

EARL HEIKA, MONTANA SCULPTOR,  
HIS LIFE AND HIS WORKS

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The purpose of this paper is to record for all interested persons the available facts concerning the life and works of Earl Heika, Montana artist/sculptor. Heika, who lived most of his life in Great Falls, Montana, depicted Western subjects in his art.

Information for the facts covered herein was obtained by personal interviews with relatives and friends of the artist, from public records, and from the archives of the Great Falls Tribune. Many biographical facts and photographs were provided by Heika's sister, Esther Egan, with whom he lived during his youth. Museums, galleries, and individuals who own Heika works allowed photographs and examinations to be made of such works.

The paper is divided into two major sections, one dealing with Earl Heika's life, the other with his art. Numerous illustrations accompany the biographical material, and both color and black-and-white photographs of the art are included. At the end of the paper is a list of over eighty clay sculptures, plaster castings, and dioramas, with the present location of each noted when such information could be determined.

Heika was born in Belt, Montana, in 1910; he died at the age of thirty-one in Great Falls, Montana, on May 18, 1941.

His father died when the boy was four years old. An older sister cared for him for seven years until his mother remarried. He stuttered badly throughout his life, a condition that worsened under emotional stress. He began painting and sculpting during his teen years, and, when he was nineteen, he had his first public display in Los Angeles. Subsequent showings of his sculpture were held in Great Falls, at Chicago's World Fair, 1933-34, at the Texas Centennial, 1936, at the San Francisco Exposition, 1939, and in New York at the Municipal Art Show, 1937.

Heika married Virginia Middleton in 1933; the couple had four children, the last born in the spring of 1941. A great blow to Heika was the sudden death of his favorite brother in 1936, a sorrow from which he never recovered. His suicide in 1941 followed family difficulties and a drinking problem.

Though primarily a sculptor, Heika painted in oil, made pen-and-ink sketches, and created dioramas in which he used sculptured figures or stuffed birds. The Western subject matter of his works includes horses, cowboys, miners, stagecoaches, hunters, prospectors, and Indians. Heika is a Western artist in the tradition of Russell and Remington. His small sculptures depict the romance of Montana in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

EARL HEIKA, MONTANA SCULPTOR,  
HIS LIFE AND HIS WORK

THESIS

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By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS . . . . .	ii
Chapter	
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. BIOGRAPHY . . . . .	4
Early Life	
Budding Career	
The Young Artist	
The Final Years	
Recollections	
III. HEIKA'S ART . . . . .	56
Types of Works	
Subjects of Works	
Context of Works	
IV. CONCLUSION . . . . .	110
APPENDIX . . . . .	112
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	124

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure	Page
1. Heika home in Belt, Montana . . . . .	5
2. Earl Heika as an infant . . . . .	6
3. Lizzie Heika and infant son Earl . . . . .	6
4. Egan home in Laurel, Montana, where Earl lived with sister's family. Pictured, Lizzie Heika, Esther Egan, Egan infant. . . . .	7
5. Earl, with dog, Coyote, and cousin, Billy . . . . .	8
6. Heika, a grown man, with aging dog, Coyote . . . . .	8
7. Earl, aged eight, carrying newspapers . . . . .	9
8. Earl, aged ten, while visiting his mother and brother, Mike . . . . .	9
9. Mike and Earl, youngsters . . . . .	10
10. Fourteen-year-old Earl, with Coyote . . . . .	11
11. Earl on fishing trip in 1925 . . . . .	12
12. Plaster casting of grizzly bear by Earl Heika . . . . .	14
13. Horse and rider. Heika sculpture owned by Melvin Cottier, Great Falls, Montana . . . . .	15
14. <u>Fresh Meat</u> , Heika. Part of Clark commission. Where- abouts unknown . . . . .	16
15. <u>The Roper</u> , Heika. Clark commission. Present location unknown. . . . .	16
16. <u>Big Horn Hunt</u> , Heika. Clark commission. Present location unknown. . . . .	17
17. <u>Bringing in the Deer</u> , Heika. Clark commission. Present location unknown . . . . .	17

18.	<u>Banjo Player</u> , Heika. Clark commission. Present Location unknown . . . . .	17
19.	<u>Bronco Buster</u> , Heika. Clark commission. Present Location unknown. . . . .	17
20.	Earl Heika holding painting of elk done on elk hide . .	18
21.	<u>Christmas Cheer</u> , Heika, 1930. Location unknown. . . .	19
22.	Heika model of eskimo dog team carrying dead polar bear. . . . .	21
23.	Postcard from Virginia and Earl Heika to his parents, June 16, 1933. . . . .	21
24.	Virginia and Earl Heika on wedding day. Picture taken outside Egan home in Lewistown, Montana. . . .	22
25.	Postcard written by Earl to his parents from Chicago World's Fair, June 25, 1933. . . . .	23
26.	Plaster cast bust of Indian, Cottier collection, Great Falls, Montana. . . . .	24
27.	Heika bust of Charles Russell, Egan collection. On permanent loan to Montana Historical Society, Helena, Montana. . . . .	24
28.	Mike and Earl Heika after a hunting trip. . . . .	26
29.	<u>The Trophy Hunters</u> , Heika pack string made in 1936 for E.B. Coolidge. Russell Gallery, Great Falls. . .	29
30.	Heika displaying unique sculpture, <u>The Mine Face</u> , which shows a copper mine operation. Owned by Anaconda.	
31.	<u>The Quartz Team</u> , Heika, 1938. Russell Gallery, Great Falls, Montana. . . . .	31
32.	Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . .	32
33.	Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . .	33
34.	Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . .	34
35.	Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . .	35
36.	Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . .	36

37. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . . . .	39
38. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . . . .	40
39. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . . . .	41
40. Christmas card, Heika. Eagn collection, Lewistown. . . . .	42
41. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . . . .	43
42. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . . . .	44
43. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . . . .	45
44. Pheasant diorama, Heika. Great Falls Sporting Goods Company. . . . .	46
45. <u>Racing the Stork</u> , diorama. Private collection. . . . .	47
46. <u>The Lookout</u> , Heika sculpture. Owned by Dr. Robert <u>Skinner</u> , Great Falls, Montana. . . . .	48
47. Heika log cabin home, Great Falls. Shown outside house, Earl and daughter, Kathleen. . . . .	50
48. Earl Heika, Montana sculptor, 1910-1941. . . . .	54
49. Heika's pencil sketch from which he made sculpture, <u>Heading for the High Country</u> . Egan collection, Dallas. . . . .	57
50. <u>Heading for the High Country</u> , Heika. Collection, <u>National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage</u> , Oklahoma City. . . . .	58
51. Bighorn sheep, Heika. Joe Egan, Helena, Montana . . . . .	59
52. Old-time stagecoach, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	59
53. Stagecoach hold-up, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	60
54. Duck-hunting diorama, Heika. Great Falls Sporting Goods Company, Great Falls. . . . .	60
55. Wolf, Heika watercolor. Egan collection, Dallas. . . . .	61
56. Indians crossing winter prairie, oil, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	62
57. Hunters in winter with laden pack horses, oil, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	63

58. Hunter shooting a buck, oil, Heika, 1930. Location unknown. . . . .	64
59. Buffalo herd, ink, Heika. Egan collection, Dallas. . . . .	65
60. The hunter's kill carried by paint pony, oil, Heika, 1936. Location unknown. . . . .	66
61. Grizzly bear. Detail from <u>Too Crowded</u> , Heika. National Cowboy Hall of Fame. . . . .	67
62. Grizzly bear, sculpture, Heika. Great Falls Sporting Goods Company. . . . .	67
63. Grizzly bear, Heika. Egan collection, Lewistown. . . . .	68
64. Grizzly family confronted by skunk, Heika sculpture. Location unknown. . . . .	68
65. Returning hunter, diorama, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	69
66. Hunting party, oil, Heika, 1936. Location unknown. . . . .	70
67. <u>Heading for the High Country</u> , Heika. National Cowboy Hall of Fame. . . . .	71
68. Additional view of <u>Heading for the High Country</u> . . . . .	71
69. <u>Heading for the High Country</u> . . . . .	72
70. <u>Down from the High Country</u> , Heika. National Cowboy Hall of Fame. . . . .	73
71. Detail from <u>Down from the High Country</u> . . . . .	74
72. <u>Hunter's Return</u> , original appearance, Heika. . . . .	74
73. <u>Hunter's Return</u> , Heika. National Cowboy Hall of Fame. . . . .	75
74. Additional view of <u>Hunter's Return</u> . . . . .	76
75. Pack train, Heika. Great Falls Sporting Goods Company, Great Falls. . . . .	77
76. Pack train, additional view. . . . .	77
77. Pack train once owned by W.A. Clark, III. Present location unknown. . . . .	78
78. Pack train, an early Heika sculpture. Location unknown. . . . .	78

79. Indian brave on pony, Heika, 1928. Location unknown. . . . .	79
80. Indian standing holding spear, Heika, 1929. Location unknown. . . . .	80
81. Piegan Indian, Heika. Laura Stainsby collection. On permanent loan to Montana Historical Society, Helena. . . . .	80
82. Stone carving of Chippewa Indian, Heika, 1933. Location unknown. . . . .	81
83. Indian couple on horseback with papoose and pony, Heika. Shown at Chicago World's Fair, 1933. Present location unknown. . . . .	81
84. Pack horse, Heika. Russell Gallery. . . . .	82
85. Pack horse, additional view. . . . .	82
86. Saddle horse, Heika. Russell Gallery. . . . .	82
87. Saddle horse, additional view. . . . .	82
88. Horseman playing guitar, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	83
89. Horseman, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	84
90. <u>Early Montana Cowboy</u> , Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	85
91. Cowboy smoking cigarette, Heika. Cottier collection, Great Falls. . . . .	86
92. Frontiersman, detail. Egan collection, Lewistown. . . . .	86
93. Frontiersman with rifle, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	87
94. Frontiersman with fringed coat, Heika. Russell Gallery. . . . .	87
95. <u>Buffalo Bill</u> , Heika, 1933. Part of exhibit at Chicago <u>World's Fair</u> . Location unknown. . . . .	88
96. <u>The Road Agent</u> , Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	88
97. Seated cowboy beside horse, Heika. Printed from the original photographic negative made by Heika after he completed the sculpture. Location unknown. . . . .	89
98. <u>Road Agent</u> , Heika. Owned by Al Brix, Helena. . . . .	89
99. <u>Road Agent</u> , bronze. Offered for sale by Classic Bronze Company. . . . .	90

100.	Road agent with wounded man. Shown with the artist soon after he completed it. Now offered by Classic Bronze. . . . .	91
101.	Cowboy with gun, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	92
102.	<u>The Contestant</u> , Heika. Egan collection. On permanent loan to Montana Historical Society, Helena. . . . .	93
103.	Detail of <u>The Contestant</u> . . . . .	93
104.	Detail of <u>The Contestant</u> . . . . .	93
105.	Bronco Buster, Heika. Egan collection, Montana Historical Society. . . . .	94
106.	Detail of Bronco Buster. . . . .	94
107.	Detail of Bronco Buster. . . . .	94
108.	Detail of Bronco Buster. . . . .	94
109.	Bronco Buster, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	95
110.	Bronco Buster, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	95
111.	Prospector with burro, from 1933 exhibit at Chicago World's Fair. Location unknown. . . . .	96
112.	<u>Prospector's Decision</u> , Heika, 1941. National Cowboy Hall of Fame. . . . .	97
113.	Additional view, <u>Prospector's Decision</u> . . . . .	98
114.	Cowboy on the trail, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	98
115.	<u>Ready to Hit the Trail</u> , Heika, 1941. National Cowboy Hall of Fame. . . . .	99
116.	Cowboy on the trail, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	100
117.	The buffalo hunter, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	100
118.	Covered wagon, Heika. Location unknown. . . . .	101
119.	Detail from <u>Too Crowded</u> . . . . .	101
120.	<u>Too Crowded</u> , Heika, 1941. National Cowboy Hall of Fame. . . . .	102
121.	<u>Too Crowded</u> as it appeared before being coated with metal. . . . .	102

122.	<u>Too Crowded</u> , Heika. . . . .	103
123.	<u>Changing Riders</u> , Heika, 1941, as it appeared at the time Heika completed it. . . . .	104
124.	<u>Changing Riders on the Pony Express</u> , Heika. National Cowboy Hall of Fame. . . . .	105



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In 1945, less than five years after the death of Earl Heika, I became aware of his work. In that last war year I married Frank Egan, whose mother, Esther Egan, is the artist's only living sister, an older sister Mamie having died during the Depression. It was more than twenty years later that I had the opportunity to examine certain Heika sculptures, and yet another three years before I gave serious consideration to writing a Heika biography and analysis.

The Montana Historical Society, in 1969, obtained several Heika models which they had cast in bronze. To use in conjunction with a showing of these, the director of the Museum in Helena wrote to my mother-in-law seeking information about her brother. At about the same time, the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City published a short Heika brochure including some erroneous biographical material, which disturbed the family. These two situations, plus occasional requests for facts received from collectors and galleries, led my husband to suggest that I might be the logical person to "set the record straight," to record for all interested persons the basic knowledge available from family and friends concerning Earl's life and work.

With this in mind, I went to Montana in August, 1969. While there, I interviewed people who had known and worked

with Heika, several old friends, his brother Mike's widow, many owners of Heika sculptures, a former employer, and the director of the Russell Gallery in Great Falls. My mother-in-law provided invaluable assistance through both her many reminiscences and numerous photographs and other materials which she permitted me to borrow.

Many persons with whom I talked offered names of others who might have information that would be helpful. Some of these were contacted in person; others were reached by mail, with most confirming facts previously obtained. Dr. Robert Skinner of Great Falls gave me his collection of photographs of Heika works, including pictures of some sculptures he now owns. The editor of the Great Falls Tribune searched the newspaper's archives and found several photographic negatives as well as three engraving plates showing both the artist and some of his works. These plates were printed for me in the newspaper plant.

In September, 1969, I visited the National Cowboy Hall of Fame in Oklahoma City which has a collection of Heika pieces. There I was given the opportunity of photographing their Heika models and of interviewing the curator of the museum.

Since many sources provided the material compiled in this paper, and because the nature of much of the information was in recalling the past, I have not attempted to give individual credit for every fact. Instead a list is given in the bibliography of those persons with whom I talked about Earl Heika.

Several persons contributed collections of newspaper clippings about Earl's career. Mrs. Laura Stainsby, Mike Heika's widow, and Al Brix, a retired musician, who knew both Earl and his brother forty years ago, along with Esther Egan, provided nearly a hundred published recordings of showings in Montana, of exhibits throughout the country, of long-past events that are pertinent to the scope of this paper. Mrs. Egan also permitted me to read and to use her file of family correspondence insofar as it related to Earl. For the help of all of these people, especially that of my mother-in-law, I am grateful.

As the wife of Earl Heika's nephew, and thus a member of the family, I have had facts and information concerning the artist available to me that are not available to other scholars. It is my purpose that this record of Earl Heika, his life and his sculpture, will be a contribution to the history of Western American art.

## CHAPTER II

### BIOGRAPHY

#### Early Life

Life was hard in the West in the early 1900's. Jobs were scarce, especially for the foreign born with little or no knowledge of the language of their new land. Babies seemed to be the most abundant crop produced; to most families, each year brought another mouth to feed. Willy Heika and his young wife Lizzie tried to make a living in Oregon in the lumber towns that dotted the coastline. Just before the dawn of the twentieth century, they joined other Finnish families and moved to a new community in central Wyoming, taking along their two baby girls and a young son. In Rock Springs, Wyoming, Willy found little work in his trade as a butcher, so he began to tend bar in the flourishing saloons catering to the transient cowhands and miners. Two more sons were born to the Heika family, making the task of the breadwinner even more difficult, just at a time when work was slowing down. The great cattle drives through Wyoming from Texas to the grazing land to the north had ceased; cowboys were settling in Texas, along the western slopes of Colorado, or in the fertile valleys of Montana, no longer stopping in Wyoming to quench their thirst in the local bars. Without work, Willy Heika took his growing family and headed north, to central Montana, to the small

village of Belt, twenty-five miles southeast of Great Falls, in the foothills of the Little Belt Mountains, where he obtained intermittent employment as a barkeeper and established his young brood in a shabby frame house. (See Figure 1.) On May 3, 1910, the last child was born to Lizzie and Willy. They recorded his name as Wilber ( 1. ), but he was to be called Earl all of his life. (See Figures 2 and 3.)

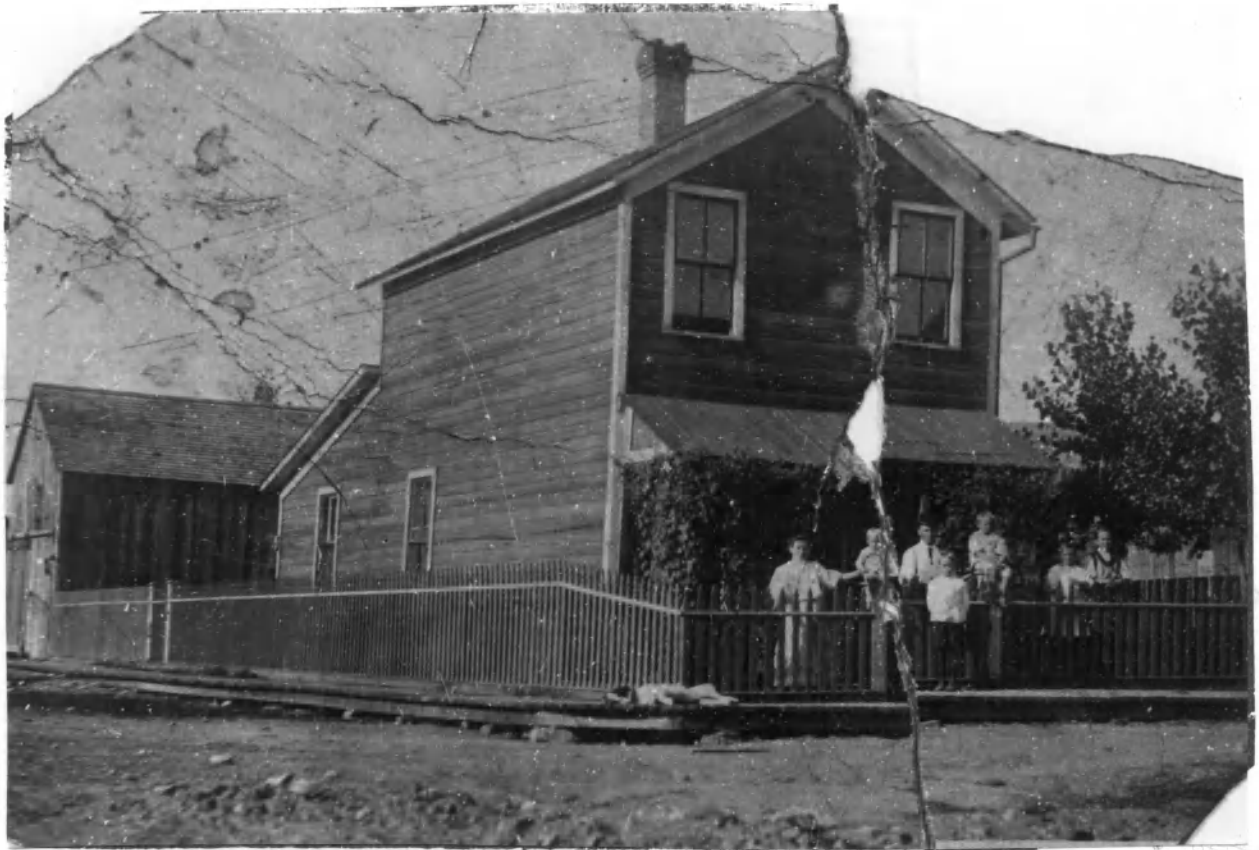


Figure 1. Heika home in Belt, Montana, where Earl was born.

Four years after the birth of his youngest child, Willy Heika died, leaving Lizzie alone to care for six children, a



Figure 2. Earl Heika as an infant.

left home to go into show business to spend her life playing the piano in the saloons of Montana, while seventeen-year-old Charlie went to California, where he was followed by his younger brother Frank. Left with young Mike and Earl, Lizzie was unable to earn enough to feed them, having to rely on the charity of the community

woman who spoke no English and had few salable skills. They moved "to town," to Great Falls, where there was more opportunity for earning a living. Fourteen-year-old Esther found work in a bookstore; eighteen-year-old Mamie



Figure 3. Lizzie Heika and infant son Earl.



Figure 4. House in Laurel, Montana where Heika lived with family of his sister, Esther Egan. In picture, left to right: Lizzie Heika, Esther Egan, Egan infant.

to survive. Esther soon married, and she and her husband, Ben Egan, took Earl to Laurel, Montana (See Figure 4.) where he was to spend the next seven years and, later, to move with them to Lewistown, Montana when Ben was transferred there.

As part of the Egan household, little Earl played along the tracks that were an integral part of the town. He learned to care for baby Billy, who was born soon after his own seventh birthday. A stray puppy, whom he named Coyote, was adopted by the boy. (See Figure 5.) The dog, who trailed him along the

dusty paths outside Laurel and went with him to fish in the nearby Yellowstone River, was to live out his life in Earl's care, (See Figure 6.) and was to be the subject of Heika's only dog sculpture. By the time he was in the second grade, he had learned the importance of earning money to help out at home. On Saturday mornings he sold the weekly newspaper throughout the village. (See Figure 7.)

Although they had no automobile, the Egan family and young Earl made frequent trips to Great Falls to see and care for Lizzie Heika. (See Figure 8.) They made the two-hundred-mile trip by train, using the family pass, the bonus that went with employment by the railroad. The two Heika brothers looked forward to these



Figure 5. Earl, with dog, Coyote, and cousin, Billy Egan.



Figure 6. Heika, a grown man, with aging dog, Coyote.





Figure 7. Earl Heika at age eight carrying newspapers.



Figure 8. Earl at age ten while visiting his mother and brother Mike.



Figure 9. Mike and Earl, youngsters.

visits. Mike, four and a half years the older, enjoyed playing with the baby of the family, while Earl looked with admiration to his light-hearted, cheerful brother. The intense love between them was evident to all who saw them together. (See Figure 9.)

His sister Esther recalls that Earl was a shy child, preferring to spend his time alone or with his dog, Coyote, rather than with playmates. (See Figure 10.)

One of the few exceptions to this, when he became part of group activities, was when, at the age of twelve, he joined a troop of Boy Scouts in Laurel. The outdoor activities and the emphasis on camping appealed to him. Though slight of build, he cheerfully kept up with the huskier boys in the rough-and-tumble troop outings.

Finally, in 1923, when he was thirteen years old, Earl returned to his mother who had married Charlie Larsen, a hard-working smelter laborer employed by the Anaconda Company in Great Falls. It was about this time that Earl developed a stutter which plagued him throughout life. He feared school and the inevitable recitations because of his stutter and the resultant ridicule by fellow students. When he became excited, the stuttering was more pronounced, leading him to drop out of school during the ninth grade, telling his sister

that it was not worth it to continue. Some stutterers outgrow their handicap with maturing years; Earl never did.

Spending his spare time in the outdoors, Earl began shaping small figures from the mud outside the family door. One day, after watching the older boy in this occupation, little Billy asked him to fashion an animal for him. Taking the mud, Earl formed a small whale, promising it to the child after it had had time to dry. He placed the model on the sill of the



Figure 10. Fourteen-year-old Earl with Coyote.

basement window where the sun could reach it. Later in the day, a rainstorm drenched the area, blowing onto the whale and, in the eyes of the child, "melting" it. Earl looked at the soggy heap of mud and determined to find other material with which to work.

Too much emphasis cannot be placed on Heika's love of the outdoors. He loved the woods and the rivers and took every opportunity to hunt or fish. (See Figure 11.) The one consistent factor running throughout his life is his attraction to nature. In addition to being an ardent fisherman and hunter, he swam in the creeks and hiked in the forests. His intimate knowledge of animal life, the result of his life-long observation, is evidenced in the flawless movement found in his sculptures of animals.



Figure 11. Earl on fishing trip in 1925.



Forty miles east of Great Falls, in a valley below the Highwood Mountains, adjacent to the Lewis and Clark National Forest, was located the Skelton Brothers' Ranch on which Earl found occasional work as a cowhand. He joined his fellow hands at night and on weekends at the local bars. For three months each summer for many years, he worked as a guide at Glacier National Park in northwestern Montana. It was here that he found the first market for his art. He executed sculptures of cowboys and animals which he sold to tourists. Later, as he learned more of the ways of the trade, he made multiple plaster of paris castings of busts of Indians, of bison and bears, selling these for nominal fees in Glacier. (See Figure 12.)



Figure 12. Plaster casting of grizzly bear by Earl Heika.

Although it was necessary for Earl to find ways of earning money to supplement his meager receipts from his sculpture, friends, family, and a growing public recognized him as an artist. He obtained the use of a small brick building which sufficed as living quarters and studio. The stove in the sparsely furnished area served a multiple purpose. In addition to heating the building, it dried Earl's sculptures. As he completed a model, he placed it on the open door of the stove, where it remained for several hours. To construct the models, he first shaped a wire armature. Around this he wound strips of cloth for bulk. He added clay to create the form of the figures. By exposing the clay pieces to a blazing fire, Earl



Figure 13. Horse and rider sculpture by Heika. Owned by Melvin Cottier, Great Falls.

allowed the clay to heat, and, thereby, to harden. Today, after nearly half a century, most of the works are intact, with no sign of crumbling. After it had hardened, he painted the clay with artist's oils in a realistic manner. Finally, details, such as cigarettes, ropes, and reins were attached.(Fig. 13.)

While vacationing in Montana in 1929, William Andrews Clark, III, was introduced to Heika. The two became friends

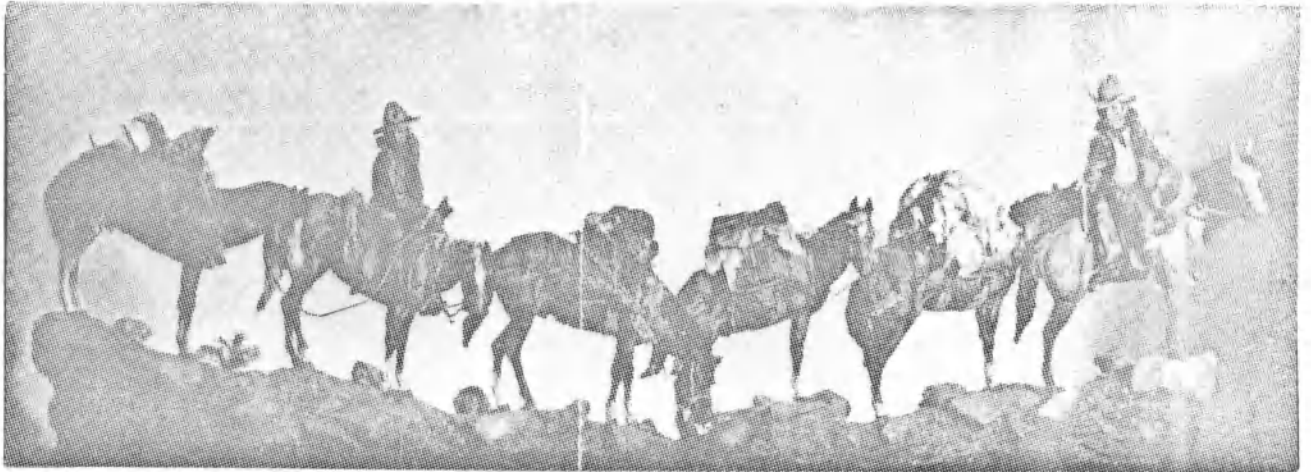


Figure 14. Fresh Meat, Heika. Commissioned by William Andrews Clark, III. Shown in Los Angeles in 1931.

immediately. Clark, grandson of one of the great copper mag-  
nates of Montana, commissioned the artist to execute a series



Figure 15. The Roper, Heika. Part of the W.A. Clark commission.

of six works which were shown at the Stendahl Galleries in Los Angeles. The Los Angeles Times included pictures and a review of Heika's work in its gravure section on May 31, 1931, in announcing the showing, which included three single horsemen on mounts and three multi-fig-ured works. The largest of these, entitled Fresh Meat, shows two riders with a string of four pack horses returning from a hunt. (See Figure 14.)

### Budding Career

Heika was sixteen years of age and untrained in any marketable skill when he dropped out of school. Unaware that the sculpting which he considered a pastime might be a means of support, he sought employment. His two older brothers were on the West Coast. It was here that he went after unsuccessful searches for work in Great Falls and Lewistown. On October 24, 1928, he wrote home from California to his mother, step-father, and brother, Mike, telling them that he was working for the railroad. He had first worked on freight, then on passenger runs, often wearing a uniform belonging to his brother, Frank. He missed the snows of Montana and the outdoor life, especially "duck hunting and deer hunting." ( 2. ) When, as the youngest man and newest employee, he was laid off by the railroad, he returned to Great Falls.

When he was nineteen, Earl entered his first work for public observation: a watercolor sketch of a wolf submitted to the Third Annual Art Exhibition of the Great Falls Chamber of Commerce. With a price tag of five dollars, the wolf remained unsold in that uncertain year of 1929. Later to come to light were sculptures of cowboys that had been executed as early as his fourteenth year, but these were found after Earl began to consider seriously the art that had occupied his private life for many years. His earliest known work is a bighorn sheep which he made for his nephew, Bill Egan, and now owned by Bill's brother, Joe Egan.





Figure 16. Big Horn Hunt, Heika. Part of Clark commission.



Figure 17. Bringing in the Deer, Heika. Clark commission.

Banjo Player, a comic figure on horseback, Bronco Buster, and The Roper are the single works. (See Figures 15, 18, & 19.) The works which show several horses depict various types of hunt



Figure 18. Banjo Player, Heika. Clark commission.



Figure 19. Bronco Buster, Heika. Clark commission.

scenes. These are, in addition to Fresh Meat, a hunter with mount and pack animals retrieving his kill in Big Horn Hunt, and a mounted rider followed by two pack horses, called, simply, Bringing in the Deer. (See Figures 16 & 17.)

Later that same year, as recorded in the Great Falls Tribune, Gary Cooper, the movie actor who was a native of Montana, gave Earl the use of a cabin studio on the Cooper ranch near Cascade, Montana. The paper quoted the young artist as "hoping that the patrons of the ranch would become patrons of his as well." ( 3. )

When he returned to Great Falls, Heika exhibited his work in local retail stores, there being few other opportunities for display. The Great Falls Sporting Goods Company and the Paris Dry Goods Store were two locations that offered him space in their windows for exhibits. On June 9, 1930, the Tribune announced the showing at the Paris of two

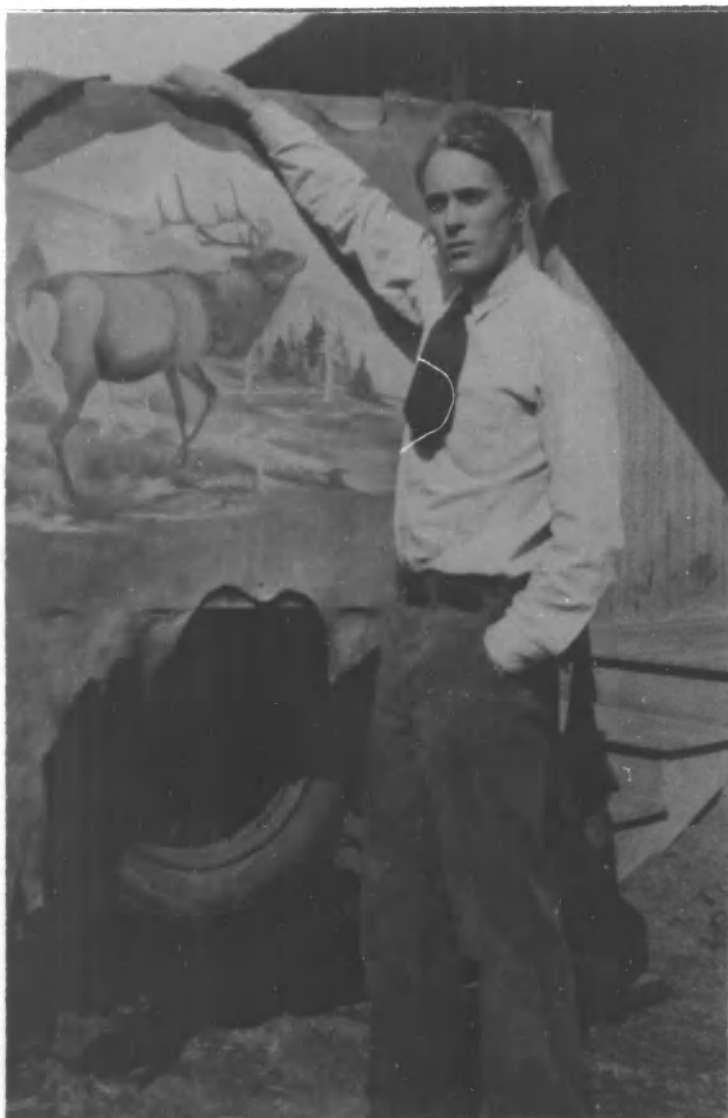


Figure 20. Earl Heika holding his painting of an elk done on elk hide.

paintings on elk hides and four charcoal sketches, the only

notice found with mention of drawings or paintings. (See Figure 20.) Here is also found one of the few listings of prices Earl charged for his work, these being, "from \$30.00 for the small bucking horse up to \$150.00 for horses carrying riders."( 4. )

#### The Young Artist

On the last day of December, 1930, when the Depression was fast gripping the nation, the Tribune carried a headline "Young Artist Has Real Rush for Christmas" over an article describing the booming business of the young, local sculptor, Earl Heika. By this time, in addition to William A. Clark, III, the twenty-year-old Heika counted among his patrons such wealthy men as John D. Ryan of New York, for whom he made a model showing two cowboys dismounted from their horses on the trail, "indulging in a little Christmas cheer." (See Figure 21.)



Figure 21. Christmas Cheer, Heika, 1930.

He made a unique bust that year for Frank M. Kerr, state manager of the Montana Power Company, showing Kerr in civilian dress except for an Indian war bonnet which he wore when he was adopted into a tribe at Polson, Montana, and given the Indian name "A-Kalt-Muc-Quait," meaning light. ( 5. ) He modelled a four-horse pack outfit and a rider on a bucking bronco for John E. Corbette, attorney for Anaconda at Butte. For Frank Bird, attorney for the Montana Power Company, he made a four-horse pack train and five single pieces the same year.

In 1932, after successful showings in Los Angeles at the Ambassador Hotel and at Camp's Art Store in San Francisco, it was announced that the work of Heika had been accepted for inclusion in the Western section at the World's Fair in Chicago in 1933. Prior to sending the works to the East, he assembled them for a local showing at the Great Falls Sporting Goods Company. According to an article in the Tribune, the group included

Eskimo driving dog team, the sled carrying a dead polar bear (See Figure 22.); young Indian warrior on horse; Buffalo Bill on horse; Indian and squaw, both mounted, the squaw with papoose on her back; prospector and his burro; cowboy on horse, the latter shying at a rattlesnake; two other mounted cowboys; and, a stone carving of a bust of a Chippewa Indian, the first work of this kind Heika has done. ( 6. )

On June 16, 1933, the Lewistown paper reported the imminent departure for Chicago of the young artist who was fast becoming famous. To be displayed at "The Village of Paris"

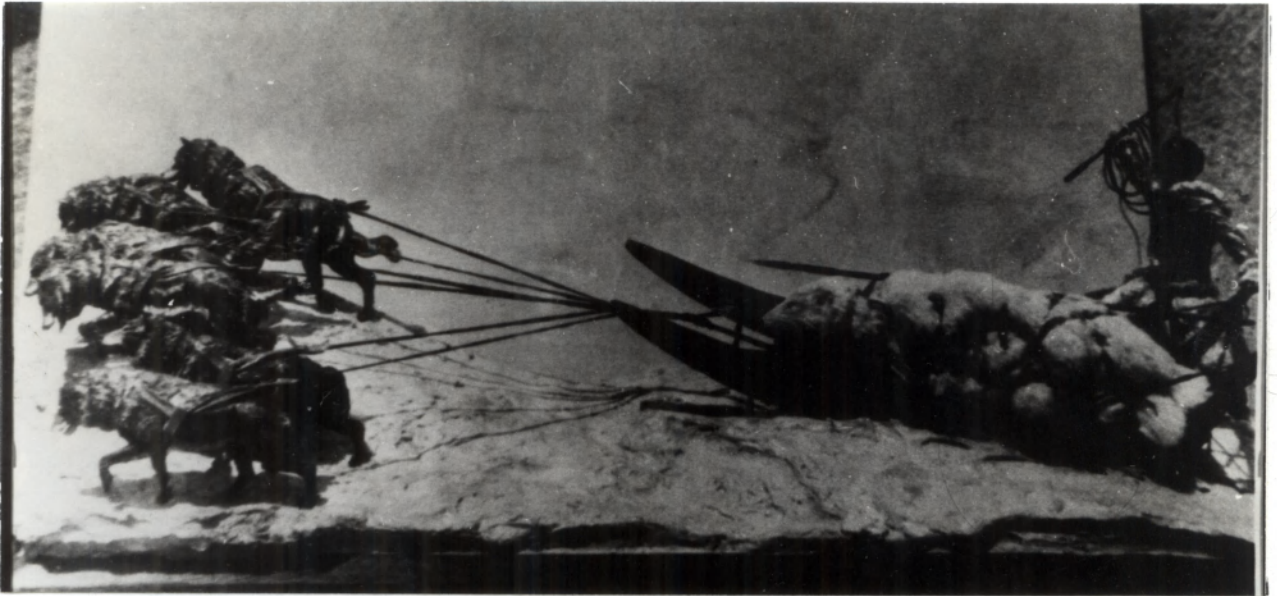


Figure 22. Eskimo dog team carrying dead polar bear.

on the fairgrounds were Heika's models of an old-time stage coach and a group of horses. Also announced at the time were the showings of additional works at the Sherman House and the Palmer House in Chicago.

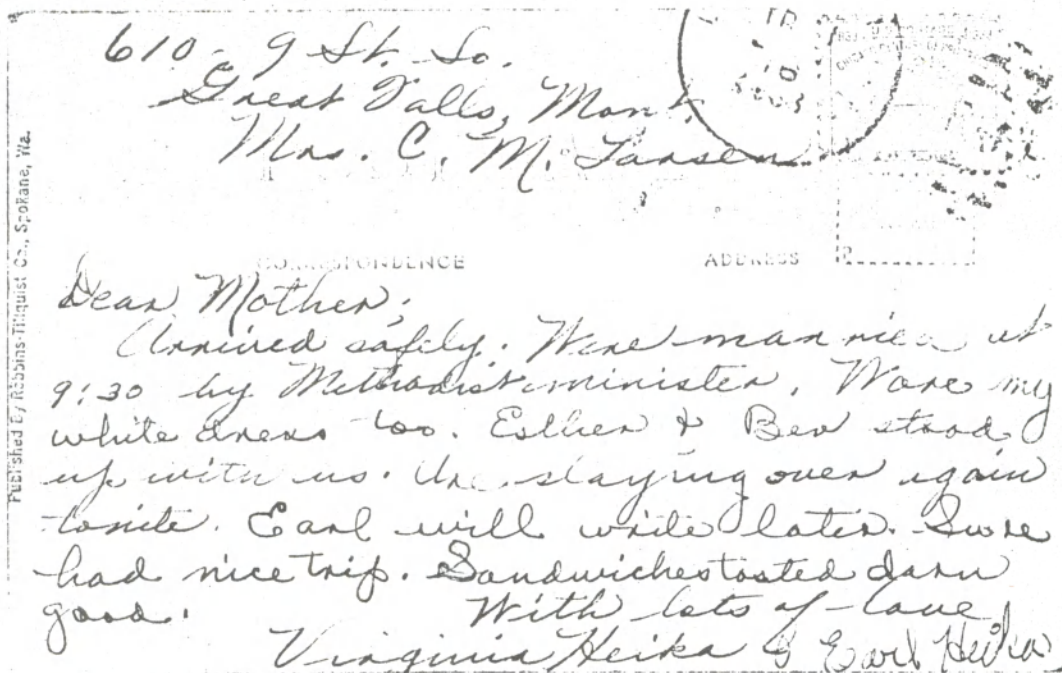


Figure 23. Postcard from Virginia and Earl Heika to his parents, June 16, 1933.





Figure 24. Virginia and Earl Heika on wedding day. Picture taken outside Egan home in Lewistown, Montana.

At 9:30 on the night of June 16, 1933, Earl married his Great Falls sweetheart, Virginia Middleton. Witnesses for the ceremony were his sister, Esther, and her husband, Ben Egan. The next morning, after writing postcards to Earl's parents and his brother, Mike, and Mike's wife, Laura, in Great Falls, telling them of the wedding, the

couple left for Chicago. (See Figures 23 and 24.)

After a trip that included stops in Cheyenne, Wyoming and Custer, South Dakota, they arrived in Chicago on June 23, toured the city, and, on the 26th of June, went to "the Bronze





Figure 26. Plaster cast bust of Indian by Heika, Cottier collection.

of promotion, had a marked influence on the young artist. For one thing, upon his return to Great Falls, he began an attempt at mass production of some small sculptured pieces. Aided by his friend, Melvin Cottier, who owns the Russell bust pictured in Figure 27, he learned to make multiple plaster castings. These included a buffalo,

While in Chicago, Earl had written to his family that selling his work was not so easy. Another time he told them that he had developed some new ideas about making money. Both of these factors, the discovery of the difficulty of merchandising and the awareness of the many methods



Figure 27. Heika bust of Charlie Russell. Egan collection



an Indian head (Figure 26), a seated bear, and a bust of Charles Russell. The Russell work is especially interesting because of the accurate portrayal it gives of the famous Montanan. In it, Heika catches the Russell visage with sureness and clarity. The well-known cowboy artist lived in Great Falls and died when Earl was a boy of sixteen. It is doubtful that the younger artist ever had more than a passing glance at the older man, yet he was able to capture a remarkable likeness of him.

Heika offered the castings for sale both in Great Falls and, during the summer, to the tourists at Glacier National Park. Since the prices he placed on the works were nominal (around one dollar, according to several persons), the venture must have been successful, even in the dark of the Depression, for there are very few of the castings around today.

The following June, the Heikas returned to Chicago for the second year of the Chicago Fair. Back home the workers at Anaconda were out on strike, a concern to Earl as he wrote to his step-father and mother en route to the East. Arriving at their destination on June 11, Earl found that the Depression was taking its toll, for the business at the Fair was only a fraction of that of the previous year. He determined again to display his work at Marshall Fields and to make the current visit a brief one, after which he would seek work in the Black Hills of South Dakota. On this, his second trip to Chicago, Earl was escorted by "Mr. Moyer" to the Field Museum of Natural History, the highlight of the trip. Money was evidently

on his mind a great deal, for he wrote that he could get a job there (at the Field Museum) if things would pick up. In the same note, he repeated the emphasis on new stratagems to employ as means of making money. After less than a week, Earl and Virginia left Chicago. Apparently his attempt at finding employment in the Black Hills was unsuccessful, for he was soon in Great Falls, working for the Great Falls Sporting Goods Company as a taxidermist when there was work. When there was not, he drove a taxi to supplement his sparse income from his art.

The first week of January, 1936, brought tragedy to the Heika family with the sudden death from a kidney infection of Earl's beloved brother, Mike. The Heika brothers had always been close to one another, spending most of their spare time together. (See Figure 28.) They worked jointly on chores,



Figure 28. Mike and Earl Heika after a hunting trip.

afterwards relaxing at the neighborhood pool hall or bar. They often went fishing on weekends. Mike and his wife, Laura, visited in the evenings with Earl and Virginia, who were expecting their first child in the late spring. The brothers spent much time hunting; deer, elk, ducks, all were challenges to the outdoors-loving sportsmen. After Mike's death, Earl began to lose some of the self-assurance he had gained with the recognition of his art. Neither friend nor family could help the bereaved brother recover from his sorrow. Earl wrote to his sisters in Lewistown, "It seems that no matter what I do or talk about, I can never release the feeling inside of me. I don't ever want to forget Mike; he will live forever in our hearts." ( 7. ) His relatives and associates sensed the change that came over him. Always slight of build, he became thinner, more nervous. His visits to the bars lengthened, often lasting for days instead of hours. He continued to work; yet, he found little satisfaction in his art or in the babies that came. Virginia's poor house-keeping, always an annoyance, now became unbearable. His stuttering worsened. Only when drinking could he speak without hesitating. Yet his hands remained steady when holding the clay that yielded to his touch.

#### The Final Years

Without the enthusiasm that had marked his showing at Chicago's World Fair, Earl arranged for an exhibition at the

Texas Centennial in Dallas in the summer of 1936. With his wife and baby daughter, he arrived in Texas on July 2, reporting to his mother that the fair was not as big as the Century of Progress had been. Neither was the art market. Texas was hard-hit by the Depression in the mid-thirties and there was little money to be spent on non-essentials. The Centennial provided hardly more than an opportunity for the Montanan to show his work in the Southwest. He left after a week. Before returning home, he went to Cheyenne, hoping there to find work. Disheartened, he wrote to his mother, "Not much luck. On our way home." ( 8. )

The period from 1936 to 1938, though filled with mounting personal difficulties, marked the most productive of Heika's life. His intricate and carefully researched works show a maturing understanding of movement and form. Many of the sculptures from these years are multi-figures, with up to three pairs of animals in teams, measuring nearly six feet in length. Some required an extensive knowledge of specialized information; all utilized an amazing understanding of anatomy.

Perhaps the best of the many Heika "pack strings," The Trophy Hunters, is a group of five horses and two men created early in 1936 for E.B. (Hardrock) Coolidge, a pioneer Montana oil man. (See Figure 29.) In 1938, W.G. Ferguson, manager of the Montanans, Inc., an organization that arranged for the display of native works of art, contacted Coolidge,



Figure 29. The Trophy Hunters, a Heika "pack string," made in 1936 for E.B. (Hardrock) Coolidge, Montana oil man.

who agreed to permit The Trophy Hunters to occupy a place of honor in the Montana exhibit at the San Francisco Exposition in 1939. Prior to his death in 1953, Coolidge notified the Russell Gallery in Great Falls of his intent to leave this model for permanent display at the gallery, where it remains today. Coolidge, described as being one of Heika's faithful patrons, gave another of the artist's works in appreciation to a staff member of the famous Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

On May 20, 1937, the artist received word that his work was accepted for another major show in the East. During the summer of that year, his sculpture was part of the Montana section at the Municipal Art Show in New York City.

Although he received encouragement from both civic and business leaders of the state, the industrial giants native to Montana but living elsewhere provided the major financial support that enabled Heika to continue to work. William Andrews Clark, III, whose grandfather, William A. Clark, rose from a \$2.50 a day laborer to amass a fortune of \$47 million in the latter part of the nineteenth century in the Montana mining business, and Cornelius (Con) Kelley, the most illustrious mining lawyer in the West, whose father helped start the giant conglomerate, Anaconda, that Kelley himself lifted to the position of world-wide giant, were among the wealthy and famous men who discovered Heika's genius and commissioned him to create works of art for their private collections.

A Western scene indigenous to Montana, one unlike any other Western art, is Heika's mining scene showing a miner working at the face of a copper mine. Completed in June, 1938, the unique work required many months of tedious labor by the artist. It is a three-dimensional sculpture, with the figure of the miner standing in the foreground before a rich copper mine opening. (See Figure 30.)

Even before he had shipped this masterpiece to the Long Island home of Cornelius Kelley, for whom it was created, he

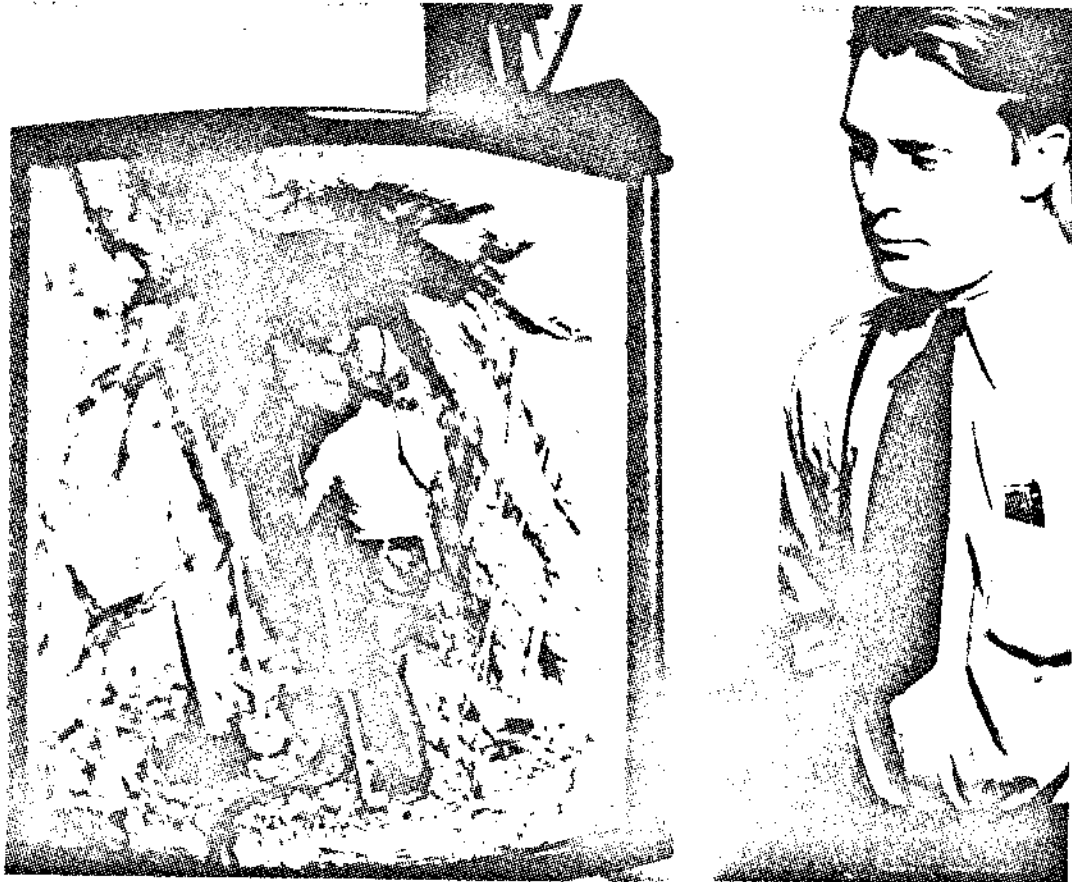


Figure 30. Heika displaying his unique sculpture of a mining scene typical of those in Montana copper mines.

was at work on another Kelley commission. The longest, most unusual of his multi-figured works, it is entitled The Quartz Team. The six-foot-long model of an ore wagon being pulled up grade by six straining horses depicts another early chapter in the copper mining industry in Montana. It was presented to Kelley as a fiftieth birthday gift by his wife. It remained in the Kelley home, prominently displayed over the mantle of the Copper Room, until February 3, 1961, at which time it was put on permanent display in the Russell Gallery

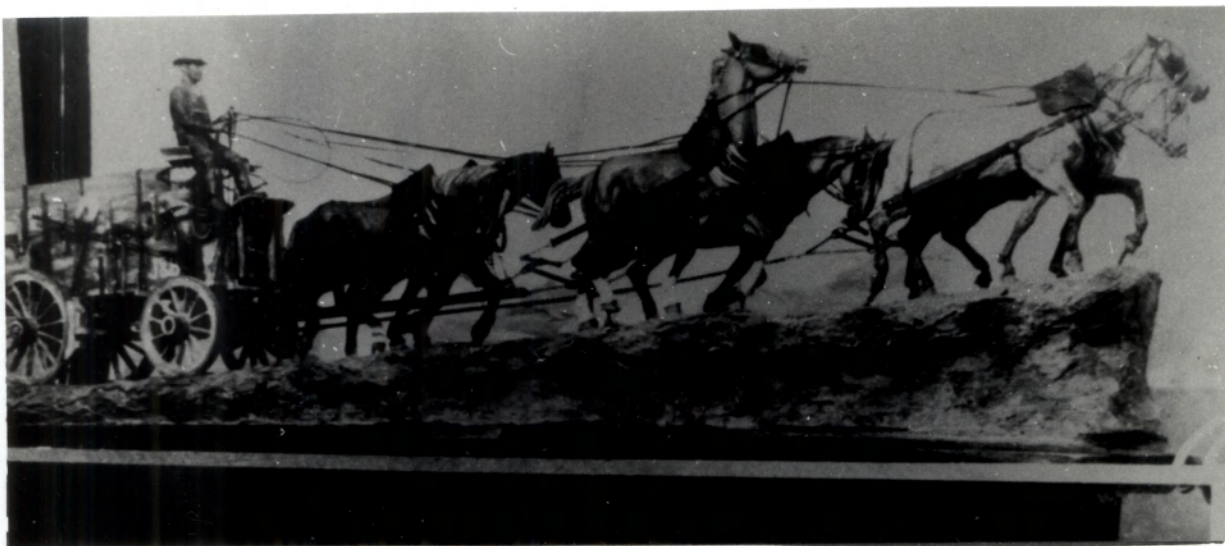


Figure 31. The Quartz Team, Heika, 1938. Six horses pull loaded ore wagon up a steep grade.

in Great Falls.

Late in 1938, Earl modelled another three-dimensional work, a crèche, which he placed in the Great Falls Public Library during the Christmas season. The Tribune described it as follows:

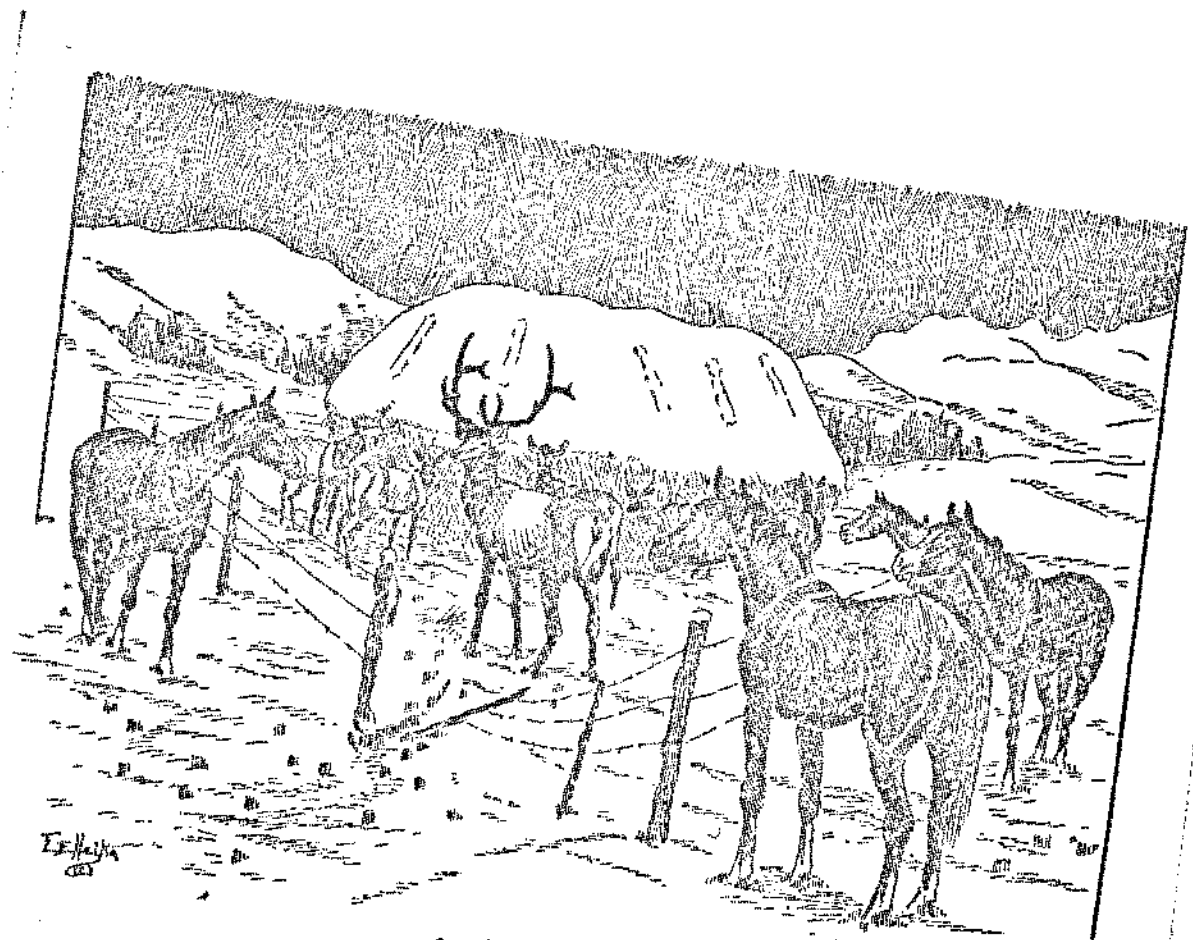


The stable, standing in the northwest corner of the room gives the appearance of great perspective and reality with its sloping floor and lifelike figures. Above the heads of the Virgin Mary and the Christchild(sic) are halos of neon lights. At the feet of Mary and the Babe are shown the three wise men kneeling with their gifts of frankincense, gold, and myrrh. In the west is an open door with the blue light of night showing the camels tethered awaiting the return of the wise men. Goats and asses are feeding at the bins. ( 9. )

The crèche was Heika's only Christmas-related sculpture. It was not his only Christmas art. For seven or eight years he made and sold Christmas cards. This provided an additional source of income and was an interesting diversion. He once wrote that he was looking forward to making these pen-and-ink drawings each year. The cards shown in Figures 32 through 43 cover a wide range of subjects, from the simplicity of nature to low comedy. These twelve cards were sent by Earl to his sister in 1939.

As did many artists, Heika bartered his art for the necessities of life, including the work of skilled craftsmen who performed their work in return for one of Earl's models. Such a model was the meticulously made Pack Train, a three-horse grouping that he used as payment to Ben Edwards for a plastering job on the Heika home in 1940. In 1962, this sculpture was sold by the Edwards family to Richard Flood, owner of the Trailside Galleries in Idaho Falls. The following year, Flood had it cast in bronze and placed for sale on the open market.

As an off-shoot of his part-time work as a taxidermist for the Great Falls Sporting Goods Company, Earl made several



Esheja  
1907

What's This?

Figure 32. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.

"After The Party"

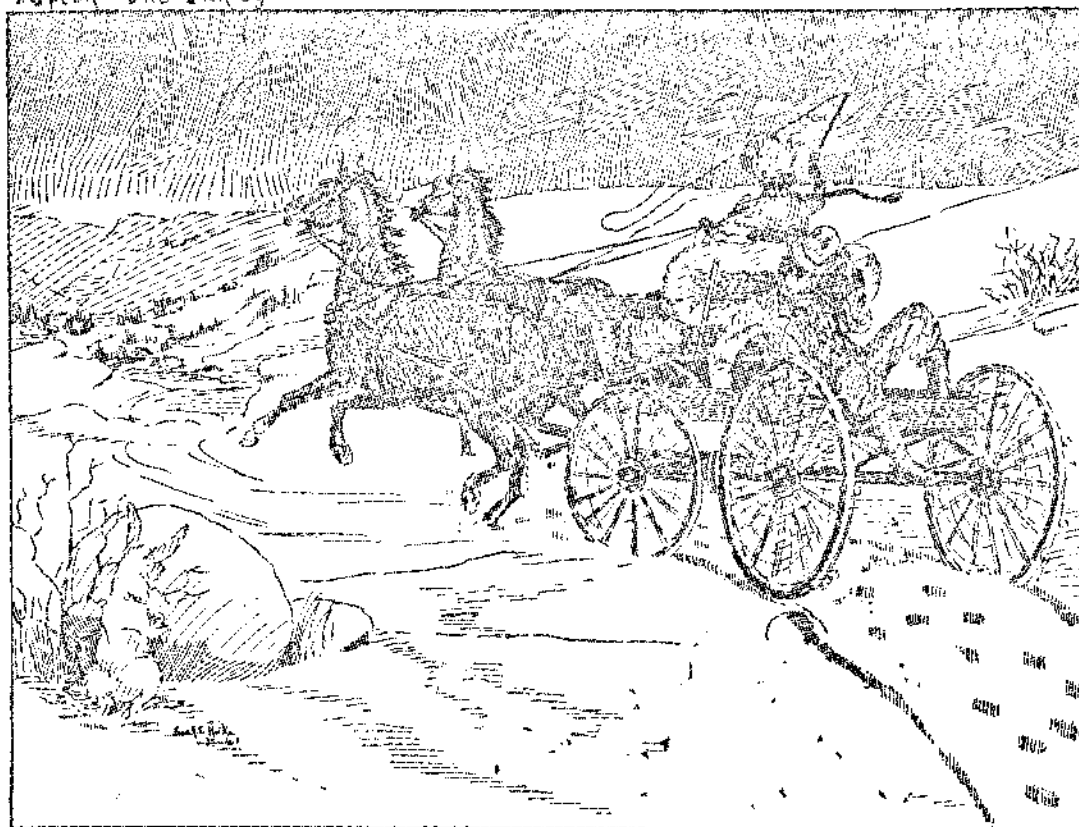


Figure 33. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.

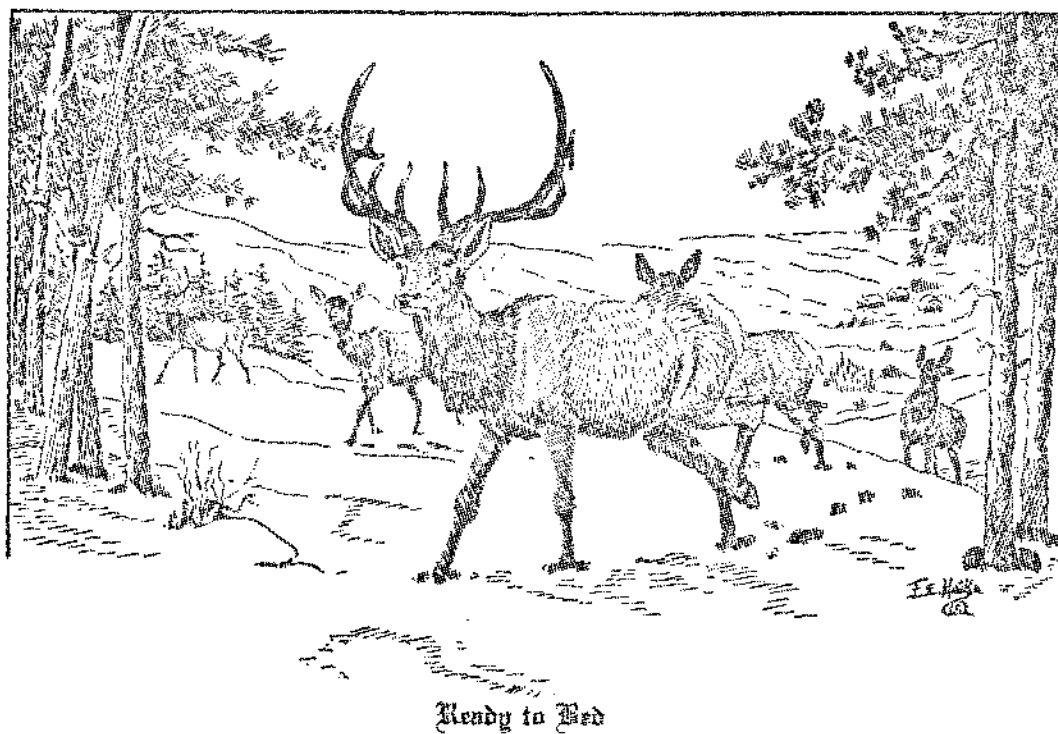


Figure 34. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.



Snowbound

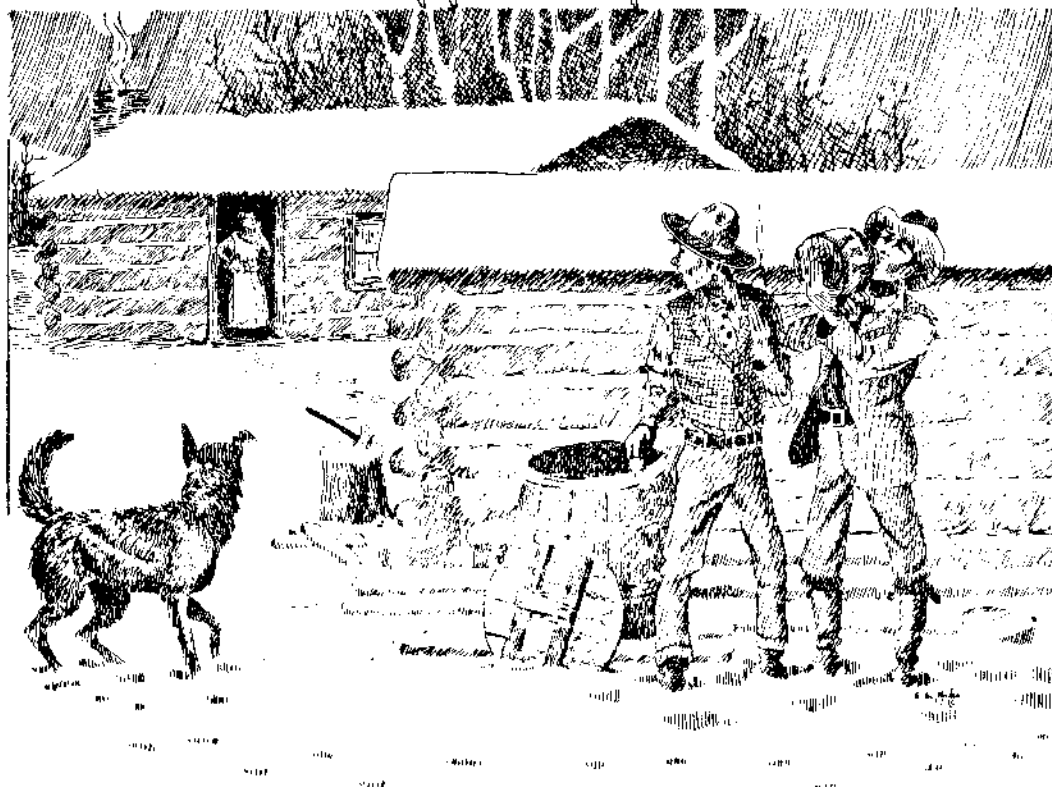
Figure 35. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.



- Hardrock - Silver - Roany  
20 - years ago

Figure 36. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.

# A Menchie Christmas



The Giveaway

Figure 37. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.



The Three Wise Men

Figure 38. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.





**Oh! Thank You!**

Figure 39. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.

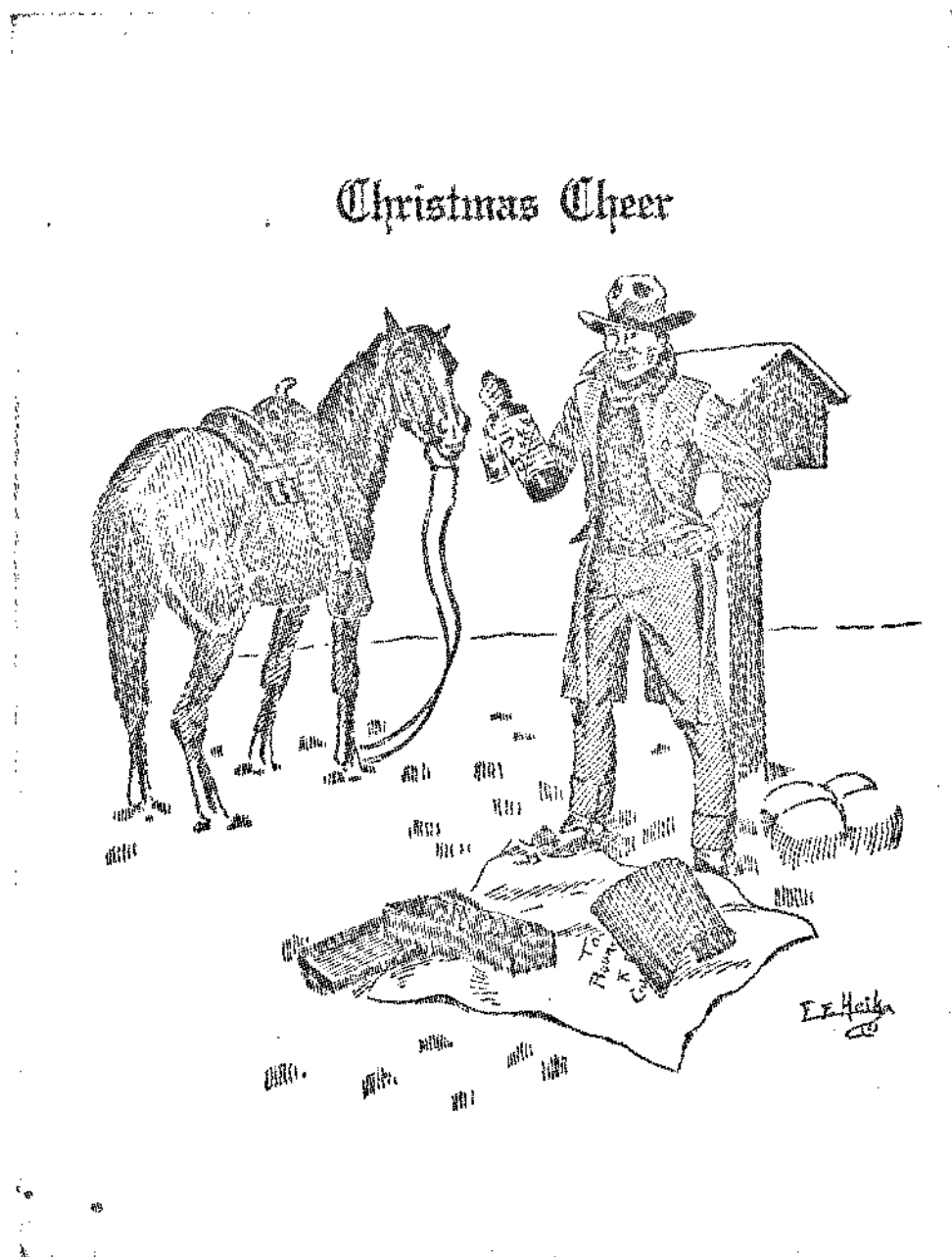
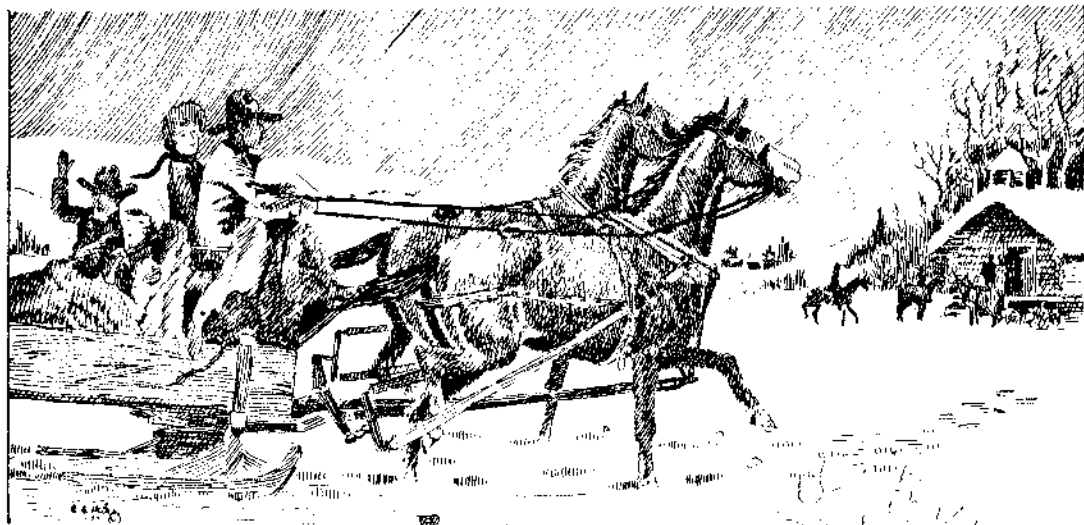


Figure 40. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.

"To The Gatherin'"



Remember the gatherings of long ago,  
 When all the folks from miles around came  
 To the little log school, where the cotton wood grows,  
 The times have changed, my wish is the same,  
 A Merry Xmas and Happy New Year  
 For you

Figure 41. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.

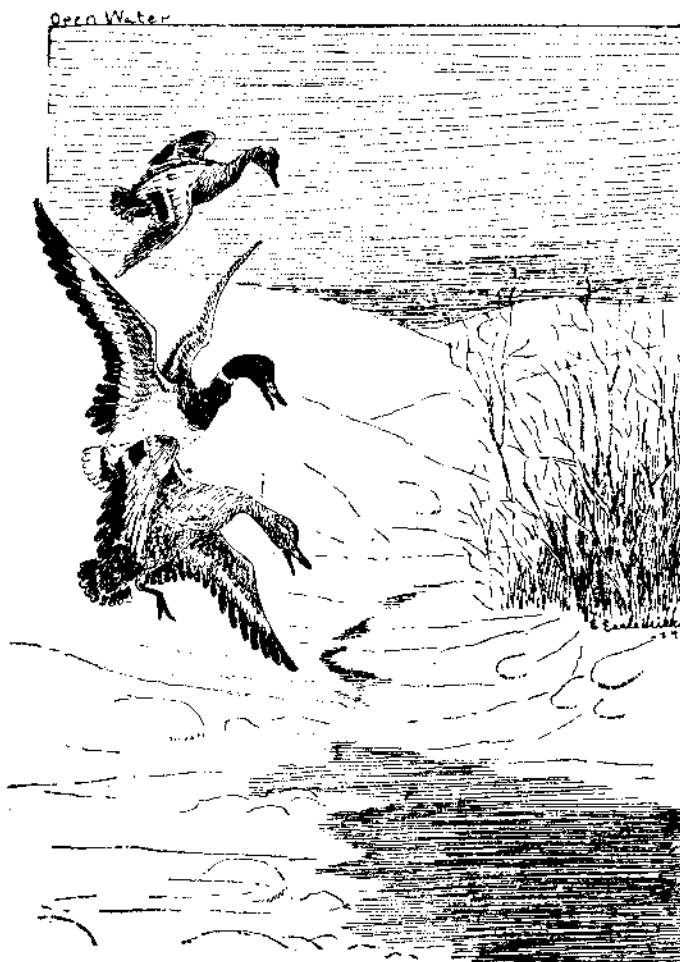
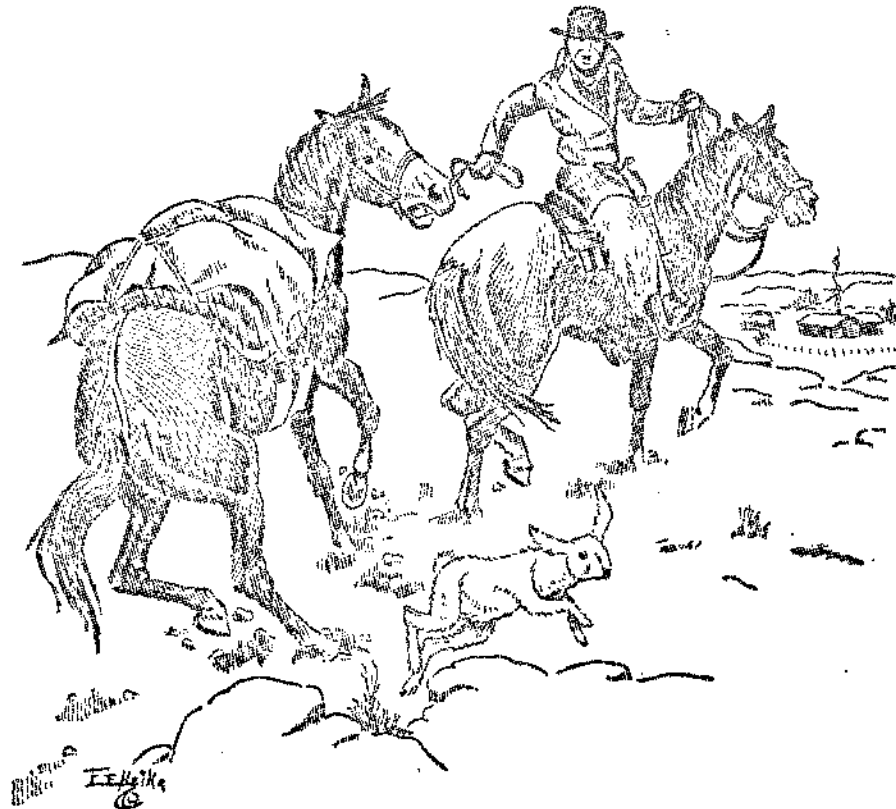


Figure 42. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.



Close to Home

Figure 43. Christmas card, Heika. Egan collection.

large, framed dioramas. These "in-depth" works are curved, painted backgrounds combined either with a model or with stuffed birds. One of the latter may be seen today at the Great Falls Sporting Goods Company in the same spot it has occupied for over thirty-five years. It shows two pheasants, a male and a female. The male stands majestically, his tail extending across the front of the scene, while the less brilliant female bends in search of food. (See Figure 44.)



Figure 44. Pheasant diorama, Heika. Great Falls Sporting Goods Company.

Another diorama is Heika's scene showing the country doctor racing the stork to a lonely cabin in the hills. The doctor in his carriage is one of Earl's earlier models. According to family legend, this is the country doctor who delivered the artist. (See Figure 45.)

Even as his work became increasingly well-known, life was more frustrating for the artist. His friends report that his drinking continued at an accelerated rate and that family friction was constant. The close proximity of the wife's family home to that of the Heika's was a problem. When disturbances arose, Virginia took the children and went to her parents'



Figure 45. Racing the Stork, diorama, Heika.

home, often to remain there for several days. The emotional strain was difficult for Earl to hide. His stuttering, always a frustration to him, became noticeably worse.

In the early part of 1940, Earl received outstanding publicity for a lone rider, The Lookout, which was purchased by J.P. Medlin of Great Falls. The sculpture, a man seated on horseback with a rifle across his lap, was presented by Medlin to B.W. Kerr, president of the Railway and Industrial Engineering Company of Greensburg, Pennsylvania. Mr. Kerr gave it to his advertising department to be photographed. Eric Zimmerman of the Von Senden Agency of Pittsburgh placed the sculpture in



front of a picture on a Great Northern Railway poster; the combination produced a startling effect. It looked like a rider on watch along a ridge in the Rocky Mountains. (See Fig.46.)

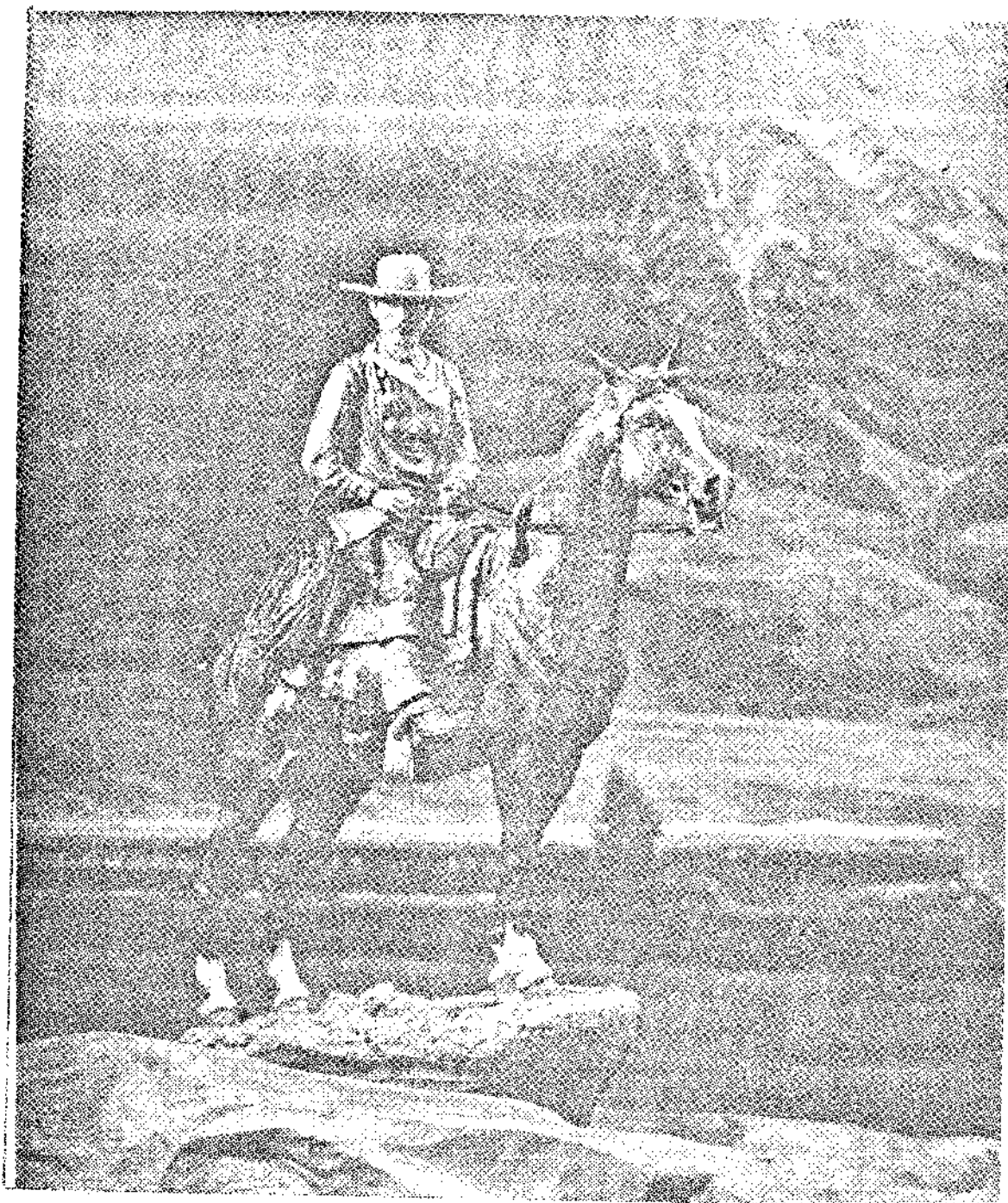


Figure 46. The Lookout, sculpture, Heika.



This Zimmerman photograph received wide distribution, providing Heika with his first national coverage. The model of The Lookout is now a part of the personal collection of Dr. Robert Skinner of Great Falls.

Particularly in small towns, the public is interested in the activities of the townspeople. As a local boy making a name for himself in the art world, Earl's comings and goings were often noted in Great Falls. On May 8, 1940, his picture, with three other Montanans, appeared in the Great Falls Daily Leader, announcing his participation in "the famous trek of the Rancheros Vistados of Santa Barbara, California." Upon his return, he completed the log-cabin home and studio he constructed with his father-in-law's help. The house, with a low, sloping semi-A-frame roof, was located near the edge of Great Falls, south of the county poor farm, and adjacent to the home of his wife's parents, the E.W. Middletons. (See Fig.47.)

Early in the spring of 1941, the fourth child, a son, was born to Virginia and Earl. The other children were a daughter, Kathleen, and two small boys, Earl and Gary. The children were the pawns in the recurring disagreements between the two parents. On the fifteenth of May, culminating a family argument, Virginia took the children and went to her parents' home. Despite the pleadings of her husband, she remained. Earl went on a roaring "binge" which lasted for two days. On Sunday morning, May 18, he drove up to the Middleton home, honking his horn, and began bumping the house.



Figure 47. Heika home built by artist in Great Falls. Shown outside house, Earl and daughter, Kathleen.

demanding a conference with his wife. At six o'clock, his brother-in-law, Gordon, called the sheriff, who arrived at six-fifteen. Approaching the car, the sheriff found Heika dead of a self-inflicted wound; he had shot himself through the chest with a .32 automatic rifle and had died immediately.

He had threatened before to commit suicide, but no one took his threats seriously. His life ended on a spring morning fifteen days after his thirtieth birthday and twenty-five miles from his birthplace. His life, which held such potential, had become too complicated; his genius, which had only begun to be recognized, was gone.

Earl was buried, after Christian Science rites, in the Highland cemetery in Great Falls. Virginia moved to California, where she remarried and remained until her death in February, 1971. The children were raised in Los Angeles, where they still reside.

## Recollections

Having spent a good portion of his youth with the Egan family, Heika continued a close association with them after he moved to Great Falls. Esther Egan looked with motherly love on her younger brother. She overlooked his faults and saw only his gentleness and potential, which may account for the fact that Earl rarely stuttered around her or her family.

Bill Egan, only seven years younger than his uncle, thought of Earl as an older brother. As a child, he trailed after the older boy and tried to copy everything he did. After Earl, as a young man, had decided on an art career, he had a studio in a small, rectangular brick building on 2nd Street, North. Bill and his younger brother, Frank, visited there and slept in the rear of the building on a day bed. Heika cooked for them on the wood stove and took them to the fairgrounds to view the wonders of the North Montana State Fair, thereby cementing the love of the boys for the artist. Today, after forty years, that visit is a vivid memory to both men.

During the late 1930's, Bill, a student at Montana School of Mines in Butte, watched his uncle create one of Heika's largest works, a relief map of the State of Montana, made for the Montana Power Company. The huge map still adorns the offices of that company in Butte. When he began to build his log-cabin home, Earl asked Bill to assist, which he did.

Back in Lewistown, the Egan boys (there were five) looked forward to visits from their uncle. He came often in the

years after his schooling ended and he always stayed long enough to take his nephews fishing in Spring Creek. During summer visits, he joined in the noisy gatherings of neighborhood boys as they swam in the chill, 58°, waters of Spring Creek north of town. He came in the early fall to attend the Fergus County Fair, first to watch the rodeo with the family, then to join the riders at the cowbarn for an all-night game of poker. His enthusiasm was greater than his skill at card playing, so he frequently arrived at home broke.

Earl's older brothers, Frank and Charlie, married while he was quite young. His favorite brother, Mike, married in 1927. Until the two older men left Great Falls, he was a regular visitor in their homes. After they moved to California, he went there to visit and stayed for nearly a year after he found a job on the railroad.

Heika was quite devoted to his family. He was anxious to please them and was thoughtful of them. When he travelled, he wrote regularly to his mother and step-father and, often, to his sisters and brothers. After he married, he continued this practice.

After Virginia and Earl married, they lived in a series of inexpensive apartments. One room of their dwelling was Earl's studio, which was filled with his equipment and a collection of Indian artifacts. An elderly Indian, whose name is now forgotten, met Earl, liked his sculpture, and gave him his treasured keepsakes, fearing they would be lost in

the event of his death. These included a headdress, a tubular breastplate, a medicine bag, and some moccasins.

Laura Stainsby recalls that she and her husband, Mike Heika, spent several evenings a week with Virginia and Earl. First at one home, then at the other, they dined together and shared experiences. Earl was a sensitive young man whom Edna Hendrickson, the widow of Earl's uncle Dick, knew as having spells of moodiness and brooding. She felt that he desired a better life for his family than he was able to provide. His travels to both coasts and to the Southwest had given him opportunities of seeing ways of life new to him. He was frustrated by his life. After his death, Virginia stayed at the home of the Hendricksons for some time. She told them that Earl had dreamed of improving the quality of their lives, but that she had not shared his concern. While Mike lived, he had provided the "cheerful attitude and good-natured optimism that Earl needed." Without Mike, he could not face life.( 10. )

It has been suggested that Earl's stuttering and his drinking were escape mechanisms, that he had an unhappy family life. Evidence seems to support that his was, indeed, a troubled life. But, it was not one without the love provided by close family ties. He lived in a rough, tough land, one where hard drinking was part of everyday experience. Saloons and bars were the gathering places for the men of the community. It was natural and normal, in that time and place,

for him to seek a familiar escape from his troubles. That he was unable to control his drinking and ended his life while under its influence is regrettable.

Figure 48 shows the photograph of him used with publicity for his exhibits. It was taken several years before his death.

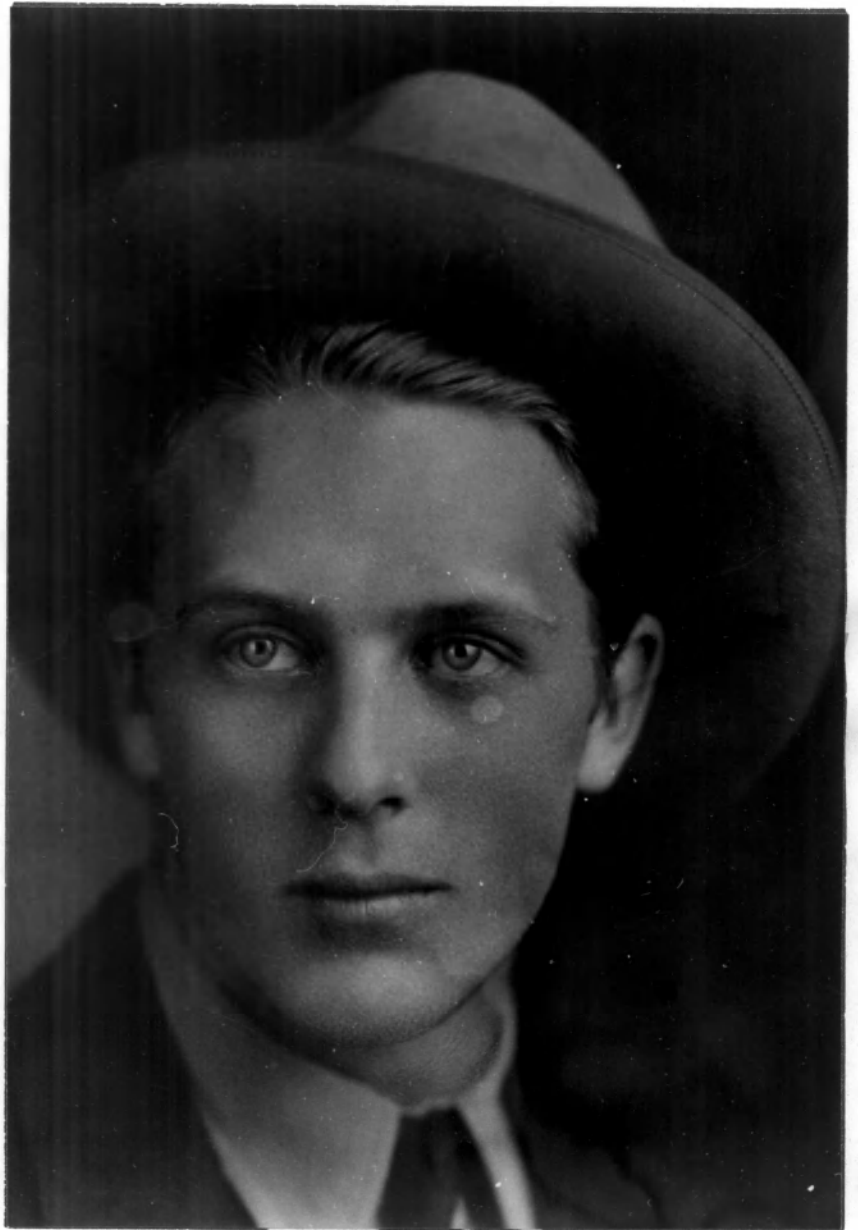


Figure 48. Earl Heika, Montana sculptor, 1910-1941.

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4. Great Falls Tribune, June 9, 1930.
5. Great Falls Tribune, December 31, 1930.
6. Great Falls Tribune, May 28, 1933.
7. Earl Heika, letter to sisters in Lewistown, Montana, February 24, 1935.
8. Earl Heika, postcard to parents from Cheyenne, Wyoming, July 23, 1936.
9. Great Falls Tribune, December 19, 1938.
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## CHAPTER III

### HEIKA'S ART

#### Types of Works

Heika came from a family that possessed artistic skills. His brother, Mike, was a cartoonist. It was this brother who persuaded Earl to try his hand at pen and ink drawings for Christmas cards, a seasonal work that provided Mike with a small income. Esther Egan, the artist's sister, is a talented amateur artist who has exhibited pastel portraits and still lifes in her hometown. When the youngest brother displayed an interest in art, his family encouraged him.

During the approximately twelve years that Earl practiced art professionally, his work fell into four categories. These are sculpture, three-dimensional, painting, and drawing. Most of his time was devoted to sculptured pieces, which, like Charlie Russell, he called models. Occasionally, and only on a commissioned basis, he made dioramic scenes which often included some of his models. Painting was an art form that he attempted periodically, there being records of less than half a dozen completed Heika paintings. His drawings were of Western scenes which he made for reproduction on Christmas cards. The non-permanent nature of these has resulted in very few examples remaining.

Earl's sculpting technique was self-taught; he had no



formal art training, though his ambition was to study in Europe. Before he began a sculpture, he made several pencil sketches. When he achieved what he was seeking, he used that drawing as a guide to developing the model. Figure 49 shows the sketch from which he made Heading for the High Country, a work that is now part of the collection of the National Cowboy Hall of Fame. (See Figure 50.) He devised a successful



Figure 49. Heika's pencil sketch from which he made Heading for the High Country.

method of assembling his materials for his models and he never changed it. He applied Marble-X, a taxidermist's clay, over a wire armature, around which he had wound narrow strips of cloth. The wire was attached to a wooden base which he covered

with clay. On some types of works, bucking horses, for instance, he attached the wire at only one point. In spite of the delicate balance needed for such structures, he

managed to secure them so firmly that there is no

flexibility. While the clay was drying, Earl set the model on an open stove door. This procedure heated the clay and dried it. He used artist's oil paints to cover the clay completely, thereby sealing it.

Heika's method was simple but successful. It worked with single, small animals, such as the sheep in Figure 51, on numerous large animals, as a harness team on a stagecoach seen in Figure 52, or groups of human figures, as in the stagecoach robbery scene in Figure 53.

The dioramas Earl made were commercial undertakings. Most of them were constructed for the Great Falls Sporting Goods Company, where they were displayed for the promotion of seasonal sales. Duck hunting is seen in the Heika diorama in



Figure 50. Heading for the High Country, Heika. From the collection in the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage, Oklahoma City.



Figure 51. Bighorn sheep, Heika.

taxidermy skills as well as his art.

Figure 54. After being used, the dioramas were placed in a storeroom at the Sporting Goods store. There they were broken or lost. The only one remaining intact is the pheasant work seen in Figure 44. It is an example of the excellence of Earl's



Figure 52. Old-time Stagecoach, Heika.





Figure 53. Stagecoach Hold-up, Heika.



Figure 54. Duck-hunting diorama, Heika.



Figure 55. Wolf, watercolor, Heika, 1929.

On March 20, 1929, Earl submitted a small, 5"x7" watercolor painting to an exhibition in Great Falls. (See page 13.) It was a poorly executed picture of a wolf. (See Figure 55.) On the wall of his studio, amidst his Indian artifacts, he hung his painting of a group of four Indians crossing frozen winter grass. (See Figure 56.) Another winter scene is his



Figure 56. Indians crossing winter prairie,  
oil, Heika.

painting of a returning hunting party. (See Figure 57.) In this work, two riders are accompanied by pack animals which carry freshly killed deer across a snow-covered hill.





Figure 57. Hunters in winter with laden pack horses, oil, Heika.

Figure 58 is an autumn hunt scene. Here, the hunter has just fired at a buck on a mountainside in the background. Earl varied the signature he placed on his works. The wolf painting and autumn hunt painting are signed "Heikka," a variation he employed half-a-dozen times.

Heika's drawings are illustrated in Figures 32 through 43. Few other examples of these have been found. There is one other drawing of a different type, a 7"x12" nude sketch of his wife. This ink and watercolor drawing is part of the Egan collection.



Figure 58. Autumn hunting scene, oil, Heika, 1936.

#### Subjects of Works

Heika's works are uniquely Western in subject matter. Hunting and riding are predominant themes, but there is a wide variety of other material. With few exceptions, he incorporates animal life into his art. Only the Indian and Russell busts (Figures 26 and 27), the miner (Figure 30), and the relief map (See Page 51) omit animal figures. Included in his works are the following: animals (bison, bears, horses, skunks, deer, sheep), Western lore (stagecoach, covered wagon, stagecoach robbery), hunters, rodeo riders, ranch hands, mining, guides,



Indians, Russell, and Montana geography (in dioramas). Other than in his drawings, he never depicted women. Only the rugged outdoorsman is part of Heika's view of the West.

In the original ink sketch seen in Figure 59, Heika shows an animal long vanished from the Montana landscape. Made in 1940, this work is part of the Egan collection. The paint pony carrying the hunter's kill is a 1936 Heika oil painting. (See Figure 60.) The angry grizzly bear in Figure 61 is protecting her cubs from approaching riders. Three more



Figure 59. Ink sketch of buffalo herd, Heika, 1940.

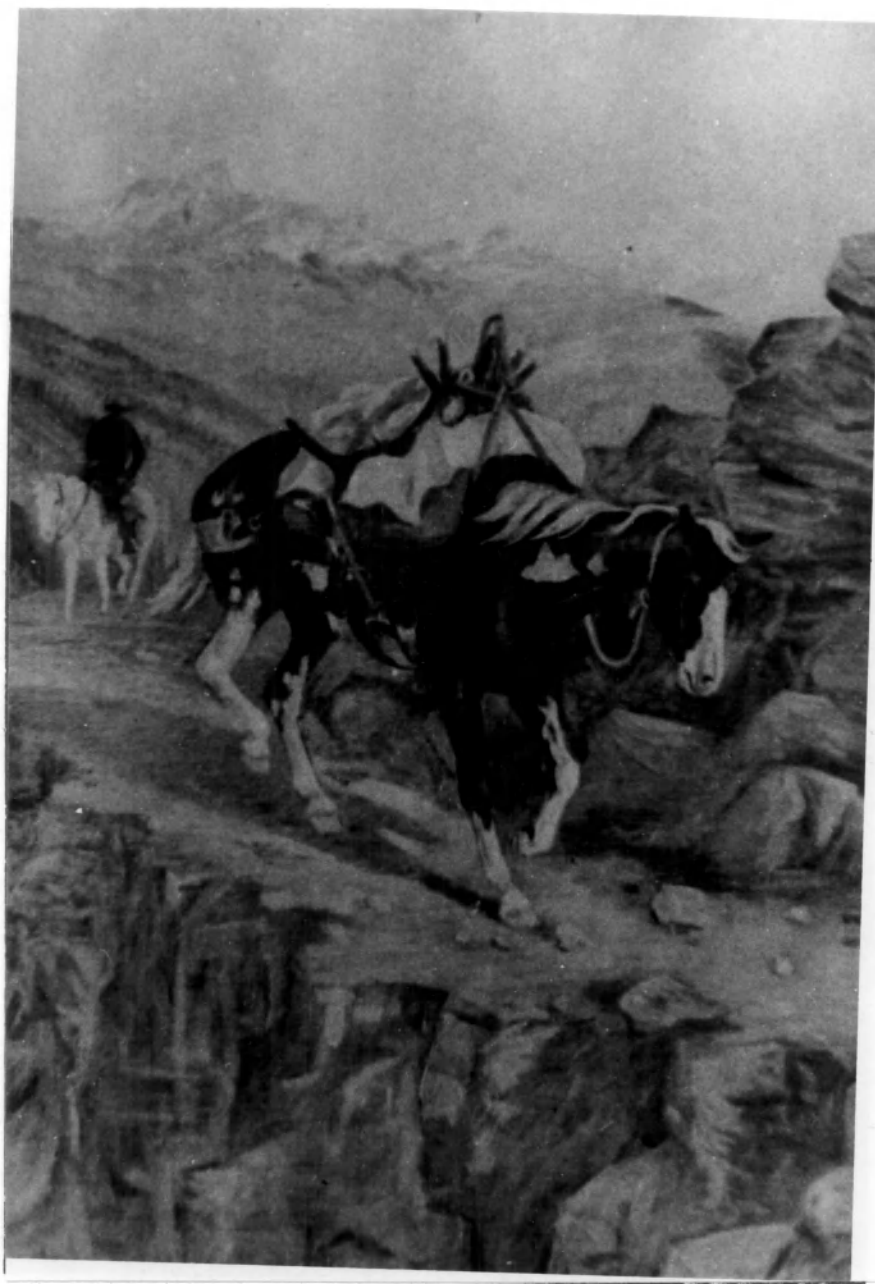


Figure 60. The hunter's kill carried downhill by paint pony, oil, Heika, 1936.



Figure 61. Grizzly Bear. Detail of Too Crowded, National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Heika bears are seen in Figures 62, 63, and 64. The small one in Figure 62 was made in 1934 for the Great Falls Sporting Goods Company. The picture



Figure 62. Grizzly Bear Sculpture, Heika, Great Falls Sporting Goods Company.

was taken in their office in 1969. The slightly damaged bear in Figure 63 is owned by Esther Egan, whose children played with this model. The group of grizzly and cubs in Figure 64 was an early Heika work.

A Heika diorama showing a lone hunter returning from a successful hunt is seen in Figure 65. Figure 66 is a painting that

depicts the return of two hunters from a hunt. With them are three pack horses. The diamond hitch pictured on the horses helped hold their loads.



Figure 63. Grizzly Bear, Egan Collection.



Figure 64. Grizzly family confronted by skunk, sculpture. Heika.





Figure 65. Returning hunters, Diorama, Heika.



Figure 66. Hunting party, oil, Heika.



Figure 67. Heading for the High Country, Heika, National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

back departing for a hunt; or, he depicts them returning from the hunt, afoot, beside the horse which carries the kill from the hunt. A departing hunter is seen in Figure 69; additional views of this work

are in Figures 67 and 68. Two sculptures showing returning hunters are in Figures 70 and 73. An additional view is in Figure 71, and a detail is in Figure 74. The

Heika's sculptures of hunters fall into two categories -- the lone horseman, and pack trains. In the first of these types, he shows one or two men on horse-



Figure 68. Additional view, Heading for the High Country.



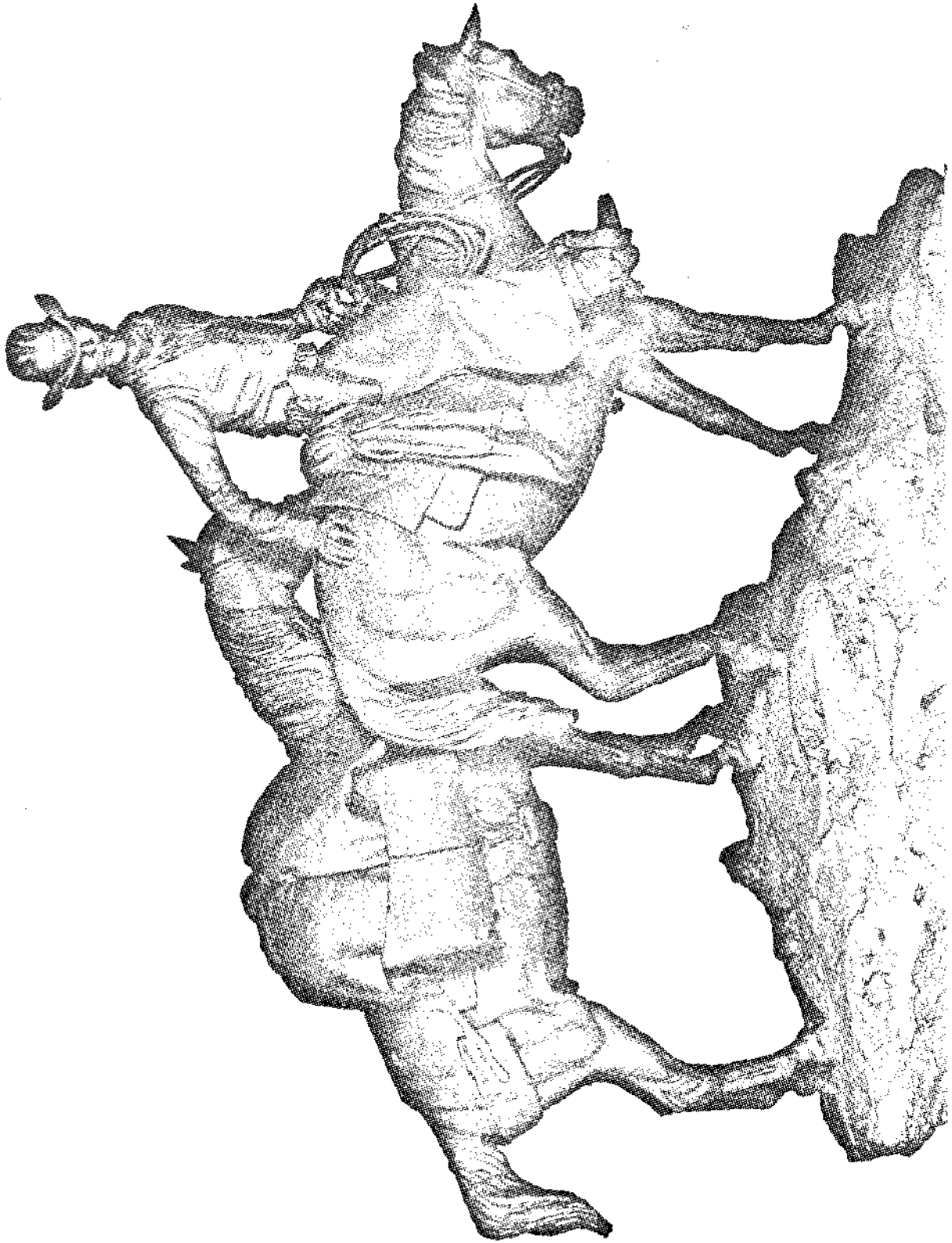


Figure 69. Heading for the High Country, Heika, National Cowboy Hall of Fame.





Figure 70. Down from the High Country, Heika, National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage.

Returning Hunter in Figure 72 shows the sculpture as it looked when Heika completed it; Figure 73 shows it as it is today.

Just before his death in 1941, Heika sold several models to C.R. Smith, President of American Airlines. Smith later presented the collection to the noted Oklahoma aviation pioneer, O.M. (Red) Mosier, Executive



Figure 71. Detail from Down from the High Country.



Figure 72. Hunter's Return as it originally appeared.



Figure 73. Additional view, Hunter's Return.



Figure 74. Hunter's Return, additional view.

Vice President of American Airlines. When Mosier died six years ago, his widow, Francys Mosier, donated seven Heika sculptures to the new Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage in Oklahoma City. Recognizing the fragile nature of the unfired clay sculptures,

the director of the museum had them sprayed with a thin coating of metal, which gives them a bluish appearance. This is the coloration seen in some of the illustrations of the Oklahoma collection. When the Cowboy Hall of Fame received the works, they were untitled. For ease of identification, the staff gave them names.

Heika's pack trains show groups of three or four horses bearing packs and deer or sheep. Two riders direct the train, one in the lead and one near the rear. An example of a six-horse train is shown in Figures 75 and 76. This work is displayed in the Great Falls Sporting Goods Company. Another six-horse train, one that was once owned by W.A. Clark, III, is in Figure 77. The five-horse train in Figure 78 is an early Heika work.





Figure 75. Pack Train at Great Falls Sporting Goods Company, Heika.



Figure 76. Additional view, Pack Train.



Figure 77. Six-horse Pack Train once owned by W.A.Clark, III.

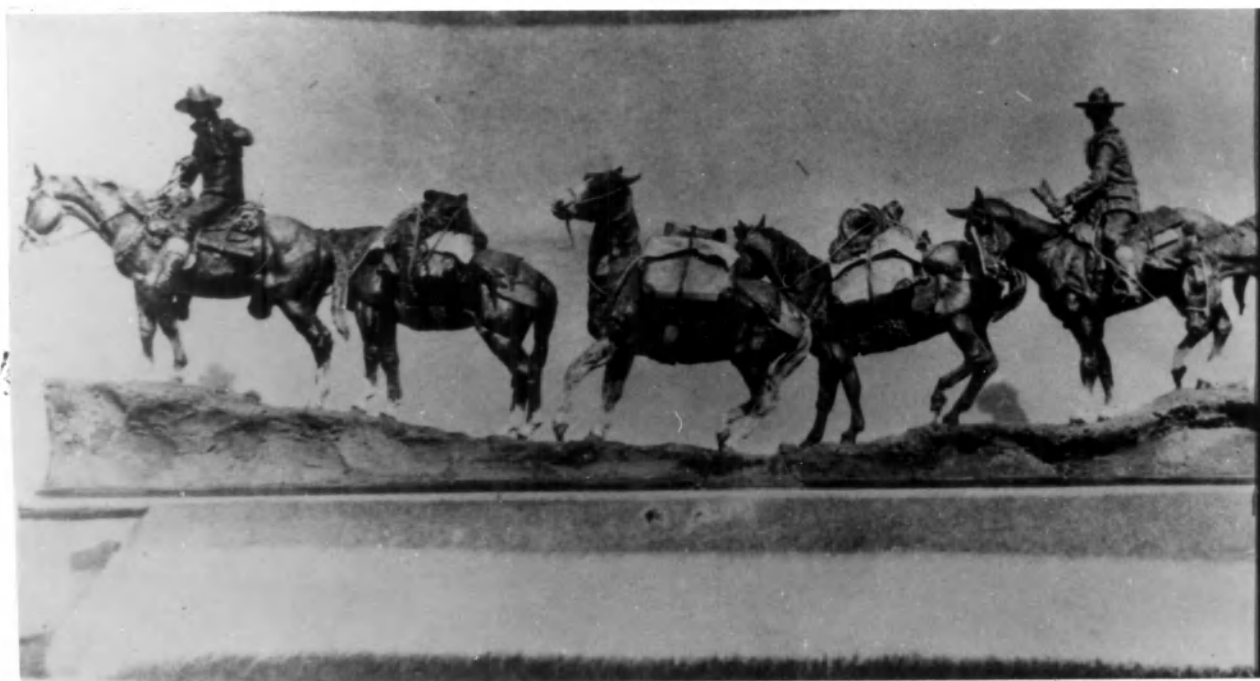


Figure 78. Five-horse Pack Train, an early Heika.



Figure 79. Indian brave on pony, Heika, 1928.

Since Indians were part of the Western scene, Heika dedicated part of his talent to their depiction. More sculptures of native Americans are found among his early works than among his later ones. In 1928 he modelled an Indian brave astride a pony. On this, he placed a stylized "EH" signature. (See Fig. 79.) Other examples of early Heika Indians are a standing Indian with spear (Figure 80) and a Peigan Indian on horseback, the



Figure 81. Peigan Indian, Heika, Laura Stainsby collection.



Figure 80. Indian holding spear, Heika.



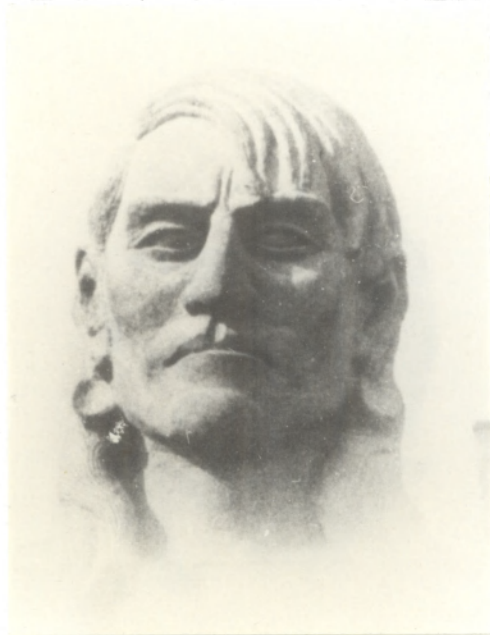


Figure 82. Stone carving of Chippewa Indian, Heika, 1933.

latter owned by Mike Heika's widow. (See Figures 80 and 81.) When he prepared the works for exhibition at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, Heika made his only stone carving (Page 20), which depicted a Chippewa Indian. (See Figure 82.) The Indian couple with papoose was also part of the sculptures he showed in Chicago. (See Figure 83.)



Figure 83. Indian couple on horseback with papoose, Heika. Part of exhibit to Chicago World's Fair, 1933.



Figure 84. Pack Horse,  
Charles Russell Galleries,  
Great Falls.



Figure 85. Pack Horse.



Figure 86. Saddle Horse,  
Russell Galleries, Great Falls.



Figure 87. Saddle Horse.



Although Earl rarely modelled single, riderless horses, two excellent examples of these are shown with two views of each in Figures 84 through 87. Both are bronze castings of original works.

Many of Heika's works are horsemen. These take many forms, but they generally fall into two divisions, those showing action in progress and those without action. As he learned to handle the balancing problems, more of the pieces showed action.

Figure 88 is a rider playing a guitar. The horse, though his feet are raised,

has an awkward stance because of the wires the artist used to attach his feet to the base. The same problem is evident in the work in Fig. 89. One solution seemed to be in placing all of the feet of the animals securely on the ground,



Figure 88. Horseman playing guitar, Heika.

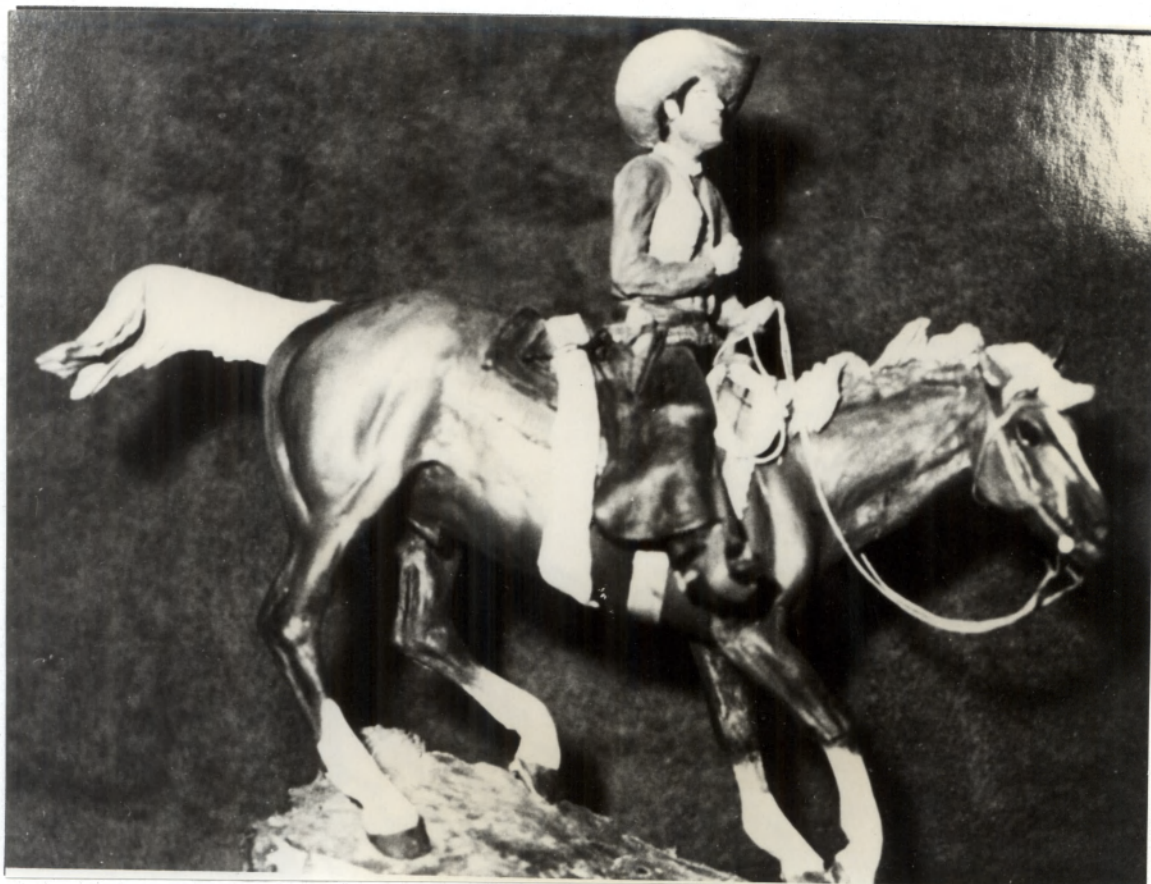


Figure 89. Horseman, an early Heika work.

as he did in Early Montana Cowboy (Figure 90) and the cigarette smoker in Figure 91.

Frontiersmen are the subject of the works in Figures 92, 93, and 94. The model in Figure 95, Buffalo Bill, was part of the exhibit at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933. The Road Agent in Figure 96 shows the rider dismounted from his horse, as does the work in Figure 97. The latter is a print of an original photographic negative made by the artist upon his completion of the sculpture.





Figure 90. Early Montana Cowboy, Heika.



Figure 91. Cowboy smoking a cigarette, Heika. Cottier collection.



Figure 92. Detail of Frontiersman, Heika. Egan collection.



Figure 93. Frontiersman with rifle, Heika.



Figure 94. Frontiersman with fringed coat, Heika.

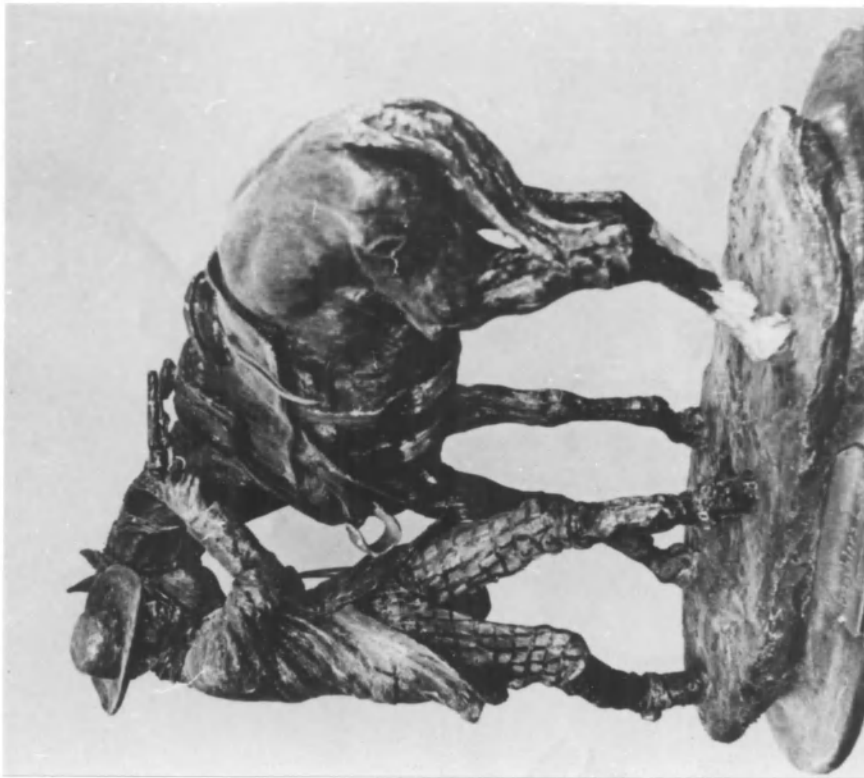


Figure 96. The Road Agent, Heika.



Figure 95. Buffalo Bill, Heika.





Figure 97. Seated cowboy beside his horse, printed from the original photographic negative made by Heika upon completion of this sculpture.

A hold-up man, or a road agent, was a popular subject with Heika. He made several models on this theme. A single figured work is seen soon after Heika completed it. (See Figure 98.)

A bronze of another Road Agent is shown in



Figure 98. The Road Agent, photograph of original.



Figure 99. Road Agent, Heika. Bronze.

Figure 99. Another bronze Heika Road Agent is being offered for sale at this time by the Classic Bronze Company of Pittsburgh. The Road Agent with wounded man, a multi-figured work is shown in Figure 100 as it looked when Heika completed it.

A single cowboy brandishing a gun is shown in Figure 101. The hatless rider on a bucking bronco in Figures 102, 103, and 104 is titled The Contestant. Heika gave this sculpture to



Figure 100. Road Agent with wounded man, as it appeared when Heika completed it.

his sister, Esther Egan. A group of five "bronco busters" is shown in Figures 102, 105, 108, 109, and 110. Details of some of the hard-working cowhands are in Figures 103, 104, 106, and 107. The last two figures in this group, Figures 109 and 110, are examples of two closely related works. Superficially, they are identical; close examination reveals that they are not. Trappings under the saddles, placement of the coiled rope, the horse's mane, the angle of the reins, and the slant of the hat are some of the differences.



Figure 101. Cowboy with gun, Heika.





Figure 103. Detail of The Contestant.



Figure 104. Detail of The Contestant.

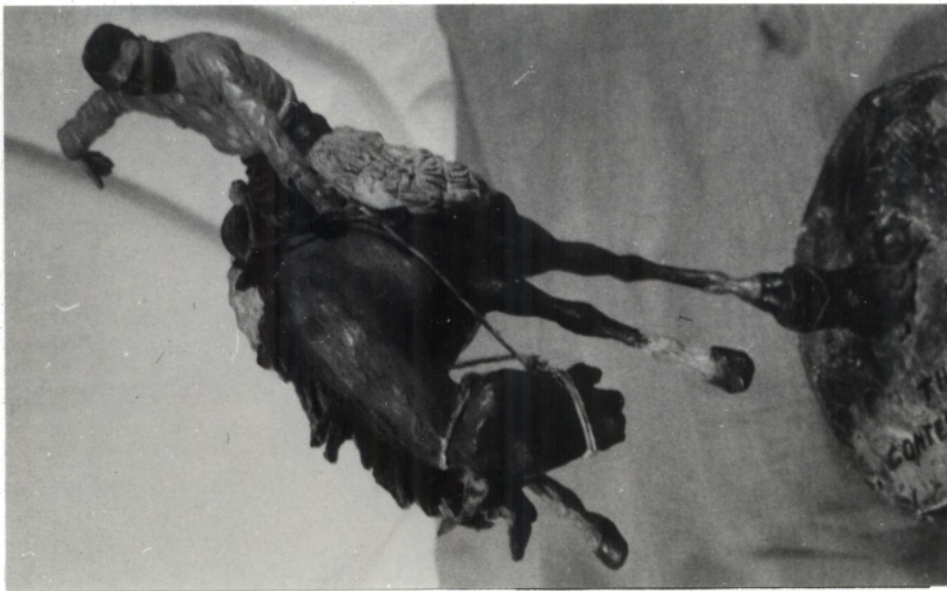


Figure 102. The Contestant,  
Heika. Egan collection.



Figure 105. Bronco Buster, Heika, Egan collection.



Figure 108. Bronco Buster, Great Falls Sporting Goods Co.



Figure 106. Detail of Bronco Buster in Fig. 105.



Figure 107. Detail of Bronco Buster in Fig. 105.





Figure 109. Bronco Buster, Heika.



Figure 110. Bronco Buster, Heika.

Heika's multi-figured works are composed of combinations of different kinds of figures. He puts animal and human forms together to picture adventures of the West. In these group sculptures, his skill with movement and form is most effective.

The prospector who, with his burro, traversed Montana in the nineteenth century is seen in his work in Figure 111. This sculpture was part of Heika's exhibit in Chicago at the World's Fair in 1933. Figures 112 and 113 show the work entitled Prospector's Decision from the collection at the Cowboy



Figure 111. Prospector and burro, Heika, 1933.

Hall of Fame. A miner on the trail, followed by his pack horse, is shown in Figure 114. Titled Ready to Hit the Trail, this is also part of the collection in Oklahoma City.

A cowboy on the trail accompanied by his pack horse is

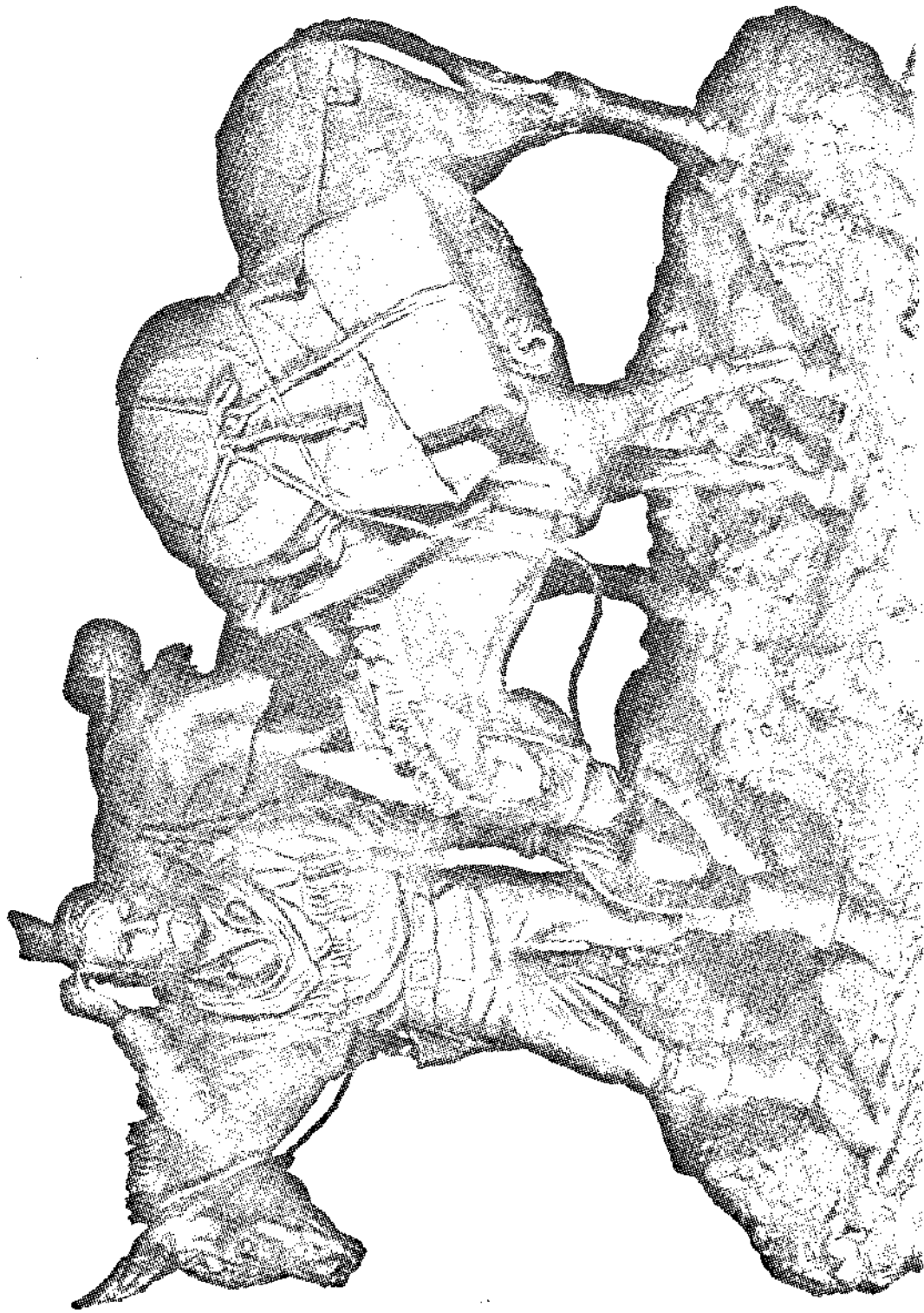


Figure 112. Prospector's Decision, Heika, 1941. National Cowboy Hall of Fame.



seen in each of the two works in Figures 114 and 116.

A buffalo hunter who has met with difficulty is shown in Figure 117. This is another work from 1933.



Figure 113. Prospector's Decision.



Figure 114. Cowboy on the trail, Heika.

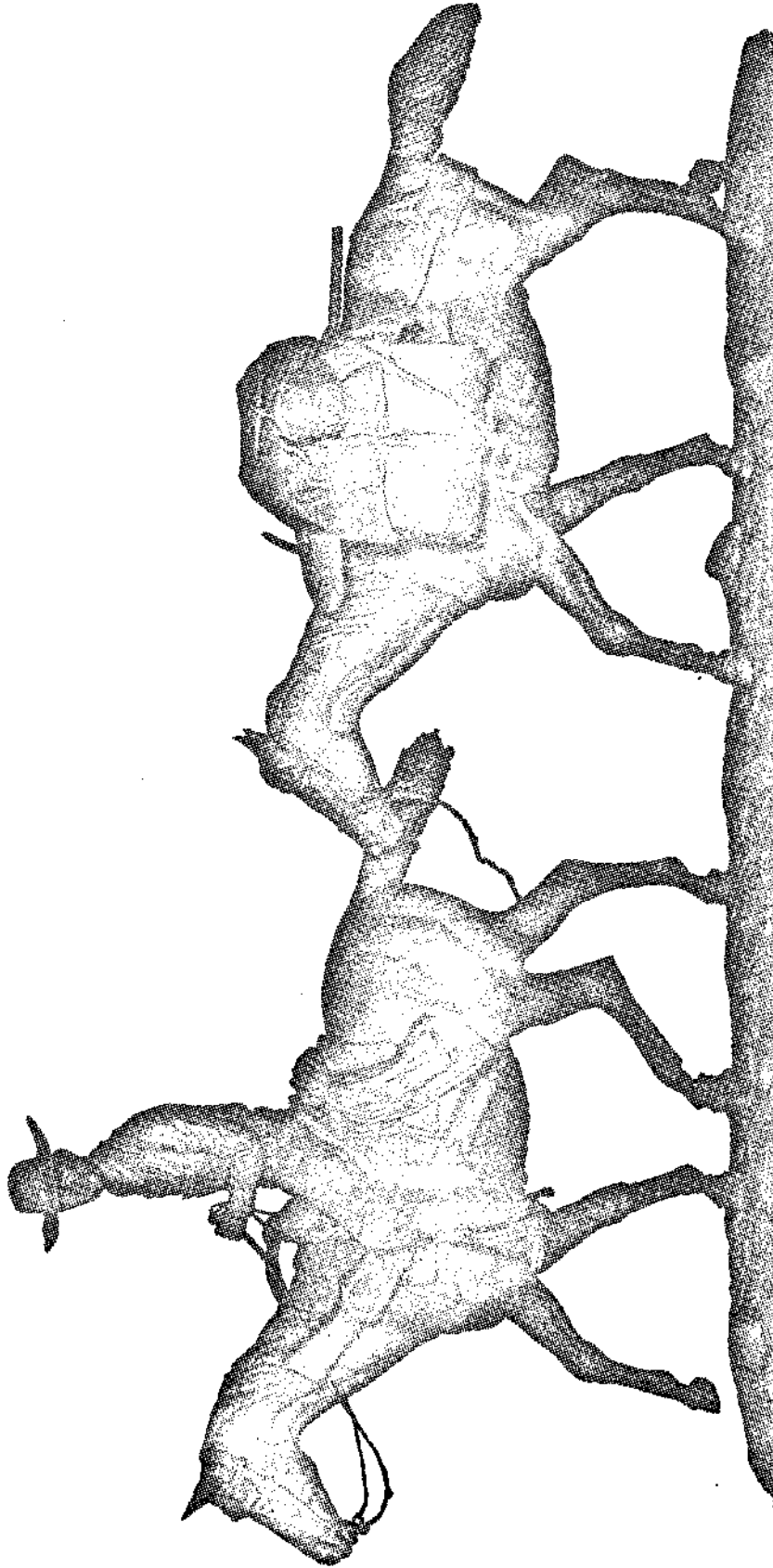


Figure 115. Ready to Hit the Trail, Heika, 1941. National Cowboy Hall of Fame.



Figure 116. Cowboy on the trail, Heika.



Figure 117. Buffalo hunter, Heika.





Figure 118. Covered wagon pulled by oxen.

One of Earl's more unusual sculptures is seen in Figure 118. This is a covered wagon pulled by two yoke of oxen. A horseman points out directions to the occupant of the wagon and the man walking alongside the oxen.



Figure 119. Detail from Too Crowded, Heika, 1941. National Cowboy Hall of Fame.



Figure 120. Detail of Too Crowded.

From the National Cowboy Hall of Fame comes the work, Too Crowded, seen in Figures 119, 120, and 122. The picture in Figure 121 shows the same work as it looked when Heika completed it. The other illustrations show the sculpture as it looks after



Figure 121. Too Crowded as it appeared when Heika completed it in 1941.



Figure 122. Too Crowded, Heika, 1941. National Cowboy Hall of Fame.



a metal coating was applied by the museum in Oklahoma City.

Changing Riders on the Pony Express, one of Heika's final sculptures, is shown in Figure 123 as it looked when the artist finished it. Figure 124 shows it as it is today in the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.



Figure 123. Changing Riders on the Pony Express as it appeared when Heika completed it in 1941.

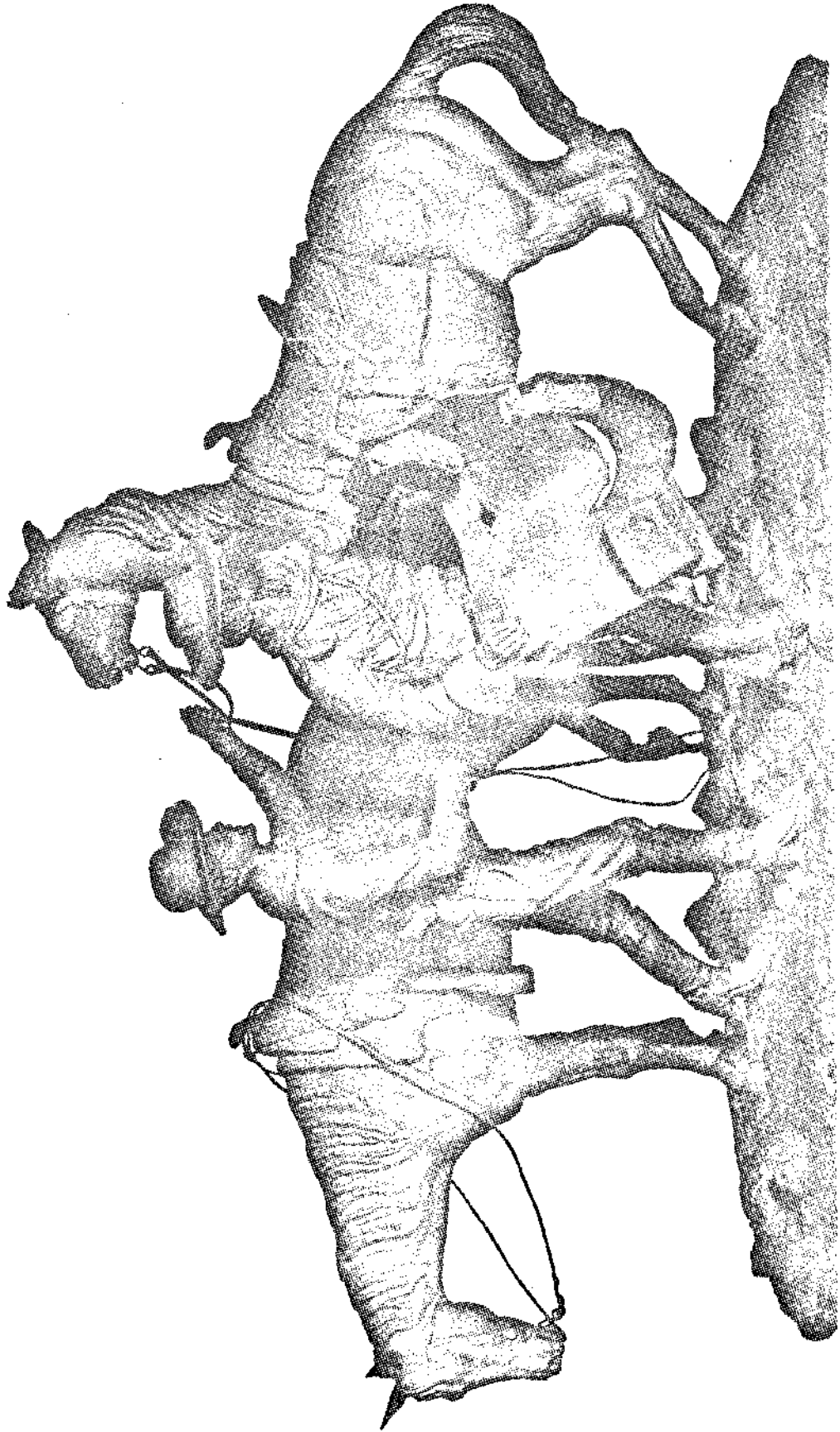


Figure 124. Changing Riders on the Pony Express, Helka, 1941. National Cowboy Hall of Fame, Oklahoma City.



### Context of Works

Like his fellow Montanan, Charlie Russell, Earl Heika portrayed in his art those facets of the West with which he was familiar. In paintings, sculptures, and dioramas, he showed the miner, the cowboy, and the Indian as they existed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Earl and his brother Mike often visited the Blackfeet Indians on the reservation at Browning, Montana. In his studio in Great Falls, he had a collection of Indian memorabilia which was given to him by an Indian friend. His knowledge of the Montana Indians was first-hand information, gleaned by close association with them. In painting and in sculpture, he captured the spirit of the Red man before his complete capitulation to the white man's civilization.

Frederick Remington saw the West from the vantage point of his Eastern studio. He made periodic trips through the western part of the United States to obtain material for his paintings and sculptures of Western subjects, works which he returned to the East coast to complete. Heika and Russell lived the lives they portrayed in art, and they produced their works amidst that which they depicted. They lived among the Indians and cowboys and understood them. Remington saw only the soldiers who came to the West to conquer the Indians. To him, the Indians were the bad guys; to Russell and Heika, they were the heroes.

Charlie Russell was a cowhand-turned-artist; Earl Heika was an artist who worked on a ranch. Their views of their co-workers are, consequently, somewhat similar. Both saw the drunken frolic of the cowboy in his spare time. Each showed the cowhand as he tried to subdue the wild horses that roamed Montana between the Missouri River and the Canadian border. Heika, like Russell, expressed his love of the Western land and of the people who tamed it.

Heika's cowboys are hard-working, hard-drinking, sun-burned men who wear leather vests and chaps. Their boots are high-heeled, and their hats are wide brimmed and well-worn. They sit their horses well, rising high in the saddle when the mount resists the rein or shies at a rattlesnake.

Russell and Remington were, primarily, painters whose interests in sculpting were secondary. Heika was a sculptor who occasionally painted. These differences in major emphases may account for the superior nature of Heika's models over those of the other cowboy artists. His horses, particularly, have a grace found only in the original animal. In teams, they strain together; yet, each animal is a unique individual. While his cowboys are lean and rugged, Heika's horses are strong and muscular.

Earl's miners are unique in the annals of Western art. No other artist portrayed the prospector or the copper miner, both of whom contributed mightily to the history of Montana. He sculpted the lone prospector, walking the mountains accompanied only by his burro; he modelled the more

successful miner who rode a horse and led a pack animal. Of all Heika's miners, the most unusual is his sculptured miner working the face of a copper mine. It has no equal in subject matter nor in execution.

True to his love of the outdoors, Heika shows every type of hunting party apt to be found on the Montana scene. His pack trains are groups of men with horses who ascend the heights of the Rocky Mountains in search of deer, antelope, or sheep. They return from the mountains with the animals they killed strapped securely to their horses' backs. Sometimes there is only one hunter with two or three horses; more often, there are two or more hunters with as many as six horses. The accuracy with which he depicts hunting scenes is the result of his own personal participation in many such hunts.

Other than public school classes, Earl had no formal art training, certainly none in the art of sculpture. Charlie Russell always kept wax with him so that he could form figures for casting. Earl worked only with clay, with no interest in a more permanent material. As near as can be determined, he was unaware of the lost-wax process. Only one mention of bronze casting is found among his memoirs, and it seems doubtful that he took positive steps in that direction.

His sculptures fall within a narrow size range. The smallest are single animals, such as bears, skunks, and

sheep, which range from five to seven inches high. Single horses average being seven inches tall and ten inches long. In groupings, the horses are slightly smaller. Some of the longest pack trains, those with six horses and four men, are three feet in overall length. Horses with riders, and bucking horses, some with riders, are never over sixteen inches tall. He was comfortable with works in the range of six to sixteen inches.

Since he worked with unfired clay, the limited size of his pieces was important. Only on small works was he able to maintain a consistent moisture content. Keeping a work moist was always a problem to him. He kept a wet cloth over the finished portions of a figure to slow the drying time and eliminate cracking.

Earl worked swiftly but carefully. He often continued through the night to finish a sculpture. Only once did he take longer than a few days to complete a work. He spent more than four months on The Quartz Team. (See Figure 31.)

As a product of the Westward Expansion, Earl Heika preserved for posterity through his art the rugged life that was part of the Montana experience. Isolated from the mainstream of the United States, the north Rocky Mountain area was slow in giving up the life of the frontier. Heika saw the romance of his land and recorded it in his own way.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

The problem posed for this study was to set the record straight about Earl Heika's life and art, to write a Heika biography and analysis. The assembling, sorting, and close examination of much information about Heika was necessary in the accomplishment of such an undertaking. The study required the careful scrutiny of interviews with sixteen persons and of personal records of family members. Duplicate information was set aside, after being used for verification of facts. Hundreds of photographs were viewed for the determination of those that were most representative of his life activities and his artistic endeavors.

The biographical information included in this paper is authentic. It is not intended to be all inclusive. This paper does not include pictures of all of the works done by Heika. It only offers examples of his art. He was a prolific artist who worked compulsively. His total output during the twelve years he was active in the pursuit of art is unknown. If he kept careful records of his creations or his sales, such records have not been uncovered during the research for this paper.

No extensive evaluation of Heika's work has been attempted. It is beyond the scope of the problem set forth for this paper.



Earl Heika was a talented Western artist in the tradition of Russell and Remington. Until recently, his work has been obscure, since most of it is privately owned. As it becomes better known, he will take a place among the other great Western artists.

## APPENDIX

### LIST OF HEIKA CLAY SCULPTURES, PLASTER CASTINGS, AND DIORAMAS WHICH INCORPORATE CLAY SCULPTURES AND/OR STUFFED BIRDS

[This list is not intended to include all of the clay sculptures, plaster castings, or dioramas made by Earl Heika. It includes only those works known by the author to have been made. Because of Heika's prolific production during his relatively short life, there are, no doubt, other Heika works.]

#### Banjo Player

Clark commission, 1931  
Clay  
Location unknown

#### Bear, seated

ca 1931  
Plaster  
6" in height  
Egan Collection  
Lewistown, Montana

#### Big Horn Hunt

Clark commission, 1931  
Clay  
Location unknown

#### Bighorn Sheep

ca 1928  
Clay  
8" in height  
Joe Egan  
Helena, Montana

#### Bringing in the Deer

Clark commission, 1931  
Clay  
Location unknown

#### Bronco Buster

Clark commission, 1931  
Clay  
Location unknown

Bronco Buster  
ca 1938  
Clay  
Location unknown

Bronco Buster  
ca 1939  
Clay  
Location unknown

Bronco Buster  
ca 1939  
Clay  
14" in height  
Egan Collection  
Lewistown, Montana

Bronco Buster  
ca 1939  
Clay  
12" in height  
Great Falls Sporting Goods Company  
Great Falls, Montana

Buffalo Hunter  
ca 1939  
Clay  
Location unknown

Buffalo, seated  
ca 1933  
Plaster  
8" in height  
Egan Collection  
Lewistown, Montana

Buffalo Bill  
1932  
Exhibited at Chicago World's Fair  
1933  
Clay  
Location unknown

Changing Horses on the Pony Express

1941

Clay (Sprayed with metal coating)  
National Cowboy Hall of Fame  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

## Chippewa Indian (bust)

1932

Exhibited at Chicago World's Fair,  
1933  
Stone  
Location unknown

Christmas Cheer

John D. Ryan commission, 1930

Clay

Location unknown

The Contestant

ca 1940

Clay

13" in height

Egan Collection

Lewistown, Montana

## Cowboy on horseback

ca 1935

Clay

Con Robinson

Great Falls, Montana

## Cowboy on horse, and rattlesnake

ca 1932

Exhibited at Chicago World's Fair,  
1933

Location unknown

## Two Cowboys on horses

ca 1932

Exhibited at Chicago World's Fair,  
1933

Clay

Locations unknown

## Cowboy, seated on ground beside horse

ca 1937

Clay

Location unknown

Cowboy holding gun  
ca 1935  
Clay  
Location unknown

Cowhand with beard, standing  
ca 1935  
Clay  
Con Robinson  
Great Falls, Montana

Creche  
1938  
For Great Falls Public Library  
Clay figures  
Location unknown

Cree Indian Warrior and pony  
ca 1936  
Clay  
Walter Jensen  
Helena, Montana

Dog Team  
ca 1933  
Exhibited Chicago World's Fair,  
1933  
Clay figures, with wood, fur,  
and leather  
Scottish Rite Bodies  
Great Falls, Montana

Down from the High Country  
1940  
Clay (Metal coating)  
National Cowboy Hall of Fame  
Oklahoma City

Duck hunting diorama  
ca 1935  
For Great Falls Sporting Goods  
Company  
Clay figures  
Private collection  
Great Falls, Montana

Early Montana Cowboy  
ca 1930  
Clay  
Location unknown



Fresh Meat, a pack train

Clark commission, 1931

Clay

About 3' in length

Location unknown

## Frontiersman on horseback

ca 1932

Clay

14" in height

Egan Collection

Lewistown, Montana

## Frontiersman with rifle

ca 1936

Clay

[Bronze casting:

Classic Bronze, under title

The Day of the Slow Gun]Gambler's Luck

ca 1935

Clay

Dr. William McMann

Great Falls, Montana

[Cast in bronze by the Montana  
Historical Society]

## Guitar player on horseback

ca 1932

Clay

Location unknown

## Grizzly Bear

1934

Clay

6" in height

Great Falls Sporting Goods Company

Great Falls, Montana

## Grizzly Bear

ca 1934

Clay

5" in height

Egan Collection

Lewistown, Montana

## Grizzly family

ca 1935

Clay figures

Location unknown

Hangover

1939

Bronze

Classic Bronze Company

Pittsburgh

Heading for the High Country

1940

Clay (Metal coating)

National Cowboy Hall of Fame

Oklahoma City

The Hold-Up

Modelled after Russell's painting of same name

1931

Clay figures

Location unknown

## Horse and rider

ca 1930

Clay

Location unknown

## Horse with rider lighting cigarette

ca 1936

Clay

13" in height

Melvin Cottier

Great Falls, Montana

## Hunter on horseback with pack horse

ca 1936

Clay

Mrs. Kenneth Lord

Great Falls, Montana

Hunter's Return

1940

Clay (Metal coating)

National Cowboy Hall of Fame

## Indian and squaw with papoose

1932

Exhibited at Chicago World's Fair,

1933

Clay

Location unknown

Indian brave on pony  
 1928  
 Clay  
 Location unknown

Indian chief on horseback  
 ca 1938  
 Clay  
 14" X 12"  
 Dr. Ivan Allred  
 Great Falls, Montana

Indian head  
 ca. 1933  
 Plaster, with oil paints  
 Melvin Cottier  
 Great Falls, Montana

Indian warrior on horse  
 ca 1932  
 Exhibited at Chicago World's Fair  
 Clay  
 Location unknown

Indian warrior on pony  
 [Also called Piegán Indian on Horseback]  
 ca 1934  
 Clay  
 12" in height  
 Stainsby Collection  
 Great Falls, Montana

Indian with spear  
 ca 1929  
 Clay  
 Location unknown

Bust of Frank M. Kerr in Indian dress  
 1930  
 Clay  
 Location unknown

The Lookout  
 1940  
 Clay  
 Dr. Robert Skinner  
 Great Falls, Montana

Man on horseback  
 ca 1935  
 Clay  
 Dr. Ivan Allred  
 Great Falls, Montana

Man with gun, standing beside horse  
 ca 1937  
 Clay  
 Con Robinson  
 Great Falls, Montana

Mare and foal  
 ca 1940  
 Clay  
 Al Bergman  
 Great Falls, Montana

The Mine Face  
 1938  
 Clay figure  
 Location unknown

Miner with pack horse  
 ca 1939  
 Clay  
 Location unknown

Old-time Stagecoach  
 1933  
 Clay figures; coach mixed media  
 [Bronze casting: Classic Bronze Company]

Pack horse  
 ca 1940  
 Bronze  
 Charles Russell Gallery  
 Great Falls, Montana

Pack outfit - four horse  
 John E. Corbette commission  
 1930  
 Clay  
 Location unknown

Pack Train  
 ca 1939  
 Made for Ben Edwards, Great Falls  
 Clay  
 Trailside Galleries  
 Idaho Falls

Pack Train - five horse  
 ca 1935  
 Clay  
 Location unknown

Pack Train - four horse  
Frank Bird commission  
1930  
Clay  
Location unknown

Pack Train - six horse  
Clark commission, 1931  
Clay  
Location unknown

Pack Train - six horse  
ca 1938  
Clay  
Great Falls Sporting Goods Company  
Great Falls, Montana

Pheasant diorama  
ca 1938  
Clay, natural materials, stuffed birds  
Great Falls Sporting Goods Company  
Great Falls, Montana

Piegan Scout  
1931  
Bronze  
Classic Bronze Company  
Pittsburgh

Pronghorn Antelope  
ca 1933  
Clay  
Mrs. J.E. Baker  
Great Falls, Montana

Prospector and burro  
1932  
Exhibited at Chicago World's Fair,  
1933  
Clay  
Location unknown

Prospector's Decision  
1940  
Clay (Metal coating)  
National Cowboy Hall of Fame  
Oklahoma City

The Quartz Team

1936

Clay figures  
Charles Russell Gallery  
Great Falls, Montana

Racing the Stork, diorama

ca 1935

Clay figures  
Private collection  
Great Falls, Montana

Ready to Hit the Trail

1940

Clay (Metal coating)  
National Cowboy Hall of Fame  
Oklahoma City

## Relief Map, State of Montana

Montana Power Company  
1938  
Office, Montana Power Company  
Butte, Montana

## Rider on bucking horse

ca 1937

Clay  
Con Robinson  
Great Falls, Montana

## Road Agent

ca 1935

Clay  
Location unknown

Road Agent\*

ca 1940

Bronze  
Location unknown

\*[ A bronze by this title is offered by Classic Bronze Company. It is a different work from that cited here.]

The Road Agent

ca 1935

Clay  
Al Brix  
Helena, Montana

## Charlie Russell, bust

ca 1933

Plaster  
Melvin Cottier  
Great Falls, Montana



The Roper

Clark commission, 1931  
 Clay  
 Location unknown

## Saddle horse

ca 1940  
 Bronze  
 Russell Gallery  
 Great Falls, Montana

Too Crowded

1941  
 Clay (Metal coating)  
 National Cowboy Hall of Fame  
 Oklahoma City

The Trophy Hunters, a pack string

E.B. Coolidge commission  
 1936  
 Clay  
 C.M. Russell Gallery  
 Great Falls, Montana

## Woman on horseback

ca 1937  
 Clay  
 Del Lowry  
 Great Falls, Montana

## Woman on jumping horse

ca 1937  
 Clay  
 Del Lowry  
 Great Falls, Montana

## CHRONOLOGY

- 1910 Born May 3 in Belt, Montana
- 1916 Moved to Laurel, Montana to home of married sister
- 1923 Returned to mother's home in Great Falls, Montana
- 1926 Left school in ninth grade
- 1927-28 Lived in California with brother Frank
- 1928 Earliest sculpture, a bighorn sheep
- 1929 Entered watercolor painting in show in Great Falls  
Met Wm. Andrews Clark, III, who became his first patron
- 1929-33 Worked during summer months as guide in Glacier  
National Park; sold art work to visitors there
- 1931 First public showing at Stendahl Gallery, Los Angeles
- 1933 Married Virginia Middleton of Great Falls
- 1933-34 Works displayed at Chicago World's Fair
- 1933-39 Worked part-time as taxidermist at Great Falls Sporting  
Goods Company
- 1936 Death in January of favorite brother, Mike Heika  
Birth of daughter Kathleen  
Showing of works in Dallas at Texas Centennial
- 1938 Completed The Mine Face, unique work on copper mining  
Birth of son Earl
- 1939 Exhibition at San Francisco Exposition  
Birth of son Gary
- 1940 National press coverage of The Lookout  
Completed building log-cabin home near Great Falls
- 1941 Birth of son Michael  
May 18, committed suicide after family disagreement

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