The Rendezvous Near Green River—Oregon 1837 (General View of the Indian Camp).

Alfred Jacob Miller was born in Baltimore, Maryland, and received artistic training in Paris and Rome. By 1837, he had returned to the United States and opened a studio in New Orleans. There he was engaged by Captain William Drummond Stewart, a Scots nobleman with a taste for adventurous travel, to accompany his party to the annual fur trade rendezvous in the Rocky Mountains, held near what is today the town of Pine-dale, Wyoming.

During the spring and summer of 1837, Miller made dozens of sketches capturing the life of his party, of trappers, of Indians, and of the life and scenery of the fur trade. Stewart’s and Miller’s journey took them through the territory later to become Wyoming, and among Miller’s best regarded works is his Green River Rendezvous.
After his return from the West, Miller was commissioned by Stewart to paint studio versions of a number of his trail sketches to hang in Murthly Castle, Stewart’s hunting lodge in Perthshire, Scotland. In 1842, after completing his assignment in Scotland, Miller returned to Baltimore where he became noted as a portraitist during his later career.

Although his landscapes tend to resemble European models and his figures are often stylized and classical in pose, Miller’s art constitutes an important historical record. No other artist had the opportunity to observe and record the era of the American fur trade with similar intimacy and detail. For this reason Miller’s paintings at the University of Wyoming’s American Heritage Center (AHC) are considered as much historical documents as artistic works, and are featured in many presentations about Wyoming and Western history.

The Acquisition of the Miller Paintings
The Miller paintings in the AHC are among those commissioned by Stewart. Those on exhibit in our 2nd floor Loggia are a gift of Everett D. and Verde Clark Graff and of Charles B. Nevins (husband of Nancy Graff, one of Everett Graff’s daughters). The Millers on exhibit on our 3rd floor are a gift of Robert C. Graff (Everett Graff’s only son). We are triply indebted to Robert Graff for his generous support for the conservation and security of the Miller paintings, as well as for his philanthropic commitment to the creation of the Alfred Jacob Miller classroom on the AHC’s 4th floor.

The University of Wyoming Collection of Western Art
Together, the Miller and Rentschler collections are now identified by the Art Museum and the AHC as “The University of Wyoming Collection of Western Art” because, to quote from an Art Museum informational brochure, “The premier collection of western art at UW is on permanent display in the AHC Loggia and Rentschler Room.” The two collections are not only a draw for visitors to the Centennial Complex (the building that houses both the AHC and the Art Museum), they are also important educational tools, being introduced regularly by Center faculty to UW students in art history and Western history.

On occasion, one or more of the Miller paintings will be missing from the Loggia for a short while. This is either because the work was requested by another museum for a special exhibit or because the work is undergoing conservation treatment. Museums from across the U.S. have borrowed Miller paintings because of their importance in the genre of Western art.