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The Robert E. Gard Reader : To Change the Face of America, From Writings by Robert E. Gard

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The Robert E. Gard READER

To Change the Face of America

From writings by Robert E. Gard

Edited by LaMoine MacLaughlin and Maryo Gard Ewell



The Robert E. Gard

READER

To Change the Face of America

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With reflections by Mark Lefebvre,

LaMoine MacLaughlin, and Maryo Gard Ewell

Wood engravings by Frank Utpatel



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Mark Lefebvre, Vice President for Health and Life Sciences, University of Wisconsin Foundation, Madison, WI, and Robert E. Gard's publisher, colleague and friend.

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Maryo Gard Ewell, community arts speaker and consultant, retired from the Colorado Council on the Arts, and Robert E. Gard's daughter.

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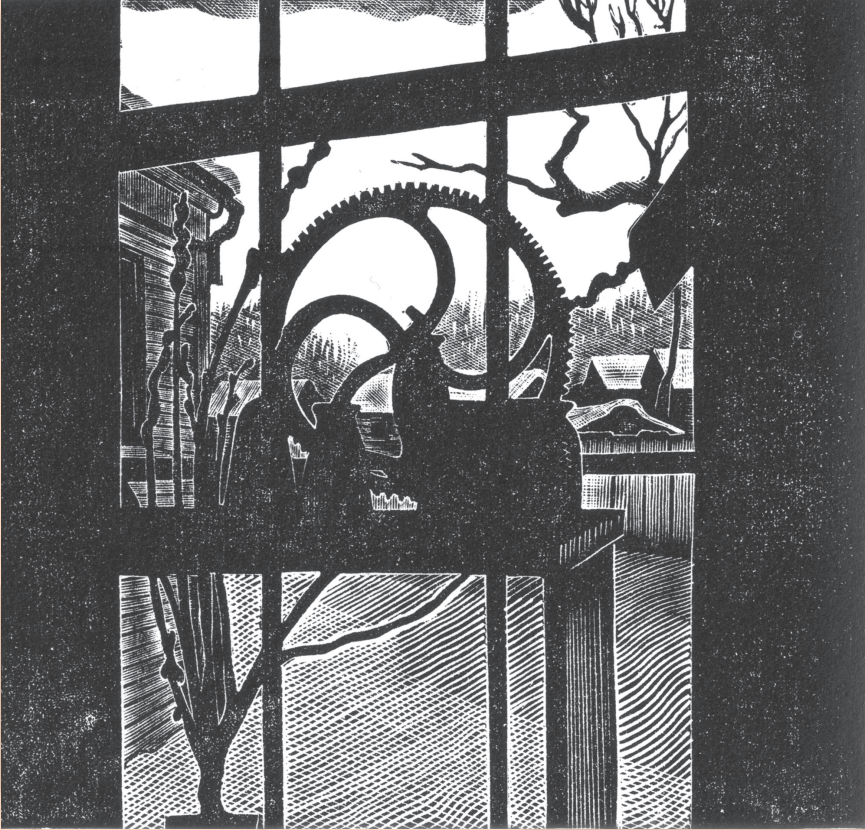
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“This is a book filled with the present and the past, with achievement and failure, with love for a state which I have made my own; it is about land and wind and people who came seeking the meaning of their lives; and it is about me who also came seeking the meaning of mine. I hope that the book is filled with the spirit of mission, and of the enrichment of human life.... I hope that within this book a person (myself) and the land (Wisconsin) are portrayed as inseparable.”

from Author's Note for Coming Home to Wisconsin

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PREFACE

As I am writing this, it is the 100th anniversary of my father's birth, my spiritual father's birth. Robert E. Gard—the man who taught me what matters most. I am sure that he celebrated both his birthday and Independence Day sitting with his own father on the front porch of their farmhouse in Iola, Kansas—the fields defining heaven as they listened to the wind in the corn. Bob knew, as he would often say, that “Where tillage begins, art follows.”

I was 21 when we met. I was a student looking for summer work. I found him standing in a long box car of an office in historic Ag Hall on the University of Wisconsin campus. He looked like Abraham Lincoln. The job that I was seeking had already been filled, but he asked me to sit and tell him something of my story. Yes, I grew up in the oldest town in Wisconsin, De Pere. The parish of my boyhood was founded by the Jesuits in 1671. I loved to wander through the village listening to people's stories. I guess Bob saw in me a younger, kindred spirit. He hired me, then and there, to be his assistant and we began what would be more than twenty years of adventures. Roles would change, but our work remained the same.

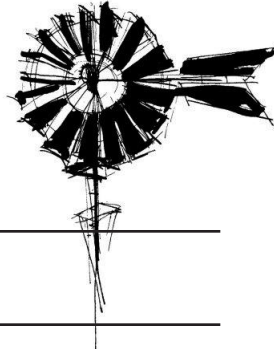
Bob Gard could find the intimate space in anyone's heart. We traveled the back roads of Wisconsin doing research for the many books we worked on together. We also taught workshops—how to make art from the experiences of day-to-day living. Bob taught me about indigenous art, grassroots art. He awakened more hearts than anyone I know. I remember vividly a winter night in a small town, a gathering of folks in a church basement—a woman had been waiting a lifetime to be encouraged to tell her story. She did so simply, plainly, powerfully. The walls disappeared.

Write, draw, paint, act, sing, dance—change the face of America! Tell a story—your story.

Before you is Robert E. Gard in his own words. Oh, the experience you

will have! He was our 20th Century Whitman. He knew what matters most in life—the commonplace given meaning in its telling. Bob had his voice as you have yours. His legacy is rooted in you giving voice to yours.

Mark Lefebvre
Madison, Wisconsin
July 2010



FOREWORD

Growing up in Wisconsin during the 1950s, I remember (what still remains in my memory as a kind of mantra) that every other program on Wisconsin Public Radio during that time seemed to conclude with the words, “this has been a production of the Wisconsin Idea Theater, Robert E. Gard, Director.” This concluding statement always completed an enchanting program about Wisconsin’s history, stories which completely enthralled my imagination.

Wisconsin has a long history of arts development at the local level. At the very beginning of the Twentieth Century, Progressive Party Governor Robert LaFollette and University of Wisconsin President Charles Van Hise developed “The Wisconsin Idea” which carried forward the concept, revolutionary at that time, that all of the elements of state government, including the University of Wisconsin, belong to all of the residents of the state. The implication was that, rather than requiring all residents to avail themselves of services centered in the State Capitol in Madison, it was the responsibility of state government and the University to go out into the state to those places where people lived. And this concept was practiced in reality. Thomas Dickinson started community theaters in Madison and Milwaukee. Franz Rickaby and Helene Stratmann. Thomas traveled to rural corners of the state gathering Wisconsin folk-music. John Steuart Curry, the first artist-in-residence of any major university, helped rural residents develop their drawing and painting talents as part of the Wisconsin Rural Artists Program. Then, from the 1940s to the 1980s, Robert E. Gard and his staff traveled to every corner of Wisconsin teaching theater and writing as part of various programs, including the Wisconsin Idea Theater, developing community theaters throughout Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Rural (now Regional) Writers Association. I had the opportunity to meet Gard in 1992 shortly before he died. He visited us during an organizational meeting of a statewide arts service organization which eventually developed into Arts Wisconsin. He

was a quiet, unassuming man, but an inspiration to all of us. To be quite honest, when we developed the Northern Lakes Center for the Arts, our arts center in Amery, Wisconsin, we did not do so to intentionally follow in the footsteps of those who had gone before us, but we had grown up with Wisconsin Public Radio and the Wisconsin Idea Theater and all of that was part of an inbred culture directed at developing the creative talents and the artistic imagination of local residents. When we started working, the commitment to growing the abilities of local people seemed only appropriate and logical.

It was only after his death that I began reading everything I could get my hands on by Robert E. Gard. I found *Grassroots Theater* and *Prairie Visions* especially inspirational. Although strictly not autobiography, they are certainly autobiographical. The books describe Gard's growth as a community arts developer: his educational years in Kansas, his early work in New York and Alberta, and his culminating achievement in Wisconsin. Early in *Prairie Visions* Gard tells the story of Mrs. Settles and her windmill. Mrs. Settles, a large Kansas farmer, had hired Gard to work for her during his summer away from the University. Her husband had built a large windmill which fascinated Gard. "If God was going to destroy Mrs. Settles, he would probably take the windmill first; it was what she really believed in, that windmill/temple her husband had made to have something to set against the wind and small-thinking folks." The image of the windmill becomes a symbol in Gard's writing. In *Wisconsin Sketches* Gard indicates, "For me windmills are life. The silent blades turn on in memory against the wind: an entire rotation of man and of earth."

Gard saw a need for images and symbols to help us push on forward in the work we all do. At the end of *Grassroots Theater*, Gard says, "It seems to me that a part of the problem facing community arts development is the lack of community symbols of art. I do not mean that we want more museums—places of defunct art—but rather that we need community arts centers in the small communities as well as in the larger cities where art may be witnessed and participated in. Community symbols are important, but so is leadership. Ways must be found to train more leaders, more voices." Perhaps those future leaders will fuel local community arts centers which will function as the artistic and cultural windmills of our time.

"A windmill on a far farm hill
Will turn and turn against the force
That nature provides
In place of electricity
To those who have vision
To erect a windmill on a hill,

And take advantage of the way the wind comes
Across the valley, lifting up the slope,
To strike the blades in air..." (*Wisconsin Sketches*)

LaMoine MacLaughlin
Amery, Wisconsin
July 2010

PART I

ROBERT E. GARD

Community Arts Developer

I was pondering once again the development of the community for the arts. I knew that the development of a community attitude friendly toward the arts was a Herculean task that must be faced. Finding ways to accomplish the task was a search that had underscored many of the experiments I had tried and one that had made me understand that the entire community must develop attitudes friendly to culture, especially drama.... The drama...should be the formulation of this spiritual core in life and should be expressive as only art can be of the deep answers in common men to the perennial threat of disaster, human dissolution, and community disintegration.... The people must see the arts as one means through which such answers can be obtained.... The ideas which have become apparent through the efforts of the American pioneers in the movement for a grassroots theater and allied arts must be spread more thoroughly back to the people.... Here on Sugar Bush Hill the wind blows hard. The forest lands stretch away and away as far as I can see. But beyond the forests there are the farms, the towns, the cities of Wisconsin, and beyond and around Wisconsin is all America waiting for the spreading back of the grassroots arts idea.

from Grassroots Theater

IF I AM LONELY IN WISCONSIN

FROM *Wisconsin Sketches*

If I am lonely in Wisconsin
It is never the fault of the people
For my friends are in every town.

I have journeyed
Through thirty years of restless movement
To visit Wisconsin places.

I have gone often in the cause of art
To meet artists or writers
Or to share a community play.

The art with the most blood is in the people—
No elitist I, nor have I ever been—
It is the grassroots where the essence of art
Most joyously flourishes.

I attach art to the well-being of America,
For I have seen farmers happily writing poems,
And whole communities participating
In music and drama.

How can a nation be weak
With those dedicated to art
Counted by millions in country and city places?

If I am lonely in Wisconsin it is not because
No one has said come here
Be with us today.

Yet in loneliness I have watched as on a high crag
Waiting a vast upspringing of people
In behalf of art.

A lonely nightwatcher sensing loneliness;
Yet is my loneliness of love.

I have been with you for an hour or a day
In joy with your joy
Accepting art in your country places.

In tears and laughter I have watched the people
Yet I have known what loneliness was
Because I desired the same joy
For all America.

John Curry from Kansas
Brought his art to Wisconsin
Inspiring country artists;

And Aaron Bohrod when Curry had gone
Went as I did to the towns
Speaking to the people about their art.
Of such concern was a great university the mother.

But if I am lonely it is more
Of the mood of the land.
It is loneliness of wild roadways
And the silence of those
Who were here long ago.

Of the people I am filled with joy and doubt
And wonder. Of the hills I am only a part
In their blue mystery.

I hear echoes through stone.
My loneliness is more the loneliness



*My spirit
responds to
rain and wind,*

*And to snow
falling in
silent wood...*

Of wanting to know, to become,
To be a part of.

My spirit responds to rain and wind,
And to snow falling in silent woods;
Of birdsfoot violets on sandy hillsides,
And of orange puccoon and small buttercups.
My loneliness is not of people,
For the people are growing in art.
My loneliness is more of small weedgrown graveyards,
And forgotten aspiring men and women.

Where are those to whom the old graves
Belong?

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

FROM *Arts in the Small Community*

America is coming of age. Note the many changing aspects of America.

A maturing America means a nation conscious of its arts among all its people.

Communities east, west, north, and south are searching for ways to make community life more attractive.

The arts are at the very center of community development in this time of change... change for the better.

The frontier and all that it once meant in economic development and in the sheer necessity of building a nation is being replaced by the frontier of the arts. In no other way can Americans so well express the core and blood of their democracy; for in the communities lies the final test of the acceptance of the arts as a necessity of everyday life.

In terms of American democracy, the arts are for everyone. They are not reserved for the wealthy, or for the well-endowed museum, the gallery, or the ever-subsidized regional professional theatre. As America emerges into a different understanding of her strength, it becomes clear that her strength is in the people and in the places where the people live. The people, if shown the way, can create art in and of themselves.

The springs of the American spirit are at the grass roots. Opportunities must exist in places where they never have existed before. A consciousness of the people, a knowledge of their power to generate and nourish art, and a provision of ways in which they may do so are essential for our time.

If we are seeking in America, let it be a seeking for the reality of democracy in art. Let art begin at home, and let it spread through the children and their parents, and through the schools, the institutions, and through government.

And let us start by acceptance, not negation—acceptance that the arts are important everywhere, and that they can exist and flourish in small places as well as in large; with money, or without, according to the will of the people. Let us put firmly and permanently aside as a cliché of an expired moment in time that art is a frill. Let us accept the goodness of art where we are now, and expand its worth in the places where people live.

WHY AN ARTS PLAN?

FROM *Arts in the Small Community*

American history begins in small settlements, and crucial American values stem from them. Sixty million Americans now live in communities of 10,000 or less. These communities produce food and essential goods and services that cannot be adequately produced elsewhere since mining, lumbering, fishing, farming, and recreation require less-densely-populated areas. Small communities, in which the ideals and realities of American life are to be found, are a response to the general needs of the larger communities.

The small community provides more than it receives. Many young people flock to the great cities, poorly prepared to contribute to the cultural well being of the city and depleting their hometown of youthful energy and vigor. When, in turn, these same cities send back other people who are seeking new, vital, internal resources, the small community gladly provides welcome, but is subjected to strain and dislocation of its daily life. Some of the city dwellers who come to the rural areas are retired citizens; others are Americans of middle income who locate a second home in the country; and still others are the varied groups brought in by newly located industries.

These new occupancies not only place new demands upon the economy and public services of the small communities, but also put a strain on the cultural life. Consequently, as small communities undergo the depletion of cultural resources that results from their role as providers for American manufacturing and commerce; as they educate their young people only to see them located in cities; as older people remain or reside in these communities in their late years because of the lower cost of living and the more intimate social acceptance and recognition they receive as industry decentralizes; then the small community finds in arts development an important part of the answer to its new needs.

It is unimpressive to insist that the large cities, with their infuriated and burning ghettos, are but the tensions of the village subculture drawn large



American small communities... the heartland of our way of life.

upon the American scene, or that the village has always made war against enlightenment, spurning genius and stoning prophets. In fact, in that area of human anguish in which man recognizes that he can't go home again, he finds in the mythic properties of the rural village an ideal for life sustained to some extent by every small community. It is this ideal, crystallized and repristinated in accordance with contemporary art activity, that will provide new resource for all America.

The contribution of the small community to American life is immeasurable. The farmland, mountains, shore, and open spaces in relation to which American small communities are located, like the small communities themselves, are the heartland of our way of life. Because American literature depicts these home places, and American painters portray them, American localities are a part of the furniture of the human imagination throughout the world. It is our conviction that the development of high quality art activity in these communities may well lead to a new phase of renaissance in the arts.

Modern art activity can provide a new birth and new creative directions of usefulness for such a community. As art activity is developed, the community is re-created. The vital roots of every phase of life are touched. As the community is awakened to its opportunity in the arts, it becomes a laboratory through which the vision of the region is reformulated and extended. And as the small community discovers its role, as the small community generates freshness of

aesthetic response across the changing American scene, American art and life are enhanced.

Can the United States rediscover, cherish, and strengthen its small communities? Can we assign to small communities the important role deserved in the forthcoming renaissance in the arts? This plan is an answer to these questions.

WHAT IS AN ARTS COUNCIL?

FROM *Arts in the Small Community*

An arts council is a group of persons who care about the cultural life of the community and seek to express this concern by organizing to promote interest and activity in the arts.

We endorse...

The arts council organization was used in the Wisconsin test communities and proved effective. Since the method has been so successful, this national plan endorses the organization of an arts council as the effective way to develop arts in all communities.

Arts councils seek to foster an active concern for the community in enterprises dedicated to art, and seek to add arts dimensions to presently operating private and public agencies.

The ideal goal of the arts council movement is to create a society of qualitative excellence in which the resources of the nation may serve beneficial and creative purposes in community life through art.

The council is committed to a strategy beginning in minute corpuscles of community art interest, which are embodied in other organizations and activities as well as in art activity itself,

and affirms that art is basic to the general community good. This ideal of art enables the community to discover art and art to discover the community.

Art produces change. Councils acquainted with the traditions of art and traditions of their community are needed to mediate this change.

The concept is more than twenty-four years old; yet some six hundred recently formed American arts councils testify to its operational effectiveness.

Arts council organizations, no two of which are the same, are tailored to fit the need and opportunity of each community.

The council places art and artist in the mainstream of American life by equipping the largest number of people with active art interests.

The articulate neighborly sharing of excellence in art will interest leaders from every aspect of life. Some will join the arts council from community concern, others from general interest in the arts; still others from disciplined arts commitment.

Each type of leadership is important because the ideal of art, initiated from common experience, supports the ideal of art as America's common faith.

THE RIVER—THE SOURCE

FROM *Coming Home to Wisconsin*

From time to time I inhabit a kind of cave in Madison, Wisconsin, where I often retire to think, and to wonder. There are so many things nowadays to think and to wonder about. Science, astronomy, religion, have opened so many immense speculations; a simple faith has become most difficult to accept in view of the now-proven complexity of the universe; yet a simple faith might likely be the only stability I have against the grandeur of limitless space, of particles which somehow drifted through something like time toward intelligence... I find all that sort of speculation fascinating; but I suppose my thoughts are most ordinarily concerned with my adopted state, Wisconsin, where I have lived happily for nearly forty years. When I originally arrived in the early 1940s, folks often asked whether I was a native Wisconsinite, and when I said, “no,” they shook their heads sadly and said that I had really missed out, and that not being a Wisconsin native was something from which I could not expect to recover. But I did recover and adopted Wisconsin as my spiritual and physical home, and I have done my best through the writing of many books and through the conception of innumerable literary and cultural programs to recall and to preserve what I could of the history, heritage, and cultural image of this great Upper Middle Western state, so rich in lore and tradition, and human sensitivity. I believe this book has the central purpose of telling how and why I “came home to Wisconsin.”

Perhaps this story of a search and a mission that ended in Wisconsin must start in my boyhood, and at my boyhood home in Kansas; for the germinal sign of the search lies in the spirit of the prairie and all that the prairie has symbolized in a quest for meanings in my own life, and in the life of my state, Wisconsin.

There are two rivers involved here: the river of my youth and its flood of memory pouring out of my family whose roots were deep in the sod that lured

them west so long ago; and the river of my hope to unfold and make plain, at least to myself, the soul and spirit of a State which has become dear to me and to which I was swept by the youthful river. Always it seems, I am upon one river or the other; they meet at times, then they separate. They branch and merge eternally with past and present. There are rushes of memory and observation and savor.

I regard my cherishing of this flow of memory with awe and curiosity for everything that has happened is now observable by me through the spiritual window of a tiny office I occupy from time to time in Madison: a room at the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters which I temporarily adopted as my private place of seeing and telling. This sanctuary, which is apart from that more busy and sometimes frantic setting at the University of Wisconsin where I have labored for so many years is a sort of cave, private, mine for one year, to discover through its window, source and meaning.

Today, for example, because Dr. John Thomson, a noted botanist, has been at the Academy and we have been talking about prairie plants on which he and his wife, Olive, are authorities, I find that I am more and more intrigued and moved by the vestiges of the Wisconsin prairie and all that it meant in Wisconsin: primitive wildlife and new hope for settlers. I trace my emotion thereof to my boyhood where the prairie was a major theme of my young life. It grew more so as I further understood what the prairie represented. My father journeyed west from his boyhood home in Illinois because of the prairie and its indefinable call that moved so many young people. Perhaps it was the grass, and the images of the grass and the movement and freedom and openness which the grass and the fall time migration of birds, that motivated him.

I well know that the existing Wisconsin prairies are no longer worthy of an epic imagining. I realize that only relic prairies exist now of all the wide expanse that was once the southern Wisconsin prairie. Some prairie plants remain along old roads, at the edges of a wood; beside fields cultivated now for a hundred years there are some prairie plants; and along old railroads and, of course, where the prairie is being restored in a few places as preservation of something that once was very precious.

One of the great prairies of Wisconsin was the beautiful Empire Prairie of Fond du Lac County. How tragic that the reality of that prairie has vanished; all one can do is try with eyes closed to picture the land the way it was when the pioneers arrived. Into the wild, tall grass they came, and their tales of the fertile land, the swales, the hills with the rolling grass, give some idea of the way it was, and the way their spirits responded to the sense of bigness, the roll, the wildness.

There is little sense today of the joy of the arriving people. The older cemeteries throughout southern Wisconsin tell part of the story. Nathaniel Tallmadge was the best known of all the early Empire farmers. He was a York

State man, as many were in that part of the state, and the name of Empire they brought with them from New York. Tallmadge had served fourteen years as United States Senator from New York. When William Henry Harrison was nominated for President, Senator Tallmadge was offered the Vice Presidency. He declined. Perhaps he knew that more than political fame he wished to move to the great new West. Had he accepted the nomination he would have been President of the United States as Harrison died in office. At any rate, Tallmadge became interested in lands in Wisconsin, resigned from the Senate and was appointed governor of the Territory. He located a farm in the town of Empire; he spent the remainder of his life there and died in 1864. He was buried in the Reinze Cemetery, donated by him from his farm lands. The old Tallmadge farm is located in section nineteen; on the land today stands the St. Mary's High School.

I am very much moved by the whole prairie experience. I can imagine, almost as though I were there myself, the elation of the pioneers when they encountered the tall prairie grass. The whole experience has a special meaning for me, too, because I, in a way, am a product of the prairie encounter. I was raised in Kansas, of course, not in Wisconsin, but I think the experience of the prairie was very much the same. It is a temptation to relive, and my mood today is one of retrospect. I value the Academy experience because it affords me an opportunity to think back.

Retrospect can go anywhere your mind has ever been. My mind ranges often, and often far backward to all that I ever heard about my family, their roots, the countries from which they came. And beyond all frontiers, to a weak grasp of human history... all of man's comprehension can be confined, made real, for him, how ineptly he may speak or write of it, and meaning that seems pertinent, is another matter. I comprehend my own span, that's all I can safely say. From the moment of my birth, as I have heard of it, through the remembered days of my childhood, to now, through a devious way, forwards and backwards in the shadows of time always along my two rivers this is what I do often, searching the kernels of events that happened, that shaped my thought, that made me what I became eventually.

My regrets now, if I may speak of regrets, are those relating to the recollections of members of my family who might have revealed secrets that I have not been able to uncover. Who, really, was great, great, great, grandfather? An absurd question, but not to me, not after twenty years spent in futile genealogical searches, trying to find out what happened in those years after the American Revolution when my ancestor migrated from New Jersey to Pennsylvania, then to western Ohio. Who was he? Often I have almost had his identity, then it eludes me.

But what pleasure in genealogical research! What fascinating hours looking

among old papers, obscure books, in written accounts in old Bibles... the clue, looked for in courthouses among ancient deeds, land records, the pale ink that recorded old births and deaths. The hours of excitement of the search for family, for identity, for knowing who and of what you are!

Perhaps my father might have told me. But then, when I was young and careless of such things, I didn't ask. He never said. How can we be so blind?



*“When I seek to
rediscover the
Wisconsin prairie
I seek to rediscover
my own soul.”*

Now, for forty years he is dead. I could have asked him how it was when he was a boy in eastern Illinois, and about his father, whom I never knew. Grandfather Jacob Gard died in 1906, before my birth. I might have asked him about things which I have since discovered, that grandfather lived in a part of eastern Illinois where there were many Southern sympathizers; how he was fired upon by Copperheads in the woods because he expressed deep sentiments in favor of the Union, and how he joined the Illinois infantry... perhaps to escape being slaughtered from ambush... Ah yes, and I remember grandfather's medals which grandmother Mary Gard prized in her room at our house in Kansas; the medals I, a little boy interested only in the shape of the metal, in faded ribbon... not until I was nearly fifty, in a library at Madison, did I come to know what grandfather did in the Civil War. There I found the record of his regiment in the muster rolls of Illinois soldiers. And my letter to the National Archives in Washington brought me documents of his enlistment, his discharge, his pension. But I never asked my father about these things, and between us the book remained closed forever and forever.

The strange ways of a father and a son. Mysterious, obscure. How do they find their way to each other through time? Through time when the barrier of youth and age exists immutable between them? Family relationships are the things that make the most difference in our lives, no doubt, but when are we ready to comprehend?

I understand, somehow, that my Wisconsin experience is not complete, and my view of the place I live and love now is not complete without exploring how and why I am here. And the Prairie is very real to me. I recognize the Latin names of some Wisconsin prairie plants and I have learned how to look for the vestiges of the prairie when it lay virgin among clumps of oaks. And I wonder why I bother? Why is it all so dear? And then, as a novelist, or a playwright, I know why, of course, for all character is sourced in the past.

The prairie indeed has a dark and hidden vision. When I seek to rediscover the Wisconsin prairie I seek to rediscover my own soul. Suddenly as my fingers lie idle on typewriter keys, my mind plunges into the depths of my own span. I was a lad of eighteen, and in a certain darkness after midnight on a June night in the 1930s I was asleep in my room in our tall, narrow, Kansas farmhouse, and I was awakened by my mother who placed her hand nervously upon my shoulder and propelled me awake. I felt her hand very hard, desperate, shaking me and she was saying, "Bobby, wake up. Dad hasn't been here all night. I'm sick with worrying."

It took me awhile to get enough awake to figure out where I was and who it was shaking me; and then I heard what she was saying, and I began to feel scared. She kept shaking and talking, "He's been gone since supertime. Get up, please Bobby, go out and look for him."

"Now? What time is it?"

"It's about two."

"My gosh, he'll come back, won't he?"

"I don't know. Please."

"He shouldn't go off alone like that."

"I guess he's sick. Hurry, Bobby."

"You got any idea where he went?"

"Well, probably over toward the Neosho River."

"That's where he usually goes. You know that."

"Yeah, I know. Well, I'll try to find him."

"He might be hurt."

"I doubt it. He's always messing around over there. I'll go, though."

I got up, not hurrying, but feeling uneasy. I knew there wasn't any reason for it, but I began to get images of him lying out somewhere in a field, hurt or dead, maybe, and how I would feel and what I'd do if I did find him. I saw the

whole picture all the way through; stumbling over the body, seeing that he was dead, maybe, if I could really tell; then running as fast as I could back to the house to tell my mother. Then the calls for help, the lanterns lighted and carried by hurrying neighbors, and all of us running and muttering to each other while my mother stayed at home with a neighbor woman or two looking out after us from the back porch, crying for us to hurry...

I pulled on my overalls and blue shirt, fumbling for the buttons. The upstairs hallway light was on, but my mother hadn't turned on any light in my room, and I had to search for my heavy shoes back under the bed. I laced them up, and stood, ready to go, but not feeling much like it, except that the urgency of my mother now standing in the doorway made me hurry a little.

"Do you want to carry a lantern, Bobby?"

"No. It'd just be in the way."

"Be careful, don't *you* get hurt."

"Nothing to hurt me, and don't worry about him, either."

The old house was so tall and narrow that the stairs seemed to go straight up. As I stumbled down them, feeling for the wall on one side and the rail on the other as I'd done ever since I was big enough to go up and down by myself, I was reminded of the game I played when I was little—seeing how many steps I could jump down from the top. But tonight my mother followed me anxiously. I went through the downstairs hall, through the dining room and the kitchen and out onto the back porch. It was screened in and the screen door always squeaked when it was pushed open as I did it now, and I went down the three steps, the bottom one loose, and stepped onto the flagstone walk that was laid to the barn.

The night sky was clear, there wasn't any moon, but in the early morning, before dawn in Kansas, there is a night light in the open sky that illuminates the fields. Eastern Kansas is a land of wind and rolls of small hills, and creeks and slow rivers. It was open prairie land once, but no longer, and on about every side around our part, there were cornfields running right up close to many farmhouses. And there was a cornfield behind our barn.

I went through the gate and across the barnyard, smelling the manure, and saw that the work team, Jack and Pet, were over in a corner of the yard. I could hardly see them; they were there, faint against the starlight, but it was comforting to know that the horses were near. Friendly horses are comforting in the night, especially if you know them as well as I knew those two. I thought for a moment of putting a bridle on Pet and riding her bareback out to look for him, but then I decided I wouldn't, because there were fence gates to open and it'd take more time and she'd be a trouble, actually, in getting through the corn.

I cut across the edge of the cornfield, trying to not step on the new corn too much. It was coming up good, and would be indeed knee-high or better by the Fourth. It was due to be cultivated soon.

Beyond the cornfield there was the railroad track with tight barbed wire fences on both sides of the right-of-way. I knew where to get through the fence, where we'd worn a place under it, and I slid down this little hollow under the fence and down the embankment. I crossed the Santa Fe track, the rails glistening and going away, away, north toward the town of Iola and south through Humbolt to Chanute and Independence, and on down to Tulsa. I'd never been down that far and someday I thought I would set out to walk down the track, maybe catching onto a freight train as it came past, and riding some and walking some, clear down to Tulsa, and maybe clear on down to Texas. I had never been away from home for any time and felt the urge to go, to leave, and had a funny kind of thrilling feeling in my guts when I thought of myself all alone, walking on the railroad, or maybe out on the high road, just ambling from place to place, not caring, free and easy, just me to worry about. Not like now, with a worry on me and the uneasiness of my mother driving me, and I not knowing what to expect.

It isn't easy to find somebody in the real early morning hours; not out in a country of cornfields and pastures and small ravines and woods and rocks. It isn't easy to know where a person will go alone in those hours; but I knew something about how a certain person would go and where, especially if the person is your father and if you like him real well, and if you are worried about him, too, no matter what you have told your mother. Your father hasn't been acting just normal lately, maybe, and he has done some strange things like sit at the dining table and not say anything at all during a whole meal, and this is strange because he has been very talkative the times you sat with him at the table. He has sat there staring at nothing special, eating a few mouthfuls and then he cries out, "Damn it, God damn it," and this isn't like him, because he has always been very considerate of Mom. He wouldn't ever let a hired man swear in front of her. She was so particular about the name of God, the way all of the Baptists were in that part of the country about swearing. But here he was shouting the name of God right out and looking as if God had done a bad thing to him. It was shocking and I couldn't forget it, really, though it was buried down inside me somewhere. But here I was in the night walking out across the fields looking for him, and I was really scared. I know my mother was thinking that he had lost his mind or something, though she had said so often that there had never been a breath of insanity on either side of the family.

By the time I had crossed the little creek that never had much water except in flood time, and had crossed the pasture where our cows were still resting... I almost stumbled onto them in the dark and one rose, I guess it was Anabell, as Dad called her, big, red-spotted, and she gave out a loud grunt when she got up. I circled around the herd and went through a grove of trees that was near our south line fence and went off across the big alfalfa field. There was heavy dew

on the alfalfa, and I felt the wetness sopping my overalls and seeping through my shoes. It wasn't cold at all, just wet, and I never had paid any attention to wetness really. I just took wetness and dryness and temperature as they came, and the way I felt about feeling things like that, was part of the way I felt about everything... not caring, just going along. But now I did hurry, because it was as if something was driving me beyond my mother's fear and my own uneasiness.

I started to trot, keeping close to the line fence, and I guessed I would follow it along until it got close to the river, and then I would turn north, because that was one way that he did like to walk sometimes. There was an old burying ground over that way near the river, and the grass in there was pretty high. I never did understand why he liked to go over that way, but it was a favorite hike of his, and one on which he hardly ever took anybody else along. It might be where he was now, I didn't know, and if he was dead or something, then I figured that he might be in there in the tall grass among the old graves that had been there ever since the country was settled back in the 1850s and 60s. One thing that Dad liked to do was talk about that old graveyard, and he could sure interest me in it when he told how it seemed to him. Dad had something special in him, that was sure. When he got to talking it was really something, and neighbors of ours who heard him talk about earlier times and about some of his ideas said they'd never heard anything like it.

Dad was self-educated. Maybe, all added up, he had the equivalent of a high school education, and he was a member of the Kansas Bar and practiced law as well as farming. He used to say that he didn't get much schooling in Illinois after the Civil War. But he had all the words he needed to say whatever he wanted to say, and he read anything that was good: he had a set of the *Encyclopedia Americana* that he had read from Volume One on and just kept reading and studying it, and there was something else he had, that my mother said was like he was gifted with poetry or something. She said he was like a wind-harp that could play any kind of music that the wind decided. But you know it's not easy to live with somebody like that.

Every now and then as I moved along through the wet grass I yelled out for him, but I didn't get any answer, and my voice sounded loud and strange in the silent early morning. The birds weren't even awake, and there just wasn't any sound at all as I stood every once in a while and listened. I thought I might hear him coming, or walking, through the grass, the way shoes sound in grass when it is wet, a soft shushh-shushh, but I didn't hear that sound at all.

I turned north and went across a plowed field that had some hickory trees and oaks growing around the edge. It was over at the far edge of this plot that the old burying ground and the long grass was, and I headed for there. I hadn't been that way for a long while—the place was kind of eerie, actually. It sat all alone at the far edge of the plowed ground, a little island there, just some-

thing left over; but I had to go now, that was sure. I kept calling and getting no answer; but as I got closer to the tall grass I thought I saw a little flicker of light and I hurried up a little, running now, breathing hard, stumbling along over the rough earth. What I saw might have been just my imagination, because I wanted so much to see a sign of Dad. It could even have been a flicker of a will-o-the-wisp that I had heard him tell about so often.

But when I got near to the grass and came up to the edge, I could see that there was indeed light shining out from the middle of the plot. My heart started to beat really fast, because I was sure, then, that I would find Dad in there and that he would be dead or something. So I called "Hey, Dad, Dad," and pushed into the grass.

He was there all right. He was lying back, his head on a piece of old log, and he was sprawled out, his legs and feet stretched wide, lying back with the lantern beside him. And he didn't say anything when I came up beside him. I did, though. "Hey, you got Mom really worried. Why'd you stay out here all night?"

"I was told to come out here."

"Who told you? Who *could* tell you?"

"All of them."

He was getting old, you could see that. In the yellow light of the kerosene lantern his face looked thin and his body seemed very small and tired. He lay there with his hat back from his forehead. I was really worried now, because I thought sure that he was sick, or had lost his mind, and I didn't know what to do or say. It would be bad enough if this was somebody you didn't know at all, but to be confronted with such behavior suddenly, in your own father, who had always seemed so interesting and ahead of other people... that is hard.

"I heard you yelling." He whispered.

"Why didn't you answer?"

"I didn't want to spoil it."

"Spoil what?"

"Why, all this. And it's a good thing you came to find me. Because, boy, you are the last of the wandering Gards. It has to be up to you, boy."

"What has to be up to me?" I asked nervously.

"You'll find out."

"Come on back home with me."

"Sit down. I've got to talk. Your mother thinks I'm running out of time; or that I'm crazy, maybe. Do you think I'm crazy?"

"Nope. But you've been acting awful funny."

"Is it funny, boy, to see the way things are?"

"I don't follow you, Dad."

"Sit over here. Here, sit down on this log. You and I always been pretty good friends, haven't we?"

“I guess.”

“And we’ve reached a time when things have to be evened out... when the Gards have run out of time. Not just me. All of us. All of us Gards. We moved west joint by joint, we just kept pressin’ on and on, and all of us had something we saw that we had to have. And now we’ve come to the end.”

“To the end of what?”

“To this land here. To this grass. This tall grass here. So tall you couldn’t see me, or hardly see my lantern. Look how this grass sets here in the middle of the land ready for growing. Everything’s gone. All that I saw here is gone. Do you know what I’m talking about, boy?”

“Not really.”

“I’m seventy-two years old. You’re young. Nobody else had the vision. But you got to have it. You are all the chance I got left.”

I unhinged myself down beside him on an end of the log. I knew we ought to be getting back to the house; that Mom would be worrying sick, that she would think that both of us had got into trouble, or hurt. I felt nervous, and the wind had come up a little bit and I heard the wind in the trees that weren’t far away.

“Let’s go home.”

“Nope. Not yet. What I’ve got to say might be the most important thing I ever said. Because you are my blood, boy. You are my chosen messenger, the one who can save my dreams for me.”

He reached over and took hold of my ankle. I felt his hand, very strong, an old man’s strong hand shaped by years of labor. It was the first time he had ever really touched me that I could recall. We Gards were never folks who touched and showed our affection for each other that way. But he held onto my ankle, like the claws of an eagle I thought. He pulled on my ankle and my leg, and sat up, scraping his heels into the grass in front of the log. He kept hold of my ankle, squeezing harder, and I let him do it; it was a strange sensation being held so hard by my father, and he used my leg to pull himself over so he could get his feet under him. He rose, very stiffly, letting me go as he stood. The grass in there was about shoulder high, very coarse prairie grass, and we couldn’t see much in the dark, though by that time the sky was just beginning to lighten. He looked like a dark shadow in the wavering grass and in the dim lantern glow, for he left the lantern sitting on the ground. He took hold of my arm when he got straightened up, and I stood up too. He pulled me beside him and started to move out through the grass.

“Come here. I want to show you.”

“Mom’ll be excited. We ought to be going.”

“She’s waited and waited for me. She’ll wait some more. She isn’t like me, boy. Her family isn’t like mine. Hers is religious. They put a lot of store by God

and how he tells them what to do. The Gards ain't that way. We go by God, but we go the way we got the strength to go. The way the wind goes; the way the clouds go. Come over here."

He pulled me along with him to the edge of the prairie. At the edge of the grass he stopped. The edge of the unbroken grass was higher than the plowed ground. We couldn't see very far out into the field, just a little way, but you could feel and tell that there were two different things: the prairie and the plowed ground, and I began to get a feeling that we were really all alone out there, and that maybe we wouldn't be able to get away. He kept holding my arm, harder now, and I thought of his hands, the way a man's hands get as he grows old, when you feel the hard bones and the muscles. My arm ached, but he didn't let up.

And strangely, he began to put into words what I was feeling before about being alone, unable to leave.

"We been cast up here," he said. "Cast up on this shore. This is an island in the whole ocean, and we are castaways, you and me, boy. No ship brought us here, but our wandering selves brought us here. This is the island of the Gards. And the Gards made the ocean, too."

I kind of knew what he meant. He'd told me many times when we were sitting out in the yard on a Sunday afternoon, and Mom had made a big pitcher of lemonade and Dad was sitting in his old wicker rocker that Mom had bought at the 1893 World's Fair at Chicago... I'd heard him tell plenty of times how the land was when he came out to Kansas in the 1880s... all prairie grass, hardly any plow broken, and the prairie flowers and plants all growing. Mom said Dad should have been a poet or a writer or something, and she couldn't see how he had got the talent to talk like he did; because there had never been a poet or a writer in the Gards as far as she knew. But now he just kept holding me, and he began to talk like he did out in the yard; but this time I seemed to be a real part of it.

"You know, boy, we saved this prairie grass here in the old burying ground, because we never wanted to disturb these graves. I don't know who these people are who're buried here. They were buried long before I came. But when the plow was turning the new sod, and the roots were breaking, when they drove the teams up to this part here they always stopped. Never broke this. Broke all the rest, and year after year we grew crops. Now this is all there is left, and the dream of the Gards is ended. You see why I come out here in the night and stay all night while your mother stays up at the house and worries about me? You see why I do it?"

"Not really. You ought to go home; you might get sick out here."

"Boy, it ain't sickness that is worrying me. Your mother wouldn't know. But I am worried about the death of dreams and the death of a country. I'm out here

in the night because this is all there is left.”

He stood for a moment; and with his left hand he grabbed at some of the prairie grass and jerked it loose. He held the grass over against me, so I could feel it and smell it. It had a dew-grass-acid smell, sort of pleasant.

“Here, take the grass. Ball it up, roll it around, tear it apart. Put it in your mouth, taste it. Chew on it.”

I tried to do what he said, getting more nervous all the time because what I wanted him to do was go home with me across the fields over to the house. I wanted to get him inside, into bed so Mom could watch out for him; and what I really wanted, I guess, was to get rid of the responsibility of him. But he wasn't going. I put a blade of the grass into my mouth and chewed on it. The juice was a taste I knew because I often grabbed spears of grass when I was walking along a fence or railroad and put them in my mouth. The taste always made me think of spring, somewhere about May, when everything is blooming in the fields in Kansas, and the new grasses are well up. There's a taste and spirit about fields and woods, and tastes of greens you can cook, and dandelions out in the yard, and meadow flowers and wild onions... all that came to me as I chewed on the prairie grass that night with Dad holding onto my arm.

“Now you *look*,” he said, “this grass here, this old burying ground that I have kept for you, boy, nobody else; this piece, this acre or so... this is not of our time, neither yours nor mine. It belongs to itself: the wild, the grasses, the roots, the fermenting soils; the wild things, the bugs, the people who used to live here... they all own this grass. I don't own it, and you don't own it. And look, how these grasses have browned and brittleed in the fall, and laid rotting under the snows. Look how the new shoots of the grasses push up in the spring out of the rot, and their roots are down in the rot, but the grasses taste sweet. You got to know how to listen. How to listen, boy.”

He stopped talking and I was afraid to answer him right then, for fear I would start him going again, and we had to get home.

“Listen to the wind,” he said. “Listen to how she breathes out, over the long grass; listen to how it is in August when she swirls out the corn leaves all over and across the field and rasps them together and roughens up across you as you walk in the tall corn at night. Feel the wind file the corn leaves against your cheek, boy, you felt *that*, and so have I, and listen to the sound of the wind in the August corn. Listen to the wind the way she whirls up the dust along the road and settles it down over the hedge rows, and how she sways the sunflowers in the fallow field and lightens up their yellow with white dust. You got to know how to listen to the wind in these tall grasses, and how it stirs up the grasses outside you and inside, too, and breathes the day, and the sunup and the evening. You got to know how to listen to the shadow of the past, and to the way this prairie grass was left here... all alone, a little prairie strip of all that was, and

all that was hoped for; for there isn't anything in what a man can remember that can't be listened to."

He was talking about the same way he talked on Sundays to Mom and me out in the yard; or to neighbors if they happened to come by. I was kind of cold now, I hadn't worn any jacket, just my work shirt with sleeves rolled up, and I shivered a little in his grasp. I guess he felt me shiver; he pulled me around to face him. He wasn't near as tall as I was, but he was a little bit heavier, sturdier built than I. I was a lot taller all right but I wasn't near as strong as he. Even now when he was old, I could feel the strength of him coming down into his hand. He came around a little now and looked me more directly in the face. I saw his face dimly, but it was sharp, like a hawk's bill, I thought, because he seemed so tense and eager, like a bird coming down out of the sky. It was when he was talking about the prairie and the way things were that he got tight and kind of desperate.

"I was there in the night, and the tall grasses were everywhere, weaving the wind, and I walked out into it, just me, alone, feeling something I never felt before, like this was the beginning of the world. The Creation. The Genesis. And like I was God himself, mastering over all, calling on all. My voice heard above the wind and up to the clouds. And I was young. Young. And I had come out seeking, searching, like my father and his father, never stopping, ever searching on and on. And I found the tall grasses—the roots of man and the roots of grass are all the same, and both of them require freedom to live and to be."

I felt like I was in some kind of a crazy play, and that I was playing one of the parts whether I wanted to or not. I tried to get away, but Dad was awfully strong, and I couldn't break his hold. He kept saying, "Don't spoil it, boy. Let it be. I want to show you how it was."

"We haven't got time. We got to go home."

"We'll go soon. I got to show you this, then I have something to ask you."

"What?"

As he spoke the words came out like little poems, and I remembered the time when my older sister was in high school and had to give a little talk about how the southeastern Kansas country looked in the days when the settlers came into it. She told her English teacher what Dad said and the teacher made her ask him to come to the school and give a little talk to the students about the early days. My sister didn't much want him to come, because she was afraid that he wouldn't change his clothes, and might shame her, I guess, but he did clean up real good after the morning chores were finished and went up to school and came right into the classroom and sat down in a back seat until the teacher asked him to come up to the front and talk. Mom heard all about it from the teacher, because my sister never did get it so she could tell what happened. But the teacher called up Mom on the telephone and said that Dad was the greatest



...it was a happy sound to me, like a million fiddle strings snapping; the cut of the blade of the plow, and the slow strength of the horses.

poet she ever heard, and that Walt Whitman never made any better poems than Dad did as he was talking to the students. Mom tried to get him to tell what he said but he never would and the students, like my sister, never could describe it either. But I guess he was pretty wild when he was talking.

“God, boy,” he suddenly continued, “you never held the handles of a sodbreaker. You never had the experience, as I did, of hearing the roots of the sod cutting and breaking; then it was a happy sound to me, like a million fiddle strings snapping; the cut of the blade of the plow, and the slow strength of the horses. Look, boy, get hold of the plow handles!”

He made me lean and take hold of imaginary plow handles, and he yelled, “Hey! Gitup!” to imaginary horses, and I swear I felt something in my hands and arms, the power of a plow cutting through sod, the grasses bending over and breaking down; the turning under, the fall of the heavy strips of *cut* roots and grass. I felt it, and as he yelled at the horses, I was there in the old days with him, walking along behind the plow. I felt unreal and foolish, too, and I couldn’t get completely into the game he was playing with himself and with me. I knew it was a game and I think he knew it was a game, too, but somehow he

was living over his life.

We came to the edge of the grass and he stopped, and forgot the game and the imaginary horses all at once. He took hold of my hand.

“Boy, you’ve got to help me. I raised you up to understand. It’s the time for you to go seeking as I did. You never yet met the Stranger, and you never felt the roots and the body of the grass as I did. And I broke all the sod that I could get that was mine. It’s gone. The tall grass is gone, and you ain’t going to find that. But you got to find something. There’s something out there that is like the grass was to me. I come searching for it. And you got to find out what they left in place of the grass, because I am an old man and I have to know before I die. I can’t go, because I have no youth left in me. But you go. You go and find and tell me what it is that you are searching for. I got this feeling so deep and bitter. You go, boy. You go searching and find a Stranger in the grass like I did; unless you do, boy, my life is over and all that I found in the middle of the grass is nothing. All the Gards will be dead. You go. Go, boy go.”

“Where do you want me to go?”

He grabbed me hard by the arm. “Say you’ll go.”

I wanted to humor him, and I didn’t have any idea what he wanted me to do. He said he wanted me to go somewhere, nowhere, where there was a stranger, whoever *that* was, standing in the middle of a big field of prairie grass. He had never mentioned a stranger before. I guessed that in his mind he could go anywhere or do anything. There wasn’t any limit. But I was different. I couldn’t talk like he could, and make everything seem like a story or a play. I couldn’t do any of that and hadn’t. And I didn’t want to go wandering away without knowing where I was headed. The Depression was a tough time to go anywhere, anyhow. All the tramps and hobos that were drifting through the country, and you could see them anytime as you stood along the Santa Fe track, riding in the coal cars, or maybe on top of the box cars. Dad just expected me to start going, looking for some more prairie grass that wasn’t out there anymore. Well, I wasn’t going to do it. But I said, “Oh, sure I’ll go. I’ll go if you’ll come home with me. Mom’ll be crazy with worry.”

“When will you leave?”

“Oh, I don’t know, soon.”

“Tomorrow.”

“I can’t tomorrow. But soon, I promise if you’ll come home.”

“Go tomorrow if you can,” Dad said. “Go tomorrow if you can, boy. You got a long ways to go.”

He let go of my arm and walked into the grass to get his lantern. The light wavered and dimmed and then got strong again as he lifted the lantern above the grass and turned up the wick. The light was growing in the sky, and the morning Kansas wind was rising. The grass lay bent over, combed out by the

wind, and I shivered in the early morning coolness. I couldn't make a thing out of what had happened. I just had the feeling that something tremendous had happened to me, and I wanted to get home. And as far as going away was concerned, I would forget about that, because I was sure that he would forget it... after he'd had a good rest, and we'd let him sleep in the morning. I would do all the chores myself, and maybe Mom would help some. But I wasn't going anyplace, no matter what. He was an old man and talked a lot, and needed to calm down, from what, I didn't know. I knew that he was excited and that he figured something had gone sour with his world, and that there wasn't any more wild prairie... that much I understood; but I was awfully tired.

He took hold of my arm as we started across the plowed field. "You got an awful lot to do to get ready to go," he said.

FEELING FOR PLACES

FROM *Grassroots Theater*

I know that a great deal of the joy I have felt as a worker in back-country American theater has sprung from my feeling for places. My father loved our part of eastern Kansas and perhaps transmitted to me his intimate knowledge of towns and prairies. Or it may have been my early association with things on and about our Kansas farm that has made a search for the flavorings of America one of my greatest pleasures.

There was our local river, for instance, the Neosho. The Indians called it that; it means rapidly rising water. In flood time it would reach out across all the lowlands, and from our upstairs windows the whole north and west would be a great brown sheet in the morning light. On the Santa Fe railroad tracks that cut east of the river the folks would sometimes gather to watch the flood water rise or to just silently watch the young corn leaves swirl around in the rapid water and come loose from their rootings. On the bridge where the Missouri Pacific crossed the river there would usually be a crowd of white and negro boys with fish lines, hoping to drag in a mud catfish. About once a year a boy would slip off the bridge and into the muddy water and would be sucked down and lost. Then the whistles at the water works would blow, and a search would go on into the night until the body was pulled out—usually down below where the river made a sharp bend. And when the flood receded the corn stalks would be lying flat against the earth, frayed and brown, and the whole earth would give off a musty smell, and cracks would begin to grow until the earth was a pattern of twisty brown cracks.

It seemed to me that the men of our town and countryside were shaped by the river and that the river knew and held their destinies. It crushed at will and gave at will, too, because in good years corn grew in great, tall stalks in the bottoms, and the ears were often half as long as a man's arm. And in good years the women's faces were serene as they sang hymns in the kitchens while their

menfolk stood at nightfall leaning on pigpen fences listening to the soft grunting of hogs and thinking, perhaps, of the corn that would fatten the pigs.

There was the river, and there was the earth along the river all plow-broken except for a prairie acre or two where there was a tangled burying ground. I saw that our earth like our river shaped men's lives and that in dry years the earth whirled away from the roots of the corn and our neighbors' faces grew long and solemn and the women quit singing hymns in the kitchens and the men praised God in small voices with the edges of questions sticking out.

The river, the earth, the sky. In the sky at dusk the nighthawks swooped and boomed, crying as they crisscrossed the air, and after a hot day a coolness would come out of the ravine that ran down to the river—a coolness and a loneliness. There were sweet singers in the bottoms along the river and on the uplands too. They sang of Scotland and Holland and Ireland and of Illinois and Indiana. There were lips that could be kissed under the rustling corn leaves, and there was sweating work to be done in the heat of the day heaving the heavy alfalfa onto the hay racks and then pitching it off in long ricks.

My observations of the life around me were pure waves of sensation which beat against me and tossed me this way and that on billows of pleasure that had no other meaning. Good and evil were inextricably mixed, and I did not care to separate them. I sensed that the river was cruel, but when I slipped the saddle off my mare and shrugged off my clothing and swam the horse across the river in the early morning hours, the water, the smooth movement of the swimming horse, and my own careless appreciation were welded into a wordless poem. There were mists that rose from the lowlands and stimulated my night-time imagination, and I was a void, an opening, a space into which sensations poured in confusion.

Looking back, I can see how these things helped to give me a taste for the flavorings of places, but a taste for theater came my way through the purest chance. Certainly, my father gave me no leaning in that direction. He was a country lawyer, a Kansas pioneer who set great store by the economic development and welfare of the countryside, but he had little sympathy at all for cultural matters. To him the arts were participated in by women or the weaker members of society and had no real place in dynamic community development.

Though he was a self-made and almost completely self-educated man, he encouraged me to go to the University of Kansas where he hoped I would become interested in law or business. I disappointed him by floundering around for a couple of years with no noticeable inclination for a profession. The nearest I came to it was once during a visit to Kansas City, Missouri, when a handwriting expert at the YMCA told me that I had a modest amount of literary ability. I could attach no possible value to his judgment, and neither could father. So I wandered America for a while in the middle of my college career, just as many

other Americans were wandering and seeking during the early depression years. I returned to Kansas University for my junior year no nearer a career than I had been before but with a keen remembrance of people and places I had known and seen and a deep liking for a wandering life.

Now it happened that there was a professor of speech and drama at Kansas University named Allen Crafton. He was small physically, as men go, with bright blue eyes and a thin nose that looked as translucent as a mellow clarinet reed. But there was so much about him that was legendary tales spun by students which grew with the telling—that my characterization of him can afford to be extravagant and perhaps sound a bit like a legend.

Crafton was a pagan-god figure whose lips were stained with the juices of barefoot-tramped grapes. He had steel in his hands and art at his fingertips. He could paint a magnificent landscape or write a poem of mighty tone or of aching, small joys. He was capable of turning out—and did turn out—a novel in a week or a play in ten days. It didn't really matter that they were not published. He seldom tried the publishers.

Women tended to follow him like dogs, and good men shoved for a place at his side. He was regarded as a wit, a philosopher, a roarer of bawdy ballads, but he could be as sensitive as harp strings in a soft wind. He was a staunch friend, and he would fight for friends like a demon. He savored the unusual, but tolerated the usual and found it useful. He loved and was a judge of good liquor and good smoke, but he was grateful for inferior stuff if a poor man offered it to him. He lived the life of Everyman; yet he kept a personal integrity and was at once malleable and impregnable. He seemed to live a man's full lifetime every day. He rode the sun like a chariot. He had a quick mind capable of whipping out at sensation and fact and gathering them into a child's wondrous pattern of imaginative grace.

Crafton had imbibed the goodness of places. He had traveled to the far cities of the earth, and he spoke of them in their own fashion. He turned back the landscapes he viewed like the pages of a book, seeking the sights and sounds of old generations.

His friends said that Crafton was undoubtedly a genius but that he would perhaps die unsullied and unknown. So there is poetic truth in all that I have written about him. And it is with gratitude that I look back on the time in 1937 when I stood with him one afternoon on the south side of Mount Oread at Lawrence, Kansas.

The prairie grass grew lush where we were standing, just as it had when the great Wakarusa Valley lying before us was the carpet of the pioneers. The grasses rustled gravely in a slow wind that seemed to blow from a wild spot on the opposite hill where the bones of men killed in Quantrill's raid on Lawrence

in '63 were lying in prairie graves. The big University buildings were at my back and the whole scene was laced through with nostalgia, for I was leaving Kansas and I knew that Kansas would never be my home again.

I first met Allen Crafton when I was a junior in the University. That was 1933, a bad time for everybody. Students I knew were living in chicken houses or in the back seats of Model T Fords. They were tracking down cockroaches in the University buildings at night and selling these quick insects to biological companies. They were doing most of the manual work of the city of Lawrence, and they were endlessly pleading with suspicious merchants and heartless landladies for credit. The struggle was primitive, too, and the highlight of the week might be a hike on Sunday night along the Union Pacific railroad and the Kaw River with twenty cents worth of hamburger for five fellows and a few matches to light a fire.

It was a bad time and a sad time. Often some sensitive spirit got too tired and leaped from the Kaw River bridge, or gagged and burned his throat and belly with poison. But it was a good time for militant ideas and pleasures of mind clashing with mind. It was a time when sham and unreality dropped away and when the girls looked deep into the eyes of their men for the soundness of soul that was in them.

Allen Crafton opened his home and often his purse to the Kansas students, but his generosity alone was not the reason for his popularity. He was an extremely able teacher. Among his course offerings was a course in playwriting. This course interested me. I had never quite forgotten what the handwriting expert at the Kansas City YMCA said, and I had been experimenting and dabbling with writing during my early college years.

I wrote some short narratives for a good teacher named Margaret Lynn who knew and loved the prairies and had written books about them. My writings, I remember, were all brief episodes about people and places I had seen in my wanderings. Miss Lynn said the sketches were good but that they were merely impressions and had little central idea. She said I probably had some good materials but that until I developed a philosophy of writing the materials would not do me much good. Although I was completely ignorant of every aspect of dramatic writing and although I had seen only a few plays in my life, I thought that a course in playwriting might do me some good and help me learn the philosophy of writing Miss Lynn had said I needed.

In 1933 when I decided to take Professor Crafton's playwriting course the depression was at its peak. There were more breakdowns caused by malnutrition, and our Chancellor, E. H. Lindley, decided that something drastic must be done. He assembled a lot of the cases of what students were doing to keep alive and went off one day to Washington to see FDR about American college life. The result of Chancellor Lindley's visit was the CSEP—"College Student

Employment Project”—which created jobs in American colleges and paid students a small sum per month. To most students the money was a profound godsend. It broke the tensions. It rippled away the drawn tightness on the faces. It started up new fires and creative hopes. The CSEP was certainly not the greatest thing that FDR did, but it saved many young hearts from breaking.

I was one of the first students to apply for and receive one of these jobs. When the committee asked me what kind of work I would like to do which would benefit me and still allow me to earn the money, I replied that I did not know. I would like a day or two to decide. And it was during this small decision period that I first attended Crafton’s playwriting class. He talked about character, and he had the great dramatic characters of world drama waiting at his lips to illustrate what he said. I listened with fascination, for I knew that he was talking about life itself and that the characters he was using as illustration were easily within my own comprehension.

After class, I walked over to old Fraser Theater. The heavy oak double doors were closed, and when I pulled them creakingly open the dim theater seemed very silent and lonely. I stood a moment looking at the empty seats and the silent blue curtain and the frame of the stage opening with its scrolls. There was a cold unreality about the place that made me uneasy. When I opened a door at the side of the stage, a curious odor came from the stage itself. Ahead of me there were six steps going up to the level of the stage, and in a moment I moved up them. There was an even deeper silence on the platform. A bare bulb burning high up cast a hard little light down upon the stage boards, and the curtains hanging around the stage seemed to move as if in a tiny draft. Ahead of me against a wall was a stack of scenery with a flat, dusty, dry smell about it, and high over head there was a small creaking and swaying sound as though a small breeze were swaying heavy ropes in wooden pulleys.

I put my hand on one of the curtains, and a filter of dust fell in the dim light. I walked out on the stage and wondered what I was to do here. I wandered around. There was a steep flight of steps at the left side going up into a high dimness. The floor around the stairs and near the walls was littered with pieces of crumpled kleenex smeared with lipstick and make-up, some odds and ends of clothing, and a pile of boards. I turned and stood in the center of the stage. It was the first theater I had ever taken the trouble to examine from the stage side of the footlights, and as I stood looking out at the seats that rose gently in front of me I tried to imagine the stage peopled by the characters Crafton had told us about. I found the experience pleasant, and I stood on the stage for a long while. The next day I saw the University committee and told them that I wished to work in the theater. They assigned me to Crafton.

He was rightly dubious at first, but after he found that I was willing to do any kind of work from scrubbing the stage to building scenery and acting we

became fast friends. I got fifteen dollars a month for working with this master of stage design, lighting, painting, and costume. He was an excellent carpenter and a good sculptor and carver. He could write a play, if he wished, or act with wondrous art. But he was most magnificent of all as director of the play.

Every day of my last two years in college was a day of creative joy because of my association with Crafton. The mighty dramatic literature of the world came to life for me. I read everything, looked everywhere for ideas. Food and clothing did not matter. The theater at Kansas University was my playground and I worked and dreamed there day after day.

I enjoyed working for Crafton at least partly because of his deep love of Kansas people and places. I stayed on as his assistant for a couple of years after graduation, and we talked increasingly of a theater of the Kansas people based on the history and tradition that seemed to make Kansas unique. One morning after one of our talks I was working on the stage and a thick cloud of dust began to drift down from the heights of the stagehouse. I was building some flats, but I let them lie and climbed to the attic. I went to the windows, and as I looked westward out across the great valley it seemed to me that the valley was curtained with thick, black velours. The richness of the prairie country was blowing away, and the whole plains lay in a whirling, drifting torment. It was as though from the attic windows I could sense all America writhing and gasping as from a great wound.

My father had been a Kansas pioneer, but the frontier that he knew was ended. It could probably never return or be relived; the depression with its floods and hungers was the end, perhaps, of a scene that began with the push West and ended in the spiritual and physical torment of the American people. If the power, the drive, the call that had sent my father forth from Cumberland County, Illinois, to Kansas was now somehow responsible for young and old wandering futilely through the depression, then, indeed, I thought, we must seek a new, inward expansiveness that would enrich us, not so much in silver and gold but in our whole soul and feeling.

Crafton had said many times that this inward growing must be of the art that was in us and of a recognition by all people of the goodness of the stuff of America re-created in terms of theater so that theater might be an accepted part of our lives. In his own way, in his own theater, Crafton was making his belief live magnificently and was probably finding his own salvation. But I wondered how his idea could spread—how it could come to everybody.

As I stood at the attic windows alone with the great dust curtain curling around Old Fraser, it did not seem strange to me that, somehow, somewhere, I might become a tiny part of the spreading of such an idea. Afterwards, I began to wonder whether the people of America might be drawn closer together in tolerance and in joy in one another through their stories and songs, their presents

and pasts told and sung in a theater whose stages were everywhere and whose actors were the folks in the cities and on the farms, in the crossroad places and in the back places where the American past lay quiet and undisturbed. I thought about it a great deal and talked it all over with Crafton.

Then, one day Crafton told me that if I were really interested in native American theater I should go to Cornell University to study with A. M. Drummond, who had made some big steps toward a New York State theater. I applied for a scholarship to Cornell, received one, and so at length I was standing with Crafton, as I have said, on the side of Mount Oread one afternoon in 1937.

There was silence between us, and my thoughts were reaching out beyond the valley to encompass my experiences in American places. I had heard American voices from the deep South, from the West and the Northwest, from New England and Texas and the middle country. I had heard a singing that was Mexico and had felt a vast, unspoken sensation that was Canada. Somehow I knew that these voices and feelings must relate themselves to a theater I earnestly desired to help create but could not really define. I hoped Cornell and Drummond would teach me American theater.

I got set up in a room on Dryden Road, Ithaca, New York, in September, 1937. Crafton had told me that Professor Drummond, who was the Director of the Cornell University theater, had already been interested in a theater of the New York State people and that he had started an interesting country theater at the New York State Fair in 1919. Crafton had told me, too, that Professor Drummond was quite unique, but he did not enlarge on that statement. I did not comprehend, when I arrived at Ithaca one rainy afternoon: that I was embarking on an experience that was to alter my whole life and that I was to make the acquaintance of a man whose ideas and examples were to be the actual groundwork of experiments in which I was to engage later.

As I think back over the leaders in American theater I have known, I am certain that Professor Drummond is the most complex of them all and probably the deepest thinker. Here is a man who made the Cornell Dramatic Club one of the outstanding college theater organizations of the country. He directed the club in outstanding productions of fine European plays, and in many cases his productions were the first in America of those plays. He set the standards of scholarly research in theater at Cornell and created a splendid program of graduate study. He made theater a respected area of study at Cornell, and the influence of his academic ideas, especially in aesthetics, spread far and wide among American universities. Yet this same man was able to feel the utmost elation in his New York State Fair experiment of 1919, when he took the Cornell Dramatic Club to the Fair at Syracuse and established a country theater which became widely talked about throughout America. He proved that he was

at least as interested in helping to establish a taste for good theater among the country folk of New York State as he was in producing plays in his own theater at Cornell. His country theater was one of the really significant early demonstrations of what an excellent theater program could do in raising countryside drama standards.

Drummond's friend, George Pierce Baker of Harvard, wrote to him after the New York State Fair experiment: "If you can demonstrate to the people of the countryside how relatively easy it is to give plays well, and that it is just as easy, or easier to give good plays rather than poor ones, you will have done real service to both your community and the bettering of appreciation of drama in the country."

Professor Drummond did demonstrate these things. His Cornell Dramatic Club played to six thousand persons a week at the State Fair. The country theater, which was established in a wing of one of the older buildings, was packed for every performance. As Professor Drummond has written: "We had 400 seats, and 500 standing room. Both were filled." The country theater was open even when productions were not on just for folks to walk through and see, and there was always a crowd looking the stage over and asking questions about stage lighting, scenery, make-up. But, Drummond has recalled: "The audience were in a way undemonstrative. It was a 'demonstration' and they were serious. We even preceded every play with a short, informal talk on the idea of the thing. But in their undemonstrative way they laughed and nudged each other and beamed and wiped furtive tears and voted it good and stayed for more and sent their friends. There is something in it."

Zona Gale of Wisconsin was extremely interested in the New York State Fair theater and waived the royalty on her play *The Neighbors*, which was the Drummond headliner. She wrote to Drummond:

I should be very glad that the play be given without royalty in country theatres, when the play is given for the benefit of any civic or other social enterprise. We might come at something picturesque, with an appeal to the imagination.

*The use of *The Neighbors* is offered free to any country theatre which will use a part of the funds so raised for the following purposes, or will prevail upon some member of the community to carry out the following:*

*To plant at least one long-lived shade tree in the community; or
To plant a fruit tree by the roadside; or
To plant a spruce or a balsam to be used, when so desired, as
a community Christmas tree.*

One tree for every performance!

And if the producers wish to give really good measure for the use of the

play, it is recommended that they conclude the evening with a community gathering, with community singing and dancing, and a discussion of the things which their community needs.

Furthermore, it is understood that the producers, the cast, and the audience at such a performance shall all be neighbors to everyone, as long as they live.¹

I find it extremely interesting, looking back, to note that Zona Gale had this connection with Professor Drummond's country theater experiments and perhaps helped in some way to formulate, or at least to confirm, some of his ideas about countryside drama. Zona Gale's home town was Portage, Wisconsin, and she had been very active in the development of the Wisconsin Dramatic Society, perhaps the earliest little theater movement in America. Professor Thomas Dickinson, then of the University of Wisconsin, founded the Society in 1910. On March 10, 1912, he wrote to Zona Gale to ask her to do a short play which the Society might produce, *The Neighbors*, which, incidentally, was written in just a few days, was the result.

The love of home place is apparent in much of Zona Gale's writing. Professor Drummond was impressed by the honest, human qualities of her characters, and I have certainly been no less so in my work with the Wisconsin Idea Theater. It is impossible to estimate the effect of Zona Gale's writings on the feeling of Wisconsin people for Wisconsin places, but it was perhaps the success of Zona Gale as a playwright—her *Miss Lulu Bett* was a Pulitzer Prize winner—which focused the great popular interest on her as a Wisconsin personality and threw playwriting and theater in general into a very favorable light in the state. Zona Gale's regard for regional themes, her interest in community development, and her success as a professional writer undoubtedly made subsequent drama development easier in Wisconsin.

Professor Drummond emerged from the State Fair theater with the convictions, which he stated in an article in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* in 1921, that plays of high literary value do "go" in the country and that local groups can be stimulated to do acceptable work. He was positive, too, that there was great latent interest waiting to be aroused in the communities of New York State.

Years afterward, when I was established in Wisconsin, Professor Drummond wrote to me:

I am pleased with your efforts in the behalf of regional drama. Not so much that regional literature and drama needs help, as because your appreciation of and presentation of the life and idiom that spring from near the soil, and from common ways of feeling and expression, are the basic stuff of our best writing, and our best thought about the many types and attitudes that make up our varied country,

¹ Quoted in A. M. Drummond, "A Countryside Theatre Experiment," *Quarterly Journal of Speech Education*, VI (Feb., 1920), 46-47.

its people and loyalties.

I think our best literature is in a true sense regional, and our greatest American writers and dramatists have done their richest work when they were rising from or returning to their native heath, folkways and sentiments.

The contemporary interest in regionally-based literature, both factual and fanciful, its success on the stage and in the press, encourages us to think that a new generation of American writers, dramatists, musicians and painters may be drawing content and style from native roots to challenge the merit of the American-bred writers of the Nineteenth Century.

And your encouragement of such an interest in your own region is a true if modest aid to some of those who will make American literature.

My personal debt to Professor Drummond is very large. It was his theories and ideas that drew my own into focus, just as it was the State Fair experience that probably made his own interest in regional drama development more keen.

Drummond's personal interest in New York State was, of course, very great. He was born in Auburn, and his entire family relationship was calculated to make him extremely fond of his town, his familiar countryside, and his neighbors. He was educated at Hamilton College, Cornell, and Harvard. During his younger days he wandered into almost every corner of central New York country and established the intimate relationship which fixed so firmly his desire to see the theater arts flourish in the back-country places he knew and loved. Nostalgia, however, was not Professor Drummond's chief motivation. He felt a keen sense of responsibility to his region and hoped to motivate a movement that might breed a superior kind of home-grown theater.

Although Professor Drummond has never formally stated it, I believe his thinking about theater in the region centered around the hope of developing fine original plays authored by the people of the area. His course in playwriting at Cornell developed several well-known playwrights, the most outstanding of whom is Sidney Kingsley.

His theory of countryside playwriting was that writers should be encouraged to consider themes and subjects closely allied to their own places. Cornell, the leading educational institution of higher learning in the region, ought, he thought, to assume a leading role in stimulating local playwriting by drawing the promising subjects and materials to the attention of writers. Cornell should stand ready to assist the local writers once they had their plays underway.

Drummond himself was a master play doctor. He believed that a body of highly usable original plays might be developed jointly by the authors and by someone like himself able and willing to straighten out the kinks in the scripts. These plays, once they were developed, would be of great service to local theater groups which, ideally, *ought* to be interested in the region where they

existed and therefore *ought* to be concerned with doing regional plays.

I do not think that Drummond had any illusions about the various groups' obvious preference for Broadway plays. He simply hoped that the larger city groups might try an original play once in a while. It was the smaller rural groups which I am sure he had in mind as doing most of the original play production.

His theory about this body of regional plays was extremely sound. He planned to distribute the plays on a non-royalty basis to help to counteract the excessively poor plays found in the commercial publishers' lists—the plays which rural groups left to themselves almost invariably selected. He did not expect to develop any great authors in his playwriting scheme. His chief desire was to see the theater come into its own as an interpreter of regional life.

The State Fair country theater, I am sure, led Professor Drummond to contemplate long-range plans for regional development in New York State.

It was three weeks after I arrived in Ithaca before I encountered Professor Drummond. During that time I noticed that students spoke of him with awe, sometimes with downright fear. When I finally met him I could see why. He is an immense man with great shoulders and a proud head. He holds his entire body more erect than any man I have ever seen. He usually wears a hat that is turned up a little at the brim and crushed down in an indescribable fashion on the crown. Behind his glasses are wonderfully alive eyes that can freeze you or warm you according to the mood of the man.

One day I was nervously waiting for him in his office when he entered slowly but with sure movements. He got his chair into exactly the position he wanted, sat down at his desk, and began straightening out some papers. Then he opened a drawer and looked for several moments among some files. He got up from his desk and went to his bookcase. He pondered over several volumes, finally took one down and laid it on the corner of his desk. He said, "Oh, dear!" in a sudden expulsion of all the breath in his lungs, and then he sat down. Finally he sighed, looked at me with a kind of glare that had a great deal of distaste in it, and said: "Well, what do you think I can do for you?"

I said, quite timidly, and a little pompously: "I want to work with you and for you, Professor Drummond. I am interested in a theater that will grow from the hearts and the everyday lives of the American people. I want to learn from you how such a theater may be encouraged."

He glanced at me quickly, then began to fiddle with some more papers on his desk. He picked up a letter and read it through carefully. I could see the date on the letter; it was about six years old. I thought that his careful reading of this old letter was eccentric, but later he made me understand that a fine letter, with all the ideas clear and the prose sturdy, was something to keep on one's desk and refer to and reread many times just for the sheer tonic of it. That was

probably why Professor Drummond was reading the letter. Anyway, he finally put the letter down and said, "Well, I dunno," and began drumming the top of the desk with his fingers.

I got up to leave, thinking that he wanted to get rid of me. He let me get as far as the door of his office, then he said, "Oh, Gard!"

I turned around and he was holding out the book he had taken from the shelf. "Have you read Carl Carmer's *Listen for a Lonesome Drum*?"

I said, "No, sir."

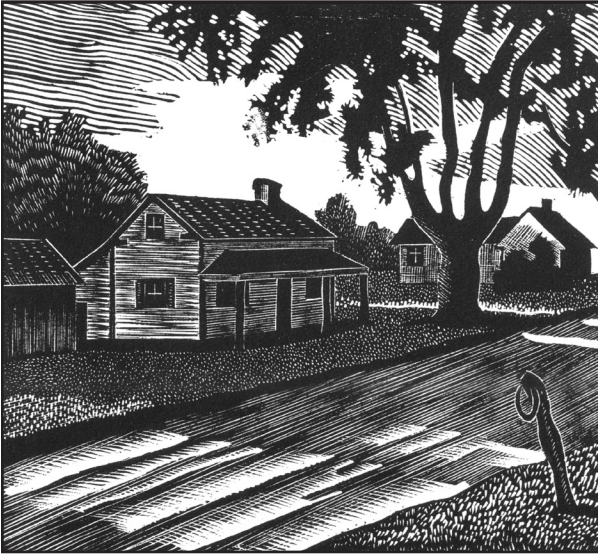
"Well, you might look it over. Pretty good."

I took the book, thanked him, and got to the door again. He called me back several times to chat about seemingly inconsequential matters. I was puzzled when I left his office; yet I had the feeling that I had met a great man; that he knew a great deal about me; that I did not know anything, really, about him.

At Kansas I had learned the fascination of ideas. At Cornell I learned, among other things, the rigors of discipline. This was an ordeal by fire under perhaps the most terrifying master in America.

The method of this amazing man was so complex and painful that the agonized student did not really know what was happening to him until things had happened. Little by little, with stinging rebuke, calculated irony, or with fabulous, small whips of rhetoric he stripped the student of practically every bit of encumbering ambition, pride, eagerness, and initiative. With students who could take it, his method was directly brutal. He might provoke the student with the most amazing accusations, defamations, and deflations, and when the poor student rose at last in desperate self-defense he would never be able to get a defense underway. Little vanities and conceits were either tossed out of the window or the student, in endeavoring to keep them, submitted himself to the most horrible tortures. He was often stood up before his classmates and flayed until, hot with shame and futile anger, he was sent forth to study himself.

All this torment was of course hitched to learning. The man was so mature, so worldly wise, that he pushed no one beyond the absolute limits of endurance, and the whole result of the Drummond ordeal was not only a vast respect and affection for the man but was also an increased desire for the ferreting out of truth and a new and stimulating liking for scholarship. For, after stripping the student down to nothing, Professor Drummond, slowly, and with the utmost patience, began to build him up again. This was almost an unconscious process. It might begin with a single "Good!" scribbled on the front leaf of a paper over which the student had spent his blood; yet so meager had been the Drummond praise until this point and so vast the Drummond integrity that the student grabbed this tiny straw of praise and wandered about in an ecstatic daze showing the paper to his friends and truly believing that he must have written a minor masterpiece.



*...the forgotten
roads, the wild
places where few
persons went...*

If the student were acting in one of the masterly theater productions that Professor Drummond directed in the Cornell University theater, a note written on a slip of cheap, yellow paper might be handed to the student by the stage manager. The note might say merely, "Smith, 1 per cent improved!" and the student would strive with all his might to make the part 2 per cent better the next night, just to get another one of those priceless scribbles. Professor Drummond could inspire superhuman feats of intellect and strength with a word or a gesture, simply because the student felt that a word or a gesture from Professor Drummond that was not ridicule or debasement meant that Professor Drummond considered the student worthy of some small respect. It was a kind of signal that a small part of the student's self-respect might be assumed again.

Professor Drummond was a man with a volcano burning inside of him. When the fire burned bright he was incomparable, wonderful, brilliant. He could tell stories beyond any living master of story-craft, or he could hold a group of keen intellectuals spellbound. When the fire burned low, however, he was grumpy, full of cliches and apt to complain woefully of his ills. He was, in other words, extremely human, with most of the human frailties that beset all of us. Some of his frailties seemed rather larger than ordinary, perhaps, because he was rude on occasion when rudeness did not actually appear necessary. He made little attempt to pay back the ordinary social obligations in the conventional way, much to the distress of hostesses who complained that he should certainly know better or that he was ungrateful for the attentions heaped upon

him. He paid little heed to the complaints about his misbehavior, but he found his own way to return kindness.

With students he was training, however, he was completely generous. He almost always paid the check at restaurants or bars. If a fellow achieved any sort of respect in Professor Drummond's eyes, then suddenly that fellow might be left to pay the check, and if he went out with Professor Drummond for food or drinks thereafter, he had better look out for himself. If a student came to Professor Drummond full of real trouble, he would be taken behind a closed door where no one might hear or suspect and be given excellent advice or helped with money. God knows how many Cornell students survived through the opening of Professor Drummond's pocketbook or how many men and girls told him their involved private troubles.

The general principles upon which he taught had great bearing on my feeling for places and for theater in relation to places. His principles were basic to the broad approach to theater I have tried to develop. This partial list of the Drummond principles is my list, not Professor Drummond's. I am sure that he never drew up any such list as this:

A man must have within himself the seeds of self-improvement.

He must not fear introspection; he must have an abiding faith in what he believes.

He must bring forth the best that is in himself in order to rightly understand himself and his works in relation to other men and to the arts.

He must respect knowledge and be able to discern and use wisely the best sources of learning.

He must respect people and must carry always a learning attitude toward any man.

He must respect place and the flavor of the countryside and develop fearlessly and poetically his regard for a familiar scene and remembered event.

He must be broad in outlook; he must not be a man pedantically interested only in the narrow, dusty corners of knowledge but one who is willing to carry ideas to the people everywhere.

He must see theater as a reflection of man; he must see drama not as a toy, a bauble, a plaything but as an instrument sensitive to all the sights and sounds of mankind.

He must have ideals but no rigid fixity of mind that might make him argumentative, impatient, and intolerant of other ideas or ideals.

He must savor and try the temper of America and acquire a thorough knowledge and understanding of her peoples, traditions, figures of speech, and historical trends.

Often the ideas that one discerned in Drummond's teachings of what a man ought to be and do were taught in the very awesome and wondrous presence of nature on top of a New York State hill, perhaps after a dinner at the Taughannock House, the Dryden Hotel, or some other country inn when the August northern lights were softly rolling the skies and the great valleys and wide stretches of the New York State land were mystically and faintly discernible. Then he was at his best. He would stand on the hill, a landmark himself, and point out the interesting places and scenes. At these times he was a poet, and the forgotten roads, the wild places where few persons went, the hulk of an old steamboat sunk in Cayuga Lake were the substance and subject of his poetry. He loved central New York above anything on earth. From him I learned a love for this soft, mysterious country of hidden drums and slender, deep lakes and long valleys.

If Professor Drummond liked any of the things I was doing at Cornell he gave little sign. During the first months I got no little notes on yellow paper, except the kind that made me wish to crawl into a hole somewhere and die. I wrote plays and passed them to him, and he passed them back with many suggestions, often, for revision, but with no indication whatever that the plays were good in idea.

Professor Drummond's famous course "66" was the place where students came face to face with dramatic theory. Wide reading was required. Searching questions addressed to the students brought them one by one to the front of the class to sit at the master's right hand where he demonstrated how feebly they grasped the meaning of Aristotle, Komisarjevsky, Gordon Craig, Evreinov, Jacques Copeau, Appia, Bakshy, and Jourdain. I did not comprehend then how greatly I was to rely on the ideas of some of these writers in my later work. Hardly a day goes by now that the *Poetics* of Aristotle does not come up somehow or that connections cannot be made with the theory of lighting advanced by Appia or with the theater-in-life idea of Evreinov. It seems logical to me now that if regional drama standards are to rise it must be through an acquaintance at least with the best thinkers in the field of dramatic and aesthetic theory.

I made scenery in the theater and helped work it for all the plays. Because I always spoke in tones so very low and so indistinct that many persons had great trouble in hearing me, Professor Drummond called me "the whispering Mister Gard" and generally worked on my sensibilities until along in the Spring, without any warning whatever, he suddenly cast me in the character of Captain Shotover in Shaw's *Heartbreak House*.

This part calls for considerable skill in acting; the character is a complex one; and the part calls also for a voice fitting a retired sea captain. I was numb with terror. Yet such was the personality and influence of Drummond that he drew a voice out of me. Little by little, with the most infinite care, my voice

grew in volume and projection, and little by little Professor Drummond moved his rehearsal chair back in the auditorium. I had no idea, really, what was happening until suddenly during a dress rehearsal my curiosity as to whether or not I could be heard grew too strong to be contained. "Professor Drummond," I bellowed, "can you hear me?"

There was a short pause while the sound bounced between the theater walls, and there was a longer pause during which Professor Drummond seemed to be lost in a kind of wonderful self-admiration. "Gad!" he said, "the whispering Mister Gard has spoken!" And this was about the only comment I received. But in all the long years of our subsequent and comradely professional relationship I do not think anything I ever did pleased him half as much as my development of a voice. I developed a voice simply because Professor Drummond willed that I should.

Yet, despite the fact that this small encouragement came my way, I grew more and more despondent, because it seemed to me that I was slipping backward, that the freshness of the idea about theater I thought I had when I left Kansas was no longer good or powerful. I was conscious only of needing to know so much and of so often seeming to find myself incapable of mastering the disciplines of graduate study that Professor Drummond insisted upon. So I sank lower and lower, developed a very nasty disposition, and was on the point of chucking the whole Cornell affair. The Cornell library chimes that had seemed so lovely to me early in the year now seemed to symbolize the University's apartness from life. I was tired of books. I wanted somehow to be merged into a more direct life stream. I hungered for open country, machines, men, animals. I believed that I had failed to find at Cornell any semblance of what I had come there to find—sympathetic and expert guidance toward the kind of theater of people that I had dedicated myself to work for.

Then, too, I had written a play that I liked, based on experiences I had had, and I was proud of this work. Professor Drummond had been holding it for nearly three months, and I felt that he must have thought it pretty bad stuff. All-in-all, I was down in the dumps. So one morning in May I went to Professor Drummond's office and told him I guessed I had better be leaving Cornell. There was silence for a while; then he said, "Who told you to go?"

"Nobody."

"Better think it over."

He obviously had more to say, and I sat and waited. "Better think it over," he repeated. "I've been working very hard for the past two months to get you a fellowship with the Rockefeller Foundation. I want you to stay and help me start a new theater project in New York State. Maybe we can learn something about stories and people and theater that will help the whole idea of American theater along."

I sat very still. The reversal was terrific. I felt like laughing; then I felt a great wave of affection for this big man who knew so exactly what to do. And I understood in that moment that everything I had experienced at Cornell, every debasement of soul, every moment of torment, every indication of faint praise, every book I had read had been calculated to make me a better worker, a more worthy worker for a larger scheme.

He said: "I had just this morning received a wire from Dr. David Stevens in New York. He would like to have you come down to the Foundation and see him."

I stood up. "I would like to stay at Cornell if you really think I could help."

He shoved the play I was so proud of across his desk to me. "I was going to send you back your play this morning. I'm sorry I kept it so long."

I took the play and saw that he had written on the cover: "This play has a real flavor of America that I like tremendously. Come and see me. I have some news for you."

That evening I dined with Professor Drummond at the Ithaca Hotel. The check lay between us on the table for a long time. Finally I picked it up.

There is good land for farming in New York State, but most of the hill land is poor. Its top soil has been spoiled by careless growing, and the wild growth is creeping back. In the hills I found people from Oklahoma, Dakota, and Kansas who had fled to the East, away from the sting and filter of the dust. I saw how the hope had faded from these Western faces and how thin the crops they grew looked against the futile soil. I knew many of these families, and in the time that I knew them they seemed to drift away, one by one, leaving the hills lonely and without laughter.

For two months I soaked up the sights and sounds and the lore of New York State. I walked among the grape harvesters working on the steep hillsides above the long, narrow lakes. I cherished the picture of the foliage greens and harvest purples and the bright kerchiefs of the pickers. I sat with old men and heard their stories of past days. I met a wonderful professor from Cornell—a jolly fat man with a bald head and thick glasses. He sang the ballads of the land in a beautiful tenor voice, and when he knew that I was not going to write a book and use his material he told me masterful stories of New York State people and places.

I traveled all over the state. I met the people everywhere. I heard yarns about outlaws, bogeymen, farmers, pretty teachers, milk strikes, revival preachers, murderers, buried treasures, race horses, haunts, wondrous cures, and probably hundreds of other things. I sat in crossroads stores, hung over back fences, sat on front steps, milked cows, chewed the fat with the boys at the Spit and Whittle Club at Dryden, New York, and generally engaged in any occupation

that allowed for yarn swapping. It was a happy time, and all through it Professor Drummond left me quite alone. Then one day he sent for me.

I went to his office with acute hesitation. Surveying my activities I could not actually see that I had accomplished much. I felt that what I had seen and heard from the people had point in the sort of theater I imagined might spring from the land and the people, but I feared that Professor Drummond would ask me what books I had read, and I knew that I could not impress him. I expected the ax to fall.

I went into his office. He was writing, and he wrote for a while. Then he said, "Well, what have you been doing?"

I blushed and said, "Professor Drummond, I have been hearing stories and swapping lies."

"Where have you been?"

I named two or three dozen places I had visited. He said, "Well, there's plenty to do."

"Yes, sir."

"You think this floating around is worthwhile?"

"Yes, sir."

He said, "I was hoping you would think so. It's the only way you ever get the real flavor of the region." He stood up. "I have my car downstairs. Let's go!"

Touring the central New York countryside with Professor Drummond was like being blind and suddenly seeing the unbelievable beauty of sunlight and landscape. It was like that, yet something more, for he seemed to endow the land with a mystic poetry that sprang from his sensitiveness to present and past. There seemed no back road that Professor Drummond did not know. There was no hilltop he had not seen and no valley to which he attached no mysterious significance. The land, the people, the winds and rains all added up to a complete and satisfying unity for Professor Drummond, and so perfectly were these things reflected in his observations that word pictures dropped from his lips like impressionistic paintings.

Sometimes at night we would stand on a high place called Butcher Hill from which all the land seemed to drop away to the North, to Lake Ontario, and then all the grumpiness, all worldly disillusion, the entire burden of life rolled away from him and he would speak for hours of the legend and of the folklore of places.

As such talk went on and on, broken occasionally by excursions to eat wonderful country food in corners of the land that only Professor Drummond seemed to know, I fell more and more under the spell of the country. It was a bewitchment that stimulated fantasies of imagination and sapped creative strength. I lived every day as a mad kind of excursion, breathing into a subconscious creativeness everything I saw and felt and heard. I had no inclination to

work. I rebelled against writing. The whole state was my stage, but I could not formalize the product of my senses into characters that were like life, nor could I merge the fantasy of ideas that rushed through me into the tight packets that were the plots and themes of plays.

There was a sudden stop to this madness. I visited a county fair one day at Morris, New York. In one tent a stage had been set up, and the tent was packed with people. They were old folks and young folks and farmers and city people. They were eager; they were in festival mood. They wanted theater, excitement. They wanted hearty humor, dramatic picture, furious impact. They had a right to expect such things, for the plays they were there to see were billed as being from rural life. Rural life to these people meant kindness, neighborliness, strong appreciations of land and wind and color. Rural life meant the strength of outdoor bodies, the good simplicities of food and work and neighborhood fun. Rural life meant songs and games, stout problems in land economics, education for the kids, and a savor of the things that were essentially part of their own place. Rural life meant a tiny thread of loneliness, too, and maybe a very occasional breath of tragedy. Rural life meant the neighborhood arts of careful canning, weaving, quilting. Rural life meant everything these people knew and understood—the whole goodness of their lives.

The plays were billed as rural life plays, and they were played by local young people and adults. When they began, I, too, was eager, for I had seen the broad, free life of American country places. But when the plays were over, I looked at the faces around me. Anticipation had turned to a solemn disinterestedness. There was no laughter, no tears—only definite exodus that was filled with vague irritation. There was no festival here—only the departure of an initial eagerness that had seemed very precious and deep.

The reason seemed to me then quite clear. The plays were not rural plays. True, they were supposedly set in the country, but their characters had no relation to the kind of country life I and the folks around me knew. They had very little relation to life anywhere. They were dreary in tone; they were filled with bad jokes lifted from a collection read somewhere or heard on somebody's radio. The characters were stereotypes of real people. They maundered on and on about poor housewives who had no pianos or washing machines or they talked in clichés about cruel fathers who would not let sons or daughters have boy or girl friends or join 4-H clubs. They hinted at shotgun weddings, and they dusted off the old conflicts between the farm and the city. They sawed back and forth on the fringes of obscene jests about the farmer's daughter and the city slicker.

I remember thinking, as I walked out of the tent into the autumn sunlight, that this was the only real theater the people in this place knew, that there could be only failure and disillusionment in such plays, and that such plays were evil and would kill any art that might grow here. I paused as I thought of the rural

life that I knew in Kansas, of the wheat fields, of the mighty machines biting through the yellow grain, of the harvest parties, and of the wild singing and dancing. I thought of New York State grape pickers singing on a steep hillside, of a farm mother holding a little child against her breast, of the terror of a violent storm, and of faces full of suffering from pain and lost crops. As I stood thinking, the great Butternut Valley that was all around Morris turned golden in the afternoon light. I looked at the hills, and suddenly my spirit was filled and lifted with a clear knowledge. I knew that there must be plays of the people filled with the spirit of places, and my aimless activities assumed meaning. I felt the conviction then that I have maintained since—that the knowledge and love of place is a large part of the joy in people's lives. There must be plays that grow from all the countrysides of America, fabricated by the people themselves, born of their happiness and sorrow, born of toiling hands and free minds, born of music and love and reason. There must be many great voices singing out the lore and legend of America from a thousand hilltops, and there must be students to listen and to learn, and writers encouraged to use the materials.

The next day I went back to Ithaca and sought out Professor Drummond. When I told him what I had been thinking, he said, "I'm glad some of the ideas have been jelling for you." And we sat down at his table and made some plans for a playwriting project for the state of New York.

Professor Drummond said that there were probably a lot of people in New York State who wanted to write plays. He said that we would try to get in touch with these people and that the result of our efforts might be such a bloom of country-grown plays that the entire state would enjoy the aroma of up-country life. He said that outside the University playwriting classes, there had been almost no attempt to get the people to think and write dramatically of themselves. When I asked him how many people might try writing a play, he refused to estimate, but his eyes warmed up, and I knew that he was dreaming of a large number and that both he and I were hoping for sensational results. I suppose that when we were alone and remembered the soul tormenting rigors of playwriting, we had some serious doubts, but these doubts did not in the least deter us from trying. Indeed, so great was our faith in the people, so real was our dream of a people's theater, and so confident was our belief in the goodness of the folklore and life of the region that it was almost as though some old central New York Indian god had endowed us with this dream as a special mission.

This dream soon became a reality. Our first task was the preparation of a letter which we circulated widely through the mails and got printed in papers and magazines. The letter pointed out that many persons, young and old, should be interested in writing a play about New York State, that as soon as good plays became available they would be circulated throughout the state, and

that anyone might receive advice and perhaps assistance by writing to Professor Drummond or me at Cornell University. The letter stated also that we were eager to get in touch with folks who might have some good ideas for plays so that we might pass these ideas on to possible authors and that we wished people would get in touch with us who might like to present some of these plays in their own communities.

Perhaps Professor Drummond knew what we were letting ourselves in for, but I did not. All I had was enthusiasm and a capacity for work. I needed both, for immediately our mail overflowed the boxes. There were letters scattered everywhere. Such a good thing as a secretary to help handle this spate of potential culture was a part of our dream that we had not dealt with. But every letter was answered, and the ideas, the encouragement, the offer of free publicity, good will, even love, made us believe that maybe, just maybe, we had touched a popular chord. The letters were filled, some of them, with a sort of fresh hope, as though a farmer or a housewife or a grocer or a country doctor after years of working and thinking and dreaming suddenly saw a chance to speak of the things he lived by. Some of the letters were neatly typed. Others were written in illegible scrawls with soft lead pencils. A few were written in foreign languages—in French, German, and Finnish.

There were letters that I remember particularly well. One was from a farmer's wife in Cattaraugus County, New York, Mrs. D. H. Chambers. She wrote that she was much interested in writing a play about the Dutch Hill war, a rather comic incident of the land troubles of the 1840s which took place on her farm. She wrote: "I have never expressed myself in the dramatic form, but I am willing to learn. I have a brother who has been fairly successful in dramatic writing and you may possibly have heard of him. His name is Maxwell Anderson."

There was a letter from a fellow up in the Adirondacks who caused me great concern. He wrote:

Was reading this day of your playwriting announcement in the paper. I wish I had until July to submit my contribution. However, I plan, or want to send, or make a contribution. I know a lot of women folks will try writing plays, and I want to try just to spite the women. I don't like the idea of giving women more chance or call for action over men, as women are not only first in nearer all things but has the world with a fence around it.

Now, has the story got to be submitted in play form, or will a story do the trick? Just what do you call a one-act play? I wish I could get a specimen copy just in case I must submit full form. Will be glad to receive any assistance, and I am obliged to ask you to hurry.

There is not a preponderance of women characters in my stories, and only

some have several characters. Do you require many characters, or will as few as several be enough? Please explain matters out to me. I want to find out what you want, if I can. Will a one-act play permit of more than one continuous scene or scenery? How many or how few words would you say would suffice? Please tell me what constitutes a one-act play so that I can tell at a glance what it is like. A stamp is enclosed for reply. Such envelopes as I have are misfits. Don't see how I can send you the usual envelope, sorry.

P.S. What shall I write about?

This mountain man never wrote a play, though he sought and received plenty of information. But as the personal mail got less bulky, our boxes began to fill with larger envelopes, brown ones with first class postage, containing plays of every sort. These we read over and sorted out and mulled over, and soon again I was engaged in a tremendous correspondence, teaching play-writing by mail, offering encouragement, criticizing or praising what seemed hundreds of manuscripts. Overnight my job became almost completely office work, though I had no office and the manuscripts were apt to be spread over tables in any corner I might find temporarily vacant. Then people began to drift into Ithaca to see us about their work. A woman from Buffalo brought her play about Underground Railroad days at Niagara Falls. An old man with long gray hair came to see me with a jolly little play about antique collectors. A machinist from around Rochester brought two scripts about workmen. A girl from the western part of the state brought her play about grape pickers. A thin young man came with his play about a schoolhouse that was painted in big red and white checks. (One faction in the community had once wanted the schoolhouse painted red, the rest of the community wanted it painted white. They had compromised.) Folks came from all points of the compass with plays that reflected many facets of regional life.

There was excitement in meeting these people and talking with them. They were new signs of an art expression that seemed to be springing up joyously everywhere, and so infectious was the spirit of this simple movement that Professor Drummond and I were caught up in it. We began to write, too, and several plays were our joint efforts. One of the plays I wrote grew out of an incident I had witnessed while wandering in the hill country of New York State. One evening I was on top of a high hill and I saw a thin old man sitting under a lone cedar tree strumming on a guitar. After a while he began to sing a slow song about a sad wind in a willow tree. I listened to him sing, and when he finished the song a wind came over the hill and brushed through the cedar. Then the old man stood up with a dream on his face and made a speech to an old friend who was lying in a cemetery grave a piece down the hillside.

"Tom," the old man said, "I can see you over yonder astanding up beside

your stone. I expect you recall like me when these hillsides was green with crops and the young fruit trees tender with spring blooms. You kin see them light yellow colors in April and smell the earth new turned.

“Looka, yonder, Tom, down the line of the hill there, see them timbers sticking up out of the long grass? That was the Ervay house and the Barnes house was down below it. Who’s that beside ye, Tom? Lucy, I expect. And is that Lally over in the corner holding her baby?”

“Everybody is gone off the hill but me, Tom. Young pine trees is growing everyplace now. Recall my place that was so fine set against the far side of the hill? Them white columns on the front porch was good to see. Could see them from a mile away, and my fields back the house spread with new wheat.

“The state’s went and bought my farm, Tom, and they’re making a woods out of it. The land’s wore out, they say. Yesterday the mail stopped comin’.

“Nothin’ but the wind left. There’s wind ablowing through the old cedar, and it’s the night wind over the graves.”

The old man put his guitar under his arm and walked down the hill. He lay down with his head up against one of the stones. The old man took his place, with his lyric speech and guitar, in a play that symbolized the New York wild country.

From the famous frontier preacher the Rev. Lorenzo Dow we fabricated a play in which the Reverend raised the devil from a flour barrel in a settler’s cabin, and thereby converted the entire settlement of Schoharie, New York. We wrote radio scripts about the old 999, the New York Central engine that set a world’s speed record, and about Colonel Tom Meachem of Oswego and his big cheese—biggest ever made. We fixed the frontier propensity for tall yarn spinning into a play called “Bill Greenfield’s Legend.”

We tried out a lot of new plays in the Cornell University theater and slowly began to build up some really actable scripts. Then we decided that we must write a long show that would set the temper of the thing we were trying to do. We hoped that such a play might draw the attention of the state to our project. For a subject we turned more or less naturally to one of the greatest of the New York State tales, the famous yarn of the Cardiff Giant.

Almost anyone, these days, knows the story of this hoax that took place in 1869 in the little village of Cardiff when a great stone man was uncovered by well diggers on the farm of “Stubby” Newell. The discovery of this figure aroused thousands of simple, God-fearing folk to fever pitch, for they believed the stone giant to be a religious manifestation, one of the Biblical giants of Genesis. Great scientists, too, were hoodwinked for a time and considered the find to be one of the important paleological discoveries of the age.

The hoax was actually fabricated by a cigar maker from Binghamton named George Hull. One day George was arguing with a preacher in Fort

Dodge, Iowa. The preacher claimed loudly that there “were giants in those days” and Hull maintained there were not. The preacher did George down in the debate, and George went out and hired men to cut a great block of gypsum out of the river bank at Fort Dodge. Then George shipped this block of stone to Chicago where he got a tombstone cutter to carve the block into the form of a giant. George got the giant to Binghamton, then shipped it by wagon to Cardiff, the wagon traveling at night for secrecy.

George was first cousin to “Stubby” Newell. Stubby let George bury the giant on his farm. In the dead of night the deed was done. The giant lay buried for a year. Grass grew over the spot secluded under the shadow of a great hill. One day Stubby hired a couple of men to dig a well right on the spot where the giant lay buried. When the men encountered a great stone foot and dug a little more to see what manner of creature lay buried there, they both tossed their shovels and ran to the village to spread the news.

In a few days Newell’s farm was tramped over by seething humanity. A tent was erected above the giant’s grave, and Hull, Newell, and company, which included by this time the famous Homer, New York, banker, David Hannum (later known fictionally as Harum), were coining money at the rate of 5 per cent on \$3,000,000!

Everybody wanted to see the giant. Certain ladies viewing the sculptured wonder fainted dead away, for Hull’s tombstone carver had left nothing to the imagination. A dentist, Dr. Boynton, pronounced the work to be of Caucasian, not Indian, origin and called it the noblest work of art that had come down to us. The Board of Regents of the state of New York came to view the colossus, bearing with them insurance in the words of the state geologist, Dr. Hall, who called the giant the “most remarkable object brought to light in this country deserving of the attention of archeologists.”

And so it went. Preachers basing sermons on the giant gleaned converts like falling chaff. One fool from the Yale Divinity School identified the giant as a Phoenician idol brought to this country several hundred years before Christ. P. T. Barnum, recognizing the giant as a magnificent showpiece, offered to buy it for sixty thousand dollars, and when he was refused, went off to New York to make a duplicate. He displayed it as the only authentic Cardiff Giant.

Professor Marsh of Yale at last exposed the hoax for what it was—a crude and recently carved block of gypsum, something which President Andrew D. White of Cornell had maintained from the first.

While Professor Drummond and I were speculating about the Cardiff Giant as a potential dramatic subject, a dreamer from the south came to visit us at Ithaca. This was Paul Green, who long before had caught a vision of a people’s theater, and who had been ever since working toward that end with Professor Koch of North Carolina University.

This tall man with the sensitive face and deep eyes made a profound impression on me. His plays were pointed out as the foremost regional dramatic expression in America. He spoke simply, yet like a poet, and everything in the earth and sky and of men had a philosophic meaning for him. He spent long hours talking with me. When he heard the story of the giant he began to grin and get excited and to walk up and down. He said the yarn demonstrated the universality of human folly, and he insisted that Professor Drummond and I start writing the play immediately.

So one day in the early Spring we drove up to Cardiff, up Highway II that runs north from Cortland to Syracuse, and we paused a little while on a great fill that the glaciers left across the Onondaga Valley like a high wall. We looked down the valley flats, across the salt well derricks, toward the little town of Cardiff near which the giant once lay. The valley was quiet and mysterious, with the hill they call Bear Mountain shadowing it from the west. It was a scene to inspire awe. Several years later, Professor Drummond writing the introduction to the published version of the drama, *The Cardiff Giant*, remarked:

The traveler south of Syracuse along Route II at close of day will sense mystery rising with the mile-long shadows from the great valley at Cardiff and with night coming down the dark slope of Bear mountain to the west, or off the star-crowned hills of Pompey to the east—mystery which could cause him to think some wonder might come upon us there, and he would, maybe, believe, as did Onondagans of the sixties.

For the Indians well knew this valley and these hills as places of old mystery: stone giants clanking through the underground; great men of old striding across the hills; gigantic Indian prophets of centuries gone who had foretold the coming of the white men, and who had prophesied that they themselves, after death, would again be seen by their peoples.

The earlier whites actually exhumed bones of huge, prehistoric men along the hills of Pompey, and later where the first roads and the railways edged into the rocks on their routes into Canastota or Cazenovia! Mystery in the old days had possessed this land of solemn and rugged beauty; and so now from our “joy in believing” in a wonder, even the “American Goliath” is not perhaps so remote from some of us.

We found an old man in Cardiff, Mr. Nichols, who lived alone in a shack. He was the son of one of the fellows who had dug the well and uncovered the giant's foot. Mr. Nichols had seen the giant lying in its grave, and he had some yellowed photographs of the scene and the wonder. He took us to the exact spot where the hoax had taken place. From him we got the atmosphere and the flavor of the event. We found other old-timers who remembered songs that were

sung at the revival meetings or who had poems that had been written to commemorate the find. We discovered relatives of Stubby Newell, and little by little we assembled a fine body of working materials.

Such materials included, in addition to the items described, notes made from the newspapers of the period, the *Syracuse Journal* and the *Ithaca Journal*, especially, from articles in magazines describing the wonder, and from actual statements gleaned from published lectures by various personalities involved. We also dug a bit into the backgrounds of Stubby Newell and George Hull, and we did extensive reading relating to the topics of the times and to the state of New York crops and climate in 1869. In other words, we assembled a fairly complete body of information pertaining generally to the region in the particular year we wished to set the drama.

During our work collecting materials, we discussed the form of the play. We believed that the play must be flexible in form to allow for the inclusion of many scenes and numerous characters. We wanted to draw a merry picture of country life in New York State with its color and variety including the social "bees," the rural school, the church picnics, the political argufiers, and all the rest. To do this, we knew that we must think more in terms of a "show" than of a strictly plotted play. Therefore, with the excellent models of the ancient Chinese theater, the "living newspaper" dramas of the Federal Theater, and the newly produced *Our Town* before us we conceived a New York State show.

One critic, Professor Henry A. Myers of the Cornell English department, thought that we had been successful. He wrote in the *Cornell Alumni News* as follows:

The Cardiff Giant will long serve as a model for advocates of native drama. It deserves, however, to be judged in the larger category of true comedy. In keeping with the homely simplicity of central New York in 1869, the authors see themselves as putting on a show rather than as presenting a play. They have done both. Rich as The Cardiff Giant is in spectacle, excitement and incidents that make a good show, it is fully as charged with the significance that makes a good play. The chorus of school-girls, the canal men, and the State Board of Regents, the showmen and farmers are the very stuff of which laughter is made, but in the laughter and behind it is the revelation of the human spirit through the medium of language.

I got up a first draft of the play which seemed pretty good to me, but Professor Drummond said: "Gard, this is too long. We'll have to cut it." And then he began to work on the play. He proved that he was a true lover of New York State and her stories, for he lengthened the play, added characters, scenes, and generally filled the whole thing with his intimate understanding of the people,

their language, their music and poetry. The final draft of *The Cardiff Giant* had ninety-eight speaking parts. In the first production in the Cornell University theater I played nine parts myself.

When the curtain rose to an enthusiastic crowd of New York Staters and the Narrator was on the stage saying, “You gotta imagine yer back in 1869; that’s when the hoax jelled—in October, ‘69!” it was as if the spirit of central New York State had come alive.

And in the very first scene the folks all began to go to Cardiff to see the giant, and the Erie canallers sang their famous song:

We was forty miles from Albany,
Forget it I never shall,
What a terrible time we had one night
On the E-ri-e Canawal!

Politicians, Farmers, Merchants, Professors, Indians, rich men, poor men, beggermen, dogs! And the preachers began preachin’, and the ladies of the Methodist, Free Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Hard Shell, Spiritualist and all the other churches began singin’ revival hymns, and Dave Harum, P. T. Barnum, Bob Ingersoll, the Board of Regents of the State of New York, the Bloomer Women, and the Yale professors all got on stage at once yelling that the giant was an honest-to-God sign from on high! Yes, sir, in the first scene there was a lot going on, but there was more to come, with the giant lyin’ in his grave there on the stage, and crowds of people milling around and demonstratin’ lots of kinds of human folly!

When the audiences saw the big show they went away thinking that the New York State Plays project was sure off to a good start, and some of them went home and did some thinking about York State and sent us a lot of good yarns.

I can still feel the central New York State land calling me. When I close my eyes, the patchwork hillsides across the deep valleys are as vivid to me as though I stood on the Cornell campus on a May morning and looked west toward Mecklinburg. I might have lived and dreamed forever in the Finger Lakes country if it had not been for the war. But suddenly one day, there it was, and the course of our creative project in New York State was instantly altered. There was writing, yes, but it was frenzied writing on wartime themes, and when we looked about the land, there were no longer home-grown plays on country stages. Sadly we admitted that the dream must wait, and for me, indeed, the York State project is only a green memory. I have never lived in New York State since.

There were many ideas that I took away from Cornell. Most of these ideas were simply a part of the maturing of other, larger ideas and not definable in themselves. But the large ideas about regional theater that I took away were

definable. Reduced to general terms they are these: A concept of theater must be broad enough to include many things. The traditional materials of the region, at least those having possible literary significance, must be assembled. Writers must be encouraged throughout the region. The people of the region must be "let in" on what the regional drama project is trying to do and a friendly public attitude toward the project must be established. The university should take the role of leadership in the theater arts not only on the campus but throughout the region.

These ideas became very important to me as I moved to Alberta, Canada, to help develop the stuff of a native cultural expression in the province and then to Wisconsin where an idea of theater grew and developed into an idea of place more than merely geographical.

THE WISCONSIN IDEA THEATER

FROM *Prairie Visions*

Individual responsibility and initiative is so highly thought of at the University of Wisconsin that if I had gone out into the state and had not been heard from for several months, I doubt whether anyone would have questioned whether or not I was doing valuable work. It is wonderful to work in an atmosphere and in a tradition of that kind.

But I didn't go anywhere for a time. I sat in my corner and thought and made plans, or visited around the University with men who had been pioneers in many fields, It was stimulating, and for almost the first time I felt that I had stature and respect among men who had made remarkable achievements in fields outside my own. My status at the University I found, was rather unusual. Mine was one of the first appointments the University had made that cut across departmental lines. I was a member of the faculties of three University divisions, and this, I was told, had been done to give me support and backing of the entire University.

These early days at Wisconsin were good days, but they were worrisome, too. I was eager to get into the field, to meet the people of the state. But I held myself back. I believed that certain things must be done first. There must be a name for a great state-wide theater movement. There must be a state-wide office at Madison with roots of communication going into the state. There must be plans for a theater on the campus where new plays by the regional authors could be played in try-out productions. There must be a playwriting project set up. There must be liaison made with the arts of music and painting, so that the whole field of a person's art concept might progress. There must be a touring company organized to carry plays of the region to the people of the region, and there must be a banding together for purposes of education and philosophy of all the theater interests of the state; and there must be a folklife organization to preserve and collect state tradition. And although I had freedom and good will I

was still, with the exception of a few, almost alone in understanding of the largeness of the thing I was going to attempt. I worried considerably.

The name was a first concern. I thought of such inept titles as the “Wisconsin Theater Program,” the “Wisconsin People’s Theater,” the “Wisconsin State Theater Project.” I discussed possible names with many persons, but nothing materialized. Then one day I was reading a book by a man named Charles McCarthy. This book was called *The Wisconsin Idea* and it seemed to mean a wonderful sort of expression of good will that arose in the state after 1900—a peaceful means used with intelligence to accomplish reforms and general good for all the people. Later, after the political meaning of the Wisconsin Idea had slipped into disuse, the University became the symbol of its meaning in the undiscouragable quality that has come to mean broad and untiring service, and a giving out of the fruits of knowledge by those that have knowledge, to those who have a need of it.

The term itself seemed to have no very general usage when I first went to Wisconsin. Indeed, many persons I talked with about the Wisconsin Idea had heard the term but had only the most vague idea of its meaning. I was greatly intrigued by it, however, and it suddenly occurred to me that here was the perfect name for the new Wisconsin experiment in theater, especially since the name reflected so strongly the University’s idea of service.

We therefore had some letterheads printed up with the name The Wisconsin Idea Theater along the top of the sheet and it seemed to me that I had found a very unique and original name for our state-wide work. It was a week or so later that I made an interesting discovery. I learned that in 1913, in the very heyday of the original concept of the Wisconsin Idea, there appeared the first issue of a small magazine called *The Play Book* published by the Dramatic Society of Milwaukee and Madison. Leading figures in this organization, which was really the first “little theater” movement in the nation, were Zona Gale of Portage, Thomas Dickinson of Madison, who later became a leading writer on the American Theater, William Ellery Leonard who later achieved a national reputation as a poet and Thomas Wood Stevens who became a greatly loved teacher of drama, and play producer. And in this first issue of *The Play Book* there was an article, entitled of all things, “The Wisconsin Idea in Theater!”

The article was written by Percy MacKaye who also became well known for his plays and his poetry. He wrote, *The Wisconsin Idea* which today [1913] is stirring our nation so deeply in government, science, civics, agriculture and the progress of the people’s self rule, is big with a promise even greater, perhaps, than that which President Van Hise of the University has suggested so admirably in his work.

“The part played by the University of Wisconsin in the development of its idea appears likely to strike even more deeply into untilled fields of man’s

spiritual nature than the plowshares of the state into nature's loam... and the seed being sown in the former is being selected, nurtured with the same scientific spirit as the latter. I refer to the work being done for the art of the theater by the Wisconsin Dramatic Society.

"The policy of the Society is to produce plays of Middle-Western life, written and acted by Americans of the Middle West. Wisely perused it should achieve a notable success. The Society deserves the interest of all Americans solicitous for the growth of the theater as a social institution. The Society desires... to quicken the art of the theater in the soil of society itself, through technical training of the imaginations, dramatic instincts and latent art-impulses of the people in all their natural and local variety. I would take occasion only to note the tremendous vitality and importance of this movement as a necessary and inevitable extension of *The Wisconsin Idea*."

So in 1913, 33 years before our version of a Wisconsin Idea Theater was conceived, there had been this statement which at least approximated one theory on which Frederic Koch of North Carolina and Professor Drummond and a lot of other people had been working: that fine playwriting could be nurtured in the regions of America, and that the result would greatly contribute to theater art. I was particularly eager, therefore, to see what had become of this first movement in Wisconsin, which apparently had had such an excellent start.

An examination of the remaining issue of *The Play Book* show that the idea of an indigenous theater slowly sank from view. The writers and the editor of *The Play Book* turned to a pedantic approach to theatre, and though a few of the plays that had been written as part of the philosophy of the movement like *The Neighbors*, by Zona Gale, remained popular, the basic principle of the encouragement of plays of middle western life seemed forgotten. Perhaps it was the First World War that was responsible. In its deeper sense, however, it was probably the social unrest that lead to the unstable 1920s and that bred a literary trend that emphasized the expatriate type of writer, removed from his homeland and looking back with dissympathy upon the scenes with which he was most familiar.

When I thought about it, it seemed to me that probably it took the great depression to awaken sincere regard for the American scene and its interpretation through authentic materials, and an awareness of the tempers and themes of the American regions. The dust storms of the 1930s, as I well knew from my Kansas days, focused attention on those troubled areas and the people. The wonderful myth of American individualism: every man's ability to pull himself up by his own bootstraps and to make himself an independent part of American commercial life, was at least partly undermined. Sham and unreality suddenly dropped away, and somehow, out of the crying trouble, a new love for the American scene was born.



I was, of course, intensely interested in the Wisconsin land and the lore of the people.

Thinking about it like this I was very proud that I had unconsciously chosen a name for a new Wisconsin theater movement that had such tradition. The gap had been bridged, and it seemed to me that now we were ready to begin on a permanent project, for certainly a great trend in literature was toward sympathetic American portrayals of scene and character. Folklorists were having a field day, and great treasuries of American folklore were actually best sellers in American bookstores—something that had certainly never happened before. The American drama, too, sometimes behind the other arts in the reflection of trend, was trying desperately to catch up, with some musicals and dramatic shows carrying strong native themes.

The drawback, of course, to a mature theater and interpretation of the state was the lack of new writers, capable of writing good serious and comic plays. I determined to do what I could about this lack, and to provide as many stages as I could that would be the workshops of the new writers. I envisioned a plan somewhat like Alexander Drummond's in New York or along the lines of the

one I had directed in Alberta, where the materials of the region, the stories and the songs might be collected and made available to writers. I determined that a playwriting project would be among the first of the many phases of The Wisconsin Idea Theater and then subjects of Wisconsin folklife. I hoped to write myself, and to discover major themes and subjects of the region.

Cogitating about such responsibilities, I began to look, to listen, and to learn. I heard of the pioneers who swept into Wisconsin in the 1830s and '50s and '60s and '70s from many nations, with a deep hope of homeland. I saw the results of their long, hard effort in the transformation of the land, and I wanted to know more about what they did, and what their motivation was. Suddenly the first thoughtful phases of the beginning Wisconsin Idea Theater were over and I was plunged into the active process of creation.

I was, of course, intensely interested in the Wisconsin land and the lore of the people. I had learned to turn my imagination almost at will into a theater where the dramatic highlights of the past and present were rolling across the stages of my mind in a sort of panorama that seemed to roll on and on without end. Sometimes, in the middle of a Wisconsin woods, I would stop for a moment to listen to the wind rising in the pines, and the wind would make me remember how it must have sounded in those greater forests before the lumbering days, or how the wind carried the great flocks of passenger pigeons across the sky, darkening the sky, rippling the water, scurrying the clouds, driving the rains, hurling the sleet and snow, casting the storms upon the Wisconsin pioneers. And as the wind would die to a whisper I could hear voices in the wind. Lonely voices. The pioneer women were lonely sometimes. Perhaps I was hearing their voices. Or perhaps the faint wind was the symbol of a memory of the freedom people sought in Wisconsin, and found. The wind remembers.

Sometimes in the night, thinking about my new weekly dramatic radio program, "Wisconsin Yarns," I would hear the wind and it would seem filled with fear. In my mind I could see a boat wrecked on Lake Michigan; the old Lady Elgin, maybe, that proud ship that carried three hundred Milwaukee citizens to their deaths on the evening of September 7, 1860. Or the fear in the wind might be a great storm sweeping up the Mississippi Valley to strike suddenly at the quiet towns along the river's banks in Wisconsin or Minnesota.

Or the rivers themselves stimulated me to wondrous imaginings: Often I would stand on the stoned banks of the old canal lock at Portage, Wisconsin, and I would remember the dream of those men who had joined with this canal the Fox River to the Wisconsin. And I would remember that the dream was about laden ships coming through the Great Lakes to Green Bay and through the Fox River system and so to Portage where, through this mile of canal, they would enter the Wisconsin and steam down to the Mississippi and so on down to New Orleans and the Gulf of Mexico. Or I would remember the lumber rafts that

floated down river on the St. Croix, the Chippewa, the Black, the Eau Claire and Wisconsin, and how the proud side-wheelers churned up the Mississippi.

And sometimes as I went through the Wisconsin countrysides it was as though I heard imaginary cries of joy. The pioneers shouting for joy at this new land to break and clear. Or it was the crying of thanks to God of the mingled European peoples: the '48 men from Germany trudging into Wisconsin, fled from their revolution-torn nation; or the Norwegians, the Danes, the Swedes, the Poles, the Finns, the Lithuanians, the Hungarians, the Yugoslavs, the Welsh, the Cornish folk with their mining picks and their pasties, the Scotch folk and the English folk. These cries my mind was hearing were from the Swiss people coming to settle at New Glarus, or they were the cries of Kentucky and Virginia men coming to settle the Southwest part of the state. Those cries were the cries of settlement. New land! Rich land! Free land! New life in heavy hearts! Yes, the pioneers, the new settlers, the blood and bone of Wisconsin.

And I was hearing laughter, too, the laughter at tall frontier tales spun by the people about this land to which they had come. And with the laughter is the cheering for the local heroes. Cap'n Scott of old Forts Howard and Crawford who was the best shot with rifle or pistol living man ever saw. Never touched liquor, Cap'n Scott didn't. If he had he sure couldn'ta bored two potatoes tossed into the air, firing as he would from the hip. Was a remarkable man, was Cap'n Scott, just like Davy Crockett, for when coons saw the Cap'n a-coming they would come down off'n their perch and surrender, just like they did for Davy. And when a reckless fellow one time challenged Cap'n Scott to a duel, the Cap'n calm as could be, shot off a piece of the feller's liver and restored him to the best health he ever had!

Or did you ever hear of the Scotch Giant? Seven feet and six inches tall he stood. Lived over to Belmont. Weighed four hundred and fifty pounds, he did. Could swing a plow over his head with one hand, or lift a bar'l of whiskey by his fingers. Could hold a dozen eggs in the palm of each hand and not break one! Or did you hear of Pierre Paquette that worked up to Portage who was so strong that when one of his oxen gave out Pierre just yoked himself into the team and pulled along with 'em? Or did you hear o' Allen Bradley of Rock Island that measured four feet around the chest and wore moccasins because no shoes would fit him? His hands were broad as shovels and he could cut seven cords of body maple in a day. Could lift a thousand pounds. Easy.

Or maybe those cheers are for Whiskey Jack who was hero of the raftsmen, and fought and drank his rowdy way all up and down the lumbering rivers! Or maybe they're for Ernie Hausen, who lived right over in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin, and was the world's champion chicken picker. Can pick a chicken blind-folded, or handcuffed, or wearing mittens, or with his bare feet, and his world record is picking a chicken clean in three and one half seconds. He can make

eighteen or twenty-four dollars an hour picking chickens. Easy.

There's a drumming sound in the air sometimes in Wisconsin. There's a strange drum that sounds from Lake Michigan, too, whenever a ship is lost. And there was a sound that I'd fancy I'd hear sometimes that was like the sound of a breaking heart. Maybe it's old Chief Black Hawk's heart breaking when, after the Black Hawk War, most of his people had been killed, and he'd been taken prisoner. Or I was hearing the breaking heart of Eleazer Williams, of Green Bay, Indian missionary, victim of grand delusions. Perhaps it was his heart breaking when at his death, he must have realized that he simply couldn't make the world believe that he was the Lost Dauphin of France, rightful heir to the French throne.

And along with the imaginary things heard, my eyes were seeing the lore of raw theater, and transmitting the feeling of theater to my creative self. I noted the rising land of the Baraboo Range of purple hills, and knew an inner theater that the mystery of their color brought to life. I was seeing the pea vineries in canning time, where Mexican laborers wearing bright handkerchiefs were working side by side with the Wisconsin farmers. Their movements, as they pitched the green vines into the shelling machines, was the movement of living drama.

One time I stopped to watch a country auction, and I saw the personal belongings of the last member of an old Wisconsin family being auctioned off. The auctioneer lifted from a trunk a yellowed wedding dress, and when he asked for bids there was a titter of nerved-up laughter that brushed across the audience. And then the laughter was still as a very old lady made her way from the back of the crowd and offered her small bid for the dress. It was undisputed and she took the dress and tottered away with it. At a local gathering that night I heard the story, and it was like a play, for the dress had been worn fifty years before by one lady, but it should have been worn by the old lady who finally bought it.

A feeling for places, and at least an instinctive understanding of the lore of the people seem basic to the creative processes of anyone wishing to make sincere and honest dramatic interpretations of regional scene.

GRASSROOTS ART

FROM *Coming Home to Wisconsin*

So many of my efforts are, in part, only a prelude to the very special and unusual encounters that occasionally take place. I remember one fall-time journey which carried me into the woods north and east of Hayward, a country of deep swamps and timber where coarse grasses rasp together slowly in the filtering breezes. It is country where a flick of movement sensed far away through and among the splashed shadows might mean an alerted deer, a country where the moss-covered stumps and the dim trails recall the days when the forest was a setting for crawling, endless motion and echoing sound of the great lumberjack days. I had heard of a man in this woodland who was delicately attuned to all the sights and sounds of the forest and whose pencil, crayon, and brush had given life to the essence of the forest itself. I wished to meet him, for the image of woodland artist living in solitude and sketching and painting with sensitive, intimate passion for the forest reality stimulated my curiosity.

I found his cabin, finally, and stood for a moment looking at it. It was a shack of unpainted boards with one tiny window and a low, plank door. The dooryard was a bramble patch with a path to the outhouse. Among the brambles were the skeletons of old machines, bleak, unidentifiable. The whole scene was interlaced with loneliness, and the ugly vestiges of human habitation filled me with uneasiness. I walked around a skimpy woodpile and approached the door.

As I came to the door I could hear a soft, yet rough, sound from within the shack and I paused a moment trying to define it. It rose and fell and fell and rose and was somehow echoed by the broken flow of the wind in the tops of the pines away from the clearing. I knocked at the door.

Instantly the sound stopped and a tremendous barking began. A voice said, “Quiet! Quiet, damn ye!” and the barking stopped instantly. There was motion beyond the door and suddenly it was pulled open violently. The smell came first, even before I could focus on the man who stood in the open door, a smell

that instantly flooded my mind with memories of other bachelor shacks I had visited in Kansas and New York and Alberta, especially Alberta, where bachelor living was defined on prairie and on mountain by rigid rules of filth and convenience. As I peered at the man and the cluttered interior I could see that he was short, that his hair was intensely black and uncombed, that he wore no trousers at all — only dirt-streaked drawers that ended in huge, thick-soled shoes.



The whole scene was interlaced with loneliness...

I could see at the far edge of the room his bunk, out of which he had quite obviously just crawled. It was occupied now by two huge hounds who looked at me steadily from the depth of human-warmed blankets.

There is a delicacy about situations such as this. Doors close so easily. Perhaps intuitively my eyes stayed on the dogs and I said, with the memory within me of dark-tan hounds in an eastern Kansas woodland on a frosty October night, “Those are fine dogs.”

He moved slightly. “They are.”

“They trail?”

He said, “They are good.”

To break the conversational ice I told him I had lived near a river, the Neosho, in Kansas, a great coon river, where there were mussels to be had in plenty, where there were ravines and tall cottonwood timber, where in the fall a good dog’s voice could be heard near two miles, and where, when the dogs would call, we would hurry through the woodlands and over the frost-stiff grass with a lantern throwing crazy shadows around us as we ran.

He moved away from the door and I went in. We fenced, jockeyed, and

eventually I admitted that I was from the University, that I had heard he was an artist, and that I had a sincere desire to view his work. He quite properly denied this for a time, but eventually he reached under the bunk and pulled out a bundle wrapped in old canvas. He grabbed the hounds by the necks and jerked them off the bunk. He laid his bundle carefully on the bunk and unrolled it. Here were some cheap crayons in boxes, a couple of dime store watercolor trays, some pencils and brushes and tubes of oil. There was also a roll of what looked like common, white shelf paper. He lifted the roll and smoothed it out. One by one he lifted sheets of paper and spread them on the bunk. The wildlife of the northwoods was there, suddenly, in the filthy shack, reproduced in breathtaking originality against delicate backgrounds of swamp and grasses and the dead rubble of decaying forest. I stood for a long while gazing at the pictures. After a time I said, "I've got to be going. Thanks for one of the great experiences of my life."

"Come back anytime," he said, and he began to gather his pictures, tenderly rolling them again for the bundle. He retied the bundle and thrust it under the bunk. As I went to the door the hounds jumped on the bed again and snuggled into the blankets.

A PORTRAIT OF PLACE

FROM *Grassroots Theater*

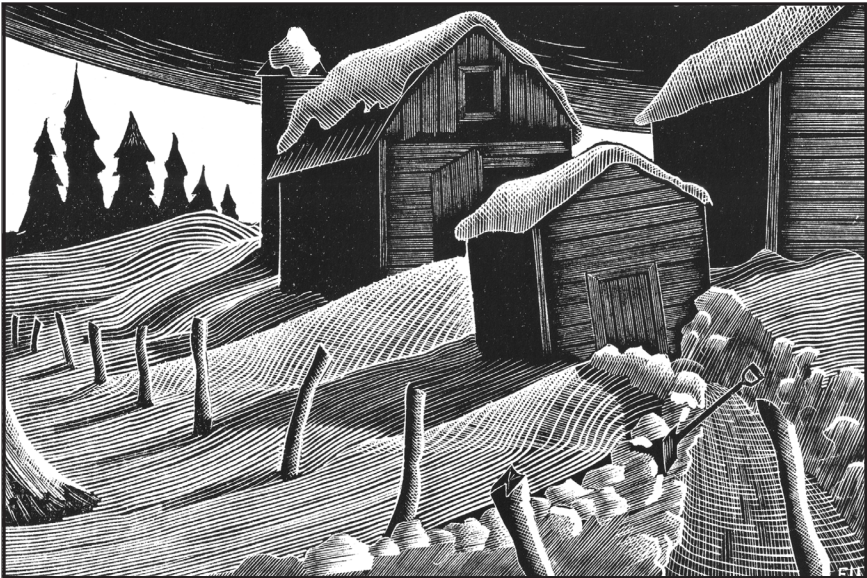
Wisconsin does not possess the soft insistent mystery of central New York nor the overpowering breadth of the Short Grass country of western Canada, but the state has its own appeals which, to me, are always more the result of Wisconsin traditions than of the geographical character of the land. One of these traditions is certainly the attitude with which people accept the Wisconsin Idea in education. For example, I was invited one evening “to make a talk on drama” at a crossroads town hall set at the edge of a large cornfield near Oconomowoc. The lady who invited me, Mrs. Isabelle Tremaine, the wife of a prosperous farmer, had written: “Come on for supper. Afterwards you may make your talk.”

I arrived at the Tremaine farm about six and was discussing rural approaches to the drama with my hostess when Mr. Tremaine staggered into the kitchen with an ugly gash in his forehead. He had smashed into a steel stanchion in the dim barn and was temporarily hors de combat. Now, cow milking in its various forms is one of the skills one never forgets and certainly I had had enough milking in my Kansas boyhood to make a permanent impression. I offered to take over at the barn and my offer was accepted easily, naturally.

The Tremaines had a milking machine, but there were certain cows who would not stand for machinery. With my head in a warm flank I meditated about a state where the role of a professor from the University is as natural to cowmilking as to conducting classes in adult education. The people of Wisconsin through their tradition of the Wisconsin Idea understand the necessities of milking and adult education equally well, and professors and people are generally on common ground. After I had finished the milking and had had a bite to eat I went to the hall and gave my little talk. It was accepted by the rural audience with the same ease and naturalness and understanding that my offer to milk the cows had been. With such understanding of motives and methods I, at least, have found the strong flavors of Wisconsin places pleasant to savor. I

have become familiar with Wisconsin's past, and I have found the past always adding spice to present observations. Not to know the past of a region is like viewing the setting but never seeing the drama.

How empty a trip westward from Madison toward Mount Horeb and Mineral Point would be for me if I did not know that I was traveling on the ridgeroad, the old military highway which carried the heavy lead wagons rolling slowly from the mines at Mineral Point, New Diggings, Benton, and the whole southwest. How empty my journey would be if I could not imagine the rolling wagons, the drivers, their speech, the dust, the blue jackets of cavalrymen, the settlers' rigs, and the immigrants from Europe on foot plodding along the ridgeroad, seeking new freedoms of many kinds, finding new freedoms in the valleys and on the hillsides. How empty my journey if I did not know that to the north and south of the road were valleys where Norwegian names are thickly sown with, here and there, a few Irish, English, or German shoots sticking through. I know that there are other valleys not far from the road where Swiss names are as thick as Norwegian and others where German names blanket the



Grant County is a county of low hills, farming country cut sharply by ravines and valleys and quick flooding streams...

countryside. It is warming to know where the plantings of names lie on the land and to know how the seed came to the soil.

It adds zest to my journey to know that the ridgeroad is the stamping ground of an elusive “haunt”—the Ridgeroad Ghost. In 1820 near Mineral Point, a Missouri man murdered a Virginian in a quarrel over a pretty Cornish girl. The Missouri man got the maiden, but the Virginian took up a flitting, terrorizing vigil as a ghost along the ridgeroad. He is seen sometimes riding a two-wheeled rig to which is hitched a splendid team of blacks (breathing fire, some say) The team and driver appear suddenly on the ridgeroad at night weaving in and out of traffic, causing squeals of terror and sudden endings to midnight romance. The Ghost sometimes is said to appear riding the cowcatcher of the occasional engine which huffs its slow way across the ridgeland on the Chicago and Northwestern branch line. The Ghost is not seen so often nowadays, since many of the Welsh and Cornish folks who lived along the ridgeroad have disappeared. But an imaginative traveler can spot him. I have.

The folklore of the region is always the coloring of the region’s portrait, and the response of Wisconsin people to adult education is a part of the picture, too, an inspiring part, especially when the educational program is attached to the arts. For example, Grant County is a county of low hills, farming country cut sharply by ravines and valleys and quick flooding streams. There are towns, too, which seem to me to be very mid-American. One cold March afternoon there was a meeting at Lancaster. This was a meeting of a group of Grant County rural artists. They had been called together to see the movie the State Department in Washington had made of their Grant County art activities. Many of the artists were actors in the movie. They brought their neighbors and families to see this movie which would be shown in nations all over the world to demonstrate that rural America has a culture of its own. The meeting was held in the local movie theater where there was 35 millimeter equipment. The place held about six hundred persons and it was full. Many of the business people of Lancaster came in, too. In the lobby of the City Hall next door paintings were piled and stacked, waiting to be taken upstairs and displayed. The artist-in-residence from the University of Wisconsin was to attend the showing of the movie and, afterward, to offer criticism and suggestion on many of the paintings brought in by the people. There was to be a supper, too, held right there in the display hall, and many of the farm ladies had brought covered dishes, or pies, cakes or meats.

I drove over from Madison with Aaron Bohrod, the artist-in-residence, Jim Schwalbach, the traveling Extension artist who had arranged the meeting, and a gentleman from the Rockefeller Foundation in New York, Edward D’Arms. He had come out to see at first hand some of the field work in the arts going on in Wisconsin. He was interested but a bit unbelieving.

“Perhaps,” he had said on the way over from Madison, “we are not ready for a people’s art expression in America.”

We sat in the back of the theater and saw the movie which had been produced by Julian Bryan who had done many good films. It was good, a work of art. The rural folk in the cast with their easy naturalness turned out to be some of the best actors we had seen. We were excited, and D’Arms expressed eagerness to go upstairs and see some of the paintings these rural folk had been doing.

We climbed the City Hall stairs and entered a long room. It was jammed with people, and there were countless original paintings lined up along the walls on tables. A passage opened before Aaron Bohrod as he went to the far end of the room. He was greeted with enthusiastic and friendly calls from every side. The people were not embarrassed. The fact that he was an outstanding American artist made no difference in their attitude toward him. He was one of their group. He believed in them and what they had been doing. He set up an easel and called for the first painting.

An elderly farm woman brought the first one. It was of a barn and cattle and a tree. Bohrod set it on the easel and commented with respect. He called attention to good points and bad, making his criticism always constructive and helpful. Then came a bachelor who had turned a corn bin into a studio; then came a high school girl, a feed store operator, more housewives, and a school teacher, a country doctor. More and more.

We watched and listened. D’Arms grew thoughtful. He made notes in a black book, asking for names and occupations of the people. Finally someone thought of food. Pictures were taken off the tables and the food was spread. We all sat down together. A grayed little lady sat beside D’Arms. She said to him, “Do you see why we like to live in Wisconsin?” He said, “I think I do.”

One night in 1950 I was invited to a farmers’ meeting that had a double purpose. The first purpose was the discussion of an economic measure near to the community’s heart, and the second purpose was to discuss what that community might do through theater to draw the community into a more cohesive body. My part was distinctly secondary on the program.

The economic question was this: Our Wisconsin Legislature recently put through a law requiring that farmers have a separate milkhouse with a concrete floor and that they haul the manure away from the barns every day. There was a date set at which time all the milkhouses must be ready. Many farmers disliked the law. They were short-handed. They had no time to build a new milkhouse. Some of them had always let the manure pile up around the barn throughout the winter and, by Gad, they would continue to do so!

This particular meeting turned into a hot one. The chair got into trouble trying to keep order, and the county agricultural agent was almost mobbed be-

cause some of the folks blamed him for their plight. This community had also summoned its state assemblyman to be present; he had voted for the milkhouse bill in the legislature. They said violent things to him. The discussion was not getting anywhere. They wrangled for a while and then decided to call it off. They turned the meeting over to me.

I was in an uncomfortable spot, faced by anticlimax and the probable futility of trying to stimulate interesting discussion in this particular atmosphere. I knew I simply could not talk about drama in ordinary terms. It suddenly occurred to me, as I fumbled about, that the previous discussion had aspects of a drama: conflict, character, excellent dialogue. So I set about fabricating, without the people actually knowing what was going on, a comic situation in which the various factions and individuals were either for or against the milkhouse law, and before we realized it a kind of group play was actually in progress, only now it seemed in terms of comedy, exciting but laughable, for I had attempted to exaggerate the purpose on both sides and to enlarge on the innocence of the county agent and to exaggerate the well-meaning, slightly self-pitying attitude of the legislator as well as the anger of several of the more outspoken opponents of the milkhouse bill.

In the informally dramatized version of the affair that we made up there at the moment the farmer was getting his whacks at the legislator and the county agent was making his excuses but within the framework of a creative situation. Somehow feelings seemed cleansed, purposes made clear, and actually everyone began to enjoy the situation. In fact, that particular group enjoyed it so much that they decided to put the dramatized discussion on again at a later gathering. And they did, with a big spread of good country grub, with some rural paintings hung around the walls of the hall, and with some singers from a county-wide rural chorus furnishing another aspect of the occasion.

We have tried this kind of community, or group, drama a number of times with general good success. It is, of course, a purely presentational sort of theater in which the members of the audience are actually the actors. The play, if it may be called that, is frank theatricality with the theatrical elements simplified and frankly artificial.

This kind of dramatic expression, which could find great place in countryside life, has a body of precedent. For example, during the nineteenth century Nietzsche, Tolstoi, Rolland, and Appia developed theories of "art for life's sake" and considered a kind of "communal" drama as the art of the future. The form of the group play I have described bears a slight resemblance also to the theatrical concept of Evreinov, the drama theorist and playwright who formulated a theory of drama-in-life.

The form has special value to groups of young persons, especially, who are able to free themselves from their inhibitions and from the ordinary conven-

tional restrictions of the realistic stage. Crowd scenes, for instance, are apt to be highly dynamic and expressive, perhaps confusing to the spectator but satisfying to the participant who is the chief one involved. It is the participant's show. Within its framework is endless scope for education on the part of a leader who may aid the participants in working out more satisfying ways of self-expression through dramatic movement and interplay with other participants.

I have traveled Wisconsin in all its seasons in my search for the flavor of the state. I recall a cold morning at the University's experimental farm at Spooner, up in the northwest corner of the state. It was November, late in the month. Snow was on the ground, and a wet, chilling wind was coming across the cutover and the swamps.

The young home demonstration agent and I paced nervously about the room. We were wearing our heavy coats. She had had a lot of experience with north country economics, very little with theater. She looked continually at her watch. She was embarrassed. She said, finally, "Well, Mr. Gard, I sure hope somebody comes."

I said, "So do I."

That morning I had driven up to Spooner from Chippewa Falls over glass-slick roads. Earlier in the month we had written from the office in Madison: "Dear County Agricultural Agent: Spooner has been selected as a regional meeting place for a one-day drama training school. Would you please notify all persons in your area and the agents in surrounding counties so that interested people may attend?"

We had exchanged several letters. The Spooner office had written that there had never been much drama in that part of the state; folks were scattered out, sort of; and they didn't have much free time. It was hard to scrape a living out of the north country earth; so they hadn't given much thought to putting on plays, but... well, if you want to come up we'll give your training school idea a go. Better wear your long underwear and carry a shovel in your car guess you haven't been up our way.

So here I was, and it was time for the meeting to begin; and not a single person had arrived. The young home agent said, wistfully, "I do wish one person would come." She glanced at me and I knew that she sincerely hoped my trip would not be entirely barren.

I said, "Keep calm."

We paced some more, and finally she said, "There is a lady over in the eastern part of the county who put on a play once. They... they said it was awfully funny."

I said, "That's nice."

She said, "After all, Mr. Gard, the weather is terrible."

She heard a noise, she thought, and rushed over to the window. A car was pulling into the yard. I ran to look, too. She cried, "There are three in that car! Three!" Sure enough, there were. Two ladies and a small boy. The young home agent rushed out to greet them and I thought, "Well, three is the size of this workshop." But it wasn't. More cars pulled into the yard. Suddenly the room was full of people. They entered cautiously, some of them, glancing at me as we shook hands. There were housewives and a surprising number of men. The home agent and I got chairs and more chairs. We were excited now and she was glowing, gratified. She whispered: "They are interested! I can hardly believe it! But they wouldn't have come if they weren't interested! "

Pretty soon the meeting was started. We talked about plays and community life, about local history, legends, about what they could do with their own groups, about playmaking in their own communities. I did not need, I found, to sell them on the idea of theater. Once they saw how theater was a part of their lives they carried me along. They represented church groups and schools. Several rural schools had let the kids off for a day so the teachers could attend the workshop. There were farm men and women. "Too bad weather to work outdoors much," the men said, attempting to pass off their presence as just something to do or just somewhere to go with the wife. But they were interested and showed it, especially when we got around to discussing playwriting based on themes familiar to the region.

One lady said to me: "But, Mr. Gard, we would love to do plays in our town, but we have no stage. We have a town hall, but there's not even a platform."

I told them that although there is a vast amount of the old fashioned and ordinary process of play production going on in Wisconsin, we have become aware of numerous experiments that seem to show that a new idea of theater is evolving. I told them that to some extent the old theater realism is dying out and that many plays are being staged without curtain, footlights, or even scenery. I told them that I believed the emphasis seemed to be coming at last to a real appreciation of human character and situation basic to people's lives. When plays cannot be found to fit the needs of the people, someone or some group must make up a play; in such playmaking there is a wonderful freshness.

I told them about such a play I saw that represented life on the town square at Stevens Point. I reminded them that Stevens Point is a small city in the heart of a large settlement of Polish people and that these Poles as well as others are in the habit of bringing farm produce to sell on the square. The play, I recalled, was colorful with dancing and singing—dances and songs the people sang and danced and everybody knew. The play used characters and subjects familiar to the central part of Wisconsin. The play was a hit, and I told the group that I believed that if we could again make our theater meaningful and joyful in terms of ourselves a great American people's movement in theater would spring to life.

I showed them how to arrange the chairs in the hall so that plays might be presented in the center of the room, and I discussed the movement in central staging that is finding popularity all over America. It was a new idea to most of the folks. We talked more theater and had lunch together.

In the afternoon a group of writers came in. Three of them had original novels. It was dark night when I got away from the farm. I said goodbye to the young home agent. She said, "You're sold on this stuff... plays and writing and art, aren't you?"

I said, "Are you?"

She said, "We'll have a drama festival up here this Spring."

RURAL WRITERS

FROM *Grassroots Theater*

I had an unformulated notion when I came to Wisconsin that a state-wide program in creative writing must be one of my objectives. As time went on I studied the possibility more and more. A conscious stimulation of wide interest in creative writing had never been attempted in the rural areas of the state. Playwriting had been emphasized by the University from time to time, but the whole idea of creative writing as a countryside movement had not been dealt with. Besides its worth to the individual, I saw in creative writing a stepping stone leading toward the public consciousness of the arts I visioned as a possible major result of all our work in Wisconsin. I saw creative writing as one intensification of the home-based or home-grown culture ideal. And I saw the Wisconsin Idea Theater, more and more, as a kind of center around which a campaign to encourage and develop home-grown theater, art, and literature might be conducted. I sensed intuitively that a free literary movement in rural areas might spread and grow quickly, since writing did not necessarily require the same group focus characteristic of theater participation.

The Rural Art project had grown from thirty exhibitors in 1938 to fifteen hundred in 1948, and I saw no reason why creative writing might not be equally well received as another creative facet of Wisconsin country life. From what I had observed in other places of the widespread desire to write, I guessed that the Wisconsin countryside was ripe with poets and that the sheets of all the original short stories and plays written each year in the state would probably paper all the rooms in all the houses of at least a small Wisconsin town.

For a long while I had wanted to open the creative writing idea up, expand it beyond just playwriting, and at last I determined that this must be done. I realized that there were several considerations one must make in developing such a literary movement. My aim was not only to awaken people to the creative factor in their lives but also to stimulate them to the ultimate production

of literary art forms. I recognized the values of a self-expression program on a broad sociological level in keeping with the general principles of the Wisconsin Idea, but I also envisioned fine books and plays and stories arising out of the broad movement through a few particular talents. The third notion inherent in the idea of a people's literary movement was, of course, that of area interpretation. I hoped for poetic or deeply sensitive writing about home themes superior to that brought out by the State Centennial.

All these considerations I had mulled over, but by the Summer of 1948 no actual plan had materialized. The opening up of a creative writing idea developed without warning. I had discussed many times with Wakelin McNeel, "Ranger Mac," the naturalist and 4-H Club leader, the possibility of encouraging the writing of more good short plays for young people's use. We knew the great need for a sincere, creative dramatic literature within the performing capabilities of young rural folk, and we thought that perhaps an appeal made directly to the leaders of 4-H clubs in the state would have merit. We hoped that several of the more creative leaders themselves would write plays which might be widely used by many groups. I volunteered to meet in Madison for a few days with any of the leaders who might wish to come and participate in a kind of writers' roundtable with the specific purpose of developing rural-life plays. Wakelin McNeel made the offer known through his office channels, and a few weeks later on a hot June morning when I had almost forgotten about the proposal my phone rang. It was McNeel and he said:

"There are nine people from rural Wisconsin here to see you."

"What for?"

"They want to talk about that writing."

"The rural plays?"

"Sure."

I said, "I wish I'd known they were coming today. I'm pretty busy."

"One of the women has thirteen children."

"A farm woman with thirteen children has time to come to Madison and talk about writing?"

"She's here," he said.

"All right, I'll see them right now. Where?"

"Bascom Hall. There's a classroom reserved."

I went up the Hill to Bascom. I found the nine people in a hot room that looked out on the slope down to Lake Mendota. There were eight women and one boy. The boy was about eighteen years old. One of the women was tall and gray, two were young, one was fat and jolly, one was quiet and serene, one was dark and small, two were middle-aged. They waited for me to say something, and as I paused a moment looking at them, for no reason at all, I began to remember the happy and careless life I led as a kid in the Neosho River Valley

down in Kansas. And it seemed that my early experience had had for me the unshackled quality of complete freedom, the gaiety, the unreasoned and complete savoring of the goodness of earth and sky, the unquestioning appreciation of neighbors and music and dancing. And with the memory of the free wildness of my youth running through me these folks who had come to see me were transformed. I forgot that they had come to Madison to talk about the technical processes of creative writing. They became, instead, a symbol of a group of my neighbors in Kansas or of people I had encountered on my wanderings, people who knew a wordless appreciation of the theater that was life.

Then I said to the eight ladies and the one boy: "You are like a group of my neighbors when I was a kid down in Kansas."

The tall, gray one said: "You remind me a little bit of a neighbor of mine up in Manitowoc County. He's a farmer. Not really a very good farmer."

"Why did you come?"

"I don't know exactly. Except that we've heard that you want people to write about their own places and the folks they know well. I think I could do that."

I said to them: "Tell me about yourselves. Where did you come from and what kind of places are they?"

And then began one of the most incredible experiences I ever had. These nine persons stayed at the University for three days; and every day about 9:00 in the morning we would start talking together. And as we talked our lives and the struggle in them emerged to lie against the whole fabric of our native places; and as we talked, hour after hour, a kind of fantastic play that was like life itself began to emerge and to encompass us all within its spaceless and formless self. There were times when we would speak, not as ourselves, but as imaginary characters that grew from our talk of people and events that were as real as the earth itself. The whole affair was a kind of dramatic ecstasy in which we were both the actors and the audience, the dancers and the music.

When the three days were over, it was as though a kind of dream had ended, with no more explanation than that with which it had begun. Then we awoke suddenly and realized that we had hardly mentioned the processes of writing at all and that, instead of a partly completed manuscript tucked in pocket or purse, we had only a confused but terribly exhilarating sense of something that had stirred our lives.

When the group was ready to leave Madison, I said: "I have met with hundreds of groups like this one, and I have seen hundreds of plays, but I have never had a deeper sense of theater than we have had together."

The tall, gray lady said: "I think it was because we all had something to express, and we did express it, and maybe the memory of it is somehow better than the written play.

"I wish there were more persons like yourselves."

“Mr. Gard,” said the tall, gray lady, “there are hundreds and thousands of rural men and women who live on the land and love the land and who understand the true meaning of the seasons and man’s relationship to man and to his God.”

I said: “If that is so, the plays they send to me don’t reflect such an appreciation.”

She replied that she thought one reason the plays reflected little poetic appreciation of the area was because everything was made to seem too complex, too technical, too difficult. She said there must be a great, free expression. If the people of Wisconsin knew that someone would encourage them to express themselves in any way they chose, if they knew that they were free of scenery and stages and pettiness that the plays we do seem so full of, if they knew that someone would back them and help them when they wanted help, it was her opinion that there would be such a rising of creative expression as is yet unheard of in Wisconsin and it would really all be a part of the kind of theater we had had these past three days, for the whole expression would be of and about ourselves.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

FROM *Coming Home to Wisconsin*

What indeed, did I come to accomplish in Wisconsin? I return again to my early days at Madison. It is 1945, a hot afternoon in early September. I am in the catacombs of an old red brick building they call Science Hall. It is where a man I am to work with has his office. Leslie Brown is slim, gray, very alert, very friendly. Among other subjects, he is concerned with the importance of the arts in people's lives. He is a specialist in popular education, in adult education. We fence for a moment, estimating our purposes, backgrounds. Suddenly Brown grabs an old straw hat. "Let's go have a beer... where we can talk."

We walk silently to a nearby tavern on University Avenue. Brown said, as we sat down, "There used to be over a hundred brands of beer made in Wisconsin and if it hadn't been for the opposition of the German Saloonkeepers League, we'd have had Woman's Suffrage a long time before we voted it in 1919. Also, there are practically an infinite number of bars in Hurley, Wisconsin, a town of about a thousand. And Wisconsin stands fourth in the national per capita consumption of all liquor; and first in the nation in consumption of brandy."

"Really?"

He said, "All that information is purely incidental. Now tell me what are you going to do in Wisconsin? There is a lot of curiosity about you here. What are you going to do that hasn't already been done?"

I took a deep breath. This was it, really. Talk before had been cheap. Now I had to say it. I said, "Look, Brown, I've done a lot of things and seen a lot of places, but nothing I did or saw meant anything until I tied it all up with the Arts and with theatre. That was back in Kansas. Then I was in New York and got interested in the happenings the people remembered; the way they spoke, the dramatic countryside events; and all of that became a theatre for me, too. Later I was working up in Canada, with the memory of the frontier right there, close enough to touch, and that was exciting; a great epic sensation of the past

and how the land was transformed.

“Everywhere I’ve been it’s as though there’s a person or an experience that has revealed to me a new part of the picture; a picture that I want to help develop, and that I hope will lead to an art in America more widely accepted than we’ve ever dreamed. In Kansas a professor named Allen Crafton opened the world of theatre for me. In New York at Cornell another professor, Alexander Drummond, taught me discipline and the wonderful, strange mystery of tales and legends that are a part of the light and shade of this picture of America’s raw theatre and art, because perhaps America will only be as great as her myths and traditions. In Canada I could see what profound effect the frontier has had on us as an American people, and how the necessities of life have to be a part of our art thinking. And long before all that, when I was a very young man, I set out from my Kansas home and experienced the raw, cutting edge of life—the Depression, the drunks, the revolutionaries, the con-men, the workers, the farmers, the weak, and the strong. Now, God help me, in Wisconsin I’ve got to discover still another part of the picture, and hopefully that will be the final part.”

Brown took a large swallow of the beer that made Milwaukee famous. I couldn’t tell whether he had been listening or not. “What is this part of the picture you’ll try to find in Wisconsin?”

I said, “It might be something like this: There are rumblings again about a more deeply American National Theatre. I get letters and hear this talk all the time, about fine American plays touring through the American countryside again, maybe under a national subsidy, and theatre centers and art centers growing in the larger cities. That will be wonderful, and it will be a part of the American cultural idea, but it will not be the largest part and it will not be my part. My part is in the back country, away from the largest center, where the hardest battle is being fought. My part and work is with the creative force that is in the people, and this creative power, developed slowly, in keeping with the life of the people, might finally swell the idea of the arts to a national spiritual crescendo.

“You talk damn big,” Brown snarled.

“And I tell you something else. I believe we ought to try to open a creative life for everyone; in the schools, the communities, on the farms, in the cities... maybe even in the bars and taverns. The arts must now come into their own. It’s the next great American thing we must do.”

The tavern was empty except for ourselves. Brown suddenly stood up and started to pace around, holding his beer glass and making gestures. “I can see this thing growing, too. Everybody ought to be a part of it. The kids and the high schools, and the community groups and the farm folks, the older people, working together and getting closer together through a big idea: through a sensibility of the arts as necessary in life. Maybe soon the federal government will

really get into the picture.”

“You’ve got it right.”

“I don’t know much about the arts,” Brown said. “But I’ll help.”

Brown was wrong. He had the most profound sense of art for he understood that everyone has to live a part of his life in art and in make-believe. During the time he remained in Wisconsin he was a brother to me, and constantly an inspiration.

I have tried sincerely to keep those ideas I expressed that afternoon so long ago, foremost. I have tried to help make Wisconsin a proud territory of the human spirit; of the sensitive approaches of man to homeplace, nature and to art. Through the arts, through so many cultural summations of Old World to New, I have tried, tried, tried; so many communities, so much teaching, travel, seeding—Success? Looking backward now, the State, as I conceived it, appears like a battlefield. The debris of conflict is everywhere; discarded dreams lie helter-skelter like thrown shields of ancient warriors; yet a sense of unique Middle West civilization is there, too, and above the plain, some monuments.

Looking further backward at the years of my Wisconsin experience, I am appalled and unbelieving as I observe the scope and number of projects, ideas, schemes, educational programs and organizations that have been launched largely, I suppose, out of the sense of mission that brought me to Wisconsin. I only hope that the great men and women who shared my beliefs know somehow that the arts in Wisconsin are alive and that they are thriving through the work of University Extension and the much more recent Wisconsin Arts Board. Sometimes I even think that Mr. McBride would know and approve. I have often comforted myself by thinking that he was going to fire me from the gang because he knew I ought to be doing different work.

I recently found documents in our archives relating to my establishment of the Rural Writers and the friendship of a great volunteer leader, Fidelia Van Antwerp; to the founding of the Wisconsin Idea Theatre Conference; the Wisconsin Regional Writers; the Council for Wisconsin Writers; the National Community Theatre Training Centers. I found abundant correspondence with the officers of the Rockefeller Foundation; with David Stevens; with Les Paffrath of the Johnson Foundation (always a backer of my programs); plans for Wisconsin Folk Drama tours that David Peterson, L.G. Sorden and I launched; the fine program in behalf of minorities, the handicapped and incarcerated “The Arts and Human Need;” the Upper Middle West Professional Playwright’s Laboratory with Dale Wasserman; with the founding of the Rhinelander School of Arts; programs of cooperation with the countries of Finland and England; the forming of the Wisconsin Arts Council and Foundation; work with Native Americans; with rural communities; with the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences,

Arts and Letters; with state folklore and folklife; work with the elderly; with the Wisconsin Bicentennial Commission; with book publishing and scores of letters to and from my good friends, Cap Pearce and Charlie Duell in New York at Duell. Sloan and Pearce; projects with Augie Derleth and other writers; with Allen Crafton and Alexander Drummond; with a hundred graduate students and assistants; with the Arts and the Small Community; the National Endowment for the Arts; with 4-H Clubs; with the National Theatre Conference; with national surveys of the American Theatre; with national and international organizations; conferences with thousands of writers eager to realize themselves... and the establishment of the Robert E. Gard Wisconsin Idea Foundation at Aldebaran Farm at Spring Green. All these things I have done, or caused to be done.

My life in Wisconsin has been a rich one; yet overall the whole experience of “coming home to Wisconsin” has taught me how necessary it is to probe deeply into the life and background of a region if the feeling of what has really transpired is to be important. It is something beyond the superficial, and even beyond the bitter necessities that a land imposes upon its settlers; it is more the spirit of a place and its distillation in human lives. That theory applied now makes me sure there must be even more great writing about the development of Wisconsin. I do not mean more history, already splendidly done. What I mean is a great and dramatic portrayal of the spirit of the people of Wisconsin... in terms of their epic arrival, struggle, the design of their nationalities. A magnificent canvas ought to be created. I am familiar with the scope of the Wisconsin land, and how the land beckoned to people. I know what happened when they converged upon Wisconsin, freedom seeking, land seeking, their families destitute for the most part, their women self-sacrificing and humble, but with terrible pride and courage. I have read the epic novels of Rolvag, the novels of Moberg; I have read the novels and the stories of Hamlin Garland, but in all of them something is lacking that is implicit in the Wisconsin story. It is a vision that was here; a great responsibility to self, to future, that ended, finally, in the concept of the “Wisconsin Idea:’ If a writer could catch that flicker of world greatness... buried in so many, many humble and seeking hearts... there it would be. It was, of course, this elusive thing, this heartrending idealism of simple people and also the terrible intellectual necessities that helped bring about free education and libraries; the gift, at least in part, of early free-thinking German intellectuals, who beginning in 1845 brought and maintained the search for a world betterment. It seemed to congeal, to focus, to become inevitably a part of Wisconsin, the soul, the spirit.

All of this, with the smell of manure on the spring air, the way the rivers look in April, the dark of forest tracks, the far flung University that spreads

its influence into every home... the farm girls and boys with multitudes of hard-won fair ribbons, the great cattle herds... the brown of fall corn, the silos, the barns so large, the fields so many, seen from above, in the air. The green of summer, the contours, and the wish for the cold green of primitive eras...all of this...drew me, draws me, and makes the Wisconsin sensation real for me. It is a sensation that “comes home” to me every time I realize this is my Wisconsin. I am at home here with all of this.

ALTERING THE FACE AND HEART OF AMERICA

FROM *Grassroots and Mountain Wings*

When I was asked to say something pertinent as to where we have been in this fascinating game of encouraging the rural arts, I got to thinking, well, yes, maybe I could say something about that because I must now be one of the oldest living survivors of that somewhat gallant group of men and women who believed that America could become something greater and more glorious in the arts, and perhaps at the grassroots.

At the end of a recent book of mine “Prairie Visions” I wrote this paragraph: “I have tried sincerely to make Wisconsin a proud territory of the human spirit, of the sensitive approaches to home, nature, and to the arts. Through the arts, through so many cultural summations of the Old World to New, I have tried, tried, tried, visited so many communities, done so much teaching, travel, seeding—Success???? Looking backward now, the State, as I conceived it appears a battlefield. The debris of conflict is everywhere; discarded dreams lie helter-skelter like thrown shields of ancient warriors; yet a sense of unique heartland civilization is there too. And above the plain some monuments...”

And having written that, and still looking back, I wonder why I had to struggle so hard to effect small changes in community and personal life. You’d have thought some folks would have known better.

Well, maybe to start with, it was hard because in America we have tended to stereotype our communities and regions in certain ways. “That’s just the way this place is, always has been, and danged if we’re going to change it much.” The views of local life are often exaggerated, but accepted as the way people are, look, or the way they are said to look and act in certain areas. And because we are and have always been a very regionally oriented people, very conscious of roots, and despite terrific changes in communications and travel which have smoothed us out, we are still conscious of our stereotypes, sometimes embarrassed by them, or amused. For example, we were once reluctant to admit that

anything very good or great, beyond the stereotypes, could come out of my home state of Kansas.

William Allen White, our great Kansas sage and small town newspaper man (*The Emporia Gazette*) once made a speech as a distant aftermath to his noted editorial "What's the Matter With Kansas." He quoted, "Oh potatoes, they grow small out in Kansas. And, they eat them tops and all out in Kansas." There are forty-three stanzas to this ballad, he said, and the burden of the song is that Kansas is about the 33rd degree in the lodge of the royal arch demon, and that a man, after going through Satan's whole sizzling inferno is sent to Kansas to get homesick for Hades. But in the first place we do not eat them tops and all out in Kansas. We eat them mashed with chicken gravy and ham gravy. And in the second place, we do not have to fill our wells with rocks to keep them from blowing away; nor do we trim the claws of catfish to keep them from scratching the bark off the trees in dry weather. Neither do we send our abstracts to Missouri, so that grasshoppers may not destroy the titles to the land. But these beliefs are so prevalent that the streetcar horses laugh till their sides ache when they see a Kansas man.

Well, every state and most communities have their humorous stereotypes. My own home town of Iola, Kansas had its too; but about the only one I heard as a kid was that Jesse James, on one of his southern forays took one look at Iola and passed it up as a bad job, and went on to Humboldt, and didn't find anything there either, and later on it was cautiously whispered that it was Henry James and not Jesse James who finally took Iola by storm.

But I learned early that such places as Iola and Humboldt, which inevitably have their stereotypes and characterizations, usually hide a sort of affectionate pride which may mask a deeper and very real and sometimes beautiful humanity, gasping for expression and recognition.

Sometimes we have had to simply push aside the overlay of these local prides and stereotypes to get at the living thing underneath; and sometimes this uncovering isn't easy; because we have been taught in school that reverence for the home town, home state and home place is a very real thing... even if we do make up funny or sometimes cruel things to say about them. We have always responded to much that is sentimental and not very good art in America, but which is tender, too. The poems we read and appreciated in my elementary school days sometimes began:

"Oh, fair Kansas, the home of my longing heart,
I'm turning my face to you.
To feel your soft breezes once again
To look at your skies of blue..."

These were the kinds of things we learned in school and in Sunday School.

I remember not feeling at all dismayed when we sang: “Jesus wants me for a *sunflower*.” That was simply justifiable pride.

Later on, before I was really seized by the art bug, I was certainly conscious that we were apt to be called rustics, or rubes, in Kansas. And maybe this came from the way we looked, or from the traveling theater companies which played so often in small town America and called us hick towns or rubes, and the boondocks. And it took us some time to climb away from these characterizations which kind of slowed down our creep toward rural culture. Anyway, I was enough aware to appreciate a small poem which appeared in some old newspaper:

“The chaps that fashion rural plays
No more find types of hick or jays,
Nor bumpkins, boobs or rustic rubes
Among the Kansas boondocks.
The Kansas all know how to write
As well as William Allen White
And they debate affairs of state
As well as Victor Murdock.”

Of course, all this poeticizing isn't in the mainstream of rural community arts. But in a way it is, too, because local prides of many kinds linger behind serious arts development. Local history, local tradition, learned locally, might and has, done much to push onward rural arts movements. Most rural or community culture groups that I am acquainted with start with local lore. In general, people love their regions and their home areas, enjoy poking fun, and occasionally get down to brass tacks to make a local scene a better place to live.

The old influences of the frontier were still very evident and hard to deal with in my young day. My dad, a farm boy from Illinois, had few inclinations to start any kind of rural art movement when he came to Kansas. He came to view the tall prairie grass of which he had heard. But he developed his poetic symbols anyway. I didn't learn about this until I was in high school and had somehow written my first poem, which I think softened me up for what I finally saw going on in him. He was grieving for the poetic ideal, the tall grass, which had been there when he arrived and which wasn't there anymore, and which he had helped destroy.

Which, of course, brings forward the subject of just what kind of nation we are. Our beginnings and our split from Britain is known by all, and save for the long lingering influence of British culture, more and more mitigated through the 19th Century, really our first hundred years or so did little to breed an indigenous American culture. Other than our folk-ways, which had their own style

of dramatization, there wasn't much by way of indigenous American drama or community arts, which was taken very seriously. But the frontier, as Frederick Jackson Turner wrote in his landmark essay, "The Influence of the Frontier on American History," was something of powerful influence. First, we had the necessities of transforming huge areas of land; a task so difficult and dangerous that there was hardly any time for gentle considerations other than household arts, quilting, weaving, furniture making. It was breaking the land, destroying the heavy prairie sods, growing crops, resolving difficulties with the Indians, with the railroads which controlled huge acreages of land along rights-of-ways, or resolving in the west, difficulties with the really large ranching interests. Then, the tasks of taking new homesteads, staying on them and proving a claim to the land. Infused through this was the lasting influence of new settlers, many of foreign birth, who brought wondrous and different values to America, and a determination to make new homes better than they had in the Old Country, and to make a better chance for their children.

Hard work, and passionate devotion to the land, and always the problems of finding markets, getting railroads built, local governments established. Finding somehow a kind of social life which depended on neighborhood get-togethers, home dances and fiddling, rough games, pie suppers, once in a while a quilting bee, and once in a while a singing bee or a spelldown. Schools must be established, churches built. What a huge task our American settlers had, and afterward... later, with you and me, the inevitable consideration: how has all this affected you and me in our determination to estimate America as a cultur-



*When I seek
to rediscover
the Wisconsin
prairie I seek
to rediscover
my own soul...*

ally-minded nation? For somewhere along in my earlier life I became conscious that I was a product of all that had happened. I learned that both my father and mother were of the westering drive, with all the hangovers and values of hard-working people, determined, in every material way, to be attached to the land.

And as I grew and became more aware, and was influenced by several wonderful teachers, the idea dawned that just maybe there was some kind of relationship in all that had happened, to me. I think I developed the notion quite early that maybe in some of our neighbors the sparks ignited by the fever of the western movement were out. I suppose I didn't then really miss the absence of original painting or pictures of any kind (other than calendar art) or the general absence of books and good magazines in homes. I didn't articulate it then, but I suppose I might have wondered why, after the glory and excitement of the search and transformation of a new land, that fever didn't lead on to something else, equally exciting and glorious... and I suppose that in my inarticulate way, I had a glimmer that this might have been the arts. It wasn't, of course, and in one incident this was highlighted for me when I heard about a neighbor woman on a far away valley farm, who was publicly threatened with the insane asylum if she didn't stop sitting at the kitchen table trying to write verses, when she could be shoveling manure in the cow-barn.

And, then, unexpectedly I discovered something about my dad. He would disappear sometimes in the night, and these night excursions became mysterious to me as I grew aware of them. One night I went in search of him, alarmed at his absence, and found him finally, sitting in the midst of a small, remaining patch of wild prairie grass. Once this plot was the long-ago burial ground of a wandering tribe of Indians who had a village on the east bank of the Neosho River. I remember sitting down with him in the grass while a kerosene lantern flared beside us. And he began to explain somewhat inarticulately why he was there, and why this place was important to him. I finally got the idea. About all the wild tall prairie grass was gone. When he'd arrived, the grass was so tall and the constant Kansas wind blew and swayed and bent it so romantically. Now the sod was all broken in our neighborhood. He said to me that night, "Now go out, boy, find the new prairie grass." I finally understood that he meant for me to go out, a searcher, and find the symbols that would change my life, and perhaps help create something great and wild and new for America. It seemed an impossible thing he was asking me to do, but I did agree to go, and before I departed on my life journey I wrote a poem... finished years later, but conceived then, and tried to synthesize what I thought a kind of Grail in America was about, possibly my search for what was left may in some way be a part of why I was requested to write this article.

Meanwhile, what was happening in American communities. Rural sociologists, like Professor John Kolb of Wisconsin, were trying to analyze what had

happened and what was happening. So many communities in earlier days had been closed. Nationalities, of which in Wisconsin there were a great number, remained jealous of their ethnic heritage, and indeed frowned on any intermarriage at all for one or two generations. Then about the third generation that began to break down; but for the most part in the 1920s and 30s it was very much an inner-ethnic culture society, folk dances, nationality games and contests, ethnic musicians, occasionally a play in German or Bohemian or French. And in rural places where there was an intermixture of strong American-generated culture not much at all went on. Indeed, among farmers and businessmen there was a sort of unexpressed suspicion of the arts... and of course, of family members who tried to write or paint, or who perhaps seemed to put too much of their time on making plays. Plays were a little less suspicious because a play could be a kind of community event, enjoyed by a number of people, as was church music and occasionally a community chorus. Indeed, the Wisconsin Dairyman's Association actually used plays to draw farmers to dairy meetings. The most primitive plays were definitely crude, rough, with two or three farmers under a large sheet, one of them holding a crude cow's head up in front... pretending to be an unmanageable critter, and then one or two farmers with some uninhibited comic flare, trying to milk her, with foreseeable consequences. The audience loved such a play... they didn't call it art. They just called it country fun; but next week or so maybe another gossip would put on a simple play which had a story. And this was great too... almost as great as seeing old Brindle kick the stuffing out of Joe and Tom who were trying to extract a little milk for baby, etc. Farmers came from miles away to view such entertainment, and since they had nothing else they thought it was wonderful. And I believed that plays even on such crude levels did something for the community. Little by little I developed the sensibility that more than anything I enjoyed watching people struggling to make their community better places, and to have some fun, especially in the kinds of places I myself knew so well. I slowly began to conceive of the rural arts as the most challenging part of America's search for a self-being.

More and more I discovered that my star, or whatever it was, was pointing me toward experiences profoundly effective on me: such as discovering a prairie acre at the University of Kansas, Mount Oread, on a slope behind the library... just one acre of wild prairie preserved as a memorial to those pioneers who had crossed that way, heading west on the Oregon Trail. And in this acre I found intimations of my Dad's acre in which he sought the remains of his early poetic drives. And the acre at Mount Oread seemed somehow to symbolize my real entry into art when a timely FDR program in 1933 provided a minor wage to work in the Kansas Theater, learning stage-craft, writing plays and finding worlds undreamed of, opening for me through drama. Maybe the prairie acre symbolized the growing love I developed for local history, and a dawning idea of

what local lore and backgrounds can mean to a community, leading often to the expression of a community's heart through theatrical presentation of heritage, theme and character. I also began to be conscious of plays on the local scene, and I went whenever I got the chance to see community plays in rural areas. I could see that the levels of play selection and the whole methods of presentation which realistic plays require, had to be improved, and I put this down as one thing with which I wanted to help and especially to try to steer community groups away from stereotyped presentations in poorly written plays, of doleful and pitiable aspects of rural family life: cruel fathers who wouldn't stand still for any talk of a piano or an organ or melodeon in the house, though mother wanted one desperately, so that Alice and Bill might begin to take lessons. The solution was always: chicken and egg money saved, nickel by nickel by Alice and her mother until... yes, one day a piano does appear, and when Dad unwillingly observes little Alice sitting down, to begin "Humoresque" he suffers a big change of heart... and says, why yes, he himself has always wanted to play the piano... maybe the barn work could get done in time for him to have a little practice too! And so forth, I admired the theme of these plays which showed that there was this hunger for something beautiful in the home. I determined that I wanted to do what I could to portray and to encourage new plays that would seek the real lives of rural people, and the poetry that I knew lay in the lives of rural folk and emerged from their nearness to the land and to neighbors. Such concepts as "quality" or "merely recreative" or "Yes, but it's not really art, you know" didn't really occur to me then though I heard a great deal of scathing talk about these concepts later. I suppose, I learned in time that the recreative arts are fundamental to arts in rural places; and that out of the fundamental desire to have fun with the arts there may well be something more profound that will emerge. That is, if faith and hard work are present and the right leaders are discovered to guide and preserve the very fragile and precious art-motives in home places.

I learned as much as I could about the real necessity of getting at the urges present in all communities, and in most human beings, to find and recreate in visual art, plays, stories, music, the indigenous symbols: so that people recognized the plots of virgin prairie, the landmark ideas and realities that motivated their lives. And I never wasted much time in arguments over whether art in rural areas was worthwhile, or whether it was just trash, done by untrained amateurs. I knew, absolutely, that it was worthwhile and that doubtless it could be improved. I think I somehow saw even then that there was a definite role for the professional artist in the small and rural community. If that could be arranged, I could see how the community would gain from mentorship and example. I could also see that the relationship of the professional artist to the community was complicated and difficult, but needed to be taken into account.

I was a graduate student in 1937–38, at Cornell University, working with one of the great philosophers and masters of drama and esthetics, Alexander M. Drummond, probably the most impressive teacher I have ever known, and one who was certain that the arts must be deeply rooted in American communities. My work at Cornell with Professor Drummond gave me some insights which were alternative to “quality” and “professional.” We substituted the wonderful words “joy, fulfillment, comprehension, change of attitude and selfless participation”... as concepts and values as good or better than the thin “professional” requirements. At one well-remembered national theater meeting held in New York, I tried my best to explain what had happened to a certain community in a rural area, when, instead of learning and presenting a scripted play, we made up a play which tackled a vital human community problem. And I tried to tell how the whole area got involved in a wonderful kind of drama, expressive, meaningful, close to life and close to being or more basically theatrical “quality” than many smooth and artificial professional plays I had seen on the New York stage. The play we made was like a catharsis, in the words of Aristotle who set out the poetics of theater and poetry and music. By that time, my New York audience was perplexed by what I was trying to do. How I wished I might show them just how it was. Anyway, I worked with many native playwrights in New York State, helped them to write and to make plays, and better than anything to help turn the play festivals that were going on, especially among young people into experiences of joy... not doleful mouthing of stereotyped dialogue, sometimes poorly directed and often sullenly presented.

Our aim was to get to the heart, to infuse, to inspire if need be, to find proper leadership and to nourish. We tried not to go in and then withdraw and assume that the growth would take care of itself. And a farmer knows the initial labor has to be kept up; to be in touch, supportive, for a period at the beginning of a cultural development is vital.

I regard David H. Stevens, once director of Humanities for the Rockefeller Foundation, as one of the great leaders and catalysts for a deeply rooted respect for arts at the grassroots. From Vice President of the University of Chicago, he moved to New York to a position that allowed him to encourage, teach and fund many vital American cultural programs. Among the figures that he helped to realize dreams of arts development were Paul Green of North Carolina, Baker Brownell of Northwestern, Frederick Koch of North Carolina (the father of American folk drama), Howard Mumford and Margo Jones of Dallas, George Izenur of Yale. Stevens made possible such monumental projects as the film library of the Museum of Modern Art, and examples of innumerable grants to scholars and movers in literature and drama... everyone during the 1930s and 40s regarded Stevens as the “grandfather of American arts.” He was warm, direct, decisive and generous... more than that, he was quickly sympathetic and

intuitive. He seemed to know what would work and what would not, and whom to trust. He had profound concern for the arts of the American countryside.

My association with him was very long and always rewarding. At the end of a challenging graduate student year at Cornell with Alexander Drummond, I received an unexpected offer from Sweet Briar College in Virginia to come there and teach. Because I was very poor and the salary looked impossibly attractive to me, I went to Professor Drummond and told him I'd decided to accept the offer. He said with no hesitation: "That would be a bad thing for you to do. I have made an appointment for you to go to New York and see David H. Stevens at the Rockefeller Foundation. He wants to see you in the morning."

I had just time to borrow \$35 from Professor Drummond, change my clothes and catch the Black Diamond train for New York. The address was the RCA Building, 49 West 49th Street. When the elevator whipped me up to the 55th floor, I had no idea what to expect. I sat down in the reception room to wait. I had with me one of the full length plays about rural Central New York I'd written, and I thought that Dr. Stevens might want to read it. But when he appeared, an intense, vital man, with very level, penetrating eyes, he said no word about reading a play. He merely gave me a firm handshake, asked about Professor Drummond, and said, "I have arranged a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship for you. We will also finance your work in New York State... I have written this to Professor Drummond. But now we want you to go out to Kansas for a visit to your old home. I'm very interested in ideas you might have as you look at things out there again. I'm happy to see you. Good-bye and good luck. Greet your mother for me."

That was all, but it was the beginning of forty years of deep friendship and steady encouragement and understanding. I have met and talked with many men and women who had an association with David Stevens and each had his own account of their first meeting; always friendly, decisive, and intuitively correct.

My work in New York State went forward, and my interest in native arts was continued after Stevens sent me to do research in native literary materials in the Province of Alberta... I learned that some of the living men and women who had established homes in the frontier period of Western Canada settlement were still alive. I had a chance to meet them and to record their stories. I began to see more clearly that a sense of place was essential to any sincere movement in the rural arts. You had to sacrifice and to love the place where you lived, and you had to feel so strongly about it that your emotion came through in poetry and art. I encountered this idea strongly in Canada; and somehow when the neighbors out there got together to put on a play, they might ask Mrs. Riley if they could use her old rocker as a prop. She said sure they could, but be careful because one of the rockers was kind of weak. Once Mrs. Riley herself appeared

in the play and sat and rocked in the old chair which was her grandmother's and she'd brought it with her from Ontario. As she sat in the chair and then she told some of her story, the symbols became more clear and important. They were so proud of these intimate things so near and dear to them, and each object became so deeply theatrical.

We didn't really worry about "quality" then, or being "professional." We were after deeper values, ideas devoted to and dear to courageous human hearts. I cherished the gatherings at somebody's house, or at a town hall. Here women and an occasional man, gathered to stitch a quilt or to work together on a creative community Christmas project, or to read a play aloud, or just to exchange stories of the way it was when the first ones came out. That was one of my rarest pleasures, to talk to those who were the first, and to record those persons' remembrances.

Later, of course, through the years, I have been harpooned by certain officials of cultural bodies (they should have known better) who wouldn't budge from their static view that the only community arts that could be funded were those that had a professional slant—they didn't care much what—just something that could be called "professional" and therefore have "quality."

I suppose that those who doubted that anything of very much good could come out of the rural areas couldn't have been familiar with an event of mighty importance to rural people everywhere and to their development of a sense of culture. It was in 1914 that Congress passed the Smith-Lever Act which in the long run probably did more for the development of a locally-based concept of the arts than any other one piece of legislation. For the first time, Federal money was made available to the counties of America so that there could be a permanent county agricultural agent at the county seat, and attached to his staff a home demonstration agent, as they were called, to work with the farm women, and later on a 4-H Club agent, and now resource agents, tourist agents, and other personnel. I thought that most influential for my purposes were the home agents who came into direct contact on the local scene, with farm women. General homemaking was one aim, but many went beyond just learning how to can, and clean, and preserve. They encouraged the women to take pride in their homes, to learn about flowers and wild floral arrangements, to hang pictures—not just the usual calendar kind: "stag at bay," or the "Horse Fair," or "September Mom," but real paintings if she could find them, and have some good books in the house and several better magazines: and many nice and often homemade things to make the house seem more attractive.

I say all this was important because of the vast system that developed: roots in every county and in many places they were, and still are, the homemaker groups that stimulated early arts groups, or "councils" though this term didn't figure much until the past sixty years or so. A better deal for farm women took

into account the endless miles a farm wife walked every day, just doing chores. *Country Gentleman Magazine* conducted a survey that showed that a farm woman walked about twenty miles every day. Sometimes the men helped to correct this great energy and time expenditure, and the women had more leisure for the arts.

But there was another great development that all this new activity stimulated and helped. The Smith-Lever Act was 1914, and in 1915 great new cultural tremors began in American theater and other arts. The idea dawning so late that America ought to respect local artists. The American theater had been strangled by great commercial interests who financed and controlled immense chains of theaters and railway cars. They moved plays of the shallowest kind around the country into most of the smaller communities. But about 1915, new forces began to show. New American writers wrote plays about real people and places, and there began to be expressions in American music and art and dance. I cannot say positively that the opening of new avenues of expression to rural people had immediate effect on the new appreciations in American theater and art, but they certainly helped to prepare the climate, and to open the way for the great new American Community Theater movement.

Community theaters, of course, existed in some places before 1915, but I have always felt that the influence of the American Drama Guild, organized in the late teens and early 20s and which swept the whole country, had a definite start from what was going on all over as a new consciousness of native arts. One might have thought that the Drama Guild had a highly elitist development because the Junior League and other such organizations were very instrumental. But that was not the case. The purpose of the Guild was to stimulate theater art at the community level, and bring better plays to American places. They succeeded admirably in doing that, and when the Drama Guild ebbed in the late 1920s, it left hundreds of continuing community theaters in its wake. Later on, some of these theater organizations became the nucleus for community arts councils.

My own time in arts development came dynamically into being in the 1930s and 40s, but I noted these developments, and when Stevens suggested that I take a large journey to scan several possible sites for future arts development, I eagerly accepted. With Rockefeller funds again, I swept around the country, and came at last to Madison, Wisconsin. It was early World War II time and the Northwestern Train from Chicago was packed with service men and women. When I stepped down from the railroad car in Madison, I was simply swept along with the crowd. I wondered what Stevens had in mind by sending me to Wisconsin. All he'd said was: "Better take a look at Wisconsin. And when you visit Madison don't go directly to the University Department of Art. You won't find much fresh going on there I think. Go on over the hill to the College

of Agriculture, that's where things are happening."

Well, I walked up State Street, climbed Bascom Hill, didn't pause except to inspect the great Abraham Lincoln statue, and finally came to the Greek Revival brick building called Agriculture Hall. Inside the front door was the Dean's Office sign. I figured that the Dean should know what was going on, and I turned into that door. By doing so, I came into contact with one of the great influences on American rural arts. Dean Chris Christensen was an immense Dane. He sat at an immense desk with a painting behind him of a farmer standing in the midst of yellow wheat, a boy on one side of him, a girl on the other. He was testing the grain for the coming harvest. I stood in awe in front of the painting and the Dean said: "That painting is by Curry. John Stewart Curry. Do you know his work?"

"I certainly do. He's our best-known contemporary Kansas artist."

"Curry's here on this campus," said the Dean. "I built him a studio here on the agriculture side. He paints there, and rural people from all over the state come to watch him, and to talk with him. We've got a rural art movement going now. I was determined to have Curry here. He's our artist-in-residence... maybe the first at a state university. But what a time I had with the art people. They didn't want him. They said there was nothing in the rural areas worth encouraging. But I rode over there. He's here. I'd like for you to meet him. Stevens told me you were coming."

Well, I did meet John Curry that day, and at his house when I went there was August Derleth, Wisconsin's great regional author. They had just finished doing a "Rivers of America" book on the Wisconsin River. Our talk was long and enthusiastic. "Dean Chris wants poetry to become as important to Wisconsin farmers as scientific agriculture," Curry said.

I felt I'd really come home!

And that's the way it turned out. In the spring I got an offer to join the University of Wisconsin faculty to launch a new cultural program bringing together the arts groups and talents of the whole state. I joined the faculty at Madison in the Fall of 1945.

I named the new program "The Wisconsin Idea Theater" because I saw the grassroots arts development as a kind of theater in which the whole state was the stage. The Wisconsin Idea had swept the country in earlier years of the century when LaFollette in government and Van Hise in education had brought the University faculty into a close working relationship with the state house and with the people. The name helped me because people knew what I was trying to do. The response was wonderful. Almost magically the community theaters, the art groups, the musicians, the writers arose from war-time doldrums. One of the first things I began was a "Wisconsin Rural Writers Association" in which we invited all the writers who lived in rural areas or on the farm, to let themselves

be known. Hundreds and perhaps thousands of poems were sent to me... and out of the flurry and the excitement, a movement to parallel the Rural Artists was formed. Both movements, with "Regional" substituted for "Rural" go forward today, stronger than ever.

But, although events seemed to move so swiftly and contemporaneously for me, seminal ideas had been planted in the state as early as 1910. Then a young professor of English at Wisconsin had proposed to a suspicious and reluctant English faculty that there must be a new course in American Drama. Horrors! Nothing good in English Lit had been recognized since 1832. American drama? What was good about that? But Dickinson wore them down, and he did offer the first such course, so far as I know, at an American State University. Then he went further. From among his students he organized what became the prototype for American community theaters. He organized the Wisconsin Dramatic Society, and drew around him the most talented writers in the state to provide native plays. Zona Gale, of Portage, Wisconsin, wrote the first one... a memorable local play called, "The Neighbors." And Dickinson went on to make the arts a vital force in the Progressive movement in Wisconsin... the chief political expression of those times.

But as years went by, little by little, I began to perceive that all of these cultural influences ought to be looked at from the potential of grassroots bodies, groups, organized especially for the total nourishing and promotion of the arts on home grounds. All of this sounds like old stuff now, of course, but then, in the early 50s the idea of total home grown culture was not very seriously taken. In chunks, like rural art and theater, it flourished separately here and there. Now it seemed necessary for the arts to be brought forward on a common front.

I don't mean to imply that I started the arts council movement. Here and there were examples of that, such as at Winston Salem where Ralph Burgard had done pioneer work, and where Chuck Mark who went to Winston Salem via my group at Wisconsin, carried it on, and both became dynamic factors in the national movement of the Arts Endowment. There were all kinds of things that were influential on me. David Stevens had brought me into contact with Hallie Flanagan whom Harry Hopkins had appointed in 1935, to head the new Federal Theater, and the hangover of this great program, so ingloriously ended by a doubting Congress, was still felt in rural and city places. Hallie was a most unique person, small, exceptionally bright, and deeply emotionally dedicated to the welfare of the arts in America, especially of course, the theater arts. But she envisioned a national chain of art centers representing all the arts where talented artists of all kinds from local areas might be permanently employed. That never materialized as she wished, but her great programs of the Living Newspaper and her social dramas involved talents across the nation. In many places, some small, some large, she made a deep impression, which in some

ways is still going on. Chiefly, perhaps, this is so in acceptance of the idea that plays hitting hard at the grassroots lives and crises of people can be done, and participated in by local people. She visited me at Cornell and I took fire from her passion for people in places and their creative potential. She saw the arts as central to community development; the arts groups becoming crystallizers for whole projects of community improvement and appreciation. She saw youth working happily with age, and the whole relationship coming together in a beautiful passion for change and improvement.

And Stevens brought me into contact with Baker Brownell, Northwestern University philosopher, whose books were and still are landmarks for community awareness and change. He saw the arts as great humanizing elements in the community, lending a “humanness” so often doubted or misunderstood. With Rockefeller funds provided by Stevens, Brownell and another professor from Northwestern, Dean Melby, performed a great service for the state of Montana. They went there to develop, among the four Montana educational institutions, a single program in the arts, including regional literature and drama.

The project had some unusual results. In one small town, Darby, they reorganized all community activities. Darby was almost a ghost town as far as anything challenging was concerned. There was nothing in Darby to endear the place to its citizens; one of its weaknesses was that it was used as a sort of hideaway or haven for nineteen state and county officials who were there only to sleep and went away by day. Brownell and Melby so changed the whole character of community life that the officials had to give back more than they got. They became participants in a project devoted entirely to Darby and area community life. They enhanced the place through its interesting local history and through its unique place in western history. Young people began to return to Darby, and the town has prospered moderately since. Brownell also worked with key individuals like Joseph Kinsey Howard, a newsman who wrote brilliant accounts of life in his state, and produced a noted book, “Montana Margins.”

Brownell came to Wisconsin. I saw to that, and I believe he guided us in early thoughts about the significant project “The Small Community and the Arts” which we undertook in 1966. Men like Stevens and Brownell, in my opinion, just aren’t around anymore.

The proposal which was created in Wisconsin in 1965 and sent forward to the new Arts Endowment and its chair, Roger Stevens, in 1966, had come out of something like the crucible I have been trying to describe. It was grassroots all the way. It was aimed at a very large segment of the American population, because I had learned from the 1960 census that 66,000,000 people in America lived in communities under 10,000. I also discovered that, so far as the arts were concerned, not very much was known about these 10,000 person communities, and even much less about the multitude of smaller communities and their sur-

rounding rural spaces. There was virtually no written record of the way arts had been nurtured and furthered. I began to think how glorious it might be if we could bring forward a plan, test it in experiment and offer a way in which communities all over the nation could view the arts and further them as a part of everyday American life. It certainly wasn't any small idea that we were generating. When somebody asked me why in the world I wanted to launch such a plan in America where there had never been overmuch support for grassroots art, and they were sure it wouldn't work. They reminded me that the big museums and the great orchestras and the professional theater had always shied away from farmers painting pictures or writing stories and putting on plays. Just recreation, they said. But I replied that if recreation can be viewed as the joy of living and can bring or can be guided to bring, creative purpose to people, and if the symbols of art can be identified in the community and an arts consciousness can be encouraged and helped to grow, then the grassroots way may be the only sure way toward wide acceptance of the arts. And as friends and advisors pursued me on this subject... of whether the arts may be just for the few capable of understanding them and talented enough to participate at a high level... I think I must have replied, "Now look, America is coming of age. Note the changing aspects of this nation. A maturing America means a consciousness of the arts among all the people. Communities East, West, South, and North are searching for ways to make community life more attractive. The arts as I see them are central to community life. The arts as I see them are central to community development in this time of change... let us hope, change for the better. The frontier and all that it meant in economic development, and in the utter necessity of building a nation, is certainly being replaced by the frontier of the arts. In no other way can Americans express the core and blood of their democracy. For in the communities, lie the final tests of the acceptance of the arts as a necessity in everyday life. In terms of American democracy, the arts are for everyone. They are not reserved for the wealthy or for the well-endowed museum, or for the subsidized professional regional community theater. As America emerges into a different understanding of her strength it becomes dear that her strength is in the people, and that it lies in the places where people live. The people, if shown the way, can create art in and of themselves. The springs of the American people are at the grassroots. Opportunities must exist in places they have never existed before. As consciousness of the people... a knowledge of their power to generate and nourish art, and provision of ways in which they may do so are essential for our time. If we are seeking in America, let it be seeking for the reality of democracy in the arts. Let art begin at home, and let it spread through the children and their parents, and through the schools and the institutions and through government. And let us start by acceptance, not negation... acceptance that the arts are important everywhere, and that they can exist and flourish in

small places as well as large, with money or without it, according to the will or the people. Let us put firmly and permanently aside the cliché that the arts are a frill. Let us accept the goodness of art where we are now, and expand its worth in the places where people live.”

We got the grant... \$250,000. We had to match that, so we had a half million to encourage and stimulate the rural community arts. Our Chancellor was nervous about the match; but our communities responded with assets in-kind which more than made it up. And each community in our tests has gone on in arts support. *Spring Green* has opened unbelievably, and much inner strife and suspicion has abated. Chiefly, when we began, the suspicion was focused on deceased Frank Lloyd Wright whose great house Taliesin lay across the Wisconsin River. Now, however, Wright’s influence is Spring Green’s greatest benefit. The Spring Green Art Fair is a living, permanent reality. The River Valley Players produce regularly in the old playhouse in the village, now called the Gard Theater. Lately a Catholic church burned, and they built a new church the people obtained the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation architects to make the plan. Spring Green has the look now of a proud arts center.

Portage has remodeled from a church, an art center whose influence has spread through the entire area.

Friendship continues to encourage local musicians, writers and artists. When we began the work with Friendship we heard that there were many fine string players living in the surrounding country. We made contact with some of those, and actually had enough for a fine string orchestra. A daring letter went from me to Leonard Bernstein in New York, inviting him to come and direct the orchestra for a performance. In a kindly reply, Leonard Bernstein declined. But the orchestra went ahead anyway with their own local conductor.

Rhineland has developed the Northern Arts Council which sponsors the Rhineland School of the Arts each summer. And the Council sponsors a national art show which has grown in prestige.

The book we prepared while the experimenting was going on was called, *The Arts In The Small Community... A National Plan*. We distributed more than 40,000 nationally. And now the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies has reprinted it, and its distribution continues. One small thing remains to be said. Many persons wanted to help, and they did. Some asked why they should, and for the book I wrote this poem:

If you try what may you expect?
First a community
Welded through art to a new consciousness of self
A new being, perhaps a new appearance—
A people proud

Of achievement which lifts them through the creative
Above the ordinary...
A new opportunity for children
To find exciting experiences in art
And to carry this excitement on
Throughout their lives...
A mixing of peoples and backgrounds
Through art, a new view
Of hope for mankind and an elevation
Of man... not degradation
New values for individual and community life
And a sense
That here in our place
We are contributing to the maturity
Of a great nation.
If you try you can indeed
Alter the face and heart
Of America

PART II

ROBERT E. GARD

Folklorist & Story-Collector

*I went forth seeking tales; to me the old
Are the fearless oracles of literature.*

*The old ones have made the stories;
A man's hands tell how he misses his work.*

From Wisconsin Sketches

AVALANCHE

FROM *Johnny Chinook*

The Crow's Nest Pass, according to legend, received its name as a result of a great battle between the Indians of the Blackfoot Nation and the Crows. The scene of this battle was entirely obliterated by the greatest land slide ever known in the Rocky Mountains.

On the morning of April 29, 1903, a C. P. R. westbound freight train crawled slowly through the Crow's Nest Pass, through the little mining town of Frank, and past the dim, massive shape of Turtle Mountain. The time was just after four o'clock.

To the boys on the train the trip was routine. The sounds were just the same; the dim, cold light was normal for the time of year. In the caboose Sid Choquette, the brakeman, was thinking that he'd be glad when the sun came up, for the air was cold and damp.

In Frank the bartender at the hotel had just finished cleaning up. He'd had a hard night. He was going home to bed—just as soon as he got rid of a lone drunk who was hanging around. The barkeeper sighed, put on his hat and reached out his hand for the drunk's collar.

Down the street, Sam Ennes stirred in his bed. For some reason he was uneasy—couldn't sleep. He struck a match and looked at his watch. The time was seven minutes past four. He lay down again, pulled the bedclothes over his shoulders. He shut his eyes, but in a minute he flicked them open again and lay there in the darkness. He strained his ears to hear the breathing of his wife. From another room, one of his daughters coughed.

In the Frank coal mine the night shift was getting ready to layoff. The nineteen men were tired, dirty, ready to quit. They plodded toward the mine entrance. One of the men noticed that the mine horses were acting very nervous. He was too tired to care.

In the Leitch household, the baby was crying.

At ten minutes past four hell broke loose in Frank. The whole top and north side of Turtle Mountain slid with a terrifying roar directly down into the Crow's Nest.

The freight had just passed the mountain when the avalanche struck. The startled crew, looking back as the train bumped to a halt, heard a sound louder than the loudest thunder and saw what they thought was a heavy gas or fog rising from mountain and town. To their surprised eyes, the town of Frank seemed to have completely disappeared. The crew gathered at the rear of the train, huddled together silent, awed by the sudden tragedy.

It was Sid Choquette, the brakeman, who first remembered the *Spokane Flyer*. The express was shortly due to speed through the Pass on its way to the coast. The men could guess, as they looked back, that the C. P. R. tracks lay covered by stone many feet deep.

There was only one thing to do, and Sid did that thing.

He started back toward Frank, over the slide with pieces of rock still hurtling down from the mountain. The dust was so thick he couldn't see what lay ahead. Some of the stones were as large as boxcars, but Sid went right ahead. He arrived in time to flag the *Flyer*.

Sam Ennes, who couldn't sleep, suddenly found himself pinned under the jagged timbers of his home. Desperately Sam pushed at the weight that held him down. After a terrible struggle he got free. His legs were torn by the nails in the boards. His face was bleeding from many cuts.

Somewhere he could hear his children crying.

He began to frantically search in the ruins. He found the three girls first, then his wife. They had miraculously escaped serious injury.

Suddenly Mrs. Ennes began to shriek that the baby, Gladys, was missing. They searched in the dust-filled darkness, and then Mrs. Ennes found the baby buried in slime and mud. Believing that the child was dead, Mrs. Ennes stumbled toward the faint light in the Maclean house beyond the stricken area. When she arrived, she discovered that the baby was alive and not even scratched. Mrs. Ennes herself had a broken collar bone.

In the mine the workmen reached the entrance. They found it blocked up tight. Believing that it was just a small cave-in, the men turned and went West to another smaller exit. The horses remained in the mine.

When the miners finally got outside, many of them knew they would never see their homes and families again. A number of the houses were buried over 100 feet deep.

In the Leitch house three children escaped, while three others and the parents were killed. One of the children, a baby, was completely unharmed. It was found on a huge rock that had been pushed quite a distance along by the slide.

The unharmed people of Frank wondered what had brought the catastrophe

upon them. Some said it was a volcano, others that it was an earthquake. Many thought it was a mine explosion or a great quantity of gas suddenly released.

That the side of Turtle Mountain, which seemed so friendly and protective, had simply slid down on the little town crouching under its shoulders did not occur to many, those first few hours. Tales of a visitation for sin were heard, and to the drunk leaving the barroom this seemed likely. He started to run—no one knew where.

Help was rushed to Frank—not that there was much anyone could do. The dead were already buried. The living were in mortal terror that the rest of the mountain would come smashing down.

Many of the passengers on the westbound train held up by the slide tried to walk across to the train waiting on the other side. They found their shoes cut to pieces, their clothing ruined by the limestone dust. A *Calgary Herald* reporter on the scene wired his paper: “To traverse two miles of boulders, some bigger than a railway coach, tossed into piles and ravines, is a task that tries a strong man, well shod. For people with thin shoes, unaccustomed to mountains, the trip is almost suicide. I had a suit of clothes ruined by the white lime, my boots were cut to pieces, and my physical system is a wreck that calls for at least a week’s recuperation. Editor please note.”

The slide had occurred on Wednesday morning. On Saturday Frank was a deserted village. A committee, including the mine inspector, crawled up the side of Turtle and reported that they had seen large cracks, newly formed, which led them to believe that the slide would reoccur. This report, backed up by the statements of Engineer McHenry of the C. P. R. that he had kept careful watch on Turtle Mountain for most of a day and had seen the mountain creeping, convinced the remaining citizens of Frank that they should vacate. Most of them went to Blairmore.

For nine days a careful watch was kept. At the end of nine days, when no further general slide had occurred, Premier Haultain decided the citizens of Frank could return if they so wished. Many did return to live most of the summer in terror. Finally there was a smaller slide in September. The slide, according to the *Calgary Herald*, was never really reported. The Frank citizens feared the report would “damage the town commercially.”

One of the touching incidents connected with the story concerns the horses imprisoned in the mine. All but two of the men escaped fairly easily, but all the horses stayed in the mine.

When the rescue party managed to clear the main slope, some twenty-nine days later, they encountered a depressing sight. All but one of the horses had died of starvation and thirst. The animals had gnawed the mine props and the wood on the cars in search of food.

The remaining horse was fastened between a car and the side of the

entrance. He was very weak—almost gone. The horse was given a few drops of water and brandy.

He lifted his head. The party left in search of blankets to keep the horse warm since they could not move him. As they went they heard the horse neigh faintly several times. ‘When they returned ten minutes later, the horse was dead. Old-timers say the horse died of a broken heart. He thought he was being left alone in the mine.

The greatest slide in the Rocky Mountains was the result of a combination of causes. There had been a mild earthquake in the region in 1901 which may have been a factor. The fact that large chambers had been opened up in the mine was thought by some to have caused the disaster.

Turtle Mountain, however, is peculiar. It is of limestone: overthrust upon shale, sandstone, and coal beds. The whole thing is an unusually weak mass of rock. There is some reason for believing that the slide can happen again, but Frank folk, apparently, are not worrying.

Passengers on the C. P. R. are amazed at the desolation still to be seen. The railroad now runs right on top of the slide. It took 4,000 Japs a month, working twenty-four hours a day, to rebuild the railroad.

When they were clearing up the debris for the railroad, it was necessary to use quantities of dynamite. The blasting caused snow to fall in the middle of May. Newly born calves on ranches in the Frank area smothered and died as a result of the snow.

For weeks the Frank school was used as a morgue. Parts of a human body would be found, and a jury empaneled to try to make identification. This was not often possible.

Most of the eighty persons killed that terrible morning were buried at the moment of death. Some were not, and they lie in a grave near Frank, with the following inscription on a common stone:

**Here Lie the Remains of Some of
the Victims of the Frank Slide.
April 29, 1903.**

The Frank slide has become a tragic legend of the Canadian Rockies.

INTRODUCTION

FROM *The Romance of Wisconsin Place Names*

The names of places lie upon the land and tell us where we are or where we have been or where we want to go. And so much more.

The names of places tell of those who came before us, of the ancestry of our ancestors, sometimes of their hopes and dreams, sometimes of what they saw when they came or what they hoped their children would see.

The names of Wisconsin register the peculiarities of her history. The first Europeans here were French—Nicolet, Marquette, Joliet, and later the French trappers and backwoodsmen—and Wisconsin is rich in names of French origin.

The first wave of settlement in Wisconsin came about two centuries after settlement of the eastern seaboard. These immigrants in the first part of the nineteenth century, coming largely from southern New England and the Middle Atlantic States, brought names from their former homes, names already old in New York State, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Connecticut. By 1848 New York had contributed 120,000 settlers to Wisconsin, New England 54,000, Pennsylvania 21,000—to say nothing of those who came from Virginia, Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland and Delaware.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, new Americans from northern Europe—Germany, Holland, Scandinavia—were leaving their mark upon the land, and naming places after towns and villages they had left behind them.

And always the Indians were there, and had named the land before the white man came. Driven out of the East, tribes found refuge in the wilderness that was then Wisconsin—and drove other tribes still farther west. Names from a dozen different tribes, some of them passing through French orthography to reach their present form, still cover the land. And since the settlers were not skilled etymologists, the meanings of these Indian names are often difficult to come by. Many other names are translations of the Indian names—to the best of the white man's limited linguistic ability.

In the second half of the nineteenth century came the lumbermen—and the railroads. Every lumber camp had to have a name (many of them now vanished), and every railroad siding and station (many now abandoned as the rail lines vanish).

It has been a pleasant task for us to compile this book of Wisconsin place names. They reflect so much of the state's tradition, settlement and flavor. All around, on every side, the appeal of Wisconsin echoes and reechoes in its names: girls' names, early settler names, classic names, presidents' names, Bible names, names that were supposed to be something else, forgotten names, nostalgic names supplied by homesick immigrants, geographic names, names from wars, from other cities and places, from feats of strength, from heroes, from friendships, lovers, dreams, from railroads, poetry and humor.

The place names of hamlets, crossroads, villages, townships, cities, counties, lakes, streams—all are monuments to someone's imagination, courage, strength, will power, kindness or devotion.

Wisconsin names are uniquely of the state and reflect its character.

Wisconsin, we believe, has a different look, a feel, a character, which always makes one know that he is coming home almost the moment he crosses the Mississippi on the west, or crosses the Illinois line on the south. There is a special feel, a homeness that is Wisconsin. Mainly, perhaps, it is the look of the land, as though a kindly Providence created a special setting for a special people. For the descent of the glaciers from Labrador and Hudson Bay modified the land, leveled off the hills in places, filled depressions. And occasionally erosion left a landmark, or a whole series of strange stone formations, and when a settler saw these things he said: Castle Rock, or Tower Rock, or Elephant Mound, or Steamboat Rock, or Ferry Bluff.

Settlers followed the land, and the formation of the land. They settled on the kind of land where they thought they would find happiness and prosperity. In the hills, the hill people of Norway, Switzerland, Wales, Germany and other far countries tended to settle, and they called the places New Glarus, Caledonia, Wales, Berlin, Vienna, New Holstein. Sometimes the settlers chose land for its flatness and fertility, and they sprinkled the crossroads and the meeting places with poetic names, or names of joy, or personalities, or hope: Black Earth, Belle Plaine, Cornucopia, Spring Valley, Star Prairie, Mount Hope.

We see all the periods of the state's history and settlement in the names. It was Marquette who first wrote the name of the great river of the state, calling it Meskousing, from which eventually came Wisconsin. Rene Menard left St. Esprit and La Pointe. The Voyageurs Eau Pleine, Eau Claire, Eau Galle, De Pere, La Baie Verte, Lac Vieux, Desert, Butte des Morts.

We believe that the place names are cherished today more than ever. As evidence, note the recent story of Winneconne, meaning "the place of skulls."

(An Indian battle once took place around there.) The Winneconne folks are very proud of their name and their town. Some time ago Winneconne, by some unthinkable chance, was left off of the Wisconsin road maps.

The Winneconne Chamber of Commerce under the dynamic leadership of its president, Mrs. Vera Kitchen, immediately organized the community for action. For if the village no longer existed, “fishermen could not know where to fish, industry would not know where to locate, employees could not know where to work.”

Even poems were written about the situation:

Wisconsin must have had a mental lapse,
To take Winneconne off the highway maps.

A contest was started on “how to put Winneconne back on the map with the winner to receive a wonderful all-expense week-end in Winneconne.”

Governor Knowles tried to smooth the ruffled feathers of the irate citizens. He told them that the name would certainly be on next year’s maps. The Winneconne folks immediately made Knowles the chairman of the nationwide contest.

The winners of the contest were two Wisconsin girls residing in Washington, D.C. who suggested that Winneconne “secede and declare war.”

Secession days were observed by officials with an appropriate program in



*Settlers
followed the
land, and the
formation of
the land.*

the forgotten city on July 22–23, 1967, with the Winneconne navy, airforce and army standing by.

A “Declaration of Independence” was issued by the village president, James Coughlin. A sovereign state was declared, and a toll bridge over Wolf River was established to collect revenues for the new state. Later in the day the toll bridge was freed. Adequate funds had been easily collected to operate the new state... about \$7.00.

At 4 P.M. of the first day of independence, a phone call was received from Governor Knowles suggesting a negotiated return to Wisconsin. The next day, at 12 noon, the negotiations were concluded, and Winneconne rejoined the State of Wisconsin in a flag-raising ceremony.

Many names are now forgotten. Dane County is dotted here and there with plats of imaginary cities whose locations are lost and whose very names have passed out of memory.

Superior City, Van Buren, Dunkirk Falls, Clinton, City of the Second Lake, City of the Four Lakes, Middletown, Troy and Beaumont, all were deprived of their hope of greatness.

Superior City, on paper, contained nearly 500 blocks. It had a wonderful location, lying as it did on the east bank of the Wisconsin River, among the bluffs, valleys, gullies, rattlesnakes, and ravines of four sections in the north part of Dane County. Provisions were made for the State Capitol which, of course, was to be located in the middle of this great metropolis. Capitol Square was bounded by Broadway, State, Wells and Taylor streets. Another public square was reserved for a park. A lot of Easterners invested and lost their stake. In the great city of Superior many lots were actually owned by renowned figures such as Daniel Webster and Henry Clay.

But present or forgotten the place names of Wisconsin are always with us. They are in our present and their roots are in our past.

DOC WATSON

FROM *Down in the Valleys*

Old Doc Watson was a vet around here, and once got a call to go up to Fish Brothers who had a sick horse. Well, when Doc got to the Fish place he found a big party goin' on, and the horse was lying there too sick to move, and they was havin' a big party all around the horse. Them Fish boys never let nothin' stand in the way of havin' a party, and Doc he took a look at the horse and seen he was about to cash his chips, so he says to the Fish boys, what have you give that horse? Well, the Fish boys wasn't ones to keep anything they had from a friend, and the old horse had sure been a good friend to them boys. So they says, well, Doc we give him everything we had except beer. And Doc says, hell, this horse ain't sick. This horse is drunk, boys. And he says, well you've give him everything else, so you better give him some beer. And that was just what the old horse needed, a big long drink of homebrew, and he staggered up to his feet and off went the Fish boys and the old horse, staggerin' and singin' like to beat hell, and old Doc shook his head and says to himself that he had sure learned something about doctoring horses. Just what it was he learned I never knew, but Doc sure knew because he took plenty of that same kind of medicine himself. You remember old Doc?

THE KICKAPOOGIANS

FROM *Down in the Valleys*

The Kickapoo River. It rises in Monroe County near Wilson. Through Vernon, through Richland, through Crawford, it moves easily on sunlight, bank-touching its journey south; stronger when the clouds are rain-hostile. Always it finds the Wisconsin at Wauzeka.

For generations the River sounds have joined human sounds. All of this: man and nature, is known as Kickapoo Country. It is beautiful and the people vastly individualistic; and on the Kickapoo River, of an August afternoon, drifting down in a flatbottom boat, quiet, no talking... the birds above singing in the overhanging branches, or in deadfalls toppled from the mud banks. Cows in the shade of groves or of a lone oak... sound of a far cowbell. It is peace; and a solitude that draws strength and meaning from the past.

And the River, responsive to rain and to man, has shaped lives in the pattern of the farming along the bottoms, and has ordained a particular way of looking at things. I've heard the Kickapoo folks talking at Ozzie's tavern at Wauzeka; or up at the Red Apple Restaurant at Gays Mills; or at the Older Folks Club at Soldier's Grove. Talkin' about their favorite subjects: the Kickapoo and Kickapoogians.

Folks around here understand what it means to just stand and look out over the land. These people are still kind of dreamers, practical though many of 'em are too, and they appreciate a great view. These farmers know what it means when you say save nature. They're not so much scholars of ecology; but they are ready to pitch in and make the land as good as it can be. These folks are truly amazing. They set great store by local things. Oak wood for instance. Old Mister Sander, when he was ill some time ago and spent a lot of time settin' beside the stove, said that he never could get warm with anything except good Kickapoo oak wood. Nothin' else would warm him through.



*For generations the River sounds have
joined human sounds...*

But this country sure does raise memorable characters! Only in the Kickapoo could there be a fellow like Tom Price.

Tom Price was a farmer who lived over by Boscobel. He was very well known, and was often appointed to serve as an executor on deceased people's estates. When the time came for Tom to give a final accounting of an estate, he would say to the lawyer, Well, I didn't know *you* were one of the heirs! He said that because he thought lawyers' fees were so high.

Tom was once down by Bridgeport and he was comin' home from there and he stopped for a drink or two. Well, he got mixed up and started drivin' up the railroad track rather than the road. Sometimes after a few you can naturally do things like that. Tom had a new Roadmaster Buick which was the biggest and fanciest car that Buick made in those days. Well, old Tom saw the train

acomin' and just before it got to the Buick, Tom jumped out and ran away. Just left his new car standin' there on the tracks. Never even looked back. Course the train came along and busted the Buick all to pieces, but by that time Tom was near town and when he got to Boscobel he roused the Buick dealer out of bed and bought a new Roadmaster, just the same color and everything, so Tom's wife wouldn't know what happened to the other one. Tom was foxy that way. He was also very scared of his wife.

Tom was said to possess some God-given traits as a mediator and was a kind of country Solomon. He was just like a barrel of oil poured over a dispute, if he wanted to be. Could settle most anything and smooth anybody down. When people over in the Kickapoo got into any kind of trouble they would call up old Tom. Judge was an Irishman named James Cullen, and he was a good friend of Tom's. Well, once old Tom was called down to court to listen to a fellow's sorry plight and he realized that it looked pretty dim for the guy. The judge did too, and they were talking... (course the Judge should never have been talkin' about the case before it came up, but he was. That's the way they do it sometimes out in the Kickapoo). The Judge says to Tom, Tom I guess we ain't gonna be able to help Jake. You see what the law says. Ah, but Jimmy, Jimmy, Tom says, the law is just what we're tryin' our best to get away from. Quit talkin' about the law! Let's just put it on an Irish basis! Tom was a character. Never drove on anything but the left hand side of the road. Was contrary that way. His wife wouldn't ride with him either. She was too smart to ride with old Tom.

THE ONEIDAS

FROM *This Is Wisconsin*

West of Green Bay, Highway 54 runs through a hilly area that has a soft, romantic look, or it did one misty day when I came up over a hill to the village of Oneida.

I was interested in the Oneida Indians, partly because they were the group led by that strange man, Eleazar Williams, from central New York to a new home in Wisconsin. At the top of a hill above the village stands a large, stone Episcopal church, with a smaller parish hall across the road, and here I sought someone who could tell me about the Oneidas, something of their history and their lore, and perhaps, if anybody cared nowadays, something of the relationship between the tribe and Eleazar Williams.

In the CAP office, which is in the parish hall, a pleasant Oneida lady answered my question instantly. "Oscar Auchiquette," she said.

"Where is he to be found?"

"Start out on 54 back toward Green Bay. Go about a mile. You'll see an icy road off to the left. Down in the valley you will see Oscar's house, next to a log cabin which is very old. I will see whether Oscar is at home."

She called, but Oscar's line was busy. I was soon to discover that Oscar Auchiquette is one of the busiest men in the whole region. His phone is hardly ever quiet.

I found the neat white house set beside a 150-year-old cabin, and in the yard I found Oscar himself, ruefully looking at the injured door of his car, which he had recently banged against a tree. He is a sturdy man in his late sixties with fine eyes and a clear, loud voice.

I said merely, "I want to talk to you about the Oneidas," and he replied, "I'm happy to see you. Come in. It is very important to talk about the Oneidas. We want many people to know about our tribe. I have tried very hard to keep its history alive."

We went into Oscar's living room in which there are many comfortable chairs. I sat in one near the telephone so I could hand it to him when it rang, for Oscar has a game leg and cannot rise easily. The phone rang a lot—all kinds of requests for Oscar to come to this meeting or that, or inquiries about the evening course that he is teaching in the Oneida language, or messages from the Green Bay Human Rights Commission. But we got a lot said, anyway. I just let Oscar talk.

"I am happy to have this opportunity of relating some of the history about the Oneida nation, in the state of New York as well as Wisconsin. It is very important that the history of the Oneida nation be made public. This would help to change the attitude of some of the white people toward us Indians.

"Let us go back to about 1390, and even before. Now before 1390, as far as I know, we were known as the Iroquois. In 1390 Hiawatha organized the five nations, and since then we Oneidas have been known as the Onaya people. Onaya means stone.

"Originally the Oneidas were Mohawks. But the Mohawks divided into two groups—one group was Mohawk, the other was the Stone People. The name for Stone People was Onaya, but this was mispronounced by the French as Oneidas. Some called us 'standing stone people.' The stone is granite, supposed to be a sacred stone with us.

"The Oneidas were a member group of the Iroquois. The Tuscorora Indians were admitted into the league in about 1720. After that we became six nations. The other nations were the Senecas, the Mohawks, the Oneidas, the Onondagas, and the Cayugas.

"Now we come to Eleazar Williams and his part in the history of our people. He was raised in eastern New York State, up on Lake George, by an Indian family—Mohawks—by the name of Thomas Williams. One day, so we Oneidas have heard the story, two white men came to this Indian couple with a little baby boy. They made arrangements for this couple to take care of the baby. That's about all we know about that early experience of the little boy, but he was very sick and the Indian couple cured him of his illness. They had another son as well, but this adopted boy was made to believe that the Indian couple were his real parents.

"The two boys were sent to school, and the Williams boy wasn't as interested as the new boy in schoolwork. The real son went back home to his parents. Eleazar Williams stayed in school, and no doubt became very well educated. Then in the War of 1812 Eleazar Williams was in the services of the United States, and he was in command of six hundred Iroquois; of this six hundred there were twelve Oneida women who fought in the War of 1812.

"Williams, who spoke the Mohawk language fluently, was also very much interested in religion, and in 1818 he became the missionary for the Oneida

You notice the many fruit trees here now.



nation. He was the only white man, if we must call him that, who was interested at all in educating the Indians. He was a very religious man, and in about 1819, he became a missionary. He taught the Oneidas the Bible and he taught them in their own language, because he was able to speak Mohawk fluently; Oneidas can understand Mohawk.

“The older generation were really well versed about the Bible, because they were taught in their own language, and at the same time, Williams taught the Oneidas English.

“Now the Ogden Land Company of New York was then interested in the lands owned by the Oneida nation in eastern central New York State around Oneida Lake. That is a beautiful part of the country, and the Oneidas were proud to be the owners.

“I have a copy of the claim that we would like to have against New York State. There are about five or six million acres that we feel we were much underpaid for. We only got seven hundredths of a penny an acre for some of it, and the Ogden Land Company turned right around and sold the Oneida lands for many times as much. We do have a claim pending in the Indian claims commission, but we also have a contract with a group of attorneys at Syracuse, New York, who would like to sue the state of New York, and they are now asking the federal government to represent the Oneidas against the state of New York.

“Through the treaty of 1794, known as the peace treaty, friendship treaty with the Tuscororas and Oneidas; and we have fought in every war this country has ever had, on the side of the United States. This is very important for people to know, the great record the Oneida nation has for its fellow men, the white men. They fought for them, with them, in all the wars. I doubt that there is another nation that has the record that equals that of the Oneida nation. If the

public could only know the history of the Oneida nation, I think they would be proud of us, as well as we Oneidas are proud of our history.

“Now then, the Ogden Land Company was interested in the Oneida lands, and in those days we had nine chiefs for the Oneida nation. Since Eleazar Williams was their missionary, he also acted as interpreter in business affairs for Oneidas. The Oneida nation would not sell their lands in the state of New York, but the Ogden Land Company and other real estate men were interested in purchase and did everything they could do to discourage the Oneidas from remaining in New York. They wanted the Oneidas to move to the state of Wisconsin. I don’t know how they got the information that they should move to Wisconsin, but the Indians were told that in Wisconsin there was all kinds of game. In fact, since Eleazar Williams was the chief interpreter, he did agree with the chiefs that they didn’t want to move; but life got more and more miserable, so finally Eleazar Williams, as I understand it, did advise the chiefs that maybe it would be better if they did move to Wisconsin. But first, he said, the Oneidas must look at the land and see just what kind of a deal they could make here in Wisconsin.

“In 1820 the first group of chiefs came with Eleazar Williams to Wisconsin and talked with the Menominee Indians and the Winnebagos, who owned the strip of land from the Milwaukee River to Iron Mountain, Michigan.

“It was agreed that the New York Indians would purchase five million acres from them. Here the history becomes cloudy. No one knows who made the agreement or took the money that we are supposed to have received from the Ogden Land Company and paid to Wisconsin Indians. Who handled the money? The government, the Indians, or Eleazar Williams? Who paid that money to the Menominees? There is no record. No receipts. I wish to say here that I am supposed to be the walking encyclopedia about Oneida history, but I can find no record of who received the money from the Oneidas.

“I am not sure whether the government was represented when we sold our land to the Ogden Land Company. Then, Eleazar Williams was accused of being bribed by the Ogden Land Company and persuading the Oneida chiefs to purchase land here in Wisconsin, and move to Wisconsin.

“Later, Eleazar Williams was excused of this blame. The chiefs themselves decided it was better to move here to Wisconsin, so in 1823 the migration really took place. The first chief who came with the group had the Indian name of Skanandoah. His name would be Elija Skanandoah; so he and Eleazar Williams led the first group out here. I have somewhere the exact figures of the first Christian party. They were all Episcopalians.

“Now let me go back on Christianity, to 1390, when there never was a white man here in our country. At that time the five nations believed in religion. They believed in superhuman power. Why? Because they had a name

for God: 'He Who Holds the Skies.' They had six seasons at which time they gave thanks to He Who Holds the Skies for all the things that grew here in our country. And they also believed in forgiveness and repenting, or forgiveness for all the things they might have done. They all form a circle and hold hands and ask Almighty God to forgive them. I want to make this very clear that there never was a white man here, for they already had religion before a white man ever stepped in our country.

"So when Eleazar Williams became missionary in 1819, the Oneidas had long ago accepted this white man's religion.

"In 1702 some of the Oneidas were converted to the white man's religion. You must know that not all the Oneidas were Episcopalians. Some had refused to accept Christianity and remained pagans, but in 1823 even those accepted Christianity and were converted to be Methodists. So the second group that came to Wisconsin in 1823 were Methodists.

"These Christian parties were known as the Orchard Parties. The Oneidas were great in planting fruit trees; that's how they came to be called 'Orchard Indians.' You notice the many fruit trees here now. So in 1823 the Oneidas came to Oneida and settled here in Duck Creek. The first Orchard party settled in the north end of the reservation of eight by twelve miles, as was set aside in 1838. That was the final agreement made in 1838, even though we had purchased five million acres. We ended up with land eight miles wide by twelve miles long. The first group naturally settled on the north end. The second group came later and had to settle the south half of the reservation. There had been a friction between these two groups, the Methodists and the Episcopalians, because the Methodists felt they were given the leavings of the reservation. To this day it shows up a little here and there in the generation in their seventies and eighties, and there are some still living at this age. And this feeling comes from these old generations. Some of the young generation don't know anything about this, but I notice it, since I have been holding office for the Oneida tribe since 1934. Every now and then I hear that this friction still exists.

"I meet so many government officials, and it is news to them to know that we have two groups here that do not work together as they should.

"In 1823 we had Eleazar Williams for our missionary. I wish to give him credit. There never was another white man interested to educate us Indians. He set up the Oneida Mission Day School where he taught up to about fourth grade. Eleazar Williams was with us until about 1845, and during this time he taught the Oneidas religion and music. He was well versed in music, and he had made some translations. He taught many religious hymns of the Episcopal church. Oneidas are musically inclined. And recall, singing may have been the only means of recreation at that time. He got good attendance. The Indians gathered here at the church and exchanged news and opinion; we have quite a

number of Indians here who have very good bass voices—I think this is lacking with the white people. We can sing really well, and we can sing loud!

“Now we still have wakes here. It used to be that the corpse was brought back to the home where we have the Indian wakes. This was carried on in a very nice religious way. So now nobody speaks out loud. It is all in a whisper to show their respect to the deceased and his family. They do not knock at the door when they come to the wake in the evening; they walk right in. A chairman is appointed for the evening. He calls on different ones to make a speech, and it is always about the Bible. Also we are not to say anything unfavorable about the deceased’s way of life. We must only talk about the pleasant things that he did.

“As to our singing, it is all Bible words, and we truly believe in our faith. We’re not only using it as a cover. Some of the religious hymns that we sing were translated by Eleazar Williams into the Oneida language. One is the ‘Te Deum’ used as a sacred hymn for the Oneidas. It is only used on Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Easter and on Bishop Day. In 1939 a folklore project was set up here, sponsored by the University of Wisconsin. Since I was one of the two who were considered the best spellers in phonetic alphabet in our language, I was selected to make the transliteration from the Oneida Indian hymnbook written in Mohawk sounds, which was carried from New York to Oneida. In 1940 I made the translation into the new alphabet.

“Eleazar Williams was our missionary from 1823 until about 1848. He died at Hogansburg, but his corpse was brought back to Oneida here and buried near our church in about 1950. The Oneidas quarried the stone for our church, native limestone. My father was a foreman in quarrying the stone. I think that right here is a great record again for the Oneidas, but not a thing is said about the work of the Indians. The priests are given all the credit for what has taken place here in Oneida. It is the Oneida Indians who were responsible for civilizing our own people. Williams was the only white man, as I’ve said, who really helped us get education.

“In 1848 Williams left us, and others took his place. Always, one or two get a superior education, and by 1870 we did have some well-educated persons, but instead of helping us they defrauded quite a few. In 1887 the Allotment Act became law; through two Oneida Indians and others, the law went through so that the reservation of 65,000 acres was broken up and allotted to individuals. Those who were not twenty-one received around twenty-six acres, and those older received forty acres if single; a married couple received ninety acres.

“Now this land was still held in trust by the federal government; in other words, it was exempt from taxation. Again these educated Oneidas worked with the superintendent and managed to get another bill passed in Congress whereby the heirs of a deceased person could sell his allotment. In 1906 this act

really began to decrease our tribal lands, because much of the land could then be sold to white people.

“From 1823 on, the Oneidas were self-supporting through hunting. The women did the garden work. The men provided the meat.

“In 1918 the government made a taxable deed, except for a few who were old or uneducated, whereby the individual owners were able to mortgage, sell, or do otherwise. Immediately they started mortgaging their land and forgetting to make payments. Quite a few acres were sold for taxes. The white men took advantage of it and paid the back taxes and took the land; after four years they could get what is called a tax title deed. Some Indians mortgaged their land for a team of horses, which maybe were supposed to be four years old and turned out to be eighteen years old! The real estate men of Green Bay and West De Pere really took advantage and laid low for Indian lands. One eighty-acre section was sold, I think, for eighty dollars.

“In 1918 the Oneidas lost a lot of tribal lands. Finally many Indians were left with nothing. Then they went up north, around Tigerton, where they could cut cordwood for maybe a dollar a cord, and that’s how they made their living. They started to move out of Oneida, because there wasn’t any more game or timber. This migration started soon after 1918.

“In 1929 it was reported that the Oneidas were ninety-nine percent landless. In other words, we might have had about 100 acres of tribal-owned land. In 1934 the Indian Organization Act came into being, and we had factions here who were very excited and said that they were going to take shotguns, round up all the white people who had taken over the Oneida land, and march them down to Green Bay. The tribal chiefs were not recognized after 1900 by the Indian bureau, so there was a self-made chief who was telling the Oneidas that under the Indian Organization Act the government was going to move them out of Oneida, up north somewhere, where there were rattlesnakes. ‘If you accept the Organization Act you will be moved.’ But that was not true.

“Actually, under the Indian Organization Act, the government will buy land wherever the Indians wish to live; later on we accepted the act, and we have our own government. We have been able, also to get back about twenty-five hundred acres owned by the tribe and exempt from taxation. We assign this land to individual Indians. Also, we own some land inside the city limits of Green Bay, and we want to work with Green Bay to better ourselves. We want to create employment for our people, and to show that we are a dependable people with a great tradition.

“I don’t know what Eleazar Williams would think if he saw us today. We have only a few Oneidas who can do bead work. Only one lady can make the husk rug out of cornhusks. We have a group of Indian dancers, but they were taught by white people, a priest who only wanted to satisfy his own curiosity. We

make the Indian corn bread from white Indian flint corn. I have a mortar here with which we hand-grind our corn. One lady bakes corn bread one day a week.

“And when the wild geese fly high, we Oneidas think it will be very cold weather; when they fly low there will be a mild winter. I told a senator from Oklahoma that when a robin sings there will be rain before twenty-four hours, and there were a few other things I told him. I said, ‘The only things which we Oneidas cannot forecast, nor tell, is when the federal government will pay us our claim!’ That must have been twenty years ago, and we still didn’t get our claim, but the money is now set aside for this five-million-acre claim; maybe, some day, the Oneidas will be again a landed people.

“I only wish that Eleazar Williams was here now. He would be helping us to fight our battles and to give us even better education.”

PART III

ROBERT E. GARD

Storyteller

Man's deepest experience of life is essentially solitary; at the same time he desires to communicate to others his moments of intense feeling, his present experience, the rich memories of the past. In the recreating and the sharing of these feelings, experiences and memories the Wisconsin Rural Writers' Association has its being and its meaning. Let us believe in each other, remembering each has tasted bitter with sweet, sorrow with gladness, toil with rest. Let us believe in ourselves and our talents. Let us believe in the worth of the individual and seek to understand him, for from sympathy and understanding will our writings grow.

Let us believe that the mark of the cultured man is the ability to express himself competently in language; that this ability can be gained best through study and application of the basic principles of creative writing; that with this study and application grow enlightenment and discrimination; and that the democratic process of government is safest in the hands of a cultured, enlightened people.

Let our purpose be to encourage: literary expression; appreciation for the fine arts; cultural aspects of rural Wisconsin life; preservation of the local history and folklore of the passing era; enrichment of our lives through self-education and worthy discussion.

Creed of the Wisconsin Rural Writers Association 1950

NOTES FOR WRITERS WHO ARE DESPERATELY MOVED TO WRITE

I have used the word *desperately* for that is exactly what most creative writers face when they begin to think about having some kind of career in writing. To any prideful and sincere writer, having just any kind of career isn't enough of a reason. As the French say, *raison d'être* is a deep motivating drive, underlying the whole purpose of a life, a line of action, or a cherished goal. Why? What drives me to do this? Why do I feel so desperate when I consider what I must do? To most really motivated writers, the desperation comes from an inner knowledge that they must do this or die. Nothing else will do. They have to write, and faced with this necessity, they look this way or that for the way to go. What to do? How to hurl themselves into the mêlée? How to make money from their efforts, say what you will about just doing it for the fun. Almost any writer I know has varying degrees of success goals: either he wants to make a living from his writing (or at least to have a following of persons who read and appreciate what he has written), or he wants to achieve some other goals of research or science that may add something to the world's knowledge.

For the writer, society has set up a whole maze of problems. First, introspectively, what does he want most to tell, to interpret? What things in his life are most interesting to him, and which he knows better than anyone else, and therefore can do a better job of writing about them? This he has to come to grips with first, for this is where most writers start. Sometimes a writer will find that he does not really know himself at all. Writers who have limited goals, who simply want to write topical or commercially saleable material for trade publications or newspapers, for example, may see little need for intensive introspection. Still, even those with limited goals will probably discover that in order to judge story possibilities, or to test the worth of ideas and subjects, and even to interpret the necessary research, they must have some basis of

background and experience and knowledge against which they may test the credibility of their material.

And if serious writers face the problem of introspection and where they are, they ought to face it in terms of family, who they are, where they have been, what they believe, and how they attained such beliefs.

For these who have not worried about these things before, and there are some who have not, the facing of personal history and its interpretation is overwhelming. First of all, asking themselves “Who am I?” — “How did I get to this place?” — some still find that they simply do not know who they are, even who their grandparents were, the names of close relatives. They might not even know how their fathers and mothers met, where they met, why they came to



The frontier gave us images of our strengths...

this particular place to live, and often there ensues doubt, dismay, and some will conclude that before they can seriously get down to the writing goals they would like to attain, they must first determine, if they can, what the goals and purposes of their parents were. Maybe this doesn't seem so important, to discover family purposes and history, but there is something mixed into all of this that is very important to a writer before he can begin to interpret and describe and make stories about what he has seen, and the dramatic episodes that he can imagine. There is in this an element of pride that can only come from a sense of family, of whys and wheres that may be obscure, and a freedom of looking.

Over many years I have slowly built up a philosophy of writing that depends on my awareness of my own background and of my own sensitivities toward people I have known, whose characters I have been able to deepen,

and of my own ability to find the many angles that underlie dramatic action. I have realized how knowledge of family background has become very important to me. The whole idea of roots, which has taken such a hold on many writers within the last quarter century, lies there in anyone's life waiting to be studied and to be included in the way people are regarded. It reveals how they got to the places where they are and what motivated them to change the land and to leave a transformational mark on land and neighbors. It is not ancestor worship exactly, but it may somewhat approach a deep regard for ancestors. Ancestors people every writer's work, and their shadows fall upon the fictional figures the writer creates. For who indeed can tell completely about his own motivations without knowing whether they differ from motivations of family members who went before him?

Most of us as writers and as human beings have deep respect, though so often unspoken, for our parents and our grandparents, and for the tales they may have told us about how they came, how they worked, what they did and the adventures they had along the way. Somehow they stir a pride in us, and within the stories they have told us lie the germs of stories we may tell, or retell ourselves.

Upon the American land lie the possibilities of search and of seeking. Within our American past lie the shadows of goals we sought and sacrifices we made to attain them. The western movement of people across the breadth of America was not a crusade, motivated by a quest for a Holy Grail perhaps, but within the western movement and the identification of a frontier lay a vast element of our strength as a people.

The frontier gave us images of our strengths and lay behind the struggles of some of our greatest writers to express images and struggles of frontier life. I believe it was the quest for a home place, an identifiable homeland that led to the adventurous questing of our pioneers. They were dissatisfied with what they had in the places where they were, and the tales they heard urged them to set forth seeking a new home where they could better express the urges for new soil, new crops, a new kind of place to raise families, and more than anything, a testing of their strength against the strength of plain and wind and unbroken sod. They had within their vision the thought of schools and churches and towns upon the prairie and perhaps places where new cities would grow too, and within such dreams was there not room for the writer? And also the visionary, the interpreter who saw all the vast urges and the processions and inscribed it? Who identified the struggle that existed in America among classes, and races. Who made drama out of the underlying currents that drove Americans across the land and inspired Europeans to sail from the old country in small vessels, to lie imprisoned below stinking decks for days and days, to suffer illness and much death in the fetid steerage cabins, and to be finally cast upon American shores so long hoped for and so long denied, there to struggle against what seemed insurmountable

odds, until little by little, they inched their way across a continent, searching for the homeland so long promised and so long denied.

It is certainly the stuff of great literature and now, perhaps, rather often forgotten as the vast underlying struggle of the undercurrent of American literature. Let us try now to see and understand and to write, and write, and write.

BARN

FROM *Wisconsin Sketches*

Barns are for boys on rainy days,
And for men on Sunday afternoons.

Barns are for insects, and farm women
With egg baskets.
An old barn board
Is a memory-sliver of wind and time.

THE FLOOD

FROM *The Big One*

On the evening of the second day of the big rain Tip followed the cows through the squishy pasture. He'd been working indoors on odd jobs all the day, and now he was restless, full of thoughts about Jan, full of worry about the rising river. His mother met him at the barn and together they fastened the wet cows and fed them. "The radio said," Gladys told him, "that a big crest of water's expected on the Neosho tonight. They've even had bigger rains than we up on the Cottonwood. They're afraid the banks north of town won't hold."

"I expect not," Tip said. "Dad wanted 'em to redig that levee years ago. Every floodtime it breaks through."

"I remember how your father urged," Gladys said.

They continued with their chores in silence, listening nervously to the splash of the rain, and when they were finished, Tip said, "I'm going to town."

"All right. Do what you can to help. But be careful."

"I will."

She watched him get out the Chevy, and waved to him as he spun the wheels on the slippery drive. He intended to go first to the library to see Jan, but when he reached town he saw a stream of people moving toward the river bridge, and he parked the pickup and moved along, too.

He came up to the bridge and immediately saw Solomon and Luke Jones standing against the bridge wall watching the water.

"Howdy, kid," Sol said. "Ain't the ol' Neosho a sight? Won't be no fishin' for a spell now, I reckon."

"I bet that ol' turtle's washed down to the Gulf of Mex now," Luke said.

"Do fish wash on down in a flood?" Tip asked, thinking of the Big One and wondering whether the flood would carry him away, too.

"Who knows?" Sol said. "Some say one thing, some another. Anyway, me and Luke saved our boat yesterday. But I reckon our shack's under water by now."

“Been there before,” Luke said. “Ain’t that river a sight?”

The water, they could see, was pretty well up to the tops of the bridge girders. They stood at the wall in the half-dark, looking down at the water and watching it suck down under the arches.

Driftwood, hunks of timber, and barns and trees bumped against the bridge, and now and then a log or piece of building would be sucked under.

The whole bridge was vibrating. Over against the railing, across from where they stood, a small group of people had stopped to watch something in the water. Tip and the Jones boys walked over and saw a white chicken sitting on top of a small outhouse. The house was bobbing and whirling around and the chicken was shifting and balancing with the movements of the building. The chicken was wet and exhausted. The house spun for a short time, then the suction began to take it. It turned over on its side and the chicken gave a little jump off the shingled roof. The chicken got onto the side of the house just as the end of the house began to go under the bridge. The sucking pulled it down, and first, as it went, slowly, the chicken climbed to the higher part. The house went faster and faster, and the white chicken dug its toes desperately against the side. Then there was nothing at all for it to hold on to. The edge of the house went under, and the chicken clung to it until the water covered its feet and legs. Then it spread its wet wings and opened its bill. It lay on the water a second before the sucking took it down.

Tip turned away, feeling sick. They followed a group of men over to the west end of the bridge where there were several big trucks lined up. It was getting quite dark now. For the moment the rain had stopped. Big mosquitoes began whizzing around. Tip and the Joneses joined the men standing beside the trucks.

“What’s goin’ on?” Sol asked somebody.

“Don’t know. Repair work, I reckon.”

After a while a lantern was lit and set on the platform of one of the trucks. The county engineer, a fleshy, red-faced man, got up on the platform and made a speech. He said that the dikes along the west side of the river above Dunbar were weakening from the smash of the waters and that the dikes would have to be strengthened or the water would probably smash through the whole west side of town. He said that he would like as many workers as could crowd on the trucks. Most all the men climbed immediately onto the truck platforms then and everybody was all jammed in pretty close.

The truck motors started, and the vehicles bumped off. They went along the edge of the river for a way where the banks were high, then cut off across the outskirts of Dunbar where the banks were lower and some dikes had been scraped up. Tip and his friends were pushed together at the back of one of the trucks.

“Ain’t a flood a terrible thing?” Sol said.

“Yeah,” said Luke.

“But it ain’t as bad as a drought. I seen this country when there weren’t enough water to grow a blade of goose grass.”

“A flood is worse,” a man backed up to them said.

“It ain’t neither,” Solomon said.

“Every time,” the man said. He was a little fellow with a sour, thin face.

“I seen this country,” Sol said, “so dry that when a guy faints, you got to throw a bucket of dust on him to bring him to.”

“I still say a flood is the worst thing.”

“You want to make somethin’ out of it?” Old Sol yelled.

“I don’t wanna fight,” the little man said.

“Then shut up. A drought is worst than a flood.”

“A twister is the worse thing I ever saw,” Luke said.

“A twister is bad, all right,” Sol said.

“It ain’t as bad as a flood,” the little man said.

“Like blazes it ain’t!” Sol said.

“A flood’ll tear up all the way down a watercourse,” the little man said, “and way beyond the course of that river, too, the cricks’ll be raisin’ cain and beyond the cricks the sloughs’ll be rippin’ up, and beyond the sloughs there’ll be the ditches cutting through all the fields in a time of bad rain. A flood’ll tear the belly out of a whole country. A twister, now, ain’t so bad.”

“A twister is terrible,” Sol said, “but it ain’t as bad as them little dust whirlwinds that’ll come acrost a field, one right after another, seems like, sweeping the ground till it’s slick enough and hard enough to be the floor of a Kansas City dance hall. It’s them little winds that’re the bad ones.”

“A flood is the worst thing,” the little man said, closing the argument.

They were all quiet for a while. The trucks bumped and churned on gravel and spun in mud. The hot motors sent gases through the floor boards. The men clung to one another and coughed and cursed. They swung up to the dikes across a chunky gravel stretch, piled off the trucks, and went to the river.

There was just a little light left in the clouded skies. The men could see the waters dimly and hear the veiled chum of the Neosho. The seeping edges of the river were at their feet along the dikes, and already wetness was spreading through in a few places.

Above, there was lightning in the skies, and the booming of the thunder rolls seemed to come faintly down the valley and to increase in volume as they rolled near. The thick grasses and reeds at the river’s edge clung against Tip’s clothes, and he thought, never realizing that his thoughts were like the words his father used when he spoke about the Kansas land: The grasses know the violent things that come from the sky. The grasses make frantic movements against their tethering roots in a twisting wind. They have seen splintered cottonwoods

and white human faces lifted to skies opened by strange lightning. And the grasses have felt the pour of rain that has mashed them against the earth and made the river speak louder and louder against the bluff. The grasses have submitted summer fibers to great stones of hail and have known, again and again, the blizzard winds and the thin, fine snow. The grasses have seen how men fear the skies and how they have put their strength against the skies in a contest that goes on forever. The eyes of the men and women of the middle of America know the sky intimately, as they know the earth, and the grasses know why there is such violence from the skies and in men. But men almost never know.

The thunder, at last, seemed to roll on top of the great flood like vast wheels set loose on the rock floor of a mighty cave. The men gave back from the edge of the flood for a moment until somebody lighted some lanterns and set them on the platforms of the trucks.

The county engineer jumped up on one of the trucks.

“Spread out along the levee, men. We’re going to sandbag her. The sand trucks’ll stand about here, and we’ll sandbag down-river about three hundred yards. This here is the weak spot where the river curves in.”

The engineer said for them to space out along the dike in a line so that they were close together, and so that they could easily pass the bags as they came down the line. Tip and the Joneses spread down-river. They kept moving until they got to the end of the line. The Jones boys were like that. They’d go just as far as anybody could go. And Tip felt the same way. Against the light from the lanterns standing on the trucks they could very faintly see the beginning of the line of men.

At the end of the line it was very lonely. Tip had never felt so close to nature, to the wild force of it. Luke was on one side of him and Sol was the last of the line, on the other side. A smell arose from the flood: of earth in churned solution, of boiling sand.

In a little while the bags of sand started coming. Up at the head of the line the shovelers filled bags as fast as a whole line of men could carry them. There were a lot of volunteers filling bags, and other fellows were wiring the tops. Then the bags were passed down the line. They came in a heaving, grunting stream, and slowly the dike’s top had a line of sandbags, then a second row behind that one.

The men worked for a long time, and along about eleven o’clock a rumor floated down the line. Sol whispered to Tip that the crest was expected about midnight.

“What you whispering for?” Tip said.

“Blast if I know,” Sol said.

“What’ll happen if this here dike busts?” Luke asked.

“I reckon we swim home,” Sol said.

They kept on working. The sandbags seemed to come faster and faster. The trucks were hauling sand as rapidly as they could make the trips to town. Every so often somebody would take a lantern and examine the water level. It was coming up all the time, and about a quarter to twelve there was a big, sudden rise. One minute the water was safely below the sandbags, then it was up with a rush around the lower bags and coming across in the lower places.

Men up the line began to shout, and Tip felt water squish under his feet. The bags seemed to come faster, and the rows at their end were growing. The lightning flashed every once in a while, and the bodies up the line were in an instant, fevered motion, then the darkness after the flash was blacker, and there was only a sense of grasping arms and heaving bodies.

The yelling increased at the head end of the line, and the cry began to spread, "Everybody out!" "Everybody out!" Some of the men near Tip began to fall back from the dike and move toward the head of the line.

"Shall we go?" Tip asked.

"Better," Solomon said.

"I'm gone," Luke said.

They stepped backward off the levee into the rapidly filtering water that was already beginning to swirl and have a current pull to it. It was well over the tops of their shoes. The men ahead of them suddenly began to run and as they started to run, a sort of panic seemed to take hold. To Tip there seemed a quick, fearsome terror in the night now and in the terrible force of the river. His weariness was suddenly gone. In his imagination flood fingers were breaking through here and there, all over, to cut him off, to catch him, to drown him. The water of his friend, the quiet river, had become a living monster, a real thing with sucking arms. He thought of the white chicken. He thought of himself alone in the middle of the flood with his arms spread out and his mouth open. He thought of Jan in the quicksand.

He began to run, too. It was hard going in the water with the rough ground under it. He lost track of Sol and Luke, but a man ahead fell down and Tip stumbled over him. The man grabbed Tip by the ankle and they struggled. A couple of other runners hit them and they all lay in the rising water and thrashed around. They all got up, finally, and ran some more.

The trucks had their motors going and men piled on. Tip couldn't find Sol and Luke. Everybody was yelling. The group Tip was with tried to pile onto one truck that was already full. The men in the truck shoved them down. They tried other trucks and were finally assimilated. The water was around the wheels when the trucks churned finally back toward Dunbar.

On the way they passed some small houses and a resident of one came running out. It was an elderly man who ran alongside the truck and shouted. He wanted to know if they had stopped the water and if it was all right to leave his

family in the house. The cries and the motions of the men on the trucks, visible from the lights behind, told him clearly that the water had broken through. The householder stood a second, then he whirled and ran. Tip could just see him leap up his front steps as the dark cut him out.

The trucks came to the bridge, and there was a bunch of people near it—a silent and sad group. A few of the folk carried household goods. Some of the women had kids in their arms. Tip got off the truck and walked across the bridge and could feel the jar of the heavy pieces of drift striking it. He stood a moment at the far end of the bridge, and pretty soon Sol and Luke came along.

“We figured you was drowned” Sol said.

“He won’t drown if he can swim like he can run,” Luke said.

“And I reckon I know how he can swim,” Sol said.

“I was pretty scared out there,” Tip said.

“Me, too,” Sol said. “And I been on this ol’ river all my life. Maybe,” he said slowly, “a flood *is* worse than a drought at that.”

They stood at the bridge for a little while and watched the people. They were coming across slowly and when they got across they almost always turned and looked back across the river. Sol lighted his pipe.

The three were bedraggled, covered with mud. They had lost the game to the river, for the water was already in the north part of town, and there was nothing much anybody could do. The houses in the low places would be full of water in the morning and there would be a time of waiting for the water to go down. People would stream back across the bridge then, and poke around in the mud on the floors of their houses, or look at their ruined gardens and lawns and fields. The thought of it made Tip sick. He said, “I’m going home.”

“Me an’ Luke, too, after a while,” Sol said. “We’re beddin’ down in the courthouse.” But Tip knew that the Joneses would stay around the bridge all night, listening to the river.

He got the truck, and drove by the library. It was very dark, very lonely, and again he had the thought of the library swallowing Jan; and the thought persisted as he drove home.

But there was another disturbing idea, too. The doubt lay hard in him that he would ever in all his life hook the Big One. The flood seemed to be sweeping the likelihood of it further and further away.

HARRY'S TRUCK

FROM *The Only Place We Live*

We get into Henry's truck and head off across the field where we will leave the truck and go afoot into the woods. I never tell Henry what it is I love best about nights in the woods. I guess my feeling for going out really is the chance it gives me to remember: things and stories come back in the night-woods. I feel, see, touch the faces of people long gone, my mother, how she nursed me when I was sick, sitting there beside the bed in the low chair, singing something old and the night coming up around the Franklin house. All of the past things do come back in the night-woods. But maybe Henry don't feel things as deep as me.

It's a funny thing: when I am out in the woods at night with a good friend and neighbor like Henry Jackson, it is as if the whole world is mine. I can believe anything I want to, be anyplace, or remember just about anything that happened. And I love to do this. I'm not a great one for daydreaming or dallying during the day, but if there is a small moon over the woods at night, and night sounds all around, something inside of me takes over. I'm me but I'm not me, I am like everybody I ever knew and they are right there beside me. People are mortal, but still they're not in a way, or not in the way they think they are mortal. When I die I would like to recall all the beautiful things I have seen all my life. That's some kind of immortality; that's the way I figure that folks are in their imaginations. That's why people are immortal, to be able to see and feel all in one moment everything they are, or what the land is, or has been.

We live in a land of small sloughs and marshes in the flatlands back away from the rivers; places of small water, and mud banks and reeds. There are large frogs that rest in against the banks.

Henry and I follow the river's edge to the place where the limestone bluff rises. There is a trail we know well. The trail follows the bluff, then rises



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through a crevice, and follows the shoulder up higher and higher, until at the top the trail emerges high above the valley. It's from up here that we can see the far, far shape of the hills and the moon rising. If it were day we could see the bridge across the river.

THE HUNT

FROM *Wild Goose Country*

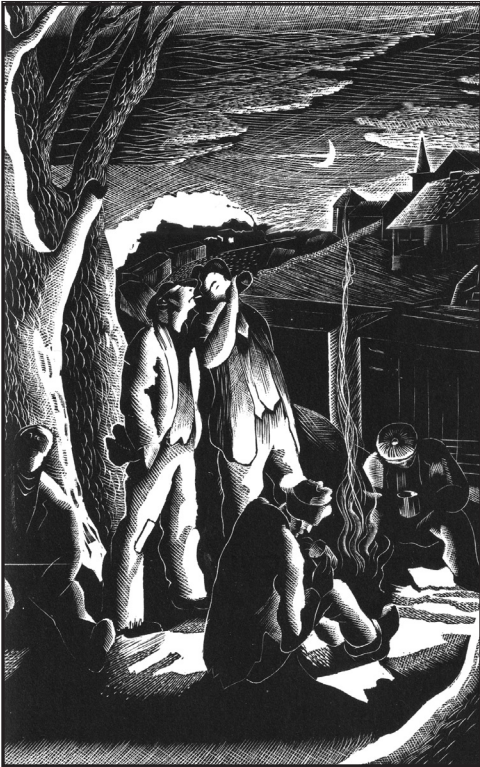
The man's name was Perry Caldwell. Joe Malone was his friend, and Joe heard the story from him. Caldwell had, all his life, been fascinated by accounts of hunting adventures, and when he was a boy, had read anything he could find in the local library, or in adventures in paperbacks, about the pursuit of game. There was something in his nature, he often believed, that drove him to an appreciation of the wilderness, the hunt, the successful chase. He would like to have been born in a generation when young men went west to adventure and to hunt. A lot of his time as a lad had gone to the making of instruments of projection: slingshots made of a V fork and a handle, cut from the smaller branches of a tree, slung with rubber bands from an inner tube, and containing a leather sling cut from old shoe leather. Or he made many kinds of spears, of straight reeds growing in the lower end of the pasture, or of bamboo, old fishing poles, or carpet poles. These he learned to fling with power and accuracy. He created bows of hedge wood, and of hickory, and collected straight branches of willow or dogwood, or sometimes his folks bought him slender dowels for arrows. He had never seriously tried to kill anything with one of these weapons, though he had many times discharged the slingshot and arrows in the general direction of birds or cattle, pretending that they were elk or buffalo. Once when he was about eleven, he had made a short hunting bow, about like the ones he had read the Indians used to hunt buffalo on horseback. And he'd ridden bareback, on one of the farm work horses, to discharge homemade arrows at old Peggy, a brindle milk cow.

He wasn't bloodthirsty, exactly, it was just that he loved the idea of hunting. Like most farm boys, he acquired a small rifle when he was about twelve, and a shotgun when he was fourteen. He hunted rabbits, and many times shot quail out of coveys at the corners of Osage Orange hedgerow. His hunting adventures weren't especially thrilling, or even very interesting. The game he shot was

faithfully cleaned and eaten. His folks insisted on that. But the long Saturday rambles in the woods and fields with a few companions, and a lunch to cook over a campfire, set permanently in motion his urge to be in the woods, in nature, and to carry along a gun in case there might be something to shoot.

In the country where he was raised, there were no wild ducks or any wild geese. Once in awhile the geese flew over his part of the country in their migration cycle, but he never got to shoot a duck or a goose.

When he went to college, he had little time to hunt, and he left his guns at home. He worked very hard to get an education and became an excellent student. After college, where he majored in business, he went to a job in a Wisconsin city not very far from the Horicon Marsh. He became a minor executive in a large manufacturing business, and as time went on, he became more and more able to go and come when he wished and to have time for recreation. He grew familiar with the countryside, took hikes with business companions, or with his wife. He became fascinated with the wild geese which gathered in the fall



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and spring at the Horicon Marsh, and in October and November, spent several Saturdays watching the birds, studying them through binoculars and making notes about their habits, their patterns of flight; and he sketched them a little, for he had taken up drawing and painting as hobbies. His sketches were rather good, though he confessed to everybody that he was just a silly amateur. He painted several pictures of the marsh settings—with reeds, water, clouds, and wild birds in flight. He loved the way geese came down onto the water and was quite successful in catching them in dramatic attitudes. He actually sold several of his paintings for very modest sums and gave others away to admiring acquaintances. He loved the way the birds wheeled, how they seemed to change the angle of their wings as they came in, how they kept their eyes always on the water, or the earth as they descended to landings. He grew to love the birds, and when he thought about his attempts at art, he considered himself a painter of wildlife. He joined several ecology organizations, and groups banded together to improve and preserve the environment. He was one of the most enthusiastic members of the local Audubon Society in his city.

The wild geese had never stirred him as a hunter until one evening, when he was at the marsh with Dick Pine, a business associate.

Dick had said, "Every time I come here I want to shoot at them."

"Do you really?" Caldwell asked. "Could you train a shotgun on 'em and keep your conscience?"

"Sure. Somebody's got to hunt. They'll all die of overpopulation."

"Honest?"

"Absolutely. Ask any scientist."

"I'd rather just study them, paint them."

"Well, you should learn to do both, hunt and paint. Most wildlife artists have been hunters, too, you know."

"Have they really?"

"Of course."

Caldwell wasn't sure this was all that true, but he accepted it. The next time he came to the marsh, the geese looked slightly different to him. He wondered how the old Indians who had once inhabited the marsh would have regarded the birds. Maybe in their time they appreciated them too, but he imagined that the Indians had chiefly thought of the birds as a source of food. He could picture the Indian hunters slipping up on a flock, concealing themselves, disguising themselves with clumps of grass or branches, finally rising, flinging off the camouflage and drawing bows to their fullest, letting the arrows go into the startled, honking birds.

The idea of the bow and arrow and the wild geese fascinated Caldwell. He remembered the thrill of making bows and arrows in his youth, and how he had cherished the notion of someday owning a real hunting bow.

He told Dick about his boyhood hunting urges one day at lunch, and Dick said, "Well, you know very well you can buy any kind of a bow you want. Maybe you'd get a kick out of bow hunting. You ought to satisfy these boyhood desires—you'd be missing something if you didn't get a bow and do a little hunting."

The idea kept moving around in Caldwell's brain, and one day he did stop in at a sporting goods store. He looked at the bows they had there, talked with the clerk about the best kind to purchase, and the best arrows to choose. The clerk asked him whether he was interested in deer hunting, and Caldwell replied that he wasn't sure what, if anything, he was going to hunt, but he'd been interested in bows since he was a kid. The clerk sold him a hunting bow and about twenty arrows, several with cutting steel tips, and few with less dangerous target points. He loved the feel of the bow and the sleek, straight arrows, recalling how he had struggled to get straight wood and to fasten chicken feathers to the shaft of homemade arrows. These store ones were quite a different matter; when he got home, he went out into the large side yard, put up a target, and began to practice.

The bow was unbelievably strong. The arrows sped swiftly and surprisingly true. He grew more and more interested and tried to get his wife to try, but the bow was too strong for her to pull, and she gave up after a try or two.

He did not give up, and over the next month bought other equipment and more arrows.

"Well, when are you going to try it on something?" Dick asked.

"I doubt that I'll ever shoot arrows at anything living."

"What'll you bet you don't?"

"I don't know why I should."

"Because you can't be a successful artist if you never hunt birds and animals. You can't catch the true wild spirit of game birds without hunting them. It's something in the blood that gets into the hands and the way you interpret."

"I think that sounds like hooey."

"It's not. Believe me. If you hunted, your art would get better."

Caldwell talked about Dick's theory with his wife. She said it sounded like a bunch of nonsense to her, but Caldwell wasn't sure. He recalled the thrill of hunting rabbits, squirrels, even crows, and he wondered if he could recapture the boyhood thrills if he hunted now. His wife said no, he couldn't. That was water over the dam, and he was a fool to try to ever recapture boyhood pleasures. He wasn't a boy any longer. She thought there might be a lot of older fellows trying to recapture and relive youthful pleasures; she didn't think it could be done.

Now when Caldwell went to the marsh on a Saturday, he looked at the geese in a different way. He hadn't told anyone, but he'd entered the goose hunter lottery, and the state had awarded him a permit and a tag. The law said he was entitled to kill one goose, and in his own mind, Caldwell had decided

to kill a goose with an arrow. He had heard of it being done, but not so many bow hunters had done it. The old Indians had done it plenty of times. How else could they ever obtain the bird. But did they shoot geese on the wing, as the law said you had to? He didn't know, but he supposed the old Indians were so good with bow and arrow that they could easily hit a flying goose. As an experiment, he wanted to try, partly because it would be quite a thrill to draw an arrow at a goose in flight, and partly because he thought he might use the experience as the basis for some kind of a painting. Some hunter, who was fond of the bow, might pay a lot of money if he could just capture the pose, the feeling of the flight, the attitude of the bird, and catch something of the wild thrill that was in the mind of the hunter.

He scouted around the marsh area, waiting for the opening of the goose season and wondering where the best place to hunt might be. He knew you just couldn't hunt anywhere. The marsh area was a closed zone. Even bow hunters had to follow the same rules as the gun hunters. He knew that he had to hunt in a goose blind. He went finally to a large farm where goose blinds were advertised. He found the manager in the barn, and the man invited Caldwell to have a beer.

"Sure," the manager said, "we do get some bow hunters here once in a while. They have a great time. They all say the same thing: that the only real thrill in goose hunting is with bow and arrow. One guy last season got his goose on the second shot, and his wife got hers late the same day. They were really happy. They said it was the greatest thing that had ever happened to them. Both of them said that. And do you know, they said it made their marriage seem more satisfying."

"I can't see how that could be caused by shooting a goose," Caldwell said.

"Well, that's what they said. Both of 'em. Said they talked it over in the blind."

Caldwell felt a little foolish, hearing stuff like that, and it didn't interest him. It seemed very juvenile somehow, but he couldn't get out of his head the idea that if he could see a goose flying above him and could draw an arrow on it, that something like an insight into art might happen—just something between him and the goose, a sense of the universal that he might transfer into a painting. And there was something else, he admitted. A feeling that the slaying of a goose, high up in the air by an arrow loosened by himself, might be self-fulfilling. He thought that the thrill of the hunt was there in him still, and the hurling of a projectile was a definite part.

He paid the club man ten dollars to reserve a place in a goose blind, and because the season wasn't open the manager took him out to see the place where he would hunt. It was a kind of box built above ground, and it had been cleverly camouflaged with cornstalks. It reminded Caldwell a little of

“It reminded Caldwell a little of Halloween, someway—it was sort of like a cornshock, but there was something about it that had a festival feel...”



Halloween, someway—it was sort of like a cornshock, but there was something about it that had a festival feel, a waiting feel, as though when the hunting season opened, the life of the blind would become part of a fantasy.

“This is the best place,” the club manager said, “right here is where the line runs, the line that a lot of geese follow out of the marsh. You know, geese are creatures of habit, and follow the same track if they can. You’ll get to shoot at geese here all right. And, too, this one is by itself. Don’t want those hunting arrows falling onto hunters, do we?”

“Think my chances of getting a goose are pretty good?”

“The best.”

Caldwell tried the blind for space, to see whether he could shoot from it, and found that he could. He’d have to be careful not to jostle a partner in the blind, and the manager said there would most certainly be somebody in the blind with him.

“It will probably be a gunner,” he said. “I doubt that another archer will be out. If somebody does come, of course, I’ll put him in here with you.”

“That’s all right. I don’t mind who comes.”

On the morning that the goose season opened at the Horicon Marsh, Caldwell got up very early so that he could be there before daybreak. His wife got up too, though he urged her not to, and fixed his breakfast. She watched as he put on his outdoor clothing: a hunting outfit with a red jacket and hat, and watched him take the bow out of its leather case, flex it, and examine the case

of arrows.

“Do you expect me to cook a goose if you should hit one with that thing?” she asked.

“Either that or I’ll give it away.”

“I probably won’t cook it. I don’t think I could bear to do it. I don’t see how you can even think of shooting one. If I didn’t know you couldn’t do it with an arrow, I’d probably throw a tantrum.”

“It’s aesthetic with me,” Caldwell said.

“Well, I hope you keep it an aesthetic experience. You don’t really strike me as a natural hunter.”

“I’m an artist. I’m doing this in the cause of art.”

“OK. I’ll be waiting. But I don’t understand why you have to shoot at geese to paint their picture.”

“Well, it’s kind of deep.”

And it wasn’t all that deep either, he knew. Really, he guessed that he simply wanted to go out and kill a wild goose. It was probably as simple as that—to feel the uplift and sensation of hunting, of loosening a bolt, of hitting, of watching, of retrieving.

“Goodbye,” Caldwell said.

His wife watched him go to the car.

The drive to the hunting club wasn’t very long, and Caldwell got there about an hour before the opening. Men were standing around the barn, inside and out” talking, laughing. Many had cups of coffee. The club men called out names, marked them off in a book, and the hunters were hauled in a station wagon two by two, or four by four, out into the field. The morning gave good promise of being fair; there were few clouds, and the moon, far down, seemed to throw wavy shadows as the wind moved the willows around the barn. A couple of wardens wandered among the hunters, joking, giving information. The guns of the hunters were all in cases; the men described their equipment, bragging sometimes about what a particular gun would do, what shells they used, what size shot. It was like moving soldiers out to a front-line, Caldwell thought, and he regarded his own participation with satire: me, the longbowman, ready for the fray. They called his name, and he walked out to the waiting station wagon.

“Gotta hurry,” the driver said. “We still got quite a few to get out there.”

“An awful lot of guys in there,” Caldwell said, “Are they all going to hunt geese?”

“Ain’t many left got a blind reserved. They’re hoping they can get one after the first geese are killed. Can’t shoot but one goose apiece, you know.”

“Yeah, I know that.”

Caldwell couldn't see the woman very clearly in the dim light. She looked slender, and he couldn't tell anything at all about her age. She had a heavy jacket on, and a leather cap.

"I guess I didn't expect to meet any lady hunters," Caldwell said.

"What's the matter. Think we're the weaker sex?"

"Oh, no."

He couldn't think of anything more to say, and the car moved out along a track at the edge of a field, then across a corner. They passed several blinds, and at a far edge, came to the blind they were to occupy.

"We figured you bow hunters ought to be together," the driver said.

"OK. Thanks," replied Caldwell. He was very uncomfortable now and wished he didn't have to go into the blind with the woman. She took her equipment out, and she was slender, he could now see for certain. Her age? He couldn't tell, but she had a sharp, definite voice, and her statements were all positive declarations.

"It's going to be a fine morning," Caldwell said stupidly.

"Who cares? I'm here to hunt geese."

The car moved away, and the woman went to the blind. She pulled the cornstalks at the entrance aside and stepped in. "Not too much room in here."

"Any room for me?"

"Well, you paid for it didn't you? Come on in. Get settled. When the birds start coming over, we don't want to be screwing around."

She had taken off her jacket, and he could see more what she was like. She looked about thirty, short hair under her cap, a rather attractive face, he thought, very determined, and a sharpness about it, too, in the thin, small mouth. Her speech was about the same as her face: positive, clipped. He got established at an end of the blind. The box was about six or seven feet long, not very wide. The top was open, and there was a narrow bench along one side.

He took out his bow and placed arrows out where he could easily get them.

"Have you hunted very much?" Caldwell asked.

"Damned right. All over. Even out West. Mule deer. Northern Wisconsin plenty. I've shot eight deer."

"Really?"

"Three of them through the lungs. I got one through the heart."

There was a silence. Caldwell didn't know how to respond. He felt nervous and uncomfortable and wondered more and more why he had come. He couldn't respond in conversation on hunting on the woman's level. He knew that for certain. He laughed nervously.

"What did you say your name was, ma'am?"

"I didn't say. And don't call me ma'am. I'm not the housewife type exactly." Caldwell laughed again. "I thought your name might be Diana."

“Why?”

“Well,” Caldwell said, feeling very silly, “Diana was the goddess of the hunt. From what you said—.”

“Never heard of her. My name’s Louise.

Yours?”

“Perry.”

“OK, Perry, bring over the birds.”

“You hunted geese much before?”

“No. First time for geese. I want to see how good I really am. Good challenge, getting one on the wing.”

It was what Caldwell had thought, too, but the way she said it turned him off. He guessed it was just target practice for her, and maybe something else, like shooting a deer through the lungs and enjoying it. Far down across the field a shotgun boomed, then another.

“I guess the season’s open,” Caldwell said.

They waited. It became lighter rapidly now. Far away he thought he could hear the sound of geese. Guns began to boom more often. He couldn’t see anything in the sky through the top of the blind, but he sensed movement, expectancy, all around him on the earth, and a kind of urgency in the sky, as though something great and terrible was about to occur. He heard the geese then, quite loud and, he thought, quite close. His companion had strung her bow, fitted an arrow, and was searching the skies with such intentness that he almost forgot to get ready himself.

“Come on,” she said, “what’re you waiting for, mister? Think they’ll fly into the blind so you can catch them by hand?”

He strung his bow and selected an arrow. She kept hers fitted to the string, in position, tense. A little time passed. No geese flew over them, but the guns were going all around.

“Where the hell are the birds,” the woman said.

Caldwell wished desperately now that he were somewhere else. The nearness of this priestess of the hunt dismayed him. He had always thought of hunting as a pleasure, a thing to be engaged in for the joy of it, never as a humorless, stressful activity, where a bullet, or a shotgun charge or an arrow must inevitably fill psychological needs of the hunter. The game itself was of little moment, and he had the feeling that she would be equally satisfied with birds, deer, or possibly even men.

“Look,” she cried suddenly.

Above them the sky was instantly filled with geese. They were quite low, and huge. Their wings stretched, necks far-out, and each body a part of the dynamism of the V of the birds. He saw, in that instant, the leader, a large bird, and he fixed his arrowpoint upon it, drawing back and back. He never knew

when he released the arrow. Entranced, he saw it go, saw the flight up and up, saw its movement and direction and felt the speed of it, saw it fly well behind the bird, and forgot the arrow as the bird flew on, out of his vision. He knew that he had missed by a long, long way, and the sense of the miss did not make him unhappy. He turned to the woman, thinking that the flight of the birds might have made her relaxed, but she swore at him, violently and brutally.

"I saw you do that," she cried. "You jostled into me. Keep your own damned end of the blind. You spoiled my aim. 'Who the hell do you think you are?'"

"Sorry," Caldwell said, amazed.

"Keep away from me. Stay there now. Stay out of my way."

The birds were coming over again. Caldwell couldn't have reached for an arrow had he wanted to. The woman fascinated him, and he watched her as she lifted the bow and drew the arrow back. The flight was a little higher than the other, but there were more birds. Her eyes were fixed and her lips moved as she sighted upward, and he saw her release the arrow, and the cry she gave was wild, primitive. Upward her arrow had transfixed a goose. He saw the final end of the action: the shaft protruding through the thrashing body, the wings beating to hold the body aloft, the struggle to lift, the lessening strength, and as an obligatto to the struggle with death, the voice of the woman cursing, elated. The goose fell, faster and faster, and Caldwell, watching, wondered whether he would have observed with the same feeling of horror, if his own arrow had transfixed a bird. He saw nothing in the action that inspired any feeling of art. The bird's body crumpled in a mass of feathers and action that was without grace or beauty.

But the woman was screaming with pleasure and she kept crying, "My first arrow! First! How'd you like that, huh, huh?"

And as the goose came to earth and lay on its side with the shaft of the arrow sticking up, the woman tumbled out of the blind and rushed to it. It wasn't dead, and he could see how the bird struggled as she came to it, seized it by the neck, twisting and pulling. Caldwell thought he heard the bird give one short, agonized honk.

He took his bow and arrows and stepped out of the blind and walked away. As he departed, she called, "Hey come back! I want to see you get one. I got mine. Look!"

She held up the goose, but Caldwell didn't stop. He fled running, back toward the clubhouse.

WILDFLOWER ROAD

FROM *Wisconsin Sketches*

This wild flower road in back country—
It's a falltime scene, color in purple and gold of gold,
Wild grasses cast in bronze, and brown, opened weed pods,
Wind in a dry rattle of summer death
Among unleafed boughs.

I, walking here, bring to this roadside setting
My own memory of splendid boyhood responses.
I am alone to observe the death of summer,
And later I will walk this road
To witness the advent of a starker season.

The roads here are meant for solitude.
They wind the hillsides swinging up;
And at a small crest cut the shoulder,
And stop and look backward into the deep valley
And thread of a dark river.

Along this road almost no human sign.
I seek nothing and man has small relationship to me
Only the way I respond is filled with question.
People have been my reason for life,
But on this country roadway in autumn
There is enough of meaning.

Only myself a sounding harp for wind,
And devourer of roadside flowers and autumn dyes.
I see a mailbox beside the road, I pause.
Mailboxes are as country weathervanes
Testing the directions of people. I have seen them
Mounted in rural-fanciful ways on plows;
On an upthrust snake of logchain; welded on an old pump
That I suppose once watered thirsty cattle.
I have noted mailboxes on posts from Sears,
On knotty, crude, lengths of unbarked pine.
Mailboxes are of people and mailboxes
Are tokens of human hopes and fears;
These I know well. But here I pause:
This box is an old one and the name faded some
I cannot read it—Morgan or Miller,
Impossible to tell. But a bird has been here
This morning and the door is open.
There is already a sprinkling of grass and down.
Tomorrow the mailman may disturb
A nest-building bluebird; let me trust
That no mail merely addressed to occupant
Is deposited in this lonely, small, sanctuary.

THE PLAQUE

FROM *University Madison U.S.A.*

On the front of Bascom Hall is the plaque that states the university's traditional credo of academic freedom:

"Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe that the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found."

The quotation, taken from a report of the university's Board of Regents in 1894, is cast in bronze and bolted to the entrance of Bascom Hall.

The statement was issued at the conclusion of the trial of a university economist, Richard T. Ely. It was Ely, in a letter written for Theodore Herfurth shortly before Ely's death, who definitely established the authorship of the declaration.

"The words were undoubtedly written by C. K. Adams [seventh president of the university]. Adams told me so himself, and the internal evidence bears this out. It was a style natural to Adams," Ely wrote.

Professor Ely had come to Wisconsin as one of America's most distinguished political economists. He had freed himself from orthodox free-trade economics and had pioneered with a realistic, inductive approach to the subject. A state superintendent of public instruction published in *The Nation* a scathing, excoriating, and denunciatory letter accusing Ely of fomenting strikes in Madison.

A committee set up by the Board of Regents to investigate the charges, on September 18, 1894, submitted its report to the board, which not only exonerated Ely but also "heralded the board's devotion to academic freedom," with the following statement:

As Regents of a university with over a hundred instructors supported by nearly two millions of people who hold a vast diversity of views regarding the great questions which at present agitate the human mind, we could not for a moment think of recommending the dismissal or even the criticism of a teacher even if some of his opinions should, in some quarters, be regarded as visionary. Such a course would be equivalent to saying that no professor should teach anything which is not accepted by everybody as true. This would cut our curriculum down to very small proportions. We cannot for a moment believe that knowledge has reached its final goal, or that the present condition of society is perfect. We must therefore welcome from our teachers such discussions as shall suggest the means and prepare the way by which knowledge may be extended, present evils be removed and others prevented. We feel that we would be unworthy of the position we hold if we did not believe in progress in all departments of knowledge. In all lines of academic investigation it is of the utmost importance that the investigator should be absolutely free to follow the indications of truth wherever they may lead. Whatever may be the limitations which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found.

Herfurth reveals that the casting of the declaration into bronze and its erection at the university generated almost as much heat as the charges that brought the declaration.

Although the university class of 1910 had the tablet cast, the memorial was not affixed to Bascom Hall until 1915 because of friction between the class and the Board of Regents.

On June 15, 1915, the tablet was erected and dedicated. President Van Hise spoke at the ceremony:

The principles of academic freedom have never found expression in language so beautiful, words so impressive, phrases so inspiring. It was 21 years ago that these words were incorporated in a report of the Board of Regents exonerating a professor from the charge of 'Socialism' that was brought against him... And from that day to this, no responsible party or no responsible authority has ever succeeded in restricting freedom of research and teaching within these walls.

The plaque was rededicated in 1956 after it disappeared from Bascom Hall, apparently as a prank, and was recovered through an anonymous phone call.

A BRIDAL BOUQUET

FROM *Wisconsin Sketches*

A bridal bouquet of white thornblossoms
Plucked from haws on a Wisconsin hill,
Was the wish of this woman
Who desired to be wed
On the very, very high land
Above the Wisconsin River.

She was indeed wed by a caring man,
She in patched blue jeans and gingham shirt,
Holding white hillside flowers:
The whole tableau
Against a blue June morning sky.

I can't say I ever saw a more radiant bride,
And her young man whose hair was long
Tenderly aided his aging mother
Over stone and goat meadow,
While in junipers round about
Waxwings uttered a wedding
Serenade.

WISCONSIN IS A KALEIDOSCOPE OF CHANGE

FROM *My Land My Home My Wisconsin*

It is the human struggle that is important in Wisconsin: the devotion of families to the welfare of the Wisconsin land. The course of the struggle is not hard to follow: from the earliest settlers with their homestead problems, the stubborn sod, the loneliness, the hard labor, often the advent of death from disease or overwork. It is easy to appreciate the man with the simple farm instrument, toiling to make his home, his place, and a future for his children. Out of that struggle came the Wisconsin spirit, and the Wisconsin Idea... a better life for everybody, a chance at books and education, at a cultural side to life, an inspirational side, a religious side, certainly a fun side. The struggle can be seen in earlier parts of the story of the Wisconsin farm. But what did the struggle mean? What did it become? Were the settlers successful? Did they achieve what they worked so valiantly to accomplish? What of the family? What of the land? Are the values of determination, hard work, regard for land and for neighbors still there? What of the youth, the vital young who gave the land its flavor and ultimate meaning?

In answer, there is a kaleidoscope of achievement, of development, of meaning. First the youth left the farm. The cities were the benefactors. The farm and family life suffered. And there were the machines that grew larger and more efficient, spawned from the simple ones made by Wisconsin inventors in the days of the primitive reaper, the plow. One man could ultimately do as much as twenty, using the machines. And the cattle improved to purebred herds on every side, and the farms grew larger, with fewer farmers. Was all this what the Edwin Bottomleys had in mind? What has happened is fascinating and paradoxical. Wisconsin has become the leading dairy state and is known far and wide as a home state, a neighbor state, a state of beautiful farmlands; and the kaleidoscope, in order to understand, is put together from the memories, the statements, the hopes of many persons from all parts of the state. The spirit

seems to be there still, though the pioneer cabins are all gone now. And there is something else... a sense of largeness, as though the land has taken on a mysterious dimension that is bigger than life. Wisconsin is the land where the image of rural America grows, waxes, and spreads itself in the eyes of the world as the state where achievement of the farm has grown almost beyond belief. But now it is a different world and we search for motifs from the past, cherishing them:

The prairies now are nearly all gone. Along old railroads are some prairie plants, undisturbed; and the wild growths are not trampled. In a country cemetery on an old prairie acre, there is still a bit of the tall, tall grass, and at times the winds weave it into patterns of strange memory.

The valley below where I stand is one where settlers arrived on a June evening in 1856. The Norwegian who led them carried a staff of locust wood. This he suddenly thrust deeply into the sod and cried, "We have here our home! It will be here, in this valley! Here I'll leave my staff until it takes root in the good soil." And, as they say, the staff took root and became a shade for the old man when he reached ninety.

I do not know who lives down there now; or whose cattle are upon the hillside. I know that once a family of seven arrived on that flat by the creek, and built a cabin and broke sod for a crop of Indian corn. Now the hillside herd is large, great black and white Holsteins with swelling udders. On that hillside there was once only one beast: a thin, brindle cow newly dried of milk.

When you envision the people coming from Europe and from New York State and New England and Virginia and Ohio, and you stop a minute to remember what they went through, how they worried through the wheat-growing era, and got dairying started, and raised hops, and improved the cattle and horses and sheep and hogs... all of that, struggling all that time. And they learned about better seed and more economical ways to farm, then struggled through World War I and the Depression and finally achieved the success story, where you can be successful on the farm if you follow the right prescriptions and have the right machines and cattle... It isn't hard to identify the struggle, the clearing and breaking of the land, but are the people still there? The struggling people, the family people, the ones who created our state and national strength and traditions. Are they, or the spirit of them, still there?

They do live on, for the spirit of Wisconsin grew out of experiences of the early families and their descendants who found their strength in the land. Generation after generation, leadership in the community and the state has come straight from the family, the home, the values of home.

Farm homes were gathering places. New methods developed at the university were synthesized and exchanged there when, from time to time, the Extension people would drop in... Soy Bean Briggs, Jim Lacy, Ranger Mac, Tom Bewick, Verne Varney, Warren Clark, Henry Ahlgren, Rudolph Froker, Dave

Williams, Bruce Cartter, Nellie Kedzie Jones, Abby Marlatt, Almere Scott, Edith Bangham, L. G. Sorden, Walter Bean, Ray Penn... Many others of the great ones who took a personal interest in the farm people would just drop by the home place to see how things were going. That was the way it was done; the whole thing evolved in one crucible... experts, farmers, all devoted to the same end: the betterment of a condition, of the land, of personal life. Community problems, farm problems, and community culture were what concerned them.

When meetings were held in the schoolhouse or the town hall, folks came from all over the countryside to discuss matters important to the farmer, or to the farmer's wife, or to his kids. Sometimes their concerns were expressed in the form of plays, usually obtained from the university, that told about the problems of the dairyman producing milk and cheese, or about a farmer raising chickens or geese or marketing produce, or about the farm wife saving up her egg money to buy a piano or organ.

The plays were done with lots of humor and fast action. Sometimes "Old Brindley," the all-purpose cow, was portrayed onstage by boisterous farmers covered with a large cloth and holding a painted cow's head. The plays were entertainment and more. They furnished a good reason for the busy farmers and their families to get together. The men would come in the evening to build a stage in the school or in the hall or outside. To some it was a great honor just to pull the stage curtain, to make the simple scenery, or to put up the lights—often just bulbs in tin cans, if there was nothing better. It was all part of the rural community spirit.

In the background of the entire rural Wisconsin way of life was what had happened. To understand the Wisconsin of today, one must appreciate the courage, determination, humor, and awareness of home and home place that accompanied the transformation of the land.

In working on this book, we talked to many farm people who helped shape this agricultural setting. All of them found it necessary to speak of the past before they could put the present into any perspective. All agreed that a world of work, suffering, and idealism lies behind the way it is now in rural Wisconsin.

As we approach the end of this story of the Wisconsin farm, we almost expect a crescendo to build toward a crashing finale to illustrate the beauty and dignity of man on the land. Although the potential of the big chords is there we have the bigger farms, larger machines, better cattle, and an understanding of how it all came to be—we can't quite hear the great stirring music that would represent the tremendous victory of Wisconsin men and women on the farm. The struggle of the past we can see—the man with an ox team breaking prairie, building a new log house, or wrestling a subsistence living from the land. But the drama of ultimate success—well, where is it?

Is it one lone man in a vast milking barn with a line of a hundred fine cows and a multitude of hoses and wires and pipes? That has some visual interest, but it isn't quite as emotionally satisfying as an old lady sitting at a cow's flank on a three-legged milking stool, a kerosene lantern hanging above her in the barn on a winter's night. The modern picture is almost too big, too perfect, too technical.

The one thing that is not technical in itself is the Wisconsin family. As we recall the past again, we see that the family depended on horse power and manpower. The machines on the farm were quite simple and there weren't many of them. An average family looked upon forty acres of land as just about all it could possibly handle. In one typical family whose surviving members we talked with, there were three boys and a girl. The father's game plan each year was to clear and to bring into production an additional five acres. That product seemed to take about all the time the family had, beyond chores and the work with land already cleared. Even in the first decades of the twentieth century, agriculture was often reminiscent of pioneer days. Most farmers still had walking cultivators, some of the more affluent farms had riding ones, and the boys contested to see who could cultivate five acres of corn in a day, or who



The Scandinavians who came to settle in Polk County were attracted by trees, rivers, and lakes. They got those, and rocks!

could plow one acre of land with a walking plow. The father depended upon his family much more than is true today. It took all the boys to clear those five acres. There just were no shortcuts.

The country itself—in this instance, northwestern Wisconsin—was heavily timbered. It was virgin timber, basswood, maple, hickory, elm... hardwoods. Father and sons blasted the stumps with dynamite. The blasting was almost continuous at times... both stumps and rocks had to be cleared away. The Scandinavians who came to settle in Polk County were attracted by trees, rivers, and lakes. They got those, and rocks!

As the family grew, the farm expanded to about a hundred acres. By the time the boys were grown, there was a stone fence all the way around the farm, and every stone came from the fields. The boys used stone boats to move those rocks, and every field was crisscrossed with the sledge tracks.

Although the family possessed very little material goods and by today's standards would even have qualified for welfare programs, they didn't think of themselves as poor. When the father and his sons and daughter and wife struggled with the task of clearing the land, their income was perhaps four hundred dollars per year or less. When there was no money at all, they simply took eggs to town to trade for sugar and coffee. Everything else came from the farm.

But no one suffered from lack of food. Before the boys did morning chores and went to school, they'd have a cup of coffee or milk and perhaps piece of bread. About seven o'clock there would be breakfast: always oatmeal and thick cream, fried potatoes, fried meat, a slab of pie and sweet bread. There was always a coffee break at midmorning with cookies brought to the field by mother or daughter. The big meal of the day was at noon: potatoes, meat, other vegetables, nothing very fancy but lots of it. There would always be afternoon cake, rolls, and cookies. They'd have supper around five, usually before the chores, and before bedtime there would likely be another snack. Seven or eight meals a day! At least that's what this Swedish family did.

But that kind of struggle on the land is mostly over now. The land in Polk County has all been broken. The farms there are good. People have a lot more material wealth. When they look back and try to put it all into perspective, they sometimes do so in football terms. Folks in Wisconsin used to know that the Green Bay Packers talked a great deal about pride. It was pride, they said, that made the Packers the kind of team it was in the Lombardi days. Certainly the one thing that all the Swedish, Norwegian, German, the other ethnic groups and old American families in that part of Wisconsin had was pride. They wanted to prove to the world that they could make their own way without help from outside agencies.

And this attitude led to faith in themselves and faith in the land. Faith in the rural areas is still very strong. The urge to have an education, to struggle

for it, not just have it handed over free, is still there. And there is pride, too, because the farms in Wisconsin are still family ones, and the same family values operate there. The farms are bigger, and there aren't nearly so many of them. The whole family may not be involved in the operation because it simply takes a lot less manpower than it used to. In 1830, to produce one bushel of wheat by hand took more than 255 minutes. Today, with a four-wheel drive tractor and combine, it takes one-half minute.

Remember that it was the land that originally drew the people to Wisconsin. People left Europe because they had no opportunity to own land. They came to have their own place. They lived through the pioneer struggle, they attained education for their children, and finally they became better off and were able to buy machinery and to put up silos and have superior cattle. They created the farm state we have today.

The farm family is what made Wisconsin a friendly, neighborly, tradition-conscious state. The family is the important thing about Wisconsin, far more important than the cow, or nutrition, or animal husbandry or agronomy. The meaning of this book lies in the kind of people who came to Wisconsin, and in their families. They played together and worked together and evolved a whole social structure. They arranged social gatherings to help one another in the harvest, to raise barns, and to support one another in times of illness, death, and disaster. Many a farm today is in the hands of its Depression-day owners because the neighbors came to the 1930s auction and "bid in" the farm for a dollar... and dared the local authorities to say otherwise. The folkish proverbs by which our forefathers sowed and reaped, the songs they sang, the religions they practiced—all are a part of the Wisconsin way of living, and of the spirit of this state. In many families these traditions have been passed down generation by generation.

Certainly one of the wonderful aspects of the rural "Wisconsin Idea" is that young people really are returning to the land. It's basic with Americans to want land, to have it, to farm it, to love it. They do actually say, in Wisconsin, This is my land, my home, my Wisconsin, because the land is so essentially theirs. And the young folks are coming home again. On many farms there is still an old dooryard tree standing, where the families once gathered on Sunday afternoons in summer. And when families come home now the old tree, perhaps a hundred years old, will mean a special thing: that the young people and the old are coming back to the homeland where their folks started it all.

This is the great meaning and the mighty crescendo, the Wisconsin theme repeated again and again. Wisconsin is still a family state. The farms large and small are mostly family farms. It isn't just a woman and a man and a plow any more. Things have gone way, way beyond that. Yet the spirit is the same, and we sense that the spirit that arose from struggle will become stronger, more pervad-

ing. Technology? Sure, we've got that in abundance, and far fewer farms, but faith is there. It is faith in the land, faith in man and man's strength and his will to survive. It is faith in the past, and faith that the Wisconsin farm country still has a potentially powerful future. It is also faith in God and in the nation. That hasn't really changed.

A lot of the farm places are really beautiful. The desperate human struggle isn't there any more, not like it used to be. But then, maybe that's good. The thing that does remain is the "spirit of Wisconsin," or as the preachers used to say: "Lord, we are neighbors. We have a duty to one another." If times are changed, so be it, but the faith of people has not changed very much. Not really. We are doing different kinds of things, no doubt, but the spirit of the family on the farm, the home, the whole knowledge that Wisconsin is a home state, a neighbor state, and that people here are home folks. That's the great thing, and a thing we'll never lose. It is too deep in our bone and muscle and our blood. There is the climax of the story... the swelling of the symphony... us, a people... a farm state, a farm people, a Wisconsin people!

Then, for closing, it is a hope for the future, for a fulfillment of human struggle, in a new land, in a new dream...

I AWOKE ONE CLEAR MORNING

FROM *Wisconsin Sketches*

I awoke one clear morning and said
I will certainly do something great today,
I will move a mountain
Or at least cause a bell to chime
Celebrating some minor victory.
Instead, near Spring Green,
I crossed a star-flowered prairie,
Sat down in the middle of tall grass,
And simply stared upward
At white clouds in a spring sky.

A Wisconsin meadow
In spring,
With shooting stars
And sweet star grasses,
Can make a fulfilled astronomer
Of any earthbound, astral,
Day seeker.

THE NEED OF WISCONSIN EARTH

FROM *Wisconsin Sketches*

The need of Wisconsin earth
Is man's hands
To crumble and make smooth.

The need of earth
Is a woman dropped to her knees
To sense reality of grass.

The need of earth
Is a landing of birds
And the freeing of water.

The need of earth
Is a man's hope of crops
And of his proud steps among new growth.

The need of earth
Is wilderness left
In uncut fence corners.

The need of earth
Is the shape of man's mind
Searching the meaning of earth.

To A CHILD...

FROM *An Innocence of Prairie*

To a child everything is available. There are no boundaries of ownership. To the innocent possession is not from greed but from wonder and love. One night I took my grandson to the top of a hill near our house. The moon was very bright and seemed quite near. The small boy reached for it, and apparently caught the moon in his hand; at least his hand was tightly closed when he reached it out to me. I opened his fingers, accepted the moon gracefully and put it in my pocket. He immediately took it out. We began a game of catching the moon, putting it into my pocket, taking it out and putting it back into the sky. One hundred and ninety-nine times we caught the moon and every time it was an experience of glory to him. Then he offered the moon to a stranger who walked by, and who did not understand that a gift of great price was freely offered, and so missed a timeless moment of celebration.

AFTERWORD

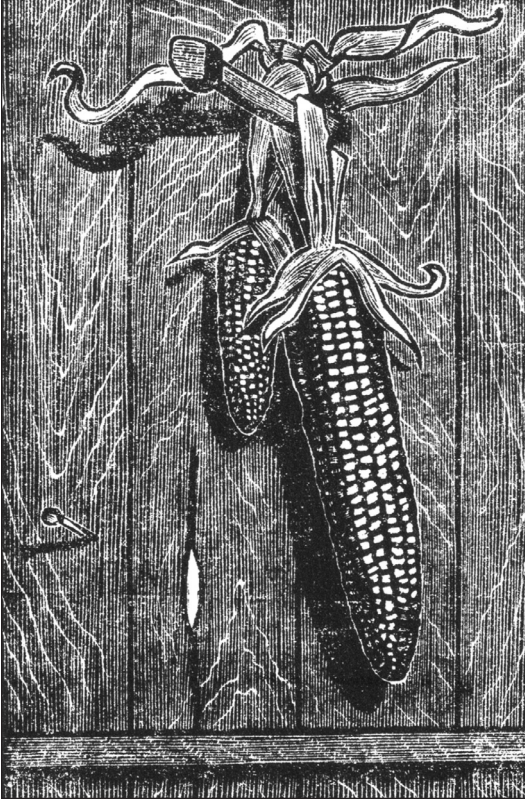
Robert E. Gard was my father. What a way to grow up.

Consider my tenth birthday, for example. I had four friends over and my folks were very mysterious about what was going to happen. When my friends arrived, we were led to the back yard. Three large pieces of cardboard had been propped up against trees—they read, Act One, Act Two, Act Three. We were told that the name of the play was to be “The Diamond in the Corn.” We were provided with a big piece of quartz and a box of old clothes. We were told that we had one hour, and that our parents would be over to watch the play at 4:00. Of course, we invented and produced a play. I see now that my parents were teaching me, however subtly, to understand that creativity begins at home, and that creativity can transform the most ordinary acts of daily life.

I remember accompanying my dad on field trips when I was a little girl. I remember some of the people he interviewed, and some of the people he schemed with, as he built the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association. I remember hanging posters and selling tickets for Wisconsin Idea Theater touring productions. I remember that when I was old enough to drive, I drove writers-in-residence—people like Marc Connelly or Studs Terkel—to their next writing workshop.

I had no idea what I was growing up with, really. In 1957, when I was nine years old, I spent a lot of time at the Women’s Club of Madison where my parents were putting on a show: my mother the producer, my father the coordinating writer-director. The show, “Man and His God,” was intended to bring all of the faith groups of Madison, Wisconsin, together to work on a pageant that would investigate the relationship between human beings and something greater, some “Other.” Gard had written:

In this day... of conformity and mediocrity, and of a seeming general



*I remember
accompanying
my dad on field
trips when I was
a little girl...*

willingness to accept less than the best, introspection seems called for... The great underlying desire of the Women's Club [is] to draw all the peoples of a fragmented... community together, regardless of race, color or creed, through universal and unselfish regard for a Creator.²

Five hundred people from twenty-four faith groups worked together, sharing the planning, writing, acting, dancing, singing, mask-making, and administrative tasks. A writer from the Milwaukee Journal said:

On what stage could you see St. Paul in company with Adam and Eve, Mephistopheles, Buddha, ancient Jewish prophets and the gods of Greek and Scandinavian mythology? Where could the sonorous words of the Old Testament be heard interspersed with a Japanese "noh" play, readings from the sacred Hindu scriptures, and poetry by such diverse authors as Aeschylus, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Christopher Marlowe?... All these ingredients and more have been

² *From the Women's Club scrapbook*

woven into a precedent-breaking production entitled “Man and His God”... Not a play, not a pageant in the usual sense, “Man and His God” is something new in modern theater.³

When I was a college student, I had a summer job helping out in a small town in Wisconsin. The multi-faceted project involved the Milwaukee Repertory Theater relocating for the summer and offering its summer season, not in Milwaukee but in Spring Green, a farming town of 1,100 people west of Madison. The summer also included acting and dance for young people and adults, exhibits, classes. It birthed a community theater. It even featured a noon physical fitness program intended to bring the business community and the artists together. It all sounds commonplace now, but in 1967 such community arts development programs were extraordinary. I didn't know at the time that my summer job, and that whole program, were made possible by the fledgling National Endowment for the Arts' first-ever “Access” grant, awarded to my dad's Office of Community Arts Development in the University of Wisconsin's College of Agriculture. So revolutionary was this idea that Mrs. Lyndon Johnson herself came to Spring Green on a site visit.

The list of activities I witnessed goes on and on: The huge intercultural pageant/festival in Milwaukee each year with Gard as writer-director. The writing clubs dotting the Wisconsin landscape. The original shows drawn from Wisconsin history, written first by Gard, and later by his associate, David Peterson, aired on WHA radio or touring to county fairs or state parks. The birthing of arts councils by Gard and his associates, Michael Warlum and Ralph Kohlhoff, throughout Wisconsin. The summer musical productions of shows like “The Fantasticks” at the University of Wisconsin Badgers football stadium.

Bob Gard was always writing, working on a portable Olympia typewriter in an office in our basement; a portrait of Wisconsin's turn-of-the-century Progressive Governor “Fighting Bob” LaFollette hung above the desk. Two hours before breakfast, every day, he wrote. Many of his books were about Wisconsin. Some were stories for young people. Some were just plain uncategorizable. (For instance, *University, Madison, USA* tells the history and lore of the University of Wisconsin-Madison but includes a fictional thread about a professor during the campus upheavals of the 1960's. This book, one of my favorites, being neither pure fact nor historical fiction, is hard to categorize and thus is often forgotten—yet it's a wonderful cultural insight into the University at a dramatic time in its history.) All of Gard's books are characterized by sensitivity to places and love of the human beings who live in them, in the context of an emerging, Progressive democracy. It is from this sensitivity to place, this humanistic response to the world, this connecting of creativity to democracy, that his philosophy of community arts development is drawn. That's why, in this Reader, the com-

³ “Great Religions Basis for Community Drama Project,” *Milwaukee Journal Women's Section*, April 28, 1957, pp. 1-2

munity arts section includes reflections on places and people. In “Notes for Writers,” Gard insists that a writer must understand his or her own roots before aspiring to great writing; similarly, he believes that the community arts activist must articulate a philosophy in which personal activism is rooted.

I don’t believe I have ever met such a big thinker. My father had ideas for personal life and for public life that went way beyond anything I’d encountered. When I was about twelve years old, I asked him why he was studying to become a Deacon in the Episcopal church. He responded that it was the same impulse that drove him to the theater: “They are both about the myth of man.” I am only now coming to understand the profound philosophical ground he was tilling.

When I left home for college and graduate school, majoring in social psychology and organizational behavior, I thought I’d left the arts behind. Then, in a public health class, Yale professor Seymour Sarason said something like this: “I’ve come to believe that the truly healthy community is one which cares as much about the creative and spiritual health of its members as about their physical health.”

That was the moment. Everything came together for me, and I saw how my father’s drive to enable the creative spark in all people to blaze up, his drive to help “bring all the peoples of a fragmented community together,” his drive to help the arts “flourish in small places as well as large... according to the will of the people,” his linking of the arts to democracy—I saw how it could all come together. It was a big idea, a thrilling idea, and I wanted to be part of it.

I never asked a lot of the questions that I should have. Still, how lucky we are that Gard wrote things down. *Grassroots Theater*, published when he was 45 years old, poses his aspirations; the *Arts in the Small Community*, 15 years later, made his ideas usable to practitioners; and *Coming Home to Wisconsin*, written in reflection after he retired, assesses the meaning of what he tried to do.

Many people are taking work that Gard and others did—whether they can attribute it or not—to new places. The community arts movement in America is thrilling today. Public support of art-making by all peoples is no longer a new idea. Art that relates to place, culture, and history is widely accepted. Articles are being written about organizational viability being linked to community relevance. Major foundations and the National Endowment for the Arts are talking about participation, not mere spectatorship. Technology is allowing people to participate and collaborate in creative exploration as never before. There are centers for the arts in tiny places as well as in urban areas. People are recognizing community arts as a contemporary art form. (Remember: “Not a play, not a pageant in the usual sense, ‘Man and His God’ is something new in modern theater”?)

Gard would be thrilled by it all. And he'd be the first to remind us that we will never really finish our work, for we are now and always about moving forward, about trying to create the America in which the vision of a spiritually healthy and "defragmented" democracy moves ever closer to reality.

If you try, you can indeed
Alter the face and the heart
Of America.⁴

*Maryo Gard Ewell
Gunnison, Colorado
July 2010*

⁴ Gard et al, *The Arts in the Small Community* p 98

CAREER NOTES ON ROBERT E. GARD

Robert E. Gard was born in Iola, Kansas, July 3, 1910. He was educated at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, and at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. He taught playwriting at the University of Kansas and at Cornell and became a Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation, Humanities Division, holding numerous Rockefeller Foundation grants for many years. With Professor Alexander M. Drummond, he helped establish the New York State Playwriting Project and assisted in creation of a statewide training program for New York State playwrights. In 1942, after teaching playwriting at the Banff School of Fine Arts in Canada, he founded and directed the Alberta Folklore and Local History Project, in association with the University of Alberta at Edmonton and the Rockefeller Foundation.

Robert E. Gard also helped in the formation of the Provincial Archives of Alberta in 1945, and his collections, assembled from first-hand accounts of pioneers still living, constitute today one of the rare collections of the University of Alberta.

In 1945 he received an offer to join the faculty of the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and took up residence there in the fall of that year, at which time he established the Wisconsin Idea Theatre. This was a cultural program designed to serve the entire state, and reflected popular concepts of Wisconsin theatre and literature as brought to the state and foreseen by the pioneers.

In Wisconsin, his chief areas of activity had been in the theatre arts and in creative writing, with a strong side activity in collecting and publishing the folklore of the state. In 1967 he organized and instituted the functional area of Arts Development under the aegis of the University-Extension. He had remained a specialist in the arts in smaller communities and rural areas.

In 1945 the Wisconsin Idea Theatre Conference came into being as a result of Gard's work. The Conference represented virtually all theatre interests

in the state. In 1948 he established the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association. Both organizations became key to the furthering of native literature and lore of Wisconsin. He remained as director of Arts Development until, at age 70, he retired from all administrative duties.

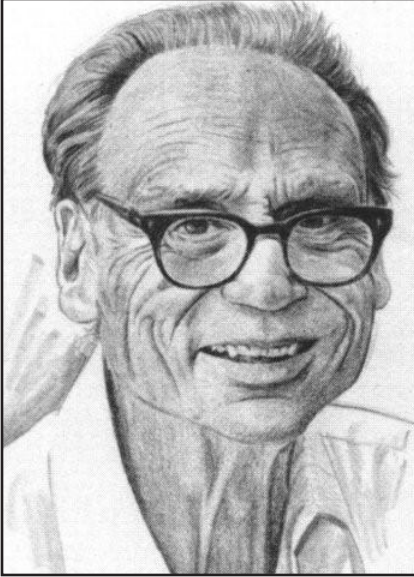
The state's first Wisconsin Arts Foundation and Council came about in part through Robert E. Gard's efforts, and he served as its first president. The organization is said to have been the first official state arts council and foundation in America. He also founded the National Community Theatre Center in 1958 and conducted a national survey of the American Community Theatre in 1957–58 for the Rockefeller Foundation. He established the nationally-known Rhinelander School of Arts in 1964, the Wisconsin Institute of Nationalities in 1966, and was appointed by Wisconsin Governor Warren Knowles as state chairman of the Nationalities Committee.

During more than ten years he wrote and directed large spectacle shows for the International Institute of Milwaukee County, which drew yearly audiences of more than 80,000. Governor Knowles also appointed Gard a member of the Portage Canal Committee, which determined uses for the historic waterway. He worked closely with the community of Portage on matters relating to its significant historical heritage and to the contemplated restoration of old Fort Winnebago.

As well as being founder of the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association, Gard was one of its early presidents. He guided the organization for more than thirty-five years as its chief adviser. When the Council for Wisconsin Writers (which gives awards for outstanding books by Wisconsin authors) was formed in 1964, Gard was one of the initiators. He became its president, and so served for more than five years. He was field editor for Duell, Sloan and Pearce, a New York publishing house, and in 1968, in association with October House, New York, he created the book-publishing corporation called Wisconsin House, which has since been sold and incorporated into another publishing firm.

Gard was elected as a Fulbright Research Scholar to Finland in 1959. There, he conducted the first study ever made of the role of the Finnish playwright in the Finnish theatre. He was invited to lecture at the University of Helsinki, oldest and largest of the Northern European Universities, and was also asked to conduct a seminar in American Studies at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. He was invited several times to return to Finland as guest of the University of Helsinki, as lecturer at the Vaasa Summer University, and at other institutions. He was a United States State Department specialist in theatre arts, attended World Theatre gatherings, and has been an international adviser on the arts to several countries.

In 1953 the Rockefeller Foundation sent Gard to the British Isles to make a survey of grassroots arts in Britain. His work had significant value in subsequent



*Robert E. Gard,
sketch by Ronald L. Daggett, Madison, Wisconsin.*

British-American programs, and he was invited to lecture and visit at Oxford and other British universities. Gard has been awarded the Gold Medal of the Finnish National Theatre for his work with Finnish playwrights, as well as the Medal of the University of Helsinki and the Jubilee Medal of the nation of Finland. His list of citations is long: Selection as a notable Wisconsin Author by the Wisconsin Library Association; Kansas Theatre Hall of Honor; Pabst \$1,000 award for service to nationality groups; \$1,000 award from the University of Wisconsin-Extension for Distinguished Service; Governor's Citation for Creativity; many citations of merit from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin; Distinguished Citizen Award from the Governor of Wisconsin; major citation from the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters; President of Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, 1977 (as well as terms as vice-president for letters and, later, arts); Member of the Finnish National Academy of Sciences and Letters; Honor Award from University of Kansas; National Chairman of Fulbright Theatre Committee; Distinguished Service Award, Wisconsin Theatre Association; Honorary Member, Wisconsin Regional Writers Association; Honorary Member, Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets; and many other awards and citations.

In 1967 Gard led a team which surveyed the American theatre for the National Theatre Conference. In the same year he received the first large grant made by the National Endowment for the Arts for work with the arts in smaller communities.

The following is a partial list of his more than forty published books:

- 1940 *Lake Guns*, Cornell University Press
1945 *Johnny Chinook*, Longmans. Green and Co., New York
1948 *Wisconsin Doorstep*, Longmans, Green and Co., New York
1948 *Cardiff Giant*, Cornell University Press
1949 *Theatre Adult Education*, National Adult Education Association
1952 *Midnight* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, and Little, Brown and Co., Boston
1955 *Grassroots Theatre*, University Press, Wisconsin
1956 *A Horse Named Joe* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1956 *Life as an Indian* (Editor), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1957 *Scotty's Mare* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1958 *Run to Kansas* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1958 *Memories of Arlington, Vermont* (Editor), Duell Sloan and Pearce, New York)
1959 *The One* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1960 *Community Theatre* (with Burley), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1961 *Devil Red* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1962 *Wisconsin Yarns* (with L. G. Sorden), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1964 *Puzzle of the Lost Dauphin* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1964 *Error of Sexton Jones* (Novel), Duell Sloan and Pearce, New York
1965 *America's Players, highlights of American Theatre* (with Semmes), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1965 *Cardiff Giant* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1965 *Finnish Folklore*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York
1967 *Theatre in America* (with Balch)
1968 *Romance of Wisconsin Place Names* (with L. G. Sorden), Wisconsin House
1969 *This Wisconsin*, Wisconsin House
1970 *University, Madison, U.S.A.*, Wisconsin House
1971 *Down in the Valleys*, Wisconsin House
1972 *Wild Goose Marsh*, Wisconsin House
1973 *Trail of the Serpent: Lore and Legend of Fox River Valley*, Wisconsin House
1973 *Wisconsin Sketches*, Wisconsin House
1974 *Woman of No Importance*, Wisconsin House
1975 *Wild Goose Country*, Wisconsin House
1976 *We Were Children Then*, Wisconsin House

- 1977 *An Innocence of Prairie*, Allison House
- 1978 *Time of Humanities*, Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters
- 1979 *The Deacon*, Allison House
- 1979 *Land, Home*, Wisconsin, Milwaukee Journal
- 1980 *Romance of Wisconsin Place Names* (Revised edition)
- 1981 *Coming Home to Wisconsin*, Stanton and Lee Publishers
- 1982 *Prairie Visions*
- 1990 *Napoleon's Ring* and *Beyond the Thin Line* (novels)

Robert E. Gard is also author of many articles, plays for radio, television and stage.

Other Honors and Offices

- State Folklorist of Wisconsin (By appointment of the governor)
- National Theatre Conference
- Foundation for Integrated Education
- Who's Who in the Midwest
- Dictionary of American Scholars
- Who's Who in America
- Who's Who in the East
- Who's Who in the American Theatre
- Playwriting Fellow, Rockefeller Foundation, 1938–40
- Rockefeller Foundation Grant (RF), Cornell University, 1940–43
- Rockefeller Foundation Grant (RF), Alberta, Canada, University of Alberta, 1943–45
- Traveling Fellow, National Theatre Conference, 1946
- RF Grant, University of Wisconsin, for special projects, 1948
- RF Grant, University of Wisconsin, for special projects, 1950
- RF Grant, Study: Cultural Arts in the British Isles, 1953
- RF Grant, Arts Research, University of Wisconsin, 1952–55
- RF Grant, Study: American Community Theatre, 1957
- Fulbright Research Grant, Finland, 1959
- United States State Department Grant, Vienna and Finland, 1961
- National Endowment for the Arts Grant, 1966
- RF Grant to Collect Oral History of Dr. David H. Stevens, 1976
- Grants to work with Senior Citizens in Creative Writing, 1978–80
- Many Humanities Committee Grants as director of projects

For more information, see <http://www.gardfoundation.org/works.html>

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- Gard, Robert E., *This is Wisconsin*, Wisconsin House, 1969.
- Gard, Robert E., *University, Madison, USA*, Wisconsin House, 1970.
- Gard, Robert E. and Ed Mueller, *Wild Goose Country: Horicon Marsh to Horseshoe Island*, Wisconsin House, 1975.
- Gard, Robert E., Aaron Bohrod and Mark Lefebvre, *Wisconsin Sketches*, Wisconsin House, 1973.

Colophon

This book was designed by Shawn K. Simmons in 2010. The typeface Neutra, used for headlines and captions, was created in 2002 by House Industries designer Christian Schwartz, who was inspired by type used by modernist architect, Richard Neutra. The typeface Electra, used for the body of the text and quotes, was originally designed by William Adison Dwiggins in 1935 and was translated into digital form by C.H. Griffith in 1988 and is now distributed by Linotype GmbH. This book was designed and epublished using Adobe InDesign, PhotoShop and Acrobat CS5 on a MacBook Pro OSX.