



# Karl Bodmer's North American Prints

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## **Karl Bodmer's North American Prints** Karl Bodmer

In 1832–34 German scientist Prince Maximilian of Wied-Neuwied traveled the interior regions of North America to document what he regarded as vanishing cultures. Accompanying him was the twenty-two-year-old Swiss artist Karl Bodmer (1809–93), whom Maximilian employed to create a “faithful and vivid image” of America and its people.

Upon their return to Europe, Maximilian began the difficult task of turning his field notes and journals into a readable account of his journey, while Bodmer concentrated on the equally complicated process of translating his drawings and watercolors into engravings to accompany the text. During the nearly ten-year effort it took to create *Travels in the Interior of North America, 1832–34*, many of the eighty-one images underwent significant changes: Bodmer and his team of some thirty engravers altered landscapes and portraits based on Maximilian’s input, modified imprecise inscriptions, and reengraved plates for future printings.

*Karl Bodmer’s North American Prints* is the first book to systematically and comprehensively document and interpret these changes to the prints. Each version—or state—is cataloged, discussed, and linked to one of the five distinct editions. Other issues, including coloring, paper, and dates, are examined. The two essays, eighty-one entries, and six appendixes contained in this volume elucidate all aspects of the project, with special attention to the number of legitimate and illegitimate reproductions the popular North American prints engendered and to Bodmer’s post-expedition output as a printmaker.

Karl Bodmer's North American prints helped shape the European view of Native Americans and the United States in the nineteenth century, and were valued for research and aesthetic purposes in the twentieth. However, the engravings are perhaps less well known today than the magnificent watercolors on which they were based; these have become famous in recent decades through publications such as *Karl Bodmer's America* (Joslyn & Nebraska 1984). This companion volume will focus attention once again on one of the most important bodies of Western American imagery ever produced.

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