George Caleb Bingham, Painter of America's Past

"Order No. 11"

George Caleb Bingham—Self Portrait

"Emigration of Daniel Boone and His Family"

"The Stump Speech"

"The Jolly Flatboatmen"

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON

FOR nearly a century he has been known as "the Missouri artist," a characterization which rather definitely limited the scope of his fame. During his lifetime he enjoyed a certain measure of recognition as one of the leading painters in the West. The American Art union chose several of his pictures for reproduction as colored lithographs and their wide circulation made his work familiar to most Americans. But because he never signed his paintings, the name of the man himself is comparatively unknown. Thousands who visited the Missouri exhibit in the Hall of States at A Century of Progress exposition in Chicago in 1933 saw for the first time an original of one of his most famous paintings and for the first time connected with it the name of George Caleb Bingham.

But a wider recognition, tardy though it has been, has come at last to "the Missouri artist." It started several years ago when a citizen of that state took an option on Bingham's home at Arrow Rock and suggested its purchase by the United Daughters of the Confederacy as a shrine to the Southern cause. Three years ago another Missourian, scion of a family intimately connected with the painter's career, declared that Bingham might well be called "Missouri's forgotten artist," for all the honor which it had paid him, and announced his intention of starting a movement to revive interest in the man and his work. In 1933 there was a loan show of Bingham paintings in the Kansas Art institute and last year the director of the St. Louis Art museum gathered from various parts of the country a representative group of his pictures which were on exhibition there for several weeks.

Another signal honor came last month when the Museum of Modern Art in New York city gave a show of Bingham's work. Time Magazine, featuring the story of this exhibition in its department on art, declared:

"Critics fell over themselves with such phrases as 'a modern Delacroix,' 'last of the Renaissance tradition,' 'rival of David and Ingres.' Only cautious bang-haired Royal Cortissoz sounded a note of doubt in the general acclaim for George Caleb Bingham: 'There is no distinction of style about his work. He was a mildly competent, mildly interesting practitioner, whose local legend may well be revived as a matter of pious courtesy.'

"Mildly competent his work may be, but the elaborate canvases of George Caleb Bingham described early life on the Mississippi and Missouri rivers far more ably than the much-touted Currier & Ives lithographs. Bingham was one of the few painters in the world who was a practicing politician all his life, and he remains today one of the few Missouri artists ever to gain national fame."

The paradox of his being both an artist and a practicing politician, however, is only one of the many interesting facts in his career. Bingham was born on a plantation in Augusta county, Virginia, March 20, 1811. When the boy was eight years old Henry Vest Bingham, his Scotch father, lost all his money and moved his family of a wife, seven children and their grandfather to the little frontier town of Franklin in Howard county, Missouri. From his earliest years the boy dabbled with pencil and paint brush. He made his own paints, using axle grease, vegetable dyes, brick dust mixed with oil and even his own brush, obtained by cutting the ends of his fingers.

A year after the arrival of the Bingham family in Franklin a fortunate circumstance aided the boy's artistic ambition. Across the Missouri river at Boonslick Daniel Boone had settled and up the river from St. Louis came the artist, Chester Harding, to paint Boone's portrait. It is probable that the boy watched the painter at work, saw the likeness of the famous Kentucky pioneer grow on the canvas and view with envious wonder the finished product. It is more certain that Harding saw some of the sketches with which the boy had adorned the fence, the pump and the walls of the chicken house on his father's farm and gave him some much-needed encouragement.

When Bingham was twelve his father died and Mary Amend Bingham, the thrifty, resourceful German housewife, took her brood of children to a little farm in Saline county, the only thing left them after her husband's death. At the age of sixteen Bingham was apprenticed to a cabinet-maker in Boonville, learned something about wood carving and made wood panels on which he painted pictures. He also began the study of law in his spare time and even took up theology with the idea of possibly becoming a Methodist minister.

Fortunately for him and for American art, however, Chester Harding again came to Boonville, noted the progress the boy had made and strongly advised him to concentrate on a career as an artist. More than that, he gave young Bingham lessons and by the time he was nineteen he had definitely decided upon painting as his life work. Borrowing $100 from a friend he used it for more instruction by teachers in St. Louis. In 1838 he went East to study in the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts and there his career began to blossom into full flower. He met many artists and had the opportunity of seeing many paintings. Not only did he see the portraits by such masters as Gilbert Stuart but he also saw descriptive or story pictures, technically known as genre painting, which appealed to him strongly and in which he began experimenting. He also continued his portrait painting and did pictures of all the celebrities he met—Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, Van Buren, Calhoun, Buchanan and John Howard Payne, composer of "Home Sweet Home."

Returning to Missouri six years later Bingham started on his career as a genre painter. The fur-trading era was drawing to a close, as were other phases of frontier life, and America owes a debt of gratitude to George Caleb Bingham for preserving on canvas so much of it before it was gone forever. About this time he painted his first version of "The Jolly Flatboatmen" (there were several later versions), one of his best-known pictures.

The next thing to which the versatile Bingham turned his attention was politics. In a hotly contested election he won a seat in the Missouri legislature by three votes but his career as a law-maker does not seem to have interfered seriously with his painting. He continued to turn out scenes of life on the river and it was these paintings which first became widely known through the lithographs of the American Art union. One result of his political career in Missouri was to turn his attention to painting pictures of that phase of pioneer life, and in "The Stump Speaker," "Canvassing for a Vote," "County Election" and "The Verdict of the People" we have an invaluable record of the stirring days when people took their politics more seriously than they seem to do now.

By this time, Bingham was making enough from his painting to enable him to go to Europe to study. After his return he painted some of his finest portraits. Later he made another trip abroad but this time his stay was a short one and in 1860 he was living in Kansas City and again taking a prominent part in the politics of the state. Despite his Virginia nativity and the strong Southern sympathy in Missouri, the outbreak of the Civil war found Bingham a stanch Northern sympathizer and a captain in the United States Volunteer reserves. So there is a paradox too in the proposal to make the Arrow Rock home of this Unionist a Confederate shrine.

But that proposal is more understandable if there is taken into account the fact that one of his pictures, the famous "Order No. 11," was a fierce polemic against an injustice suffered by the Confederates in Missouri at the hands of some of Bingham's fellow-Unionists. In 1863, while Bingham was state treasurer, Quantrill and his guerillas made their famous raid on Lawrence, Kan., and massacred many of its defenseless citizens.

In retaliation for this, Brig. Gen. Thomas Ewing, Jr., who was in command of the military district of the border with headquarters in Kansas City, issued his "General Order No. 11" calling for the concentration of all residents of the border into certain military centers and the delivery of their harvested crops there. Those who could prove their loyalty to the Union cause would be given permission to remain within the limits of the military stations but all "rebels" were to be driven out of the district. All of this had to be accomplished within 15 days.

It was one of the most drastic military orders ever issued during the Civil war. Bingham made a trip from Jefferson City to Kansas City and protested vehemently against its issuance. But Ewing was obdurate and the order was executed ruthlessly and in many cases with unnecessary brutality. Whereupon Bingham took a vow that "he would make the author of that order infamous to posterity with his pen and brush."

At the close of the war, Bingham moved to Independence and there began painting "Order No. 11." After it was finished he borrowed $5,000 from his friend, James S. Rollins, to have the painting engraved on steel. He had printed 5,000 copies which he sold and for many years after the Civil war these steel engravings hung in hundreds of Missouri homes to keep alive the hated memory of Thomas Ewing and his cruel "Order No. 11."

Ewing had returned to his home in Ohio after the war and in 1877 he was a candidate for governor. Whereupon Bingham went to Ohio, taking his painting with him and exhibiting it in all the larger cities. He gave lectures on it and wrote articles for the newspapers addressed to the voters, denouncing Ewing and calling upon them to keep such a man from becoming the chief executive of their state. The result was that Ewing was defeated. Bingham had kept his vow, although he did not live long to enjoy his triumph. He died in 1879 and is buried in the old Union cemetery in Kansas City.

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SEEN and HEARD around the National Capital

By CARTER FIELD

Washington.—Probability that some compromise on the so-called 30-hour week bill, probably limiting the hours of work in any industry to 36 or 40 hours, but with perhaps a few special exemptions, will be enacted by the present congress is growing. Flat prediction that such a compromise would be enacted is made privately by half a dozen of the more important figures in the house, and by an equal number of influential senators.

The importance of this prediction would be enormously enhanced if the names of the senators and members of the house could be mentioned, with their exact views. Incidentally some of those making the prediction said that they personally opposed the idea; they were merely giving their opinion as to what would happen, not what they wanted.

Nor were these just personal conversations. In each case the statements were made to a group of men who came to Washington seeking to find out what the prospect was—men who wanted to adjust their situations to the probabilities. They did not come to argue for or against the measure, though all of them, for private reasons, happened to be opposed to it.

The tremendous pressure for the measure does not result primarily from the fact that the American Federation of Labor is strongly for it. Nor from the fact that virtually every other labor group is for it. It comes from the evidence that though business has picked up somewhat unemployment has not diminished by anything like the same extent.

So, in short, the thought is a "share the work" idea, rather than a social betterment idea.

It is aimed at reducing unemployment, not at bettering living conditions. In fact, there is some talk of amending the proposal of the Federation of Labor, as embodied in the Connery bill, in a way that would be very displeasing indeed to labor, and which labor, both organized and unorganized, would oppose violently.

Just a Possibility

This is to change the idea so that instead of reducing the number of hours per week, but requiring—as the Connery bill does—that the same amount of dollars be paid each week for the shorter number of hours that is now paid for the present work week, the bill would reduce the number of hours with no mention of what the rate of pay should be. In short, leaving to employers, and to the revision of NRA codes which would follow, what the wages for the shorter work week would be.

This is not mentioned as a probability. Only as a possibility. Actually, it is highly improbable. The measure will probably pass, if it passes at all, with the requirement that the same wages be continued regardless of the cut in hours. And, of course, the compromise, raising the number of hours from the 30 proposed in the Connery bill to at least 36, will soften this blow as far as employers are concerned.

But, as a matter of fact, economists do not regard the question of wages here as very important, except in so far as they apply to inflation. They reason that if the hours are reduced, and the pay per hour increased, the result will be inflation just as surely as by any possible expedient proposed by the followers of Senator Elmer Thomas.

They reason that a wholesale vertical boost in wages, forced by law, would result promptly and almost mathematically in an increase in prices, reducing the purchasing power of the dollars earned by the workers. Hence, the laborious arguments by the opponents of the 30-hour week, or any compromise of it, that it would result in lowering the standard of living in America, either by a smaller number of dollars to spend by each worker, if the pay is maintained at the same hourly rate, or by the smaller purchasing power of the dollars if the wage rate per week is maintained.

The reasoning that is expected to put the compromise over is not concerned with this. It is concerned with getting more people to work, and cutting down the need for the dole and for work relief.

Social Program

Every indication now is that President Roosevelt's social program—old age pensions and unemployment insurance—will go through in very much the form proposed, despite the loud cries of the insurgents about a government subsidy.

The idea of taking all the money for unemployment payments, and old age pensions, out of the federal treasury, is very appealing in some directions. People would like to dodge the direct deductions from their pay envelopes. Argument is made that this tax on pay rolls, which, if both bills are counted, runs gradually up to 5 per cent, would heavily increase the cost of production.

But the great advantage that President Roosevelt has had right along, and gives every prospect of continuing to hold—always excepting World court, St. Lawrence seaway, and the bonus—is that his

For example, the ten senators on the appropriations committee who a few days since voted to emasculate the dole for work relief, with the avowed purpose of saving the treasury two billion dollars, have maneuvered themselves into a position where it will be rather difficult for them to vote against the President on the social security bills. Or at least vote against him on the only roll-call where the President's position might otherwise have been in jeopardy.

When the roll-call comes on the question of paying all the cost out of the federal treasury—which will be the big test vote—those ten senators would be rather embarrassed to vote to make the treasury carry the load—after all their loud cries in the appropriations committee about the strain on the federal credit of spending nearly five billion dollars on work relief.

Local Interest

Which is highly interesting because some of those ten senators were not worried in the slightest about the federal credit when they voted against the President on that bill in committee. They followed Glass and Adams, who made that issue. But some of them were just voting on that excuse in the hope of getting their states, and the counties and cities back home, out of a jam. They wanted a direct federal gift to the unemployed as against a work project, which contemplates that the local governments shall pay a considerable percentage of the work relief money back to the federal treasury, with interest.

Which is very different, especially if the credit of their states, or local communities in their states which need relief work badly, feel that they have already strained their credit to the breaking point.

But every senator who publicly took the position that the five-billion-dollar bill was too great a strain on federal credit has put his vote on the social security bill in pawn, as far as the only real test vote is concerned. For there is expected to be only one roll-call of importance on those bills which will attempt to shift the entire financial burden on to the federal treasury.

Some contend that the President has already taken one beating on this social security legislation. Their argument is that he wanted both bills enacted prior to the adjournment of the many legislatures which are in session this winter. He did express a hope for that. But it was a hope, not a conviction. It put the stigma for delay on anyone holding up the procession, but the President really never expected any such quick action, and has expressed no disappointment about it.

Civil Service

Real friends of civil service are far more interested in an immediate reform, which would require only an executive order, than in either the proposal of Senator George W. Norris of Nebraska, or Senator C. O'Mahoney of Wyoming.

What they would like to see is elimination of the prohibition, imposed by an executive order, which prevents any present employee of a post office from taking the examination for the postmastership. This provision, which seems rather hard to explain on any ground other than pure spoils politics, strikes at the heart of the whole civil service idea. It bars advancement to the top in any particular office.

It is this situation which plays into the hands of the Hurley faction in Massachusetts, preventing Postmaster Hurley from taking an examination—unless he should resign in the meantime—for appointment to the very job he now holds!

This merely happens to be what seems to many a ridiculous side of the situation. For it might naturally be thought that the man who had been postmaster for a period of years, who had come up through the ranks just as if he had been employed in some private business, and who, according to the testimony of business firms in the city of Boston, had been giving satisfaction, would and should stand a better show of passing first in an examination for his own job than anyone outside the office.

But actually the present law—for that is what an executive order amounts to—not only prevents Postmaster Hurley from competing in an examination for the place he now holds, but it prevents any other employee of the Boston post office from competing.

Favor Norris Plan

Another phase of the present post office situation, which is very distressing to civil service advocates, is that barring anyone from an examination for postmaster who does not receive his mail at the particular office for which he is a candidate. In many western and other thinly populated states there is some point to this. But there is very little merit in it, civil service people contend, in and around the big cities.

The Norris plan would delight the civil service people if they thought there was a Chinaman's chance of its going over. The idea of a postmaster general divorced from politics, serving President after President on a long term appointment just as Comptroller McCarl has served in auditing expenditures, is, in the opinion of the civil service folks, just too good to be true. And therefore not likely to happen.

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For a tiny girl's play or school frock nothing could be very much nicer than this adorable little bloomer frock with its quaint over-the-shoulder yoke and prettily puffed sleeves. The frock is simple to slip into, too, buttoning up the front, with only three buttons to be fastened. And it allows plenty of room for romping—the skirt is gathered to the yoke at the back and box-pleated in front. A smart checked or plaid wool or cotton would be pretty for this frock—little girls always seem to love gay colors—and be sure to make up four or five of those crisp white collars in linen or pique. The bloomers, by the way, are included in this pattern.

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Smiles

CONCENTRATED CARE

"Did Crimson Gulch go Democratic?"

"Of course," answered Cactus Joe. "We was havin' one quarrel after another, and we jes' decided to let political leaders take the full responsibility for carryin' on the argument."

Two Kinds

"Five pounds!" exclaimed a parishioner. "Is that all the squire is giving to the church fund? Why, he ought to give at least fifty!"

"Ah," said the vicar gently, "I expect he forgot the 'ought'!"—Toronto Globe.

No Wonder

"Is somebody sick at your house, Johnny?" asked the neighbor. "I saw the doctor going in there last night."

"Yep, pop is," replied the kid. "The stork brought mom triplets."