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In honor of
Kenneth B. Grant

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PREFACE

This illustrated issue of *Midwestern Miscellany* had its origin in a session dedicated to Midwestern art and architecture at the May 2010 SSML symposium. Participants were asked to employ interdisciplinary methodologies in linking art or architecture to the literature of the Midwest. The essays by Kosiba, Szuberla, and Wydeven were first presented as papers in that session. Sara Kosiba examines Grant Wood's illustrations for a special edition of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* in her ongoing attempt to clarify definitions of Midwestern regionalism; Guy Szuberla employs the recently published *Autobiography of Irving K. Pond* to introduce readers to an important Midwestern architect; and Joseph Wydeven discusses the Nebraska novelist and photographer Wright Morris, who pictured architecture in prose and photography.

Two other essays round out this issue of *Midwestern Miscellany*, both employing interdisciplinarity and involving literature and pictures. Elizabeth Raymond employs an American Studies approach to examine questions about the identity of the state of Minnesota, and she uncovers some interesting contradictions. Finally, Gary Cialdella explores his personal background and motivations as a photographer for taking the photographs that appear in his book *The Calumet Region: An American Place* (2009). He also discusses his own reactions to the region in reference to the works of literary artists who were also deeply immersed in the Calumet area. The variety of images reproduced here, along with the diversity of the essays, should make for interesting and informative reading.

CONTENTS

Preface		4
Grant Wood's Conflicted Regionalist Aesthetic	Sara Kosiba	7
Irving K. Pond: The Making of a Chicago Architect	Guy Szuberla	27
The Literary Architecture of Wright Morris	Joseph J. Wydeven	51
Is Minnesota in the Midwest Yet? Images of an Iconoclastic Midwestern State	C. Elizabeth Raymond	63
Words and Photographs: Imaginative Literature and the Making of <i>The Calumet Region:</i> <i>An American Place: Photographs by</i> <i>Gary Cialdella</i>	Gary Cialdella	80

GRANT WOOD'S CONFLICTED REGIONALIST AESTHETIC

SARA KOSIBA

Most known for his iconic painting *American Gothic* (1930), Grant Wood was exploring regionalism in art at the same time that regionalism in literature was also undergoing extensive advocacy and development. While Wood embraced the artistic possibilities of his native Iowa, he also showed great ambivalence toward the moniker of a “regional” artist, and his comments often demonstrated that indecisiveness in addressing the focus and purpose of his art. In regard to *American Gothic*, Wood vacillated in applying meaning to the painting, finding it both Midwestern and universal, depending on the moment. Wood also illustrated a special edition of one of the books most notable in the literary “revolt from the village” movement, Sinclair Lewis’s *Main Street*, seeming to embrace and almost parody Midwestern figures in those illustrations simultaneously. Alongside the regional artistic debate, illustrated by columns like Carl Van Doren’s “The Revolt from the Village” and the writings of the Southern Agrarians¹ being worked out in various publications of the time, Wood’s name would be associated with a similar regional critique, suggested by the title of his essay, “Revolt against the City” (a text now attributed to Frank Luther Mott), a publication that embraced the freedom rural environments brought to art.² The similar struggles and arguments taking place in regional art and literature demonstrated the difficulty in crafting a regionally distinctive aesthetic and the problems so many individuals faced in reconciling their art with their identities. Examining these parallel moments synthesizes the cultural struggles facing Midwestern artists in all media during that time and informs the contemporary issues we face in understanding and defining Midwestern culture and identity.

Born near Anamosa, Iowa, on February 13, 1891, Wood spent his formative years there; eventually, he made trips outside the state in his early '20s to attend art school in Minneapolis and Chicago. Like many artistically inclined Midwesterners of the time, Wood also spent time in Paris, making three trips between 1920 and 1926. While never becoming part of the innovative modern art movement marked by artists like Henri Matisse or Pablo Picasso, Wood's early work both mimicked French form and maintained an adherence to certain principles that characterized his later work:

The resemblance of [Wood's] quaint street scenes to earlier interpretations by post-Impressionist French artists, while tenuous, nonetheless measures Wood's distance from contemporary urban realists in his own country. Though not a total stranger to American cities, he was inattentive to their crowds of inhabitants, superstructures, and enormous spaces as subject matter even before his rural regionalist commitment. (Dennis, Grant Wood 64)

Upon his return from Europe, Wood began focusing more intently on defining a regional artistic style, explaining later, "I lived in Paris a couple of years and grew a spectacular beard that didn't match my face or my hair, and read [H.L.] Mencken and was convinced that the Middle West was inhibited and barren." Wood continued to explain humorously that his aesthetic changed when "I realized that all the really good ideas I'd ever had came to me when I was milking a cow. So I went back to Iowa" (qtd. in "Artist's Odyssey" 30). In 1933, Wood participated in an exhibition at the Kansas City Art Institute that placed his work alongside that of Thomas Hart Benton and John Steuart Curry, resulting in the assertion of a regionalist movement in American art located predominantly in the Midwest (Balken 78).

Wood's *American Gothic* was not his first major work after returning to Iowa for good, but it was the painting that brought him the most fame and notoriety. In October 1930, the painting was awarded the Norman Wait Harris Bronze Medal at the Art Institute of Chicago's Forty-Third Annual Exhibition of American Paintings and Sculpture. In the months afterward, an image of the painting went on to be reproduced in publications as widespread and diverse as the *New York Times*, *Chicago Evening Post*, *Des Moines Register*, *New York Herald Tribune*, *Boston Evening Transcript*, *Boston Herald*, *Kansas City Star*, *Omaha World-Herald*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Indianapolis Star*, *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, and many others

(Biel 46-47). *American Gothic* was also the first painting to complicate publicly Wood's stance as a regional or Midwestern painter. Everyone from art critics to members of the public seemed unable to determine if Wood was ridiculing or simply representing Midwestern life, a distinction made even more difficult by his own resistance to clearly state his intentions. In regard to much of the cultural debate that followed the painting's widespread appearance, Stephen Biel notes in his study of *American Gothic* that

[Wood] told the press: "All of this criticism would be good fun if it were made from any other angle. I do not claim that the two people painted are farmers. I hate to be misunderstood as I am a loyal Iowan and love my native state. All that I attempted to do was to paint a picture of a Gothic house and to depict the kind of people I fancied should live in that house." The clothing, he explained, indicated that these people were "small-town" rather than country folk. And they were generically small-town. It was "unfair to localize them to Iowa," Wood insisted; they were "American."

Why relocating these "prim, stern people" from farm to town made much of a difference, Wood didn't reveal, and he later contradicted himself in saying (in 1933, when the painting was already being seen differently) that "the cottage was to be a farmer's home." (48-49)

Biel's study highlights the consistent ambiguity Wood had in defining his work and particularly this painting. As much as Wood was reclaiming his home region, he was as ambivalent as many other regional artists at the time as to what that region actually symbolized and meant.

The often contrary nature of Wood's own evaluation of his art and the indecision shown by various critics in terms of artistic interpretation were highly characteristic of the time period. The early twentieth century saw a surge in discussion of local and regional politics, literature, and art in American life. As Biel notes,

American Gothic appeared to its first viewers as the visual equivalent of the revolt-against-the-provinces genre in 1910s and 1920s American literature—the genre, broadly speaking, of Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919), [Floyd] Dell's *Moon-Calf* (1920), Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street* (1920) and *Babbitt* (1922), as well as [Carl] Van Vechten's *The Tattooed Countess* [1924] and many other novels and short stories. (70)

The ambivalence many felt toward the individuals depicted in *American Gothic* was also timely as the painting received the award from the Art Institute of Chicago the same year that Sinclair Lewis became the first American awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, mainly for the merits of his novels *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, two novels that critiqued small-town, middle-class Midwestern life. Wood's philosophies would also be publicly shaped by comments in the 1935 essay, "Revolt against the City," where the narrative voice notes,

I do believe in the Middle West—in its people and its art, and in the future of both—and this with no derogation to other sections. I believe in the Middle West in spite of an abundant knowledge of its faults. Your true regionalist is not a mere eulogist; he may even be a severe critic. I believe in the regional movement in art and letters (comparatively new in the former though old enough in the latter); but I wish to place no narrow interpretation on such regionalism. (658)

These comments, attributed to Wood but most likely written by noted regionalist Frank Luther Mott, underscore the complicated nature of regional art and how the love of a region does not exempt an artist or author from also acknowledging harsh realities. Even though the words may not have been penned by Wood himself, associating his name with the pamphlet as the "authorial" figure publicly links his art with these philosophical views.

It is perhaps this love of the region despite its faults that motivated Wood's varying portrayals of images and landscapes in the 1937 Limited Editions Club publication of *Main Street*. Lewis's *Main Street* had contributed to the founding of the "revolt from the village" movement argued for by Carl Van Doren in 1921, shortly after the novel's publication. Carol Kennicott, the novel's protagonist, leaves her life in vibrant St. Paul and moves to Gopher Prairie, Minnesota, to live with her newlywed husband. The atmosphere of the small town is stifling to her, and the novel becomes a detailed analysis of what the people and conditions are like for her as she tries to adapt. Lewis based much of the novel on his own memories and experiences growing up in the town of Sauk Centre, Minnesota. Van Doren asserts, regarding the novel, that "[t]he villages of the Middle West, [*Main Street*] asseverates, have been conquered and converted by the legions of mediocrity, and now, grown rich and vain, are setting out to carry the dingy banner, led by the booster's calliope and

the evangelist's bass drum, farther than it has ever gone before—to make provincialism imperialistic" (410). It is unlikely Wood was ignorant of these criticisms, as "Revolt against the City" notes that "[t]he feeling that the East, and perhaps Europe, was the true goal of the seeker after culture was greatly augmented by the literary movement which Mr. Van Doren once dubbed 'the revolt against the village.' Such books as 'Spoon River Anthology' and 'Main Street' brought contempt upon the hinterland and strengthened the cityward tendency" (652).

Disregarding this criticism and solidifying the signs of his own regional ambivalence, Wood accepted the commission to illustrate the special edition of *Main Street*. Lea Rosson DeLong notes in the companion volume to a 2004 exhibit of the *Main Street* illustrations that

Both men [Lewis and Wood] were amenable to the project, so it went forward. Wood agreed to produce illustrations (nine were published) to be interspersed throughout the book, and Lewis agreed to write a new introduction. Further, [New York publisher George] Macy and his printers, the Lakeside Press of Chicago, allowed Wood to contribute to the design of the book. His drawings were produced mainly in 1936, with the last arriving in New York in March of 1937, and by May, the book was published and favorably reviewed. (9)

This suggests that Wood played a more collaborative role in the process than simply providing images. DeLong also notes that "[t]he precision and complexity of the completed drawings is evidence that he addressed this task with the same attention he brought to his painting" (41), a factor particularly evident when considering the simplicity in Wood's composition of the nine pictures on brown craft paper using only white or blue/black shades of pigment. The fact that he achieved such a variation of color and dimension with such basic tools is a strong sign of his talent.

Critics have varying perspectives on the nature of the illustrations. In "Illustration as Interpretation: Grant Wood's 'New Deal' Reading of Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*," David Crowe highlights Wood's apparent embrace of the rural farmer throughout his paintings and sees Lewis's work as contrary to that, proposing that "Wood's reading of *Main Street*, as evidenced by the illustrations, is concerned with issues raised by the 'New Deal' politics of the 1930s—including the virtue and necessity of work, the nature of

political systems and the individual, and the humanitarian responsibility of citizens in a humane society" (96). Other critics, particularly Lea Rosson DeLong in her recent commentary on the individual images, find direct parallels between Lewis's words and Wood's illustrations—as if Wood is translating *Main Street* into a visual representation using little editorial/artistic comment.

However, in viewing the images themselves, it appears that Wood is calling for broader reflection. An unsigned article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* published shortly after the 1937 edition's release, states,

The frontispiece is entitled *Main Street Mansion* and the characters chosen are described as types, not called by name. *The Perfectionist* is obviously Carol Kennicott, the heroine of the novel, and *General Practitioner* is, of course, her physician husband—his portrait being the more striking for the whimsical choice of a pair of hands than a face as the subject. One recognizes the other characters as the book is recalled or read. But clearly these are intended to be neither portraits nor mere sidelights on Lewis' homely characters. They are Grant Wood's own conception of American village types and they are the fruit of his years of concentration on such people. As such they go a good deal beyond the scope of ordinary illustration and have a place of their own, possibly as prominent as the novel itself. (qtd. in DeLong 46-47)

The observation that Wood has not linked these portraits to the actual characters by name is particularly apt. The illustrations offer similarities and yet interpretive differences in connection with the novel that are strongly suggested by the descriptive labels provided.

The resolution of the debate over the true intentions of Wood or the closeness of his interpretations to the descriptions in Lewis's text is ultimately left to the viewer. However, there are enough complications in the images to suggest that seeing them merely as a cosmetic appendage to the text is overly simplistic. John E. Seery takes many critics to task in their assessment of *American Gothic* for "seem[ing] to presume [that] Grant Wood cannot be both affectionate and scandalous; such extremes must be mutually exclusive; likewise, his simple painting cannot be truly Janus-faced, a projection of projections, of reciprocating gazes that withhold and mask as much as they insinuate and reveal" (par. 23). This critique also applies to the *Main Street* illustrations, as there are layers and distinctions of Wood's own that make these pictures both similar to the story's

descriptions and independent in their commentaries on the people and places.

The first image in the 1937 edition of *Main Street*, opposite from the title page, is *Main Street Mansion* (titles were determined by Wood).² Questions abound, such as whether this is meant to be the Kennicotts' house, or the house Kennicott intended to build some day, or a representation of some other house. DeLong speculates that Wood's artistry in this picture is an extension of the ambivalence he shows toward the region:

Houses were a specialty of Grant Wood's. He had built them and decorated them for years. He had definite ideas about what sort of domestic architecture was right for the Midwest. *Main Street Mansion* is, like much of his work, a compromise between two conflicting approaches. It represents the pretension and spiritual emptiness that Carol finds, but it also expresses the solidity, comfort, and triumph over the elements of Dr. Kennicott. (99)

Considering the limited materials Wood was working with, the monochromatic nature of the illustration is not surprising. However, he does manage significant color gradation in the other images, which makes it more likely that the bland nature of *Main Street Mansion* is intentional. Significantly, particularly in comparison with the other illustrations, there is no real sign of life in this image other than a few branches and a small patch of sky. Shadows loom prominently in this picture. The solid linear lines of the house project a sense of stability. It is a house that could be at home on a street in Gopher Prairie or on almost any residential town street. It is, above all, a neat and respectable house characteristic of the neatness of the Midwestern landscape in so many of Wood's other paintings. This suggests that while the house may parallel that of the Kennicotts, it may also represent Wood's own commentary on the Midwestern small town.

Wood appears more critical in the portraits of people that form the bulk of the illustrations. In titling those images, Wood focused on portraying a particular type or symbol rather than specifically labeling them after characters in the novel. *The Perfectionist*, which appears near the end of chapter four, is generally thought to be a picture of Carol Kennicott. However, if meant to be a pure portrayal of Carol, it is narrow at best. Even R. Tripp Evans, in his recent biography of Wood, notes the inconsistencies between the portrait and the

character: "Rather than suggesting Lewis's tireless promoter of culture and aesthetics, this figure appears small-minded and hypocritical" (223). Wood's shading manages to convey a blue color (evident in this picture and several others), impressive for use of only white and black pencil. While some critics, such as Crowe and DeLong, contend that the woman's face conveys a sense of superiority, I would suggest that the expression is much more thoughtful or pensive than judgmental. The woman's expression is definitely not a happy one, but if the woman is indeed Carol Kennicott, she is an unhappy character throughout most of the novel as she consistently tries to make Gopher Prairie feel like a place where she can belong and feel at home. At the end of chapter four, where this image appears, she is still trying to figure out the social dynamic in Gopher Prairie. While walking home with her husband from the welcome party thrown for her at the house of Sam Clark, Carol is gently reprimanded by her husband for her impulsive behavior and Lewis describes her reaction: "She was silent, raw with the shameful thought that the attentive circle might have been criticizing her, laughing at her" (53). With Carol's feelings often hurt throughout *Main Street*, it is hard to see how her expression could be very different from that of the woman in the illustration. Wood may be commenting more on the nature of the world's being far from perfect, no matter how much one tries to adapt to it.

The Sentimental Yearner is attributed to the character of Raymond P. Wutherspoon, or "Raymie," and appears in chapter nine. Raymie is referred to in the novel as a "sentimental yearner," making the title fit perfectly, but Wood's picture leans more toward highlighting Raymie at the beginning of his depiction in the novel and does not encompass the changes he goes through after marrying Vida Sherwin in chapter twenty. In the beginning of the novel, Raymie is a misfit among the "manly" men of Gopher Prairie, preferring to engage in singing and the arts. The man in the illustration is well dressed, wearing a bow tie (much like Raymie wears in the novel) and sniffing a flower, which suggests effeminacy. His expression is perhaps the most puzzling, as the man is sniffing the carnation while casting his eyes upward as if in thought or reflection. If these portraits represent "types" as much as they also represent characters, *The Sentimental Yearner* appears much more lost in his own thoughts and sentiments than other portraits in the book. Wood does not appear to be judging the figure in the portrait for his sentimentality as much as

demonstrating yet another type that makes up the dynamics of the small Midwestern town.

Many critics state that Wood's next illustration, *The Radical*, is unsympathetic. Connected to Miles Bjornstam in the novel, particularly through his self-proclamation as a radical (Lewis 115), the image is located in chapter twelve and again is open to individual interpretation. James Dennis, in his comprehensive analysis of Wood's life and work, described a shift in the artist's thinking regarding the portrait:

While his cap, tools, and dogskin coat comply with the Lewis image of the outcast 'Red Swede,' the foxy red mustache is certainly more villainous than picaresque. Thought initially moved by the pathos surrounding Bjornstam, the most convincingly tragic character in the book, Wood finally decided to discard his first compassionate treatment of the handyman, in which raised brows and untrimmed mustache endowed the face with a melancholy, timid aspect. In the published version he satirized instead the bankers'-eye view of the opinionated atheist-anarchist as the slightly insane bad-man of the town. (Grant Wood 122)

However, Dennis's analysis seems a bit harsh in characterizing Wood's attitude toward the radical or struggling members of small towns, as he comments in his later book *Renegade Regionalists* that, even though it didn't figure prominently in his art, Wood "did encourage Midwestern artists to pay attention to the struggles farmers waged seasonally against national and economic forces intensified by the Depression" (61). If Wood was sympathetic to the farmers' plight, it seems odd that he would portray a working-class radical like Bjornstam harshly, as the character is only seeking to make a living for his family and to achieve equal treatment and respect from the rest of the town. It is only when Bjornstam's wife and son contract typhoid from bad water and die that his radicalism becomes more exaggerated. The lack of community compassion during these circumstances makes Bjornstam even more reluctant to feel part of the village. The figure in Wood's portrait looks sideways at the viewer, eyes slightly squinted. Rather than antagonistically defiant, this expression conveys strength, particularly as the figure is gripping what could be the handle of a shovel or some other tool. Clothed as a working man would be and surrounded by tools of his trade (including a hammer and scythe, not-so-subtle references to the Soviet flag),

the figure represents a man ready for hard work and strong enough to stand up for himself. The radical, as a type, is generally unwelcome in small towns for upsetting the status quo, so the expression in the drawing seems appropriate for both the sense of purpose and the hostile interaction with the public that figures such as Bjornstam would encounter.

The General Practitioner, appearing amid chapter sixteen, is one of Wood's more abstract images, particularly as it is the only illustration focused on a person that does not include the person's face. All one sees in this image are hands, presumably the hands of Dr. Kennicott, who refers to himself as a "plug general practitioner" (Lewis 175) in the novel on one side and the hands of an unknown farmer or working man on the other, with only a blue homemade quilt to color the divide between them. The doctor is clearly taking the other man's pulse, marking time on a gold pocket watch. The doctor's hands in the picture are not necessarily the hands described by Lewis in the novel. Lewis depicts Kennicott's hands as being clean and capable, but Carol mentally notes some of their deficiencies later in the novel: "She noted that his nails were jagged and ill-shaped from his habit of cutting them with a pocket knife and despising a nail file as effeminate and urban. That they were invariably clean, that his were the scoured fingers of the surgeon, made his stubborn untidiness the more jarring. They were wise hands, kind hands, but they were not the hands of love" (Lewis 290). Again, focusing on portraying types as much as the characters themselves, the clean, capable doctor's hands in Wood's illustration focus more on the idealized aspects of Kennicott's job—taking care of patients and making house calls—than on his faults as a person or on his personality.

The Good Influence, located in chapter twenty, appears as the most satirical of Wood's pictures, mainly due to the smile on the woman's face. As Lea Rosson DeLong notes in her discussion of the illustrations, "Even without reading the novel, most of us can easily suspect from Wood's drawing how good 'The Good Influence' is" (155). It is a kind smile, but a smile that maintains a judgmental edge rather than pure innocence. Attributed to the character of Mrs. Bogart, the image of the widow is centered in the picture with only the hint of a church and some sky in the background. Wood is careful to show the woman's devotion to her dead husband through the prominent placement of the hands, showing that she still wears a wedding ring. The portrait exudes a sense of self-righteousness.

Mrs. Bogart is a rather self-important character in the novel, playing the role of the neighborhood busybody, continually focusing on what Carol is doing, and gossiping about her neighbors with far from innocent intentions. In fact, the portrait embodies the very type Lewis describes in his novel: "Mrs. Bogart was not the acid type of Good Influence. She was the soft, damp, fat, sighing, indigestive, clinging, melancholy, depressingly hopeful kind. There are in every large chicken-yard a number of old and indignant hens who resemble Mrs. Bogart, and when they are served at Sunday noon dinner, as fricassee chicken with thick dumplings, they keep up the resemblance" (69). The "chicken-yard" is a strong metaphor for Gopher Prairie and, by extension, small towns everywhere. They are all fenced in by their boundaries or local conventions and, in continuing this metaphor, peopled by "hens" like Mrs. Bogart.

The Practical Idealist is often said to be Vida Sherwin. The image is one of the most positive in the collection; the smile on the woman's face appears the most amused and genuine. While she has rather plain facial features, her eyes are bright and engaged. Lea Rosson DeLong proposes that of all the women Wood focused on, this is "the one Wood most admired," although she provides no evidence for this connection. However, DeLong mentions later in her discussion that "Wood depicts the pre-marriage Vida, before the release of her energy into the aggrandizement of her husband and the minutiae of domestic life" (165). This is an important point to consider, for while the earlier depictions of Vida do parallel that of the portrait (Lewis's emphasis on the character being filled with energy and sitting on the edge of the chair in anticipation), the portrait only shows Vida's positive qualities. After her marriage to Raymie Wutherspoon, Vida's inner opinions and bitterness begin to show through, which seems interesting in contrast to the portrait, as *The Practical Idealist* appears in chapter twenty-four. While Vida is a good friend to Carol and loyal to the town as a whole, she carries her own inner conflicts in the novel, reflecting "These people that want to change everything all of a sudden without doing any work make me tired! . . . And [Carol] comes rushing in, and in one year expects to change the whole town into a lollypop paradise with everyone stopping everyone else to grow tulips and drink tea. And it's a comfy homey old town, too!" (Lewis 254). If anything, Vida portrays the inner struggle characteristic of many inhabitants of small towns, wanting to keep things progressive and new, yet torn with a love of

the community as it is. As a more complicated character, the portrait of *The Practical Idealist* does not truly encompass all of Vida's dimensions.

The Booster, located in chapter twenty-nine, is a portrait representing the type of character that "Honest Jim" Blausser embodies in the novel, a rather Babbitt-like figure complete with his striped suit, Odd Fellows ring and Moose Lodge pin. The figure looms over the podium he's leaning on, prominently in front of the American flag, suggesting his own exaggerated importance or presence. It also signifies a sense of strong, patriotic Americanism. In one of the disagreements between Carol and her husband toward the end of the novel, Dr. Kennicott questions her sincerity and patriotism: "You can camouflage all you want to, but you know darn well that these radicals, as you call 'em, are opposed to [World War I], and let me tell you right here and now, you and all these long-haired men and short-haired women can beef all you want to, but we're going to take these fellows, and if they ain't patriotic, we're going to make them be patriotic" (Lewis 420). Carol's response refers to "Honest Jim" Blausser, asking her husband if failing to accept what he represents makes her "pro-German" and un-American. "Honest Jim" is loved by the town of Gopher Prairie, not entirely for his actions, but because he represents patriotism and loyalty and tells the community what they want to hear. Particularly as *Main Street* was published so soon after World War I, the figure of "Honest Jim" captures the fervent Americanism expressed in many small towns, and Wood's illustration gives visual perspective to this type.

Village Slums is the last image in the book and the last one that Wood completed. DeLong notes that "if the slum he portrays is not a Midwestern Hell's Kitchen, it is still a dreary place" (190). The slums in the picture resemble the slums of Gopher Prairie where Miles Bjornstam and his family live. They portray a stark contrast to the prosperity or comfort in the rest of the village. Lewis provides the town's perspective on this area by stating, "Wherever as many as three houses are gathered there will be a slum of at least one house," and notes the local townspeople's perspective that there is no poverty in their town, and if any appears, it is deserved (113). However, despite the dreariness in Wood's illustration, the houses also represent a sense of community, even if the neighborhood is segregated from the rest of the town. While Wood does not specifically depict people in this image, we do see tracks from many individuals spread-

ing outward from the communal water pump located in the center of the picture. These tracks through the snow portray a sense of life and community in a place where people would often focus on the opposite. As the last image in the book, located in chapter thirty-three, it suggests a continued imperfection in a town that strives to be otherwise.

Wood's illustrations are far from caricatures and do little to embrace blindly the idealized nature of small town life. And yet, I contend that his portraits do not convey as heavy a critique of the Midwest and the small town as Lewis's novel does. His illustrations, while relevant specifically to *Main Street*, also lend themselves to an interpretation of "Main Streets everywhere," as Lewis notes in his introduction to the novel. They show images with redeeming and yet flawed characteristics; the illustrations are of places and people who are often strong and yet ordinary, human and yet cold, eager and yet empty. The complicated sentiments expressed by Wood prior to drawing these images carry through in their production, as these characters and images are far from being grotesques but embody admirable qualities and imperfections simultaneously. "Revolt against the City" argues that true regionalists need to be capable of admiration along with criticism for the people and places they focus on; Wood's illustrations show that he adheres to that philosophy in his work.

Wood is not alone in his indecision regarding Midwestern art, as many literary figures also demonstrated this same ambivalence in their writing and careers. In the fiction of the time period, the love/hate dichotomy often used to categorize reactions to the region becomes blurred with many perspectives in between those two extremes. Midwestern writers in the 1920s and 1930s struggled with the region in their work. Those who stayed in the region tended to embrace the Midwest with more warmth, but they did not see it as representing perfection either. Bess Streeter Aldrich notes imperfections in many of her characters, as they are caught up in instances of being critical and vain about who they are and what their place is in the world. Ruth Suckow, like Wood, a fellow Iowan, portrays characters who are often farmers or from small towns as they face issues like unemployment and divorce—and, at times, are subjected to harsh criticism from their neighbors and local town society. Writing in the third person, Suckow comments in the introduction to her col-

lection *Carry-Over* (1936) about the way that contemporary critics had addressed her own work:

She was led to recall earlier criticism, not her own. Some of this seemed out-moded, some well taken, some peculiarly ill-judged. Most of these books were first published in an era when American self-consciousness was highly aroused and very touchy. Their purpose was frequently mistaken for an 'indictment' of American rural and small town life, particularly in the Middlewest, or for a sort of exposition on the general futility of human existence. Obviously, the books are neither indictment nor celebration. The writer has always believed that the matter of locality has been overemphasized in estimations of her fiction, and re-reading, she is happy to say, has confirmed that belief. If the stories did not throw a shadow beyond locality, she would never have gone to the trouble of writing them. (vii)

These comments hold true both for Suckow's work and those of her fellow Midwest-based writers, such as Aldrich, Zona Gale, August Derleth and others. Their work embodies a sense of the local while still throwing light on larger ideas and themes. For those Midwestern-born writers who left the region, the situation was just as complex. While writers like Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Robert McAlmon and others "escaped" the Midwest to become part of literary and artistic circles in places like Paris and New York City, the writing they created in those places still harkened back to the region, not only drawing on subjects they knew well but also representing that complicated relationship to place characteristic of regional writing.

Overall, Wood's images, while perhaps not embodying the perfect stereotypes of village life, show a dynamic in their overall composition that appears in many depictions of Midwestern art and literature. Wood's illustrated commentary also shows an ambivalence in depicting Midwestern subjects that parallels the authors of his time, most of whom are engaged in similar struggles. Perhaps studying the visual complexities of this artistic struggle can provide us with complementary insights into the literary representations of attraction and repulsion that the region inspires.

Troy University

NOTES

- ¹Carl Van Doren's article highlighted the significant number of texts, including Lewis's *Main Street*, which tended to portray small Midwestern towns in a harsh light. The Southern Agrarians were a band of poets and scholars primarily associated with Vanderbilt University who advocated to a return to rural Southern values. Their philosophies were best articulated in their collection *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930). These were two of a number of publications during this time discussing and debating regional art and culture.
- ²Many scholars have noted that Wood was not the author of "Revolt against the City," including Wanda M. Corn in her study, *Grant Wood: The Regionalist Vision* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1993), (232-33) and R. Tripp Evans in his recent biography of Wood. Both authors extensively explain the rationale behind this determination, including comments made by his sister, Nan Wood Graham, in her memoir, *My Brother, Grant Wood* (Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1993). Evans states in his biography of Wood that the artist "appears to have lent his name to the project as a personal favor to Mott" (232).
- ³All comments regarding the illustrations (and the accompanying photographs) are from an examination of copy #1184 (out of 1500 original copies) of the Limited Editions Club edition of *Main Street*. Thanks to Kent State University Library Special Collections for permission to view and photograph the illustrations. (Thanks also to MBI, Inc. for copyright permission to publish the photographs with this article.)

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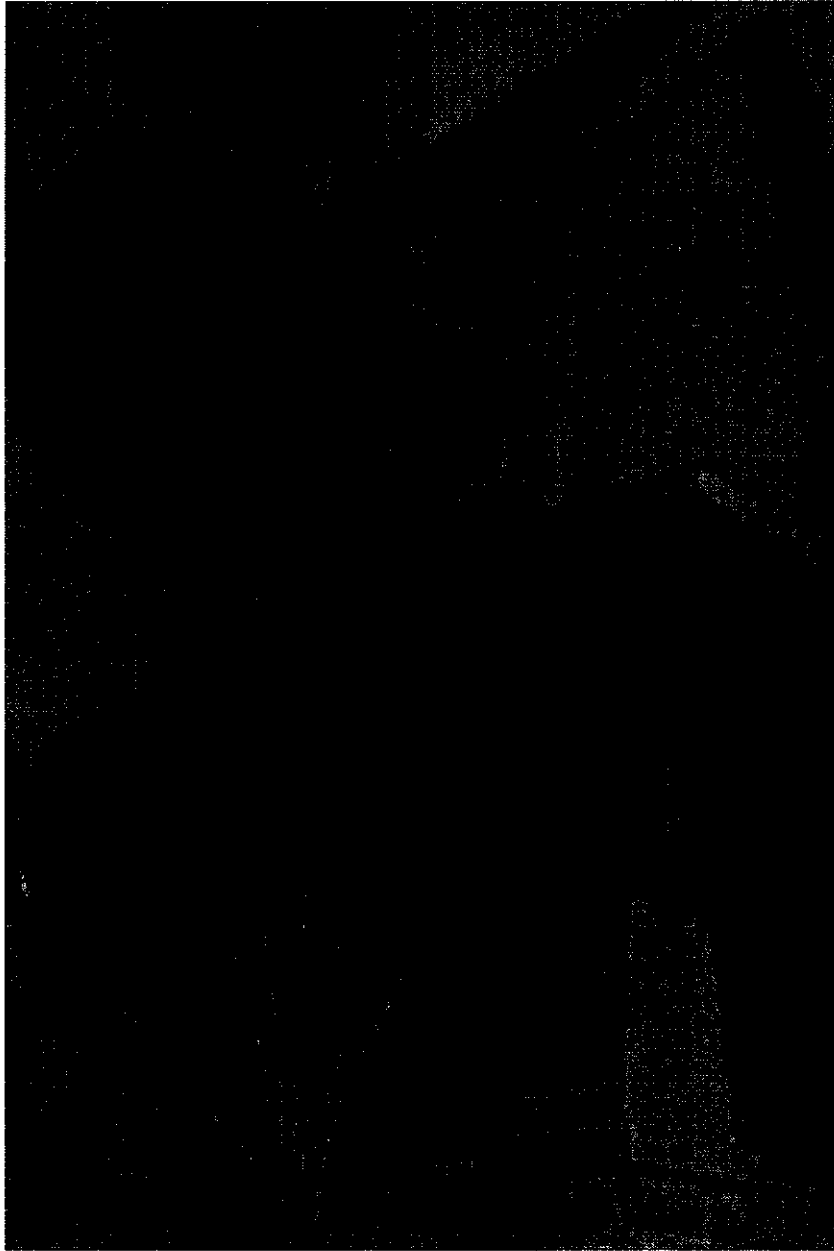


Plate 1: *Main Street Mansion*. Photograph courtesy of Kent State University Library Special Collections. Reproduction permission courtesy of MBI, Inc.



Plate 2: *The Perfectionist*. Photograph courtesy of Kent State University Library Special Collections. Reproduction permission courtesy of MBI, Inc.

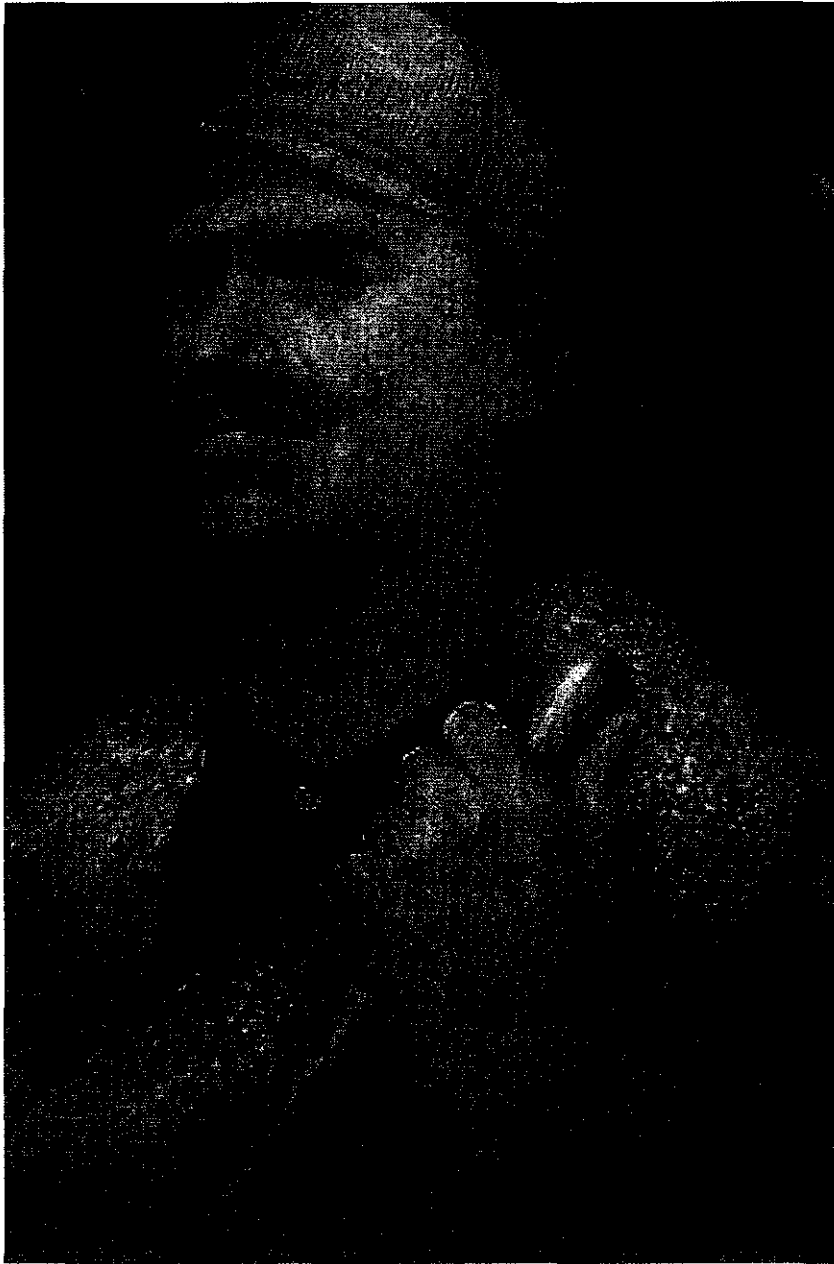


Plate 3: *The Radical*. Photograph courtesy of Kent State University Library Special Collections. Reproduction permission courtesy of MBI, Inc.

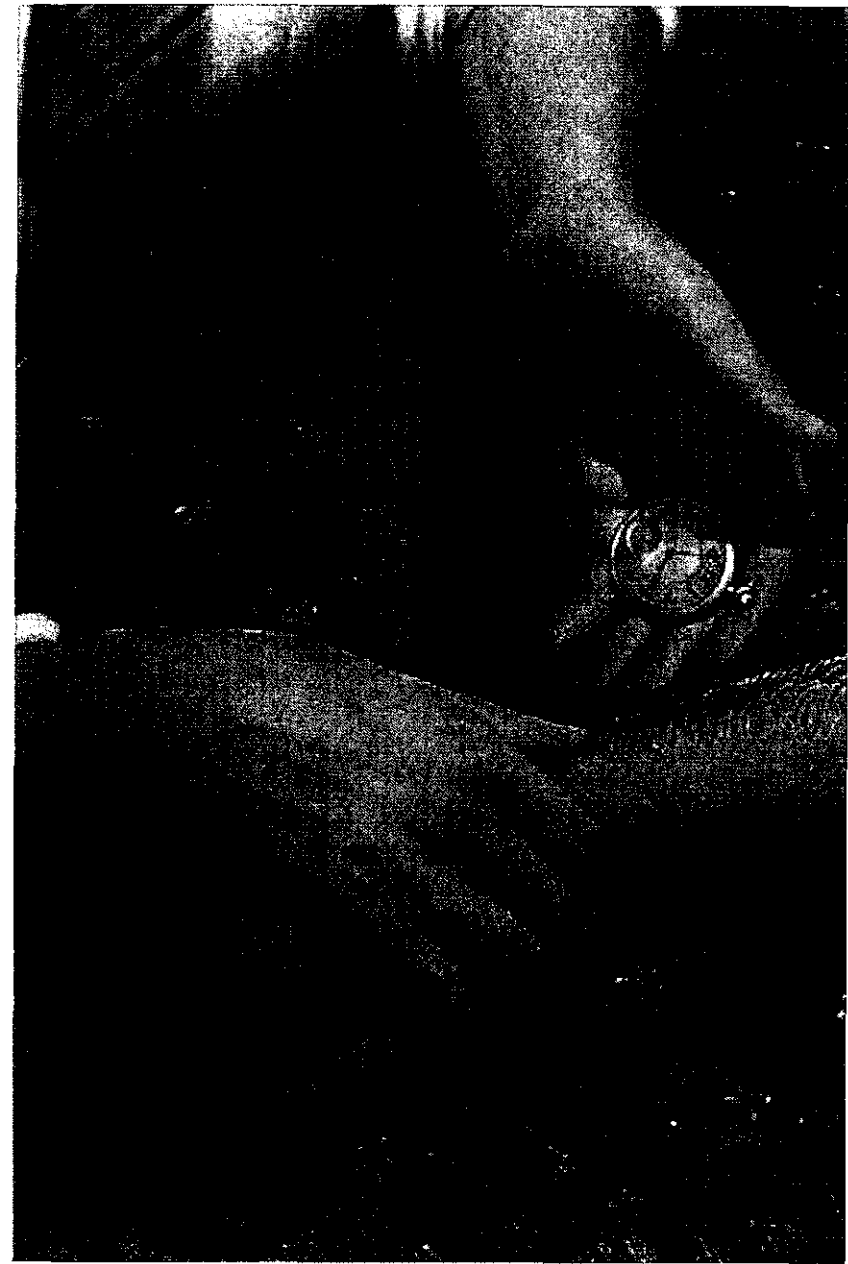


Plate 4: *General Practitioner*. Photograph courtesy of Kent State University Library Special Collections. Reproduction permission courtesy of MBI, Inc.

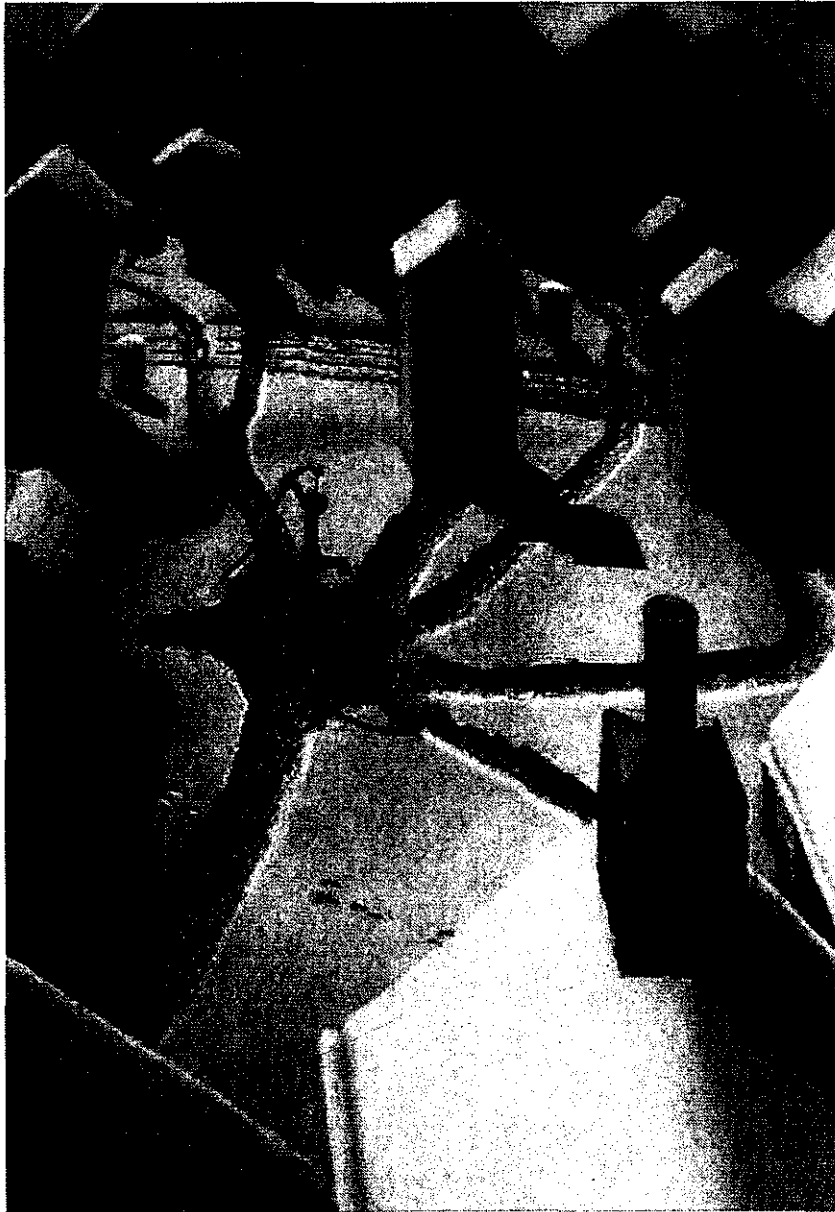


Plate 5: *Village Slums*. Photograph courtesy of Kent State University Library Special Collections. Reproduction permission courtesy of MBI, Inc.

IRVING K. POND: THE MAKING OF A CHICAGO ARCHITECT

GUY SZUBERLA

When Irving Kane Pond (1857-1939) took the Michigan Central from Ann Arbor to Chicago in mid-summer 1879, he was twenty-two years old, had just graduated with a degree in civil engineering from the University of Michigan and hoped to make his way as an architect (plate 1). Some sixty years later, writing notes for his autobiography, he could still recall the exact time and date of his arrival in Chicago: "July 31, 1879 at 11:25 am."¹ Before the trip from his home in Ann Arbor, he had visited the city only once on a football weekend. Yet, even then, he knew that this was the place to begin his "real education in architecture" (79). Through the summer he had worked as a surveyor, saving up the cash he would need to live in the city. He carried with him one book on art, Philip Hamerton's *Thoughts about Art*, a portfolio of his own pen-and-ink drawings, and, most important, a welcoming invitation from the Chicago architect William Le Baron Jenney (*Autobiography* 79, 157).² Like countless other young men and women before and after him, he was going to Chicago to seek his fortune, to fulfill ambitions that he was just beginning to realize.

He soon found that Jenney, his old teacher at Michigan, could give him no permanent job and not much paying work. He did give him a place in his office, a kind of springboard for a job search. During the first few months, as he struggled to find work as an architect, Pond shared the top floor of [an] Ontario Street house with college friends. The long winter away from home, his worries about money, and a brush with "typhoid" tempted him to give up on his ambitions (*Autobiography* 79, 158). Until the spring of 1880, when he started work under the architect Solon S. Beman at Pullman, he



Plate 1: Irving K. Pond, 1879, months before he leaves Ann Arbor for Chicago. Class picture, University of Michigan, Pond Family Papers, Bentley Historical Library, The University of Michigan.

filled in as a draftsman for Jenney, picked up odd jobs with other architects and designers, and finished serving out a rough, unplanned apprenticeship. Working at Pullman, the model industrial city, he quickly rose from draftsman to supervising architect. In 1883, Beman offered him a partnership.

With a change in a line or two, the story of his “permanent move to Chicago” might be fit into the popular tales of small-town Midwesterners coming to live in the big city (*Autobiography* 151). George Ade, John T. McCutcheon, and others had spun such adventures into newspaper fables and cartoons. Dreiser, Hamlin Garland, and Henry Blake Fuller, the historian Timothy B. Spears notes, made “small-town and rural transplants” into “a recognizable urban type”(xxi). Pond knew Ade, McCutcheon, Fuller, and Garland, and it’s possible that, for a dozen pages or so, the influence of their writings—and the figure of the “urban type” they had created—carried over into the writing of his autobiography.

Pond wrote what became *The Autobiography of Irving Kane Pond* in 1938-39, finishing the manuscript in the last year of his life. His working title was “The Sons of Mary and Elihu,” an indication that he intended an homage to his parents and his brother Allen B. Pond (1858-1929). It was not published until 2009, when the Chicago architect David Swan edited the work and supplemented the text with dozens of photos and line drawings. The twenty-four chapters give us valuable pieces of Chicago’s architectural and cultural history. Pond tells his life story in a voice that sounds, by turns, sententious, charming, playful, and proud. If there is a single type, or a narrative template for the length and breadth of his autobiography, it might be found in the conventions surrounding the artist-hero of the *kunstlerroman*. His first eleven chapters, in particular, seem to trace over this form, outlining his growth from “Boyhood and Infancy” through “College and Education” on to the status of architect and artist. He represents himself, especially in his boyhood and at the outset of his career, as possessed by a “super-sensitiveness,” driven to seek “a deeper insight into affairs human and architectural” (*Autobiography* 46, 91).

Nowhere in the *Autobiography*, though, does Pond suggest that in leaving Ann Arbor and Michigan for Chicago, he was throwing off outworn village prejudices or living out a dream of artistic liberation. Instead, he takes pains to honor the social idealism and the stern Victorian moral values of his parents. His father had been an ardent

abolitionist, a newspaper publisher, social reformer, and state senator. He frequently entertained Michigan faculty and local political leaders, and Pond remembers with pride “the many inspirational figures” that had visited his home (*Autobiography* 75). If going to Chicago and then touring Europe (in 1883) completed his “education in architecture,” his travels did not cancel out his home-grown values. Through much of the autobiography, he shows himself building upon his college studies and the experience of growing up in Ann Arbor.

Pond’s career was long, productive, and varied. Between 1886, when Pond & Pond was established, and 1936, when the firm closed, I.K. Pond designed over three hundred “buildings and projects.”³ Though his name and some of his commercial work, like the Kent Building (1903), have been associated with the Chicago School of Architecture, he persistently denied that he was part of the Chicago School (*Autobiography* 165). Arguing against a regional designation, he said that he preferred the term “modern” (qtd. in Prestiano 46). He’s generally credited with having coined the term “Prairie School,” but, in defining it, he disparaged the widespread notion that the horizontal lines of this architecture expressed democracy or “the spirit of the prairies of the great Middle West” (*Meaning* 174). His most famous commission, and perhaps the most important, was the Hull-House complex of buildings, designed and built for his friend Jane Addams over a twenty-year period, beginning in 1889. The 1910 City Club (now Chicago’s John Marshall Law School) was another notable expression of his progressive values and those of his brother Allen: it was once home to the Municipal Voters League. His designs for student unions—the Michigan Union, Michigan League, Purdue Union, and Michigan State Union, among them—defined the building type, and, in still other ways, expressed his belief that this architecture promoted democracy and an uplifting idealism.

Pond was eighty-two years old when he wrote the final chapters of his autobiography. He had lived long enough to sense what his place in architectural history might be, and his descriptions of his own work and professional career, alongside characterizations of rivals like Frank Lloyd Wright, introduce some special pleading. Because he had outlived most of his contemporaries, professional rivals, and closest friends, as well as his family and his wife, an elegiac tone shadows parts and passages and whole chapters of the autobiography. Remembering the architect Louis Sullivan, he continues some of the arguments and late-night “rambling conversations” they

started twenty and thirty years before at The Cliff-Dwellers Club (*Autobiography* 59-60). A dozen pages or more of Pond’s autobiography can be read as a response to Sullivan’s *The Autobiography of an Idea* (1924), a book he had reviewed and criticized on publication.⁴ But, just as interesting and important, his autobiography stands as a record and recollection of an architect who played a part in the creative years of Chicago’s first Renaissance.

“EUROPEAN SKETCHES”

Pond, if the narrative frame in the *Autobiography* holds true, always had a program for self-improvement and cultural education. When Solon S. Beman offered him a partnership in 1883, he chose instead a year of travel through France, Spain, Italy, Germany, England, and other European countries (*Autobiography* 90-1). His intent, as the “Personal Gossip” column in *The Inland Architect* had it, was to “study the architecture of the continent, old and new” (August 1883). He topped his grand tour with visits to New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. The travel gave him the chance to see and sketch the architectural monuments and art that, until then, he had seen only in reproductions and architectural histories. In the *Autobiography*, he had fondly remembered that while in college he drew the illustrations for the classicist Martin L. D’Ooge’s book on the Schliemann excavations in ancient Troy (78). Although he says he never regretted that during his second year at Michigan the program in architecture was dropped, he was quick to add that he missed the opportunity to take “a course in Architecture as a cultural study” (*Autobiography* 77-8). The time abroad more than made up for this deficiency and, in ways he might not have anticipated, proved significant for his professional career.

After his travels, he returned to Chicago in August 1884, worked for another year on the remaining projects at Pullman, and, while still in Beman’s office, took the first steps toward establishing a private practice. In 1885 he designed the Ladies Library in Ann Arbor and two modest townhouses on Harper Avenue near the University of Chicago (plate 2). If this work was not yet a declaration of independence, it signaled his intentions and ambitions. With his brother Allen, he formed Pond & Pond in 1886. I.K. Pond was the architect and designer in the firm; his younger brother, a graduate of Michigan in civics, took charge of the business end. Their first important com-

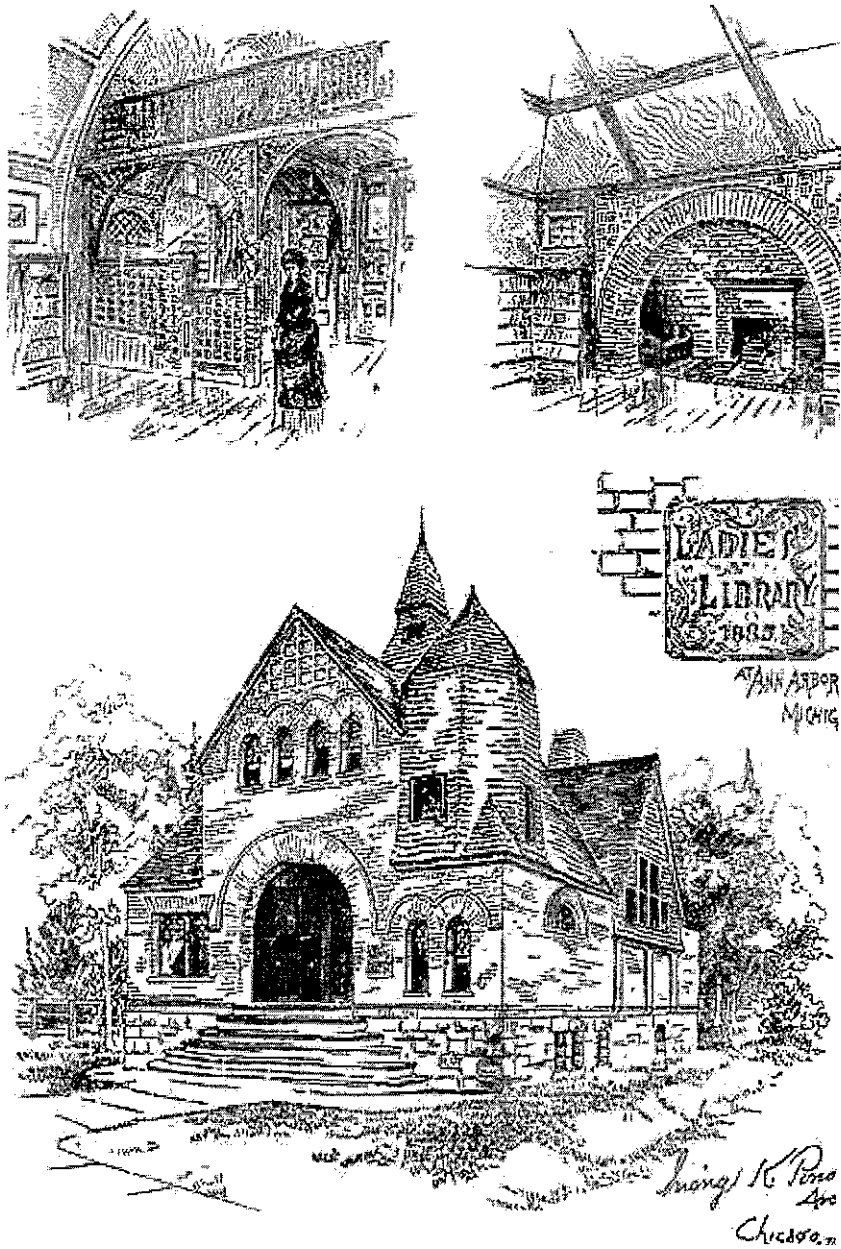


Plate 2: Ladies Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan. Presentation drawings by I.K. Pond, *The Inland Architect* 10 (1885): 37.

mission was back in Michigan: remodeling “The New Detroit Opera House” (1886), on Detroit’s Campus Martius.

The success of the firm in its first years turned on I.K. Pond’s considerable talents and growing reputation, and, at times, on a complex network of Michigan friends and connections. As he charts the genesis of some of these early commissions in his autobiography, the string of concatenated names can grow to the length of a biblical genealogy, the kind of listing stitched together with dozens of “begats.” Consider the way he introduces the story of the Lydia Ward Coonley and Franklin H. Head commissions, both in 1888: “I . . . had met Dr. Swing’s family and . . . the Bents who had hailed from Ann Arbor. Bailey had heard of me through his cousin Frederick C. Gookin whom I had met at the house of another old Ann Arbor friend, Mrs. John Dickinson, on Chicago Avenue. Gookin knew of my writings and sketches . . .” He completes the run of names and connections by recounting a trip to Ann Arbor and Detroit that, in the end, led to an invitation “to prepare plans for two residences,” the Coonley and Head homes on Chicago’s Near North Side (*Autobiography* 142-3).

Pond’s passing reference to his “writings and sketches” gives another clue to the fledgling firm’s successes in the late 1880s. He was referring, almost certainly, to “European Sketches,” a series of articles he wrote for *The Inland Architect* (*IA*).⁵ A few months after his return from Europe, the first of these, “The Alhambra,” appeared in the journal’s December 1884 issue. The ten-part series continued irregularly through January of 1887. Each of the essays recorded—and illustrated with his flowing pen-and-ink drawings—Pond’s impressions of old-world cities and towns, their people and government, their art and architectural monuments. In the essay on Nuremberg, he implicitly identifies himself with “the romantic traveler” (*IA*, January 1887: 102). In the two Alhambra essays, he speaks of himself as a traveler taking in the “customary,” but also as someone ever willing to follow back alleys and climb over housetops to find “ancient Moorish ruins” (*IA*, December 1884: 66). Pond was named after Washington Irving and the writings of his namesake were fully represented in his personal library.⁶ Whether or not he draws directly on Irving’s *Tales of the Alhambra* here, he was writing within an American literary tradition that ran from Irving and Hawthorne through Henry James and Edith Wharton, a tradition valuing journeys to the picturesque ruins and historical places of

Europe. He speaks, for example, of the Alhambra's "soft gleam of romance," and describes the Gate of Justice spreading its shadows over an "enchanted ground" (*IA*, December 1884: 66). (plate 3) In one poetic flight, he says he believes that "every stone in the great pile has its romance or its legend." Yet in the same essay, he shifts easily into the technical language of a civil engineer: "the Moorish builders seemed to recognize the weakness of the arch [The] weight of the walls and roof is carried on the columns by means of lintels and piers" (*IA*, January 1885: 78-9).

The Inland Architect, as Robert Prestiano has said, was "the first major architectural journal in Chicago and the Middle West" (xiii). Between 1883 and 1908, under its editor Robert C. McLean, it was the voice and spirit of "Western Enthusiasm," an advocate for the Chicago School of Architecture before the Chicago School had a name or a recognized identity (Prestiano 39). Chicago's architects, in the 1880s and in the years after, articulated a functionalist or commercial aesthetic and had begun to declare their independence of East Coast influences and traditional historical styles. *The Inland Architect* published their discussions and disputes, the ideas and discoveries that propelled the making of a modern architecture. If anyone felt, if Pond himself thought, that there was a contradiction in putting the "European Sketches" into *The Inland Architect*, it was not said aloud or alluded to in any of his essays. In the late 1880s, on the pages of this journal, Pond's affection for the picturesque places of the old world and the poetry of its architecture coexisted with the opening arguments for Chicago School modernism.

Judging by the commissions that came to Pond & Pond in the late 1880s, the publication of the "European Sketches" served as both an advertisement and as a kind of source book. From his European sketchbooks, he drew general inspiration and particular design motifs. When, for example, he went back to work for Beman in late 1884, his first assignment was to "design the marble stairway on the . . . Adams Street court of the Pullman Building" in downtown Chicago. For the design, he looked to his sketches of St. Mark's in Venice. Using his studies of one of the cathedral's capitals, he followed its "decorative forms," making them over into a "swirl" of leaves in the Pullman design (*Autobiography* 123). The Stevens Art Building (1888), Pond & Pond's first commercial building in Chicago's loop, translated one of Pond's European sketches, a pen-and-ink drawing of Nuremberg's Nassau *haus*. His drawing of this



Plate 3: "The Gate of Justice—Alhambra," illustration for Pond's "European Sketches: The Alhambra, 1," *The Inland Architect* 4 (December 1884): 66.

mediaeval tower house was published in the November 1884 *Inland Architect*; it emphasized the Nassau *haus*'s long sloping rooflines and the picturesque shadows and shapes in the roof's flanking bartizans. These forms, with necessary modifications, were carried into the Stevens design, moved from picturesque and mediaeval Europe to Chicago's commercial center.

Two residences Pond built in 1891—a townhouse for Eugene R. Hutchins and a mansion for Lydia Ward Coonley—reflect his continuing interest in picturesque effects and his use of sketchbook sources. The Stevens Art Building design had more or less directly quoted the forms of the Nassau *haus*. For the Coonley and Hutchins designs, he again used the "European Sketches" to create composite designs. He turned to the sketches published as "Fragments of European Architecture" for the outlines and the rugged surfaces that defined the Hutchins dormers. From still other "Fragments," he drew the peaked caps for the Coonley house's projecting bays (*IA*, August 1884: 10-11). The play of light, shadow, and color in Pond's presentation drawings for the Coonley residence, especially in one watercolor drawn for presentation, make it clear how much he valued "Polychromatic Ornament." In an 1886 essay under that title, he spoke of his admiration for "beautiful and harmonious color composition" and "shadows of broken intensity" in architecture. He illustrated these harmonies through references to his Italian travels: the western front of Venice's St. Mark's, Giotto's famed campanile, and Florence's San Miniato al Monte (*IA*, April 1886: 42). The brick diaperwork in the upper stories of the Coonley mansion and the striated lines of brickwork on its first floor drew inspiration and polychromatic designs from these Italian examples (plate 4).

The Coonley mansion (Lake Shore Drive at Division) and the Hutchins house (1429 Astor) were both built on Chicago's newly fashionable Near North Side. The Hutchins commission, as already noted, came to Pond & Pond through Ann Arbor connections. The Coonley commission, though tangentially linked to Ann Arbor friends and family, held a different significance. Lydia Arms Avery Coonley Ward (1843-1924), to give her fullest name, was a minor writer, the author of inspirational works like *Singing Verses for Children* (1897). She was also a philanthropist, an early supporter of the settlement house movement. It was at her home that Jane Addams said she "first unfolded plans for founding a settlement in Chicago."⁷ That the Ponds came to design the Coonley mansion in 1888—and

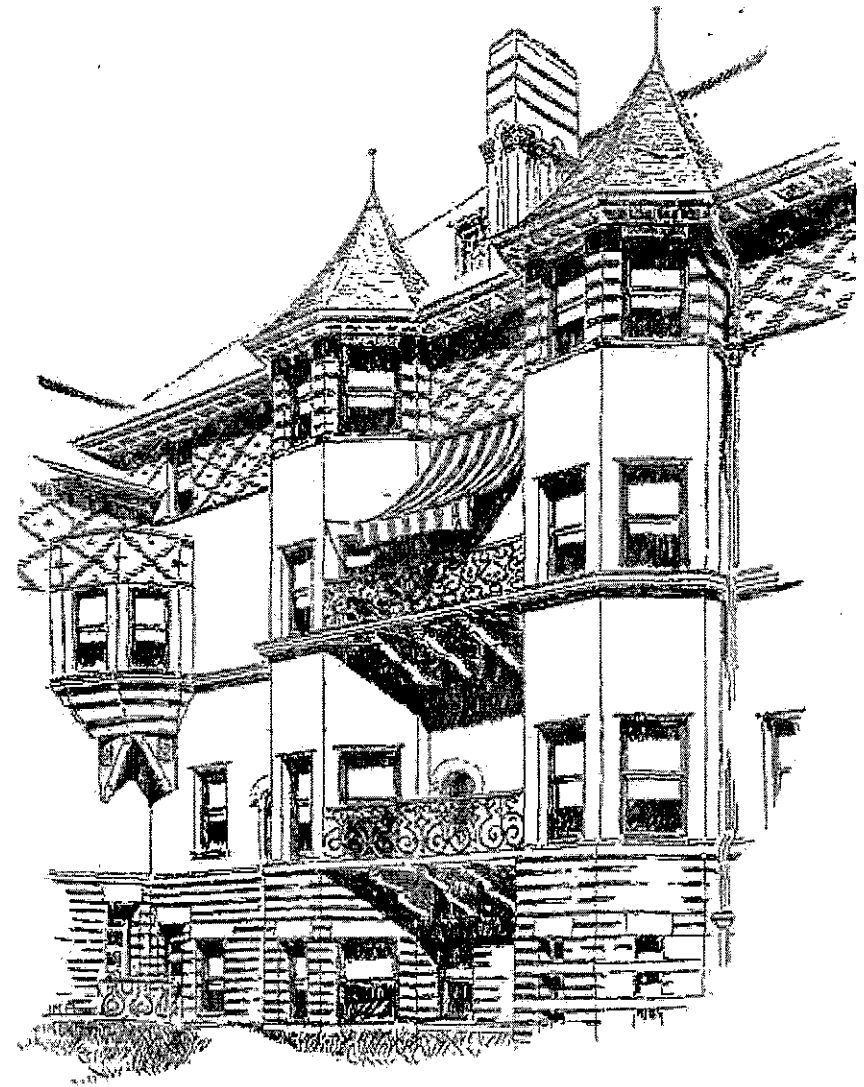


Plate 4: Irving K. Pond, presentation drawing. Residence of Mrs. John C. Coonley, *The Inland Architect* 15, (May 1890).

within a year the first building at Jane Addams' Hull-House—indicated that they had entered into the circle of artists, writers, and patrons who would make up the Chicago Literary Renaissance and the city's "Upward Movement."

"WISE DINERS"

The Inland Architect of September 1890 announced that Pond & Pond was building a home for the Chicago lawyer and industrialist Franklin H. Head: "For Franklin H. Head, a three story and basement residence; size, 32 x 75 ft., to cost about \$20,000, to be erected on State Street, corner of Banks. It will have a front of Anderson brown brick and stone, with brick bays, plate glass windows, mahogany, birch, and oak interior, elevator, dumb waiters . . ." (23). The list of costly materials and modern conveniences, the prime location on the near north side, the price tag, and the name of Franklin H. Head all hinted at the social significance of this commission. Measured against the advertised cost of a typical two-bedroom "Workingman's" home on Chicago's South Side (about \$1,500), the \$20,000 outlay for Head's residence looks rather extravagant. Compared with the Glessner house on Prairie Avenue (\$149,000 in 1887), however, or Potter Palmer's Lake Shore "castle" (more than a million dollars, 1885), the size and cost of Head's home appear modest, if not restrained. Bertha Palmer's grand ballroom ran 75 feet long; the first two floors of Head's home (with its 75-foot front) might have been squeezed into it.⁸

The Palmer mansion, like the grand mansions lining Chicago's Prairie Avenue—popularly known as "millionaires' row"—was an example of conspicuous construction, intended to afford a large stage for public entertainments and displays of wealth and power. Head's chaste Georgian residence, in contrast, seems to have been designed as a setting for a salon. In his *Autobiography*, Pond characterized Head's "home . . . as the favorite rendezvous in Chicago for distinguished artists, actors, and men of letters" (249).⁹ Though Head had made his money as a corporation president and in banking, he had a lifelong interest in literature and the arts. Among other things, he was president of the Chicago Literary Club and published several humorous and satirical books; he was a "governor" of the Art Institute of Chicago, a trustee of the Newberry Library, and in 1900 served as a member of the jury of awards for the Paris Exposition. In the years just before the Little Room and other gathering points for Chicago

writers and artists formed, homes like Coonley's and Head's were comfortable places for talk about the arts and culture and social reform.

Pond and his brother met the novelist Henry Blake Fuller for the first time at Head's new home in 1891. The shy, somewhat reclusive Fuller had wanted to meet the author of the "European Sketches," and Head, though he did not know of Fuller's interest, engineered a dinner for him and the two Pond brothers. Their table talk is lost or, rather, distilled into Pond's recollection of a "congenial atmosphere." We do know from Pond's summary of that night that Fuller told him he "had been reading for the last four or five years my writings . . . in *The Inland Architect*" (*Autobiography* 364). Because Pond adds that they met "just after the appearance of [Fuller's novel] *Pensieri-Vani*," we can place the dinner after 1890 and, without any hazard, figure that they also talked of Fuller's fascination with things Italian (Pilkington 55-6). Fuller's novel—its full title, *The Chevalier of Pensieri-Vani*—wandered over Tuscany's dusty back roads and through Italy's hill towns. His novel, like Pond's "European Sketches," was the story of a pilgrimage to picturesque ruins and a romantic past. The novel's finely formed blend of art criticism, social satire, and operetta characters won over Pond.

Roger Shattuck memorably named "The Origins of the Avant-Garde in France," *The Banquet Years* (1968). With roughly equal justice, the origins of Chicago's Literary Renaissance might be called "A Dinner Time." The dinner at Head's home that night did not, in the style of their Parisian contemporaries, produce an artists' manifesto, launch a literary journal, or even lead to plans for a vanity press publication. Still, the meeting of the Ponds, Fuller, and Head and hundreds of other Chicago dinners and rendezvous like it should be much better known. These common and regular get-togethers in the 1880s and 1890s concentrated the cultural forces that initiated the first Chicago Renaissance.

Before the end of the evening, Pond was "certain that he had found a worthy addition to the growing group of artists" that already included the sculptor Lorado Taft (*Autobiography* 364). Within a few years, this group of artists and others would evolve and grow into the Little Room, the Saracen Club, the Cliff-Dwellers, the Eagle's Nest Artists Colony, and a dozen other clubs and groups dedicated to uplifting the city's arts and culture. Some six years later, Fuller summed up the city's strenuous and self-conscious efforts in an 1897

Atlantic essay: "The Upward Movement in Chicago." In his opening paragraphs, he conceded that Chicago was trying "to make up lost time," trying hard to move "past the plane of required culture on toward the farther and higher plane of actual creative achievement" (534). He implied, when he did not underline it with irony, that such a determined pursuit of "the higher and more hopeful life" was ripe for satire and burlesque (534).

In a self-mocking spirit, Pond, his brother Allen, Fuller, Lorado Taft, and other regulars met as a dinner group grandly named the Deipnosophists, or the Wise Diners. Their coterie also claimed the title The Committee on the Universe. Some forty years later, Pond remembered that the conversation, "was choice, learned and witty." For their own amusement, they gave "one or two burlesque art exhibits." The Wise Diners, earnest as they might be during the rest of the week, sought gaiety and were rarely given to solemnity (*Autobiography* 260-61). The group included, among its large rotating cast, the sculptor Lorado Taft, the novelist Henry Blake Fuller, the journalist Alexander McCormack, and, of course, both Pond brothers.

They dined in the Albion Café, later known as the Tip-Top-Tap, a restaurant on the ninth floor of Beman's Pullman Building (southwest corner, Adams and Michigan). Pond tells us in his autobiography that the main room "was decorated by Louis Tiffany of New York, in his best style" (260). If Chicago had a salon in the 1890s—a place where local wits exchanged *bons mots* and would-be *philosophes* tossed up fantastic schemes of reform—this was the suitably elegant setting for it. The top three floors of the Pullman building once held much-coveted apartments: the financier Samuel Insull, the impresario Flo Ziegfeld, and the performer Anna Held lived there at different times. For some forty years, until Pullman required the space for offices in 1924, the Pond brothers made their bachelor quarters in these apartments.

Fuller parodied the Deipnosophists' dinners in *With the Procession* (1895), the second of his Chicago novels. Drawing on the nights he had dined with the Wise Diners, he invented a fictional Consolation Club. He has its members give mock-serious speeches on "a reconstructed universe" and "the simple hopes and ideals of the Western world" (201). The setting for their meeting seems to have been deliberately stripped bare of Tiffany's art nouveau flourishes. No hint of his exotic figures or gorgeously painted peacocks and friezes appears in Fuller's rendering of the club's "upper chamber on

Erie Street." The Consolation Club members meet, debate, and eat beneath "a large plaster bust" of Ralph Waldo Emerson, "the prince of optimists": "[They] discussed the affairs of a vast and sudden municipality; they bade one another not to despair, after all, either of the city or of the republic. And towards eleven o'clock [were set before them] cheese sandwiches and beer . . ." (199). Members and guests of the Consolation Club present tales of their troubles or complaints about the political and social problems of the time. Instead of receiving consolation, their fellow members dish out ridicule, feign sympathy, and, like the Wise Diners, indulge themselves in a full measure of nonsense humor.

URBAN INTERSECTIONS

Pond & Pond moved its offices several times during the firm's fifty odd years of existence but stayed always in Chicago's downtown, close to the Pullman Building and their favorite clubs and restaurants. Between 1886 and 1891, the firm's first five years, its offices were in the Pullman Building where, until 1926, the Ponds also had their apartments. From the Pullman they moved their offices to the Venetian Building (34 Washington) and, in 1897, to Steinway Hall (17 Van Buren). Here they joined a group of younger architects that included Frank Lloyd Wright, Hugh Garden, Walter Burley Griffin, Myron Hunt, Dwight Perkins, and Robert C. Spencer. The architect Thomas E. Tallmadge remembered "an ideal artistic atmosphere [pervading] the colony in the old lofts of Steinway Hall" (qtd. in Brooks 31). For a year or two, the Steinway Hall architects and some from outside the loft offices made up a luncheon group called the Eighteen. Out of their table talk and an exchange of ideas over drafting boards, they created the residential architecture now known as the Prairie School. Pond, though a regular member of the Eighteen, never wholly embraced the Prairie School style or program. Frank Lloyd Wright associated the "comradeship" of Steinway Hall with "inspiring days" (Brooks 31). That "comradeship" did not last long, as, one by one, the Eighteen moved to other architects' offices or left the city. Nor did Pond and Wright ever become friends. Recounting the old headlines about Wright eloping with a client's wife, Pond condemned the Mrs. Cheney scandal and Wright's other "domestic affairs" (*Autobiography* 168). Over the years the two were to trade personal insults and send out deprecating comments on each other's work. And yet for Pond, the Steinway Hall years between

1898 and 1923 marked an important and productive time. He completed the group of buildings at Hull-House in 1909, built the American School of Correspondence (Chicago 1906), the City Club for the Municipal Voters League (1910-11), and Lorado Taft's studio on the Midway Plaisance (1911); added cottages to the Artists Colony (Oregon, Illinois), and began work on the Michigan Union (1916). In 1910 he was chosen president of the American Institute of Architect, and in 1918 he published *The Meaning of Architecture*.

Pond & Pond won a clientele that, as this abbreviated listing suggests, was urban, educated, and civic-minded. For the most part, their clients lived in Chicago or the immediately surrounding suburbs. Many, like the amateur writers Coonley and Head and the pianist Fanny Bloomfield Zeisler, belonged to the Little Room or in some other way played a vital part in the first Chicago Renaissance. Another block of clients came from the ranks of Chicago's social and political reformers, Jane Addams the most important of these. The Chicago alderman and congressman William Kent, president of the Municipal Voters League, also typifies this group. He commissioned the Kent Building (Franklin and Congress 1903-04), a steel skeletal structure that embodied the architectural forms of the Chicago School (plate 5). Frances Crane Lillie, an early backer of Jane Addams, had Pond build a chastely modern Hyde Park home in 1901. In 1907, her grandfather, the plumbing fixture millionaire Richard Teller Crane (1832-1912), commissioned the Crane Nursery at Hull-House as a memorial to his wife.

Many of the clients that the Ponds found in Chicago were, like themselves, transplants from mid-America. But they also built in small Midwestern towns. Following the lines of rail commutation out of Chicago, the Ponds secured commissions in LaSalle and Kankakee, Illinois; Lake Geneva and Kenosha, Wisconsin; Cadillac, Holt, and St. Joseph, Michigan. Here they matched their progressive architecture to the already advanced tastes and aesthetic values of their hinterland clients. Just as often, they brought to the towns and small cities of the Midwest their version of the modern architecture and technology of the Chicago School.

In April of 1935, some sixty-five years after he had come to Chicago, Pond ended his architectural practice. He withdrew from the successor firm of Pond & Pond and Edgar Martin, and, at the age of seventy-eight, announced his retirement. In 1936 he closed the offices of Pond & Pond. He was making an unhurried exit. The



Plate 5: The Kent Building. Chicago, built 1903-04. Photo from *The Brickbuilder* 25 (September 1916): plate 144.

Chicago School of Architecture had been declared dead in 1922, when the Chicago Tribune Tower competition awarded top prize to a Gothic revival entry by Hood and Howells. Louis Sullivan, in the last chapter of his *Autobiography of an Idea* (1924), had argued that the Chicago School was a lost cause, subverted by the classicism loosed upon America at the World's Fair of 1893. When Lewis Mumford published *The Brown Decades* in 1931, he wrote as if he were rediscovering the long forgotten glories of Chicago's modern architecture.

The cultural forces and concentrated energy that had poured into the Chicago Renaissance—the clubs, dinner groups, artists' colonies, political and professional organizations, as well as the civic movements Pond had joined and organized—were disappearing or fast fading away. The many artists he knew in the Fine Arts Building dispersed after World War I. The Little Room group met for the last time in 1931 (Duffey 56); about the same time, the Chicago Architectural Club moved out of the downtown. By 1936, most of Pond's friends, colleagues, and rivals had died or moved away from the city: Louis Sullivan had died in 1924, Henry Blake Fuller in 1929 and Jane Addams in 1935. The figures that had joined to make the Chicago Renaissance were now becoming the stuff of memoirs. Pond finished writing his autobiography in 1939 and died in the same year.

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NOTES

- ¹Pond's notations on his arrival in Chicago, as well as the addresses of his offices and residences in the city, are given on one of the unnumbered pages preceding the manuscript of his autobiography, "The Sons of Mary and Elihu." The manuscript is collected in the "Irving Kane Pond Papers," American Academy of Arts and Letters.
- ²All future page references to *The Autobiography of Irving K. Pond*, ed. David Swan (Oak Park, IL, Hyoogen Press: 2009) will be cited parenthetically in the text.
- ³For his edition of Pond's *Autobiography*, David Swan compiled a "Partial List of Buildings and Projects (1885-1936)." See the *Autobiography*, pp. 461-67.
- ⁴Pond's review, "Louis Sullivan's 'The Autobiography of an Idea': A Review and an Estimate," appeared in *The Western Architect* 33 (June 1924): 67-9.
- ⁵Additional references to the *Inland Architect and News Record* will be cited as *IA*, and given parenthetically in the text.
- ⁶Pond's bequest to the University of Michigan General Library included several multi-volume collections of Washington Irving's works. "The Exchange and Gift Section" of the University's libraries has a complete record of the several bequests of books he made. See also a comment on his name in the *Autobiography* (19).
- ⁷For the full Jane Addams quotation and a brief listing of Coonley's writings, see the entry on "Lydia Arms Avery Ward Coonley" in the *Dictionary of American Biography*.

- ⁸For example, Chicago developer S.E. Gross offered "a five room brick house" for \$1,750 in *Dziennik Chicagoski* (17 October 1900). See David Lowe's *Lost Chicago* (NY: American Legacy P, 1985) for a description and photos of Mrs. Palmer's ballroom or "picture gallery" (36-7). When completed in the mid-1880s, the Palmer mansion cost over a million dollars. The estimate of costs comes from Susan Benjamin and Stuart Cohen's *Great Houses of Chicago* (NY: Acanthus P, 2008).
- ⁹Hamlin Garland, in *A Daughter of the Middle Border* (NY: Grosset, 1922), much like Pond, described Head's home as "one of the best-known intellectual meeting places on the North Side" (2).

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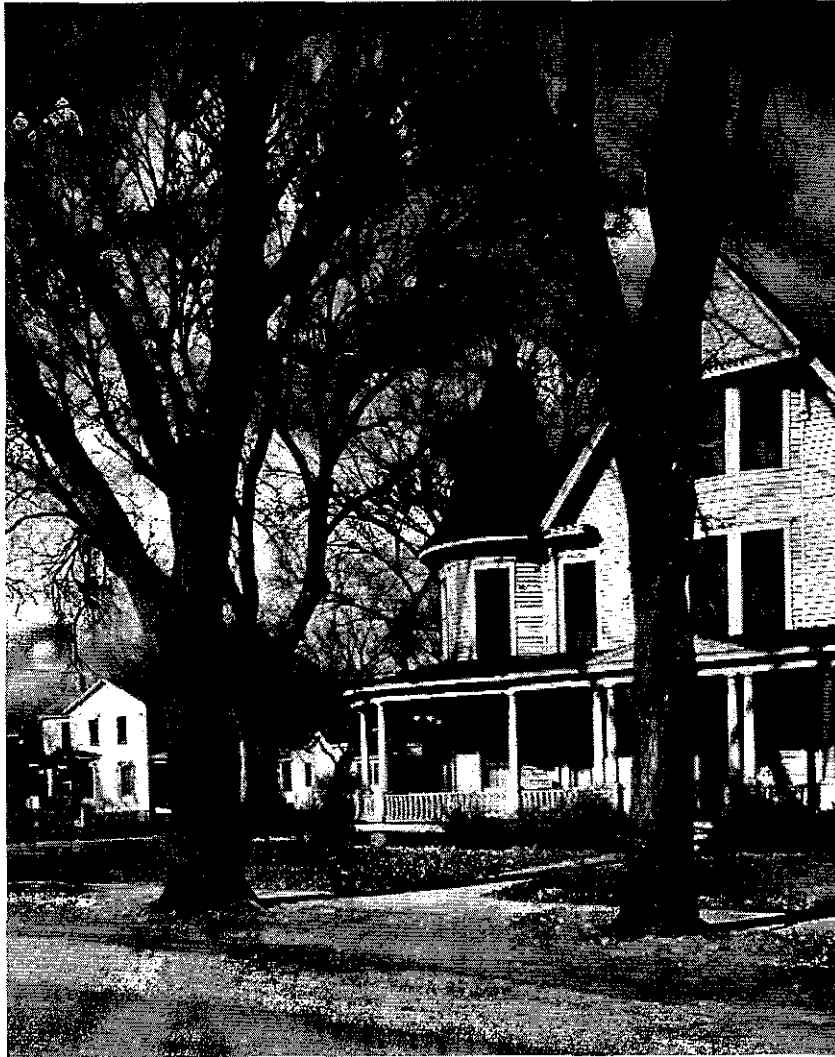


Plate 1: "Central City Nebraska," 1940s. Collection Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona c2003 Arizona Board of Regents.

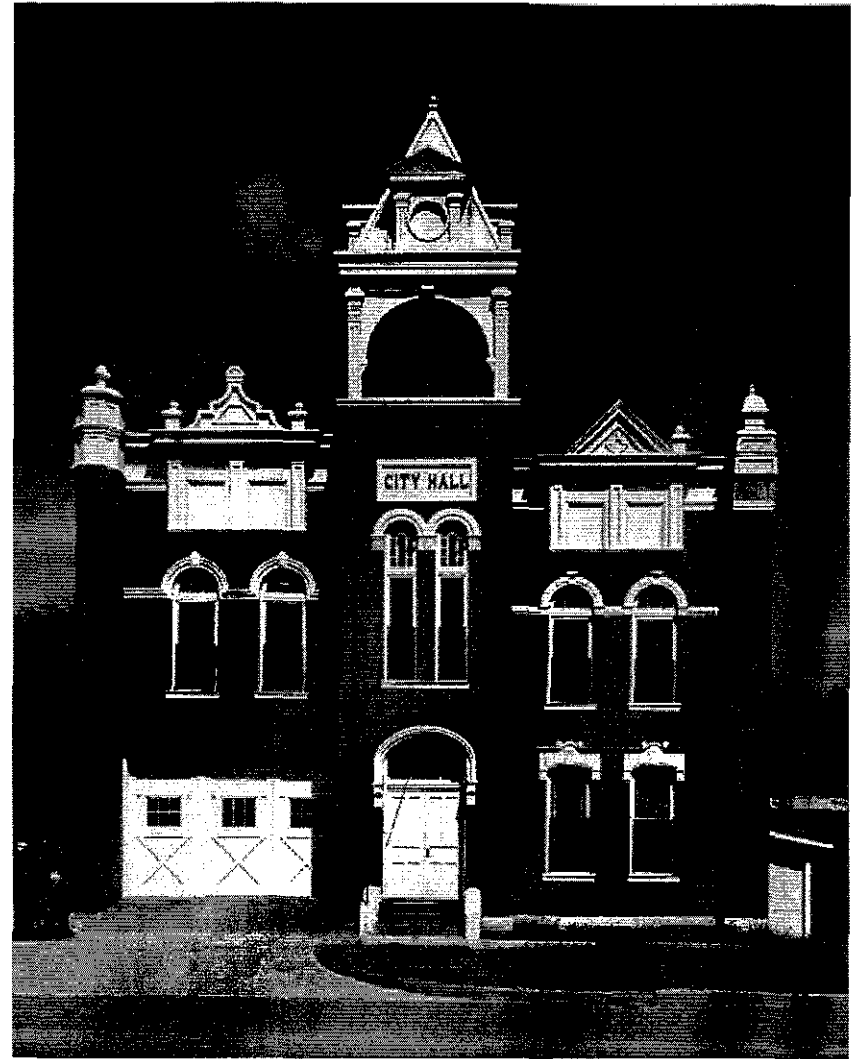


Plate 2: "City Hall, Tecumseh, Nebraska," 1943. Collection Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona c2003 Arizona Board of Regents.

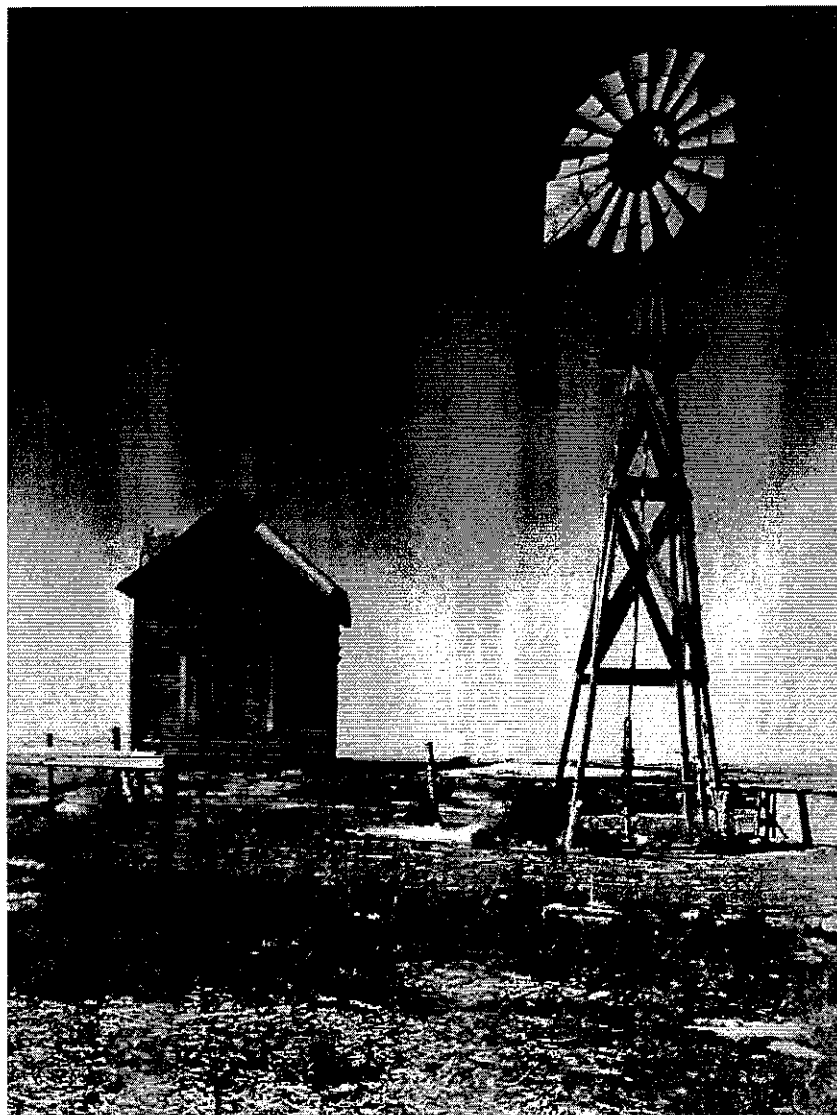


Plate 3: "Abandoned Farm and Windmill, Western Nebraska," 1947. Collection Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona c2003 Arizona Board of Regents.

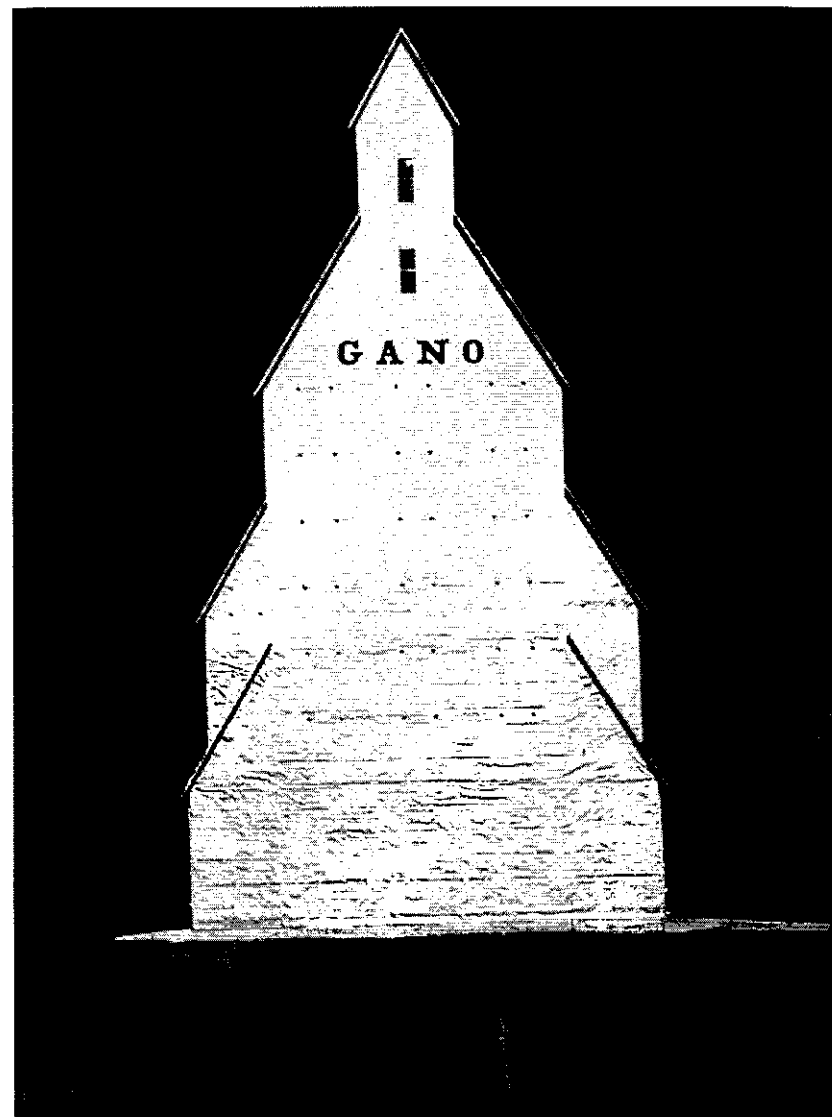


Plate 4: "Gano Grain Elevator, Western Kansas," 1940. Collection Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona c2003 Arizona Board of Regents.



Plate 5: "Storefronts, Western Kansas," 1940. Collection Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona c2003 Arizona Board of Regents.

THE LITERARY ARCHITECTURE OF WRIGHT MORRIS

JOSEPH J. WYDEVEN

Houses, as much as the wide wilderness and open spaces by which we have defined the reaches of our collective imagination and identity, are the locus of the central conflicts of American life. (Marilyn Chandler, Dwelling in the Text 6)

It had seemed to Webb, right at that moment, that he had gone abroad not to find himself, or other such prattle, but in order to return to this room and rediscover America. To find in this house the spaciousness of American life. . . . It was the house, the house itself, set in its miniature suburban forest, that brought the conflicting forces together and gave them shape. (Wright Morris, The Deep Sleep 7)

In her superb study *Dwelling in the Text: Houses in American Fiction*, Marilyn R. Chandler examines American literary residences to explore her thesis that America's cultural conflicts are often reflected in our domestic architecture. Not surprisingly, she begins her survey with Thoreau, whose "governing idea" in *Walden*, "is that the material is always a manifestation of and a conduit to the spiritual . . ." (26). Along with houses conjured up by Hawthorne, James, Kate Chopin, Faulkner, Marilyn Robinson and others, Chandler considers houses of Midwesterners Willa Cather, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Toni Morrison.

But a Midwesterner ignored in Chandler's book is the Nebraska novelist and photographer Wright Morris; this is an unfortunate exclusion, as Morris is intensely concerned—in both photography

and prose—with the implications of Thoreau's house at Walden, especially involving westward immigration. In important works over forty years, from 1940 to 1980, Morris gave us versions of Midwestern houses as they illustrate the American postfrontier spirit. Morris's houses serve often to represent ideas of inhabitation and relations among inhabitants, sometimes coupled with a Thoreauvian critique of the meretricious.¹

From the beginning of his career Morris was interested in the significance of vernacular architecture in American life. Beginning with his first publication, "The Inhabitants" (and a photo-text show at the New School for Social Research) in 1940, Morris responded to Thoreau's promptings. Two years before, in 1938, Morris had spent a winter living alone in a cabin on Quassapaug Pond near Middlebury, Connecticut (where his wife was teaching at the Westover School), and conducting experiments with words and photographs; it was there that Morris first read *Walden* and came across passages that resonated with him. Later, in *Writing My Life* (1985) he called this "my Thoreau period" (39). What Morris took from Thoreau was not his critique of capitalism but his reverence for houses that reflect natural processes and whose spirit is shaped by those who live in them. Morris adds his own attraction to *abandoned* houses which still provide evidence of the lives once lived within them; he often spoke of these houses as being *haunted*.

Morris's response to Thoreau is found most explicitly in *The Inhabitants* (1946), a book-length expansion of a photo-text Morris first produced in 1940—the photographs of which constitute for Stephen Longmire "a survey of American vernacular architecture"(6). In the 1940 version Morris had placed photographs across from prose sketches and emphasized American "folkways"; there he first enunciated his theory of the photo-text: "Two separate mediums are employed for two distinct views. Only when refocused in the mind's eye will the third view result. The burden of *technique* is the reader's alone. His willingness to participate—rather than speculate—will determine his range"(147).

For the expanded 1946 version, Morris added a third component to the format: he retained the photographs and text on facing pages but added a running prose commentary specifically addressed to Thoreau, as well as an epigraph from *Walden*:

What of architectural beauty I now see, I know has gradually grown from within outward, out of the necessities and character of the indweller, who is the only builder—out of some unconscious truthfulness, and nobleness, without ever a thought for the appearance[,] and whatever additional beauty of this kind is destined to be produced will be preceded by a like unconscious beauty of life . . . it is the life of the inhabitants whose shells they are . . . (*The Inhabitants*, N. pag.).

Morris quoted Thoreau to support his idea that the act of living inside houses confers a kind of holiness. Part of the first text in the book reads:

Thoreau, a look is what a man gets when he tries to inhabit something—something like America. . . . I guess a look is what a man gets not so much from inhabiting something, as from something that's inhabiting him. Maybe this is what it is that inhabits a house. . . . An inhabitant is what you can't take away from a house. You can take away everything else—in fact, the more you take away the better you can see what that thing is. That's how you know—that's how you can tell an inhabitant. (*The Inhabitants*, N. pag.).

The book contains fifty-two photo-texts. Most of the photographs are from non-Nebraska locations, and few texts make specific reference to Nebraska. All the photographs are of exteriors—of houses, grain elevators, churches, store fronts—from across the United States. Morris was pursuing a project he had in mind as early as 1940: ". . . not one book, but a series, each dealing with a phase of our national life . . .". In visual terms, Morris was interested "in the old, the worn and worn out, the declined, the time-ravaged, the eroded and blighted, the used, abused, and abandoned, as well as the structured volumes, the contrasts in texture, the endless gradations from black to white in stone, shingle, clapboard, painted or peeling . . ." (*Photographs and Words* 20-21).

Morris never followed through on this ambitious plan because his rediscovery of Nebraska intervened, and his interests veered from sociological to intensely personal concerns. This new focus was found almost immediately, in his next book, *The Home Place* (1948), arguably his first major work, and one that marks an important transition in his career, while tacitly expanding his Thoreauvian outlook. The book is his first—and only—attempt to employ *fiction* as the text in photo-text; it is also the first of his photo-texts to picture interiors.

The setting of *The Home Place*, and of the photographs found in it, is the broken-down house near Norfolk, Nebraska, of his Uncle Harry and Aunt Clara² where Morris had spent some weeks in his boyhood.³ In 1942 Morris returned to this Nebraska locale; and the visit was significant in committing him to “a pact with the bygone . . . the recovery of a past I had only dimly sensed that I possessed. I was blissfully ignorant of any awareness that this would prove to be the work of a lifetime” (*Photographs and Words* 41).

The Home Place retains the earlier format of photographs facing prose, but here the prose is fictional. The format continues to confuse many viewers, who think the photographs are meant to “illustrate” the novel, which was clearly not Morris’s intention. Rather, he still appears to have wanted readers to come up with a reflective “third view” of their own. In telling the story of the protagonist’s return to Nebraska, Morris significantly involves Midwestern architecture. There are first of all various photographs of this “ruin” of a house and associated structures (a few including Uncle Harry); there are also photographs of churches, train stations, barber shops, grain elevators, and the like.

The text of *The Home Place* is fairly simple, telling the story of Clyde Muncy and his wife and two children. Morris hangs the plot on the postwar housing shortage in the United States. The Muncy family has been living in tight urban quarters in New York, and the thinly rationalized plot explores the family’s possible move to Nebraska: at least two houses are available in the immediate area. The novel’s argument is set up largely in terms of contrasts: city vs. country, modern vs. traditional, inhabitants vs. “transients,” Nebraskan Ivy’s claims vs. those of New Yorker Muncy; added to these are subtextual interactions between photo and text and between subtle photographic vision and rural simplicity.

The interplay between photographs and text is sometimes obvious, at other times merely suggestive. Occasionally the text refers explicitly to structures or objects depicted in the image across the page, as in the case of a photograph of a typical rural outhouse and a textual reference to “Mr. T. B. Horde’s three-seater privy,” along with the commentary, “I’d say the privy is the rural chapel, where a man puts his cares in order, or forgets his cares and turns his mind to other things” (108-09). Another juxtaposition pairs a brief discussion of two brothers, “a pair for lookin’ alike,” across from a photograph of

two false-fronted commercial structures made with Morris’s directly frontal approach (170-71).

More telling is the commentary beside a photograph of a grain elevator, in which Morris explains the ontological role of architectural structures in plains culture:

Later, if the town lasts, they put through some tracks, with a water tower for the whistle stop, and if it rained, now and then, they’d put up the monument. That’s the way these elevators, these great plains monoliths, strike me. There’s a simple reason for grain elevators, as there is for everything, but the force behind the reason, the reason for the reason, is the land and the sky. There’s too much sky out here for one thing, too much horizontal, too many lines without stops, so that the exclamation, the perpendicular, had to come. Anyone who was born and raised on the plains knows that the high false front on the Feed Store, and the white water tower, are not a question of vanity. It’s a problem of being. Of knowing you are there. (76-77)

A more subtle ontological statement is found in the photograph of a worn planed board half buried in the sun-cracked earth, as if to suggest the close relation between nature and culture and the ease with which nature can reclaim the built environment. It is telling that across from this image is a discussion of relationship, “connection” (58-59).

The plot is resolved when Clyde and Peg Muncy visit Uncle Ed’s Place, which they have been told will soon be available, as Ed is very ill in town and is expected to die soon. Aunt Clara reneges on her promise to make the house available to Clyde’s cousin Ivy, a farmer who would actually work the land, as she is sympathetic to the Muncys’ need for a house, despite Clyde’s obvious agricultural ineptness. The visit to the house, however, makes the question moot, as it is soon clear to Clyde and Peg that they do not belong there—a point made clearly through the narrative and the photographs accompanying it. The photographs show country things and, more intimately, Ed’s bed, ragged clothing hung on pegs, and the contents of his dresser drawer, including simple verses of meaning to him that he had cut from newspapers.

The intimate effects Clyde and Peg encounter in the house, and the feelings they elicit, evoke Morris’s most trenchant writing on the haunted quality of vacant houses. When Peg enters the house, Clyde observes, “she came to the center of the room, like you do in a

haunted house. My own feeling is that only vacant houses are occupied, or haunted, which is a better word" (130). More extensively, about such a vacant house, Clyde insists:

[A]ny house that's been lived in, any room that's been slept in, is not vacant any more. From that point on it's forever occupied. . . . with the people gone, you know the place is inhabited. There's something in the rooms, in the air, that raising the windows won't let out . . . The closets are full of clothes you can't air out. There's a pattern on the walls, where the calendar's hung, and the tipped square of a missing picture is a lidded eye on something private, something better not seen. . . . The figure in the carpet is what you have when the people have lived there, died there, and when evicted, refused to leave the house. (132)

When he looks at Ed's bed, Clyde thinks in appropriately photographic terms: "There are hotel beds that give you the feeling of a negative exposed several thousand times, with the blurred image of every human being that had slept in them. Then there are beds with a single image, over-exposed. There's an etched quality about them, like a clean daguerreotype, and you know in your heart that was how the man really looked" (135).

This "haunted" intimacy affects both Clyde and Peg, who come quickly to understand that their claim to the house is too brittle, forgetful of intimate histories and sacred traditions. Almost without need to speak, they understand they have no rights to the house, nor do they have the appropriate experience to add their lives to this house's history. When Clyde prepares to leave the house, he observes, "I felt like a man whose job it was to close up a church. In this passion, that was the word for a man's house. The citadel, the chapel, of his character" (145). In the book's final pages, before their departure from the home place, Muncy is moved to say, "Home is where you hang your childhood" (174). As such, home is a place of intense nostalgia.

The Home Place was Morris's only attempt to couple his fiction with his photography, but his interest in literary architecture did not end there. His efforts to employ photographs in the sequel, *The World in the Attic* (1949), were rejected by Scribners as cost-prohibitive, but another reason might have been because that novel was considerably more conceptual than its predecessor. It also includes the first of

many prose portraits of houses serving as metaphors, symbols, and guides to aspects of Midwestern American culture.

At the core of *The World in the Attic*, set in Junction, Nebraska, is a mansion which symbolizes the crux of a conflict between traditional (and somewhat parochial) Middle Western values and the temptation to comfort and ease which had been imported from the South (through Indiana) in years past. The representatives of these two poles are Aunt Angie and Uncle Billie Hibbard on one hand and Miss Caddy Hibbard on the other, who all live in the mansion, though in decidedly separate spheres. The narrator is again Clyde Muncy, who, with his reluctant wife and children, is visiting his boyhood friend Bud Hibbard and his family before returning to New York.

The mansion itself is described in detail. In contrast to Bud Hibbard's cramped house—"a square box with a peaked roof, on a concrete platform" (50)—the mansion is spacious and elegant, a good place for Clinton Hibbard, the District Attorney, to bring his new Indiana-bred wife: "When Clinton Hibbard built this woman a home, in the manner to which she was accustomed, he took a city block and built it where he thought the new town would soon be. A house with seventeen rooms, every room with great windows rising from the floor to nearly the ceiling, and pieces of Indiana flagstone set into the yard for a walk" (49). After Clinton's death, Miss Caddy lived on alone, subject to the ill will of the town, which had never liked her lavish inclinations. The town itself, however hopeful of its future, falls into decline, and the mansion at the edge of town never works its way to the center; instead, it now faces a "town dump . . . where the garbage was burning" (173).

The possibility, symbolized by the magnetic field set up between Angie and Caddy—between work and pleasure, that is⁴—is never realized, and towards the end of the novel, Miss Caddy dies, leaving the house to Aunt Angie and the spying eyes of the townspeople. The funeral is staged in the house itself, and in the evening from a distance, the house is reminiscent of a beacon, like Gatsby's house on Long Island, "lit up—as they used to say—like a barn dance, the shutters thrown open, and lights in every room in the house. From several blocks away it looked like a fire raging inside" (180).

Another incongruous house, this one noted mostly for its out-of-place qualities, is found in *The Works of Love*, the novel Morris finished after the death of his ambitious but ineffectual father. The father's name in the novel is Will Brady, and the largest symbol of

his impractical nature is the showy "city house" he has built for him out in the country. It is to be a "modern thirteen-room house. As illustrated in *Radnor's Ideal Homes*, Will Brady's house would have a three-story tower, and was listed under 'mansions,' the finest section of the book . . ." (87). The house unintentionally mocks Brady's pretensions.

This out-of-place mansion contrasts sharply with Brady's later accommodations in Chicago after his chicken business fails. There a chastened Brady lives in an apartment house where his straitened living conditions are described in word pictures:

Inside the room was a small gas plate on a marble-topped washstand, a cracked china bowl, a table, two chairs, a chest of drawers, an armless rocker, an imitation fireplace, and an iron frame bed. Over the fireplace was a mirror showing the head of the bed and the yellow folding doors. The bed was in the shape of a shallow pan with a pouring spout at one side, and beneath this spout, as if poured there, a frazzled hole in the rug. (216)

That the room is constricted is shown in the problem with movement through its space: "To get from the sink to the stove it was better to drop the leaf on the table and then lean forward over the back of the rocking chair" (216). This room is a far cry from the city mansion Brady had built in the country, and his final downfall is adumbrated in the architectural descriptions.

In the more conceptually dense middle novels of his prime, *The Field of Vision* (1956), which won the National Book Award, and *Ceremony in Lone Tree* (1960), Morris is less interested in depictions of architecture than in employing architecture as a symbolic setting for an exploration of American conflicts. One of the satirical highlights of *The Field of Vision* is the description of Walter McKee, a typical middle-class Nebraskan, in architectural terms:

His life, for instance. A simple frame-house sort of life with an upstairs and a downstairs, and a kitchen where he lived, a parlor where he didn't, a stove where the children could dress on winter mornings, a porch where time could be passed summer evenings, an attic for the preservation of the past, a basement for tinkering with the future, and a bedroom for making such connections as the nature of the house would stand. In the closets principles, salted down with moth balls. In the storm-cave, sprouting like potatoes, prejudices. . . (56-57)

Architecture is more important in *Ceremony in Lone Tree*, set in the Lone Tree Hotel, which houses the absurd family reunion of the Scanlon clan. Morris provides the setting—and the tone—in the first section, "The Scene," a catalog of everything that has gone wrong with the westering American Dream. The first lines echo Matthew Arnold, as we are invited to "Come to the window. The one at the rear of the Lone Tree Hotel" (3). The hotel has a history: "Three stories high, made of the rough-faced brick brought out from Omaha on a flatcar, the Lone Tree Hotel sits where the coaches on the westbound caboose once came to a stop . . . In the westbound caboose were the men who helped Lone Tree to believe in itself" (14-15). The hotel incorporates slabs of Italian marble, and in its lobby and barber shop, the heroic William Jennings Bryan once presided. Now, however, the hotel "faces the south, the empty pits that were dug for homes never erected and the shadowy trails, like Inca roads, indicating what were meant to be streets" (14-15).

The hotel is now all but abandoned—except for the crotchety old man Scanlon, who spends most of his time either sleeping or peering through a window. The window has a flaw in it through which Scanlon sees "the props of his own mind" (4). From the window Scanlon sees the past in a building housing the "MIL NE Y" and the livery stable, at the back of which, "inhabited by bats, is the covered wagon Scanlon was born in." In front of the stable is a gas pump, behind it an abandoned fire-hose cart, a series of false-fronted stores and the Lyric Theater (15-17). Although Scanlon cannot see this view, Morris tells us: "From the highway a half mile to the north, the town sits on the plain as if delivered on a flatcar—as though it were a movie set thrown up during the night. Dry as it is, something about it resembles an ark from which the waters have receded" (6).

Such is the antiquated setting for the Scanlon family reunion, the location decided upon only after Scanlon's daughters read the headline in the *Omaha Bee* written about Scanlon: "MAN WHO KNEW BUFFALO BILL SPENDS LONELY CHRISTMAS" (19). The past is much on Scanlon's feeble mind, but the present is no better, especially as Morris's satire is flooded with the moonlight of imagination as an antidote to the terror recently unleashed by the mindless rampage of a mass murderer founded on real-life Charlie Starkweather. Although the murderer has recently been captured, the fear in the various family members is still palpable. The novel is thus poised satirically between the defeated past and the befuddled present.

Although there are many others, one more example of Morris's involvement with Midwestern literary architecture is appropriate: the Nebraska house associated with eighty-two-year-old protagonist Floyd Warner in *Fire Sermon* (1971). Warner, living peevishly in a trailer park in California with his nephew Kermit Oelsligle, is called back to Nebraska because his beloved sister Viola has died, so he and Kermit embark on the long automobile-and-trailer journey back into the past. Along the way they encounter a young hippie couple, Stanley and Joy, whom they eventually pick up, and to whom Kermit attaches himself when at the end Warner takes off without him.

Warner and Kermit, along with Stanley and Joy, arrive in Chapman, where they find a "house with two floors and the green blinds drawn at the upper window," with a screened rear porch: "The screen door had a thread spool for a knob, a hole kicked in the screen at the bottom" (28-29). This house had belonged to Warner's father and had descended to Viola, where she lived "while the others died and left to her those things they valued" (142). The house, similar to that of *The Home Place*, is a storehouse of memories and materials now ready for auction. It is as if Morris has gathered together the interior furnishings from all his previous Nebraska work—a compendium of artifacts detailed (and sometimes pictured) in book after book: pillboxes, cameos, "bureaus, chairs, and sideboards," mirrors, and "a three-legged table . . . covered with framed pictures"; "There is a ball of tinfoil, a pocket watch with a chain, a flashlight, a pocket knife with a broken bone handle, two bed casters, a shaving strop, and a shoebox lid full of black and red checkers. There is more, but it would take all day to sort it out" (134-35). Such cataloging appears to unlock and memorialize the past.

After examining the downstairs, Warner makes his way up to the room which Viola has emptied, except for a rocker facing a window and the cemetery beyond. There Warner sits, "or rather he sagged there, his hands hanging limply between his knees, his head tilted as if to catch small sounds from the yard" (136). When Kermit finds him, he thinks Warner is dead. Morris appears to have brought these accumulated items from the past into one central location as a symbolic ritual act. Enraged when he finds Joy and Stanley sitting naked in Viola's bed, Warner attacks them with a mop and in the process knocks over a gas lamp. The following conflagration is seen through Kermit's eyes, for Warner has fled: "Black and white smoke billowed, and in the roiling cloud he saw tongues of flame like bolts of

lightning" (149). The house and its weighted contents are completely destroyed, and Joy has the last word: "'Fire purifies,' she said, and gave [Kermit] her big, warm, friendly smile" (155). The house built in the pioneer-era nineteenth century is thus destroyed—signifying perhaps Morris's sense of a loss of viable continuity between past and present worlds.

Obviously, houses are a key to Morris's Nebraska—probably a result of the many houses—but hardly a *home*—that he lived in during his boyhood, when his father moved him from place to place or farmed him out to neighbors and relatives.⁵ This seeming obsession with houses is most obvious in *The Home Place*, where the evidence is cumulative, but is seen in occasional references as well in other works to houses in which the carpenter has neglected to put in stairs to the upstairs rooms, or miscalculations in upper rooms have windows bottoming at floor level, or doors open dangerously to porches never built. In *Plains Song* (1980), one of the characters is employed as a builder of houses—though, perhaps not coincidentally, he is a failure.

In addition to houses, in these novels Morris emphasizes other structures: in *The Fork River Space Project* (1977) an entire ghost town, at the center of which is a structure housing the visionary project of the title; in *The Works of Love* the hotel lobbies which provide Brady both comfort and identity; and in *The Field of Vision* the Chicago YMCA and the hotel room—"the heart of the labyrinth"—where Lehmann solves the identity of the mysterious Paula Kahler.

There is something distinctly "Midwestern" in these structures and interiors, especially as found in the states on the Great Plains. Here the crucial fact of nineteenth-century life is the drive emblemized by the Homestead Act. This has something to do as well with the Midwest's need to assert its borrowed/copied *urban* "eastern values" as found in the blustery provincialism of Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* and *Main Street*. By Morris's time the rural realities that survived the Depression were often sad truths—things that had once been whole were now fallen into shabby disrepair—making more meaningful the "haunted" qualities of the "inhabitants," whose houses were "holy"—as found so visually immediate in *The Home Place*.

NOTES

- ¹It gives great satisfaction to read in Barbara Burkhardt's *William Maxwell: A Literary Life* that "Morris's photography was helpful to Maxwell, who consulted his prints of Midwestern farms as he wrote the novel *So Long, See You Tomorrow*" (15), a novel employing several important architectural structures.
- ²That Harry and Clara retain their names in the fictional narrative of *The Home Place* is one of many indications that the work has an acutely autobiographical basis.
- ³In an interview with Peter Bunnell in 1975, Morris claimed that "The Home Place, lock, stock, and barrel, was bulldozed out of existence in the late fifties. Nothing remains but what we have in the book . . ." (*Time Pieces* 91). But research has proved that this is not true, though apparently the house was moved from its original location. This fabrication is carried over into Morris's final novel, *Plains Song* (1980), where the Clara character has become Cora, and her farm has been plowed under, "[i]nto thin air" (200).
- ⁴"A great current had once passed through this town, with one pole in Miss Caddy, one pole in Aunt Angie, and one could string up a wire to this force and be alive." (174)
- ⁵Morris explored his younger years most engagingly in *Will's Boy* (1981).

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IS MINNESOTA IN THE MIDWEST YET? IMAGES OF AN ICONOCLASTIC MIDWESTERN STATE

C. ELIZABETH RAYMOND

In 1995, Minnesota essayist Bill Holm published an essay that facetiously inquired, "Is Minnesota in America Yet?" In it he described a state "out of sync" with the rest of the United States, one whose immigrant culture was "pickled in amber." In Minnesota, Holm suggested, successive waves of northern Europeans had created a civic style that was admirably progressive and participatory, or at least was widely perceived to be so. It was this perception, he argued, that was perhaps most characteristic of Minnesota, the pervasive sense in the state that "we are somehow cleaner, more virtuous, harder working, better governed, more boring but more civilized than 'them,' whoever 'they' are."¹ According to Holm, this smug sense of Minnesota distinctiveness was disappearing only slowly, as the influence of the state's immigrant generations waned.

Literary depictions of Minnesota have focused more frequently on its representative normality than on this distinctiveness. Most notoriously, perhaps, the state was the setting for Sinclair Lewis's caustic 1920 bestseller, *Main Street*, in which he characterized the region as representing a different kind of smugness, preoccupied with materialism and status and devoid of substantive ideas. *Main Street's* protagonist, Carol Kennicott, felt stifled by the narrow-minded prejudices of Gopher Prairie, a place that "calls anybody 'well informed' who's been through the State Capitol and heard about Gladstone."² When she escaped from Gopher Prairie to Washington, DC, for two years during World War I, however, she came to understand that it was far from unique and that many other American towns also shared Gopher Prairie's "village virus." Similarly, when F. Scott Fitzgerald needed an everyman narrator to recount and contextualize the events

and personalities of *The Great Gatsby*, he gave Nick Carraway a background like his own, from St. Paul, Minnesota. In a gentler vein, but with similar effect, writer Garrison Keillor entertains listeners of his radio variety show, *A Prairie Home Companion*, with tales of the mythical Minnesota community of Lake Wobegon. Despite Keillor's description of the latter as a place where "the women are strong and the men good-looking and all the children above average," Lake Wobegon's widespread appeal stems from its very ordinariness. Indeed, in 2000, *National Geographic* even published an article on the fictional Lake Wobegon that was illustrated with photographs of everyday central Minnesota families.³

In these texts and many others, Minnesota features not as distinctive, but as resolutely representative. Located in the twelve-state North Central Census District that is traditionally identified as the Middle West, Minnesota epitomizes the region that, according to historian Glenda Riley, most Americans think of as "dowdy," a place that is "solid—even cute and charming—yet still a bit monotonous."⁴ The 2000 *National Geographic* Lake Wobegon article is a perfect example of the genre, with photographs that depict family reunions at a lake, the local veterans' association, neighbors having coffee, and captions that report, "We shoot the breeze, catch up on the gossip. We talk about politics some, but if it gets too rough, we drop it." Further exploration of the iconography of the state, however, reveals that Holm's description of Minnesota's proud idiosyncrasy, its resistance to being identified with the rest of the Midwest, also has a long history. In this article I briefly trace that history to inquire, following the facetious Holm, "Is Minnesota in the Midwest Yet?"

The Middle West emerged as an identifiable region only in the twentieth century, according to geographer James Shortridge. By 1912 it had become a symbol of the idealized pastoral values that a rapidly industrializing US was elsewhere abandoning. For Frederick Jackson Turner, the Middle West represented independence, egalitarianism, morality. Alternatively, for Sinclair Lewis, it embodied narrow-mindedness, materialism, and hypocrisy. Whether viewed positively or negatively, however, it was widely agreed to constitute the central American core, the most American part of America. As Robert Sayre has pointed out, it is the paradox of Midwestern regionalism that the region "has its identity in not having an identity of its own but being the real America."⁵ In its familiar guise as rural heartland, it plays a regional role as the country's symbolic home, the sim-

ple, unexciting, unchanging background for national dramas played out elsewhere, as critic Barry Gross says:

The suspicion persists that what goes on at either coast is the extreme, the perverse and bizarre, the grotesque and the Gothic, unreal and, worse, unAmerican. The belief persists that the middle represents the heart and the center, the norm against which the extreme East and the extreme West are measured as abnormal, aberrational.⁶

The features of this region are familiar in literature and in iconography, certainly to readers of *Midwestern Miscellany*. It is the site of Hamlin Garland's *Main-Travelled Roads*, of Ole Rølvaag's *Giants in the Earth*, and Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*, among others. Ronald Weber argues that the Middle West enjoyed an early twentieth-century period of ascendancy in American literature when its concerns and its writers were the country's pre-eminent literary influences. In a visual parallel, the region's pioneer farmsteads and rectilinear townships are the subject of innumerable nineteenth-century county atlases that chronicle the triumphal emergence of farmland from the forests and prairie grasslands. The region's distinctive pastoral landscapes were painted by Grant Wood in the 1930s, and by Billy Morrow Jackson in the 1970s, and its art was the subject of a comprehensive exhibit in Columbus, Ohio, in 2000, evocatively entitled "Illusions of Eden."⁷

Americans celebrate its physical landscape each time they sing of spacious skies and amber waves of grain. Folk singer Joel Mabus affectionately described its stolid denizens, eating green beans and drinking iced tea, "living on the middle and not on the edge," in his song, "Hopelessly Midwestern." The region's ubiquitous section line roads and rectilinear fields are a potent symbol of agrarian America, as historian Martin Ridge testifies when he claims that "the visual image of the American farm is neither the cotton field nor the vineyard, but the corn and wheat fields of the Middle West." Indeed, for many Americans, the Midwest is visually reducible to a cornfield, alternatively identified as the "Corn Belt."⁸

In Minnesota, however, this Corn Belt identity has always been an uneasy fit. While Minnesota produces corn, it is known agriculturally for dairy products and for wheat more than for maize. Sheet music for Minnesota features lakeshores and pine trees instead of corn shocks.

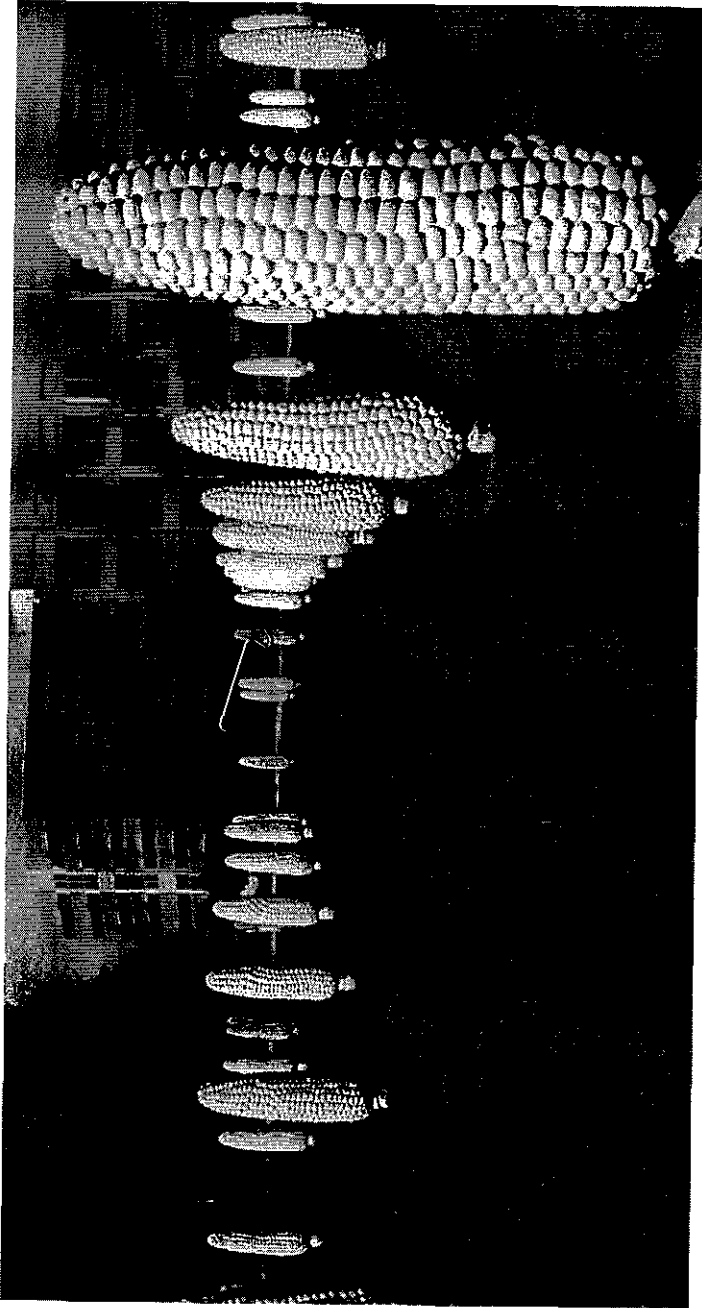


Plate 1: Malcolm Cochran (b. 1948) *Field of Corn* (with *Osage Orange Trees*), 1994. Cast concrete, bronze, new planting of *Osage Orange* trees. Commissioned by the Dublin Arts Council with support from the city of Dublin, Ohio. Photograph courtesy of Joseph J. Wydeven.

In fact, in both iconography and self-descriptions, Minnesotans have often consciously differentiated their state from the rest of the Middle West, just as Bill Holm observes of their politics. As early as 1853, for example, while Minnesota was still a territory, guidebook author J. Wesley Bond was comparing it favorably to other parts of the West that had been previously settled. These earlier Wests featured “low latitudes, the miasmas of flat lands . . . lynch law, the bowie-knife, uncertain means of education, and a gospel ministry on horseback.” By contrast, “Minnesota presents another picture.” High and well drained, it is “the inviting home of intelligence, enterprise, good laws, schools and churches.”⁹

In 1872 the State Board of Emigration was making the same point, by then actually naming its inferior rivals: “In Minnesota are found neither the illimitable level prairies which distinguish Illinois, nor the vast impenetrable forests of Indiana and Ohio, in which the settler finds it so difficult to carve himself a home.” In 1893, the managers for Minnesota’s exhibit at the Chicago World’s Fair advanced a similar claim for state superiority based on environmental determinism:

The denizens of some monotonous, marshy, fever-smitten plain cannot rise morally, mentally or materially to the level of those more happily circumstanced, and thoughtful man will trace a necessary connection between the fair topography of this state and its constant succession of natural beauties and the alertness and enterprise and successes of its people.¹⁰

The state’s drive to regional distinction from the rest of the Midwest continues unabated into the present. Resolutely ignoring the proximity of the region’s capital city of Chicago, Minneapolis and St. Paul in the nineteenth century turned westward to focus on forging shipping and trading ties with the Pacific Coast and Asia. The Great Northern and Northern Pacific railroads were precursors of the latter-day Northwest Airlines, headquartered in the state. With the regional Norwest Bank (which purchased Wells Fargo but adopted the latter’s name), these business names testified to an attempted regional realignment by which the Twin Cities functioned as the commercial and cultural capital of an expanded “New Northwest” that stretched west to Seattle. By 1960, a cultural geographer noted that the press in Minneapolis and St. Paul had successfully promulgated an alternate identity for the state as “Upper Midwest,” a realm in which the region’s urban behemoth, Chicago, was irrelevant.¹¹

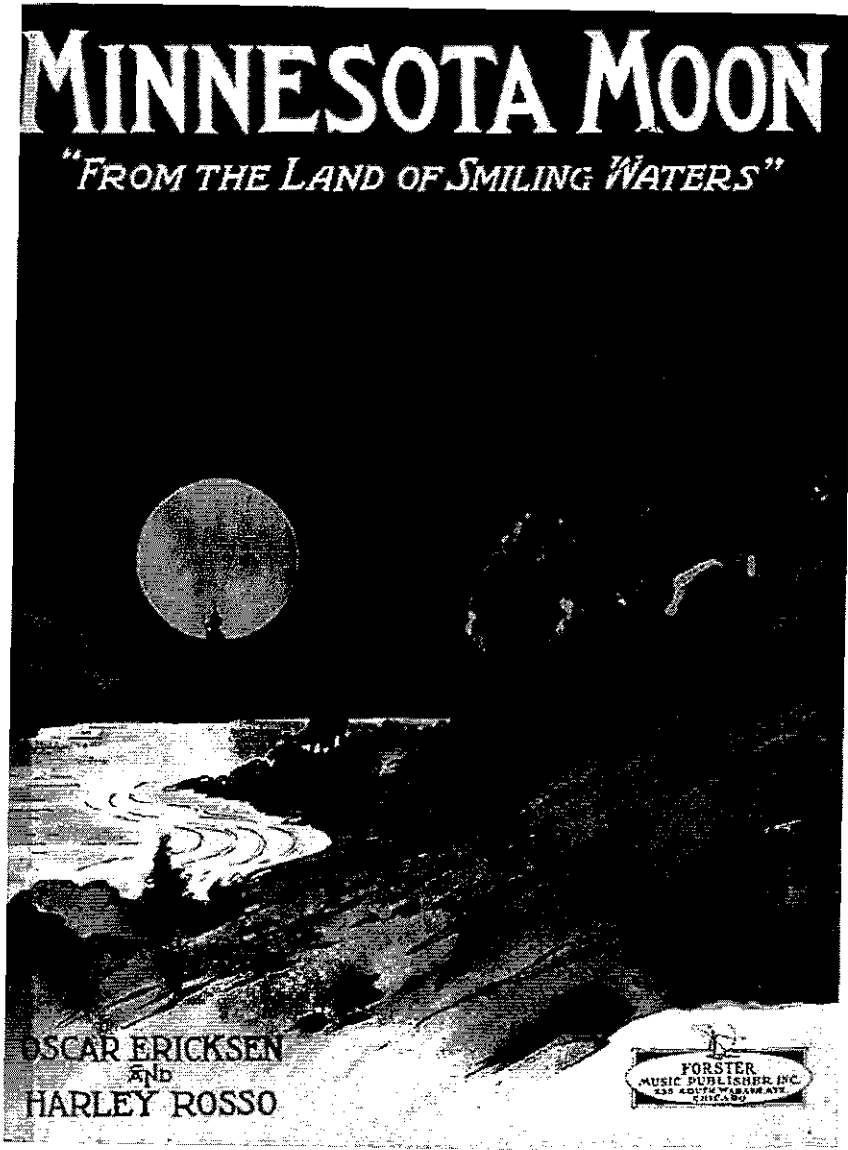


Plate 2: Sheet music in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society. Used by permission.

Even today, residents circulate derogatory Iowa jokes that are intended to articulate and reinforce Minnesota's superiority to its southern neighbor. "Why does the Mississippi run south?" they ask, and answer, "Because Iowa sucks." "What do you say to a pretty girl in Iowa?" "Nice tooth." "What does Iowa stand for?" "Idiots out walking around." Interviewed about the phenomenon by a St. Paul newspaper, visiting Iowans disclaimed any intention to retaliate in kind, noting mildly that "We're pretty decent people." One Iowa native analyzed the phenomenon in psychological terms: "I think Minnesota has a little bit of an inferiority complex. We don't feel the need to defend our state."¹²

Minnesotans, however, apparently do, although they face definite challenges in doing so. First and foremost, the character of the entity they defend has never been entirely clear. Complexities and contradictions abound within the political boundaries of the state, due in part to the diverse characteristics of the three ecological zones that come together there. Minnesota originally comprised extensive hardwood forests across the south and east, tall grass prairie along the southern and western borders, and pine forests to the north. Although the latter zone has come to seem the dominant one in contemporary depictions of Minnesota, the other zones contended for recognition and complicated easy synopsis. Convincing summary statements about the state were accordingly difficult. The problem was apparent a century ago, in 1901, when Minnesota staged a major exhibit at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York, (later infamous as the place where McKinley was assassinated).¹³

As part of this exhibit the state proudly proclaimed its brand-new identity, invented by the three-person Board of Managers specifically for the occasion, as "The Bread and Butter State." The slogan captured not only the state's abundant wheat crop, but also Minneapolis's dominant position in flour milling and the increasing attention to dairying in the farm districts of southern and central Minnesota. To represent it, the Board of Managers mounted as the state's principal exhibit a twelve-foot long sculpture of the new capitol building in St. Paul, executed entirely in butter. Reaching more than five feet high, the model was pronounced "a marvel and a gem," and the managers proudly reported that "everyone who saw it carried away with him or her the impression that Minnesota was a great and enterprising state to be enabled to erect such a magnificent capitol."¹⁴

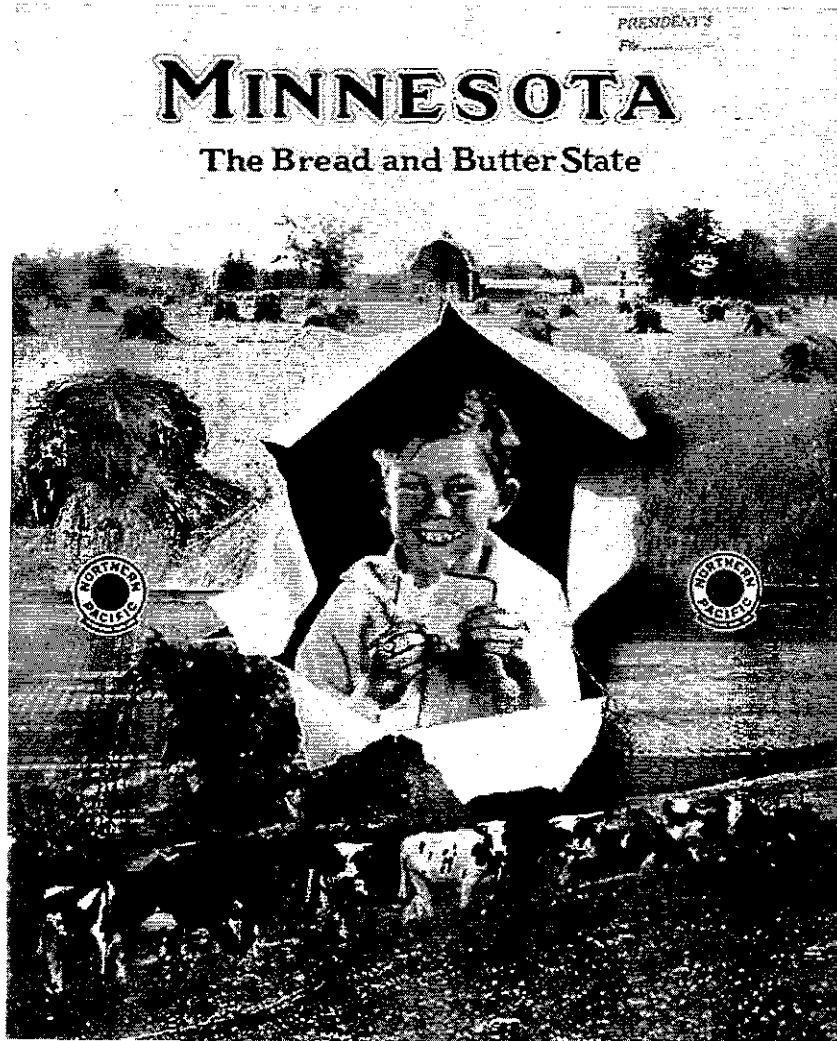


Plate 3: Sheet music in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society. Used by permission.

On June 18, a special Minnesota Day at the fair was proclaimed, and the internal contradictions surfaced in earnest. All the speeches delivered for the occasion were recorded by the *Buffalo Express* and reproduced in the Board of Managers' 1902 report. Governor Van Sant dutifully expounded the exhibition theme in his address:

Out in Minnesota we raise the grain to feed the world, and our mammoth mills grind it into the best flour ever made . . . now we have turned attention, for a few years only, to dairy interests, and what is the result? . . . Our butter takes the premium at every exposition held . . . So great have we become known in that respect that we have changed our name from the Gopher State to the great Bread and Butter State of the Union.

The president of the Board of Managers, however, hailed from Duluth. In his remarks Alexander McDougall emphasized timber and iron ore. He carefully differentiated his own region as "the eastern portion of the state, in which I am more at home than I am in the bread-and-butter portion." This latter, western part of the state, he confided, he would leave to the governor to explain.

Other speakers from other parts of the state extolled in turn Minnesota's many virtues, its fruit-growing capacity, its position as the Empire State of the Great Northwest (a tribute to the host state of New York, the original Empire State). Finally, one of their slightly puzzled New York hosts rose to respond. Rowland Mahany, a former congressman from Buffalo, admitted that he hadn't known much about Minnesota before being invited to the banquet, so he looked up the state in his encyclopedia. It didn't alleviate his confusion, as he recounted: "I learned also that Minnesota is called the Gopher State, and then Gov. Van Sant tells us that it is the Bread-and-Butter State, and one of the eminent speakers of this evening refers to it as the North Star State. I would like to know how many states this State of Minnesota is?"

Mahany's plaintive query could certainly be forgiven. Multiple and fluctuating images of Minnesota have been a consistent feature of the state and they persist into the present. In the nineteenth century it was promoted simultaneously as an agricultural paradise and an industrial center. At the same time tourists were being intentionally lured in 1881 by accounts of a sportsman's paradise, where innumerable lakes were filled with hungry and delectable fish. In 1930, a pamphlet encouraging farmers to relocate to Minnesota described

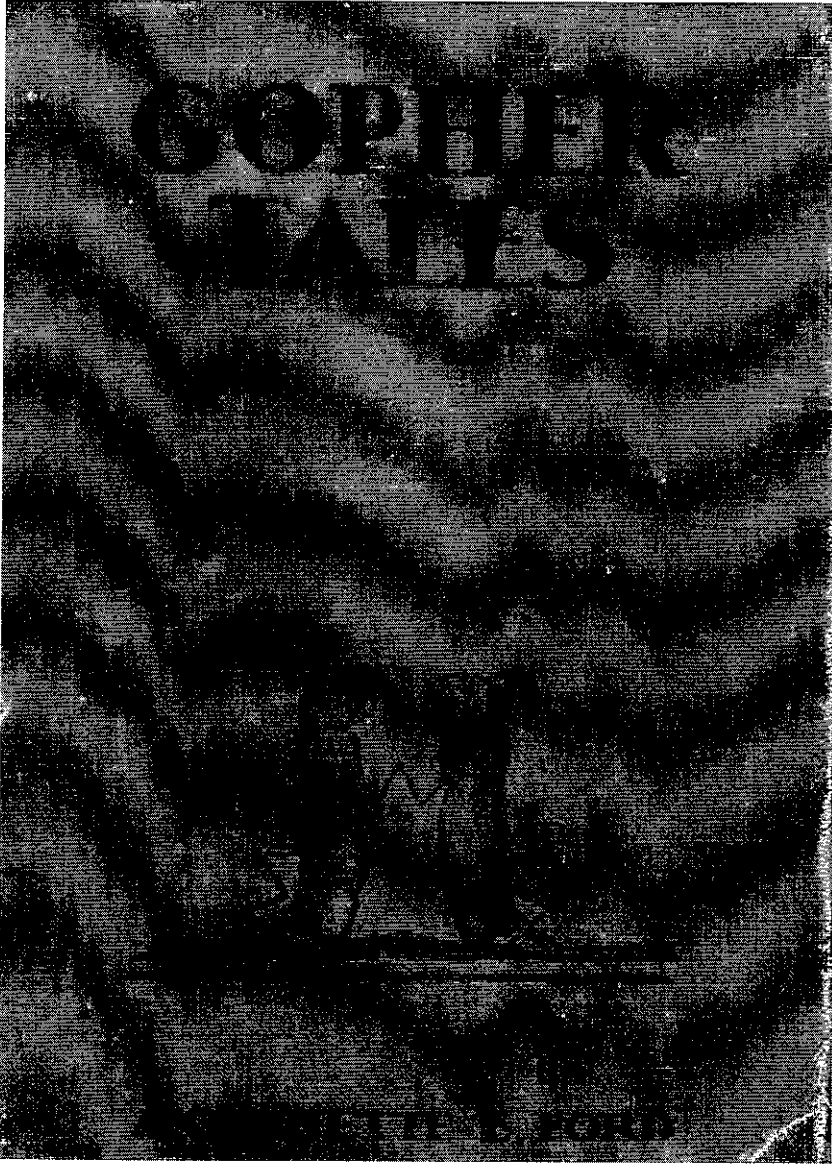


Plate 4: *Gopher Tales* (1932). Image by author.

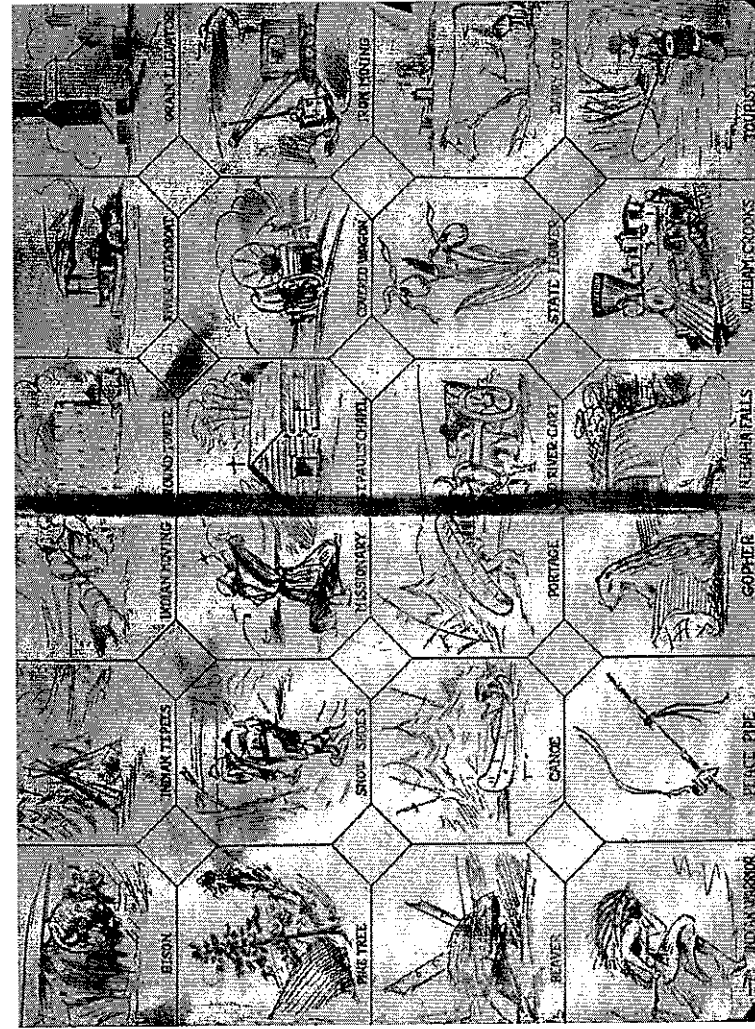


Plate 5: *Gopher Tales* (1932). Image by author.

it as a place where, "after the milking is done in the morning, you can have a day of fishing and swimming and be back home in time for the evening chores."¹⁵

Indeed, even the number of those emblematic lakes proved notoriously indeterminate. In 1879 the Milwaukee Railroad promoted Minnesota as a land of 5,000 lakes. By the 1880s many sources proclaimed 7,000, others 8,000. In 1906 the Northern Pacific Railway catalogued 10,000, a number that was enshrined in 1917 by the establishment of the Ten Thousand Lakes of Minnesota Association, a group to promote state tourism. The last figure was codified by being emblazoned on the state's license plates, even though the actual count of Minnesota lakes is in excess of 15,000. And yet, a 1998 schematic representation of the state includes neither farm nor lake, aside from the cliffs of massive Lake Superior in the northeast corner.¹⁶

Whatever it was, however, Minnesota *was* assuredly *not* simply another Midwestern state. A final, encyclopedic image from 1932 encapsulates some of the familiar themes of Minnesota identity by which the state asserted its particularity. The endpapers to a grade school textbook from that year, *Gopher Tales*, illustrate numerous subjects discussed in the narrative. They also incidentally provide a convenient inventory of the distinguishing attributes claimed by Minnesota. The twentieth-century economy is clearly represented in the form of grain elevators, mining steam shovels, and the dairy cow posed in front of a farmstead. Native peoples play a more prominent role, however, with six depictions of warriors, tepees, and numerous forms of Indian trade and transport. The early French presence is represented by the missionary and chapel, as is Minnesota's northward orientation, in the form of the portage scene and the Red River oxcarts. Both of the latter were instrumental in facilitating the early nineteenth-century trade routes to the north for the fur trade and later between St. Paul and the Selkirk settlement in present-day Manitoba. Perhaps most surprising are the overt depictions of tourism, including Minnehaha Falls and the fisherman in waders.

Each of these drawings could be analyzed separately, but several general themes are worth noting. They are condensed in the drawings but also supported by textual evidence drawn from historical and contemporary accounts describing Minnesota. One familiar motif is Minnesota's venerable history, its relative antiquity due to the early French explorations in the seventeenth century and subsequent settlement by fur traders and their families. Early accounts of the state

made much of this history, depicting a place that had an ancestry as venerable as the colonial states of the eastern seaboard, with ruins that were already crumbling when nineteenth-century "pioneers" arrived in a new wave of settlement. In this version, the native tribal peoples figure as part of the romantic past, rather than as contemporary inhabitants.

Another theme is the importance of a northern orientation in the state. The Red River route from Canada connected Minnesota firmly to the trade needs of the north rather than to the exclusively east-west orientation that characterized most Midwestern settlement. Railroad developers continued the pattern of linkage with Canada, and Minnesota's official nickname, L'Etoile du Nord, or North Star State, reinforces this directional emphasis. As Minnesota essayist Paul Gruchow put it, "We occupy the center of a continent in which the classic lines of tension have run from east to west, but *our own sights have long been set on the north.*" Not an ignominious edge of the Middle West, therefore, but the gateway to the north, was Minnesota.¹⁷

Minnesota's distinctive climate is another theme common to *Gopher Tales* iconography and to descriptive textual accounts. The snowshoes and pine trees of the textbook evoke a northern identity for the state and also symbolize its notorious winters, which were associated with the place, according to William Lass, long before it became a state. Making a virtue of necessity, perhaps, Minnesota winters were described as its most characteristic season. They were heralded in 1852 by the *Minnesota Democrat* as "the happiest, healthiest, merriest season," and in very similar terms as recently as 1998 by the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*. The latter lamented a winter without snow as "damp, brown, Ohio-like" in its discontent. Such a winter was clearly to be disdained in favor of the hearty, invigorating, unifying winters that were part of Minnesota's essence.¹⁸

This self-same climate was part of the attraction for the tourists who flocked to Minnesota from before its creation as a separate territory. Wealthy Southerners traveled up the Mississippi for relief from summer heat in the days before air conditioning. Sufferers from consumption and other afflictions of the lungs sought the "bracing air" of its dry winters. These, according to an 1867 guidebook, were far preferable to the "warm, 'open,' thawing, changeable winters of Ohio and Illinois that break down constitutions and render recovery from disease difficult." Minnesota winters, by contrast, were pre-

sented as predictably dry and cold, without the temperature fluctuations that were thought to make more southern locales unhealthy.¹⁹

But climate was not the only attraction. Minnesota was admired as well for its romantic river scenery. The Falls of St Anthony at Minneapolis were sought out by discerning travelers who praised them, as did Catherine Stewart in 1836, for “scenery which might cause pleasurable excitement, even for those who have lingered round Niagara’s own flood” (the measure of any American landscape in the early nineteenth century). Visitors came by steamboat to Fort Snelling, established in 1819 at the confluence of the Mississippi and Minnesota rivers, and later spread by railroad throughout the state. Encouraged by emigrant and tourist guides and instructed by the published accounts of other travelers, they learned to regard the scenery along Lake Pepin, south of St. Paul, as “rival with the most interesting portions of the Rhine.” One 1856 Boston traveler hazarded that “no grander, no more beautiful scenery, is to be found in the United States.”²⁰

In particular Minnesota’s claims to nineteenth-century distinction rested on Minnehaha Falls, the “Laughing Water” made famous by Longfellow’s enormously popular poem, *Hiawatha*, in 1855. Located on Minnehaha Creek, these falls were diminutive compared to the powerful St. Anthony Falls on the Mississippi River. Unlike the latter, however, Minnehaha Falls weren’t industrially exploited. Surrounded by the apparatus of scenic tourism in the form of viewing platforms and refreshment stands, they remained a landscape icon throughout the nineteenth century and are preserved as a park today. According to one Danish visitor in 1871, these falls were a place “which every American knows at least by name and hundreds visit yearly.”²¹

The successor to nineteenth-century romantic tourism was the vigorous recreational tourism of the twentieth century, when hunters and fishermen, skiers and canoeists ventured away from the Mississippi River and out across Minnesota’s many lakes and other waterways. Blandished first by railroad guidebooks, and later by state tourism organizations, they were facilitated by the establishment of an extensive state park system in cutover timber lands. Partisans of their own climate, Minnesotans enthusiastically sought the outdoors in all seasons. In the words of historian Clifford E. Clark, Jr., “In the 1960s, when middle class Americans embraced the glorification of the simple, outdoor life, Minnesotans could picture

themselves as living in the ideal environment.” It was something they had been doing, it seems, all along.²²

Modern Minnesota continues the quest, obsessively cataloguing its advantages and its distinctions, monitoring its position on lists of states possessing desirable qualities. It is, as historians Joseph and Anthony Amato point out, “an ideal constantly under construction.” Art historian Karal Ann Marling, long a student of Minnesota’s eccentricities, hypothesizes that “Minnesota’s concern with what it is, and why, and how the Land O’Lakes is qualitatively different from other places may be the most distinctive feature of its regional culture.” Whatever that culture might be, however, it is assuredly *not* Middle Western, at least not as Minnesotans construe the term. Minnesota writer Patricia Hampl learned her unique place in the world at her father’s knee:

We were not really the Midwest, my father explained; that would be Iowa or Nebraska, Kansas—hopeless places. We were the Upper Midwest, as the weatherman said, elevating us above the dreary mean. My father pointed with derision at the cars with Iowa license plates, hauling boats on trailers behind them, as we passed them on Highway 200 going north. . . . He pointed out to us, over and over, the folly of the Iowans and their pathetic pursuit of standing water.

Minnesotans and the state they inhabited were clearly to be understood differently, not as the benighted place that people fled, but as Holm’s enlightened and progressive mecca, to which they understandably flocked. The subtle distinctions in regional identity might be lost on a Californian confounded by the Midwest’s apparent sameness, but in Minnesota, they mattered enormously.²³

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NOTES

¹Bill Holm, “Is Minnesota in America Yet?” in Mark Vinz and Thom Tommaro, eds., *Imagining Home: Writing from the Midwest* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2000), 178.

²Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* (1920; NY: New American Library edition, 1961), 171, 412.

³Garrison Keillor’s description of his fictional town is repeated in every episode of his National Public Radio show and also in “In Search of Lake Wobegon,” *National Geographic* 198:6 (December 2000), 86-109.

⁴For the traditional Middle West, see John D. Hicks, “The Western Middle West, 1900-1914,” *Agricultural History* 20 (April 1946), 65: “If Americans were obliged to select a ‘heartland’ for the United States, most of them undoubtedly would point on their maps to the twelve states of the Middle West, or as the census maps have it, the North Central States.” Glenda Riley, “Foreword” in Lucy Eldersveld Murphy and Wendy Hamand Venet, eds.,

- Midwestern Women: Work, Community and Leadership at the Crossroads* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1997), ix.
- ⁵James R. Shortridge, *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (Lawrence: U of Kansas P, 1989); Robert Sayre, "Rethinking Midwestern Regionalism" *North Dakota Quarterly* 62 (Spring 1994-5): 117.
- ⁶Barry Gross, "In Another Country: The Revolt From the Village," *MidAmerica*, 4 (1977): 108.
- ⁷Ronald Weber, *The Midwestern Ascendancy in American Writing* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1992); Robert Stearns, ed., *Illusions of Eden: Visions of the American Heartland* (Columbus, OH: Columbus Museum of Art, 2000). I have traced the emergence of this regional image elsewhere in "Middle Ground: Evolving Regional Images in the American Middle West," in Theo D'Haen and Hans Bertens, eds., *'Writing' Nation and 'Writing' Region in America*. Amsterdam: VU UP, 1996, 95-116.
- ⁸"How the Middle West Became America's Heartland," *Inland* 2 (1976), 19.
- ⁹J. Wesley Bond, *Minnesota and Its Resources* (1853), quoted in Carlton C. Qualey, "A New El Dorado": Guides to Minnesota, 1850s-1880s," *Minnesota History* 42 (1971): 219.
- ¹⁰State Board of Immigration, *Minnesota: Its Resources and Progress, Its Beauty, Healthfulness and Fertility, and Its Attractions and Advantages As a Home for Immigrants, With a Map* (Minneapolis: Tribune Printing Co., 1872), 8; State Board of World's Fair Managers, *Minnesota: A Brief Sketch of Its History, Resources and Advantages* (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Co., 1893), 30.
- ¹¹For Minnesota's self-identification as the capital of the Northwest, see the testimony submitted by Minneapolis in 1914, in support of its bid to become the site of a federal reserve bank ("Location of Federal Reserve Districts in the United States," 63 Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Documents, No. 485, Serial 4583). Joseph W. Brownell, "The Cultural Midwest," *Journal of Geography* 59 (1960): 81-5.
- ¹²Jokes collected by Minnesota Historical Society employee Sean DeBlieck, 1999. The Iowa response is recorded in "Iowa Slam-dunks Minnesota Pride," *St. Paul Pioneer-Press*, March 16, 2000, 1B.
- ¹³In his 1991 Ph.D. dissertation, geographer John Joseph Flynn identifies Minnesota as more environmentally diverse than any other Midwestern state ("Minnesota's Sense of Place: Creation Through Images," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1992, 158).
- ¹⁴*The Bread and Butter State: Report of the Minnesota Board of Managers for the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo, N.Y.* (St. Paul: Pioneer Press Co., 1902), 18-9. All quotations in the following paragraphs are from this source. For the legacy of butter sculpting launched by this exhibit, see Karal Ann Marling, "'She Brought Forth Butter in a Lordly Dish': The Origins of Minnesota Butter Sculpture," *Minnesota History* 50 (1987): 218-28.
- ¹⁵"Come to Minnesota, the Bread and Butter State: You'll Do Better on a Minnesota Farm!" (St. Paul: 10,000 Lakes-Greater Minnesota Association, 1930), 15.
- ¹⁶The successive totals for Minnesota's lakes come from *Tourists' Guide to the Health and Pleasure Resorts of the Golden Northwest* (Chicago: Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul Railway Company, 1879, 111; *Land or Promise, South Western Minnesota, North Western Iowa* (St. Paul: St. Paul & Sioux City Railroad, n.d.), 5; Alfred Stewart Dimond, *The Magic Northland, An Illustrated Guide for Tourists to the New Northwest* (Minneapolis: Hoppin, Palmer & Dimond, 1881), 126; and *Minnesota Lakes* (St. Paul: Northern Pacific Railway, 1906), 5. For the association see Clifford E. Clark, Jr., "Minnesota: Image and Identity," in Clark, ed. *Minnesota in a Century of Change* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1989), 1-18.
- ¹⁷Jim Brandenburg and Paul Gruchow, *Minnesota: Images of Home* (Minneapolis: Blandin Foundation, 1990), 30, emphasis added. For examples of the historical claims, see Catherine Stewart, *New Homes in the West* (Nashville: Cameron & Fall, 1843; reprint Readex Microprint, 1966), 79; Charles H. Sweetser, comp., *Tourists' and Invalids' Complete Guide and Epitome of Travel to the Northwest* (NY: American News Co., 1867),

- 28-9; and State Board of World's Fair Managers, *Minnesota* (1893), 7-9. The view of the landscape shaped by the Red River Trail is perceptively detailed in Carolyn Gilman, "Perceptions of the Prairie: Cultural Contrasts on the Red River Trails," *Minnesota History* 46 (1978): 112-22.
- ¹⁸William E. Lass, "Minnesota, An American Siberia?" *Minnesota History* 47 (1984): 149-55. See also Ralph H. Brown, "Fact and Fancy in Early Accounts of Minnesota's Climate," *Minnesota History* 17 (1936): 243-61 and Charles H. Sweetser, comp., *Tourists' and Invalids' Complete Guide and Epitome of Travel to the Northwest* (N Y: American News Co., 1867). Quotes from the *Minnesota Democrat*, December 1, 1851 and from the *Minneapolis Star Tribune*, January 3, 1998. Flynn has described winter as one of the central elements in defining Minnesota's sense of place in "Minnesota's Sense of Place," 112-3.
- ¹⁹Sweetser, *Tourists' and Invalids' Guide*, 10. For scenic tourism see Theodore C. Blegen, "The 'Fashionable Tour' on the Upper Mississippi" *Minnesota History* 20 (1939): 377-96. Health tourism is discussed by Helen Clapesattle, "When Minnesota Was Florida's Rival," *Minnesota History* 35 (1957): 214-21.
- ²⁰Catherine Stewart, *New Homes in the West*, 67; *Tourist's Guide to the Health and Pleasure Resorts of the Golden Northwest* (1879), 63; anonymous Boston traveler quoted in Charles M. Gates, "The Tourist Traffic of Pioneer Minnesota," *Minnesota History* 16 (1935), 278.
- ²¹Robert Watt, quoted in Theodore C. Blegen, "A Danish Visitor of the Seventies," *Minnesota History* 10 (1929): 413. See also George Tuthill Borrett, *Letters from Canada and the United States* (London: J. E. Adlard, printed for private circulation, 1865), 185.
- ²²Clark, "Minnesota: Image and Identity," 8.
- ²³Joseph Amato and Anthony Amato, "Minnesota, Real and Imagined: A View from the Countryside," unpublished draft manuscript, 2000, copy in author's possession, p. 25; Karal Ann Marling, "Culture and Leisure: 'The Good Life' in Minnesota," in Clark, ed., *Minnesota in a Century of Change*, 548; Patricia Hampl, "Views from the Hill," in Clarence Andrews, ed., *Growing Up in the Midwest* (Ames: Iowa State UP, 1981), 100, 102.

WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHS: IMAGINATIVE
LITERATURE AND THE MAKING OF *THE CALUMET*
REGION: AN AMERICAN PLACE:
PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY CIALDELLA

GARY CIALDELLA

No place is a place until things are remembered. —Robert Gard

It's a Sunday morning in the late summer of 2002. I'm sitting in the Kennedy Cafe, on Kennedy Avenue in Hammond, Indiana, looking out the window, sipping coffee and waiting for the waitress to bring my breakfast. Two days earlier, I drove in from my home in Kalamazoo, Michigan, on one of many excursions to photograph in the Calumet Region. In 1986, I began photographing this part of the Midwest. Years of photographing culminated in 2009 with the publication of *The Calumet Region: An American Place*. When I was growing up in the Region, it was one of this country's largest and most prosperous industrial centers, encompassing the southern portion of Chicago and Cook County in Illinois and neighboring Lake and Porter counties in Indiana. By the time I began photographing the area it was already sinking into its long decline. When I left for college in the 1960s, I could not imagine the changes to come, nor the hold this place would have on me.

On that Sunday morning, a light rain was falling as I stared out the window. My attention turned to the storefronts across and down the street. I am always looking at things I find visually interesting that might be source material for a photograph. I, of course, don't photograph everything that holds my attention, but often an arrangement of things will linger in my mind's eye for a time, perhaps to reappear in a different form in a photograph. On this day, I was paying attention more to words than to visual forms. I found the homespun names on

the storefronts across the street charming, like a familiar dialect: The Tattoo Lady, Deb's Gun Range, Mr. Sweeper, Poppy Joe's, Paradise Realty, Flick's Tap, Ann's Linens, Shear Delight. In my delight I jotted down the names, perhaps for some future use.

Flick's Tap made it into Jean Shepherd's *In God We Trust, All Others Pay Cash*. As the reader meets Shepherd, the narrator, he is visiting his hometown and is on his way to meet his childhood sidekick Flick. Shepherd is riding in a cab, something he routinely does in New York City but never in the Region. When the cabby asks if he's from out of town, he responds that he is. This pretense announces his reticence about being back in the Region. Looking out the cab window, Shepherd sees "the grimy streets lined with dirty, hard ice and crusted drifts covered with that old familiar layer of blast-furnace dust . . ." (15). He sees other cars carrying loads of men going to their jobs, the steel and railroad worker, and "refinery slaves" (15). As the cab lumbers along, the scene unfolds "into painfully familiar country: ragged vacant lots, clumps of signboards advertising paint, American Legion halls, bowling alleys, all woven together with a compact web of high tension wires, telephone poles, and gas stations" (18).

Shepherd's list of the "painfully familiar" happens to comprise the subject matter of my photographs. Shepherd nails the description of these things in the social landscape of the Region, even as he finds them unattractive and provincial. Years of photographing have taught me to look at everything and see its visual potential. Perhaps only a photographer like me, who grew up building with Erector Sets and model railroads, finds it persuasive to make visual poetry from such subjects. Novelist and critic John Berger observes that "[W]e are near to chaos. But through chaos come prophecies of an order" (200). As the writer shapes words to impress his will and create prosaic worlds, the photographer wrestles with space and form to produce visual poetry.

Shepherd's cab chugs along and finally comes to a stop across the street from Flick's tavern. Upon entering, Shepherd sees that the place hasn't changed much. The bar is longer, the jukebox is bigger, and there's a color TV hanging from the wall. His memory recoils as he breathes in "the air that was as gamy and rich as ever, if not more so, a thick oleo of dried beer suds, fermenting beer rags, sweaty overalls, and urinal deodorants" (18).

During the many photo trips to the Region over the years, I made a point of seeking out places like Flick's. They are only indirectly my subjects, but sipping a beer and chatting with a customer or listening



Plate 1: Amoco Park, Hammond, Indiana, 1989. Photograph courtesy of Gary Cialdella, www.calume-regionbook.com

to the chatter of others deepens my appreciation for the people and the place, and perhaps through a kind of osmosis, these encounters inform my photographs; if only to enrich experience, they concentrate my attention on being there—in the moment.

In his writing, Shepherd reveals a particular quality, the gritty charm, of life in the industrial Midwest—used car lots, bowling alleys, factories, and railroad lines punctuating the landscape. For Shepherd, however, the people are what he connects with the most, relishing their idiosyncrasies. In one such sketch, Flick is tending bar, and he and his old friend are schmoozing over beers about the old days and people they knew. Flashbacks pop in and out of focus, but their conversation is disrupted by a ruckus: “An uproar broke out in one of the booths back in the gloom near the wall. Two structural ironworkers were loudly Indian wrestling . . . Flick’s jaw squared as he darted from behind the bar. I watched in the mirror as he quelled the battle, fed the combatants two more boilermakers, and returned” (102). With a keen ear for regional dialect, Shepherd evokes a strong sense of place. A transplant to New York City, Shepherd drew on his experiences growing up in the Region for the homespun humor of his radio shows and writings, the best known of which is the movie *A Christmas Story*. The tavern is a favorite setting for many of these sketches, and Shepherd understands its importance to the social fabric of these working-class communities.

My maternal grandfather owned the Terminal Tavern on Grove Street in Blue Island, Illinois, although he didn’t take part in the day-to-day operations. The tavern’s name comes from its location, which was within a block of both the Rock Island and Illinois Central railroad lines serving my hometown. Grandpa and Grandma lived above the tavern with one of my aunts in a unit of the apartment building he had built with the help of friends. Every Sunday my family made afternoon visits to my grandparents, and I would often find Grandpa in the tavern, sitting with friends and talking. Usually I would sit on a bar stool, twirling back and forth and drinking a soda.

Being just a kid then, I don’t remember any of the talk that took place, but the ambiance left an indelible impression. If it were summer, a White Sox or Cubs ball game would be on WGN radio, and the play-by-play could be heard in the background, the voices of Vince Lloyd and Jack Quinlan mingling with the banter of the patrons. In his best stories, Shepherd uncorks the fragrance of places like this. These mom-and-pop taverns can be found throughout the neighborhoods of



Plate 2: CC Liquors, Indianapolis Boulevard, Whiting, Indiana, 2000. Photograph courtesy of Gary Cialdella, www.calumetregionbook.com

the Region. They have names like Flick's, Dusty's in nearby Whiting, or Steve's Lounge in Chicago's Hegewisch neighborhood.

My fondness for the people who live in the Region lies just beneath the surface of my photographs of neighborhoods and industrial landscapes. When I stop in one of the local restaurants or bars, I am reminded of the people I knew growing up—my grandfathers, both of whom worked for the Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad, the uncle who worked a lathe at the machine shop, and the Chicago fireman who moonlighted at the candy wholesale business where I worked after school. Like the texture of the land and skies in my photographs, the people of the Region have their own distinctive patina.

Although we didn't foresee it, my generation, coming to maturity in the 1960s, experienced the last full decade of industrial growth in the Region. At that time, a nearly continuous belt of heavy industry spread across the southern Lake Michigan shoreline, from U.S. Steel's Chicago South Works at 87th Street and the Lake, south into Chicago's southeast side neighborhoods bordering Indiana, then east along the Lake Michigan shore through Whiting, East Chicago, and on to Gary, Indiana. On a clear day, standing on the Whiting beach, the Standard Oil Refinery at your back, you could see the Chicago skyline, and maybe pick out the Prudential building, which, at forty-one floors, was the city's tallest building. U.S. Steel, Wisconsin, Republic, and Acme Steel were among the mills in Chicago proper. The last to survive, Acme Steel, closed in 2001. What is left of the Region's functioning mills are now in East Chicago, Gary, and nearby Burns Harbor, Indiana. Except for U.S. Steel in Gary, they are foreign owned.

Life in the mills has always been grimy and dangerous, the men dwarfed by the enormous industrial structures. In his novel *Middlesex*, Jeffrey Eugenides illuminates the factory experience of his grandfather's generation beginning their work life in America during the 1920s at Ford's River Rouge Plant in Detroit. Their experience could just as easily have been the experience of workers at U.S. Steel's South Works, or of Inland Steel in East Chicago, Indiana, or any number of other mills and production facilities in the Region. He writes that, ". . . the Rouge appeared against the sky, rising out of the smoke it generated. At first all that was visible was the tops of the eight main smokestacks. Each gave birth to its own dark cloud. The clouds plumed upward and merged into a general pall that hung over the landscape . . ." (94).

My grandfather sees only the bearing in front of him, his hands removing it, grinding it, and putting it back as another appears. The conveyor over his head extends back to the men who stamp out the bearings and load ingots into the furnaces; it goes back to the Foundry where the Negroes work, goggled against the infernal light and heat. They feed iron ore into the Blast Oven and pour molten steel into core molds from ladles. They pour at just the right rate—too quickly and the molds will explode; too slowly and the steel will harden. They can't stop even to pick the burning bits of metal from their arms. (96)

During all the years I lived in and photographed the Region, I was never inside a steel mill. The bowels of these places are out of reach, unless you work in one or have other official business there. Simply photographing the exterior can cause a near instantaneous response from mill security. On one occasion—and there have been several—I had stopped my car to make a photograph near the Indiana Harbor Belt Railroad headquarters. I completed the photograph, stowed my gear in the car and went on my way. Seconds later, I noticed a security vehicle chasing after me. I pulled over and was able to talk my way out of further difficulty, but these incidents have a way of lingering in my mind, inducing twinges of paranoia.

I photograph with a large-format camera, composing as I look through the back of the camera, a black cloth over my head, as I concentrate on the upside down and reversed image on the ground glass. It's a wonderful way to make photographs, but the black cloth blinds you to what's going on around you. Photographing in these settings, I have learned to work quickly. One might think that someone photographing today, with my choice of cumbersome equipment, is more of a curiosity than a threat, but that is not generally the case. Photographer and writer Robert Adams observes that the reason he likes photographers is because "they don't tempt [him] to envy. The profession is short on dignity: Nearly every one has fallen, been the target of condescension . . . been harassed by security guards, and dropped expensive equipment" (16).

Steel mills and production lines are dangerous places, and wandering around in them is not to be taken lightly. Just looking at the scale of these places from the outside induces one's jaw to drop. Early in the making of *The Calumet Region: An American Place*, one of Inland Steel's blast furnaces adjacent to the Indiana Harbor Canal was still in operation. There was a vantage point (where I was never hassled) on the street bridging the canal where I could watch and make

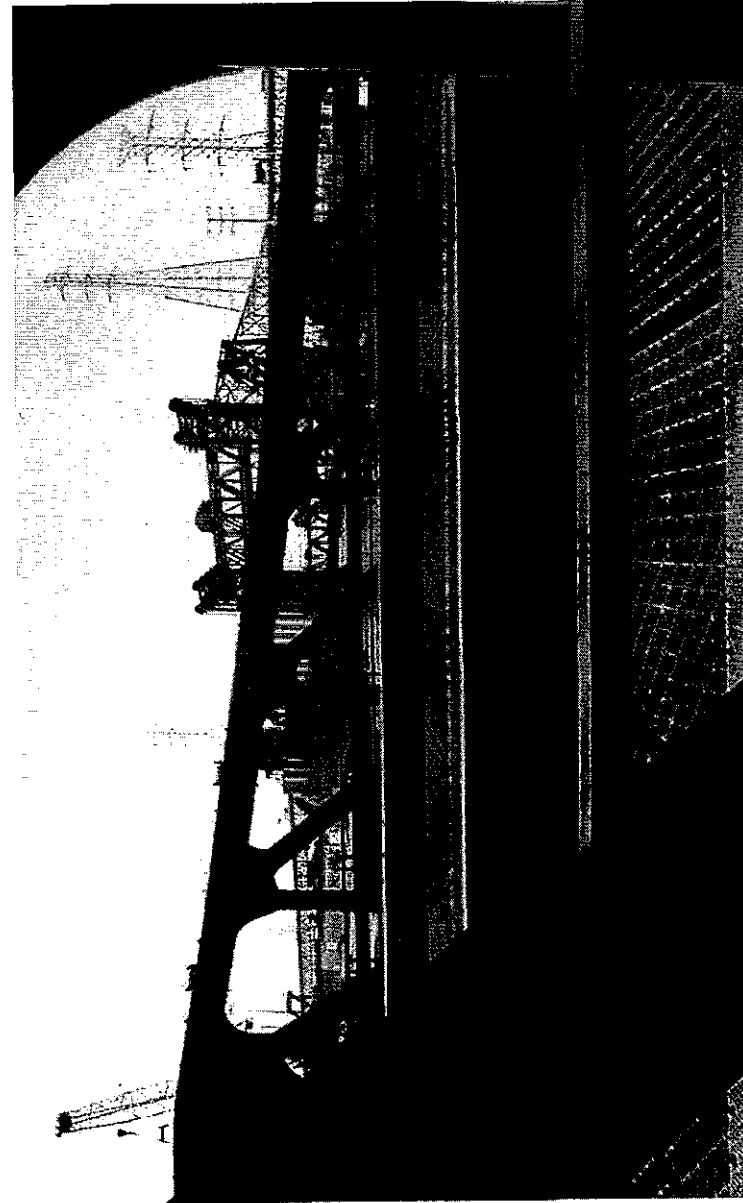


Plate 3: 95th Street Bridge. View south toward railroad bridge, Calumet River, Chicago, 2002. Photograph by Gary Cialdella, www.calumetregionbook.com

photographs. Coke is unloaded from barges by giant shovels attached to overhead cranes carrying their loads into the plant. There's a beauty to the process of seeing this scale of industrial operation. I made a few photographs I liked from that location, one in particular a few years later of the mothballed blast furnace. Within two years of making that photograph the structure was razed. The scale, complexity, and human effort of steel production is found in the early chapters of Eugenides's *Middlesex*:

The Foundry is the deepest recess of the Rouge, its molten core, but the Line goes back farther than that. It extends outside to the hills of coal and coke; it goes to the river where freighters dock to unload the ore, at which point the Line becomes the river itself, snaking up to the north woods until it reaches its source, which is the earth itself, the limestone and sandstone therein; and then the Line leads back again, out of substrata to river to freighters and finally to the cranes, shovels, and furnaces where it is turned into molten steel and poured into molds, cooling and hardening into car parts . . ." (96).

The parts were being manufactured for Model Ts. One by one the coarse parts pass before the men on the assembly line where "Wierzbicki reams a bearing and Stepanides grinds a bearing and O'Malley attaches a bearing to a camshaft" (96).

In the early 1960s, I was a student at Dwight D. Eisenhower High School in Blue Island, Illinois, and soon would have my driver's license. Blue Island's main street is Western Avenue, which at twenty-five and a half miles is the longest continuous street in Chicago. Western's most northern point is Howard Avenue, where Chicago meets Evanston. It ends south of Blue Island where it merges into the Dixie Highway on the west side of the small suburb of Dixmoor, Illinois, seventeen miles south of the Chicago Loop. Western Avenue and similar arteries connected us to all parts of Chicago and the Region. Cheap gas made driving an inexpensive adventure. When boredom struck, I would jump into the car with friends and take off on a late-night drive.

Imagine, from my block at 120th Street, driving north on Western Avenue eleven miles to 18th Street. Turn right and travel a mile or so and you will be in the vicinity of Blue Island Avenue, the heart of Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood, so named by its nineteenth-century Czech inhabitants. In need of coffee, you wander into the Economy Restaurant and there spot Katman and Stoch in a booth. They're the

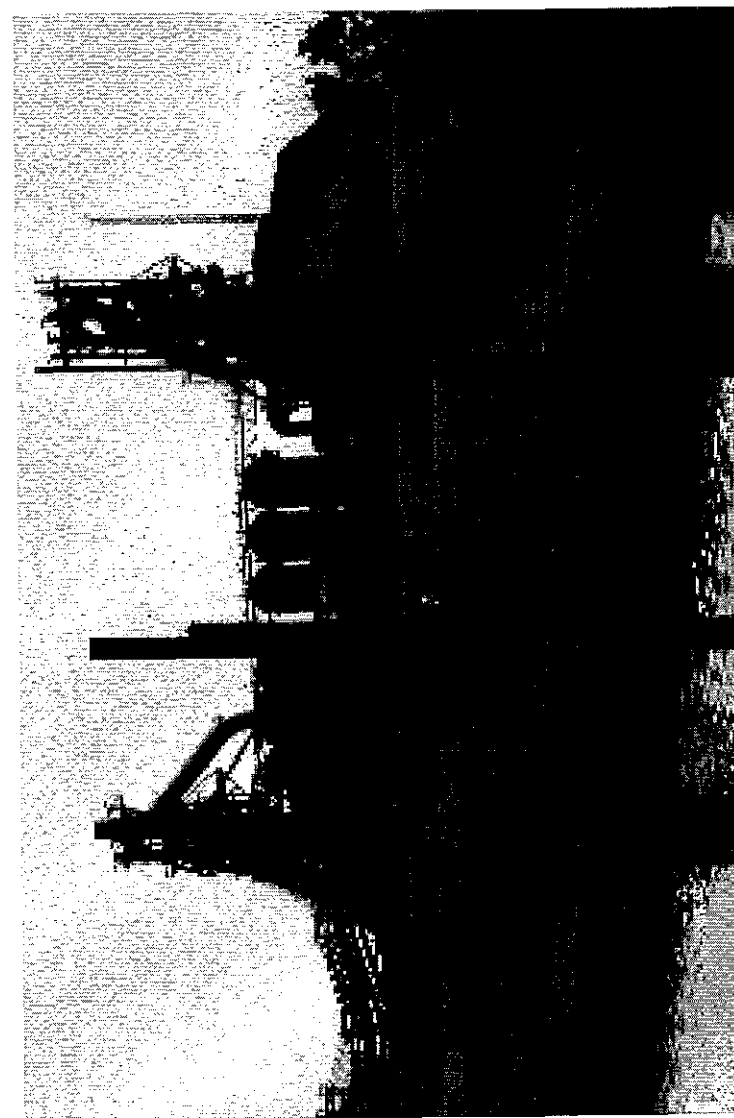


Plate 4: Dormant Blast Furnace, Indiana Harbor Canal, East Chicago, Indiana, 2002. Photograph courtesy of Gary Cialdella, www.calumetregionbook.com

protagonist and friend in Stuart Dybek's *I Sailed with Magellan*. They're dipping fries in salsa, on Dexadrine and coffee, pulling an all-nighter. In their accelerated state, it occurs to them that they have never seen the dawn, and so they set out to see it, assisted by Stoch's uncle, a security guard at a Gold Coast high rise, who escorts them to the rooftop. It's three o'clock in the morning. Stoch is standing in the blustery wind at the edge of the building and he calls out to Katman to check out the view:

Far out over the dark lake, where the horizon might be, there's a red-dish aura as if an enormous coal we can't see is glowing.

We stand watching, waiting for the coal to peep over the rim of black water and crack into crimson and gold. But dawn seems stuck, glimmering just out of sight beyond the curve of the planet, whose rotation we can feel in the numbing wind that buffets the chain-link fence bordering the roof. The speed in our systems makes us shiver faster. We're staring out, not so much shivering as vibrating like the fence, when Uncle Humky joins us, and we point out the glow. (168-69)

The glow is not the dawn, but the blast furnaces of the mills in Gary, and Uncle Hunky says laughing, "[Y]ou two *dupas* thought Gary, Indiana was the dawn!" (169). Before their curiosity to see a sunrise, the two young men were dreaming of a road trip, like Sal and Dean, the main characters in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*, to escape the city for the excitement of Mexico. The open road was the catalyst for many young men, including myself, to break the spell of the hometown. My own road trip was to the mountains of Colorado—a considerable contrast to the Calumet Region.

After graduating from high school and uncertain of my plans, I enrolled at Thornton Junior College, in nearby Harvey, Illinois. I wasn't sure what I wanted to study, but I knew I didn't want to work in a mill or refinery. The Clark Oil Refinery was across the street from my high school, and although the industrial forms caught my eye, the stench it released into the air was unpleasant, not to mention harmful to our health. From the high school ballfields, we could see the small figures of men moving about working at the surface and on the towers. Later, I learned that one of my cousins was employed there, his first full-time job after graduating from high school.

Steve Tesich has written two coming-of-age stories placed in the Region, the novel, *Summer Crossing*, and the screenplay for *Four*

Friends. Both works are partly autobiographical, and in full or in part are set in East Chicago, Indiana, to where Tesich, his mother and sister emigrated from Yugoslavia. Tesich is better known for his screenplay of the 1979 movie *Breaking Away*, set in Bloomington, Indiana, where he attended Indiana University. But it's his lesser-known *Four Friends*, directed by Arthur Penn, with which I feel in closer harmony. The first third of the movie and the conclusion take place in the Region, where those scenes were filmed. The story begins with Danilo, the young adolescent from Yugoslavia, and his mother arriving in the United States to join their hard-nosed steelworker father and husband to begin their new life in East Chicago. The brusque steelworker picks up his family at the train station, and as they drive away we see through Danilo's eyes a panorama of the Region unfold over bridges, past the steel mills, to the tiny apartment where they will live. At their destination, Danilo looks about and in the near distance sees the mill his father will walk to for his next shift. This first scene rolls past bridges crossing the Calumet River channel near its entry to Lake Michigan in South Chicago and on to the mills in East Chicago, places where I made several of the photographs appearing in *The Calumet Region: An American Place*.

Four Friends, released in 1981, and *Summer Crossing*, published in 1982, share some things in common, specifically high school graduates making their way into the world. *Four Friends* has epic aspirations, following the different routes that the main characters take through America's 1960s counterculture. The novel is centered in the Region and is fundamentally about the place. In *Summer Crossing*, high school graduates Daniel Price and his two friends Larry Misiora and Paul Freund struggle to come to terms with what to do with their lives after graduating from high school.

The center of the story is Daniel's love affair with the older and more worldly wise Rachel. His preoccupation with her propels the story, but it is the Region itself that holds center stage. During one warm summer night, Rachel drives Daniel to Whiting Beach, the volume turned up on the car radio as they bounce across the railroad tracks that separate the neighborhood from the waterfront. Daniel's heart is aimed at Rachel, but his senses can't escape the surroundings. "A breeze was blowing from across the lake, warm and humid. Her blouse fluttered. Her hair blew back. I could see the lights of Inland Steel in the distance. The water smelled of industry and jobs" (224). Throughout the novel, the Region's presence hangs over the

characters like an unseen hand pressing down on them. "The air was getting misty and smoggy . . . [Y]ou could smell the steel mills and the refineries . . . On certain days you could watch the soot fall like black snow" (21).

Daniel's friend, the hot-tempered, angry Larry Misióra, recognizes the contradiction between where they live and a possible fate that might await him. His family's home is across the street from the Sunrise Oil refinery, operating twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Misióra's anger over his parents' lives spills over in daily conversations with Daniel: "You know what they're like. You've seen them. Marshmallows. Everything is 'lovely and nice.' You look out of our house and you look right at that fucking refinery and you smell that shit they call air and they think it's 'lovely and nice' because my dad can walk to work and not only that, he can walk home for lunch. How lucky can one man be? That's his big deal" (75).

The refinery (the Region) is the presence Misióra can't ignore, the dragon he must slay. The face of this dragon is a smiling cartoon character painted on the side of oil storage tanks and trucks. Misióra's malevolence goes beyond his hatred of his parents and the mere existence of the refinery and extends to everyone who passes through its gates: "Smoke hissed out of the refinery, rising, disappearing into clouds. Men walked through the yard, surrounded by a fence, like termites through termite mounds made of steel" (76). Reading these words, I am reminded of the houses I photographed adjacent to refineries, seeing only a short distance away refinery workers going about their work inside a fenced-in world. Photographing in East Chicago and Whiting, in the neighborhoods closest to industry, often it seemed to me that time had stopped, that it was still 1960.

The hometown is a well-served theme in storytelling, especially Midwestern storytelling. To escape from, to be stuck in, or to return to one's hometown can provoke complex sets of responses. When I returned home for a visit from college in Michigan, I encountered my own confused feelings and ambivalence about my hometown. In Lee Zacharias's short story, "Disasters," the narrator is back home in Hammond, Indiana, accompanied by her fiancé, Jesse. What was supposed to be a short stopover had turned into days of waiting for the parts needed to repair her broken-down sports car. At the start of the story, the narrator and her fiancé are riding the South Shore train returning to Hammond from a day trip to Chicago's Loop. It's twilight as the narrator closes her eyes, reflecting that when she had

"come north from college on the Greyhound, a great gray cloud hung just ahead of the Kankakee River on Highway 41; inside this cloud I grew up" (314).

The sky itself is a presence in the literature of the Region, a palor setting a tone for these stories. Photographing in the Calumet, I have become aware of the particular quality of light and how it intermixes with the tonal values on the landscape. This is due, I assume, to the combination of industrial and atmospheric effects of Lake Michigan. I am often asked about my decision to photograph in black and white. I point out that the tonal values best express my emotional connection to the place; the palette of middle gray tones in my silver prints is similar to the appearance of steel and concrete, the moods of the lake and sky. There is, too, the quality in black-and-white photographs that evokes memory more than color. John Berger postulates why black-and-white photographs are stronger triggers of memory. "The sharper and more isolated the stimulus memory receives, the more it remembers, the more comprehensive the stimulus, the less it remembers. This is perhaps why black and white photography is paradoxically more evocative than colour photography" (193). I do not know if his conclusion has been scientifically verified, but it does equate to my own experience.

In Zacharias's "Disasters," the "great cloud" also reflects the emotional state of the narrator, reminding her that before her family moved to Hammond, they had lived in Chicago, where they had friends in Lincoln Park, with its fine brick town houses and tree-lined streets. But in Hammond, it is only "freight trains, tracks, heavy winter skies. Yellow brick cocktail lounges dark through the doors, glass-block windows so thick no light could get through" (314-315).

Twilight is fading as the train pulls into the Gostlin Street stop, and the narrator and her fiancé leave the station for the nearly empty streets of Hammond. On State Street, she points out to Jesse the lights of the downtown business district. Downtown Hammond was once the regional shopping district. When I started my series, the shift to suburban malls was a *fait accompli*. Zacharias describes scenes like those I have photographed. The protagonist and her fiancé walk "past streetlights tating the land cleared for renewal, [crossing a] bridge over some dark sludge" (317). In a tone of disappointment she points out to Jesse where the old public library had been replaced "by garden apartments strung over asphalt so like all the garden apartments I'd seen that pointing them out seemed hardly worthwhile" (318).

Memories and the present moment weave through her mind. They walk across State Line to the former notorious strip of Calumet City (Cal City), Illinois, once known for having more liquor licenses than any community in the country.

The narrator's malaise mirrors the vacuity of Hammond's postindustrial downtown. The story was published in 1992, and Zacharias's descriptions of the area parallel what I saw when first photographing there. The character's reflections about her hometown and her feelings of loss are similar to feelings I have had when photographing a rundown landmark. There are a handful of distinctive buildings remaining in downtown Hammond, but most of the gems are gone or are in disrepair. The most dominant new building on State Street is a faux-colonial mega-Baptist church, the husband and wife founders of which were for a time memorialized in a mural portrait painted on a wall of a church building facing a parking lot. I was fortunate to have made a photograph of it before it was unceremoniously painted over.

At the end of their evening, the narrator and her fiancé call a cab for home. Home is the house that she lived in for years, her parents' home before they retired to Florida, now belonging to her steelworker brothers. Sitting on the bed, "rubbing [her] fingers over the faded chenille [she'd] slept under for years and years . . . looking . . . at the icky blonde furniture that was so familiar . . . [and] the wall painted an imaginative pink instead of mint green as when I'd lived there . . ." she speaks to her fiancé "very casual like I'd never lived there at all. 'I hate this house'" (323).

I have only a dim memory of the first house I lived in. It was a two-flat on Canal Street. Aptly named, the street paralleled the Cal-Sag Canal, the waterway linking Great Lakes shipping at the Port of Chicago and Lake Calumet to the Illinois River and eventually to the Mississippi River. I knew none of that as a young child, but I did know to stay away from the canal. My mother grew up on the opposite side of the canal, and she was determined to pass on to me the warnings she was told of the hobos and other dangers lurking along its banks. All that I saw were the barges moving in one direction or the other and the Rock Island trains crossing the canal bridge. Later we moved to the house my parents had built on the north side of Blue Island, a mere block and a half from the city of Chicago. The small brick house on Artesian Avenue was the center of my world.

Five years after we moved to the Artesian Street house, my world suddenly expanded. It was a Saturday, August 27th, 1955. At 6:15 that

morning, several miles to the east at the Standard Oil Refinery in Whiting, the overnight crew was performing their last duty before the end of their shift, to restart the 252-foot-high piece of equipment known as a hydroformer. It wasn't a single error or breakdown, but a sequence of events that caused the massive explosion that ignited the fires engulfing acres of storage tanks that took eight days to extinguish. Tons of flaming debris pummeled the residential neighborhood adjoining the refinery. Nearby residents shaken out of their beds thought it was an atomic bomb explosion. Over fifteen hundred residents living near the refinery were evacuated. Firefighters were called in from Whiting, Hammond, and East Chicago. They arrived to see burning oil on Indianapolis Boulevard.

Whiting is far enough east of Blue Island that I didn't hear the explosion earlier that morning. But my friends and I did see the giant mushroom-shaped cloud hovering in the eastern sky. I remember thinking it looked just like the mushroom-shaped clouds of A-bomb blasts we'd seen in school movies and on television. These were the days of "duck and cover," and it didn't take much of an imagination for the thought of the atomic bomb to occur to us. That day was the first I heard of the town named Whiting, Indiana.

The memory of the Whiting refinery explosion stayed with me and was the catalyst for the Calumet Region project. The first place I photographed was Whiting and the homes in the neighborhood adjacent to the refinery. Memory and place are pervasive presences in my photographs, past and present informing my choice of subject matter. Photographers, working as I do, bear witness to what is before us; we are given to point out singular moments. Henry James expressed something similar when he wrote that it is "the prime business and the high honour of the painter of life always to make a *sense*—and to make it most in proportion as the immediate aspects are loose or confused." Though the means and results differ, this is true of all artists working from life. James continues, "[T]he last thing decently permitted him is to recognize incoherence—to recognize it, that is, as baffling; though of course he may present and portray it, in all richness, *for incoherence*" (273).

Steve Tesich was fifteen years old when he immigrated to East Chicago in 1957. Therefore, he couldn't have witnessed the Whiting refinery explosion, but it's fair to conclude it was a momentous enough event for him to have known about it and to use in *Summer Crossing*. Near the conclusion of the novel, Daniel and Rachel meet

for the last time. Daniel is certain if he says just the right words to Rachel, he can prevent her from leaving him. But the moment is cut short, as they are pulled away from each other by a tremor sweeping past them, and in the same instant they notice “the brilliant glow of light like a gigantic flash bulb exploding behind us. In the distance, over the flat roof of Kroger’s Supermarket, due east in the direction of the Sunrise Oil Company and Misióra’s home, I saw in place of that one flickering flaglike flame the jagged outline of an enormous blaze. It was as if a small mountain had suddenly been dropped down on the eastern horizon and set on fire” (357). In the haze of disorientation Daniel imagines, as did my friends and I, that maybe the Russians had finally started World War III—a circumstance, he concludes, that, if true, would certainly stop Rachel from leaving him. They walk toward the direction of the explosion and arrive at Railroad Avenue and 142nd Street, where they see the site where “two huge oil tanks had exploded and in their place were flames two or three times taller than the tanks had been” (358).

Daniel walks from the scene of the fire smelling of oil and smoke and runs into Larry Misióra, who had left weeks ago without a word. Misióra is smiling, he’s in a bristling mood, and he tells Daniel that he started the fire: “I did it . . . I went and did it, Daniel.” At first, Daniel doubts his friend, but soon he realizes he is telling him the truth:

I kept trying to go away and stay away . . . This last time I went west. Got as far as Iowa and just couldn’t keep going. I kept seeing that Sunrise character, that smiling cartoon. And I knew, you see, I just knew that, when things go bad for me I’d go back. It would always be there, waiting for me to return. My place. My job . . . Sooner or later I knew it would get to me. And the thought of walking through those gates for the rest of my life, I tell you, it just made me crazy. So I did it. You might say I went and removed the temptation. (363-64).

Summer Crossing concludes with the three high school friends going their separate ways. Misióra drives off in his car to parts unknown. Paul Freund, after a summer working in the city parks, lands a union job, with assistance from his soon to be father-in-law, as a toll collector for the Indiana Toll Road. Daniel realizes the time has come for him to leave, and he boards the train for New York City. He’s in a reflective mood as the train moves past his hometown, and he thinks to himself: “I had spent my whole life in East Chicago, and the New York Central rattled through it in less than five minutes” (373).

There’s an unspoken emotional divide in the literature of the Region, between those who leave and those who stay. These stories, as well as my photographs, were completed long after each of the authors left the Region. Photographing in the Calumet, I was conscious of the present moment pressing upon the past, and vice versa. To use William Faulkner’s oft-quoted line from *Requiem for a Nun*, “The past isn’t dead. It isn’t even past”(92). The first photographs I made of houses in Whiting awakened in me strong feelings of familiarity. I flashed back to my childhood experience, the house on Artesian Street, of walking to school past houses like those I was now photographing.

Houses have always been important to me. As a kid I drew them, and in college I studied their architectural styles. The homes I photograph and admire the most are vernacular structures. They call to mind the homes of my childhood neighborhood. In appearance they speak less about style and the builder and more about the people who live in them. In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard expresses what is at the heart of my intention when photographing houses. “If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty” (4). The straight on, portraitlike approach I employ, and the small 4x5-inch silver contact print extend emphasis to intimacy. Bachelard is enamored with small woodcuts of houses and says that “[T]he more simple the engraved house the more it fires my imagination as an inhabitant . . . Its lines have *force* and, as a shelter, it is *fortifying* . . .” (50); in skilled hands representational images of houses can become “insistent, inviting . . . no dreamer ever remains indifferent for long to a picture of a house” (49).

The houses I photograph are generally in working-class neighborhoods, and often they are situated very near heavy industry. In these settings, intimacy becomes ennobling, and I see these dwellings in a different light, as Tom Joad figures standing firmly against a harsh and prohibitive other. As Bachelard notes “. . . everything comes alive when contradictions accumulate” (39). One particular brick façade home on Schrage Avenue in Whiting was emblematic. More than any other single home, it spoke to me of domesticity in the midst of the industrial landscape. The house faced west, its backside to the refinery, a cared-for lot and dead-end street flanking its sides. The owners took fastidious care of the place, from the perfectly kept yard to the carefully patched driveway. A feature of the house was a Madonna statuette resting in a niche below the draped front windows. Later, it

was moved to a garden spot below the garage window. Over the years I have made a ritual of driving past the house. I was reassured seeing it, cared for, stout against the bleak refinery landscape.

In early 2010, I met a journalist in Whiting for an interview about the Calumet book. Over coffee, our conversation came around to the importance of place in people's lives. Like myself, this journalist was fascinated by the pride of place shown in the care of the residents' homes, particularly noticeable in the Region's industrial belt. He asked to see where I began the series, and I led him to the house on Schrage Avenue. I made the turn to drive up to it, but there in front of me was an empty lot where the house should have been. Only after the journalist left did it sink in. I stood facing the vacant lot, my hands trembling, feeling that I had suddenly lost a dear friend. I walked closer to look for a fragment, but found no evidence the house had ever been there.

Memory of place is the connective tissue of these stories and photographs. Over the years of photographing in the Region, I was conscious that I, too, was telling a story, one connected to my own experiences and simultaneously aimed at the arc of history reshaping the Region. With every passing year, pieces of the Region's distinctiveness disappear. The familiar is erased, covered over and diminishing in public memory. Yet even as the Region has changed, a visit there today puts me in two worlds: the place it is becoming, and the one of my childhood when three shifts comprised a routine day.

Kalamazoo, Michigan

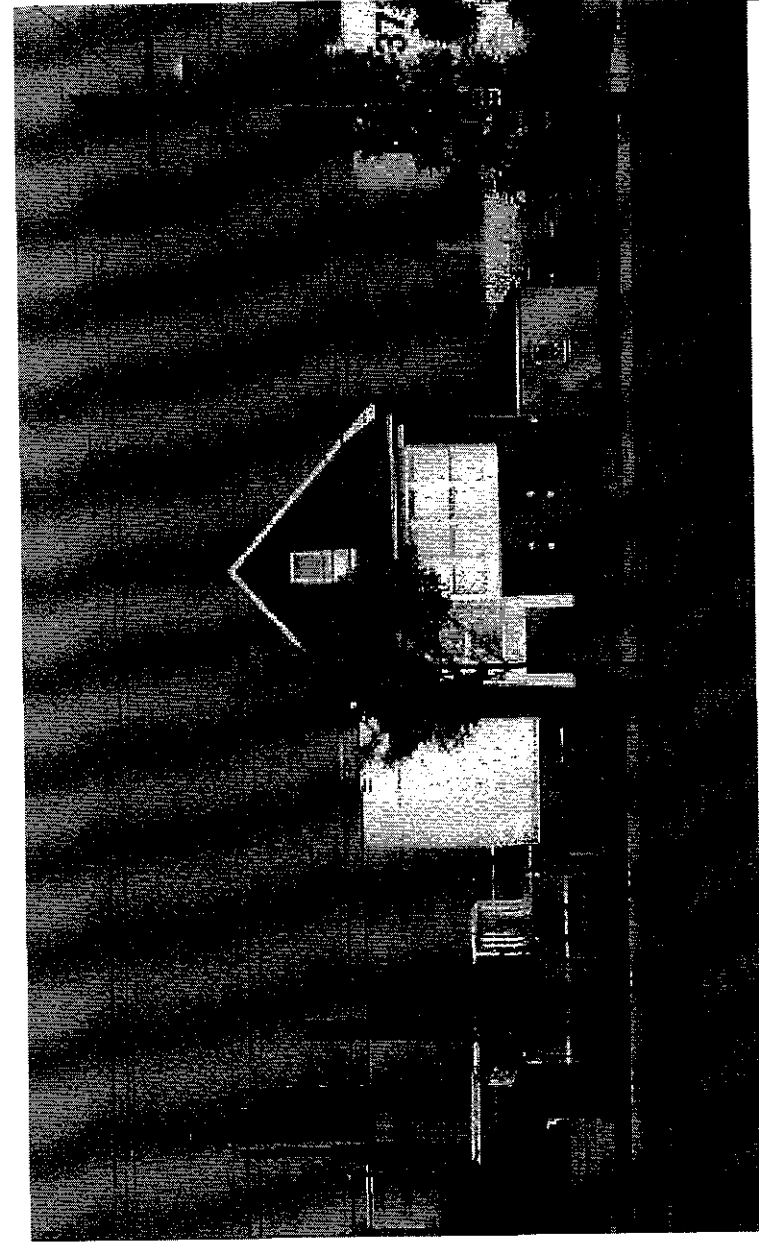


Plate 5: 129th and Schrage Avenue, Whiting, Indiana, 1999. Photograph courtesy of Gary Cialdella, www.calumetregionbook.com

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