

NEW MEXICO HISTORY MUSEUM

PALACE OF THE GOVERNORS

Wild at Heart: Ernest Thompson Seton **New Exhibit Traces How One Wolf's Death** **Led to a Century of Wildlife Conservation**



Santa Fe (Jan. 27, 2010) – Opening May 23 at the New Mexico History Museum, *Wild at Heart: Ernest Thompson Seton* dedicates itself to telling the often overlooked story of the conservationist, author, artist, lecturer and co-founder of the Boy Scouts of America. Ernest Thompson Seton's impact on America's conservation movement was immeasurable but, today is largely forgotten. *Wild at Heart: Ernest Thompson Seton* sets out to change that.

Running through May 8, 2011, this original exhibition replaces *Fashioning New Mexico* in the museum's second-floor Albert and Ethel Herzstein Changing Exhibitions Gallery. It's accompanied by a catalog, *Ernest Thompson Seton, The Life and Legacy of an Artist and Conservationist* (Gibbs Smith, Publisher, 2010), with a foreword written by Sir David Attenborough.

Curated by New Mexico art historian David L. Witt, director of the Seton Legacy Project for the Academy for the Love of Learning in Santa Fe, *Wild at Heart* marks the first major exhibition about Seton. Most of the art and artifacts – more than 30 original paintings and drawings by Seton, books, personal memorabilia, and photographs – have been seldom if ever seen. Most of the items on loan to the exhibit come from the Academy for the Love of Learning and from the Philmont Museum and Seton Memorial Library at the Philmont Ranch in Cimarron, N.M.

Born in England in 1860, Seton moved to Canada with his family when he was six, and eventually settled in the United States as an adult. As a young man, he immersed himself in the study of the natural world, becoming one of the first important experts on animal behavior. Schooled in fine art, Seton was a prolific writer and illustrator.

In 1893, Seton was sent to Clayton, N.M., by an Easterner who owned the L Cross F in the northeastern part of the state. Seton's assignment: track and kill marauding wolves. After a brutal encounter with a wild wolf named "Lobo," Seton experienced a profound change of heart. He wrote "The King of Currumpaw, A Wolf Story," published to worldwide acclaim in *Scribner's Magazine* the following year. Through that story, Seton invented the genre of the realistic animal story, portraying animals as they actually live in the wild and changing forever the way Americans looked at nature.

"Seton is a godfather to today's environmental movement, as important to the early development of wildlife conservation as John Muir is to wilderness preservation," Witt said.

In 1902, Seton founded an outdoor youth-education program known as "Woodcraft" that provided a model for all subsequent summer camps in the United States. In 1910, Seton co-founded the Boy Scouts of America.

"His contributions to the environmental movement and to science, literature, art and youth education have enriched the lives of hundreds of millions of boys, girls and their families for more than a century," said Witt, who himself earned the rank of Eagle Scout in 1967.

Seton was the most important and technically accomplished wildlife illustrator since Audubon, and his concepts for bird identification influence the field guides of Roger Tory Peterson and others. In all, Seton wrote some 40 books and more than 1,000 magazine articles and short stories, and drew or painted some 6,000 works of art. His book *Wild Animals I Have Known* has been continuously in print since it was first published in 1898. (Rudyard Kipling once wrote to Seton that the book inspired him to write the Jungle Books; in his foreword to the Seton catalog, Attenborough recounts receiving a copy of the book at the age of 8: "I still have it. It was the most precious book of my childhood.")

Much of Seton's understanding of nature came not from Western science, but from his extensive studies with First Nations peoples in Canada. Seton was a vocal supporter of Native people's political rights and a passionate advocate for the study of their culture, ethics and history.

In 1930, Seton moved to a 2,500-acre ranch in the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains outside of Santa Fe, founding the Seton Village neighborhood, where he lived until his death in 1946. He designed Seton Castle as his

residence on the property, which included a museum, library, art gallery and library/lecture hall for the Seton Village community that developed as friends and colleagues settled on the original property. It was there that Seton established his final educational project, the College of Indian Wisdom (later, the Seton Institute). Classes focused on the arts, crafts and ethics of Native peoples.

The Academy undertook the Seton Legacy Project after acquiring Seton's house and remaining art collections in 2003. In 2005, a fire devastated the castle, leaving only a shell. But the Academy has continued its work, and as part of *Wild at Heart* will host tours of the castle and village from 10 am to 1 pm on June 13, Aug. 14, Oct. 9, 2010, and April 9, 2011. A one-day workshop, "The Wilderness in Your Heart," will be held from 10 am to 4 pm on Sept. 18, 2010, and March 5, 2011. For details, go to www.aloveoflearning.org.

This fall, the Academy will unveil the Seton Castle Contemplative Gardens, the Ernest Thompson Seton Gallery, and the new Center, a LEED-registered, environmentally responsible facility.

Participants in the Seton Legacy Project include Seton family members, historians and others, including Witt, a naturalist, writer, historian and museum curator who has studied the Seton legacy for more than 35 years. He assisted on the BBC/PBS *Nature* television series feature called *Lobo, The Wolf That Changed America*, which premiered in both the U.S. and the U.K. in 2008.

Photo credit: *Black Wolf of the Currumpaw*, an oil on board painting by Ernest Thompson Seton, 1893. Photo courtesy of Philmont Museum.

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The New Mexico History Museum is the newest addition to a campus that includes the Palace of the Governors, the oldest continuously occupied public building in the United States; Fray Angélico Chávez History Library; Palace of the Governors Photo Archives; the Press at the Palace of the Governors; and the Native American Artisans Program. The New Mexico History Museum/Palace of the Governors is a division of the Department of Cultural Affairs. For more information, visit www.nmhistorymuseum.org.

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