

Ursus horribilis: Seth Kinman's Grizzly Chair

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Résumé de l'article

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On July 7, 1866, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* included an engraving of President Andrew Johnson's White House library. | **fig. 1** | On the right of the image, one sees a curious object that can only be described as a “bear chair.”¹ This chair was constructed entirely out of two Californian grizzlies. Its arms and legs were made of bear limbs, grizzly bones provided support for the seat and back, and bear hides were used as upholstery. The main feature was a detachable bear head protruding from under the seat. With the pull of a cord, the bear would come alive, startling occupants by snapping its teeth at their feet. Although the chair was constructed out of two bears, the lower half created the illusion that it was a singular bear, standing on four legs with its head extended. Almost thirty years later, the same chair appeared, looking somewhat disheveled, in a photograph for an 1893 article about the World's Columbian Exposition (also known as the Chicago World's Fair) in *The Californian Illustrated Magazine*; its caption read “BEAR CHAIR—HUMBOLDT COUNTY.”² How did the Grizzly Chair make its way from a private presidential collection to a public exhibition at the World's Fair, and how did its meaning alter over a span of thirty years? The fate of the chair is representative of Arjun Appadurai's notion of the “social life of things,” which emphasizes changing meaning through circulation. Through its mobility, the Grizzly Chair exemplifies American hunting practices and use of animals before the protective, ecological, and empathetic turn of the Progressive Era (1890–1920). In this essay, I will analyze the biography of the Grizzly Chair in order to address questions that are raised by looking at the “afterlives” of animals: From where did the bears originate and who made them into a chair? Once a chair, where did it go, with whom did it come into contact, and how did its status change over time and place?³

The Grizzly Chair was given to President Johnson on September 8, 1865, as a gift from its maker Seth Kinman (1815–1888) of Humboldt County, California.⁴ The self-taught chair-maker used parts of animals, which he had hunted and collected, to produce chairs to exhibit at his saloon and traveling curiosity collection. | **fig. 2** | In fact, between 1857 and 1876, he gained fame through the creation of four chairs for US Presidents James Buchanan, Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, and Rutherford Hayes. Buckskin-clad, with his four-foot rifle named “Old Cotton Bale” in hand, Kinman began touring his western persona in the 1860s and sold *cartes de visite* of himself and his famous chairs. Sharing hunting stories of the West, while using animal trophies as props, Kinman performed what Karen R. Jones refers to as “the game trail.”

1. The library is now the Yellow Oval Room. “The President's Library at the White House, Washington, D.C.,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (July 7, 1866): 244.

2. Charles Edwin Markham, “California at the World's Fair,” *The Californian Illustrated Magazine* (June–November, 1893): 762.

3. See Samuel J. M. Alberti, ed., *The Afterlives of Animals: A Museum Menagerie* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); and Arjun Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).



Figure 1. Anonymous, “The President’s Library at the White House, Washington, D.C.,” *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, Saturday, July 7, 1866.

4. This was not the first, nor the last bear to enter the White House. In 1807, Thomas Jefferson housed two living grizzly cubs on the grounds, and Theodore Roosevelt, an avid sports hunter, would later decorate the State Dining Room with his trophies, including several bear mounts; he also placed polar bear rugs in the Blue Room.

5. Karen R. Jones, *Epiphany in the Wilderness: Hunting, Nature, and Performance in the Nineteenth-Century American West* (Boulder: University of Colorado Press 2015), 12.

6. See Seth Kinman, dictated autobiography, in George M. Richmond, *I’m A Gonna Tell Ya A Yarn...* (Ferndale: The Ferndale Museum, 2011); *Seth Kinman’s Manuscript and Scrapbook*, preserved by George M. Richmond and transcribed by Richard H. Roberts (Ferndale: The Ferndale Museum, 2010).

7. It is worth noting, here, that a figure in Gast’s painting resembles a young Kinman. In the foreground of the scene, a buckskin-clad man with rifle in hand walks west. Escaping his path are two animals that Kinman hunted in vast numbers in his lifetime: the elk and the bear.

8. *Seth Kinman’s Manuscript and Scrapbook*, 41.

9. Susan Snyder, ed., *The California Grizzly: Bear In Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 4.

10. *Ibid.*

According to her, the hunting frontier was a site of performance—“an unfolding theater where the roles of hunters and the wild things they chased were rehearsed and replayed for the purposes of personal and social memory.”⁵ Kinman performed the game trail for decades, and, in so doing, he put the entertainment value of his stories ahead of their facts. As a result, portions of his biography are questionable.⁶ Nonetheless, his story of moving westward from Illinois to Northwest California during the Gold Rush is emblematic of the nineteenth-century doctrine of Manifest Destiny, which is rooted in the idea that America had been chosen to expand, to drive out Indigenous peoples and animals, and to perpetuate “civilization.” This doctrine is aptly symbolized by the female figure of Columbia, who ushers in light in John Gast’s painting *American Progress* (1872), which was widely circulated as a lithograph.⁷

Aware of the public’s increasing interest in both hunting stories of the West and their resulting animal-objects, Kinman began to make chairs from the collection of antlers he had amassed over years of market hunting elk, as well as gathering antlers shed naturally. By interlocking four large antlers of equal size, Kinman formed the legs and frame of a chair; he upholstered the seat with elk hide and used elk hooves as decorative feet. | **fig. 3** | Soon, Kinman conceived of making his first presidential chair of elk horns:

The idea occurred to me, why not make a chair for the president? He is the ruler of a free people and though he has no throne of gold, why should he not sit in a chair of which the frame is made of elk horns, every point and antler of which was an emblem of a weapon of defense of the wild and untrammled freedom of the beast.⁸

Kinman’s description of elk as needing “weapons of defense” for their freedom is typical of the end of the nineteenth century, when the abundance of wildlife was drastically dwindling due to the impact of market hunting. His hunting stories and photographs, however, encouraged the idea that the West was still a wild place that needed to be tamed by people like him.

Kinman claimed to have killed more than eight hundred grizzlies in his lifetime. The California grizzly bear was so named, not for its “grizzled” hair, but for its “grisly” character. Formally classified in 1815 as *Ursus horribilis californicus*, “terrifying bear of California,” its name set the tone for its relations with humans for the next century. Since their “discovery,” grizzlies were associated closely with the “wilderness” and were understood by white settlers as creatures that needed to be eradicated for the safety of people and livestock. | **fig. 4** | Bears inhabited California as far back as the Pleistocene Epoch,⁹ long before humans arrived. When humans joined grizzlies, as Susan Snyder suggests, it was a relationship of co-existence, but little firsthand information on the relationship has survived, “because what annihilated the grizzlies also decimated the culture of the early Californian Indian communities.”¹⁰ The earliest evidence that does remain includes the official California State Prehistoric Artifact, a small chipped stone carving in the shape of a bear from approximately seven to eight thousand years ago, as well as a number of petroglyphs and rock paintings that resemble bears. Evidently, humans and bears coexisted for thousands of years. When white settlers arrived, however, grizzlies became part of a narrative in which Indigenous peoples needed to be saved from dangerous animals. As part of their justification for colonization, settlers of California decimated the grizzly population in less than sixty years,

Figure 2. Anonymous, Interior of Table Bluff Hotel and Saloon in Table Bluff, Humboldt County, California, 1889. Photo: courtesy of the Sonoma County Library.



Figure 3. (above right) Mathew Brady, Elk-Horn Chair, presented to President Lincoln, Nov. 26, 1864, by Seth Kinman, the California hunter and trapper. Albumen print on card mount, 11 x 7 cm (carte de visite format), 1864. Photo: courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division [LC-DIGPPMCSA-52243].

Figure 4. Felix Octavius Carr Darley (artist), Frank Holl (engraver), Native Californians Lassoing a Bear, c. 1870–1880. Hand-coloured etching, 15 x 21.4 cm. Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division [LC-DIG-PGA-10967].



a length of time equivalent to the bear's lifespan.¹¹ Believing themselves independent of nature, settlers "divided the native fauna into 'good' animals and 'bad,' judging each according to its worth and usefulness." In Snyder's words, "The 'vermin' were set upon by both individuals and government agencies."¹² Between the 1870s and 1890s, the State of California and private landowners posted bounties on grizzlies at ten and twenty-five dollars a head. Hunting grizzlies was a dangerous business, and it could bring fame to those willing to take the risk. As *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* reported in 1861:

If you kill your bear, it is a triumph worthy [of] enjoying; if you get killed yourself, some of the newspapers will give you a friendly notice; if you get crippled for life, you carry about you a patent of courage which may be useful in case you go into politics. ... A "chawed up" man is very much admired all over the world.¹³

There was also a market for live grizzlies. They were used for a variety of lucrative purposes, including the popular bear-and-bull fights, which continued the European tradition of bear-baiting, a spectator sport that involved tormenting bears and pitting them against other animals.

In describing his presidential chairs, Kinman emphasized the importance of obtaining materials through hunting in order to "make the patriotic idea complete."¹⁴ The equation of hunting with patriotism was manifested to audiences in popular forms such as Wild West shows, literature, magazines, and art that depicted struggles between man and animal. An iconographic motif that dominated nineteenth-century illustration and photography was that of the hunter posed in what Karen Wonders terms "victory-over-vanquished portraits." These portraits depicted a successful hunter standing next to—or on top of—the slain victim. She writes, "The motif of manly victory over the native game had similarities with flag planting of mountaineers and other explorers of foreign parts."¹⁵ This claim of dominance resonates with Mathew Brady's 1865 studio photograph of Kinman seated in his Grizzly Chair, which was taken just before he gifted the chair to President Johnson. | **fig. 5** | Like the victory portraits, the heroic narrative of the hunt is carefully illustrated by the inclusion of dead game, weapon, and hunter. In the picture, the weaponry that Kinman required to kill the bear is clearly illustrated: his buck knife is stabbed into the ground, while his tomahawk and large rifle rest against the body of the bear/chair. Connecting the hunter to the hunted, the rifle is loosely cradled in Kinman's right arm, while one of his fingers points downwards towards the trigger and the face of the bear. Unlike the victory portraits of hunters standing erect over their game, Brady's photograph depicts Kinman seated casually, his legs crossed, while grinning slightly at the camera. His arms and hands parallel those of the bear and provide a size comparison of human to animal; a pattern of fingers and claws is repeated across his waist, drawing attention to his belt of souvenir grizzly claws, which were collected from his largest quarries. In this image, the Grizzly Chair is not so much a hunting trophy as it is an object that represents the hundreds of grizzlies Kinman had hunted in a *tour de force* for the President.

Hunting trophies are markers of what occurred between the hunter and the hunted. They are objects associated with a specific memory of the person responsible for the animal's death. As Garry Marvin notes, "Hunting trophies come alive through the reveries or narratives of the hunter—they become the

11. See Peter Alagona, *After the Grizzly: Endangered Species and the Politics of Place in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013).

12. Snyder, *Bear in Mind*, 176.

13. "The Coast Rangers: A Chronicle of Events in California, 11—Hunting Adventures," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (June 1, 1861), 593–606, 602–603.

14. Seth Kinman's *Manuscript and Scrapbook*, 41.

15. Karen Wonders, "Hunting Narratives of the Age of Empire: A Gender Reading of Their Iconography," *Environment and History*, 11, 3 (August 2005), 269–291, 279.

Figure 5. Mathew Brady, Seth Kinman, 1865. Detail of negative: glass, wet collodion. Photo: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division [LC-DIG-CWPBH-00010].



sites of memory and the focus for stories and reminiscences of hunting.”¹⁶ Kinman’s Grizzly Chair, however, was not made to honor the specific hunting experience of the two bears. When he gave the chair to President Johnson, he reportedly did not, as he normally did when touring the country, make reference to any hunting stories. In this respect, the bear chair is more than a hunting trophy: it becomes a symbol of expansion, conquest, and victory over the western frontier. It was offered to the President as a testament to progress in the form of a seat. While Kinman alluded to his four chairs as thrones, they were never considered as such in any official capacity. They were recorded as presidential gifts, and the only chair that was documented on display in the White House was the Grizzly Chair. In the engraving in *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, this chair appears to have been used only as decoration and not as an official seat for the president, who appears sitting behind his desk across the room.¹⁷ Unlike royal thrones, which are passed on from one ruler to the next, chairs used by American presidents change with each incumbent. In fact, the only piece of furniture that traditionally has remained in the Oval Office is the Resolute Desk, a gift from Queen Victoria to President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1880, the same president who received an elk chair by Kinman in 1876.

Looking back at the Grizzly Chair in the context of the White House, it may seem out of place, even eccentric, among the button-tufted Victorian sofas of Johnson’s private library. However, Kinman’s chairs were in keeping with the mid-nineteenth-century Victorian craze for “animal furniture,” which used the art of taxidermy to transform preserved animals into functional objects for the home. After the displays of stuffed animals at London’s Great Exhibition

16. Garry Marvin, “Enlivened through Memory,” in *The Afterlives of Animals*, 210.

17. The elk chair that Kinman gifted to Hayes is on display at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library and Museum in Fremont, Ohio.

in 1851, taxidermied animals became a popular commodity in Europe and North America during the second half of the nineteenth century. While many scholars have interpreted taxidermy as demonstrative of power over nature and colonial conquest, as Sarah Amato argues, the variety of objects made from preserved animals “reflected the Victorian and Edwardian belief that animals should be useful to humans, even in death.”¹⁸ Using animal bodies to make furniture for upperclass homes, British taxidermist Rowland Ward started the trend of “Wardian” furniture in the 1850s. An 1896 article in *The Strand Magazine*, titled “Animal Furniture,” features some of Ward’s creations, “there are scooped-out pheasants as pie-covers; the eggs of emus and ostriches as basins and jugs; hares’ heads as matchboxes; flying opossums holding card-trays; coiling snakes as umbrella stands; capercaillie claws as candlesticks; wild asses’ ears as tobacco-pouches.”¹⁹ Larger animal furniture included bears mounted as waiters standing and holding drink trays or lamps, as well as several chairs, each made from the entire body of an animal, such as a small elephant and a giraffe. When comparing the Grizzly Chair to Ward’s furniture, it is apparent that the latter consisted of a menagerie of whimsical, submissive, and often-anthropomorphic animals posed to suggest they were offering their services willingly as useful household objects. In contrast, the Grizzly Chair, and especially the head of the bear, is at once a testament to human domination and control of animal bodies, and a reflection of contemporary visions of what it would be like to meet a savage beast in the “wild.”

The objective of taxidermy is to produce lifelikeness in something that is dead—to preserve and accurately portray the animal that once was. Jane Desmond claims that the resurrection of animal life through the act of looking is like “an excerpt from a play, a fictional (yet naturalistic and naturalized) narrative based in and on dominant tropes of human-animal relations.”²⁰ What if the resurrection is created by the pull of a cord? The Grizzly Chair’s mechanical function allowed for a double re-animation. And during the moment its jaws snapped, it created a tense proximity between sitter and

18. Sarah Amato, *Beastly Possessions: Animals in Victorian Consumer Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 183.

19. William G. Fitzgerald, “Animal Furniture,” *The Strand Magazine*, 12 (1896): 273–280. 279.

20. Jane Desmond, *Displaying Death and Animating Life: Human-Animal Relations in Art, Science, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 33.

Figure 6. Anonymous, *Humboldt County Exhibit, California State Building, 1893*. Photograph printed in California at the World’s Columbian Exposition 1893—*Final Report of the California World’s Fair Commission, Including a Description of All Exhibits from the State of California*, Chicago, 1893 (Sacramento: A. J. Johnson, Suit. State Printing, 1894), 29.



animal-object. In the context of European colonialism and the use of taxidermy, Rachel Poliquin writes, “Savage animals savagely posed offered ‘natural’ proof of the validity of European colonial management.”²¹ Taxidermy of big game animals in the American context can be understood the same way. Grizzlies were preserved and collected as proof that they existed and functioned as material forms of power and progress; the Grizzly Chair would have been viewed as a representation of the domination of the Wild West.

Kinman gave the Grizzly Chair to President Andrew Johnson, who succeeded Abraham Lincoln after his assassination in 1865. Through its use of an animal that was deemed ferocious and unpredictable, the Grizzly Chair was intended to symbolically protect the president’s seat of power. When Johnson received the gift, Kinman told the audience that the mechanized bear head was meant to frighten off rebels and office seekers of the White House, to which the president replied, the head better stay well protruded.²² Three years later, grizzlies were extinct from Humboldt County and Johnson was impeached.²³ It is unclear how the chair made its way back to Kinman, but it eventually came into the possession of Martha J. Herrick, a ranch owner from Humboldt County, who purchased the Grizzly Chair from Kinman’s estate after his death in 1888.²⁴ Under her ownership, Kinman’s curiosities and chairs became representatives of Humboldt County, first in 1893 at the Mechanics’ Institute’s twenty-seventh Industrial Exposition in San Francisco, and later that same year at the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

To put the Grizzly Chair in the context of the 1890s, it is important to note that a significant transformation occurred in the relations between human culture and the natural environment at the beginning of the American Progressive Era (1890–1920), when the majority of early state and federal legislation protecting the environment was passed. Among the issues addressed was the perceived need to restrict hunting and fishing, which had caused considerable damage during the nineteenth century. Commercial hunting had, most notably, brought the American Bison to the brink of extinction: from an estimated sixty million in 1800, its numbers dwindled to less than three hundred in 1900.²⁵ The California grizzly would be extinct by the 1920s. An important change occurred between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in how hunting was practiced and understood in America, especially in terms of cultural identity. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the utilitarian function associated with hunting for sustenance was replaced by its value as sport. With a desire to connect with the tradition of elite British hunters, urban and educated middle- and upper-class Americans, whom Thorstein Veblen called “the predatory leisure class,” increasingly valued the ideal of the sportsman.²⁶ Figures such as Theodore Roosevelt were the new wearers of buckskin suits—a revisioning of the backwoodsman Kinman once represented, but now with a conservation agenda to ensure sport hunting in the future.

While hunting trophies grew in popularity towards the end of the nineteenth century, by the time Martha Herrick wanted to exhibit the Grizzly Chair in 1893, the fad for animal furniture had waned. In fact, Humboldt County initially refused to include Kinman’s collection at the Mechanics’ Institute’s Industrial Exposition, because the organizing committee thought no one would be interested. They reluctantly agreed, however, once Herrick insisted

21. Rachel Poliquin, *The Breathless Zoo: Taxidermy and the Cultures of Longing* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2012), 96. For the latest literature on taxidermy and art, see Giovanni Aloï, *Speculative Taxidermy: Natural History, Animal Surfaces, and Art in the Anthropocene* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); and *Antennae: The Journal of Nature and Visual Culture*, www.antennae.org.uk.

22. Daily Chronicle, September 9, 1865. Reprinted in *Seth Kinman’s Manuscript and Scrapbook*, 121.

23. Raymond F. Dasmann, “Wildlife in Transition,” in *Green Versus Gold: Sources in California’s Environmental History*, ed. Carolyn Merchant (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1998), 23.

24. It is worth noting that throughout his lifetime Kinman made at least three bear chairs, two of which had detachable mechanical heads. As a result, it is difficult to know if the Grizzly Chair in Herrick’s possession was once owned by Johnson. However, Herrick’s chair was recorded in the press as Johnson’s, and it should, therefore, be considered the same chair, since viewers understood it as such. See Lauren Zook, “President Andrew Johnson’s Grizzly Bear Chair: A Gift from Seth Kinman,” *White House History*, 43, *White House Historical Association* (Fall 2016): 58–65.

25. “Time Line of the American Bison,” *US Fish & Wildlife Service* www.fws.gov/bisonrange/timeline.htm (accessed March 26, 2018).

26. Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899; repr. New York: Routledge, 1991), 171.

on personally paying for the shipping costs.²⁷ Herrick's exhibit, titled "Humboldt as it was in 1850," was criticized by San Francisco's *Weekly Times*, which described it as an "antiquated and moth-eaten collection of 'fake' relics." Despite the display of the county's magnificent natural resources, the article continues, it was humiliating to watch reporters pass them all by, in the thrall of "their gaping ecstasy over the Kinman stuffed bear, with its jaw and string attachment."²⁸ One could say that the presidential chair became "de-throned," like president Johnson himself, in that it no longer represented American values. It was now merely an amusing prop used in a historical display. Herrick's exhibit may have been criticized in the press, but it nevertheless won a Grand Silver Medal in its class at the Industrial Exposition.²⁹ Perhaps due to this success, Herrick became one of the organizers of the Humboldt County exhibit in the California State Building at the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition later that year.

An article in *The Californian Illustrated Magazine* about the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition describes Humboldt County as one of the most isolated parts of the state, and this aspect of its character was suggested in the imposing display through "the forest, the mountain slope, and the glen, with deer, bear, and other wild animals therein."³⁰ Overall, the display emphasized the abundance of natural resources in the county through its presentation of flora and fauna. | **fig. 6** | The main attraction of the exhibit was an imitation mountainside that included native moss, ferns, and shrubbery. On the side of the "mountain" was a good-sized cave from which stuffed animals of the county emerged.³¹ "As we enter," the article in *Californian Illustrated Magazine* maintains, "a grizzly, coming out of his cave growls across our path. One thinks himself in the midst of a museum. Here are trophies and relics and curios; here are woods and fruits and grains, and Mrs. Herrick knows the story of them all."³² Present throughout the duration of the fair, Herrick offered lectures on the history of the county with Kinman's curiosities and chairs as props. Various accounts of these lectures suggest that Herrick did not mention or emphasize the history of the Grizzly Chair as a presidential gift, but rather focused on Kinman's biography and his contributions as a settler of his home county. Although the California grizzly had been extinct in Humboldt County since 1868, its inclusion in the exhibit in both chair and mounted form heightened a sense of realism in Herrick's diorama-like creation, and fashioned a romantic experience of the northwestern frontier for visitors. The use of taxidermied bears to create a more romantic landscape reflected sentiments of the wildlife conservationist movement that would continue into the early twentieth century. William Temple Hornaday, an American zoologist, wrote in his 1913 book *Our Vanishing Wildlife: Its Extermination and Preservation*:

The real sportsmen and naturalists of America are decidedly opposed to the extermination of the grizzly bear. ... A Rocky Mountain without a grizzly upon it, or at least a bear of some kind, is only half a mountain—commonplace and tame. Put a two-year-old grizzly cub upon it, and presto! every cubic yard of its local atmosphere reeks with romantic uncertainty and fearsome thrills.³³

While his efforts to safeguard the species were too late, Hornaday's description of grizzlies as integral to the landscape reveals how the protection of animals was tied to a glorified vision of the landscape of the American West. The

27. *San Francisco Examiner*, January 5, 1893; reprinted in *Seth Kinman's Manuscript and Scrapbook*, 185.

28. *Weekly Times*, January 12, 1893; reprinted in *Seth Kinman's Manuscript and Scrapbook*, 187.

29. Herrick's exhibit won a Silver Medal in Class No. 45: Geology, Mineralogy, Zoology, Botany. See *Report of the Twenty-Seventh Industrial Exposition* (San Francisco: Mechanics' Institute, 1893), 10.

30. Markham, "California at the World's Fair," 771.

31. "Humboldt County Exhibit—Description of," *Final Report, California World's Fair Commission, Including a Description of All Exhibits from the State of California* (Chicago, 1893), 29.

32. Markham, "California at the World's Fair," 766.

33. William T. Hornaday, *Our Vanishing Wildlife, Its Extermination and Preservation* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 177–178.

issue was less about preserving a species and more about saving what it had come to represent.

The display of grizzly bears in an exhibit devoted to a county in which they were extinct was not unusual for the California State Building at the Chicago World's Fair. One could argue that the number of California grizzlies there outnumbered those in the wild. As its population declined, however, the bear's symbolic meaning increased. As Peter Alagona argues in *After the Grizzly*, "By the time they were extinct, the California grizzly had become an indelible icon."³⁴ Bears were included in most exhibits of the State Building in a variety of media, including taxidermy mounts, rugs, badges, bronze and plaster statues, paintings, and, of course, California state flags. John Berger's famous essay "Why Look at Animals?" asserts that, in our late-capitalist society, animals have disappeared in their original form and have been replaced by symbols.³⁵ This observation could also be made of the California State Building at the Columbian Exposition of 1893, where the "real" bear was replaced by symbolic forms; in other words, it was overrepresented in compensation for its loss. In the context of the Exposition, the Grizzly Chair took on new meaning. As Michelle Henning writes in *The Afterlives of Animals*, this "process of recontextualization ... by which some of the properties of an exhibited object become perceptible and others disappear from view, may be described as the object's 'social life.'"³⁶ The chair was now a symbol and souvenir of what once was—the materiality of its moth-eaten, deteriorating body was a testament to time passed.

At the Chicago World's Fair, Frederick Jackson Turner read his seminal essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" to a gathering of the American Historical Association. Turner's "frontier thesis" traced the social evolution of frontier life and proposed that westward exploration and settlement had shaped US democracy and character from the colonial era until 1890, the year the US Census officially declared the frontier closed. In discussing the process of exploration and westward settlement, Turner describes a meeting between civilization and the untamed wild:

The wilderness masters the colonist. It finds him a European in dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought. It takes him from the railroad car and puts him in the birch canoe. It strips off the garments of civilization and arrays him in the hunting shirt and the moccasin. It puts him in the log cabin of the Cherokee and Iroquois ... In short, at the frontier the environment is at first too strong for the man. ... Little by little he transforms the wilderness, but the outcome is not the old Europe. ... The fact is, that here is a new product that is American. At first, the frontier was the Atlantic coast. It was the frontier of Europe in a very real sense. Moving westward, the frontier became more and more American. ... Thus the advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines.³⁷

Turner's thesis exemplifies the collapsing of animals and Indigenous populations "as the supposed embodiment of the 'savagery.'" According to Pauline Wakeham, his narrative demonstrates "the supposed loss of animals and aboriginals as natural resources with particular use-values for the consolidation of white national identity."³⁸ Presenting his ideas at the Chicago World's Fair, a celebration of the four hundredth anniversary of the "discovery" of the New World, Turner heightened the degree of urgency and historical significance of his thesis. His description of the settlement of the US frontier offered

34. Alagona, *After the Grizzly*, 22.

35. John Berger, "Why Look at Animals?," in *About Looking* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 3–28.

36. Michelle Henning, "Neurath's Whale," in *The Afterlives of Animals*, 158.

37. Read at the meeting of the American Historical Association in Chicago, July 12, 1893. Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1921), 4.

38. Pauline Wakeham, *Taxidermic Signs: Reconstructing Aboriginality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 18.

a romanticized picture of struggle and conquest, a vision that was reflected in exhibits of natural resources, material goods, and representations of peoples and animals at the Fair.

Turner's reminiscence of the US frontier resonated with an exhibit that depicted frontier life as something that needed to be protected for members of the "leisure class." While a part of the World's Columbian Exposition earned the title "The White City" for its use of neoclassical architecture and blinding display of the relatively new technology of electricity, it also included a small, wooded island upon which stood a replica of a hunter's log cabin lit by candles. Decorated with elk antlers, animal hides, and a large fireplace lit in the evenings, the cabin offered visitors a taste of frontier life reimagined by the elite organizers of the exhibit—the Boone and Crockett Club, a wildlife and habitat conservation organization founded in 1887 by Theodore Roosevelt. This was not the rough frontier that Kinman had experienced first-hand decades before, but the site of a new pastime reserved for members of an exclusive men's society.³⁹ While the efforts of the conservation movement were associated with an appreciation and desire to protect the American landscape, the movement was entwined with issues of race, class, and gender. Scholars of American masculinity have noted that modern urban life was perceived to have "distanced men from older forms of masculinity" and in compensation they turned to outdoor sports as an antidote.⁴⁰ Hunting associations and private clubs allowed members to reclaim their manhood through ideal representations of the American West, which became, as Karen R. Jones writes, "a landscape of testosterone and restoration."⁴¹ As a celebration of industry, technology, and expansion, the World's Columbian Exhibition represented what the outdoorsman was trying to escape in everyday life. The Boone and Crockett Club cabin, in contrast, offered a place of solitude and renewal of manhood.

In highlighting not only national achievement in commerce, but also nineteenth-century ideas of expansion, empire, and racial ideologies, the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago looked very much towards the future. The Humboldt County exhibit and the Boone and Crockett Club cabin, however, embodied Turner's concern that the past not be forgotten in the future. In both its San Francisco and Chicago contexts, Kinman's collection became souvenirs of a romanticized past. The materiality of the deteriorating bear chair was testament to a species that was, by then, heading towards extinction: an animal once integral to the imagined American landscape was becoming a myth. Souvenirs of frontier life, as exemplified in animal trophies, were soon to collect dust in hotels, saloons, and trading posts across the country. According to a local newspaper, at the end of the Chicago World's Fair, Martha Herrick "sold the moth-eaten Humboldt relic known as Seth Kinman's Grizzly. It was predicted at starting that his bearship would never return."⁴² ¶

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39. Sarah Bonnemaïson and Christine Macy, *Architecture and Nature: Creating the American Landscape* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 35–38.

40. Monica Ritvo, *Nature's Noblemen: Transatlantic Masculinities and the Nineteenth-Century American West* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 9.

41. Jones, *Epiphany in the Wilderness*, 57.

42. *Ferndale Enterprise*, August 18, 1893; reprinted in Seth Kinman's *Manuscript and Scrapbook*, 189.