

## Arkansas Muslin

**White Swan. Crow. Battle of the Little Big Horn, ca 1890-1904. Muslin, graphite, ink, watercolor, 36 x 72 inches. Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Museum Collections. Catalog number 61-6-1.**

The collection folder contains the following letter from the donor.

*Donated to the University of Arkansas Museum by Judge E. B. Meriwether on February 16, 1961. His cousin, Dr. Alfred Preston Meriwether, practiced for the "Indian Service" and acquired the painting "from an old Indian named White Cloud." Sometime between 1890 and 1905, while in Indian Service, Dr. Meriwether treated an old Indian named White Cloud [sic]. The Doctor asked White Cloud if he knew anything about the Battle of the Little Big Horn. The Indian said he did. The Doctor asked him to tell him someday. About three months later the Indian came into the Doctor's office and placed this painting on the Doctor's desk and said "This is the battle as I knew it." The Indian was a scout for Col. Reno who went to the aid of General Custer, but who got there, unfortunately, too late. The painting has been in the possession of Dr. Meriwether until the time of his death, and since that time has been in my possession. Signed E. B. Meriwether.*

In 2000, I was researching art for inclusion in *Rubbing Out Long Hair*. I asked for an image of the "White Cloud" painting as the reference to it indicated the Little Big Horn. By that time, I had the references by Cowles, Douglas Bradley, Wildschut, and Ewers and recognized White Swan's work immediately when the image was received. The university accepted my recommended correction in 2007.

A paucity of records about Meriwether's BIA service has stymied more definite information about a time frame for his service at Crow Agency. A newspaper article about a previous assignment indicated he was sent to the Crow Agency early in 1890. Circumstantially, records of another doctor in that position at the Agency in 1895 suggests Meriwether spent 1890-1895 there. Given the accuracy of the rest of the donation letter, this painting should be dated in that same period. The donor letter gave a range of time, 1890-1905, during which the painting had been acquired. Along with the artist attribution, the university agreed the date should end in 1904. I believe it more accurately dated 1890-1895.

This is one of only two paintings showing just Little Big Horn events, the other being the Denver muslin. Six events are shown here. In actual sequence of occurrence are LBH Crow's Nest (middle top row), LBH Coup 1 (middle bottom row), LBH Coup 2 (lower left corner), LBH Coup 3 Encircled (top left corner), LBH Bugler (bottom right corner), and LBH

Travois (upper right corner). Neither this nor the Denver muslin depict the Attacking a Soldier event. More details about each of these events follow, but a few points are essential for both these discussions.

Douglas Bradley's argument that the Crow's Nest event did NOT happen at the Little Big Horn is clearly refuted here. It is clearly seen in the Denver muslin well. Details of that discussion are with that deed, but it is the start point for what I have called "White Swan's Great Fight" in several presentations and articles. The positioning of the travois and bugler depictions in this construction provides some basis for the bugler being displayed at the start Reno's advance across the Little Big Horn River. In other depictions the bugler is shown directly with the travois. I believe this association is correct – with the travois – as bugle calls were used the night of June 29 to maintain unit and column cohesion in the dark, rainy march to the Far West. Colonel Gibbon described the bugles use as "...the advance found itself separated from the rest of the column, and we had no recourse but the sound of the bugles to get the command together again." White Swan shows his right arm and leg bandaged although other depictions are more explicit. The three coups are clearly shown and make possible clear identification in all other paintings.

The heavy gunfire into which White Swan and Half Yellow Face rode is seen in LBH Coup 1. The Cheyenne lance-bearer, Brave Bear, is shown attacking White Swan from the rear. For decades, White Swan's part in this part of the battle was discussed regarding "he stood, and he fought." Now, I believe, he can be noted for the three victories that day. Eleven Lakota and Cheyenne men were killed in this part of the battle. He claimed three.