

Buckskin and homespun on the hard Texas frontier

BUCKSKIN AND HOMESPUN

By David Holman and Billie Persons (Wind River Press, 4601 Ramsey Ave., Austin, Texas 78756, \$120).

By LEE MILAZZO

CHRISTMAS is traditionally the time for special gifts for special people, and in recent years bibliophiles have had no difficulty in making the perfect selection for discriminating collectors of fine books.

In 1972 they chose Al Lowman's *This Bitterly Beautiful Land*, a magnificent Texas "commonplace book"; in 1974 they selected *Letters of Hard Times in Texas*, a gathering of previously unpublished letters from Texas pioneers; in 1975 they singled out Al Lowman's *Printing Arts in Texas*, an outstanding survey of the book arts in the state; and in 1978 they preferred *How to Conquer Texas*, a first reprint of a rare 19th century pamphlet. Amazingly enough, each of these beautifully designed and carefully printed volumes (three won the book design award from the Texas Institute of Letters) emanated from the same source, the remarkable Holman family of Austin, the designer William R., artist Barbara, and their printer son, David.

This year's Holman production may very well be the best yet, both for textual excel-

lence and for its physical beauty. Beautifully designed, photographed and printed by David Holman, *Buckskin and Homespun* is a large folio volume printed letterpress from classic Janson type on Curtis rag paper made especially for this book. It is handsomely bound in lovely natural-finish cloth. Furthermore, it features more than 100 evocative illustrations, including 11 color photos, 54 black and white photos, and 37 line drawings by Pat Massey. As always, Holman has skillfully treated all of these elements — typography, paper, binding, etc. — with a rare blend of restraint and imagination, and the result is a simply stunning book in every respect.

But why a book on fashion or dress? For many reasons, actually. To begin with, as legendary fashion expert Stanley Marcus remarks in his introduction, the book demonstrates that "the strong human desire for ornamentation and decoration that has existed from the beginning of time" clearly influenced even the inhabitants of the rough frontier. Also, Holman and Persons' findings show how Western wear has been "America's great contribution to fashion," just as they reveal the obvious, sometimes startling similarities between the Texas of then and today. Finally, *Buckskin and Homespun* is a major contribution to the history of the advancing frontier, confirming again our suspicion that most pioneers alternated, perhaps uneasily, between



One of Pat Massey's drawings

clinging to traditional standards and adapting to changing circumstances.

SINCE CLOTHING was obviously more difficult to obtain than food or shelter, most Texans preferred to adapt to their new land by using indigenous materials. While Davy Crockett made the buckskin shirt a lasting symbol of the frontier, this material, home-made from deerskin, had practical as well as symbolic value: it was cheap, durable and excellent camouflage in the Indian-infested wilderness. Gov. Francis Lubbock described its chief disadvantage, however, remembering after a thunderstorm that his

pants got painfully "tighter and tighter." Readers will probably be amazed at the quality of the excellent surviving examples of buckskin pictured in the full color illustrations of Gov. Hardin Runnels' buckskin coat made by Indians in 1857, Davy Crockett's 1830s vest, and Robert Hall's brilliant coat and pants.

Along these same lines, moccasins and coonskin caps proved to be very practical, but by 1845 many Texans were able to switch to homespun rather than to fight in buckskin. In fact, both Sam Houston and Stephen F. Austin wore the two cloths