Pacific Coast Indian tribes’ members to the hops fields, the German-
Russians to sugar beet production, Mexican families to cotton farming,
and Chinese and Japanese gang labor to a variety of crops. This restora-
tion provides a more complete and nuanced picture of western labor
and helps make sense of the political interactions between farmers and
labor. A greater acknowledgment of the Reconstruction Era Black Codes
of the South as the basis of the Tramp Laws, which had spread across
the nation by the 1890s, would strengthen the argument, particularly
in regard to the cotton frontier of the Southwest. By the 1920s, migrant
agricultural labor was on its way to being re-racialized around an An-
glo/Mexican binary; as Wyman notes, “The Rio Grande was no longer
the border between the United States and Mexico — the real border
was becoming racial rather than geographical” (260).

Wyman also focuses on agricultural labor as an industrial system,
which highlights connections between the growth of the West in the
nineteenth century and the monoculture factory farming of today. Lo-
cavores and current students of globalization may be surprised to find
Washington apples in Manchester, England, and California peaches in
Europe in the nineteenth century. They were, in fact, a key element in
the development of the West. Finally, “because the West’s new crops
were now sold on both national and world markets, they were beset
with sudden, sharp price swings, during growing season and between
seasons. . . . In this regard fruit raising and other endeavors were no
different from western mining and logging, which also had heavy
start-up requirements and suffered frequent shutdowns over collaps-
ing prices” (19). The arc of globalization is longer and more pro-
foundly important than is often considered. Ironically, the regional
nature of Wyman’s study is what highlights this key element.

Hoboes were a key element of western history, and they have too
often disappeared from the historical record. Wyman has helped re-
store to the historical record the multiethnic peoples who were key to
harvesting and developing the West.


Reviewer Katherine Harper is manager of foundation relations at the Rock &
Roll Hall of Fame. Her research and writing have focused on the Iowa short-
story writer Ellis Parker Butler.

Homer Croy, favorite son of Maryville, Missouri, made his name writ-
ing warm, witty depictions of the American Midwest — the region he
dubbed “Corn Country.” The collection under review bundles samples of Croy’s 1910s–1950s magazine work, excerpts from his nonfiction works, and chapters from the memoirs Country Cured (1943) and Wonderful Neighbor (1945). The earliest tales bear the stamp of his friend Ellis Parker Butler, the Iowa-born humorist who first invited Croy to join the Authors League and who introduced him to the editors of the major magazines. By the early 1920s, Croy’s byline was appearing regularly in Collier’s and the Saturday Evening Post, and he had developed a distinctive style of his own. This was a writer capable of creating both the comic adventures of the culturally oblivious Peters clan (They Had to See Paris, 1926) and West of the Water Tower, a naturalistic novel of small-town sin and shame that earned its author a Pulitzer Prize in 1923. Croy’s reminiscences of rural Missouri are warm and whimsical, casual in tone but not slangy, often suggestive but never smutty. They paint a timeless picture of farming life.

Beyond one out-of-print monograph and a few articles, to date no serious examination has been made of Homer Croy’s writings. Nor has his fascinating life been documented in a full-length biography. The introduction and section headings to this book by editor Zachary Jack — a seventh-generation Iowan — are a valuable addition to what little today’s readers might know about the one-time chronicler of Corn Country.


Reviewer Breanne Robertson is a Ph.D. candidate in art history at the University of Maryland. She is the author of “‘The Cultivation of Corn in Mayan and Modern Times’: Lowell Houser’s Winning Design for the Ames Mural Competition” (Annals of Iowa, 2011).

As Maine politicians and cultural leaders clash over the fate of Judy Taylor’s labor-themed mural at the Augusta Department of Labor building, Murals of Iowa, 1886—2006 offers a timely and persuasive argument for the preservation of Iowa’s endangered artistic heritage. In this foray into the history of Iowa murals, Gregg R. Narber expands the scope of his earlier research on New Deal murals to provide a comprehensive look at mural art in Iowa from the late nineteenth century to the present day. With this ambitious undertaking, he seeks to familiarize Iowa residents with their cultural heritage, thereby increasing their appreciation for and protection of these public monuments.

Narber chronicles concurrent developments in society, politics, and fine art to impart a more sympathetic attitude for public art com-