

# *The Spirit of America*

by Jim Crutchfield

## *David Wright Supports the 1 of 1000 Endowment Program*



*"The Spirit of America" painting by David Wright has been created to raise funds for the 1 of 1000 Endowment. Limited edition prints and canvas giclees are offered for sale by the NMLRA.*

Several years ago, NMLRA's past president, the late Merrill P. Deer, performed an analysis of several ways to create an endowment fund whose purpose was to support the long-term financial stability of the Association and the muzzleloading sport that we all love. The fund was to perpetually preserve the principal, while at the same time generate sufficient interest to be used for the furtherance of the Association's educational and other goals. Deer decided upon a fund strategy he called the "1 of 1000 Endowment Program." The premise was simple: recruit 1,000 members to contribute \$1,000 each, thereby funding the program with a tidy one million dollars. The \$1000 is tax deductible and payable in a variety of ways over a three year period. An application for membership in the "1 of 1000 Endowment" can be found on the NMLRA website.

The good news was, it was a terrific idea. The bad news has been that it's been a challenge to find 1000 contributors. Deer joined as Member Number 1, and the late Ron Ehlert, who presented Deer's idea to the NMLRA's board for approval, became Member Number 2. By May, 2005, when NMLRA member Robert Copner joined the program, only forty-one others had done so before him.

Discussing the matter with Ehlert at Friendship in September, 2005, Copner offered a new idea to get the recruitment

program going again. Ehlert liked the proposal and informed Copner that he was thereby appointed to chair the new committee to raise the one million dollars. Ehlert would create a unique powder horn that would be awarded to an individual randomly selected from among new "1 of 1000" members who joined during the year, 2006. The goal was met and Winston Roland walked away with the horn. Lee Larkin, a gifted artisan and master hornor of the Honourable Company of Horners, fashioned and donated the horn for the 2007 contest, won by Roger Schaefer. Frank Willis and Joe Becker produced the 2008 horn, which also commemorated the seventy-fifth anniversary of NMLRA and will be awarded, once a total of two hundred "1 of 1000" members come forth, to the winner of a drawing among new contributors joining since September, 2007. Future artists of the Honourable Company of Horners who have so willingly and unselfishly donated their time to produce museum quality horns for future years' events include Willy Frankfort, Robert Albrecht, Mark Preston, John Kiselica, and Robert Wiegard.

To date, only 168 individual members of NMLRA have joined the "1 of 1000 Endowment Program." That's less than one per cent of the Association's membership! Additionally, twenty muzzleloading clubs and organizations have pitched in, bringing the total number to 188. Obviously, the program must be



Artist David Wright in his studio with the painting "Gateway to the West" which he created for the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

reintroduced with renewed vigor if the Association is ever going to arrive anywhere near its goal. The financial strength and survival of the NMLRA is essential to preserve our nation's rich historical heritage in the sport of muzzleloading. And this is where my long-time friend and neighbor, David Wright, enters the picture.

Robert Copner commissioned Wright to create a large, original oil painting titled "The Spirit of America," from which limited edition, signed and numbered prints and canvas giclees have been reproduced. Says Wright, "Bob and I wanted to depict a subject that would represent the rich heritage and unifying spirit that enabled our forefathers to settle our country. The painting depicts a group of self-reliant settlers as they take the country westward. Each and all, in their indomitable ways, represent the unique spirit that has always characterized the American people. As they faced forthrightly the unknown, as they stared down life-threatening risk, as they challenged the wilderness frontally, as they heard the hum of arrows, they persevered, they planted their flag. They carried freedom and democratic ideals on their backs and have earned the gratitude of the generations that have followed. They epitomize the Spirit of America."

A portion of the limited edition prints will be reserved for new members of the 1 of 1000 Endowment as they sign up. The rest of the prints will be offered for sale to the public to raise funds. All proceeds from the sales will go to the 1 of 1000 Endowment and the Association's Education Building fund.

In addition to the paper prints, canvas giclees have been reproduced in two sizes; 30" and 48" wide. A 48" framed canvas giclee will be displayed as the artistic focal point in the entry hallway of the Education Building at Friendship. Additionally, a permanent display of the names of the 1 of 1000 members who donate to this worthy effort will also grace the walls. Wright comments:

"It is an honor to create this painting for the 1 of 1000 Endowment, and to be a part of this worthy fund-raising endeavor. It is my hope that this may help assure the perpetuity of the NMLRA. "The Spirit of America" symbolizes the rugged determination of those courageous Americans who settled our country and laid the base for the greatest nation in the world. A most appropriate quote, worded by my good friend, Flavil Q. Van Dyke says it all: 'On the shoulders of yesterday's heroes, we look beyond the horizons of tomorrow.' Those selfless contri-

butions of our dedicated forefathers allow the promise of continued freedom and prosperity and hope."

Wright, a Life Member of the NMLRA, will relinquish any royalties from the sale of the prints, and has agreed to attend the National Championship Shoot at Friendship, Indiana on Sunday, September 13, and be on hand to personally sign copies of the prints and giclees which will be made available to the public at that time. This will be a great opportunity to meet the artist and purchase a print, or, join the 1 of 1000 Endowment and receive a free print.

If you don't know David Wright, you've missed a great opportunity to rub elbows with one of the nation's premier artists of the American frontier [and Civil War]. David and I have been friends for almost a quarter of a century; in fact, it was he who first introduced me to Maxine Moss, then the editor of *Muzzle Blasts*, and, to Bill Scurlock, then and now, the editor of *Muzzleloader*. I've been writing for both magazines ever since.

Wright was born in Rosine, Kentucky, known as the "Birthplace of Bluegrass and Bill Monroe," and raised in Middle Tennessee, where he still resides. I won't tell you when he was born, since I figure if he wants you to know, he'll tell you. But, I will say that he's a couple of years or so younger than me, if that tells you anything.

He received formal, professional training as an artist with advanced study in Italy. Like many successful fine artists today, Wright began his career as a commercial artist – as a designer and illustrator in 1962. His career was soon interrupted by Uncle Sam by way of an event then called "the draft." He served two years in the Army with a year-long combat tour in Vietnam. Returning to his career in commercial art in 1966, he soon turned his attention to his true love: fine art and the painting of Southern landscapes, and the American frontier, mountain men, Indians, and the Civil War. In his own words:

"The history of our country has always fascinated me. I paint people in the historical environment, creating an atmosphere rather than detailing the event itself. In this way, you can see and understand – even feel – those critical moments in history that present our heroes in the lives they led – as explorers, hunters, trappers, settlers, soldiers, and Indians."



The award winning painting "The Captives", done in 2008, captures the moving emotion of Wright's historical works. Wright feels this is one of his more significant paintings when trying to tell the story of the American Frontier.



*Wright on a recreated 1820s ride through the Uinta Mountains in Utah. Wright feels that these trips give him insight into the challenges experienced by the 18th and 19th century frontiersmen.*

In 1973 Wright joined a newly formed print publishing company, Gray Stone Press and, by 1978, had phased out all his commercial interests and devoted his focus entirely on fine art. He is still with Gray Stone Press today, 36 years later. Wright's rise to national stature has been a long, challenging road. Very few artists achieve immediate success. He says it takes more hard work than talent to succeed as a professional painter. There is no substitute for putting in the time. Wright has done this. His chosen subject, American history, is a far different field than painting landscapes, which is where he

began and is a genre he still loves today. He relates, "Painting historical subjects is a much more challenging job than painting landscapes, particularly because of the exhaustive research that underpins the authenticity. I feel that it is an historical artist's obligation to present and future generations to paint the subject with as much accuracy as possible."

Accuracy is, indeed, one of Wright's trademarks. However, he relates with a chuckle, "Don't ever say never. What seems set in stone today may be overturned tomorrow by new findings. I've certainly made my mistakes through the years; however at the time I did the work, I thought my research was solid."

While David's popularity in print escalated through the years with many sold-out editions, his success in the original market has risen, too. He presently has a five-year backlog in commissioned work; his paintings hang in several prestigious museums and public and private collections. He has won a few awards along the way, too. He has been honored to produce works for several historic sites and non-profit organizations, among them Cumberland Gap National Historical Park, Wilderness Road State Park, the Lincoln County Historical Association, United Daughters of the Confederacy, and others. In 1982 he was commissioned to create the poster for the World's Fair Arts Pavilion held in Knoxville, Tennessee. A frontiersman with imposing longrifle was depicted. He is represented by Legacy Galleries in Scottsdale, Arizona and Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and Lord Nelson's Gallery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

For the past two years, David has shown at the prestigious "Quest For The West Show and Sale" at the Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art in Indianapolis, Indiana. The Eiteljorg Museum features a world-class collection, in-



cluding some of the best Western art on the globe, by artists such as Charles M. Russell, Georgia O'Keefe, Thomas Moran, Howard Terpning, and a number of the original members of the Taos Art Colony. In 2007, David's painting, "Uninvited Visitors" garnered the "Harrison Eiteljorg Purchase Award," and was acquired by the museum for their permanent collection. In 2008, Wright's "The Captives" won both the "Victor Higgins Work of Distinction for Best Individual Work" and the "Patron's Choice Award." This piece, which depicts a haggard and terrified white pioneer couple in a canoe with their two Indian captors, is especially meaningful to David, who recently said, "It describes a scene that unfortunately often beset settlers during the westward expansion of our country. The conclusion is left to the viewer, but it is ominous. The painting is also one of my personal favorites. As history, the story I tried to depict is dramatic and arresting; as symbolism, it presents a range of involving elements; and as technique, it fulfilled my rigorous objectives. I've tried to draw the viewer into the subject matter in a compelling and lasting way."

I've always believed that David's overwhelming success in the art world is due, not only because he possesses a great talent, but because he performs such meticulous research into his subject matter before he ever puts paint to canvas. Many are the times we have chatted on the telephone and I've learned that he was about to leave town on a research trip to Utah, or Wyoming, or Montana, or one of a dozen other places. To study a David Wright painting – say his moving portrayal of William Clark and Sacagawea in "The Blue Belt," – is like going back in time and observing a photograph, had there been one, of the occasion. I've floated the Missouri River and the background scene in that painting is as close to reality as you can get.

There's no telling how many covers of *Muzzle Blasts* and *Muzzleloader* David's paintings have graced, not to mention book covers and dust jackets. I'm proud to say that several of my favorites found their way onto covers of my own books, which added immensely to not only their attractiveness, but to their salability as well.



Wright and actor Wes Studi on the set of *Last of the Mohicans* in 1991. Wright met Studi during the filming of the epic story of the French and Indian War. Studi, who has become a friend has also been a model for a number of paintings by Wright.

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Wright checks the clothing of a soldier during the filming of the History Channel documentary "First Invasion - The War of 1812." Working as Art Director for the Native Sun Productions documentaries gives Wright insight into the different dimensions of the "look" of historic images which he feels helps him with his art.

One of David's proudest achievements was when he was commissioned to create a painting for the Cumberland Gap National Historical Park depicting Daniel Boone and his companions making their way through Cumberland Gap in 1775. Heretofore, only George Caleb Bingham's 1851 painting depicted this event, and there is no comparison between his portrayal of rigid, stoic-faced pioneers walking between non-existent cliffs, and David's piece, entitled "Gateway to the West - Daniel Boone Leading the Settlers Through Cumberland Gap, 1775" which makes you feel like you are one of the group,

looking back to observe the others. A breathtaking fourteen-foot mural of the painting hangs proudly in the Visitor Center at Cumberland Gap National Historical Park.

David's paintings have been featured in several television documentaries, and as an avid historian, his articles have appeared in both scholarly and popular journals and magazines and as contributing chapters in some well-read books about the American frontier. His historical knowledge and frontier expertise have broadened his field of endeavors and he has appeared on television as an historical consultant in several documentaries, including *Boone & Crockett: The Hunter-Heroes*, which has aired numerous times since 2001 on the History Channel.

He served as Art Director for Native Sun Productions' high definition, award-winning film *Daniel Boone and the Westward Movement* for the Cumberland Gap National Park. More recently, he art directed the Native Sun Productions History Channel film: *First Invasion - The War of 1812*, for which he received a Prime Time Emmy nomination.

Wright reflects on this expansion of his talents: "Working with the film industry is an intense and fulfilling job. To work in three dimensions gives me an added perspective which I think benefits my painting. But there is where my heart lies - painting, and I will always continue to be a painter."

David and his wife, Jane, reside in Gallatin, Tennessee in a beautiful 18th century-style home situated over the ever-running falls of historic Asher's Creek. His paintings can be seen on his website, [www.davidwrightart.com](http://www.davidwrightart.com).

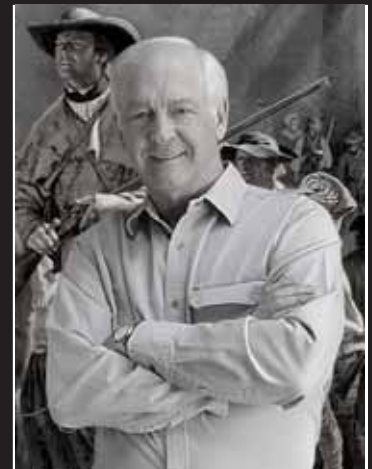
So, don't forget! David will be at Friendship on Sunday, September 13 to meet people, sign prints and talk muzzleloading and history. Don't miss this chance to meet a fine fellow, a great artist, and support a great cause by buying a limited edition print of a subject in which we are all interested - *The Spirit of America*. **MB**



"The Spirit of America"

## MEET ARTIST DAVID WRIGHT

David will be available to meet the public and personalize your "The Spirit of America" print on Sunday, September 13, 2009, at the NMLRA National Championship Shoot at Friendship, Indiana. Come, meet the artist and purchase your print to support a worthy cause. Join the 1 of 1000 Endowment program and receive a FREE print. For more information or to order your print, call 812-667-5131, go online at [www.nmlra.org](http://www.nmlra.org), or see form below.



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_____ Limited edition print 23" X 27 1/2" @ \$150.00 each	\$ _____
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