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Cover: Color illustration from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, October 18, 1862, of women and children fleeing Louisville by order of General William Nelson because of the expected bombardment. The Filson Historical Society
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Tecumseh!
Performed at the Sugarloaf Mountain Amphitheatre, Chillicothe, Ohio.
Script by Allan W. Eckert.
Directed by Carl T. Fischer.

All summer, the outdoor drama *Tecumseh!* has entertained audiences at the Sugarloaf Mountain Amphitheatre in Chillicothe, Ohio. In its thirty-first season, the two-act play is Allan W. Eckert’s adaptation of his own work *The Frontiersman*. In *Tecumseh!*, Eckert presents a tragic story that follows the rise and fall of the famous Shawnee warrior from the 1780s through his death in 1813. Eckert has proven to be a prolific writer who has garnered both a Newberry Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize nomination. An epic musical score by Carl T. Fischer accompanies the production, and notable Native American actor Graham Greene provides the voice of the narrator.

The play begins in 1784 with the killing and scalping of a white settler by a small party of Shawnee hunters. The young warrior Tecumseh opposes the scalping and from that time forward he is on a path to become a great noble leader. During the first half of the play, Tecumseh gains the respect of his fellow Shawnee. He convinces many not to move West in reaction to white encroachments on their territory but to stay and fight. Later, gaining the trust of the Shawnee chiefs, he receives authority to organize a prisoner exchange with white settlers. The exchange goes awry as devious white settlers thwart efforts at peace. During the first act, the audience is also introduced to Tenskwatawa, Tecumseh’s younger brother, whose depiction is of a weak young man who earns little respect from the other Shawnee. The first act concludes in 1797 as Tecumseh reveals to his brother his plan to unite all Indians in a great confederacy to stop white expansion. And while on a journey to persuade the various chiefs in the Old Northwest to join in this plan, he leaves his brother in charge as a prophet. But because Tenskwatawa is not a real prophet, Tecumseh provides him with the stories of visions he needs to tell

*Tecumseh addresses General William Henry Harrison.*
in order to achieve that rank among the Shawnee.

The second act opens in 1808 as General William Henry Harrison contemplates the growing Indian threat to white settlers and to his army in the Old Northwest. When Tecumseh returns to Ohio in 1811, he pursues a love interest directed at a white settler named Rebecca Galloway. Though they love each other and want to get married, their relationship is doomed because of the impending conflict. Upon returning to the Shawnee villages at Tippecanoe, Tecumseh finds divisions growing within the nascent confederacy, in part because, in Tecumseh’s absence, Tenskwatawa has become a raging megalomaniac. Though he promises his brother to remain true to the confederacy’s cause, Tenskwatawa has his own plans. Seeking even greater power through a military victory, Tenskwatawa inadvertently destroys the confederacy when he falls for a trap Harrison has laid for him. Tecumseh then banishes his brother and moves to create an alliance with the British. Fighting on the Thames in 1813, Tecumseh dies in the final climactic battle scene.

“Why do we remember Tecumseh?” asks Eckert in the playbill. For him, it is because Tecumseh “combined the attributes of strength and courage, wisdom and compassion, selflessness and altruism in a manner that justifiably exalted his image to an unparalleled greatness.” In a word, Tecumseh is noble. And indeed, in this play, he becomes the noblest of the “noble savages,” as well as the most venerable and masculine of all the characters presented here. In so doing, Eckert seems to draw on a racialized image of Native Americans to make his tragic hero into a Great Man. To do so, Eckert produces great empathy in his audience by creating in Tecumseh a Christ-like character, a “messiah figure,” in Eckert’s own words. The image is complete when Tenskwatawa plays Judas to Tecumseh’s Christ at a last supper where the latter foretells his own death and resurrection. Here the audience is meant to empathize with Tecumseh’s plight, even though the fulfillment of his vision would deny the possibility of the audience’s very
existence. Tecumseh, after all, had hoped to keep white settlers from occupying the Ohio country and what became Indiana. But history has precluded any need for the audience to feel threatened by Tecumseh and his prophesied removal of whites. Just as the ceremony required to resurrect Tecumseh nears completion, the shaman conducting the ritual is shot dead, leaving it unfinished. When the narrator portends at the end of the play that Tecumseh “only sleeps” and that he “will come again,” the audience knows better. Tecumseh is dead, and their forebearers were the victors.

According to the production company’s website, Tecumseh! presents the “epic life story of the legendary Shawnee leader.” Thus, the viewer can presume a level of historical accuracy. And this production of Tecumseh! has done well in this department, allowing for an appropriate level of dramatic license. The staff seems to have spent a great deal of time making sure that costumes are historically accurate, that actors pronounce Shawnee words correctly, and that the story remains true to major historical events. But scholars would disagree with several of the play’s portrayals and contentions, suggesting ways it could be improved without undermining the dramatic power of the performance. First, the Indians’ alliance with the British was not a last resort, as depicted in the play, but a long-established and mutually dependent relationship. Second, few modern historians see Tenskwatawa as a bungling, illegitimate prophet riding on Tecumseh’s coat-tails. Instead, they see him as an important and legitimate spiritual leader who complemented Tecumseh’s military guidance. Perhaps the time has come to update this aspect of the play. Still, this is good popular history. During much of the production, the audience cannot help but feel as if they are amidst the action. Movement surrounds the audience as men and painted horses periodically enter and exit along trails on both sides of the amphitheater seats. And, the crackle of guns and the roar of cannon fire come from every direction, often leaving smoke and a sense of battle. No hefty tome or droning lecturer here; rather, Tecumseh! provides an effective telling of an important, and generally accurate, historical story to a wide audience.

Show dates: June 13-August 30, 2003, Monday through Saturday. All performances begin at 8:00 p.m.. Ticket Prices: Monday through Thursday, $14.00 (Adult), $7.00 (Child); Friday and Saturday, $16.00 (Adult), $8.00 (Child). Phone: 866-775-0700. Website: http://www.tecumsehdrama.com/index.html

William H. Bergmann
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In the late nineteenth century, the brothers Cornwall and Wallace Kirkpatrick operated a brick and tile factory in the tiny town of Anna, Illinois, located in the far southern portion of that state. They were unlikely men indeed to make some of the most intellectually challenging ceramic art in Victorian America. They were after all businessmen and politicians; they had no training in art and little contact with other artists, and they disparaged all that was considered refined and genteel in late nineteenth century America, including art pottery. Yet they did produce important art. For thirty years or so, the Kirkpatrick brothers made by their own hands stoneware pottery and novelties that in their political and aesthetic sophistication far exceed many made by the more famous art potters of the day, including those in Cincinnati. Richard Mohr, a professor of philosophy at the University of Illinois and a prolific writer in the field of ceramic art, argues less convincingly that the Kirkpatricks and their pottery significantly influenced George Ohr, the so-called “Mad Potter” of Biloxi, Mississippi, who only in recent years has become famous and whose work now commands both museum exhibitions and high prices.

Unusual and even startling on occasion, the Kirkpatricks’ pottery has defeated even the most sincere early efforts of writers and curators to explicate its meaning. One writer in the early part of the century, for example, saw the Kirkpatricks as simple purveyors of novelty items—especially snake jugs—who hawked their wares by infusing pots with warnings against drunkenness in hopes of selling to temperance advocates. These stoneware whiskey jugs were covered with snakes representing alcohol, and the snakes chased and sometimes consumed figures of men who appear to be trying to escape into holes leading to the interior of the jug. In short, the figure of the drunken victim tried to enter the very place that would ensure his doom, as temperance advocates assumed all drinkers of hard liquor did. But Richard Mohr demonstrates that these snake jugs do not argue for temperance at all, and by their visual puns and trickery force viewers

to laugh at the foibles of all men who drink before taking a swig themselves, hence encouraging the use of alcohol. For those less attuned to the visual language of punning, the brothers also sometimes moved the opening of the jug so that a person who tried to drink from the spout found liquor dribbling down his chin from the handle—an age-old joke among potters in Europe but nonetheless effective in undermining serious moral reform.

Equally baffling to critics and curators have been the small pig flasks that the brothers Kirkpatrick decorated with tart commentaries on persons or places. These small stoneware flasks required the user to put the rear end of the pig to one's mouth in order to suck the whiskey out of the jug, placing the drinker in the least genteel position imaginable. Furthermore, the Kirkpatricks also often placed the name of a person or place, Cincinnati among them, on the side of the pig with a hand drawn nearby pointing to the pig’s hindquarters. The humor is gross and meant to embarrass, and thereby to upset all notions of Victorian decorum. Here Mohr argues that the Kirkpatrick brothers had fashioned a visual vocabulary that very effectively used the categories of high culture specific to art pottery in order to lampoon a variety of late nineteenth-century middle class preoccupations: health and sanitation, respectability and genteel behavior, and boosterism or pride of place.

Finally, the Kirkpatricks produced many pieces that convey distinct political messages by means of a visual language. Here Mohr successfully links the liberal Republican politics of the Kirkpatricks to some of their most striking jugs, especially one that depicts the depredations of Democratic tax collectors who gathered a tax on whiskey. The author notes that the Kirkpatrick brothers became ardent Republicans after the Civil War at a time when to be Republican meant holding liberal views, although they lived in the most staunchly conservative, Democratic part of Illinois. This put the brothers in the position of opposing virtually everything their neighbors and friends agreed upon, and led them to rely—perhaps out of necessity—on a sometimes deliberately ambiguous visual language to spread and promote their political views. They did so by producing vases and jugs that used a wide variety of visual puns developed by their favorite political cartoonist, Thomas Nast, a leading liberal Republican himself to whom the brothers sent a snake jug and from whom they received an appreciative note in return. The brothers circulated their political pottery widely at county fairs and business meetings and conventions in Illinois.

Richard Mohr shifts in the second half of Pottery, Politics, Art to a consideration of the work of George Ohr, arguing that the Kirkpatrick brothers influenced Ohr in both his political vocabulary and his aesthetic ideas. This claim is backed up by slender evidence indeed. Ohr, in fact, probably did visit the pottery factory in Anna in 1882, and many of
his novelty items do resemble some of the pieces produced by the Kirkpatrick brothers. But this line of argument claims—rather unnecessarily given their other aesthetic accomplishments—too much for the Kirkpatrick brothers because, of course, Ohr learned much from the many other potteries he visited, as well as from his visits to museums and to the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876. The reviewer finds particularly unconvincing the claim that Ohr owes something to the Kirkpatricks for his aesthetic innovations late in life on which his current fame rests. Ohr’s transition to a modernist visual language came long after his visit to Anna, Illinois, and there is nothing in the pottery of the Kirkpatrick brothers to suggest any inclination to the simplicity of modernist forms. Mohr, however, is on firmer ground in arguing for great similarity in the scatological references found in the work of both the Kirkpatricks and George Ohr, although such references were not peculiar to the Kirkpatrick brothers and, in fact, circulated widely in the jocular “hail-fellow-well-met” culture of middle class businessmen in late Victorian America. Here Mohr correctly identifies private dime museums as the source of much of the scatological visual language found in some of the grossest pottery and novelties produced by the Kirkpatrick brothers.

Richard Mohr’s most important innovation lies not so much in his impressive detective work that has rescued the story of the Kirkpatrick brothers and their pottery from historical oblivion, but in his close and persuasive reading of the pots themselves. His careful attention to form, color, and variation allows him to use the pots as a historian might use a letter or a newspaper article or a government report, and this is a substantial methodological advance for cultural historians who have traditionally been reluctant to use objects as evidence. He finds in the snakes that slither around many pots made by the Kirkpatricks, for example, not just references to Bernard Palissy’s naturalistic plates and tiles made in sixteenth century France or their nineteenth century imitations, as an art historian might. Instead, Mohr sees the Kirkpatrick brothers cleverly reworking that rustic visual vocabulary to produce irony, wit, and acerbic political and social criticism that neither Palissy nor his successors ever thought to convey. And in doing so, the Kirkpatricks, in fact, make an important contribution to not just ceramic art but to the history of art as whole in nineteenth century America. At the very moment during which ceramic art in America adopted a serious, feminine, and relentlessly genteel visual vocabulary that focused on flowers and birds and pretty landscapes, the Kirkpatricks turned in the opposite direction. They made pots and jugs that both celebrated and criticized the culture of middle class small town businessmen in all its glory—full of practical jokes, decidedly masculine, and indelicate in the extreme.

But was all this merely a gaudy display of taste-
lessness, just art for the Odd Fellows and the Masons, a nineteenth century equivalent of Elvis paintings on velvet? Mohr argues convincingly to the contrary, but it is here that he runs off the rails. In saying that the Kirkpatrick brothers’ influence in modern ceramic art may be seen mainly in the work of George Ohr, the author ignores other legacies that may be more far reaching. Some of the brothers’ work wound up in the Smithsonian Institution and must have been viewed there by other important artists. One can also see snakes and serpents on some Rookwood pots made in the late nineteenth century, although used to much less interesting purposes than did the Kirkpatricks. But for historians the real value of the Kirkpatricks’ pots and jugs may be what they tell us about the material culture of politics in late nineteenth century America. The novelties produced in the thousands and shipped to all parts of the country by the brothers, in particular, may have had a broad circulation among Republican campaign managers and politicians thereby influencing the terms by which they shaped their language and rhetoric. Mohr did not raise much less seek to answer such questions, but they suggest that scholars have not yet explored the full significance of Cornwall and Wallace Kirkpatrick and the ceramic art they made.

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