

# Frontier America:

# The Far West







# Frontier America: The Far West

Department of American Decorative Arts and Sculpture  
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

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*Distributed by New York Graphic Society, Boston*

**Museum of Fine Arts, Boston**

## Foreword

For many Americans, the western frontier has seemed more a part of legend than of reality. But the frontier did exist, and it helped forge the American character.

Through "Frontier America: The Far West," we experience the frontier's reality. The art, artifacts, and crafts of the men and women who struggled with nature in the vast area between the Missouri and the Pacific express the cultural evolution that is uniquely American.

No culture has wider roots. The Far West was initially settled from the East by the descendants of English and Scottish tobacco farmers in Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Carolinas, from the South by Spanish colonizers, from the Southeast by blacks, and from the North by French fur traders. Long before that the great cultures of the American Indian tribes were thriving, and they too take their proper place in the exhibition.

Conceived and produced by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the exhibition will not end in Boston. It will tour American cities and, during our nation's bicentennial year of 1976, it will travel overseas to some of the European countries that have contributed to the pluralistic nature of American life.

The exhibition reveals the robust spirit, the driving energy for discovery, and the rich diversity of creative expression that were characteristic of the early settlers of the West despite the hardships and deprivations of frontier life.

Those qualities were fundamental to the emerging American culture, and it is appropriate that we reflect on them as we commemorate our two hundred years as a nation.

GEORGE WEISSMAN  
*Vice Chairman of the Board*  
*Philip Morris Incorporated*

## Preface

"Frontier America: The Far West" is the prologue to a series of exhibitions celebrating the Bicentennial of American Independence at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. This exhibition concerns the people and their popular arts in the western half of the United States before the age of industrialization. The theme of the Far West is firmly rooted in our image of self and closely related to the symbols of a growing nation: abundant natural resources, boundless energy, and vast spaces. These symbols have often been explored in pictures, books, and films; but only recently have objects from the Far West—as distinct from symbols—been scrutinized as an important part of the record. Boston, which in the seventeenth century was a vital part of another nation's frontier in the early America, later played an important role in the course of the western growth of our own country when the trading ship *Columbia*, out of Boston, skirting the Pacific Coast, gave the United States a claim to the Oregon country by sailing up the Columbia River in 1792. In a continuing spirit of exploration, the Department of American Decorative Arts and Sculpture of the Boston Museum, with the assistance of outside scholars, has re-examined the nature of western culture. Both the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue are the result of cooperative efforts stemming from many sources. More than three hundred and fifty paintings, drawings, and photographs, as well as decorative and utilitarian objects have been assembled from private and public collections. Among these are forty paintings and drawings from the M. and M. Karolik Collection in the Boston Museum.

Through the generosity of the lenders it has been possible to bring together the arts and crafts of the Far West in wide variety. The project could not have been realized without matching grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and Philip Morris Incorporated on behalf of Marlboro. For these contributions we express our gratitude.

MERRILL C. RUEPPEL

*Director, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*