area that was not yet settled was considered frontier. Often it was areas occupied by Native Americans. The Frontier times lasted from the first years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence until settlers reached the west coast at the beginning of the 1900's. The Frontiersmen were often trappers, traders, and explorers who told others what they had seen. By doing this, they led the way for other people to move into these areas.

Who are some of the famous frontiersmen?

One very famous one was born in Reading, Pennsylvania in 1734 to a Quaker family of farmers. That person was Daniel Boone. He grew up in the frontier and moved south with his family to North Carolina in 1753. Of course, we would not have called either of these areas states then, since the American Revolution had not taken place. Two other Frontiersmen that are well known are David Crockett and Kit Carson. Both were born in the southern areas of what would be the United States.

***The Frontiersman* shows an Indian riding a horse. I know that horses came from Europe. When did the Indians start using horses?**

You are right. The Spanish brought horses to the United States in 1540. The Spanish made slaves of the Indians. In 1680 the Pueblo Indians in the area that is now New Mexico revolted and when the Spanish fled, they left many horses behind. The Indians bred the horses and raised large numbers of them to trade and sell to other Indian tribes. The Indians became known for their skill in raising horses, and in using them for hunting. The Native Americans generally rode with only a blanket on the horse, rather than a saddle, so they could mount and ride quickly.



These riders have saddles on their horses, even the Native American. When did riders start using saddles?

Some of the information that we get comes from looking at drawings. It appears that the first saddles were used about 800 BC. They were simple pads that were tied on to horses to protect the horse and make the rider more comfortable. A saddle with a support (called a tree in saddle talk) was first used in about 200BCE. Stirrups to support the rider and keep him balanced were in use by 322AD. Today there are all sorts of saddles, even ones for camels.

The Native American has only one feather in his headband. I thought that most Indians wore lots of feathers and beads on their head.

Different Indian tribes wore different types of headdresses. Most of the Delaware Indians wore only a headband and one or two feathers. Both men and women wore the headdress. The headbands were beaded or braided and often had a tribal pattern in them. The feathers could be turkey, hawk, egret or crane feathers. Other tribes used long feather war bonnets, baskets, fur turbans, buffalo head dresses with the horns buffalo horns, and rows of porcupine quills.

There are many excellent books to read about Native Americans and life on the frontier:

Little House on the Prairie series by Laura Ingalls Wilder

Walk Two Moons by Sharon Creech

The Birchbark House by Louise Erdrich

Read a complete biographical listing at the Children's Literature Network at www.childrensliteraturenetwork.org.

Related Images

In Schucker's time, there were photographs of Indians in addition to paintings and sketches of Indians. The paintings *Lapowinska and Tishcohans* by Gustavus Hesselius depicts two very important Indians from the Delaware tribes in Pennsylvania. The painting was made in 1735. This painting is on exhibition at the Atwater Kent Museum in Philadelphia at www.philadelphiahistory.org.

If you enjoy looking at artwork about Native Americans and frontiersman, visit the Frederic Remington Art Museum in Ogdensburg, New York, at www.fredericremington.org.

Related Links

The clothes on the Native American and on the frontiersman look very comfortable? What are they made of?

The clothes on the Native American and the Frontiersman in the center are made of buckskin. The material was not always made from a buck or male deer. Instead it could have been the skin of a horse or cattle or other animal. It was not that easy to take a skin of an animal and change it into a wearable material. Today, the skin needs to be prepared by a tanner, a person who can handle the strong chemicals that are used. In the days of the frontiersmen, smoking the hide did the tanning. This is the only part of



making the garments that is changed over time. You need to allow extra space so you can move easily, and for the fringe decoration. To sew you need to use animal sinew or simulated sinew, and an awl to poke the holes. You can use beadwork, bells, feathers and other materials to decorate the clothes. Learn more about making buckskin clothing at www.4seasonstoursandtravel.com.

How did Mr. Schucker know how American Indians dressed during the frontier times? Did he have photographs or paintings of the Indians?

The frontiersmen often dressed similar to the Indians of the area. The Indians also changed to some of the explorer's customs. These men are in the woods, and would need clothing that would protect them from branches and insects. Schucker may also have seen actual frontiersmen in what were called Wild West Shows. The most famous of these was Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, which included mock Indian battles and marksmanship. Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show is fictionalized in the famous musical, *Annie Get Your Gun*. Learn more about the musical at www.broadwaymusicalhome.com.

