

# The Annals of Iowa

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## In This Issue

MICHAEL S. HEVEL, a doctoral candidate in the higher education program at the University of Iowa, describes the role of literary societies at Cornell College, the State University of Iowa, and the Iowa State Normal School in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He argues that those societies provided opportunities for students to display publicly, in a variety of changing formats over the years, their higher learning. Through their programs, society members demonstrated their educational gains, improved their speaking abilities, and practiced the cultural arts. In addition, society members were instrumental in creating features of campus life that endure to the present.

BREANNE ROBERTSON analyzes Lowell Houser's entry in the competition to create a mural for the Ames Post Office in 1935. She argues that his choice of Mayan subject matter, drawing on a contemporary fascination with Mexican culture in both subject and style, distinguished his work among a strong pool of applicants in the competition, and the execution of his mural sketch, which adhered to traditional notions of history painting, demonstrated a technical and thematic expertise that fulfilled the lofty aims of the selection committee and ultimately won for him the competition.

## Front Cover

Members of the Orio Literary Society at Iowa State Normal School staged a dramatic production of *Louis' Last Moments with His Family* in 1897. For more on literary societies at Cornell College, the State University of Iowa, and the Iowa State Normal School, see Michael Hevel's article in this issue. Photo from University Archives, University of Northern Iowa.

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# Public Displays of Student Learning: The Role of Literary Societies in Early Iowa Higher Education

MICHAEL S. HEVEL

AT SIX O’CLOCK in the evening on June 13, 1911, student and alumni members of the Zetagathian Literary Society at the State University of Iowa (SUI) gathered in the banquet hall of the Burkley Imperial Hotel in Iowa City to celebrate the organization’s fiftieth anniversary. The 127 “Zets” in attendance, representing over 10 percent of all the men that the society had initiated since its inception, sat next to former classmates at tables arranged into the letters Z and I. Having paid one dollar for their dinner, many members wore a pennant-shaped red leather badge inscribed in gold lettering with “Zet Semi-Centennial, 1861–1911” that they had received the previous morning at registration. There, in the Drawing Room of the Hall of Liberal Arts (today’s Schaeffer Hall), alumni met the current student members of the literary society and perused the old society records on display. Later that afternoon the reunion attendees gathered for a photograph in front of the society’s first meeting place, the

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A State Historical Society of Iowa research grant funded this study. The archivists at Cornell College, the University of Northern Iowa, and the University of Iowa — especially Kathy Hodson, Gerald Peterson, and Jennifer Rouse — proved patient and helpful with my first research project. Professors Linda K. Kerber and Christine A. Ogren at the University of Iowa provided insightful comments on earlier drafts. Suggestions from *Annals of Iowa* editor Marvin Bergman and the anonymous reviewers greatly improved the final draft. Lane Schmidt digitally enhanced the images.

THE ANNALS OF IOWA 70 (Winter 2011). © The State Historical Society of Iowa, 2011.

Old Capitol, the state's first capitol building and SUI's first permanent campus building. As the banquet ended, the Zets left the hotel for the Iowa City Commercial Club, where a typical society meeting followed. The society elected three of its banquet guests, including SUI President George MacLean, as honorary members. Then the Zets began "motions of various sorts [that] brought forth vigorous discussions [and] fighting over again the old time parliamentary battles of yore." After the spirited discussion, about 30 Zets spoke on the history of the society and hopes for its future, with some "note of sadness or regret at the changed position of literary societies in the University."<sup>1</sup>

The Zets had many reasons to celebrate. Their society, the oldest student organization at SUI, had made significant contributions to the university. But the Zets did not make such contributions alone, either at SUI specifically or within Iowa higher education generally. Members of SUI's other literary societies joined the Zets in providing important learning experiences for students. Although attending very different institutions than SUI, literary society members at Cornell College in Mount Vernon and at the Iowa State Normal School in Cedar Falls provided similar opportunities for students and made similar contributions to their respective campuses. Through their programs, society members demonstrated their educational gains, improved their speaking abilities, and practiced the cultural arts. In addition to these programs, society members were instrumental in creating features of campus life that endure to the present. Indeed, literary societies played a formidable if largely forgotten role in early Iowa higher education, providing opportunities for students to display publicly, in a variety of changing formats over the years, their higher learning.

Although the contributions of student literary societies to higher education in Iowa have generally been forgotten, historians have argued the educational significance of literary societies across different institutional types and different time periods. Historians writing in the 1960s and 1970s primarily analyzed white men's experiences at eastern colleges before the Civil War. First established at Yale, Harvard, and Princeton in the mid-

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1. Theodore A. Waner, *History of the Zetagathian Society of the State University of Iowa* (Iowa City, 1911), 199–206.

eighteenth century, a tradition of two rival literary societies quickly spread to other campuses. Historians best remember literary societies for their debates in which college men engaged political issues and for their establishment of private libraries. The most prevalent theme running through early accounts of literary societies is their curricular significance during a period known for a curriculum that provided college men neither intellectual encouragement nor practical relevance.<sup>2</sup> More recently, historians have demonstrated that literary societies were an important feature of the higher education of women students at academies and seminaries beginning in the late eighteenth century, at land-grant colleges in the 1870s and 1880s, and at state normal schools until the early twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> Despite the attention given to literary societies, historians seldom consider these organizations across different institutional types.<sup>4</sup>

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2. The notable and recent exception to “forgotten” Iowa literary societies is Andrea G. Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West* (Lincoln, NE, 2008), chap. 3, who considers how women experienced coeducation at four land-grant colleges, including Iowa Agricultural College (today’s Iowa State University). Radke-Moss argues that literary societies provided a space where women students negotiated the tension between separation and inclusion inherent in early coeducational institutions. On the development of men’s literary societies and their curricular significance at eastern colleges, see Frederick Rudolph, *The American College and University: A History* (New York, 1962), 136–44; James McLachlan, “The Choice of Hercules: American Student Societies in the Early 19th Century,” in *The University in Society: Europe, Scotland, and the United States from the 16th to the 20th Century*, ed. Lawrence Stone (Princeton, NJ, 1974), 440–94; Thomas S. Harding, *College Literary Societies: Their Contribution to Higher Education in the United States, 1815–1876* (New York, 1971); Lowell Simpson, “The Development and Scope of Undergraduate Literary Society Libraries at Columbia, Dartmouth, Princeton, and Yale, 1783–1830,” *Journal of Library History* 12 (1977), 209–21; and Frederick Rudolph, *Curriculum: A History of the American Undergraduate Course of Study Since 1636* (San Francisco, 1977), 95–98. For the brief resurgence of interest in literary societies at these institutions after the Civil War, see Bruce Leslie, *Gentlemen and Scholars: Colleges and Community in the “Age of the University”* (University Park, PA, 1992), 196–98.

3. See Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006), 117–32; Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, chap. 3; and Christine A. Ogren, *The American State Normal School: “An Instrument of Great Good”* (New York, 2005), 108–119.

4. The closest exploration of literary societies across institutional type occurs in Kolan Thomas Morelock, *Taking the Town: Collegiate Community Culture in the Bluegrass, 1880–1917* (Lexington, KY, 2008), chaps. 3 and 4. Morelock explores the developments of literary societies during the evolution of Transylvania

ONE OF FOUR STATES admitted to the Union during the 1840s, Iowa achieved statehood in 1846, a year after Florida and Texas and two years before Wisconsin. Iowa's population grew dramatically: four years after statehood, fewer than 200,000 people lived in Iowa, ranking the state as one of the least populous, but almost 1.2 million people lived in Iowa by 1870. Although Iowa's population was exploding, it was home to few racial minorities. The Census Bureau counted fewer than 6,000 African Americans and just three Chinese American residents in 1870.<sup>5</sup>

To accommodate their state's growing population, Iowans began establishing institutions of higher education. Coeducation was a marked feature of many of the new institutions. In 1853 Methodist leaders formed the Iowa Conference Male and Female Seminary, which consisted of a primary and preparatory school, on a hill outside Mount Vernon. The board of trustees shortened the institution's name to Iowa Conference Seminary the following year, before adding a collegiate department and changing its name to Cornell College in 1855. Legislators created the State University of Iowa (today's University of Iowa) in Iowa City by statute in 1847, although the institution did not hold classes until 1856. That September more than one hundred students enrolled in its preparatory and normal departments, while only 15 men and 4 women studied at the college level. The next year the collegiate department was suspended and did not reopen until 1860. Iowa State Normal School (ISNS) — later known as Iowa State Teachers College and eventually the University of Northern Iowa — opened outside of Cedar Falls in 1876. Four faculty members taught 27 students on the institution's inaugural day, but by the end of the first term the student body had increased to 88.<sup>6</sup>

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University and the prominent role of literary societies of several colleges in Lexington's public life in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

5. *Ninth Census: The Statistics of the Population of the United States*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC, 1872), ix–xvii, 3, 27–29, 131–42.

6. William C. Heywood, *Cornell College: A Sesquicentennial History, 1853–2003*, (Cedar Rapids, 2004), 3–5; J. L. Pickard, "Historical Sketch of the State University of Iowa," *Annals of Iowa* 4 (1899), 7, 31, 33; William C. Lang, *A Century of Leadership and Service: Iowa State Normal School 1876–1909, Iowa State Teachers College 1909–1961, State College of Iowa 1961–1967, University of Northern Iowa 1967–* (Cedar Falls, 1990), 1.

Male students established literary societies during each of the three institutions' first year. Four days after the Iowa Conference Male and Female Seminary moved from its temporary location in Mount Vernon's Methodist church into the newly finished building in November 1853, 22 men founded the Amphicyton Literary Society. Men at Iowa State Normal School were nearly as eager to launch a literary society. After that institution's first term, ten men organized the Philomathean Society in January 1877. The first men at SUI, preoccupied with the looming Civil War when the collegiate department reopened, often neglected their studies in favor of practicing military drills. But that did not prevent 13 men from founding the Zetagathian Society in April 1861. The new "Zets" stopped their military drills long enough to gather in a dimly lit room in the northwest corner of the Old Capitol to debate whether "Christopher Columbus deserves more honor for discovering America than George Washington for saving it."<sup>7</sup> Rival men's societies, similar to those typical at eastern colleges, developed at all three institutions within a decade of their openings.<sup>8</sup>

But before a rival men's society developed on any of these three campuses, female students established their own literary societies. Three months after men formed the first literary society at ISNS, seven women created the appropriately named Alpha Society. Two additional women's societies developed before another men's society formed at ISNS. Early women students at SUI started two literary societies: 22 women founded the Erodelpian Literary Society in October 1862, and women students, primarily from the normal department, established the Hesperian Literary Society in the spring of 1863.<sup>9</sup> The Hesperians en-

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7. Heywood, *Cornell College*, 21; Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 189; Wanerus, *Zetagathian Society*, 5–10.

8. Heywood, *Cornell College*, 56; S. B. Montgomery and G. H. Kerr, "History of the Adelpian Society," *The Sibylline*, Adelpian Literary Society Papers, Cornell College Archives, Russell D. Cole Library, Cornell College, Mount Vernon (hereafter cited as CCA); Clifford Powell, L. O. Smith, and I. N. Brant, *History and Alumni Register of Irving Institute of the State University of Iowa* (Iowa City, 1908), 6–7; Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 189.

9. Most sources agree that women students founded the Hesperian Society in the spring of 1863, but the Hesperians themselves occasionally disputed this. In the second yearbook published at the university, the Hesperians wrote of

countered greater membership challenges because the normal department's curriculum was shorter than the collegiate department's requirements and because the students in that department were more likely to accept teaching positions during the academic year. Women at Cornell College waited the longest after their institution's opening to form a literary society, but they still formed the oldest women's society among the institutions. In December 1857 Cornell College women established the Philomathean Literary Society, nearly 20 years before men at the state normal school selected the same name.<sup>10</sup>

As time passed and the institutions matured, students established more literary societies, breaking the national trend of having only two rival societies on a campus.<sup>11</sup> In 1895 several ISNS Philomathean alumni who continued their education at SUI decided to organize another men's literary society, naming the new society after their old one. Writing back to the Philos in Cedar Falls, these students asserted that their new society was "a branch of the old 'Philo' society at I.S.N.S." Women formed long-lasting literary societies at each campus during the early twentieth century, including the Aonian Literary Society at Cornell, the Octave Thanet and Hamlin Garland literary societies at SUI, and the Chrestomathian Literary Society at ISNS. The Octave Thanet and Hamlin Garland societies at SUI named themselves after authors who had lived in and written about Iowa, and those authors visited the societies several times. Although most literary societies were active for decades, on each campus

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their founding: "Hesperia's early record, more priceless than Sibylline's books, were, like them, destroyed ere mortals knew their potency. Hence, it must ever remain a question which puzzles the profoundest thinkers, whether the Hesperian was the first or second young woman's literary society to be established in the State University of Iowa." "Hesperian Literary Society," *The Hawkeye: Junior Annual of the Class of '93* (Iowa City, 1892), 99.

10. Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 66, 189; Helen E. Lavender, "A History of the Erodolphian and Hesperian Societies of the State University of Iowa with a Brief Résumé of the Octave Thanet, Whitby, Athena, and Hamlin Garland Societies" (master's thesis, State University of Iowa, 1937), 1-4; Heywood, *Cornell College*, 56.

11. For an interesting account of students' unsuccessful efforts to form a third literary society at Princeton, see Steven J. Novak, *The Rights of Youth: American Colleges and Student Revolt, 1798-1815* (Cambridge, MA, 1977), 36-37.

TABLE  
STUDENT LITERARY SOCIETIES BY INSTITUTION

**Cornell College**

Men's Societies	Years Active	Women's Societies	Years Active
Amphicyton	1853–1928	Philomathean	1857–1928
Adelphian	1859–1928	Aesthesian	1872–1928
Star	1876–1928	Alethean	1888–1928
Miltonian	1888–1928	Aonian	1902–1928
Parmenian	1916–1928	Promethian	1916–1928
		Thalian	1916–1928

**Iowa State Normal School (University of Northern Iowa)**

Men's Societies	Years Active	Women's Societies	Years Active
Philomathean	1877–1929	Alpha	1877–1935
Aristotelian	1886–1929	Shakespearean Circle	1884–1937
Orio	1893–1922	Cliosophic	1886–1932
Men's Forum	1929–1932	Neotrophian	1891–1934
		Zetaletheans	1893–1935
		Margaret Fuller Ossoli	1897–1930
		Chrestomathian	1902–1934
		Eulalian	1908–1934
		Delphian	1908–1935
		Homerian	1913–1930
		Irving	1913–1933

**State University of Iowa (University of Iowa)**

Men's Societies	Years Active	Women's Societies	Years Active
Zetagathian	1861–1933	Erodelphian	1862–1933
Ciceronian	1863–1864	Hesperian	1863–1933
Irving Institute	1864–1929	Octave Thanet	1900–1933
Philomathean	1895–1928	Whitby	1913–1928
Rhoterian	1922–1928	Athena	1916–1933
		Hamlin Garland	1920–1934

Note: Founding dates are easier to identify than dating societies' demise. Many ending dates are estimated by the last year the organization appeared in a campus yearbook. All literary societies at Cornell College ceased to exist when the faculty permitted students to form social groups, but for many organizations it is unclear if they stopped functioning prior to 1928. At ISNS in 1929, the Philomatheans and Aristotelians combined their membership to establish the Men's Forum.

several literary societies formed in the twentieth century that had comparatively brief existences (see table).<sup>12</sup>

Open to most students, literary societies were more egalitarian than many later features of campus life, such as fraternities and sororities and intercollegiate athletics. Despite this relative openness, these organizations, like the institutions to which they belonged, were most accessible to white students. Surviving evidence suggests that African American students were neither formally excluded from SUI's literary societies nor did they ever join one. With assistance from local residents, African American women at SUI organized the Mary Church Terrell Club in 1913, and African American men created the DuBois Club. Although these organizations shared some common features with literary societies, much of these students' energies necessarily focused on addressing the racial inequities found on campus and in the community. Cornell College barred African Americans from enrolling before reversing that decision in 1870. The Amphyctons welcomed the college's first black student as a member; he remained active in the society for two terms until he withdrew from the college. African Americans never attended ISNS in large numbers while literary societies were active, but literary society members occasionally made "Negro life in the South" the focus of their society programs.<sup>13</sup>

Academic leaders at each institution publicly demonstrated the importance of literary societies in three significant ways. First, faculty members helped students create literary societies. At their first meeting at SUI, the founding Erodolphians asked Professor Oliver Spencer, then acting president of the infant university, to write the society's constitution. At ISNS, Miss

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12. "To our Brother 'Philos' of the I.S.N.S.," *The Normal Eyte* (Cedar Falls), 12/14/1895, 114; "Historical Mention of the Members of the Philomathean Forensics Society," Philomathean Forensics Society Papers, University Archives, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls; Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 189; *Treasure Book of the Rhoterian Literary Society, 1923-24*, Rhoterian Literary Society Papers, University Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City (hereafter cited as UIA); "Men's Forum," *College Eye* (Cedar Falls), 9/19/1929, 5.

13. Richard Melvin Breaux, "We must fight race prejudice even more vigorously in the North: Black Higher Education in America's Heartland, 1900-1940" (Ph.D. diss., University of Iowa, 2003), 163-74; Heywood, *Cornell College*, 63; "Society Notes," *Normal Eyte*, 2/13/1897; "Philo Public," *Normal Eyte*, 4/8/1899; "Orion" and "Neo," *Normal Eyte*, 10/3/1903; "Alpha," *Normal Eyte*, 11/14/1903.

Webster, an instructor, encouraged the first women students to establish a literary society. She “christened” it Alpha, not only because it was the institution’s first women’s society but also because it was the name of the society she had belonged to as a normal school student in New York. Later, faculty members continued to be catalysts in forming literary societies at ISNS. Marion McFarland, an instructor of applied English, helped organize the institution’s fourth women’s society in 1891. A year later, the faculty further empowered McFarland, instructing her to organize temporary societies as needed. Cornell College faculty members were especially instrumental in founding societies. Dr. Samuel Fellows, the principal of the seminary, and Professor David Wheeler were both founding members of the Amphicyton Literary Society. Individual faculty members helped establish two more men’s societies in the 1870s. The college’s preceptress, Miss Susan Hale, organized the first women’s society. Despite her influential role in founding the society, one early student recalled, “Most of the girls were decidedly opposed to having the lady teachers present as active members [of] the soc[iety]; the teachers, fully appreciating this feeling silently absented themselves from the soc[iety] meetings after meeting with us twice.” While students appreciated (and needed) faculty support for their organizations, they wanted to control the societies themselves.<sup>14</sup>

At different times and to varying degrees, faculty members also awarded academic credit to students for participating in literary societies. From 1863 to 1873, literary society members at SUI received partial credit for “rhetorical exercises.” Ten years after students first established literary societies at ISNS, the “overburdened” faculty members allowed society work to meet a similar curricular requirement. Under this arrangement, members performed an original exercise once a month during a literary society meeting. Faculty members awarded academic credit

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14. Lavender, “Erodelphian and Hesperian,” 1; Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 66, 189–90; Heywood, *Cornell College*, 56–57; James “Dietrich” Scollay, “The Miltonian Alumni Register, 1871–1981,” 4, Miltonian Literary Society Papers, CCA; “Star Society History,” *The Sibylline*, vol. 1, Star Literary Society Papers, CCA; Amanda Plaskett Smead, “After Reading the Sibylline (Vol. 1) — 1888,” 2–3, Philomathean Literary Society Papers, CCA.

after society officers reported which students fulfilled the requirements. Students at ISNS who chose not to join a literary society had to meet weekly with faculty members to fulfill the same requirement. Literary society men at Cornell College received three hours of academic credit for participating in debates arranged by the Debating League. To receive credit, men had to comply with faculty regulations that required students to enroll in one fewer class than normal, be in good standing with the faculty, take seven public speaking lessons, and receive the approval of his class officer.<sup>15</sup>

Finally, at young campuses with few buildings, institutional presidents and governing boards demonstrated the importance of early literary societies by providing rooms for them. At Cornell College, Amphicyton members did not wait until doors, windows, or even floors were installed in the campus's second building before finding a permanent home for their organization. On a "cold bleak night" in November 1857, the young men climbed a ladder to the third and highest story of the unfinished College Hall. From that high and risky perch, members teetered across wooden support beams until they reached a specific location to claim the future home of their society. The Philomathean women, waiting until stairs and floors were built, selected a room across the hall on the same floor. The two earliest literary societies at ISNS also secured society halls. The attic space above the chapel in South Hall (later named Gilchrist Hall) was divided in two, providing each society with a room. At SUI, South Hall became the home of the first four literary societies in 1869. Originally intended to serve as a dormitory, the three-story "plain brick structure" quickly became classroom space for the growing university, but SUI officials apportioned the third floor among the four literary societies and the Board of Regents provided limited funds to "finish and furnish" the rooms.<sup>16</sup>

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15. Lavender, "Erodelphian and Hesperian Societies," 16; Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 189–91; "Constitution of the Debating League of Cornell College," Debating League Papers, CCA.

16. Heywood, *Cornell College*, 13; Rev. John Onesimus Foster, "Early Recollections of Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa" (1916), 11, CCA; Montgomery and Kerr, "History of the Adelphian Society"; "Old Literary Societies Stole Social Stage," *College Eye*, 10/20/1939, 7; Wanerus, *Zetagathian Society*, 248; Pickard, "Historical Sketch," 25–26; W. M. J. Haddock to Iowa State Board of

Societies that formed later often struggled to find space on campus. In its first year at SUI, the Philomathean Literary Society met in an attic room in the Dental Building. The men did not find that arrangement agreeable, arguing that the room "was entirely unsatisfactory and on account of its location there was much difficulty in getting visitors to attend the meetings and programs." The society soon moved to the history room in South Hall for its meetings. Following a fire that destroyed South Hall in 1901, the society temporarily met in the Philosophy Building. Finally, in the fall of 1902 the university offered the society the southwest room of Close Hall. There is no record of literary societies established after 1900 at SUI ever securing permanent space. The societies that formed after the Philomathean and Alpha at ISNS did not receive permanent space until 1902, when the completion of the Auditorium provided five additional rooms for the societies. The Miltonians at Cornell purchased a half-interest from the Philomatheans to share their hall on the third floor of College Hall, but their historian cautioned, "Though the Milts shared this hall with the Philomathean women, it appears they shared little else, including a fondness for one another."<sup>17</sup> New literary society members' efforts to secure a society hall and older societies' members' displeasure with sharing their halls with upstarts suggest that these students recognized the prestige permanent homes in campus buildings brought to their organizations.

Established during a period to which some historians have dated the demise of these organizations,<sup>18</sup> literary societies enjoyed a long life at Cornell College, Iowa State Normal School, and the State University of Iowa. At these institutions, literary societies remained active on campus until the 1920s and 1930s,

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Regents, "Mem. of Aid Given the Societies for Board," 5/24/1889, University Manuscript File Collection, UIA.

17. Lang, *A Century of Service*, 191; "Historical Mention of the Members of the Philomathean Forensics Society," 3, 5, Philomathean Forensics Society Papers, UIA; Lavender, "Erodelphian and Hesperian Societies," 121-26; Scollay, "Miltonian Alumni Register," 5; "Bill of Sale," 3/10/ 1902, Amphicyton Literary Society Papers, CCA.

18. See Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Chicago, 1987), 28; Rudolph, *The American College*, 145; and Harding, *College Literary Societies*, 297.



*The Zetagathian room inside Close Hall at SUI in 1910, several years after a fire destroyed the original room in South Hall. The spindle-back chairs face the front of the room, where the audience would find a piano, the president's chair, and an elevated platform for speakers. From Samuel Calvin Collection of Photographs, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, available online at Iowa Digital Library ([www.digital.lib.uiowa.edu](http://www.digital.lib.uiowa.edu)).*

when an expanded curriculum and extracurriculum supplanted the purposes of the institutions' first student organizations. In the meantime, the societies' programs and contributions to campus life gave members opportunities to publicly display their higher learning.

AS THEIR MAIN ACTIVITY at all three institutions, literary societies planned programs that enabled members to demonstrate and refine their public speaking skills. Societies presented such programs regularly, sometimes weekly. Typically held on Friday or Saturday, men's and women's programs usually occurred on different days, although the societies occasionally combined efforts to present a joint program. Men's and women's societies often paired off to become "brother" and "sister" societies. Members of the brother society attended their sister society's

programs in large numbers, and the women returned the favor for men's programs. Literary societies often opened their programs to the public and advertised their upcoming programs. In an era before radio or movies, society programs provided entertainment for students and the broader community.<sup>19</sup>

Debates always served as the central feature of men's literary societies; women's programs often included debates but emphasized a greater variety of forensic activities. The first constitution of the Philomathean men at ISNS mentioned several activities to be included in their "regular exercises" but listed "debates" first. The first interaction between the Zets and the younger Irving Institute was an intersociety debate in June 1865. The Zets argued in favor of capital punishment, winning the debate described as "one of the most important events in their history." At the first meeting of Cornell College's Philomathean Society, the institution's two female instructors read papers they had written. At SUI, Erodolphians initially alternated the focus of their programs between debates and members reading compositions. Over the course of the 1870–71 academic year, Erodolphian programs included 87 essays, 29 declamations, 24 orations, and 12 debates. The early Alpha programs at ISNS closely mirrored the men's programs, but the women regularly included a summary of current events and a biography of an influential figure.<sup>20</sup>

Literary societies advertised their programs with posters placed in prominent locations on campus. Surviving posters of SUI's Zetagathian men and Hesperian women illustrate the differences between men's and women's literary societies. In their debates, the Zetagathians typically argued over international, national, and state politics. In the spring of 1898 the Zets debated government-owned railroads, immigration, the Electoral College,

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19. *Students' Offering* (Cedar Falls), 2/1/1879; Wanerus, *Zetagathian Society*, 52.

20. "Sixth Anniversary of the Amphicyton Society of Cornell College, Mt. Vernon" (1859), Amphicyton Society Papers, CCA; Montgomery and Kerr, "History of the Adelpian Society"; Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 65, 66; Wanerus, *Zetagathian Society*, 48, 38–39; Smead, "After Reading the Sibylline," 2–3; Lavender, "Erodolphian and Hesperian Societies," 24, 66. The student historians of the Adelpian Literary Society at Cornell College wrote in 1888, "Formerly the programs were chiefly in line of debate, now the exercises are varied and more formal." "Adelpian Society History," *The Sibylline*, vol. 1, Adelpian Literary Society Papers, CCA.



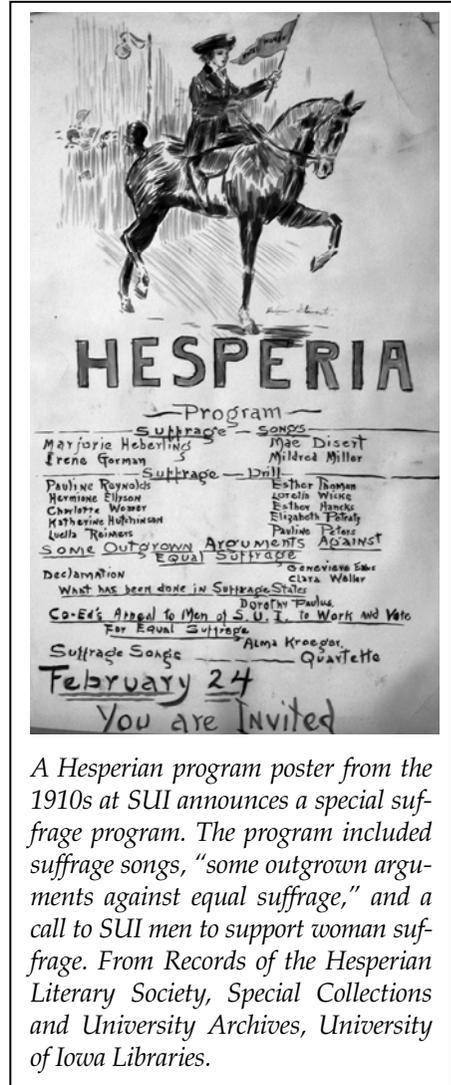
*Members of the Miltonian Literary Society at Cornell College engage in a debate in their society hall. At all three institutions, both men's and women's literary society members participated in debates that honed public speaking skills and required awareness of current affairs. Early literary society debates drew large crowds from the community. Later, literary societies organized intercollegiate debates. From Miltonian Records, Literary Society Collection, Cornell College Archives.*

pension policy, and the annexation of Hawaii. When Hesperian programs included debates, the women might explore a national political issue, but regularly focused on domestic, educational, or campus issues. The women considered allowing upper classmen to attend the Freshmen Party, the benefits of intercollegiate football, and providing free textbooks, lunches, and baths in public schools. The Hesperian women engaged literary topics more regularly than the Zetagathians. Hesperians wrote poems and short stories that they presented at their programs. In addition to such original pieces, Hep programs highlighted the works of accomplished authors. Each year, Hep women also planned programs that featured seasonal or holiday themes.<sup>21</sup>

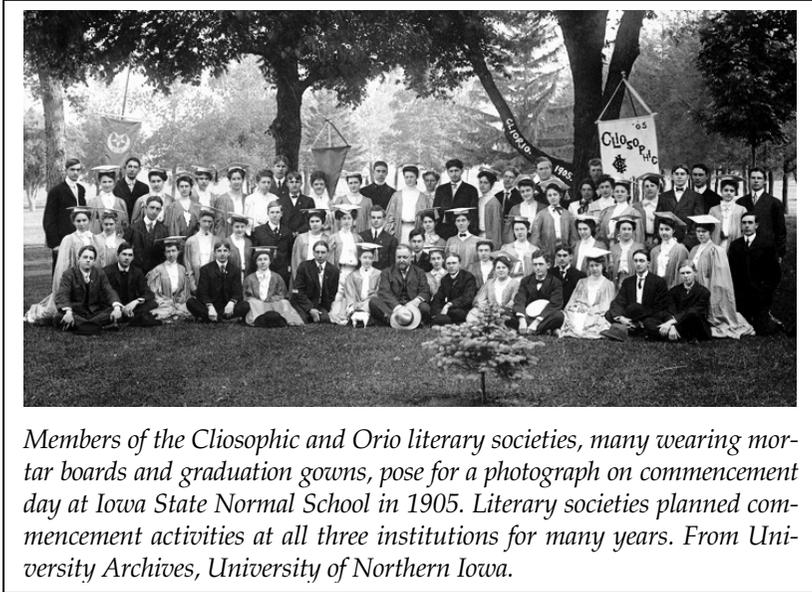
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21. Hesperian Program Poster Collection, Hesperian Literary Society Papers, UIA; Zetagathian Program Poster Collection, Zetagathian Literary Society Papers, UIA.

For much of their existence, literary societies commemorated the end of the school year and members' graduation with large public programs attended by commencement visitors. At the end of the first year at Iowa Conference Male and Female Seminary, students participated in three days of well-publicized "exhibition exercises," which included public examinations, orations, and musical performances. As these exhibition exercises evolved into Cornell College's commencement activities, literary societies became responsible for planning "class exercises" during the days before graduation. Fifteen years after the first exhibition exercises, the Amphicytons presented class exercises consisting of two essays, two orations, a speech by a graduating member, six musical performances, and a debate on a looming question for many graduates: "Do the learned professions offer so great inducement as business pursuits?" SUI's first four literary societies marked the end of each academic year with a joint program called "commencement exercises" beginning in 1869. Representatives from each society demonstrated their speaking skills in front of large crowds, and the societies presented their graduating members with diplomas. ISNS celebrated its twenty-fifth



A Hesperian program poster from the 1910s at SUI announces a special suffrage program. The program included suffrage songs, "some outgrown arguments against equal suffrage," and a call to SUI men to support woman suffrage. From Records of the Hesperian Literary Society, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Iowa Libraries.



*Members of the Cliosophic and Orio literary societies, many wearing mortar boards and graduation gowns, pose for a photograph on commencement day at Iowa State Normal School in 1905. Literary societies planned commencement activities at all three institutions for many years. From University Archives, University of Northern Iowa.*

anniversary with a six-day event, estimated to attract 1,500 alumni, culminating with the Class of 1901's graduation. The women's societies began the celebration with a joint program in the afternoon of Friday, June 7. The men's literary societies presented their program the next evening. Alumni provided "literary" entertainment — skills they had developed as society members — the day before commencement.<sup>22</sup>

Literary societies at these Iowa institutions generally eschewed a private activity that was common among the societies at eastern men's colleges: the establishment of society libraries. The Adelphians at Cornell College were the notable exception. By 1862 they had amassed a library of more than 300 books; the collection quadrupled to nearly 1,200 volumes by 1888. The literary society's library included works of American and English literature and, compared with the slow-growing college library, remained the students' main source of modern reading for many years. Eventually the society's books were donated to the college

22. Heywood, *Cornell College*, 26–27; "Class Exercises" (1869), Amphicyton Literary Society Papers, CCA; Lavender, "Erodelphian and Hesperian Societies," 43–46; Wanerus, *Zetagathian Society*, 59–66; "Program for the Quarter Centennial Anniversary of the State Normal School," *Normal Eye*, 5/4/1901.

library, and other societies and their alumni provided additional support, establishing the Star Literary Society Alcove of Psychology and the Adelpian Literary Society Alcove of American History. Yet SUI's Zetagathians' private library was more representative of Iowa societies' efforts to establish libraries, which were unsuccessful if attempted at all. Due to the lack of space for a library in the society hall, the members' lack of time to monitor a library, and the growth of the university library, the Zets auctioned their private library in 1870.<sup>23</sup> There is no evidence that women's societies created private libraries at any of the three institutions.

Students designed their society programs in large part to display their education to other students and to the larger community. Debates enabled them to demonstrate mastery of an issue and required students to predict which arguments might prove most persuasive with the judges and audience. Through recitations, orations, speeches, essays, and reading original works of poetry and fiction, literary society members presented information they had learned or created. At the end of their higher education, the most accomplished literary society members, both men and women, performed in front of large audiences consisting of their peers, their faculty, their parents, and other commencement visitors. But literary society members did not limit themselves to society programs; these students made many other contributions to campus life. The common denominator among these features of campus life was their place in the public sphere.

AT CORNELL COLLEGE, SUI, and ISNS, student literary societies made significant contributions to their campuses, many of which became institutionalized features of the institution. Most literary society programs included musical performances, providing both student and community musicians with attentive audiences. The literary societies' members' emphasis on music was significant because only at ISNS was music initially included

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23. Montgomery and Kerr, "Adelpian Society"; Heywood, *Cornell College*, 58; "Star Literary Society Alcove of Psychology," Star Literary Society Papers, CCA; Parke E. Simmons to Prof. James E. Harlan, 4/7/1905, Adelpian Literary Society Papers, CCA; Wanerus, *Zetagathian Society*, 69-73.

in the curriculum. After the normal department closed at SUI, the university stopped offering music courses to students. Yet the university's literary societies supported music. Erodelphian women added music to their programs beginning in 1863, and musical performances regularly constituted a large portion of society programs. In an effort to attract larger audiences than their rivals, the men's societies spent heavily — sometimes as much as \$20 per act — on musical performances, before agreeing to limit musical expenses to less than \$2 per week. As their budgets grew, the societies purchased pianos for their halls. SUI societies also provided performance opportunities for early campus musical groups such as the Law Quartette, the Guitar Club, and the SUI Orchestra. At Cornell College, only "short-term and part-time" instructors taught music until the establishment of the music conservatory in 1879. Literary societies, however, demonstrated an interest in music for their entire existence. The third anniversary program of the Philomathean Society at Cornell College in 1860 included four musical performances. As late as 1907, the women of the Aesthesian Literary Society traded their typical society program for a musical concert. At ISNS, whose first music faculty member arrived in 1879, students received a more formal musical education in comparison to Cornell or SUI, but there, too, literary society programs featured musical performances.<sup>24</sup>

Literary societies also supported students' theatrical interests long before the institutions' curricula offered opportunities in the dramatic arts. ISNS students found their only dramatic opportunities within literary society productions until the institution hired its first dramatic instructor in 1904. The Philomatheans and Alphas closed the winter term of 1879 with a performance of the two-act play *Bread on the Water*, and the Shakespearean Circle women presented an abridged version of *The Merchant of Venice* in 1898. Students were unable to major in theater until 1938 at Cornell College, but literary societies often sponsored dramatic productions. The Alethean women presented the Ger-

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24. James Senior Stinehart, "History of the State University of Iowa: Musical Activity to 1915" (master's thesis, State University of Iowa, 1941), 14; Lavender, "Erodelphian and Hesperian Societies," 30–31; Wanerus, *Zetagathian Society*, 52–53; Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 65–67, 69.



*Members of the Orio Literary Society at Iowa State Normal School staged a dramatic production of Louis' Last Moments with His Family in 1897. Wearing replicas of eighteenth-century European fashion, an Orio member plays King Louis XVI of France holding the hand of his son as a female student portrays the fainting Queen Marie Antoinette before the king's execution. Literary societies provided students with opportunities to participate in dramatic productions long before theater arts became part of the curriculum. From University Archives, University of Northern Iowa.*

man play, *Einer Muss Heiraten (One Must Marry)* in 1902; five years later the Aesthesian members performed Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; and the Philomathean women teamed with the Adelphean men to stage a five-act comedy in 1914. The literary societies produced their plays independently until 1917, when Professor Clyde Tull joined the Cornell faculty and began improving their dramatic efforts. The first dramatic performance at SUI occurred when the Zetagathians and their "lady friends" presented scenes from *The Merchant of Venice* and two other plays in 1870. Hesperian members began performing farces in 1888; their initial comedic effort drew an audience that

approached 600. That same year marked the first collaborative theatrical venture between two societies when the Erodelphian women and Irving Institute men presented the comedy *She Stoops to Conquer*. A decade later, the Zetagathian and Hesperian Societies performed *In Football Clothes*, a farce written by a Zet who was also captain of the football team. The play centered on a Thanksgiving Day football game between the universities of Iowa and Minnesota. In 1901 SUI literary society members helped establish the Dramatic Club, and when the University Theatre was organized 20 years later, the original membership consisted of one drama group and five literary societies. During the University Theatre's first season, men's and women's literary societies paired off to present three of the five performances.<sup>25</sup>

Literary society members were also instrumental in the development of campus newspapers. Dissatisfied with SUI's first campus paper, *The University Reporter*, the Zetagathians and Hesperians established a new monthly circular, *The Vidette*, which was published from October 1879 until September 1881, when faculty requests and fiscal shortfalls consolidated the two papers into the *Vidette-Reporter*. A board of editors, all literary society members, controlled the new paper. Although a school of journalism would form in 1924, remarkably little faculty support guided literary society members when they carried the burden of producing the student newspaper. At Cornell College, literary societies published the campus newspaper for more than 30 years. In 1869 students created the *Collegian*, which they renamed the *Cornellian* in 1890. The women of the Alpha Society produced the first campus circular at ISNS. It soon evolved into *The Students' Offering*, which was printed from 1878 until 1884. In the beginning, the paper's editorial board was selected from the entire student body, but in the last five years the Philomathean and Alpha societies shared responsibility for the publication. In

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25. *Students' Offering*, 5/1/1879; Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 202, 456; "Alethean Literary Society German Play" (1902), Alethean Literary Society Papers, CCA; "A Midsummer Night's Dream Presented by the Aesthesian Literary Society" (1907), Aesthesian Literary Society Papers, CCA; Lavender, "Erodelphian and Hesperian Societies," 39-43; Waner, *Zetagathian Society*, 66-68; Elinor F. Jones, "The University Theatre," *History of the State University of Iowa*, vol. 8, *Miscellaneous Papers* (Iowa City, 1945), UIA; *The 1923 Hawkeye Yearbook* (Iowa City, 1922), 307.

1892, the literary societies provided most of the leadership for the institution's new student paper, *The Normal Eye*.<sup>26</sup>

Literary societies invited prominent politicians, social reformers, and authors to speak on campus to the larger student body. At SUI, the Zetagathian Society and the Irving Institute created the SUI Lecture Bureau in 1890 to bring speakers to campus. In its first season the lecture bureau generated a profit of \$1.01 per society. The following year the societies split profits of over \$250. The Lecture Bureau continued through 1902, when a combination of an "unusual number of other entertainments" and "the unhappy coincidence of stormy weather" during the scheduled lecture nights forced the Zets and the Irvings to cover a \$131 deficit, effectively ending the collaborative effort. Although the men's literary societies at SUI formalized an organization to arrange campus lectures, the Erodolphian women secured the most prominent visitor when Jane Addams accepted their invitation to deliver a lecture series in January 1900. At the time of her visit, the 40-year-old Addams had recently completed her first decade leading Chicago's Hull House, where she and her colleagues offered social and educational programs to members of the working class and urban poor. Upon learning of Addams's upcoming visit, Professor George Patrick gave her lectures his "hearty endorsement": "Miss Addams is a charming lecturer and both the charm and the power of her lectures are due to the fact that she knows just what she is talking about, and her knowledge comes not from books nor from theories, but from real experience in social reform work." Addams titled her SUI lecture series "Democracy and Social Ethics" — also the title of a book she published two years later. Her six lectures occurred in the afternoons at the crowded Unity Church in Iowa City. In her first lecture on current social problems, Addams told students and community members that "to fulfill the demands of our social morality and devote ourselves to the good of the whole, we must have some idea of the experiences of the whole."

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26. Wanerus, *Zetagathian Society*, 74–78; Millicent B. Righter, "The History of Journalism at the State University of Iowa, 1868–1924" (master's thesis, University of Iowa, 1950); Carol C. Ouckrop, "A History of the University of Iowa School of Journalism" (master's thesis, University of Iowa, 1965), 12–16; Heywood, *Cornell College*, 140; Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 67–68, 191–92.

Over the course of the remaining lectures, she asserted that the conditions of the poor were not “universally” their fault, used the example of a truant boy to demonstrate problems in the educational system, and questioned wealthy capitalists who assumed to know the “needs and appreciations” of those intended to benefit from their “great public gifts.” At the end of Addams’s lectures, the student newspaper editors thanked the Erodelphians for planning such an important visit.<sup>27</sup>

Literary society members instigated early intercollegiate competition by entering into forensic contests with their peers at other institutions and establishing organizations to coordinate such opportunities. Intercollegiate competition among the three institutions began in February 1874, when Frank Brush, representing SUI’s Zetagathians, traveled to Knox College in Illinois. Upon arrival, he faced students from seven other institutions in an oratorical contest for a \$100 first-place prize. Both men and women society members at SUI participated in intercollegiate debates. The first intercollegiate debate involving SUI students occurred in 1893, when a team composed of two Zets and one Irving member ventured north to Minneapolis. There, SUI men defeated a team from the University of Minnesota over the issue of government ownership of the telegraph system. Three years later, Erodelphian and Hesperian women combined efforts to challenge University of Wisconsin women to a debate. The University of Wisconsin’s president responded that public debate was inappropriate for women, writing, “While there are occasions when women are called upon to discuss questions of a more or less public interest, they are so few in number and occur so infrequently that it was not at Madison thought best to encourage a movement of this kind.” Not long deterred by this rebuke, the Hesperians accepted an invitation to debate from Cornell College’s Philomatheans and traveled to Mount Vernon in 1899; the next year the Hesperians invited the Philomatheans to Iowa City for a debate. ISNS men first experienced intercolle-

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27. Waner, *Zetagathian Society*, 97–104; *The Vidette-Reporter* (Iowa City), 12/9/1899, 12/16/1899, 1/13/1900, 1/25/1900, 1/27/1900; Jane Addams, *Democracy and Social Ethics* (New York, 1902). For an early controversy involving a speaker the Adelphians invited to campus in the 1860s, see Heywood, *Cornell College*, 57.

giate debate in 1894 against Iowa Agricultural College (now Iowa State University). Twenty-four students traveled from Ames to Cedar Falls to witness the ISNS students win the debate. Cornell College's president and faculty began encouraging male students to engage in intercollegiate debates in 1896.<sup>28</sup>

In an effort to have more regular and equitable intercollegiate opportunities, literary society members collaborated with the faculty to establish formal organizations responsible for planning those contests. At ISNS, male and female literary society members formed the Oratorical Association in 1893. The Iowa State Oratorical Association, comprising colleges and universities across the state, prohibited normal school students from competition because their institution did not offer a four-year collegiate course of study. Two years later, the Inter-State League of Normal Schools formed to promote oratorical contests for normal school students, and ISNS students eagerly participated. In January 1898, the men's literary societies established the Debate League to arrange intercollegiate debates. Female students, mostly literary society members, created the Women's Debate League for a similar purpose in 1913. Five years earlier at SUI, faculty and male society members formed the Forensic League to plan and prepare for intercollegiate debate and oratorical contests. All men's literary societies belonged to the league, and the Forensic Council, made up of five faculty members and four men's society members, controlled the league. Women's literary society members led the effort to create a similar organization, which resulted in the Women's Forensic Council in 1913. Women elected three faculty representatives to serve alongside a woman from each society. Around the turn of the twentieth century, the men of the Adelpian, Amphicyton, Miltonian, and Star societies formed the Debating League of Cornell College. Cornell College women also engaged in intercollegiate debates, but there is no evidence that they created a formal organization to arrange such opportunities.<sup>29</sup>

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28. Wanerus, *Zetagathian Society*, 121–24; Lavender, "Erodelphian and Hesperian Societies," 53; Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 194–96, 451–53; *Normal Eyte*, 2/22/1896.

29. Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 194–96, 451–53; *Normal Eyte*, 1/29/1898; "Women's Debating League is Organized," *College Eye*, 9/24/1913; Wanerus,



*Members of men's and women's literary societies at Cornell College enjoy a picnic at Palisades Park along the Cedar River. Literary society events offered students socially acceptable opportunities to interact with the opposite sex at each institution. Such opportunities were especially important when campus rules prohibited unsupervised interactions between the sexes. From Literary Society Collection, Cornell College Archives.*

Literary societies at these three Iowa institutions provided students with many opportunities, but the one perhaps most treasured by students was a socially acceptable means to interact with members of the opposite sex. Each institution admitted both men and women from its opening, but coeducation, particularly during the institutions' earliest years, was a source of great angst for faculty members charged with monitoring student behavior. That anxiety resulted in strict rules limiting the interaction between male and female students. Nowhere were the rules stricter than at Methodist-supported Cornell College, which prohibited students of the opposite sex from walking together; a faculty member even reprimanded a male student for helping a female student who had tripped. However, society programs at Cornell College ended with a "sociable" in which society members informally visited with those in attendance. At ISNS, the Philomathean men and Alpha women began joint programs in the fall of 1877. Faculty members soon created a

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*Zetagathian Society*, 144–47, 177–79; Lavender, "Erodelphian and Hesperian Societies," 61; "Constitution of the Debating League of Cornell College," Debating League Papers, CCA.

rule that required societies to gain their permission in advance for joint programs. Students often secured faculty support and used the guise of society work to interact with the opposite sex. Campus regulations permitted male and female students to “mingle in groups but not in pairs.” An early alumna recalled that when faculty members discovered a couple alone but in “earnest conversation,” the students “would be absolved from discipline when they asserted that their detention was due to the complications arising in making out the next program for a joint meeting of the literary societies, and perhaps be commended for being engaged in so laudable pursuit, although no visible signs of their work might be apparent.” At the turn of the twentieth century at SUI, male students often asked female students to attend society programs as their dates. For parties, Zets often drew names of Hep members to ensure that every woman had an escort. Through their involvement in a literary society, women occasionally were responsible for asking men to attend functions. Ione Mulnix, a Hesperian from 1904 to 1909, drew the names of two Zet “freshies” to bring to a leap year party her junior year. A month later, the women were to ask men to attend an intersociety debate.<sup>30</sup>

The students who joined and supported literary societies made many contributions to their campuses outside of their formal programs. Those contributions, like their programs, offered students opportunities to publicly demonstrate the learning and culture associated with their higher education. Students who performed musically or theatrically displayed their talents to an audience comprising fellow students as well as the larger community. Students who controlled and wrote for the campus newspaper offered their writings and opinions for public consumption and critique. Intercollegiate debates and other forensic competitions attracted the public’s attention to a degree typically associated with athletics. And faculty members and administrators were amenable to men and women students

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30. Heywood, *Cornell College*, 139–40; Lang, *A Century of Leadership*, 66; Ione Mulnix to Parents, 1/29/1908, 3/9/1908, Ione Mulnix Papers, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City. Andrea Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 110–11, finds literary societies performing a similar role at land-grant colleges.

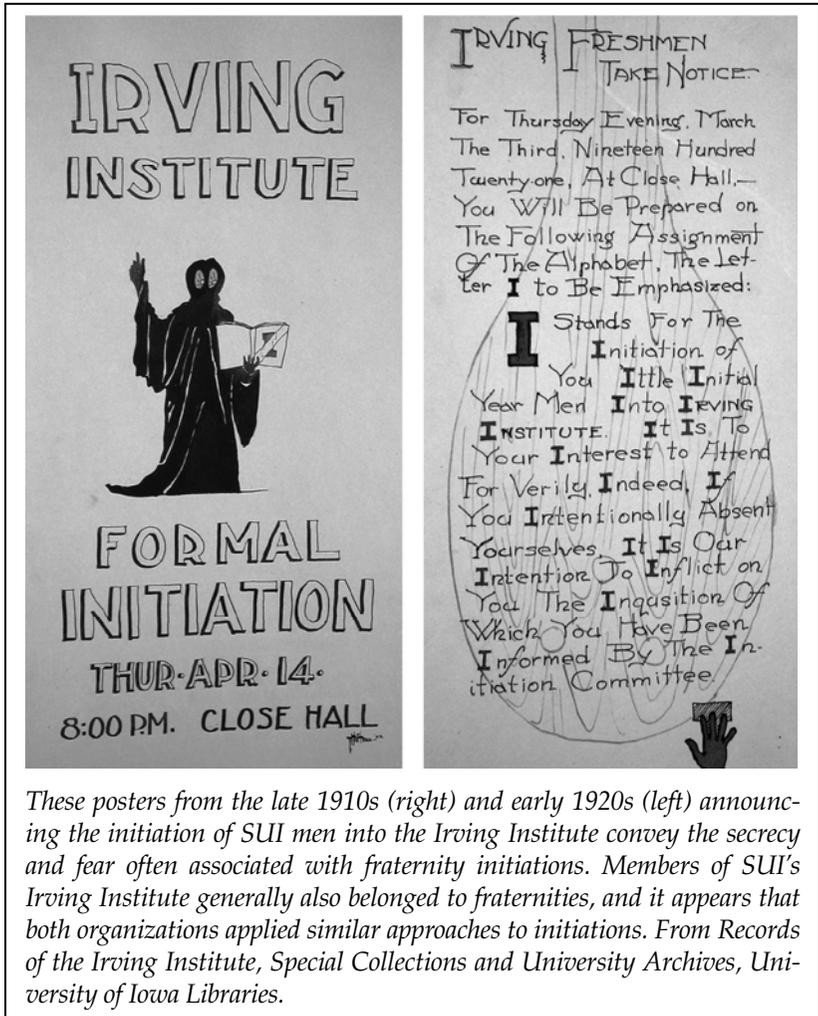
interacting through literary society events because they considered these activities to occur in public space. The public nature of literary societies placed them in stark contrast to the inwardly directed fraternities and sororities that slowly developed at each institution.

HISTORIANS often place much of the blame for the demise of student literary societies on college fraternities, which developed at eastern colleges several decades after literary societies, arguing that students developed a stronger loyalty to these smaller, selective, and secret organizations than to the more egalitarian and inclusive literary societies.<sup>31</sup> However, an examination of the relationship between these organizations at Cornell College, ISNS, and SUI suggests that the decline of literary societies was more complicated. Moreover, inserting women's organizations into the student literary society narrative requires a consideration of the relationship between women's literary societies and sororities. Fraternities and sororities developed differently on each campus, and the relationship between these organizations and literary societies varied among and within the campuses.

Of all the literary societies at these institutions, the contested role of fraternity members in the Zetagathian Literary Society at SUI most closely resembles the traditional historical narrative. Some Zetagathians became charter members of the university's early fraternities, but a rift eventually developed within the society between fraternity men and nonfraternity members, caused primarily by fraternity men electing only themselves to the Zets' "various positions of honor." In April 1887 tensions escalated as the Zets considered an amendment to the society's constitution that would prohibit fraternity men from society membership. In "one of the hardest parliamentary battles ever fought in Old South Hall," 51 members debated the role of fraternity men within the literary society. By a vote of 37 to 14, the Zets adopted the amendment with three more votes than the two-thirds majority required. Even after the ban, the admittance of fraternity members into the society continued to be an issue for the Zets.

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31. Rudolph, *The American College*, 146; Horowitz, *Campus Life*, 29.



These posters from the late 1910s (right) and early 1920s (left) announcing the initiation of SUI men into the Irving Institute convey the secrecy and fear often associated with fraternity initiations. Members of SUI's Irving Institute generally also belonged to fraternities, and it appears that both organizations applied similar approaches to initiations. From Records of the Irving Institute, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Iowa Libraries.

Some Zets regularly presented proposals to remove the constitutional ban on fraternity membership. In 1902 the society lost the best student orator at SUI when he joined a fraternity. By 1905 the Zets had changed their mind regarding the compatibility of fraternity and literary society membership. This “longest and hardest fought controversy” of the Zetagathian Society had come to an end, leading the society’s historian to conclude that rivalry between the two types of organization no longer existed

and that "the two now flourish side by side, neither encroaching upon the rights of the other."<sup>32</sup>

Although the Zets struggled with the role of fraternity men in their organization for two decades, the more prevalent relationship between literary societies and fraternities and sororities at SUI was one of peaceful coexistence. Literary societies existed as the sole extracurricular outlet for only four years at SUI. Men had formed two fraternities by 1867, and five fraternities and two sororities were actively recruiting members by 1882. Fraternities and sororities at SUI encouraged their members to belong to literary societies. In the 1891 *Hawkeye* yearbook, Pi Beta Phi sorority women noted that their requirements for membership included literary society involvement. That same year almost a quarter of Irving Institute men also belonged to a fraternity. Sororities likely extended the life of women's literary societies. Awarding "points" to those who joined literary societies, sorority women made up the majority of society members during the societies' waning years.<sup>33</sup>

In comparison to SUI, literary societies and secret societies were more directly connected at Cornell College. There, the board of trustees, presidents, and faculty members worried over the private nature of fraternities and sororities and never permitted students to establish such organizations. The prohibition, however, did not stop students from creating and joining such organizations. Cornell's first secret society developed shortly after the institution opened. The "Literary Klub" shared characteristics of both a literary society and a fraternity. Limited to 12 secret male members, students designed their meetings to improve their writing and debating skills. The same early alumnus who recalled the Amphicytons scaling Main Hall to claim their society room remembered the Klub as an "aristocratic society, composed of only a few students, who did not care to make

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32. Waner, *Zetagathian Society*, 105–20; R. C. Craven, V. F. Price, W. S. Anderson, W. H. Dart, N. DuPuis, A. N. Naven, and Rich. G. Hargrave to Zetagathian Society, 4/23/1887, *Zetagathian Literary Society Papers*, UIA.

33. Waner, *Zetagathian Society*, 107–8; Bette Towner, "Sororities at Iowa," in *The History of the State University of Iowa*, vol. 1, *Miscellaneous Papers* (Iowa City, 1944), UIA; "Irving Institute" and "Pi Beta Phi" in *The Hawkeye Junior Annual of the Class of '92* (Iowa City, 1891); Lavender, "Erodelphian and Hesperian Societies," 117.

known their number, but felt so self-centered that no one could get into their number save just such as they were sure they wanted." The Klub did not last long, and it appears that Cornell students did not form another secret society until the turn of the century. Although faculty-approved literary society constitutions forbade society members from joining fraternities or sororities, some students used their literary societies to conceal secret societies. Edith Dayton, a member of the Aesthesian Literary Society who graduated in 1907, received an invitation to become initiated into a sorority apparently sponsored by her literary society. "This is very secret owing to the disfavor which sororities have at Cornell," explained the sorority's corresponding secretary. In May 1923 several members of the Adelpian Literary Society "were taken into" the Delta New Hand Fraternity, likely joining older Adelpian members who had previously been initiated.<sup>34</sup>

When Herbert Burgstahler assumed the presidency of Cornell in 1927, he confronted the "long-standing problem" of the existence of prohibited fraternities and sororities on campus. There were at least ten secret societies, and students became bolder in their public displays of their unapproved fraternal membership. After the recommendations regarding fraternities and sororities on campus from a committee of students and faculty failed to create consensus among the larger faculty, one faculty member organized a class to explore the issue. A survey conducted by the class revealed that over half of Cornell students belonged to fraternities or sororities. The class's efforts resulted in a compromise, rejecting the existence of "fraternities" and "sororities" but permitting the creation of "social groups" that shared characteristics with secret societies. The faculty required that these organizations be "democratic" in nature and not affiliate with national fraternities and sororities. The social groups were also not to name themselves with Greek letters or with the words "fraternity" or "sorority" (the social groups generally ignored the prohibition of Greek letters in their names). In many ways — including their single-sex nature, smaller number of members, emphasis on social activities, and adoption of

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34. Foster, "Early Recollections," 11–12, CCA; Heywood, *Cornell College*, 59; Beulah Perren to Edith Dayton, n.d., Aesthesian Literary Society Papers, CCA; *The Cat's Meow* (Mount Vernon), 5/12/1923, CCA.

Greek letter names — these social groups resembled “local” fraternities and sororities found on other campuses.<sup>35</sup>

Among the three institutions, students waited the longest to form fraternities and sororities at ISNS. As at Cornell College, long-standing regulations, passed by the Board of Directors two months before the institution opened, prohibited students from creating and belonging to “secret societies.” Students apparently obeyed this rule for 20 years. Women formed the first secret society, Nu Omicron Nu, in 1896. Three years later, men established the Able Hobo society, limiting it to 13 secret members. The fraternity met in secret locations, both to maintain the anonymity of its membership and because of faculty and student opposition. Men formed the Xanthos Social Club in 1900, replacing “social club” with “fraternity” in the organization’s name by 1902. A third fraternity appeared in 1915, by which time women students, who far outnumbered men on campus, had created six sororities, all before any rules permitted them to do so.<sup>36</sup>

In contrast to the varied interests of literary societies, fraternities and sororities at ISNS focused on private matters, especially providing social opportunities to facilitate interaction between male and female students on an intimate scale. For example, Nu Omicron Nu women “gave a novel party to their gentlemen friends” on April Fools’ Day in 1904. The women planned “progressive games” for the men, blindfolded them and led them around campus into “obstructions” and mud puddles, staged potato races and whistling contests, and served the men “a dainty course luncheon.” In February 1907, 15 Able Hoboes and “their lady friends” celebrated the fraternity’s “mid-winter banquet” at the Irving Hotel in Waterloo. After arriving “in two sleighs each drawn by four horses,” they enjoyed an elaborate meal, which included oyster cocktail, baked red snapper, larded tenderloin of beef, shrimp in mayonnaise, and Neapolitan ice cream, “served by the efficient Irving hotel waiters.” Even though the banquet took place on a Wednesday night, the stu-

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35. Heywood, *Cornell College*, 193, 198-201; Alpha Sigma Pi Papers, CCA.

36. Lang, *A Century of Leadership and Service*, 478-79.

dents did not return to Cedar Falls until “an early hour in the morning.”<sup>37</sup>

Faculty members at the by then named Iowa State Teachers College failed to take decisive action regarding fraternities and sororities, passing the issue between committees over the course of several years. In September 1914 the Men’s Council, a student government group, claimed that such organizations were detrimental to both their members and the entire student body and asked the faculty to prohibit fraternity members from representing the institution in intercollegiate activities or other public performances. The faculty members referred the proposal to a committee that reported to the dean of women but never again addressed the proposal. The following March, the dean of women asked the faculty to support her policy of denying all requests by outside organizations to form secret societies on campus, but President Homer Seerley, the institution’s long-serving president who himself had belonged to both a literary society and a fraternity at SUI, intervened. He appointed a faculty committee to consider the dean’s proposal and make a recommendation to the larger faculty. One year later, President Seerley created another faculty committee to consider the appropriate stance toward fraternities and sororities. The committee, minus one vocal dissenter who proposed penalties for the organizations and their student members, concluded that although fraternities and sororities were of questionable worth, they had developed to such a degree that any attempt to eliminate them would fail. The committee recommended that the faculty begin oversight of the organizations and that each organization be assigned a “sponsor” who would ensure that the members obeyed the rules of the institution. Faculty members debated the committee’s proposal before eventually referring the report back to the committee, where apparently the faculty’s consideration of fraternities and sororities died.<sup>38</sup>

Regardless of debates in faculty meetings, fraternities and sororities continued to exist as unrecognized groups for another

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37. *Normal Eye*, 4/9/1904; *ibid.*, 9/24/1904; *ibid.*, 11/9/1904; *ibid.*, 2/6/1907; *ibid.*, 2/12/1908; *ibid.*, 12/7/1910; *College Eye*, 3/19/1919; *ibid.*, 4/16/1919; *ibid.*, 2/7/1923.

38. Lang, *A Century of Leadership and Service*, 480–81.

decade in Cedar Falls. Eventually, most students agreed that fraternities and sororities should be recognized and encouraged to affiliate with national organizations. When campus newspaper editors asked students their opinion of fraternities and sororities on campus in 1925, non-fraternity men replied that the existence of national organizations would be preferable. The editors encouraged faculty oversight. Noting that fraternities and sororities "seem to have flourished in spite of their lack of recognition," the editors argued that the organizations might "do as much for the school as any other organization" if "their steps are led in the right direction." Sorority women and fraternity men concluded that governing councils might encourage faculty recognition. Sorority women formed the Inter-Sorority Council in 1922; fraternity men established the Pan-Hellenic Council the next year. Those early efforts were unsuccessful because administrators and faculty failed to help students enforce their rules. Eventually, fraternity men convinced the faculty of the need for greater oversight. When the Interfraternity Council's new constitution went into effect in the fall of 1926, the voting members of the governing organization consisted of two representatives from each of the campus's three fraternities, two elected faculty members, and the dean of men.<sup>39</sup>

Students established different types of fraternal organizations at the three institutions: at SUI, local chapters of national fraternities and sororities; at Cornell College, "social groups" that shared similarities with secret societies; and at Iowa State Teachers College, local fraternities and sororities. The relationships between literary societies and fraternities and sororities were complex and different at each institution, but fraternities and sororities were not the primary cause of the demise of literary societies at these Iowa campuses. Indeed, literary societies thrived in the public sphere while fraternities and sororities placed their emphasis in the private. The institutionalization of many features of campus life that earlier had been the responsi-

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39. "What Do You Think of the Fraternities and Sororities on the Hill?" *College Eye*, 2/4/1925; "Should Sororities and Fraternities Be Recognized?" *ibid.*, 1/30/1924; Lang, *A Century of Leadership and Service*, 483; "New Interfrat Council to Begin Work on Big Program this Fall," *College Eye*, 7/9/1926.

bility of literary societies and students' shifting interests eventually made the campuses' earliest student organizations obsolete.<sup>40</sup>

THE ZETS had much to celebrate at their anniversary dinner in 1911, yet the alumnis' "note of sadness . . . at the changed position of literary societies" was well warranted. Literary societies at all three institutions struggled to find their niche on growing campuses with more curricular and extracurricular options. By the 1920s, intercollegiate athletic teams, student organizations focused on academic disciplines, curricular opportunities for musical and dramatic performances, and fraternities and sororities competed with literary societies for undergraduates' attention.

Literary societies attempted to adapt to modern times. In the 1920s women's literary societies at SUI began offering radio programs. In 1929 the Erodelphians planned a radio program that included a history of the society, popular songs, poetry readings, and a violin solo. These radio programs also connected the society with their alumnae members. An alumna of the Hamlin Garland Literary Society who had moved to Chicago wrote to the active members after she was unable to listen to the society's radio program: "I didn't forget your broadcasting on the nineteenth for the first thing I did at eight-thirty that Tuesday evening was to turn the dials to WSUI. But I'm very sorry to say that I couldn't reach you as WIBO — a Chicago station — was broadcasting a program at the same time and they have the same wave length. . . . I was very disappointed, needless to say, that I was forced to give up this program of Hamlin

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40. Nicholas L. Syrett, *The Company He Keeps: A History of White College Fraternities* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009), 135, reaches a similar conclusion: "The story of [the demise of] literary societies is as much the story of the changing interests of post-bellum college students as it is of fraternities' destruction of what had once been a thriving college institution." I generally agree with Syrett's nuanced argument about the role of fraternities in the demise of literary societies, although I disagree with the claim that students' interests (at least at these Iowa institutions) in "theater, music and publication . . . diverted students away from literary societies." Rather, when faculty members and academic leaders institutionalized these features into the curriculum, they simultaneously weakened the position of the literary societies. Dorothy E. Finnegan, "A Potent Influence: The YMCA and YWCA at Penn College, 1882–1920s," *Annals of Iowa* 65 (2006), 1–34, comes to a similar conclusion regarding the demise of the long-functioning YMCA and YWCA at Penn College in Iowa.

Garland but am looking forward to more luck the next time." These radio programs proved to be some of the last literary society activities societies at SUI.<sup>41</sup>

Despite efforts to remain relevant, each institution's literary societies were extinct by the mid-1930s. Students' curricular and extracurricular options and interests had widened beyond the multipurpose literary societies. When faculty officially permitted Cornell College students to form social groups in 1928, literary societies disappeared. In December 1927 the Philomathean Society at SUI reorganized as "a literary discussion group," and its final photo appeared in the 1928 yearbook. The final picture of the Irving Institute appeared in the 1929 *Hawkeye* and that of the Zetagathians in 1933. Most of SUI's women's literary societies' last active year on campus was also 1933. In April 1934 Hamlin Garland, the 74-year-old author who would publish the collection of poems *Iowa, O Iowa!* the next year, gave a lecture on campus. After the lecture, he dined with members of the university's last active literary society, the organization that bore his name. That banquet appears to be the last recorded activity of a literary society at SUI. Literary societies remained active slightly longer at Iowa State Teachers College. As late as 1920, nearly half of the students belonged to one of the literary societies; a decade later fewer than 20 percent of the students were members. The two oldest men's societies, the Philomatheans and Aristotelians, merged in 1929 to form the Men's Forum, which lasted a few years. Between 1930 and 1935 ten literary societies became defunct. The Shakespearean Circle, the last literary society to exist with official university recognition, remained active until 1937.<sup>42</sup>

The purposes and activities of the literary societies outlived the organizations. The intellectual development and public speaking skills that literary societies fostered were now cultivated in large academic departments and institutionally spon-

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41. Lavender, "Erodelphian and Hesperian Societies," 30; Marjorie P. Hansen to Hamlin Garland Society, 4/15/1929, Hamlin Garland Society Papers, UIA.

42. Philomathean Secretary Book 1924-27, 12/9/1927, Philomathean Society Papers, UIA; "Hamlin Garland Will Give Round Table Lecture Here," *Daily Iowan* (Iowa City), 4/22/1934; Hamlin Garland, *Iowa, O Iowa!* (Iowa City, 1935); "Hamlin Garland Will Talk at Old Capitol This Afternoon," *ibid.*, 4/25/1934.



*Today, literary society bulletin boards line a stairwell between the second and third floors in College Hall at Cornell College. These intricately carved wooden bulletin boards were used to announce upcoming society events and the schedules of society programs. They now serve as the only physical reminder of student literary societies at any of the three institutions. Although literary societies have been defunct for three-quarters of a century, many activities that they started — including student newspapers, dramatic productions, and musical groups — continue to be active components of campus life at each institution. Author photo.*

sored forensics and debate programs; the intercollegiate athletic contests and entertainment for the community that literary societies provided were replaced by institutionally sponsored musical and dramatic performances, motion pictures, and radio; the social opportunities that literary societies offered for students were now taken up by fraternities and sororities and many other campus organizations. Each new extracurricular activity weakened the multipurpose literary societies. Perhaps more significantly, many literary society activities became institutionalized in the formal curriculum. Although these Iowa literary societies have been absent from their campuses for nearly three-quarters of a century, their formative roles in the lives of the early students and their contributions to their institutions — particularly their role in providing students opportunities to publicly display their higher education — deserve to be as well remembered as the literary societies at eastern men's colleges.

# “The Cultivation of Corn in Mayan and Modern Times”: Lowell Houser’s Winning Design for the Ames Mural Competition

BREANNE ROBERTSON

IN AUGUST 1935 the U.S. Treasury Department’s Section of Painting and Sculpture released a formal announcement inviting artists to submit mural designs for the newly erected post office in Ames, Iowa. Unlike its predecessor, the Public Works of Art Project, the Section of Painting and Sculpture (or “the Section”) was not an emergency relief program. The federal agency focused instead on aesthetic concerns in determining its public art patronage, which consisted chiefly of the construction and decoration of federal buildings. To maintain quality according to agency standards and to encourage young artists, the Section developed a selection process for commissions based on state, regional, and national competitions. The Ames mural competi-

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This article is drawn from my dissertation research, which examines Lowell Houser’s *Evolution of Corn* (1938) and other instances of U.S. artists portraying ancient Mesoamerican subject matter between the years 1933 and 1945. I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Sally M. Promey and Renée Ater for their comments and support in the preparation of this article. I would also like to acknowledge Marvin Bergman and Ginalie Swaim at the State Historical Society of Iowa, Dennis Wendell at the Ames Historical Society, Tanya Zanish-Belcher at Iowa State University, Gene Morris at the National Archives II, and Matthew Sams and Marie Kroeger at the Art Institute of Chicago for their assistance in consulting unpublished materials on Lowell Houser.

THE ANNALS OF IOWA 70 (Winter 2011). © The State Historical Society of Iowa, 2011.

tion was one such competition, held to decide which regional artist would decorate the new post office. The parameters of the design competition stipulated that eligible artists must reside in Iowa or adjacent states and that subject matter for the mural be related to the local activities and history of Ames. Specifically, the announcement identified the industry, pursuits, or scenery of Iowa; historical events of local significance; and the postal service as appropriate subject matter for the public mural.<sup>1</sup>

As a general guideline, the Section designated 1 percent of construction costs for the decoration of new federal buildings. In Ames, the mural competition promised the winning artist a government contract in the amount of \$1,300 to cover costs for the production and installation of the post office mural; other worthy submissions would receive smaller commissions in other Iowa towns. This monetary award was not insignificant; \$1,300 in 1935 translates to roughly \$20,700 in 2010.<sup>2</sup> For regional artists, many of whom struggled financially in the hard economic climate of the Great Depression, such an opportunity — to earn a steady paycheck and to work under the aegis of the federal government on a public building — was a highly attractive prospect.

Twenty-seven artists participated in the Ames mural competition. Although the formal training, professional experience, and natural talent of the artists varied, Superintendent Edward B. Rowan of the Section of Painting and Sculpture nonetheless expressed pleasure with the breadth and quality of mural entries. In a letter to Des Moines art librarian and competition juror Louise Orwig, he wrote, "Some good work is included [among the entries] and I believe it will be possible to award not only the Ames commission but also the other three post offices listed in your announcement form."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Formal announcement from the U.S. Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture regarding the Ames mural competition in the folder "Iowa Competitions," Case Files for Embellishment of Federal Buildings, Records of the Public Buildings Service, RG 121, entry 133, box 28, National Archives, College Park, Maryland (hereafter cited by Record Group, entry, and box number only, e.g., RG 121, entry 133, box 28).

2. This information is based on the CPI Inflation Calculator, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, at <http://data.bls.gov/cgi-bin/cpicalc.pl>.

3. Edward B. Rowan to Louise Orwig, 11/16/1935, RG 121, entry 133, box 28.

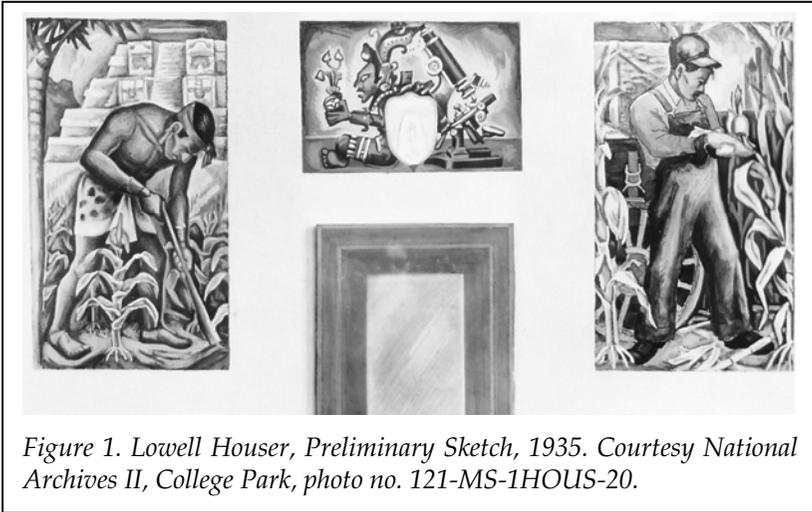


Figure 1. Lowell Houser, *Preliminary Sketch*, 1935. Courtesy National Archives II, College Park, photo no. 121-MS-1HOUS-20.

That fall the Section awarded the Ames Post Office mural contract to Lowell Houser. Richard Haines, R. F. Gates, and Richard B. Tabor received smaller mural commissions for post office buildings in Cresco, Harlan, and Independence, respectively. Houser's winning design included two vertically oriented rectangular pendant panels flanking the Ames postmaster's office door (fig. 1). The left image portrays a scene from antiquity, a Mayan Indian tending maize, while the right panel depicts its modern equivalent, a contemporary Iowa farmer harvesting ripe ears of corn. A smaller, central square panel unites these two compositionally and thematically with a decorative heraldic design composed of an indigenous deity, a seed kernel, and a scientific microscope. The success of Houser's design seems to have eclipsed any consideration of its historical inaccuracy, particularly with regard to the inclusion of a Mexican Indian in a mural dedicated to the local history and culture of Ames, Iowa.<sup>4</sup>

The territory now known as Iowa possesses a rich and diverse history with regard to American Indian civilizations. A

4. Houser's career as a whole remains understudied and relatively unknown to art historians and critics. The only sustained investigations of Houser's mural to date and, as such, an essential touchstone for this current study, are Mary L. Meixner, "Lowell Houser and the Genesis of a Mural," and idem, "The Ames Corn Mural," both in *The Palimpsest* 66 (1985), 2–29.

broad range of North American tribes — ancient Mound Builders, Sioux, Algonquians, Sauk, Meskwaki, Ioway — inhabited the grassy plains and lush river banks of the future state. Yet at no point in its long history did Iowa serve as a homeland to the Mayan Indians. Why, then, did Houser choose to include a Mayan Indian in his composition? I posit an explanation for this artistic decision by examining the myriad sources of inspiration for his mural design and by analyzing the circumstances of the Ames mural competition. By adhering to traditional notions of history painting and by displaying firsthand knowledge of Mexican culture in both subject and style, Houser crafted a mural design in which he asserted a continuity not only of agricultural practice in the Americas from antiquity to the present but of distinguished art-making as well. His choice of Mayan subject matter represents the concentrated effort of an artist to distinguish his work among a strong pool of applicants in the Ames mural competition. In so doing, Houser skillfully demonstrated a technical and thematic expertise in his mural sketch that fulfilled the lofty aims of the federal selection committee and ultimately won for him the competition.

BORN IN CHICAGO in 1902, Lowell Houser moved with his family to Ames, Iowa, when he was seven years old. The son of a streetcar conductor, he spent the remainder of his youth in Ames and graduated from Ames High School in 1921. He attended Iowa State College for one quarter, but withdrew at the end of the term to pursue a career in painting.

In 1922 Houser began his formal training at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he studied painting, mural design, and illustration. His attendance at the conservative art school instilled in him conventional ideas about the didactic function and elevated status of history painting, which ranked at the top of the hierarchy of academic genres. In its most traditional form, history painting depicted historical or mythological events to teach moral or civic virtues. Artists typically selected noble yet dramatic narrative incidents from textual accounts and made a serious effort to incorporate descriptive details to bolster credibility and a perception of truth. Lofty in tone and large in scale, history paintings presented viewers with an elegant representa-

tion of past events and an exemplary model for future change. Such images, successfully executed, possessed sufficient rhetorical agency to inspire higher thoughts, proper modes of conduct, or patriotic feelings in the public.<sup>5</sup> Among Houser's teachers were the noted Chicago artists Louis Grell, Albert H. Krehbiel, and Harry I. Stickroth.<sup>6</sup> Under their tutelage, Houser learned the necessary components of history painting — knowledge that would serve him well in the Ames mural competition 12 years later.

At the Art Institute of Chicago, Houser met and became close friends with fellow art student Everett Gee Jackson, who convinced him that Mexico was the ideal place to pursue his artistic ambitions. The following year, the two men embarked on a series of extended trips to Mexico. Houser's exposure to Mexican art, both ancient and modern, coupled with the personal connections he would make during his sojourn abroad, had a profound and lasting influence on his art production, particularly with regard to style and subject matter.

In June 1923 Houser and Jackson drove from Jackson's boyhood home in Mexia, Texas, to the Sabinas Mountains in Mexico's border state of Coahuila.<sup>7</sup> Although their initial goal was to live among the Kickapoo Indians, the two artists struggled to gain favor with the native inhabitants of the sparsely populated region. As art historian James Oles succinctly put it, "the Indians had little interest in hosting these seekers of the 'primitive.'"<sup>8</sup> After a few weeks of exploring and sketching, the pair returned to Texas and quickly devised a plan to make a second trip to Mexico in the fall. This time, they would venture deep into the interior of the country in search of preindustrial countryside and picturesque peasants.

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5. My discussion and terminology with regard to history painting relies on the definition of the genre and its component parts in Patricia M. Burnham and Lucretia Hoover Giese, eds., *Redefining American History Painting* (New York, 1995).

6. The Art Institute of Chicago, School Catalogue, List of Instructors and Lecturers, 1922–1923, photocopy provided by Matthew Sams, Assistant Director, Registration and Records, and archives volunteer Marie Kroeger.

7. D. Scott Atkinson, *Everett Gee Jackson: San Diego Modern, 1920–1935* (San Diego, 2007), 16.

8. James Oles, *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914–1917* (Washington, DC, 1993), 79.

In September Jackson and Houser boarded a train for Guadalajara; soon the two artists pushed beyond the bustling colonial city and settled in Chapala. Jackson later recalled their delight at the pristine village, as yet untouched by modern industry: "Lowelito [Jackson's nickname for Houser] and I were speechless at what we had found." He explained that "Chapala in 1923 was not at all the way it is today," but remained still a "visual world of magic: bright sunshine and blue shadows up and down the streets, red tile roofs and roofs made of yellow thatch, banana trees waving above the red tile roofs, bougainvillea of brilliant color hanging over old walls, the gray expanse of the lake, and a sky in which floated mountainous clouds." The two men were so inspired by this "overlooked paradise," Jackson wrote, that they routinely lost track of time while drawing and painting their new environment.<sup>9</sup>

During this productive period in Chapala, Houser met Anita Brenner, who, like Jackson, played a significant role in determining the course of his career. A Mexican citizen whose family had moved to Texas during the Mexican Revolution (1910–1917), Brenner returned to Mexico City in 1923, when she was 18 years old. Brenner's activities as an anthropologist, political writer, and art critic brought her into contact with nearly every artist, intellectual, and journalist in the capital, including the Mexican muralists. Reflecting on her intimate connection to Mexico's avant-garde artists, Brenner wrote in her journal, "I am proud when I think that the best of Mexico [are] my closest friends," mentioning specifically José Clemente Orozco, Jean Charlot, and Francisco Goitia.<sup>10</sup> During a chance meeting in Chapala, Brenner suggested to Houser that he join the archaeological expedition of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, which had recently signed a contract with Mexico to excavate, repair, and restore the ruins at Chichen Itza. Houser expressed interest in the project and, to his great surprise, soon received an offer to become an "artist in residence" at the ancient site.<sup>11</sup>

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9. Everett Gee Jackson, *Burros and Paintbrushes: A Mexican Adventure* (College Station, TX, 1985), 5.

10. Susannah Glusker, *Anita Brenner: A Mind of Her Own* (Austin, TX, 1998), 46.

11. Jackson, *Burros and Paintbrushes*, 107. Brenner was so impressed with Houser's talent that she had orchestrated this opportunity for her new American friend.



Figure 2. Jean Charlot, *The Massacre in the Main Temple* (1922–1923). Fresco, 14' x 26', National Preparatory School, Mexico City. Photograph courtesy Jean Charlot Collection, University of Hawaii at Manoa Libraries.

In preparation for his departure for the Yucatan, Houser relocated to Coyoacan near Mexico City in the fall of 1926. There the American became acquainted with many members of Brenner's distinguished social circle, including Jean Charlot. Born in Paris to a Mexican mother and a French father, Charlot had arrived in Mexico City in 1921 and quickly established himself as a member of the cultural avant-garde, becoming close friends with Fernando Leal and Diego Rivera. In 1923 he assisted Rivera in painting *Creation* (1923) at the National Preparatory School in Mexico City. Charlot also produced a mural of his own design for the school. Titled *The Massacre in the Main Temple* (1922–1923), the mural portrays the dramatic defeat of the Aztecs during the Spanish Conquest (fig. 2).<sup>12</sup>

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In her book *Idols Behind Altars* (1929), Brenner described Houser as an American artist who had "gone Mexican" and whose art drew inspiration from "Mexican scene and popular design." After meeting Brenner only briefly, Houser likewise held her in great esteem, admiring both her intellect and her kindness.

12. This mural has also appeared in publications under the title *The Fall of Tenochtitlan*. Jean Charlot states in his essay "Jean Charlot's First Mural: The

Houser was already well versed in the activities of the Mexican muralists prior to meeting Charlot. In 1925 Houser and Jackson had made a brief visit to Mexico City to view the public murals. Jackson later recalled in his autobiography his lukewarm response to those modern frescoes, stating that the paintings seemed to him "like the funny-paper drawings, only much more refined." Houser, by contrast, found them "very exciting." Although Jackson did not identify which works of art they viewed, the two Americans likely visited the National Preparatory School to see the well-publicized murals of Rivera, Charlot, and others. It must have been personally significant for Houser when, the following year, he had the opportunity not only to befriend Charlot but to have the muralist critique his paintings. Houser naturally placed much stock in the experienced muralist's opinions. Jackson recalled in his autobiography how he and Houser both "regarded Charlot with unflinching respect" and suspected that his advice "just might indicate the right direction" for their art.<sup>13</sup>

Charlot continued to exert a strong influence on Houser's artistic development over the next two years as the pair worked side by side as field artists at Chichen Itza. Excavations at the site had begun in 1924 under the direction of American archaeologist Sylvanus Griswold Morley and were well under way when Houser joined the project three seasons later. Houser, Charlot, and another field artist, Ann Axtell Morris, created scale drawings of ancient Mayan stelae and mural paintings. From Charlot, Houser gained an appreciation for Mayan art and culture as a noble example of antiquity. "When I came I thought Maya art was primitive," wrote Houser in a 1927 letter to Jackson; "now I think it is the most civilized that I know. In the collection of a rich family in Merida there is a Maya vase which dates probably to 400 or 600 A.D. in the period of the Old Empire of Guatemala, the earliest period by far, and the most perfect."<sup>14</sup> Houser also adopted Charlot's view that ancient Mesoamerican civilizations

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Massacre in the Main Temple" that this second appellation is erroneous. See Jean Charlot Collection, University of Hawaii at Manoa Libraries, Honolulu, Hawaii.

13. Jackson, *Burros and Paintbrushes*, 40.

14. Mary L. Meixner, "Lowell Houser's Poetic Glass Mural in Des Moines," *Palimpsest* 73 (1992), 34.

offered fitting subject matter for public art, as the elder artist had demonstrated in *The Massacre in the Main Temple*.

Upon his return to the United States in 1929, Houser must have noted that a pervading interest in Mexican art and culture had swept the nation. In the art world, exhibitions of Mexican art surged in number during the 1920s and 1930s. Those shows, which ranged in focus from ancient artifacts and plaster reconstructions of Mayan temples to Mexican folk art and modern painting, presented the American public with ample evidence regarding Mexico's rich artistic traditions. In architecture, the Mayan Revival style grew rapidly in popularity and spread throughout the country. American tourism to Mexico and publications about Mexico, ranging from non-fiction to children's books, also increased significantly.<sup>15</sup> If Houser's associations and experiences in Mexico had not already convinced him of the aesthetic value of ancient Mesoamerican civilizations, his decision to feature a Mayan figure in his competition design may have resulted from this widespread popular fascination with Mexican art and culture.

Notably, several pre-Columbian scholars served as consultants to architects and industrial designers seeking to incorporate authentic motifs into their Mayan Revival designs. A leading expert in Mesoamerican archaeology and Mayan hieroglyphics, Sylvanus Morley, acted as consultant to architect Albert Kahn during the construction of the Fisher Theater (1928) in Detroit, Michigan (fig. 3). Since Morley was also the acting director of the Carnegie Institution of Washington at this time, it is not surprising that many of the decorative motifs at the theater derive directly from the Mayan sculptures, tiles, and murals uncovered

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15. Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations Between the United States and Mexico, 1920–1935* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1992), 16, 55–58. Mexico accounted for only 4.6 percent of American expenditures for foreign travel in 1923. By 1930 that percentage had risen to 8.2 percent, and in 1933 American expenditure in Mexico was 16.7 percent of all foreign travel. The number of books about Mexico reviewed in *Book Review Digest* between 1920 and 1927 was 35; that number increased to 65 for the years 1928 to 1935. Delpar tallied these figures based on the books listed under the categories Mexico and Mexico City and the subcategories Antiquities, Description and Travel, Foreign Relations, History, Politics, Government, Social Life and Customs. She notes that the years indicate when the reviews appeared in print, not necessarily when the books were published.



Figure 3. *The Fisher Theater in Detroit as it appeared in 1928. Photograph by Manning Brothers Photographers, private collection of David Voydanoff.*

at Chichen Itza. Houser, who worked alongside Morley at the Carnegie Institution of Washington's archaeological site for two seasons, must have known of his supervisor's activities and perhaps even discussed the topic with him on occasion.

Mexico's modern muralists themselves garnered fame and popularity exhibiting and working in the United States. Houser, who met muralists Jean Charlot and José Clemente Orozco during his sojourn in Mexico, surely took note of their activities upon his return home. Reflecting the keen interest many American artists took in the Mexican muralists, Thomas Hart Benton recalled years later, "I saw in the Mexican effort a profound and much-needed redirection of art toward its ancient humanistic functions. The Mexican concern with publicly significant meanings and with the pageant of Mexican life corresponded perfectly with what I had in mind for art in the United States. I also looked with envy on the opportunities given Mexican painters for public mural work."<sup>16</sup> Between 1930 and 1934, Rivera and

16. Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican*, 128.

Orozco executed major mural commissions across the nation, including the controversial and highly publicized fresco panels at Rockefeller Center and Dartmouth College. In addition, American Ambassador to Mexico Dwight Morrow used his connections with the Carnegie Corporation to organize a large exhibition of Mexican art at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. More than 25,000 visitors attended the exhibition *Art in Mexico*, which featured the work of 24 Mexican painters, including Orozco, Rivera, and Charlot. From New York, the exhibition traveled to 13 other cities in the United States, reaching roughly 450,000 people.<sup>17</sup>

By the 1930s, the Mexican example of mural painting not only bolstered arguments for U.S. government sponsorship of public art but offered a model, both technically and thematically, for American artists to emulate. George Biddle, an old schoolmate of Franklin D. Roosevelt, employed this precise line of reasoning in his appeal to the president in support of a federal art program. On May 9, 1933, he wrote,

The Mexican artists have produced the greatest national school of mural painting since the Italian Renaissance. Diego Rivera tells me that it was only possible because Obregon allowed Mexican artists to work at plumbers' wages in order to express on the walls of the government buildings the social ideals of the Mexican revolution.

The younger artists of America are conscious as they have never been of the social revolution that our country and civilization are going through; and they would be eager to express these ideals in a permanent art form if they were given the government's cooperation. They would be contributing to and expressing in living monuments the social ideals that you are struggling to achieve.<sup>18</sup>

Biddle's encouragement worked. That winter the U.S. government initiated the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), the first in a series of art patronage programs established under the New Deal. Houser was among the earliest American artists to receive government support in 1934, when he assisted Grant Wood on the ambitious nine-panel mural cycle, *When Tillage Begins, Other Arts Follow*, at Iowa State College. Acknowledging the Mexican

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17. *Ibid.*, 144–45.

18. George Biddle, *George Biddle: An American Artist's Story* (Boston, 1939), 268.

mural program's important role in providing a model for the U.S. government to follow, PWAP Director Edward Bruce doubted "whether the impetus to employ the more liberal painters in America would ever have made the progress that it has without the great awakening which was brought to us from Mexico."<sup>19</sup>

The paintings of Mexican muralists Rivera and Orozco left a strong impression on many American artists in the 1930s. Edward Laning, for example, watched Rivera paint at Rockefeller Center "night after night" because he wanted "to learn about fresco painting from someone who knew." And Harry Donald Jones paid explicit homage to Orozco in his 1937 mural cycle at the federal courthouse in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, by illustrating the Mexican artist at work on his murals for Dartmouth College.<sup>20</sup>

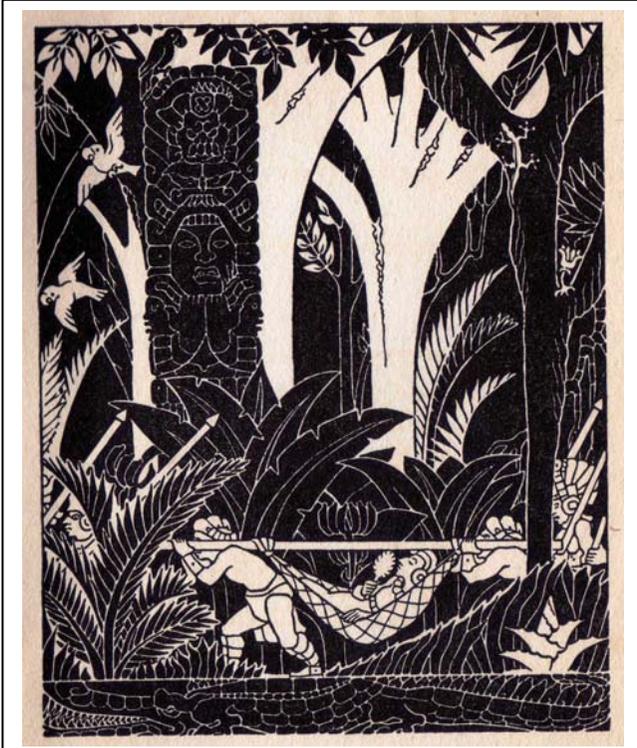
Houser's approach to mural painting also closely followed Mexican precedents, since his introduction to public mural art occurred during his travels south of the border. He developed an early yet enduring enthusiasm for Mexican style and subject matter in his art. Throughout his career Houser demonstrated a sustained interest in and strong conviction for ancient Mayan culture in particular. In addition to the Ames mural, he published Mexican-style woodcuts in *Dial Magazine* and illustrated several children's stories on pre-Columbian themes, including Alida Malkus's Newbery Award-winning book, *The Dark Star of Itza: The Story of a Pagan Princess* (1931; fig. 4). In 1938 he again proposed a Mayan Indian as the primary subject for a glass mural at the Bankers Life building in Des Moines. When his clients insisted that he modify his design using a North American Indian instead, Houser complied with regret, stating, "I am a little sorry to move out of the Maya field. . . . It is so darned rich and so well suited to the round corners of your building."<sup>21</sup>

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19. Edward Bruce and Forbes Watson, *Art in Federal Buildings: An Illustrated Record of the Treasury Department's New Program in Painting and Sculpture* (Washington, DC, 1936), 1:23. See also Lea Rosson DeLong, *When Tillage Begins, Other Arts Follow: Grant Wood and Christian Petersen Murals* (Ames, 2006).

20. Edward Laning, "The New Deal Mural Projects," in *The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs*, ed. Francis V. O'Connor (Washington, DC, 1972), 79-114. Other artists who worked on the Cedar Rapids Federal Courthouse mural cycle were Francis R. White, Don Glasell, and Everett Jeffrey. I thank Gregg R. Narber for bringing this mural to my attention.

21. Meixner, "Houser's Poetic Glass Mural," 34.



*Figure 4. Frontispiece illustration by Lowell Houser for *The Dark Star of Itza*. Courtesy of Houghton-Mifflin Publishing Company.*

GIVEN THE RECENT POPULARITY of Mexican art and culture in the United States at the time of the Ames mural competition, Houser naturally believed that a mural design incorporating Mesoamerican history would appeal to art officials on the selection committee. Unlike other government-sponsored projects supporting public art, such as the Treasury Relief Art Project and the Works Progress Administration, the Section of Painting and Sculpture did not require artists to be eligible for financial relief. Quality, instead, was the primary criterion for determining whether an artist received a commission. This emphasis on artistic merit reflected the Treasury Department's stated goal of acquiring "the best available American art" and making it available throughout the country so that it might up-

lift public morale during the lean Depression years.<sup>22</sup> Edward Bruce explained,

Our objective should be to enrich the lives of all our people by making things of the spirit, the creation of beauty part of their daily lives, by giving them new hopes and sources of interest to fill their leisure, by eradicating the ugliness of their surroundings, by building with a sense of beauty as well as mere utility, and by fostering all the simple pleasures of life which are not important in terms of dollars spent but are immensely important in terms of a higher standard of living.<sup>23</sup>

Beauty was not the only characteristic necessary for a successful design submission, however. In their endeavor to make art available to all Americans, art project officials adhered to a traditional academic belief in the civilizing capacity and educational benefits of fine art. "Good contemporary art," observed Forbes Watson, "spread throughout the country and always visible to the inhabitants of town and hamlet and city, is almost certainly destined to have results in educating the artist and the layman."<sup>24</sup> Paintings portraying religious, mythological, literary, historical, and allegorical subject matter most easily carried a moralizing message or intellectual theme, so the genre of history painting (which might include all of these) was generally the preferred mode in art academies for creating didactic works of art.

Adhering to this conventional view of history painting, the Section directed potential applicants in the Ames competition to compose a mural design centered on themes of "the Post; local history, past or present; local industry, pursuits, or scenery."<sup>25</sup> The government call for paintings of local relevance was not unique to the Ames mural competition; it reflected broader institutional notions of what constituted suitable subject matter for public art. Art project officials justified their preference for local subject matter, claiming that "a work of art carries more

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22. Bruce and Watson, *Art in Federal Buildings*, 1:xii.

23. Memorandum in support of project to employ artists under Emergency Relief Appropriation Act of 1935, enclosed in letter from Edward Bruce to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 5/1/1935, RG 69.5.2, box 432.

24. Bruce and Watson, *Art in Federal Buildings*, 1:23.

25. Formal announcement for the Ames mural competition, RG 121, entry 133, box 28.

meaning for the people when it deals with familiar subject matter and reflects their local interests, aspirations, and activities."<sup>26</sup>

Art officials envisioned the post office as an ideal site for public art. Located in large cities and small rural towns across the nation, these public buildings served as social centers for the community. Almost everyone visited their local post office regularly, so the art installed there would reach the greatest number of people and, it was hoped, inspire in them lofty thoughts about their community and its past.<sup>27</sup> Forbes Watson stressed the educational mission of the government-sponsored mural program when he posed the question: "When the farmer, the laborer, the village children and the shopkeepers go to the nearest Post Office and see there, for example, a distinguished work of contemporary art depicting the main activities, or some notable events in the history of the town, is it too exaggerated to suggest that their interest will be increased and their imagination stirred?"<sup>28</sup>

To distinguish his work in this competitive New Deal environment, Houser needed not only to demonstrate to the federal selection committee a capacity for technical excellence, but also an original thematic conception appropriate to the elevated function assigned to public art. Fortunately, the artist's formal academic training and subsequent travel to Mexico equipped him with the skills and breadth of knowledge necessary to meet this challenge. According to Superintendent Edward B. Rowan, Houser's mural sketch stood out for its "outstanding intelligence of the conception" and "real unity of idea."<sup>29</sup> In other words, his composition presented unusual and innovative subject matter in a manner perfectly suited to the aims of public art.

Few artists in the Ames mural competition dared to stray from the recommended themes of local history, local industry, and the postal service. Despite the claim in the formal announcement that these subjects "may be interpreted freely" and that, above all else, the jury desired "as distinguished and vital a con-

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26. Section of Fine Arts, "Exhibition of Photographs and Sculpture," RG 121, entry 137, box 3.

27. Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz, *New Deal for Art* (Utica, NY, 1977), 37.

28. Bruce and Watson, *Art in Federal Buildings*, 1:23–24.

29. Edward B. Rowan to Lowell Houser, 11/21/1935, RG 121, entry 133, box 28.

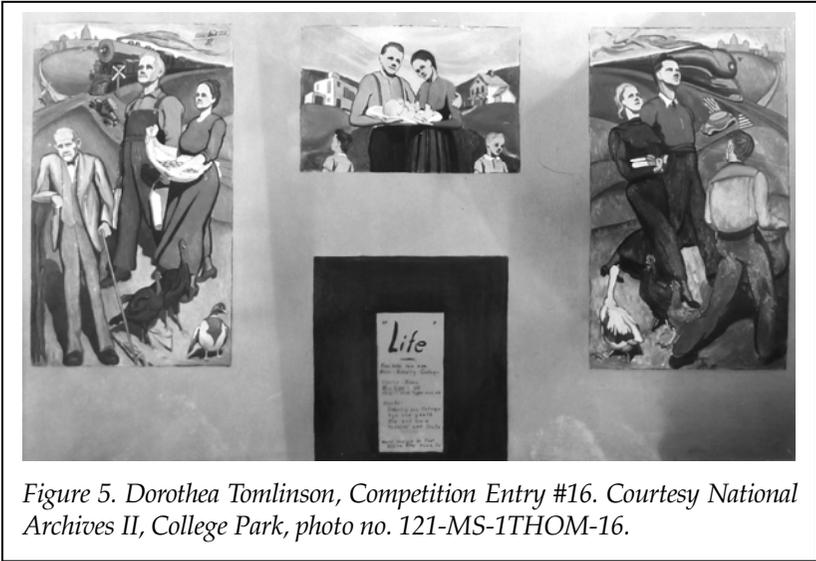


Figure 5. Dorothea Tomlinson, *Competition Entry #16*. Courtesy National Archives II, College Park, photo no. 121-MS-1THOM-16.

ception as possible," the majority of design entries for the Ames mural competition presented viewers with idyllic scenes of Iowa farm life or grand tributes to pioneer settlers.<sup>30</sup> Dorothea Tomlinson, for example, in her competition entry chose to depict three stages in the lifecycle of Iowa residents (fig. 5). Divided into three panels, the mural design presents a trio of college-bound students, a married couple with young children, and an older set of retirement-aged individuals. A continuous rolling landscape unites the three scenes, and accoutrements such as books, fresh eggs and milk, and small children attest to the abundant prosperity of Iowa pursuits, be they intellectual, agricultural, or interpersonal. Robert Allaway, Frank Vernall, E. L. Allen, Vernan Etler, Mignon Wray Lynch, Harry Donald Jones, Felix Summers, and Rea James similarly portrayed Iowa in their competition entries as an idealized, pastoral paradise of virtuous farmers, handsome livestock, and fertile lands.

Houser, by contrast, devised an original theme for the Ames mural competition: "The Cultivation of Corn in Mayan and Modern Times." Clearly divided into three distinct sections,

30. Formal announcement for the Ames mural competition, RG 121, entry 133, box 28.

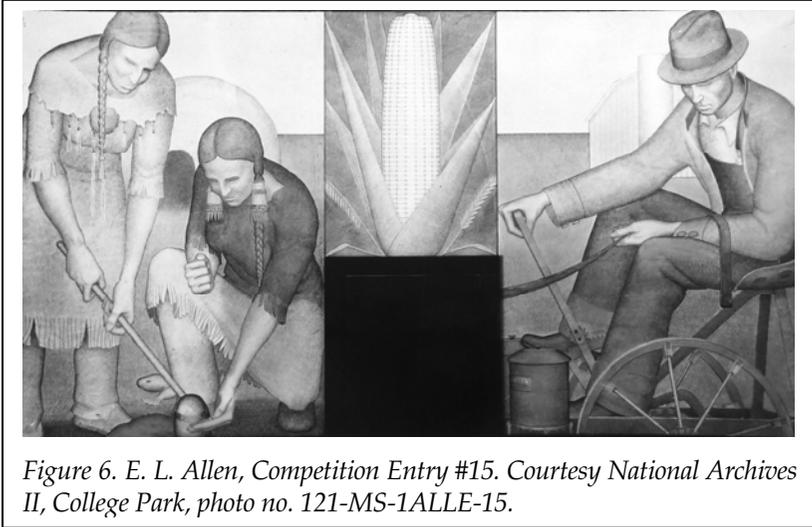


Figure 6. E. L. Allen, *Competition Entry #15*. Courtesy National Archives II, College Park, photo no. 121-MS-1ALLE-15.

Houser's submission differs little in conception from the final mural installed two-and-a-half years later. In the left panel of the sketch, a Mayan Indian leans forward to push a rudimentary tool into the fertile soil of a field of young corn, while, in the right panel, a modern Iowa farmer harvests a ripe ear of corn amid the mature stalks surrounding him. A wagon waiting to be filled with the harvest appears directly behind the Iowa farmer, who does not mirror the bent Mayan figure in posture but rather stands fully upright to perform his task. A scientific microscope and Mayan maize god appear in the central panel behind an oversized kernel of corn. An overall formal emphasis on vertical elements such as the palm tree, erect figures, and tall cornstalks dominates the composition (fig. 1).

Houser was not alone in his decision to highlight Iowa agriculture, nor was he the only artist to incorporate Native Americans in his mural design. Ernest Freed, Elizabeth Lochrie, and others featured North American Indians in their pictorial renderings of pioneer settlers and westward expansion. David Warren Sexton and E. L. Allen, like Houser, even combined the themes of agriculture and indigenous history in their representations of American Indians growing corn. Allen's mural design, in particular, bears a resemblance to Houser's finished mural, as it was installed at the Ames post office (figs. 6 and 7).

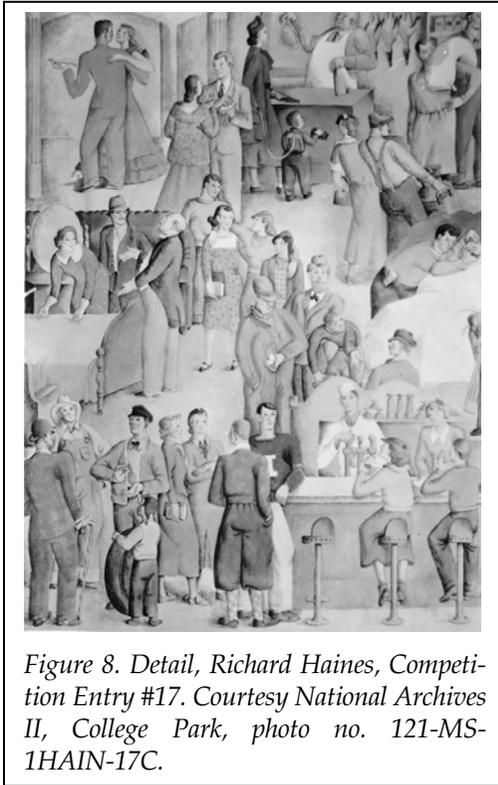


Figure 7. Lowell Houser, *The Evolution of Corn*, 1938. Oil on canvas, Ames Post Office, Ames, Iowa. Courtesy Section of Fine Arts, Public Buildings Administration, National Archives II, College Park, photo no. 121-GA-25HOUS-2295.

In both works, two scenes of corn cultivation, one ancient and one modern, flank a central partition depicting an oversized ear of corn. Conceptually both works construct a visual argument claiming a seamless agricultural lineage in which the modern Iowa farmer descended, culturally at least, from an indigenous source. What distinguished Houser's composition from Allen's design and others in the Ames mural competition is the Meso-american identity of his Indian figure.

HOUSER eventually won the Ames mural competition, but his mural design did not fare well in the first round of jury deliberations. On November 2, 1935, an appointed local committee consisting of cosmetics magnate and art collector Carl Weeks, art librarian Louise Orwig, and architect John Normile met in Des Moines to perform a preliminary evaluation of the competition entries. Their task was to determine the relative aesthetic merit of contest submissions using two major criteria: technical execution and subject. The top designs were those that "best solve[d] the problems of scale and color in relation to the architecture" and that were "most suitable in theme and subject matter."<sup>31</sup> To ensure a fair assessment of their work, artists participated in the contest anonymously, identifying their designs by number only.

31. The Corcoran Gallery of Art, *Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture Designed for Federal Buildings* (Washington, DC, 1939), 1, in Still Photographs, RG 121-CGA, box 1.



*Figure 8. Detail, Richard Haines, Competition Entry #17. Courtesy National Archives II, College Park, photo no. 121-MS-1HAIN-17C.*

On November 9, Orwig notified Superintendent Rowan that the Iowa committee had selected entries #17, 12, 10, 22, and 16, designs belonging to Richard Haines, Robert Allaway, Ernest Freed, Felix Summers, and Dorothea Tomlinson. Houser's entry was not among the finalists. Instead, the local jury exhibited a strong preference for scenes of contemporary farming and small-town life. Richard Haines's mural submission, for example, consists of three rectangular panels all teeming with vibrant scenes of daily Iowa activities (fig. 8). Haines assembled ordinary locations and events — furniture shopping, dancing, socializing at a soda shop, buying meat from the local butcher — and elevated them to the status of fine art. Remarking on Haines's design in a letter to Superintendent Rowan, Carl Weeks enthusiastically proclaimed, "Our first choice is a honey."<sup>32</sup>

32. Carl Weeks to Edward Rowan, 11/7/1935, RG 121, entry 133, box 28.

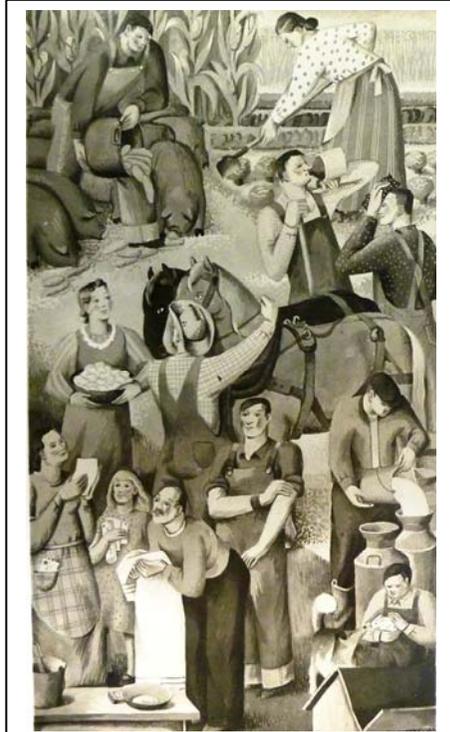
Louise Orwig, however, soon expressed reservations about the artworks she and the other Iowa committee members had endorsed. In a second letter to Rowan she admitted, "I feel that our judgment was hasty after living with the designs." She assured the Section official that anonymity within the competition was not breached and that their decision was unbiased. She then recommended Houser for the commission, stating, "I consider Lowell Houser outstanding in ability and would consider it a 'coup' for the Treasury Dep't if they would use him for designing the Ames mural. I believe that he would make something of great value to the community in which he lives and is interested. I really hope that it will be so." Superintendent Rowan judiciously replied that he was glad to know the competition remained absolutely anonymous and that he hoped "a fine piece of work will result."<sup>33</sup>

Mural sketches for the Ames mural competition arrived in Washington, D.C., for final review by mid-November. After several days of deliberation and study, a jury composed of representatives from the Section and from the Supervising Architect's office agreed to overturn the decision of the Iowa committee and to award the Ames Post Office mural commission to Lowell Houser. Superintendent Rowan, recognizing the sensitivity of the situation, drafted a lengthy explanation for Carl Weeks defending the unexpected competition result. On Haines's mural composition, he wrote,

The Section admired the spirit and observation in the Haines designs and appreciated the wide local interest they would have. Agreeing largely, if not completely, with your estimate of Haines' work, the Section has awarded Haines the mural in Cresco, Iowa, Post Office, on the basis of Design #6 [fig. 9]. The Section preferred these designs to his others because of their greater organization. He seemed more successful in simplifying his material for the smaller sized panels than in letting it run all over the wall. In preparing his design for the new space we are suggesting that he use as much of the same material keeping it more carefully composed for the smaller space.

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33. Louise Orwig to Edward Rowan, 11/9/1935, RG 121, entry 133, box 28; Edward Rowan to Louise Orwig, 11/13/1935, *ibid*.



*Figure 9. Detail, Richard Haines, Competition Entry #6. Courtesy National Archives II, College Park, photo no. 121-MS-1HAIN-6C.*

Houser's winning design, Rowan explained, was "better suited to the mural problem" of the Ames Post Office in scale and color. In addition, it presented an "unusually intelligent conception tying together the ancient Mayan and American corn agriculture." For its simpler composition and innovative subject matter, he concluded, Houser's mural sketch "seemed to us the only design in the competition with a really significant theme."<sup>34</sup>

IT IS UNCLEAR exactly what Rowan meant by this final statement, but apparently the Section recognized the greater merit of Houser's mural as history painting. Houser's conception for

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34. Edward Rowan to Carl Weeks, 11/26/1935, RG 121, entry 133, box 28.

*The Evolution of Corn* conforms to academic definitions of history painting in two important ways. First, Houser selected for depiction a scene from ancient history. Since its inception as a *grand genre* in the seventeenth century, history painting had relied heavily on figures and events from classical Greece and Rome as models for admirable actions and ideal civic traits. Houser did not choose Greek or Roman subject matter for his mural sketch, but he did stay true to the spirit of conventional history painting in his portrayal of the distant past by choosing New World equivalents. Archaeologists and scholars at that time often compared the achievements of the ancient Mayans to those of other esteemed civilizations, especially ancient Greece. Sylvanus Morley was a strong proponent of this favorable mode of assessment. Between 1922 and 1936, the archaeologist published several articles for *National Geographic* in which he proclaimed the Mayans "The Greeks of the New World." He also compiled evidence in support of his claim in an early report for the Carnegie Institution of Washington, stating,

[Mayan] history recorded in their hieroglyphic inscriptions covers a range of more than a thousand years; their observations in astronomy reveal a knowledge of the movements of heavenly bodies equaled by that of few peoples of antiquity; their system of chronology kept an account of elapsed time which in accuracy rivals our own; while in sculpture, painting, and architecture the Maya have been most aptly termed "The Greeks of the New World."<sup>35</sup>

Implicit in this sobriquet is the notion that the Mayans were a sophisticated, civilized, and relatively peaceful people. In keeping with such characterizations of Mayan culture, Houser in his mural sketch represents the Mayan Indian figure industriously engaged in agricultural pursuits. The muscular anatomy and graceful movements of the scantily clad Indian in his design also recalls the heroic nudity often employed in conventional history paintings to denote moral purity. In this way, Houser's portrayal of the ancient Mayan figure and his modern counterpart, who in the final version of the mural conspicuously mir-

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35. Sylvanus Griswold Morley, "The Foremost Intellectual Achievement of Ancient America," *National Geographic* 41 (February 1922), 109–31; idem, "Archaeological Research at the Ruins of Chichen Itza," in *Reports upon the Present Condition and Future Needs of the Science of Archaeology* 61–97 (Washington, DC, 1913), 63.

rors the Mayan in both action and pose, fulfills the traditional aim of public art by stirring viewers' imaginations and by providing models of dignity and civic virtue for them to emulate.

Houser subscribed to a particular Native American mythos in which indigenous cultures spanning the entire continent shared a singular, distinct history and culture. He did not distinguish among various American Indian groups. Instead, he believed that the Mayans were the "fountain head" of all other Native American cultures: "The other Indians were to the Mayas much as the out-of-the-way provinces of Rome were to the Greeks."<sup>36</sup> Houser was not alone in this idea. The catalog for the exhibition *Indian Art of the United States* informed visitors that traditional American Indian art "can best be considered as *folk art*" because indigenous culture had reached its peak in ancient Mexico and in the Andes.<sup>37</sup> In that context, Houser's inclusion of a Mayan figure rather than a Plains Indian in his mural design would not only be an acceptable artistic choice, but a more respectable one. Indeed, the *Ames Daily Tribune and Times* stressed the antiquity and cultural prestige of ancient Mexico, explaining that Houser's mural depicted "corn cultivation as practiced by the Maya Indian, which marks the very beginning, so far as is known, of American civilization."<sup>38</sup>

Houser sought in his mural design to accomplish the didactic mission of history painting by teaching viewers about ancient America. Herbert Spinden, the curator of ethnology at the Brooklyn Museum, shared Houser's belief in the educational value of pre-Columbian materials. During the Great Depression, Spinden developed an educational outreach program that employed the museum's American Indian collection as a didactic tool "for the socialization and assimilation" of the influx of Eastern European immigrants to his city.<sup>39</sup>

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36. Lowell Houser to Mickey, 9/7/1930, quoted in Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican*, 193. See also Meixner, "Houser's Poetic Glass Mural."

37. Frederic H. Douglas and René d'Harnoncourt, *Indian Art of the United States* (New York, 1941), 11.

38. *Ames Daily Tribune and Times*, 4/20/1938.

39. Barbara Braun, *Pre-Columbian Art and the Post-Columbian World* (New York, 1993), 42.

To enhance the educational value of his mural design, Houser toiled to incorporate "authentic" descriptive details in his composition. In the field of history painting, the accurate portrayal of costume and accoutrements lent legitimacy to the overall scene. The perceived "truthfulness" of a painting was fundamental to its success in cultivating refined behavior and artistic taste in the public, since viewers would only be inspired to greater civic virtue if they believed in the two-dimensional models before them. Additionally, the general art-viewing public of the 1930s exhibited a marked preference for naturalism and, by extension, absolute truth of representation. As art historian Virginia Mecklenburg remarked in her insightful analysis of New Deal art patronage, "Most communities demanded unflinching accuracy in their art, and several cities refused to accept murals that violated this precept."<sup>40</sup>

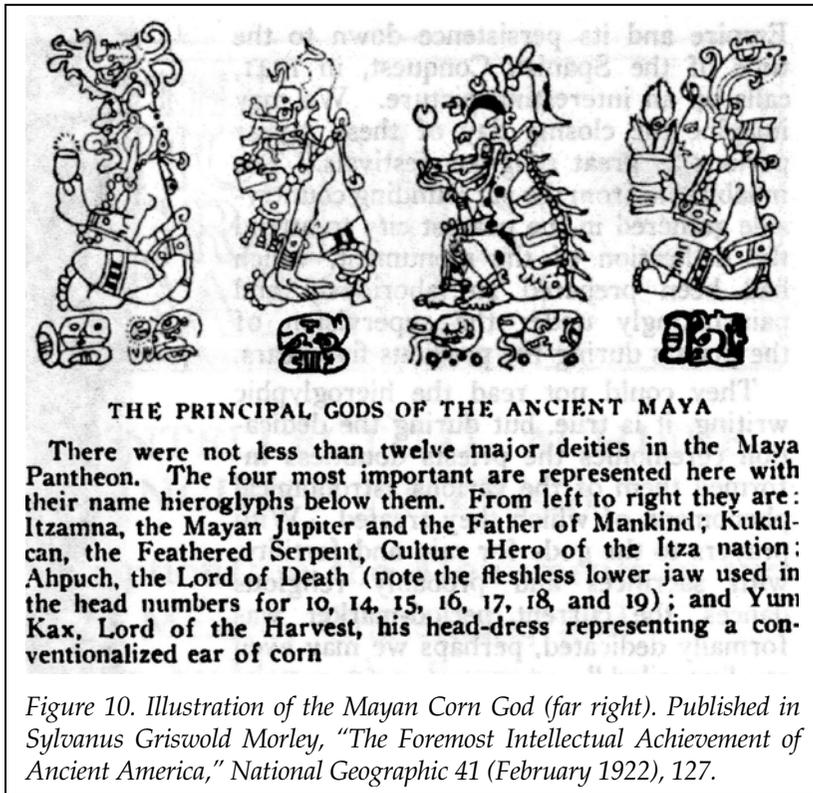
Mexican antiquity at that time still remained a relatively specialized field of knowledge, the purview of historians and archaeologists. Houser, who had seen ancient Mayan art firsthand during his tenure with the Carnegie Institution of Washington at Chichen Itza, was uniquely qualified to offer insight on this impressive if mysterious ancient civilization, and his experience certainly aided him in his endeavor to include "authentic" details. Frank J. Linn, a student at Iowa State University who served as the model for both the farmer and the Mayan Indian figures in the Ames mural, recalled that Houser would relate "his experiences painting Mayan temples in Yucatan" as he worked.<sup>41</sup> Not only did the artist have ample firsthand experience with Mayan artwork during the expedition, but he had also studied Aztec sculpture at museums in Mexico City.

Houser also made a point of modeling the seated maize god at the center of his composition upon an archaeological line drawing. Specifically, Houser referred to an illustration showing "the principle gods of the ancient Maya" in an article his former

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40. Virginia Mecklenburg, *The Public as Patron: A History of the Treasury Department Mural Program* (College Park, MD, 1979).

41. *Ames Daily Tribune*, 5/11/1985. Edward Rowan also emphasized truth of descriptive detail in public art when, in a letter to Ames competition participant R. E. Beard, he extolled Houser's mural design for its portrait representation of Frank J. Linn, "a graduate of Ames [Iowa State College]," as the modern farmer.



archaeological supervisor, Sylvanus Morley, had written for *National Geographic* (fig. 10). Houser's deity bears a striking resemblance to "Yum Kax, Lord of the Harvest," who is shown at the far right of the magazine illustration. Shown in profile, the Mayan deity is seated cross-legged and holds before his chest a small, round pot from which emerges the curled leaves of a young maize plant and an oversized seed kernel, the Mayan glyph for corn. The pre-Columbian god wears large jade ear-spools, a beaded jade necklace, and an elaborate headdress representing "a conventionalized ear of corn," all symbols of his divine status. The deity in both images exhibits a sharply sloped forehead, pointy chin, decorative wrist cuffs and an elaborately woven skirt. Houser was so precise in his quotation of the illustration that he reproduced even the claw-like thumbnail, rounded toes, and pronounced arch of the foot for the figure in his competition mural sketch.

While preparing the final version of his mural for installation, Houser continued to modify his original design with additional references to specific Mayan and Aztec objects. According to the *Ames Daily Tribune and Times*, the pre-Columbian deity in the sky was actually a conflation of two monuments. "The face and square of the ancient sun, from one of the earliest known Guatemalan steles or square monuments, are imposed on the round sun shield of the Aztecs, the later people who conquered the Mayas."<sup>42</sup>

HOUSER'S MURAL SKETCH further succeeded in the Ames mural competition because of its skillful handling of color and scale. While the artist remained faithful to the major tenets of history painting as a genre, he deviated from the European academic model with regard to technical concerns such as composition, drawing, and color. In both form and style, Houser attempted to transcend European artistic conventions by employing modern compositional techniques from the Mexican mural movement.

Houser's extended working relationship with Jean Charlot at Chichen Itza established a lifelong friendship, and the two artists sustained a keen interest in each other's work throughout their careers. In early May 1937 Charlot traveled to Iowa to visit Houser, who at that time was reworking his design for the Ames Post Office mural.<sup>43</sup> Charlot's philosophy about mural design must have influenced Houser's thinking. In an essay for *American Scholar*, Charlot exhorted artists to adopt a particular "mural style" in response to the architectural and optical challenges of that medium. A mural artist must take into consideration not only the obvious architectural limitations of a building, such as doors and windows, he argued, but acknowledge that "there is a fitness when the space enclosed between the walls of a given room opens into a painted space similarly limited and ordered." Charlot also advised artists to employ earth tones, simple modeling, and geometrically rendered figures on a he-

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42. *Ames Daily Tribune and Times*, 4/20/1938.

43. Jean Charlot to Zohmah Day (Charlot), 5/10/1937, Jean Charlot Collection, University of Hawaii at Manoa Libraries, Honolulu, Hawaii.

roic scale to ensure legibility in their mural paintings “from both centered and lateral vision.”<sup>44</sup>

While working to transform his mural sketch into a final painting, Houser, in his correspondence with Superintendent Rowan, exhibited a deliberate sensitivity to optical and architectural considerations, suggesting an intimate familiarity with Charlot’s tenets on mural painting. In 1936 Houser faced the arduous task of modifying his competition design to accommodate a set of bulletin boards installed next to the postmaster’s door. Houser had made full use of the vertical wall space flanking the door frame in his preliminary sketch. Recognizing the challenge, the artist first appealed to the Section to intervene on his behalf in hopes that the space might be restored to its original configuration. The Section contacted the Ames postmaster regarding the matter but concluded that Houser had no choice but to redesign his composition to suit the wall’s new, limited dimensions. Houser was understandably disappointed, because his winning design now required significant revisions.<sup>45</sup>

Over the next 16 months, Houser merged the three panels of his preliminary design into a single, horizontal frieze-like composition. In a letter to Superintendent Rowan explaining the redesigned mural, Houser related how he “could find no way of using the wagon in the same scale as the man, except by reducing the whole thing to a size that would not show on the wall.” Heeding Charlot’s call for legibility in mural painting, he “dropped it.”<sup>46</sup> He also divided the elements of the central “hieroglyph” to form the basis for more elaborate scenery on each half on the mural, and he added new iconographic elements and decorative details, including the Mayan rain deity, the scientific water molecule, and ticker tape. Finally, he in-

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44. Jean Charlot, “Public Speaking in Paint,” *American Scholar* 10 (1941), 455–68. Although Charlot’s article on mural painting did not appear in print until 1941, six years after Houser conceived his design for the Ames mural competition, the two artists maintained a lasting friendship. A testament to their enduring mutual admiration is Charlot’s decision to include a reproduction of Houser’s *The Evolution of Corn* in his 1945 article, “Murals for Tomorrow,” for the journal *Art News*.

45. Correspondence between Lowell House and Edward Rowan, September–December 1936, RG 121, entry 133, box 28.

46. Houser to Rowan, 1/2/1937, RG 121, entry 133, box 28.

verted the modern Iowa farmer to face toward the center of the composition, and he reconceived the figure's pose to create greater balance and symmetry.

Houser also had success in harmonizing the updated mural design with the overall structure of the building. Recalling Charlot's pronouncement that the most successful murals are those that are "similarly limited and ordered" to their surroundings, Houser reported to Rowan that the rectangular elements of his updated composition mimicked the architectural design of the post office. Even so, he fretted about how best to harmonize his mural in the new space. In the months preceding the mural's installation, he composed a series of letters to Rowan expressing anxiety over the paint colors chosen for the post office's interior walls, explaining, "When I designed the colors of the painting I had in mind the off white tone of the plaster as it then appeared." Houser, who had followed Charlot's endorsement of earth tones, feared that the proposed color for the lobby would not coordinate with his painting. "I hope that the color chosen for the paint job will not depart too much," he added.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, Charlot's other writings, both published and unpublished, held considerable importance to Houser with regard to establishing his place in history. Charlot identified ancient Mayan mural paintings as belonging to a "truly indigenous tradition" whose legacy might easily be seen in the modern mural decorations of Mexico and the United States.<sup>48</sup> Later, he related this notion of a continuous mural tradition to his personal experience, reflecting that by digging "at the roots of Mexican art" at Chichen Itza, he had helped it in developing "some of its newest buds."<sup>49</sup> In this line of reasoning, the Mayan figure in Houser's Ames mural competition entry becomes self-referential, a clever

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47. Houser to Rowan, 7/23/1936, RG 121, entry 133, box 28; Houser to Rowan, 10/18/1937, *ibid.*; Houser to Rowan, 2/2/1938, *ibid.*; Rowan to Houser, 2/9/1938; Rowan, Memorandum to Supervising Architect, 2/18/1938, *ibid.*

48. Jean Charlot, "Mayan Art," *Magazine of Art*, July 1935; *idem*, "A Twelfth-Century Mayan Mural," *Magazine of Art*, November 1938, both reprinted in *An Artist on Art: Collected Essays of Jean Charlot*, vol. 2 (Honolulu, 1972).

49. Jean Charlot, unpublished manuscript pages (505–6) of *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920–1925* (New Haven, CT, 1963), Jean Charlot Collection, University of Hawaii at Manoa Libraries, Honolulu, Hawaii; quoted in Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican*, 103.

means by which the artist may both participate in and pay homage to this distinguished artistic lineage.

IN LATE APRIL 1938, Lowell Houser witnessed the installation of his completed mural *The Evolution of Corn* (1938) above the postmaster's door at the central post office in Ames, Iowa. The hanging of this large canvas marked for the artist the completion of a multiyear contract with the U.S. Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture. Measuring roughly 18' x 6', Houser's mural juxtaposes two figural scenes, one ancient and one modern, depicting the cultivation of corn (fig. 7).

The left section shows a tawny, muscular man bending at the waist to plunge a wooden staff tipped with an obsidian blade into the earth. Fully nude with the exception of a white loincloth, a cylindrical cloth headdress, and simple thong sandals, the man strides forward in a wide-legged stance that accentuates his well-defined muscles and toned body. Lush vertical shoots of green cornstalks surround him, indicating that his physical labor is directed at tending the maize crop. Behind him, at the base of a mature tree, is a carved stone deity representing the maize god of the ancient Mayan civilization. A large sun disc bearing the frightful visage of the Mayan rain god dominates the sky above a distant white stepped pyramid, while gray storm clouds composed of jagged lightning bolts, a sinuous serpent, and a second, ghostly image of the rain god dispense dense streams of precipitation upon the maize below.

In the right half of the composition, a modern Iowa farmer dressed in sturdy denim overalls, a long-sleeved, button-up shirt, work gloves, boots, and a brimmed denim cap mirrors the wide stance and bent posture of his Mayan counterpart. Surrounded by golden stalks and dry, bristling leaves of mature corn plants, the fair-skinned figure leans forward with a sharp-bladed sickle to manually harvest ripe ears of corn. Cascading strips of ticker-tape mimic the jungle foliage on the left, while a modern microscope takes the place of the antique stone deity. Water molecules in the form of white arrows evaporate from the distant Ames skyline. Above, a scientifically rendered sun inscribed with statistics such as the sun's surface temperature fills much of the sky, while a thin strip of clouds containing scientific instruments

spews gray sheets of rain upon the fields below. Houser's stated goal for this section was "to make a sort of modern hieroglyph of the present [scientific] explanation of the sun and rain" to complement his portrayal of Mayan cosmology on the left.<sup>50</sup> The central panel dividing these two scenes depicts a monumental ear of corn, a transparent kernel sprouting roots, and a superimposed cornstalk, encapsulating the full growth cycle of the Iowa crop, from seed embryo to ripened ear, against a vibrant red background.

According to the *Ames Daily Tribune and Times*, "a stream of curious people" visited the post office for the express purpose of viewing the mural. Reactions were favorable. Ames resident Dora Oberg, for example, called the painting "a beautiful piece of work"; C. L. Smith, an entomologist at Iowa State College, declared, "It surely is nice." Local residents praised Houser's skillful coloring and balanced composition but debated the accuracy of the modern half of the painting. Viewers puzzled over the abstracted water molecules and deplored the "unrealistic" portrayal of the modern Iowa farmer. "If that's the way you pick corn, I'd hate to live on a farm," announced S. A. Nichols, a local Ames resident who felt that Houser had represented the harvesting farmer in an exaggerated pose.<sup>51</sup> No one was quoted as questioning the appropriateness of Houser's decision to include a Mayan Indian in the mural rather than a member of an indigenous group with historical ties to Iowa.

In the Ames mural competition, Lowell Houser successfully capitalized on the widespread cultural interest in Mexico and demonstrated in his mural design a technical and thematic expertise derived from firsthand knowledge of Mexico's modern art and pre-Columbian civilizations. By depicting a scene of American antiquity and by skillfully executing color and scale, Houser successfully crafted a nationalistic history painting that not only asserts a continuity of agricultural practices from the ancient Mayans to the present day but also positions the artist as the cultural inheritor of a long-established Native American artistic tradition. In so doing, Houser conceived of a mural de-

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50. Houser to Rowan, 1/2/1937, RG 121, entry 133, box 28.

51. *Ames Daily Tribune and Times*, 4/20/1938.

sign that Superintendent Edward Rowan deemed “one of the best, most thoughtful and hence significant, sketches that has ever come in any competition.”<sup>52</sup>

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52. Edward Rowan to Louise Orwig, 3/23/1936, RG 121, entry 133, box 28.

## Book Reviews and Notices

*Stealing Indian Women: Native Slavery in the Illinois Country*, by Carl J. Ekberg. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007. xvi, 236 pp. Illustrations, maps, figures, tables, notes, index. \$38.00 cloth.

Reviewer Catherine J. Denial is assistant professor of history at Knox College. Her book manuscript, *Un/Making the Nation: Marriage and the Politics of American Expansion in Dakota and Ojibwe Country, 1805–1845*, was recently accepted for publication by the Minnesota Historical Society Press.

*Stealing Indian Women* is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarship on the myriad forms of slavery that have existed in North America. Focusing on the late seventeenth to late eighteenth centuries, Ekberg explores those areas of the Illinois country — modern-day Illinois and Missouri — settled and governed by non-Native people, with specific attention to the towns of Kaskaskia, Ste. Genevieve, and St. Louis. Through the meticulous analysis of parish documents, legal depositions, and the military and civil records of successive French, Spanish, and English regimes, Ekberg crafts a singular portrait of three bustling communities and the practices of Indian slavery that ran through each.

Ekberg's work is split into two distinct sections. The first focuses on the practice of Indian slavery in both Upper and Lower Louisiana in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Ekberg provides an exhaustive analysis of the French practice of enslaving Indian people, trading them, and governing their working conditions, balancing a global perspective on the North American colonial venture with a detailed portrait of the idiosyncratic implementation of European goals at the local level. Colonial laws, military practices, and religious rites are all given their due, but Ekberg demonstrates a shrewd understanding of local cultures — whether in New Orleans or in the small town of Ste. Genevieve, several months travel north — and the ways isolation, kinship, and neighborliness had the power to alter policy in meaningful ways.

In the book's second section, Ekberg expands this further by focusing on the "Céladon affair" — a legal drama that involved the communities of Ste. Genevieve and Kaskaskia from 1773 to 1774 and that turned upon the death of a local, kidnapped, female, Indian slave; the local woodsman who may have murdered her; a second enslaved

Indian woman who ran away from her owners at the woodsman's behest; a member of the French military who ran a sideline in liquor trading; and the new Spanish civil authorities who were technically responsible for untangling the situation. In the depositions surrounding the Céladon affair, we hear from governors, lawyers, soldiers, widows, wives, mothers, and priests; from the enslaved and the free; and from white, black, Indian, and mixed-heritage individuals. Ekberg is right to suggest that the incident provides a rare means to examine the social life of an eighteenth-century middle American community.

The first section is the strongest, blending an appreciation for new scholarship — notably Jennifer Spear's work on *métissage* in Lower Louisiana and Brett Rushforth's analysis of Indian slavery under the French regime — with a meticulous processing of French and Spanish parish and civil records. The Louisiana country that emerges from this section is an energetic, complex, far-reaching colonial enterprise — a welcome corrective to the common assumption that expansion into the Trans-Appalachian West was undertaken only by the English and their descendants. What weaknesses mar the text here are largely rooted in language. Ekberg defines marriage, for example, as a rite observed according to western strictures, whether religious or civil. This transforms all women in long-term partnerships contracted by a different means into "concubines" — a term weighted with pejorative meaning that obscures Native practices of partnership that would have existed alongside the rites of the Catholic church. Ekberg also often refers to Indian people as "red" — an archaic and pejorative term in American historical inquiry.

Section two lacks section one's energy and focus. Ekberg's narration of the Céladon affair stretches over three chapters, sometimes falling prey to repetition, and analysis of the affair is overwhelmingly reserved for the book's conclusion. What analysis is offered in the affair's earlier narration is often incidental to the kidnapping, murder, and escape with which the townspeople were dealing — a digression into the value of bear oil instead of butter in hot weather, for example; or the fortune of a deer hide after a buck had been killed. Were Ekberg seeking to undertake a wide-ranging analysis of middle American life, such details might be more pertinent. They rarely serve his articulated goal of making the Céladon affair a transparent demonstration of social and racial mixing — by choice and coercion — in this specific time and place.

Ekberg's work makes a valuable contribution to our understanding not only of Indian slavery but of the cultures of middle America in the eighteenth century. There is more work to be done here, particularly in

comparing the form and function of African slavery in the region, and the differences in an enslaved persons' experiences of bondage depending on their race and labor. Ekberg's book issues that challenge — for us to continue to think critically about community, society, rank, and cultural exchange, and to fully appreciate the wide range of human experiences rooted in the pre-United States west.

*Catlin's Lament: Indians, Manifest Destiny, and the Ethics of Nature*, by John Hausdoerffer. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009. 208 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Kate Elliott is assistant professor of art history at Luther College. Her dissertation (University of Iowa, 2009) was "Epic Encounters: First Contact Imagery in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-Century American Art."

Upon reading the title of John Hausdoerffer's slim book, *Catlin's Lament: Indians, Manifest Destiny, and the Ethics of Nature*, one might wonder if there is a need for another examination of the nineteenth-century artist, ethnographer, showman, and charlatan, George Catlin. Catlin's life and work have been chronicled in dozens of books, exhibition catalogs, scholarly articles, and dissertations since his death in 1872. This surfeit of material must be added to the copious body of work — both written and visual — that the artist himself left behind, meaning that those interested in the artist will have little difficulty satisfying their curiosity. Throughout *Catlin's Lament*, it is clear that Hausdoerffer relies on those who preceded him, but in his attempt to reconcile the many inconsistencies of the artist's life, the originality and the ultimate merit of his examination become clear, making it a worthwhile addition to the body of literature on the artist.

Scholars have struggled to make sense of the many inconsistencies in Catlin's life, his writings, and his professed beliefs. Known for his nuanced and humane portraits of Native American men and women, Catlin simultaneously bemoaned the destruction of Native culture and willingly perpetuated stereotypes of Native American savagery in exploitive public performances running in conjunction with his portrait exhibitions. Hausdoerffer explores these contradictions and explains them as evidence of Catlin's continued adherence to an ideology of expansion that governed Jacksonian America, despite his avowed commitment to Indian rights.

Each of the four chapters takes a different moment in Catlin's life when these inconsistencies rose to the surface. Hausdoerffer begins with Catlin's early career as a conventional portraitist in eastern cities, where he was exposed to Philadelphia's Enlightenment scientific

community. There, it is argued, Catlin was influenced by the emerging understanding of nature as isolated, abstracted, and something to be classified for the benefit of posterity. Hausdoerffer then examines Catlin's trips west in the 1830s, when he began documenting in earnest life he believed to be vanishing. Finally, he follows Catlin across America and to Europe as he endeavored to awaken audiences' consciousness to the plight of Native Americans.

Throughout the text, Hausdoerffer's clear prose untangles Catlin's often jumbled understanding of core concepts such as nature and culture, savage and civilized. But perhaps Hausdoerffer's greatest contribution is his nuanced examination of Catlin's lament, a specific rhetorical structure that allows one to mourn the "vanishing" Indian without confronting the reasons for the destruction. Through his art, writings, and public performances, Catlin, Hausdoerffer argues, "joins a chorus of voices preparing American audiences to accept themselves as imperialists and to explain themselves as compassionate beneficiaries of a now, though sadly, 'empty' continent" (91).

Hausdoerffer's nuanced examination offers a new way to understand George Catlin not simply as the Indians' champion nor as their exploiter, but as both. Indeed, the tension between Catlin's words and his actions betrays a man very much of his own time, one who despite his sympathies and his awareness of the destruction wrought by white culture cannot supplant his acceptance that the Indian was destined to vanish. This ability to see beyond facile dichotomies is perhaps the greatest strength of Hausdoerffer's text; scholars struggling with subjects of equal complexity can take note.

*Catlin's Lament* is not without problems, however. Catlin's opportunistic outlook, so deftly established by scholars such as Brian Dippie, receives only a cursory nod here. One must always balance Catlin's sheer ambition with his words. Far too often Hausdoerffer takes Catlin at his word, however, and fails to look critically at Catlin's published version of events. A secondary problem is a significant lack of understanding of the realities of the American art world in the 1830s and 1840s, especially the role of portraiture within that period of American history. Overall, though, Hausdoerffer has succeeded in presenting a complex man and a complex subject in an engaging and illuminating way. Readers looking for a general text on Catlin will find *Catlin's Lament* overly specific, but those interested in a cultural analysis of Jacksonian America will find it an appealing text. Scholars of American history and intellectual history will be especially interested and perhaps find in Hausdoerffer a productive model for such cultural inquiry.

*Steam and Cinders: The Advent of Railroads in Wisconsin, 1831–1861*, by Axel S. Lorenzsonn. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2009. ix, 342 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, indexes. \$29.95, cloth.

Reviewer Don L. Hofsommer is professor of history at St. Cloud State University. His many books include *Steel Trails of Hawkeyeland: Iowa's Railroad Experience* (2005).

Wisconsin, with 7,554 miles of rail line in 1920, ranked 12th at that time among states in that respect. Its steamcar evolution was typical of what happened elsewhere. Early impulses dated from 1831, but they were extremely premature. By the end of 1850, however, Wisconsin claimed 20 miles of route in service, and before initial Civil War shots were fired the state boasted 925 miles of track. *Steam and Cinders* offers to tell “the story of the first thirty years of railroads in Wisconsin” (ix). The record here is part and parcel of this country’s early railroad westering experience — exuberant boosterism with promotions running well ahead of justifiable demand for transport. Wisconsin’s population was scant, its potential traffic volume inadequate, and investment capital proved to be scarce, competitive, and expensive. Nonetheless, enthusiastic advocates at Kenosha, Racine, Milwaukee, Sheboygan, and Fond du Lac — rival places all — dreamed of innovative financing that they hoped might merge rails from a bewildering array of pioneer roads, some of them mere “paper” fantasies, others that actually threw down ties and rail upon elementary grades that, for the most part, inched horizontally across the state from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River, with a growing overlay of vertical arteries stretching northward from the Illinois frontier. Much of the focus is on Milwaukee and on Byron Kilbourn and his many errands.

*Steam and Cinders* is a useful step-by-step recitation of early railroad development in Wisconsin. It is dense with detail and with tales of rejoicing when rails finally reached one aspiring community or another. Yet the Wisconsin record is not analyzed in broad context — it is not mirrored adequately against important economic and political patterns and directions, nor is it set against the rapidly unfolding national and regional railroad network. There is a tip of the hat to the growth and development of Chicago railroads as powerful tools of urban economic imperialism skillfully employed by business barons of that muscular city, but neighboring Iowa and Minnesota are barely mentioned. Wisconsin’s railroad experience appears as if in a vacuum.

*The Underground Railroad on the Western Frontier: Escapes from Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa and the Territories of Kansas, Nebraska and the Indian Nations, 1840–1865*, by James Patrick Morgans. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2010. ix, 221 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth.

Reviewer Galin Berrier is adjunct instructor of history at Des Moines Area Community College. He is the author of "The Underground Railroad in Iowa," in *Outside In: African American History in Iowa, 1838–2000* (2001).

In this his second foray into the growing genre of Underground Railroad studies, author James Patrick Morgans seeks to illuminate as many instances as possible of freedom seekers' flights from and through the western states and territories of Arkansas, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, and Indian Territory, as well as Iowa. Since these states and territories were the origin of most of the known freedom seekers who came to or passed through Iowa, Morgans's latest effort deserves our attention.

Morgans has consulted an impressive variety of sources both contemporary and current. His intent has been to use "in all cases, if possible the bondsperson's own words to describe the escapes" (1). Sometimes these come from classic narratives by former slaves such as Henry Bibb, William Wells Brown, Henry Clay Bruce, and Samuel Ringgold Ward. Others are from Canadian newspapers, contemporary letters, and reminiscences. Morgans found especially helpful the thousands of oral histories collected by the WPA Federal Writers Project in the 1930s. As he is aware, these must be used with great care as "mostly white writers were used . . . many follow-up questions were missed . . . [and] in some cases it was obvious the interviewer had a racial agenda" (198).

As with his first book, *John Todd and the Underground Railroad* (2006), Morgans is at his best where he has done the most original research in letters, newspapers, and other primary sources, namely the Underground Railroad in and around Tabor, Percival, and Lewis in southwest Iowa. The story of the slave Eliza's escape from S. F. Nuckolls of Nebraska City to Chicago and perhaps to freedom in Canada is especially well told (99–102), but the familiar stories of the Charlotta Pyles family and the slaves of Ruel Daggs, both from southeast Iowa, are also related, as is John Brown's well-known winter trek across Iowa in 1859 with a dozen freedom seekers from western Missouri. Nothing of any significance seems to have been omitted.

Terminology is a challenge for those who write about slaves and runaways. Some have resorted to *enslaved persons* and *freedom seekers* as less pejorative, but others find these contrived and artificial. Morgans occasionally uses both terms, but commonly employs *bondsman*, *bonds-*

woman, or bondspersons. This takes a bit of getting used to, although his meaning is perfectly clear. Morgans misses no opportunity to express his outrage at the cruelty and inhumanity of American slavery, but his repeated use of the nineteenth-century abolitionist label *slaver* to describe both slaveholders and slave catchers — and almost anyone else who supported the “peculiar institution” — is perhaps a little harsh.

Morgans has written a good book, but it could have been even better had it been submitted to peer review and rigorous editing prior to publication. This would, for example, have saved him from referring to “the slave ship *Armistad*” (178) when he clearly means *Amistad*, and from consistently misspelling Fredrick Douglass’s surname with a single “s” (136–37, 196, 219). This is not a minor detail; Douglass is known to have added that second “s” to distinguish himself from his former master.

Despite these and other flaws, Morgans has produced a useful work based on wide research. Chapter four, “Iowa-Nebraska” (90–118) is the best brief yet comprehensive account of the Underground Railroad in Iowa yet published. It goes a long way toward redressing the omission of the story of the Underground Railroad in the Trans-Mississippi West from the otherwise excellent *Bound for Canaan: The Underground Railroad and the War for the Soul of America* (2005), by Ferguson Bordewich, and from other recent accounts. It is a commendable effort.

*Yankee Warhorse: A Biography of Major General Peter Osterhaus*, by Mary Bobbitt Townsend. Shades of Blue and Gray Series. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2010. xiii, 270 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95 cloth.

Reviewer Robert Wooster is Regents Professor of History at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi. His most recent book is *The American Military Frontiers: The United States Army in the West, 1783–1900* (2009).

Born in Koblenz in 1823, Peter J. Osterhaus moved to Baden following his mandatory service in the Prussian army. There he joined the short-lived liberal revolution, barely escaping with other Forty-Eighters to America. Settling with his family in Belleville, Illinois, he made and lost a fortune; the secession crisis found him working as a clerk in St. Louis. Like many of his fellow immigrants, Osterhaus, a staunch Unionist, volunteered in April 1861 for Federal service. Elected as a major in the Second Missouri Volunteer Infantry, the approachable, dependable Osterhaus went on to become the most able German American general officer of the Civil War, serving in early contests for

control of Missouri, the Vicksburg (during which he was wounded in the leg), Chattanooga, and Atlanta campaigns, Sherman's March to the Sea, and the final capture of Mobile, Alabama. Following the war, he commanded troops occupying parts of Mississippi until January 1866, leaving the army as a major general of volunteers. He held a post as U.S. consul in Lyon from 1866 to 1877, retiring to private life in his native Germany, his health nearly shattered by the aftereffects of his wound and wartime bout with malaria.

Using translated works documenting Osterhaus's early life in the Germanies, a smattering of surviving personal papers, the *Official Records*, the *Supplement to the Official Records*, the normal array of Civil War-era diaries, letters, reminiscences, and recollections, and State Department records of his overseas service, author Mary Bobbitt has written a biography befitting this capable Union officer. Although Townsend is Osterhaus's great-great-granddaughter, her portrayal, while sympathetic, never lapses into hagiography. Skilled in deploying his artillery, adamant about training his men, and dependable at gathering reliable information, Osterhaus emerges as a good, careful tactician. When he made mistakes, as he did when he blundered into a trap at Ringgold Gap laid by one of the Confederacy's best generals, Patrick R. Cleburne, Townsend acknowledges those errors.

Generally well regarded in Union military circles, Osterhaus never achieved the recognition he probably deserved during his lifetime, which has translated into his having remained largely unknown except to the most devout students of the war. Townsend attributes this to his German heritage and, relying heavily on the recent work of Thomas J. Goss, the tangled politics of the Lincoln administration. Indeed, Osterhaus seemed to perpetually draw the short straw, having the misfortune to serve under a spate of generals of mixed competence — John C. Frémont, Franz Sigel, John McClelland, Joseph Hooker, and E. R. S. Canby.

Those particularly interested in the history of Iowa will be especially interested to find that a number of Iowa regiments served under Osterhaus's commands. Moreover, Townsend does admirable work in detailing the complexities of dealing with the powerful political bloc represented by midwestern immigrants, especially Germans, in the Civil War. Finally, it is always refreshing to see that the field of history remains open to committed independent scholars such as Townsend, whose biography of Osterhaus will stand tall among those of second-echelon Civil War generals.

*Civil War Arkansas 1863: The Battle for a State*, by Mark K. Christ. Campaigns and Commanders Series 23. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. xii, 321 pp. Illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Terry L. Beckenbaugh is assistant professor of military history at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. His Ph.D. dissertation (University of Arkansas, 2001) was "The War of Politics: Samuel Ryan Curtis, Race, and the Political/Military Establishment."

Mark Christ's *Civil War Arkansas 1863* is a long overdue work of narrative history and an excellent addition to the University of Oklahoma Press's Campaigns and Commanders Series. Christ chronicles the military operations for control of the Arkansas River valley during the American Civil War in 1863. The fighting along the river valley in 1863 finally has a good history for scholars and lay readers to refer to.

The book is a straightforward, chronologically arranged monograph. It starts with a brief summary of secession in Arkansas, followed by a cursory examination of the war up to the start of 1863. According to Christ, the key to Arkansas was control of the rich Arkansas River valley, which was crucial to Arkansas's limited economic infrastructure, but was also pivotal to the control of Missouri and the Indian Territory. Christ devotes chapters to the specific military operations in the Arkansas River valley: the Battle of Arkansas Post, January 9–11, 1863 (chap. 2); the Helena campaign and battle, mid-June through July 4 (chaps. 3 and 4); the Federal campaign to capture Little Rock, mid-July to September 11 (chap. 5); the Battle of Honey Springs, Indian Territory, July 17, and the capture of Fort Smith, September 1 (chap. 6); and the Battle of Pine Bluff, October 25 (chap. 7). Christ then wraps up the book with a brief epilogue.

The narrative is easy to follow considering that there are operations going on at both ends of the Arkansas River valley throughout most of 1863. Christ handles this potentially confusing activity adroitly, focusing on the more important operations near the mouth of the Arkansas River before moving west to discuss operations further upstream. If there is a flaw in Christ's analysis — and it is more an issue of degree than omission — it is that he does not emphasize the importance to Missouri of operations in the Arkansas River valley. That is understandable because the book is titled *Civil War Arkansas 1863*, but Missouri was always on the minds of the Trans-Mississippi planners on both sides in the Civil War. Christ certainly does not ignore the influence Missouri had upon the planning of operations, but it should be stressed to a greater degree. This is a minor criticism, however. Christ makes a minor mistake when he states that Major General Frederick

Steele, Federal commander of the Little Rock Expedition, was a veteran of the Battle of Pea Ridge (155).

*Civil War Arkansas 1863* is the first modern attempt at a monograph of operations in the Arkansas River valley. The book makes a significant contribution to Iowa Civil War historiography, as most of the Federal units that participated in the campaigns discussed are from the upper Midwest, mainly Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Missouri. Iowa troops played key roles in all of the major campaigns in Arkansas, but especially at Arkansas Post and Helena.

*Prairie Republic: The Political Culture of Dakota Territory, 1879–1889*, by Jon K. Lauck. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010. xx, 281 pp. Illustrations, map, notes, bibliographical note, index. \$32.95 cloth.

Reviewer David A. Walker is professor of history at the University of Northern Iowa and regularly teaches courses on the American West. He is a coauthor of the *Biographical Directory of American Territorial Governors* (1984).

The tone of early twenty-first-century partisan political action and commentary is frequently in the background of this study of late nineteenth-century political culture. Jon Lauck has a personal stake in the topic: raised on a farm near Madison, South Dakota, he left the state to earn a Ph.D. in history from the University of Iowa and a law degree from the University of Minnesota, and then returned to practice law and teach at South Dakota State University. Lauck is currently senior advisor to U.S. Senator John Thune (R-SD).

The author's clearly stated intention is to counter the new western history's focus "on episodes of terror and destruction and images of conquest and savagery" (5). A Turnerian, Lauck argues that there is a "collective need to take American democratic institutions more seriously" (xvi). He seeks to provide balance and complexity to the story and to gain recognition of a genuinely democratic movement in Dakota Territory. His settlers "vigorously embraced American democratic practices and centuries-old republican tradition . . . personal virtue . . . commonwealth over personal gain, . . . and the agrarian tradition" (5).

The central theme repeated through the book is that southern Dakota Territory east of the Missouri River (he uses the broader term Dakota Territory despite differences from the northern and western sections) was fundamentally an extension of the Midwest, the major source of Dakota immigrants. Dakota Territory's founders were agents of civic responsibility (republicanism) and Protestant Christianity influenced by the American Revolution and Civil War. Following the massive immigration of the Dakota Boom, fully under way by 1883,

residents grew increasingly unhappy with corruption among appointed territorial officials and minimal local control inherent in the territorial system.

Lauck writes, "The republican faith of these midwestern immigrants formed the bedrock of Dakota Territory's political culture" (9). This was visibly reflected in local institutions, cultural activities, and events leading to statehood. Public education emphasized civic virtue, American history and literature, the Constitution, and democratic traditions. Protestant Christianity, dominated by Congregationalists and Episcopalians, was another powerful influence on Dakota settlers. Patriotic parades and celebrations along with the influence of the Grand Army of the Republic contributed to the cultural environment.

Clearly, the most visible example of Dakota settlers' commitment to American democratic ideals was reflected in three constitutional conventions that met in Sioux Falls during September 1883, September 1885, and July 1889. With emphasis on the precedent-setting 1883 meeting, Lauck concludes that delegates did not pursue "revolutionary" policies, including the most contentious issues of prohibition and woman suffrage. Instead they emphasized limiting government power, denouncing the territorial system, ending corruption, promoting agrarian ideals based on small yeoman farmers, and recognizing the importance of Protestant Christianity.

Creation of two states resulted from passage of the Omnibus Bill of 1889. The primary stumbling block was congressional Democrats' fear of adding more Republican senators and representatives. Additional opposition came from the Northern Pacific Railroad Company, which dominated the northern reaches of the territory and whose leadership feared tighter regulation from a state legislature. Territorial Governor Nehemiah Ordway (1880–1884) often appeared as an agent of the Northern Pacific and thus opposed statehood. According to Lauck, Ordway epitomized the plunder and corruption of appointed officials and revealed contempt for republican ideals. Evidence of corruption led President Chester Arthur to replace Ordway with Gilbert Pierce (not Louis Church as Lauck indicates on page 107).

Lauck offers an alternative interpretation that challenges Howard Lamar's classic *Dakota Territory, 1861–1889: A Study of Frontier Politics* (1956). Lamar concluded that "an elite" controlled all three constitutional conventions and that delegates were dismissive of corporate and railroad regulations and failed to adopt "radical innovations." Lauck shows that rather than being controlled by an "oligarchy," the statehood process reflected economic and social diversity among convention delegates and widespread public support for the final docu-

ments. Territorial voters approved all three constitutions by margins that increased from 29 to 91 percent. Lauck counters Lamar's criticism of the delegates' rejection of reforms such as prohibition and woman suffrage, arguing that the action "was primarily based on cultural objections and pragmatism, not the economic self-interest of statehood advocates" (135).

Lauck readily admits support of early twenty-first-century conservative politics in his approach to scholarly interpretation. Thus it is difficult to fully accept his claim that "I organized the book based on my reaction to what I found" after "perusing the historical sources" (22). Yet this study is built on a thorough reading of primary as well as secondary sources: newspapers as well as governmental, organizational, and personal documents. The publisher provided an interesting set of contemporary photographs and maps. Unfortunately, several elements may confuse readers. Lauck implies that the Great Sioux Reservation was created in 1877 rather than in 1868. The map on page 12, labeled "the railroad network in Dakota Territory" in 1889, shows only eastern South Dakota, falsely implying that there were no railroads elsewhere in the territory. Despite these minor quibbles, this is a well-written, thoughtful analysis of the political culture in one of the largest U.S. territories.

*The State We're In: Reflections on Minnesota History*, edited by Annette Atkins and Deborah L. Miller. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2010. viii, 337 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95 paper.

Reviewer Marvin Bergman has edited the *Annals of Iowa* since 1987. He is also the editor of the *Iowa History Reader* (1996, 2008) and a coeditor of *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa* (2008).

*The State We're In* reflects the diverse approaches to state history that are possible in the present environment — from a close literary and historical analysis of some early accounts of hunting expeditions by Henry Hastings Sibley, later to become one of Minnesota's most influential citizens and its first governor (there's a similar analysis of prognostications of Minnesota's future by Sibley and two other prominent Minnesotans in the 1850s), to a memoir of a flood in Marshall in 1957. There is even a wonderful piece of short fiction that ends the volume, though it's not clear whether it is set in the past, and its setting vaguely somewhere in Minnesota is not important to the story's development. This diversity makes for an apt celebration of Minnesota's sesquicentennial — the volume originated in a conference held in 2008, the

state's actual sesquicentennial year — but it's not entirely clear what other purpose this unfocused collection of brief essays might serve.

That said, the rich opening essays (after the editors' introduction) by James H. Madison and Paula M. Nelson, reflecting on the current state of state history from a regional (Madison) and local (Nelson) perspective are worth the price of the book. While insisting on the importance of state history, Madison refuses to yield to the temptation to justify its importance by pointing to some set of images or values that midwesterners (or Minnesotans or Iowans) supposedly share. He also cautions against a narrative of progress, "comfort history . . . that makes us feel good about ourselves and our home place as it submerges and hides other stories that might cause discomfort" (22). Nelson adds a caution against seeing humans acting in history only as part of groups (the working class, Norwegians, Anglo-Saxon Protestants). Instead, she makes a case for a "humanities-based history [that] never forgets the essential humanity of its subjects and the commonalities that bring us together, despite race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class, and other differences" (28). She also balances Madison's warning against "comfort history" with a cautious endorsement of "exceptionalism" in state and local history. "The 'exceptional,'" she writes, "often provides powerful stories for us and can serve as motivating examples, or warnings, to those who study them" (30).

Otherwise, the volume includes topics and approaches for nearly every taste: essays on the "forgotten" St. Peters Treaty of 1837 and the U.S.–Dakota War of 1862, essays that harshly judge the white settlers, seconded by a personal essay by the descendant of Irish settlers who benefited from the displacement of indigenous peoples even if they did not participate directly; a plea to tell and preserve stories connected to the Mississippi River; scholarly perspectives on baseball teams at Indian boarding schools in the early twentieth century and on African Americans in the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression; a defense of the authenticity of the controversial Kensington Runestone; a summary of the Civil War correspondence of two brothers who had contrasting perspectives on their service in the First Minnesota Battery; an apologia for a career in public history; a close analysis of a seemingly simple posed office photograph from 1901; and an account of what one can learn from a close reading of local and ethnic cookbooks. And this is just a sampling of the 24 essays included in the volume — a rich feast for those interested in a taste of Minnesota history and perhaps a suggestive appetizer for those more interested in the history of surrounding states.

*People of the Sturgeon: Wisconsin's Love Affair with an Ancient Fish*, by Kathleen Schmitt Kline, Ronal M. Bruch, and Frederick P. Binkowski, with photographs by Bob Rashid. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2009. xii, 292 pp. Illustrations (mostly color), timeline, appendix, notes, illustration credits, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer Gordon O. Hendrickson is retired State Archivist for the State Historical Society of Iowa.

*People of the Sturgeon* is a well-written history of the relationship between the people of Wisconsin's Lake Winnebago area, especially the Fox and Wolf River valleys, and the ancient freshwater lake sturgeon. The story of Wisconsin's sturgeon fishery demonstrates the value of implementing careful conservation practices to ensure the long-term preservation of a species. This coffee-table-style book looks at the role of sturgeon in Native American culture, explores the impact of sturgeon during Wisconsin's pioneer period, and details the evolution of a sport fishery dependent on careful regulation for its continued existence. Nineteenth-century exploitation, especially a demand for caviar, brought freshwater sturgeon near to extinction, but a handful of conservationists led efforts to regulate sturgeon fishing in Wisconsin. *People of the Sturgeon* documents the effort to create and enforce effective regulations to preserve the sturgeon fishery. Despite initial resistance, state regulations slowly became accepted in the Lake Winnebago area and, with the aid of citizen support organizations, lake sturgeon now prosper.

*People of the Sturgeon* is well written, heavily illustrated, and well documented. Sidebars throughout the book provide enjoyable stories of individuals, organizations, and traditions related to this special fish.

*Somewhere to Belong*, by Judith Miller. Daughters of Amana Series. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 2010. 364 pp. \$14.99 paper.

*Love Finds You in Homestead, Iowa*, by Melanie Dobson. Love Finds You Series. Minneapolis: Summerside Press, 2010. 345 pp. \$12.99 paper.

Reviewer Jonathan G. Andelson is professor of anthropology at Grinnell College. He has researched and written extensively about the Amana Colonies.

The *Annals of Iowa* does not normally publish reviews of fiction, but as the Amana Colonies are a virtual Iowa icon, an exception was made for these two novels set in the colonies' past. This review will not deal with the literary merits of these books, but only with their relevance to Iowa history.

The Amana Colonies were established in 1855 in Iowa County by members of the Community of True Inspiration, a separatist group of German Pietists whose origins date to 1714. The Inspirationists believed that divinely inspired "instruments of God" (*Werkzeuge*) walked the earth and lived among them, conveying God's warnings, admonitions, and promises. The members accepted these "testimonies of the Spirit" as second only to the Bible as beacons for a spiritual life. Aside from the *Werkzeuge*, leadership was in the hands of lay elders. Inspirationists were pacifists, refused to swear oaths, and did not practice baptism. In 1843, in response to divine command delivered through the *Werkzeug* Christian Metz, a substantial portion of the group emigrated to the vicinity of Buffalo, New York, where they established themselves as the Ebenezer Society and adopted community of goods in imitation of the Apostolic community. Removal to Iowa, also at Metz's instigation, was completed by 1863. A mixed economy based on agriculture, manufacturing, and craft work characterized both Ebenezer and Amana. Metz died in 1867, and the last *Werkzeug*, Barbara Landmann, in 1883. In 1932 the members voted to discontinue community of goods and reaffiliate as shareholders in a joint-stock corporation, allowing private property, wage work, and private enterprise. The community's religious aspects remained substantially unchanged.

*Somewhere to Belong*, set in 1877, is the story of two young women, one an Amana native, the other the only child of a Chicago physician and his wife who move to Amana on a trial basis (with the permission of the elders), hoping eventually to become full-fledged members of the community. The book's chapters alternate between the two girls' perspectives on their intertwined lives, narrated against a backdrop of the conflicting attractions of life in a quiet, peaceful, religious community and life in the more exciting, more diverse, but decidedly more selfishly individualistic outside world. The plot weaves through a labyrinth of family tensions, secrets, romantic love, and Christian faith.

*Love Finds You in Homestead, Iowa* can be described in nearly the same terms, except the story takes place in 1894 and the main protagonists are a young Amana woman and a slightly older man who unceremoniously arrives in the colonies on a freight train out of Chicago, unemployed and accompanied by his desperately ill four-year-old daughter. The young woman is the first to see them near the depot in Homestead (one of seven villages of the Amana Colonies). She hurries them to the village physician, who diagnoses diphtheria and promptly quarantines the child, her father, and the Amana woman. A subplot of possible embezzlement by the man during his days as a bank teller in Chicago supplies the tension in this "love finds you" story.

The authors have done their history homework. Both cite the Amana Heritage Society and others for help in understanding Amana history, and there are literally hundreds of accurate historical details in both books: common property, communal dining, the village *Bruderrat* (Elders Council), the “mill race” that brought water to the Amana mills, the preference for celibacy, the one-year waiting period following an engagement, the calico dresses, the *Kinderschule* where young children were cared for while their parents worked, the sheep flock in East Amana, the presence of hired help in Amana, and the young members’ curiosity about the world outside the colonies. Readers unfamiliar with Amana will not be misled by what is in the books.

On the other hand, both authors leave out important facts. In 1877, the year of Miller’s story, the last of Amana’s divinely inspired “instruments of God” still lived and, despite her age, would have been a commanding presence in the colonies, but she is not mentioned in the novel. Also absent is any reference to the Amanans’ refusal to swear oaths, serve in the military, or baptize children (or adults), their observance of the love feast (including the office of footwashing), or their millennial expectations — all central to their religion but decidedly heterodox in terms of “mainstream” Christianity. It is as if Miller avoided anything controversial about Amana religion, even though the religious character of the community is her central motif. Miller also chooses not to deal with the historically salient issue of language (German in Amana), except to distractingly insert the occasional German word: “A gut spot, ja?” (105) or “Look at the waste of gut food” (122). Dobson is more careful about the German and includes a brief explanation of the “instruments” and Amana history near the end of the novel, although she, too, skirts the other distinctive features of Amana religion.

Because the action in both novels takes place in a single year, readers do not get any feel for Amana *history* in the sense of change through time. For that reason, the term “historical fiction” is perhaps not appropriate for either book. More accurate would be “historically situated fictional ethnography.”

The two novels are part of a literary genre dubbed “bonnet fiction” — especially nostalgic, sentimental novels about the Amish — by the publicists at Bethany House. Summerside Press describes itself as “an inspirational publisher offering fresh, irresistible books to uplift the heart and engage the mind” (4), and Bethany House, on its Web site, gives as its purpose “to help Christians apply biblical truth in all areas of life — whether through a well-told story, a challenging devotional, or the message of an illustrated children’s book.” Both novels satisfy these goals in ways that are generally respectful of Amana history.

*A Summer to Be: A Memoir by the Daughter of Hamlin Garland*, by Isabel Garland Lord, edited by Keith Newlin. Bison Books. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. 424 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$23.95 paper.

Reviewer Marcia Noe is professor of English and director of women's studies at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. She is a senior editor of *The Dictionary of Midwestern Literature* (2001).

Hamlin Garland, Pulitzer Prize-winning author and Wisconsin native, wrote eight volumes of autobiography, in addition to works of realist midwestern fiction, such as *Main-Traveled Roads*, which draws on his childhood on a farm near Osage, Iowa. His elder daughter's memoir complements his own writings and enlarges our understanding of this prolific author, lecturer, and crusader for social justice by illuminating his roles as an overprotective and controlling yet loving and generous husband and father in middle and old age. Isabel writes engagingly of the idyllic childhood and teen years she and her sister experienced as the pampered daughters of a best-selling novelist, but focuses mainly on her early stage career and romantic relationships with and marriages to Hardesty Johnson and Mindret Lord.

Scholars of midwestern history, literature, and culture will value her anecdotes about Chicago Renaissance figures such as her uncle, sculptor Lorado Taft, and novelist Henry Blake Fuller; they will also appreciate her tales of the family's summer sojourns in England, where they socialized with Conrad, Shaw, Galsworthy, and their contemporary cultural luminaries, as an index of Garland's importance in his own time. Keith Newlin's superb introduction and notes contextualize the memoir and make it a valuable addition to Garland scholarship.

*Good, Reliable, White Men: Railroad Brotherhoods, 1877–1917*, by Paul Michel Taillon. The Working Class in American History Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009. xi, 266 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$75.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper.

Reviewer John Williams-Searle is director of the Center for Citizenship, Race, and Ethnicity Studies at the College of St. Rose. He is the author of "Courting Risk: Disability, Masculinity, and Liability on Iowa's Railroads, 1868–1900" (*Annals of Iowa*, 1999).

Most labor historians characterize the Big Four railroad brotherhoods — the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers (BLE), the Order of Railway Conductors (ORC), the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen (BLF), and the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen (BRT) — as conservative "bread-and-butter" business unions. Paul Taillon, however, argues that the Big Four played an important role in reorienting the relationship

between labor, capital, and the state at the beginning of the twentieth century, moving workers from an era of labor-management relations governed by the courts to a system of free collective bargaining regulated by federal legislation.

The railroad brotherhoods began in the 1860s as fraternal organizations devoted to advancing the interests of highly skilled white male railroaders. They saw themselves as equal to anyone, particularly the nation's railroad managers. Accused of being "aristocrats of labor," they rejected government interference in the labor-capital relationship and relied on the courts for relief. Labor historians have thus concluded that the Big Four lacked a transformative class consciousness and sacrificed broad worker solidarity across craft lines for an insular vision of middle-class fraternalism. Taillon's work, however, demands that we reexamine the Big Four.

After they experienced the full power of the federal injunction during the 1888 Burlington Strike, the Big Four drastically changed their perspective regarding the federal government's role in the labor-capital relationship. When courts used the Sherman Antitrust Act to rein in labor and left the power of the railroad corporations unchecked, railroaders realized that they could not bargain as equals with railroad managers. Thus, the Big Four demanded a federal system that would protect the rights of workers and acknowledge their importance as independent citizens within the republic. Taillon demonstrates that the Erdman Act (1898) was the brotherhoods' first successful leverage of their political power to force federal intervention on behalf of railway workers.

Taillon's examination of the Big Four's political engagement reveals that railroad brotherhoods were both class conscious and increasingly militant. By 1900, the brotherhoods abandoned their fraternal origins, becoming more politically savvy and increasing their relevance. Brotherhood members maintained that their relationship to capital should be based on working-class activism mediated by the state, rather than collective bargaining based on their status as individual men. This class-conscious new liberalism and the political lobbying that it occasioned led to the passage of important new federal legislation, such as the Newlands Act (1913) and the Adamson Act (1916). The latter established an eight-hour day for railroaders and was characterized as labor's Magna Charta, freeing railway workers from their "railroad lords" (202). Railway workers thus stood at the vanguard of defending workers' rights. Taillon concludes that the Big Four's shift from fraternal unionism to political engagement played a significant, and heretofore unrecognized, role in modern labor-capital-state relations.

Taillon notes that when railroaders pressured the state, the outcome was not always progressive. The Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, for example, used state power to help them expel African American brakemen from their ranks through an amendment to the 1934 Railway Labor Act that undermined black union representation (206). Moreover, the Big Four did act for themselves first; changing labor's playing field vis-à-vis the state was not the primary reason that they developed an effective legislative presence. Taillon, however, shows that unintended results can still be critically important.

His main argument is skillfully demonstrated and a significant achievement, but his deft handling of gender in the earlier chapters is not sustained in later chapters. The first third of the book offers important insights about gender and work culture, suggesting that women played an important role in transforming railroaders' ideas about themselves as men. His connection of the domestic world with the shop floor is an exciting development in a historiography relatively devoid of gendered analysis. However, Taillon drops this promising analysis midway through the book, transitioning into a standard narrative institutional history. Taillon suggests that the Big Four's turn to politics necessitated the devaluing of the fraternal manly ideals that had helped to launch the railroad brotherhoods, but I'm not convinced that railroaders suddenly stopped debating the meanings of railroad manhood in 1898 and even less convinced that their wives had nothing to say.

That caveat aside, Taillon has written an impressive and useful history that sweeps aside a long-standing misreading of the origins of twentieth-century unionism. He has produced a book that is indispensable not just for historians of railroad labor, but for labor historians as well as historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era and the development of the twentieth-century state.

*Making Capitalism Safe: Work Safety and Health Regulation in America, 1880–1940*, by Donald W. Rogers. The Working Class in American History Series. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009. viii, 275 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$55.00 cloth.

Reviewer James D. Schmidt is professor of history at Northern Illinois University. He is the author of *Free to Work: Labor Law, Emancipation, and Reconstruction, 1815–1880* (1998) and *Industrial Violence and the Legal Origins of Child Labor* (2010).

A growing literature in U.S. history addresses the accident crisis of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an era when the violence

of industrialization threatened to overwhelm daily life. These studies have often centered on how that crisis remade the American state and the broader culture of modernity. Many scholars have investigated workers compensation, but less attention has been paid to the actual administration of workplace health and safety regulations. Donald W. Rogers's new book does an excellent job of remedying this deficit.

The book began in the early 1980s as an investigation of the Wisconsin Industrial Commission, and that genesis is apparent in its overall argument. Aimed at the debates then raging about the interplay of "state and society," Rogers comes down on neither side. Instead, he argues that Wisconsin's system was neither "captured" by modern industry, nor was it the product of "pluralistic" negotiations among business, labor, and the state. Rather, it took on a cast of "left-corporate liberalism" (6). Expanding on his initial study, Rogers looks into health and safety administrations in five other states: Ohio, California, New York, Illinois, and Alabama. In doing so, he finds that "federalism perpetuated a checkerboard of safety law programs, not a duplication of Wisconsin's 'left-corporate liberal' approach" (7). As a result, one of the Midwest's shining moments in American political history loses a bit of its luster. All in all, however, Rogers concludes that a moderately effective state-based system of regulation grew in the early twentieth century, spanning the gap between the private law resolutions of the nineteenth century and the federal programs of the later twentieth century.

Early on in the book, Rogers admirably traces the development of classical jurisprudence regarding workplace safety, duly noting the limitations on liability that common law jurists erected. Still, he valuably notes that the "due care" standard that arose across the nineteenth century did lay the conceptual groundwork for later regulations. After this initial survey, much of the narrative focuses on the politics of health and safety in Wisconsin, using coverage of the other five states as a way to judge Wisconsin's representativeness. Contrary to much of the prevailing literature, Rogers finds that Wisconsin's progressive ideals were not imitated whole-cloth in other areas. While certainly true in terms of actual administration, one wonders whether the motivations Rogers notes did obtain in other states. The political and academic progressives who designed Wisconsin's system did so "largely to secure business and labor cooperation with executive leaders' pursuit of industrial and political stability" (33). Such a viewpoint suggests that Rogers's story supports older interpretations of progressivism, which stress its mild, reformist, even conservative thrust.

In the book's most fascinating passages, the author details educational campaigns to sell safety to business and labor, noting that work-

ers themselves sometimes resisted safety administration. Organized labor, however, largely supported the measures, yet it was a change in the thrust of the labor movement that eventually helped to undermine the state-based system of regulation. The political retrenchment of the 1920s stalled the expansion of health and safety programs, but it was the Great Depression and the turn to collective bargaining that marked the turn away from non-federal regulation. As to the effectiveness of all of this for actual health and safety, including occupational diseases such as silicosis, Rogers is uncertain. Government activity occurred, but declining death, injury, and disease rates could have come from changes in industrial practice. As a result, the coming of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration in 1975 serves as a coda to the book and to the larger story as well.

In general, the book is well done, if somewhat narrowly focused. More attention might have been paid to the lives of actual workers, the activities of progressive organizations, or changes in medicine. The attention to other states is beneficial, but the story is still largely centered on Wisconsin, without much direct investigation of the social, political, or economic contexts of the other states. For instance, how might working conditions in a Jim Crow state such as Alabama have differed? Such questions suggest areas for further research, especially in states such as Iowa that were not as heavily industrialized as some others. Anyone undertaking such inquiries will want to start with Rogers's account.

*For the Freedom of Her Race: Black Women and Electoral Politics in Illinois, 1877–1932*, by Lisa G. Materson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009. xv, 344 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$42.00 cloth.

Reviewer Virginia R. Boynton is professor of history at Western Illinois University. Her research and publications have focused on women's involvement in Illinois's government-sponsored war effort during World War I.

African American history during the Jim Crow era has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years, as has the history of women during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. In this important new study, historian Lisa Materson joins these two fields, while simultaneously contributing to the historiography on political culture in modern America and on Illinois and the Midwest. Drawing on a wide range of manuscript sources, government documents, newspapers and periodicals, and published primary and secondary sources, the author documents the impact of black women who migrated to Illinois

(primarily Chicago) on state and national politics, especially through the Republican Party. She demonstrates that as voters, campaigners, and lobbyists black women supported candidates and elected officials who kept alive the effort to enforce civil rights for African Americans in the United States. More broadly, these women made a significant contribution to promoting the GOP ideology that federal power should be used to protect the citizenship rights of African Americans, in the South as well as the North.

Starting with the first statewide election in Illinois in which women were allowed to vote — the 1894 election of University of Illinois Board of Trustee members (the 1891 Woman Suffrage Bill legalized women's voting for school-related offices in Illinois) — and continuing through multiple political battles at the local, state, and national levels until the early New Deal, Materson traces the pivotal roles played by some of the state's black female activists, including Ella Berry, Jennie Lawrence, Irene Goins, and Irene McCoy Gaines, in GOP politics. The author illuminates the myriad ways black women organized support for the nomination and election of sympathetic candidates — most of them white, many of them women — for local, state, and national positions. While often disappointed with the subsequent actions (or inaction) of some of these elected representatives, these politically active — and politically savvy — black GOP women continued to seek out and support those who offered the best chance of garnering government support for at least some part of their cause. White Republicans such as Ruth Hanna McCormick, elected to Congress in 1928 in large part because of the efforts of the Colored Women's Republican Clubs of Illinois (CWRCI), did not always come through for their black supporters, but did at times provide strong support for important causes, including the struggle against lynching.

Materson's analysis of black GOP women's involvement in the anti-lynching campaign is one of the strengths of this study. Her analysis of their roles in this legislative campaign is comprehensive. Working through local women's clubs affiliated with the National Association of Colored Women, Illinois's black women successfully pressured their state's congressional representatives to support the anti-lynching bill introduced by Missouri GOP Congressman Leonidas Dyer. The U.S. House of Representatives, with support from Illinois congressmen, passed the Dyer Anti-Lynching Bill in 1922, before that year's congressional mid-term elections. However, the Dyer Bill was threatened with a filibuster by the Democratic minority in the U.S. Senate, and the Republican leadership withdrew it from Senate consideration once the 1922 mid-term elections were over. Materson traces the im-

pact that this loss had on the black Republican women of Illinois, who subsequently determined that because their efforts to get as many newly enfranchised women to the polls as possible in 1920 and 1922 elections did not lead to policy change in the federal government's commitment to protect black citizens' rights, they needed to establish a formal organization dedicated solely to that purpose. Consequently, the CWRCI was established in 1924 and remained active and influential in Illinois GOP politics throughout the next decade.

In her conclusion, Materson highlights the irony of the experience of black GOP women in Illinois; she notes that "just as they had built up effective Republican organizations, forces beyond their control drew black voters toward the Democratic Party" (239) in the early years of the New Deal response to the Great Depression. Nonetheless, as the author argues, black Republican women played a crucial role in keeping alive within their party during these decades a commitment to black civil rights during the turn-of-the-century nadir in American race relations.

*The Man Who Wrecked 146 Locomotives: The Story of "Head-On Joe" Connolly*, by James J. Reisdorff. David City, NE: South Platte Press, 2009. 48 pp. Illustrations, bibliography. \$19.95 paper.

Reviewer Chris Rasmussen is associate professor of history at Fairleigh Dickinson University. In "Progress and Catastrophe: Public History at the Iowa State Fair, 1854-1946" (*Annals of Iowa*, 2004), he wrote about staged train wrecks and other staged catastrophes at the Iowa State Fair.

In 1896 tens of thousands of spectators paid to gape as two 60-ton locomotives collided head-on in front of the grandstand at the Iowa State Fair. The engines' earth-shaking collision launched the singular career of Joseph S. Connolly, who staged 73 train wrecks at fairgrounds across the nation between 1896 and 1932. James J. Reisdorff has done a remarkable job of tracing Connolly's exploits, from his small-town Iowa boyhood to his final train wreck at the 1932 Iowa State Fair. Reisdorff has unearthed hard-to-find accounts of Connolly's staged train wrecks, and his book contains dozens of photographs, sketches, and advertisements depicting these destructive spectacles.

Reisdorff's book is not merely a collection of historical curiosities, but attempts to explain the psychological and social factors that made staged train wrecks so popular. "Head-On Joe" Connolly probably never read Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis, but he intuitively understood his audience, observing that "somewhere in the makeup of every normal person there lurks the suppressed desire to smash things up" (9).

Train wrecks not only stirred a deep psychological response in viewers but also suggested that America's rapid and sweeping industrialization in the late nineteenth century had not been achieved without considerable costs. In the mid-nineteenth century, locomotives became the embodiment of speed, power, and technological progress. Yet that progress exacted a ghastly price, as thousands of Americans were injured or killed annually in railroad and industrial accidents. The popularity of harrowing newspaper accounts of accidents and stage plays about historic disasters attest to many Americans' morbid fascination with catastrophe. Connolly went the journalists and dramatists one better, offering his audience the sight and sound of two locomotives actually hurtling into one another, resulting in a mass of crumpled steel.

Reisdorff attributes the waning popularity of staged train wrecks to several causes. When Connolly staged his 73rd and final collision at the 1932 Iowa State Fair, Americans were still reeling from the "great crash," and the spectacle of gratuitous destruction seemed grotesquely wasteful in a nation in which one of four workers was unemployed. Americans' fascination with destruction had not entirely evaporated, but was now satisfied by newer technologies, such as automobile and airplane daredevils and motion pictures. In an era of rapidly advancing technology and streamlined design, mighty steam locomotives were no longer the emblem of technological progress but had become obsolete, and their final stop was the scrap heap. Yet, even at the outset of the twenty-first century, their legacy endures, and we still sigh that a needless political, social, or personal disaster is, of course, a train wreck.

*Horse-Drawn Days: A Century of Farming with Horses*, by Jerry Apps. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2010. xii, 199 pp. Illustrations (many in color), appendixes, notes, index. \$24.95 paper.

Reviewer Pamela Riney-Kehrberg is professor and chair of history at Iowa State University. She is the author of *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (2005).

Jerry Apps grew up in central Wisconsin, farming with horses. In this colorful, highly illustrated book, he has brought together a wealth of information about farming before the tractor. Part one, titled "A Time for Horses," tackles a number of important issues, such as a history of horses, draft horses, and draft-horse equipment, the relation of horses to people, and the current use of draft horses. In part two, "A Horse Farming Year," he follows the use of horses throughout the agricultural calendar, detailing their use at each time of the year. He inter-

sperses his own family story with horses, as well as other oral histories, with a more general discussion of the use of draft horses in America.

*Horse-Drawn Days* is an engagingly written, very interesting volume, useful to anyone concerned with the rural and agricultural history of the Midwest. It is also worth picking up just to look at the beautiful illustrations, drawn largely from the collections of the Wisconsin Historical Society. Apps has chosen an intriguing selection of images, some photographs of horses at work, some advertising art featuring draft animals and implements to be used with them. Particularly interesting are full-color ads from McCormick-Deering, the Johnston Harvester Company, and International Harvester. The book is well worth a look and a read.

*Barns of Wisconsin*, by Jerry Apps, with photographs by Steve Apps. Places along the Way Series. Madison: Wisconsin Historical Society Press, 2010. xvi, 208 pp. Illustrations (most in color), map, appendixes, notes, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

Reviewer James R. Shortridge is professor of geography at the University of Kansas. His many publications include *The Middle West: Its Meaning in American Culture* (1989) and "Kansas Barns in Time and Place" (*Kansas History*, 1999).

Coffee-table books that celebrate elements of the past are common fare. Most of these are beautifully designed, but lack informative commentary. *Barns of Wisconsin*, a collaboration between a professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin and his photographer son, is a delightful exception. A reader's eye is drawn initially to more than a hundred color photographs nicely reproduced on quality, 8"x10" paper. Jerry Apps's words are arguably even more valuable. They occupy about half the book and provide historical and cultural context that brings the photographs to life.

The quality of *Barns of Wisconsin* derives in part from experience, for the book first appeared in 1977, with Jerry Apps providing captions for sketches and drawings done by Madison architect Allen Strang. The original book was modest, but successful, and inspired Apps to expand the project after Strang's death. Four of the earlier sketches reappear in the new edition (pp. 56, 73, 121, 145), but photographs now carry the visual message. Supplementing the contemporary shots by the junior Apps are several dozen historical ones drawn from the files of the Wisconsin Historical Society. Each contains a full caption, providing specific locations and insights.

The book includes twelve chapters and two appendixes. Opening essays discuss the significance of barns and their major forms (ethnic

and pioneer, two-level bank, and circular designs). Then come chapters on roof types, building materials, timber framing, decoration, and unique creations. Finally, the scale expands with discussions of silos, farmstead layout, and preservation. Each chapter is short (about 14 pages) and well balanced between text and illustration. Each also includes a half-page sidebar about a particular related issue such as the stovewood barns of Door County, precut kits available from Sears, and preference for the color red. One appendix lists barns on the National Register of Historic Places. The other maps these structures plus those shown in the contemporary photographs.

Jerry Apps is an impressive author. He knows his material through personal experience and academic training and possesses a graceful, storyteller's voice. The book offers no original research on the distribution of barn types or the success of preservation efforts, but is trustworthy on details of construction and use. The stress always is on the classic structures of the past rather than modern equivalents such as canvas-walled dairy buildings and plastic-tube silos. Some readers may question this orientation, but it allows space to explain many nearly forgotten aspects of rural life. I learned, for example, how builders installed hayforks early in the construction process so as to lift shingles easily to the roof; how an African American, Algo Shivers, built most of Vernon County's famous round barns; and how the assembly of bents for a typical barn might take a crew three or four weeks.

Iowans will find this book useful. Iowa's barns are similar, and the text can help residents better interpret them, including the ones beautifully photographed by Michael P. Harker for *Harker's Barns* (2003).

*Birth Control on Main Street: Organizing Clinics in the United States, 1916–1939*, by Cathy Moran Hajo. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2010. xi, 251 pp. Maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. \$75.00 cloth. \$25.00 paper.

Reviewer Rose Holz is a historian and assistant professor of practice in women's and gender studies at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. She is the author of *The Birth Control Clinic in a Marketplace World* (forthcoming).

Before I begin, I need to come clean: Cathy Moran Hajo is a friend of mine and because of the similarity of our research interests, we have read much of each other's work. I am delighted therefore that her book has finally come out because Hajo adds new stories to and challenges long-held assumptions about the oft-told tale of Margaret Sanger and the early twentieth-century birth control movement. She

does so by framing her analysis around the local birth control clinic. Not content, moreover, to analyze just one or several clinics within a given locale (as others have done), Hajo examines more than 600 facilities across the nation. Her account is thematically arranged — in terms of the clinics' relationships with activists, patients, national birth control organizations, and the federal government, as well as their intersections with eugenics and racial politics — and it covers the first boom of clinic establishment, which began in the teens and peaked in the 1930s during the Great Depression.

What, then, does she find? First, Hajo forces us to move beyond Margaret Sanger and the American Birth Control League as the source of the movement's success. It was the clinic, after all, that local organizers seized upon with gusto, and it was the clinic that legitimated the cause locally while simultaneously working to satisfy women's unmet birth control needs. Second, her focus also dispels any notion that most clinics "behaved like smaller versions of Margaret Sanger's first doctor-run establishment" (3). Instead, the institution was far more malleable, as much a product of local needs and constraints as it was of directives from the national office. Third, a focus on the clinic invites readers to understand, and to differentiate between, what activists *said* and what they *did* (3). While much has been made of the movement's benevolence and its racist and eugenicist underpinnings, seeing what happened inside the local clinic suggests how complicated the relationship between ideas and practice was. As a result, the clinic comes off as a complex and dynamic institution, full of as much life as it was of institutional rules.

Hajo's discussion of race is especially interesting. Without forgiving any of the movement's prejudices, she takes aim at those who portray the clinic as simply a tool to reduce the numbers of some populations. Certainly, racism was at work: White activists didn't think African Americans could practice birth control or run their own clinics; they also feared working in black neighborhoods. White patients, moreover, complained of black patients in their midst. "It is ironic," Hajo argues, "that the few efforts that were made [to reach black communities] have been tarred as racist plots to exterminate poor blacks, when the larger picture was one of neglect" — a startling new conclusion to a long and contentious debate (113). Meanwhile, the situation for African Americans was equally complex. Many, even among those who supported birth control and opened clinics of their own, suspected the motivations of white activists, but "none made it the center of their activism" (84). For them, the struggle for racial equality was far more complex.

For those interested in the history of the Midwest, this book offers a fair amount. It offers, for example, intimate looks into the workings of clinics in places like Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, and Milwaukee. Although we learn very little about those found in Iowa, this could serve as a source of inspiration. As the charts in the beginning of the book make clear, by the end of the 1930s the state did have some clinics; we just don't know very much about them. That dearth of knowledge should energize Iowa historians to rectify this gap. Each clinic has its own story, and each adds new insight into a complex national movement.

I do have several reservations about the book. First, for all her efforts to examine the clinics' many intersections, their interaction with the marketplace is only tangentially examined, perpetuating the notion that these worlds existed apart when in reality they overlapped. Thus, the title somewhat misleads. While the sentiment behind it is worthy, in practice "birth control on main street" usually meant commercial sources of birth control, not clinics. Indeed, large as the movement was, clinics served only a fraction of the American population. Finally, as is the case with so many birth control movement histories, Hajo's story ends in the late 1930s, leaving readers again hanging as to the future of this complex institution. But perhaps she can be forgiven, because, as she puts it, "It is a story for another day" (17). Now it is up to us to make that day happen.

*Perimeters of Democracy: Inverse Utopias and the Wartime Social Landscape in the American West*, by Heather Fryer. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2010. xi, 373 pp. Map, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$50.00 cloth.

Reviewer Roger W. Lotchin is professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of *The Bad City in the Good War: San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland, and San Diego* (2003).

In this ambitious book Heather Fryer compares four World War II western settings: the Topaz Japanese Relocation Camp, the Los Alamos Atomic Laboratory community, the Vanport housing project in Portland, and the Klamath Indian Reservation in Oregon. She concludes that, besides many differences, they shared several commonalities: "marginalization, repression, displacement, and disillusionment [with] the federal government" (32). She also ties their story to a larger one that dates back to President Thomas Jefferson and the physical anthropologist Thomas Morton. Jefferson's views of a nation based on the yeoman farmer and Morton's pseudoscience of racial hierarchies

dominated government policy well into the period of McCarthyism. Throughout, the U.S. government tried to manage the West demographically in the interest of creating an Empire of Liberty. Each of the settlements was conceived as a utopia where controlled demographic management by the government would create little Empires of Liberty that would influence the rest of America and the world. The hand of mission through Manifest Destiny rests heavily on the author's text. Unfortunately, these projects backfired and created "inverse utopias" instead. It is an interesting argument by a younger scholar who shows great command of both primary and secondary sources. The book is also informative and offers new material on all of the communities. However, my objections are fourfold.

First, the communities are not comparable; the commonalities fit some of the four, but not others. For example, the scientists at Los Alamos were not marginalized, displaced, or repressed. None of them was forced to participate in the Manhattan Project. What the author is calling repression was simply the army's attempts to provide security for a project of the utmost importance to national security, the race to create an atomic bomb before the Nazis did. Far from being security-conscious to the point of repression, the army was not safety-conscious enough to prevent numerous breaches of security by Klaus Fuchs and others. And the scientists were hardly marginalized; they were at the center of the most earthshaking change in the history of warfare. The Klamath Indians and the Nikkei were certainly marginalized, but not the scientists. And none of the four communities was repressed. One of the author's best chapters is on "resistance" at Topaz, but even that could not have happened if the government had really repressed them.

I also object to Fryer's characterization of these histories as part of the government's attempts to create utopias in the West. She treats the story as one enormous, two-century government plot. If one believes in conspiracies, this is the book to read. In fact, the hard-pressed Roosevelt administration improvised each of the communities ad hoc to meet a specific war emergency. The government did not intend any of the communities to be utopias; it intended three to respond to a specific historical emergency. Especially in the case of the relocation of Japanese Americans, the government basically stumbled into the camp solution and even then not until well into 1942, when it determined that it had no other option.

The author is also oblivious to the impact of wartime politics on her story. For example, she treats the problem of racial segregation at Vanport as a stand-alone story of civil rights. She precociously docu-

ments that there was racial prejudice against African Americans in the Portland area, but she does not integrate that discussion into the larger one of impressive black gains during the conflict. African Americans earned good money, even in segregated shipbuilding work; the NAACP increased its members tenfold; and millions migrated from the very segregated South to the less segregated North, where they joined big-city political machines and began to make their voices heard in politics. In Vanport there was housing segregation in part because managers had to find homes for blacks without alienating whites, who might move to another job or back home. The hypermobility of the work force was one of the biggest production problems of that conflict. Fryer sees only the civil rights implications of the Vanport managers' actions, not their political realities.

Finally, Fryer's conspiracy is above all a conspiracy of race. One is reminded of excitable McCarthyite politicians and pundits who thought there was a Communist behind every bush. For Fryer, there is a racist lurking there instead. Yet the Midwest, and Iowa in particular, was especially friendly to Japanese resettlement there from the camps!

*Acts of Conscience: World War II, Mental Institutions, and Religious Objectors*, by Steven J. Taylor. Critical Perspectives on Disability. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009. 484 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, indexes. \$34.00 cloth.

Reviewer Kimberly D. Schmidt is professor of history at Eastern Mennonite University. Her research and writing have focused on Amish and Mennonite women.

An old debate among historians centers on World War II as a watershed moment in American history. Where some see continuity in issues besetting the nation such as civil rights and women's rights, others see significant change. Place disability history in the picture and the claim for watershed becomes stronger; prior to World War II the plight of the mentally disabled, confined for the most part to state and privately run "insane asylums," was readily and conveniently forgotten. That all changed, as Taylor documents, with the assignment of conscientious objectors to serve in such institutions.

Conscientious objectors (COs or "conchies") were young men who for religious or moral reasons refused to bear arms, although they were willing to serve their country in alternative service assignments. Most of the men were from the historic peace churches: Mennonites, Church of the Brethren, and Quakers, although the Methodists were represented as well. Under the direction of the Selective Service, con-

chies worked for the National Park Service, the Forest Service, and the Soil Conservation Service. After conchies questioned if ditch digging and road building best utilized their energy and talents, the Selective Service expanded work assignments, authorizing work as attendants in hospitals and other institutions with significant numbers of mentally disabled patients. The standard care of the time, which is graphically illustrated throughout the book and on its cover, consisted of unsanitary crowding, poor food, no clothing, "restraints" such as handcuffing the patients to their beds for days at a time on soiled and urine-soaked sheets, and significant physical abuse. Into these difficult situations were placed idealistic, often activist young men.

Taylor's narrative relates how the CO experience during World War II reshaped attitudes and practices regarding patient treatment. Conchies exposed the horrors and reformed if not revolutionized the treatment of patients they strove to care for using pacifist ideals as their guide. Conchies refused to beat or harm patients. Many rejected the use of restraints on patients except under the most dangerous conditions. Four conchie activists founded the Mental Health Foundation, a clearinghouse for a number of issues associated with attendant care, institutional reform, and educating an unaware public. Although they were ultimately not successful — mental institutions continued some of their most egregious practices through the 1960s — CO activists were instrumental in bringing the horrific conditions to national attention, including to Eleanor Roosevelt, who became an ardent supporter.

Taylor provides a narrative rich in detail and anecdotes. The section on race relations is fascinating, although it is buried in a chapter on "Detached Units." Because of conchie insistence, some CO dining halls were desegregated by 1943, eleven years before the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision. Quakers and members of the Church of the Brethren, along with Methodists, Jews, and many who had no religious identification led this effort. The largest group of COs, however, hailed from Mennonite and related Anabaptist groups such as the Amish. Mennonites and Amish did not engage with state authorities, preferring to "witness silently."

This story is fascinating, and the sources are many and unassailable, but the magnitude of Taylor's project tends to overwhelm the narrative. He provides so much context that it takes until page 136 to finally get through the background and into the story of World War II. The text vacillates between engaging and flowing narrative and ponderous prose, especially when the author reverts to detailed explanations of meetings where summaries would have benefited the reader. Some sections read like lectures with odd snippets introduced seem-

ingly at random for humorous effect. A few chapters lacked coherent organization, and some chapter titles were confusing. And the conclusion provides Taylor's own compelling reasons for writing this history, material that belongs in the introduction.

Yet, Taylor's resurrection of the history of CO resistance to a very popular war in spite of public condemnation is a story that bears telling. In it one finds the beginnings of the mental health profession in the United States, and it shows how the consistency of pacifist ideals of justice played out both politically (against the war) and personally in the care exhibited for the mentally disabled and other oppressed groups.

*Anamosa Penitentiary*, by Richard Snavely and Steve Wendl. Images of America Series. Mt. Pleasant, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2010. 127 pp. Illustrations. \$21.99 paper.

Reviewer L. Mara Dodge is professor of history at Westfield State University. She is the author of *Whores and Thieves of the Worst Kind: A Study of Women, Crime, and Prisons, 1835–2000* (2002).

This slim volume consists primarily of a photographic history of the Anamosa State Penitentiary. The chapters are titled The White Palace (on the prison's construction and architecture), The Keepers, The Kept (including infamous cases), Work, Play, Hearts and Minds (education and rehabilitation), Day by Day, Escapes, Views, and Tailings.

The authors, Richard Snavely and Steve Wendl, were career employees of the Anamosa Penitentiary and helped establish its prison museum, the source for most of the images and stories. The authors begin with the claim, "They just don't build prisons the way they used to. . . [But] over a century ago, in a small town on the Iowa prairie, a beautiful prison was built" (7). This celebratory tone infuses the work, providing both its strength and weaknesses. Indeed, according to Arcadia Press, its Images of America series is designed to "celebrate the history of places, towns and cities across the country."

Each chapter consists of just a single-page introduction to the topic, followed by a dozen, high-quality glossy images. Although the photo captions are extremely detailed and informative, there are no citations, no references to the major works on prison history, and no index. The approach is anecdotal and descriptive rather than analytical. No overall statistics are provided on such topics as the number of prisoners and changing patterns of incarceration over time; average sentences; or the types of crimes for which prisoners were sentenced or how these patterns changed. Nor is there any demographic data on such

factors as prisoners' race, ethnicity, age, or gender. The approach is topical rather than chronological and lacks a comparative perspective. Instead, the authors provide an impressive visual history with intriguing and entertaining accounts that would fascinate anyone interested in the history of this particular prison and town.

## New on the Shelves

"New on the Shelves" is a list of recent additions to the collections of the State Historical Society of Iowa. It includes manuscripts, audio-visual materials, and published materials recently acquired or newly processed that we think might be of interest to the readers of the *Annals of Iowa*. The "DM" or "IC" at the end of each entry denotes whether the item is held in Des Moines or Iowa City.

### Published Materials

*The American Home Front, 1941–1942*, by Alistair Cooke. New York: Grove Press, 2006. xx, 327 pp. IC.

*The American House*, by Mary Mix Foley. New York: Harper & Row, 1980. 299 pp. DM, IC.

*Camoupeidia: A Compendium of Research on Art, Architecture and Camouflage*, by Roy R. Behrens. Dysart: Bobolink Books, 2009. 463 pp. IC.

*Deep Nature: Photographs from Iowa*, photographs by Linda Scarth and Robert Scarth. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009. 101 pp. DM, IC.

*Encyclopedia of Television Shows, 1925 through 2007*, by Vincent Terrace. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009. 4 vols. DM, IC.

*False Colors: Art, Design, and Modern Camouflage*, by Roy R. Behrens. Dysart: Bobolink Books, 2002. 223 pp. IC.

*Farm House: College Farm to University Museum*, by Mary E. Atherly. 2nd ed. A Bur Oak Book. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009. xi, 250 pp. DM, IC.

"Framing the 'Fragile Giants': Aestheticization of Landscape in the Loess Hills of Western Iowa," by Blake Mayberry. M.A. thesis, University of Nebraska at Omaha, 2008. iv, 55 pp. IC.

*From Cabin to Capital*, by LeRoy G. Pratt. Rev. ed. Des Moines: Dept. of Public Instruction, State of Iowa, 1971. v, 46 pp. DM, IC.

*Gary Thompson, All-American*, by Chuck Offenburger. Milwaukee: Hexagon Grandhaven Group, 2008. 351 pp. *Basketball star at Iowa State University in the mid-1950s and later TV sports commentator.* DM, IC.

*Harold Gene Fitzgerald: An American Success Story*, by Eugene Basilici. Bethany, MO: Central Programs, Inc., 2009. 119 pp. DM.

*Henry and Gladys*, by Milly Morris-Amos. [Ottumwa, 2008]. 224 pp. *Fiction set in early twentieth-century Ottumwa.* DM, IC.

*Henry Clay Dean*, by E. L. Mitzel. N.p., n.d. 62 pp. *Compilation of articles from the Unionville Republican about the colorful Civil War-era Methodist minister and politician.* DM.

*History of the Norwegian Settlements: A Translated and Expanded Version of the 1908 De Norske Settlemeters Historie and the 1930 Den Siste Folkevandring Sagastubber Fra Nybyggerlivet i Amerika*, by Hjalmar Rued Holand, translated by Malcolm Rosholt and Helmer M. Blegen. Waukon: Astri My Astri Pub., 2006. x, 468 pp. DM, IC.

*Hooking Up*, by Tom Wolfe. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000. 293 pp. Includes an essay on Intel founder Bob Noyce's ties to his home town of Grinnell. IC.

*Infantry Tactics: Double and Single Rank; Adapted to American Topography and Improved Fire-arms*, by Emory Upton. Rev. ed. New York: D. Appleton, 1877. viii, 445 pp. IC.

*Iowa Historic Property Study Iowa Highway 3 Bridge over the West Branch of the Des Moines River, Humboldt, Iowa: (Iowa Site Inventory No. 46-00005) (HADB No. 46-001)*, by Camilla R. Deiber. Marion: Louis Berger Group Inc., 2009. DM, IC.

*An Iowa Mother: An American Son*, by Lorraine E. Carroll and Vincent W. Carroll. Sarasota, FL: Peppertree Press, 2007. 155 pp. Poetry "whose roots sprout from the Iowa soil." DM.

*Iowa*, by Jean F. Blashfield. New York: Children's Press, 2010. 144 pp. IC.

*The Korean War: An Encyclopedia*, edited by Stanley Sandler. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities 872. New York: Garland Pub., 1995. xxxiv, 416 pp. DM.

*Long Dark River Casino*, by G. Louis Heath. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009. 124 pp. Novella that "probes the soul of a fictional Mississippi River community, Quinlan, Iowa." IC.

*Marjorie's Vine: A Compilation of Newspaper Articles*, by Marjorie McGuire McConnell. Ottumwa: Roseyblossoms, 2008. 404 pp. Society columns from the Centerville Iowegian. IC.

*May 21st, 1918 Cyclone: A Path of Destruction*. [Plain, WI?: Old Franklin Township Historical Society?], 2008. 315 pp. Northeast Iowa and southwest Wisconsin. DM.

*Medicine Ceremony of the Menomini, Iowa, and Wahpeton Dakota with Notes on the Ceremony among the Ponca, Bungi Ojibwa, and Potawatomi*. 1920. Reprint. New York: AMS Press, [1984]. 357 pp. DM, IC.

*Methland: The Death and Life of an American Small Town*, by Nick Reding. New York: Bloomsbury, 2009. x, 255 pp. Investigative reporting from Oelwein. DM, IC.

*Montgomery-Butler House Feasibility Study Report*, by Marlys A. Svendsen. Saron, WI: Svendsen Tyler, Inc., 2001. 97 pp. Historic house in Iowa City. IC.

*A New System of Infantry Tactics: Double and Single Rank, Adapted to American Topography and Improved Fire-arms*, by Emory Upton. New York: D. Appleton, 1868. iv, 392 pp. IC.

*Notes from No Man's Land: American Essays*, by Eula Biss. Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2009. 230 pp. Includes an essay on race relations in Buxton, Iowa. DM, IC.

*On Holiday: Season's Readings, Christmas Poems*, by John David Thompson. Pella: Palindrome Publishing of Iowa, 2007. iv, 128 pp. DM.

*A Peculiar People: Iowa's Old Order Amish: An Expanded Edition*, by Elmer Schwieder and Dorothy Schwieder. A Bur Oak Book. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009. xxiii, 188 pp. DM, IC.

*Prison Religion: Faith-Based Reform and the Constitution*, by Winnifred Fallers Sullivan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009. x, 305 pp. *Analysis based largely on a court case involving a faith-based rehabilitation program implemented at the Newton Correctional Facility.* DM, IC.

*Raito Kamen No Shogai*, by Gill Brendan. Kyoto: Gakugeishuppansha, 2009. 511 pp. IC.

*Reflections along the White Pole Road*, by the White Pole Road Development Corporation. Des Moines: Meredith, 2008. 124 pp. *Photo history of road through Adair, Casey, Menlo, Stuart, and Dexter.* DM, IC.

*Sculptor in Buckskin: The Autobiography of Alexander Phimister Proctor*, edited by Katharine C. Ebner. 1971. Rev. ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009. xii, 227 pp. DM.

*Show Me the Hero: An Iowa Draftee Joins the 90th Infantry Division during WWII in Europe*, by Dale Lundhigh. Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2009. 229 pp. DM, IC.

*Societies of the Iowa, Kansa, and Ponca Indians*, by Alanson Skinner. N.p.: Bibliophile, n.d. 120 pp. DM.

*Stephenson's Revised Iowa Eighth Grade Examination Question and Answer Book: All the Questions with Complete Answers for Eighth Grade Examinations*, compiled by Sam C. Stephenson. 2nd ed. Lincoln, NE: Lincoln School Supply Co., 1924. 152 pp. *Questions issued by the State Superintendents of Public Instruction of Iowa from 1918 to 1924.* IC.

*The Two Great Canyons: Excerpts from Letters Written on a Western Journey*, by Cyrenus Cole. Cedar Rapids: Torch Press, 1908. 41 pp. *Descriptions of the Canyon of the Yellowstone and the Grand Canyon.* DM, IC.

*U.S. Infantry Tactics, for the Instruction, Exercise, and Manœuvres of the United States Infantry, Including Infantry of the Line, Light Infantry, and Riflemen, Prepared under the Direction of the War Department and Authorized and Adopted by the Secretary of War, May 1, 1861.* Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1861. 540 pp. DM, IC.

"When the Locomotive Puffs: Corporate Public Relations of the First Transcontinental Railroad Builders, 1863–1869," by Leland K. Wood. Ph.D. diss., Scripps College of Communication, 2009. viii, 237 pp. DM.

*Woodmen of the World: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow.* Omaha: Woodmen of the World/Omaha Woodmen Life Insurance Society, 2009. 177 pp. DM.

"Youth Voter Mobilization Techniques and their Effectiveness in the 2008 Iowa Democratic Caucuses," by Jacqueline Amy Dycke-Norris. M.A. thesis, Iowa State University, 2008. iii, 109 pp. IC.

## Announcements

THE IOWA HISTORY CENTER at Simpson College is pleased to congratulate Ms. Pam Stek of the University of Iowa as the 2010 recipient of our prize for the outstanding master's thesis in Iowa history. Her award-winning essay is titled, "'We Must as a Race Defend Our Own Candidates': African American Political Activism in Mahaska County, Iowa, 1885-1900."

The center now seeks nominations for the outstanding master's thesis in Iowa history for 2011. Selection will be based on contribution to the knowledge of Iowa history; originality of the subject matter or methodology; use of sources; and written expression. Nominees must have completed their master's degree between July 2010 and June 2011.

The winner will be announced in fall 2011 and will receive a \$300 cash prize and an award plaque. Three copies of the thesis and a brief letter of nomination from the thesis advisor, which includes contact information for the nominee, should be submitted to Bill Friedrichs, Director, Iowa History Center, Simpson College, 701 North C Street, Indianola, IA 50125. Application deadline is June 30, 2011.

For further information, please contact Linda Sinclair, (515) 961-1528 or [linda.sinclair@simpson.edu](mailto:linda.sinclair@simpson.edu).

## Contributors

MICHAEL HEVEL is a doctoral candidate in the higher education program at the University of Iowa. He studies the history of higher education with a focus on college students. He is completing his dissertation, a history of college students' alcohol use from the beginning of the temperance movement in 1820 until the end of national Prohibition in 1933.

BREANNE ROBERTSON is a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland. She received her M.A. in art history from The University of Texas and has held curatorial internships at the Smithsonian American Art Museum, National Portrait Gallery, and National Gallery of Art. She currently holds a Douglass Foundation Pre-doctoral Fellowship at the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Her dissertation is titled "Forging a New World Nationalism: Ancient Mexico in United States Art and Visual Culture, 1933–1945."

## The State Historical Society of Iowa

*The Annals of Iowa* is published quarterly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, the Historical Division of the Department of Cultural Affairs of the State of Iowa. The society operates from two centers, Des Moines and Iowa City. A museum, research library, state archives, special collections, community programming, historic preservation, and membership programs are located at 600 East Locust Street, Des Moines, IA 50319, phone 515-281-5111. Publications, a research library, and special collections are located at 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, IA 52240, phone 319-335-3916. The society also operates several historic sites across the state.

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## Submissions

*The Annals of Iowa* invites the submission of articles on Iowa history and on subjects concerning the nation and the Midwest with an Iowa focus. State, local, and regional studies of political, economic, social, cultural, intellectual, institutional, ethnic, religious, material culture, archeological, and architectural history are welcome. The *Annals* also reviews significant books on related topics. A detailed set of editorial guidelines is available on request. All correspondence concerning editorial matters should be addressed to:

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