

Grant Wood and Marvin Cone. Artists of An Era

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

"Grant Wood and Marvin Cone. Artists of An Era." *The Annals of Iowa* 45 (1979), 82-83.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.8607>

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THE ANNALS OF IOWA

were also apparent. Western urban design, for example, copied the gridiron pattern almost slavishly despite local topography. Portland, located on high bluffs overlooking the Willamette River, resembled Des Moines, a prairie city, in design in 1880. Stockton, California was designed as a perfect square, eleven blocks by eleven blocks, for a total of 122 blocks. The West displayed the same architectural eclecticism prevalent in the East. A comparison of park systems showed a nearly equal record of success and failure, East and West. Why, then, does Larsen berate the West for lacking originality in city design, architecture, and parks? He strains the point, particularly after a strong chapter on population and demography in which he notes that over half the largest cities' populations came from other states (and nations). If the populations were drawn from elsewhere, including the East, is it any surprise that the civil engineers and businessmen who planned and laid out the cities copied what they knew?

In the category of minor annoyances, the study would have been helped by an early definition of terms. The author uses "city" and "town" interchangeably. Would it not be possible for a reader to assume that a "town" goes through stages of growth and development to become a "city?" Also, Larsen doesn't define what "frontier" means to him. He consistently refers to the twenty-four urban centers as "frontier towns," although a place containing 8,000 or more in population is presumably no longer in the center nor on the fringes of a frontier.

The real value of this study is seeing how the Western urban centers condensed the town-building experience to best their rivals and to gain the approbation of the urban East, the chief source of their inspiration.

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Grant Wood and Marvin Cone. Artists of An Era, by Hazel E. Brown. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1972. pp. xi, 150, Illus., \$6.95.

Cedar Rapids, Iowa was a place hospitable to those who

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worked in the arts during the first three decades of the twentieth-century. The talents of artists Grant Wood and Marvin Cone were nurtured there. Hazel Brown's book concentrates on the friendship between Wood and Cone and their relationships with the community of Cedar Rapids.

One might fear that the author would worship Grant Wood, but there is no awe of him; there is love, affection, awareness of human frailties and foibles. Miss Brown is a scrupulous observer, never, to her credit, a judgmental one. For example, she gives a factual account of how Wood rid himself of his wife—a chilling story, and Brown wittingly or unwittingly makes small, apparently light-hearted, statements about him that reveal much of his character.

The reproductions included in the book do not fulfill the intent stated in the jacket copy that an effort was made to reproduce works representative of both artists' mature styles. This is true of Cone's work, but not of Wood's. The reader is told that works owned only in the state, not elsewhere, were chosen. I don't understand this. Why? What *is* reproduced would never have won Wood his present place in American art history.

In Brown's narrative, Marvin Cone emerges as the better man, the better artist—a characterization certainly not without its defenders and its detractors.

Every conscientious teacher and every artist knows that art has a continuity. The artist owes much to the past, just as the future may owe something to him. Also, there is no progress in the arts, though there is change. Marvin Cone and Grant Wood were artists that contributed to such a continuity, in terms of the legacy they drew upon and the place they carved for themselves in American art history.

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