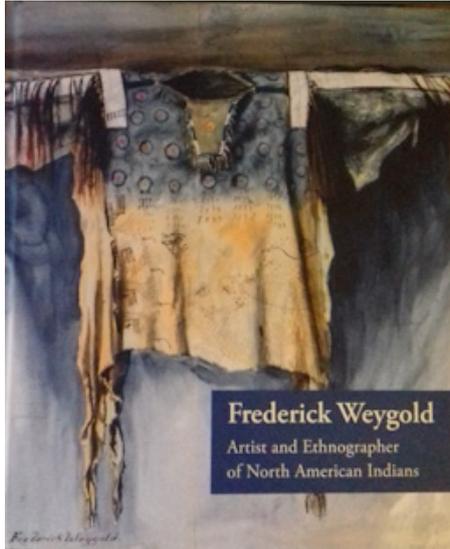


Reviews/Recensioni

Frederick Weygold, An Unusual Man Called One Tongue



Christian Feest

Frederick Weygold. *Artist and Ethnographer of North American Indians.*

Preface by Christian Feest and C. Ronald Corum. Text by Christian Feest.

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This book was published in conjunction with an exhibition presented at the Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky, where Weygold's personal collection of Native American artifacts, donated to the Museum, constituted the core of that institution's collection. The book's editor and exhibition's guest curator, Christian Feest, is not only a stellar scholar, but has also been working for decades on Native American collections in European, and especially German as well as Austrian museums, and on the 'special relationship' existing between Germans and Native Americans. As a matter of fact, some of the Founding fathers of American anthropology, such as Boas, Radin, Sapir, Goldenwiser, Lowie were German-speaking Jews; Kroeber was not Jewish but, like Boas, came from the German Jewish and Gentile closely knit community in New York. Leslie White, who studied with Boas for a while at Columbia University, NYC, peevishly claimed

that German-speaking Jews so dominated the department that he felt like an outsider (Banner 2010:196). Boas had introduced German intellectual tradition into American anthropology, and most students attracted by this discipline in the early 20th century were of German descent.

Weygold, as an artist and a self-taught ethnographer, is little known outside German-speaking Europe; hence Feest fills a cultural void concerning not only an interesting intellectual, but also the wider context of the German-American community, the largest of the ancestry groups reported by the US Census Bureau in 2014. German-Americans, however, are peculiar because their ethnical identity sank underground during the First World War anti-German paranoia and subsequent controversy about the German war guilt. Frederick Weygold, a staunch independent thinker, but usually not prone to verbal brawling, was ankle-deep in the controversy and even got into trouble when he shouted 'Liar!' at a Rev. Straton, leader of

the Fundamentalists' Anti-Evolution League, asserting in a public meeting that it had been the whole German people who, poisoned by 'that philosophy of hell' (Darwin's and Nietzsche's), attacked the unsuspecting world to destroy liberty and civilization in WWI. "The Great War literally removed the hyphen from 'German-American', Feest writes (p. 126). Actually, German-Americans dropped the 'German' part altogether and succeeded so well in assimilating, that they not only played a prominent role in the military (from Pershing, Nimitz, Spaatz, Eisenhower to Schwarzkopf), industry, business, and culture, but gave a number of presidents to the US with nobody raising a hue and cry about the German danger. Dwight D. Eisenhower's original family name was Eisenhauer, Herbert Hoover's was Huber, and Donald Trump's was Drumpf; Richard Milhous Nixon's maternal ancestors anglicized Melhausen to Milhous, and even Obama has German blood from his mom's side. But their ultimate triumph is, in my opinion, that they succeeded in making hot dogs, hamburgers, Heinz mustard and Budweiser all-American symbols.

A younger son of the pastor of Friedens Evangelical Church, three miles west of St. Charles, Missouri, Frederick Weygold (1870-1941) was a member of the substantial community of German immigrants in Missouri and, later, Kentucky. He started studying in a log cabin in 1875 and, when his father became pastor of St. Paul's Evangelical Church in Louisville, Kentucky, he attended Louisville public school. Since the good reverend wanted his son both to receive the best education possible and preserve him for 'Germaness', Frederick was sent to a Gymnasium, and later to university in Germany. On the whole, Frederick, talented in languages and history, proved to be a sore disappointment for his father, because he did not even bother to write his graduation thesis, decided to become an artist, studying art in Karlsruhe and Stuttgart, and remained in Europe until 1902. Moreover, Weygold did not follow his father's steps in the Evangelical Church, but pursued (after his father's death) an ecclesiastical career, albeit

heretical, in the Clifton Unitarian Church, born from the Social Gospel movement with a very progressive bent. For example, it preached that women had equal rights and that the Bible was no longer the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Weygold became one of its prominent speakers and officials, and it was thanks to his work for the congregation that he was able to pursue his work as an artist and amateur scholar of Native American art in American museums.

Since most Native Americans were forced to leave Kentucky during the Indian Removals of the 1800's, and it was much likelier that Weygold encountered moonshiners by the dozen than a single Native Kentuckian, his long-life fascination for the 'Indians' started in Europe. He taught himself the Lakota language and began drawing early objects from the Great Plains in German museum collections, and he met his first Lakota among the warriors who worked for the various Wild West Shows when he went back to the US. In 1909 he first visited Indian Country when he went to Pine Ridge Reservation, SD, bought Lakota artifacts for the Museum of Ethnology in Hamburg, and documented Lakota life and culture in photographs, many of which he later used for his paintings and illustrations. Although Weygold met other Native Americans, and dealt with Indian art from other tribes, he was especially interested in 'the Sioux,' as they were usually known to the great public.

The *Bad Speaker* (as Germans were called) Weygold was so honest and straightforward in his dealings with the Lakota, that he got the moniker *One Tongue*, because he did not speak with forked tongue. He found the Lakota in transition from the old way of life to the reservation life. Most lived in log cabins, although some tipi were still standing; members of the former military societies took positions in the Indian police, in the tribal courts or other jobs the agents offered. People converted to one of the many brands of the Christian religious market, but also participated in traditional ceremonies. Some holy men became catechists, others went on

curing people because white doctors were very few in the area. Weygold had mixed feelings about the government's assimilation programs. He believed in progress and was optimistic regarding the ultimate success of the allotment and other measures taken by the government to create a new generation of well-educated and prosperous 'red' citizens, but the reason he went to Pine Ridge was to meet the last glorious veterans. He met George Sword, Short Bull and Red Cloud and attended a Giveway, he wrote about with an eye for ethnographical description. Red Cloud, who had acted as a sort of middleman between the old ways and the new ones, was in his late eighties, paralyzed and blind, but still attended celebrations. Red Cloud was Weygold's 'rendezvous with history', Hump gave 'him access to a wealth of Lakota traditional knowledge' (p. 79) and, although it was against the custom, decided to give Weygold an account of the *Hunka* ceremony, one of the seven sacred rites of the Lakota. Short Bull, who had preached the Ghost Dance, sold him some drawings of the Sun dance, at the time forbidden by the government, and his prayer tipi.

Pine Ridge had not been heaven, but the Blackfoot reservation in Montana was hell. The more he immersed himself into the miserable way of life the Native American reservations, the more radical Weygold became in his views (p. 125). He started campaigning with reports and speeches in favor of Indian Rights, a subject he went on supporting until he died.

Weygold was a man between two centuries: on the one hand he was a progressive and a radical in politics and religion, and was far ahead of his time in recognizing the importance of the European collections for the study of Native American arts. On the other hand, he was a romantic, fascinated by the old warriors, and was deeply rooted in the 19th century in his thinking about modern art and in part about how to represent Native American art. Actually, this book is not only a lavishly illustrated biography of Weygold, but it also offers an outline of provincial life,

showing that also in backwoods Kentucky, as most consider it, one could live a rich cultural experience. Moreover, the book traces in outline the story of the visual representation of the Native Americans both in the arts and the museums, which is far from neutral and objective and follows, step by step, the story of the representation of the Other. 'Like many others before and after him Weygold was attracted to Native American objects through their association with the imagined 'Indian' of literature and popular culture, largely derived from features of Plains Indian cultures.' (p. 165) Native American artifacts found their place in ethnographic museums or the anthropological departments of natural history museums. Both in Europe and the United States Native American artifacts had no place in art museums, and if displayed at all, they were more poorly documented and the focus of the curators went on their 'artistic', not their cultural value. Weygold collection suffers not only because of its unsatisfactory documentation, but also because he was unable, for economical reasons, to compete for spectacular pieces with other, much richer private collectors. Weygold's collection constituted the core of the Native American collections at the Speed Museum in Louisville, but in 1947, seven years after his death, the museum changed name and focus becoming J.B. Speed Art Museum.

Weygold was almost forgotten, yet this book and the exhibition it accompanies 'aptly illustrate one of the main purposes of museums as archives: to preserve even seemingly useless documents to give them a second chance in the future. Outside the museums, an interest in Weygold emerged in the 1970s both in Kentucky and in Germany.' (p. vii-viii). In 1973, just after the occupation of Wounded Knee, C. Ronald Corum, graduate student at the University of Louisville, visited the reservation, and started his very long journey to discover Weygold, which finished only when by coincidence, Christian Feest, who masters the required German language skills (which appears to have been a serious obstacle) and experience in museum and

archival research about Lakota history and culture, was in Kansas City and showed interest when the project was submitted to him in 2012. The preface of this book, by Christian Feest and C. Ronald Corum, telling the story of the research about Weygold on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean in some way is a thriller. A sort of scholarly chain letter paid off, putting in touch German scholars on the brink of the Happy Hunting Grounds, and American younger ones. The older scholars passed the baton to the younger ones and, at last, Frederick Weygold's life and art and the cultural ambience he worked in can be appreciated.

References

Banner, Lois W. (2010). *Intertwined Lives: Margaret Mead, Ruth Benedict, and Their Circle*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.