

The first two volumes in this massive project have already received the C. F. W. Coker Prize from the Society of American Architects and the Thomas Jefferson Prize from the Society for History in the Federal Government. This guide is an indispensable resource for any historian who plans to conduct research on the development of Iowa or other trans-Mississippi states.

Confessions of a Depression Muralist, by Frank W. Long. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997. xi, 179 pp. \$24.95 cloth.

REVIEWED BY BARBARA MELOSH, GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY

This lively and engaging book recounts Frank W. Long's ten-year stint as muralist for the Treasury Section of Fine Arts (the Section), which commissioned 1,100 murals and 300 sculptures for New Deal-era federal buildings (mostly post offices). Long competed energetically for Section commissions and won more of them than any other artist. Nonetheless, he portrays his work for the Section with decided ambivalence. Long derides the Section's commitment to American scene painting—American subjects rendered in representational style—and concludes that the demands of public art "threaten[ed] [his] artistic integrity."

Confessions also suggests the vexed and contradictory character of New Deal-era regionalism. The Section tried to select artists who had some local connection, and encouraged artists to capture the locality in their paintings. Long's mural for Berea, Kentucky, has been championed as one of the few to exemplify a truly local commission awarded to a recent resident. However, Long was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, and educated in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Paris. He moved to Berea for professional reasons—to execute a mural commission in nearby Louisville.

Regionalism itself was a contradictory ideal, since regionalist consciousness was largely the product of an emerging national politics and identity. Thus, American scene painting was often a celebration of regional distinctiveness set in a remembered or imagined past. In this invented tradition, the Midwest loomed large as an ideal economic and political landscape, emblem of agrarian democracy; thus, the history of the Section helps to illuminate the cultural history of the Midwest.

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