

George Caleb Bingham: Missouri's Famed Painter and Forgotten Politician, by Paul C. Nagel. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005. xviii, 161 pp. Illustrations, recommended reading, index. \$19.95 paper.

Reviewer Greg Olson is exhibit curator at the Missouri State Archives. An artist by training, he has created exhibits for a number of museums. His research interests include the history of the indigenous people of Iowa and Missouri.

George Caleb Bingham's paintings of frontier Missouri brought him nationwide fame and admiration, yet he was a restless man whose life was filled with many heartbreaking disappointments and unfulfilled desires. In this new biography of Bingham, Paul Nagel portrays the artist as a passionate man whose interests often drew him outside the confines of his studio. Although Bingham dabbled in preaching and business at various times in his life, it was his love of politics that often distracted him from painting, sometimes for months or even years at a time.

A native Virginian, Bingham was just eight years old when he moved with his family to Missouri while it was still a territory in 1819. As an adult, he made a name for himself by painting scenes of the rustic river men, fur traders, and colorful political figures who inhabited the frontier in the middle of the nineteenth century. Bingham traveled widely across the United States and even lived for a time in Europe as he sought to improve his skills as an artist and increase his income through the sale of his work.

Bingham's artistic accomplishments are well remembered today, but his political achievements, which, Nagel contends, were not insignificant, have been nearly forgotten. A staunch Whig who also owned slaves, Bingham stepped boldly into the heated debate over slavery and states rights as the nation stood on the brink of Civil War. While serving a single term in the Missouri legislature from 1848 to 1850, Bingham led the effort to draft a series of resolutions that expressed the desire of many residents of the border state to preserve the Union. When the majority of the legislature rejected his resolutions, the artist angrily refused to seek reelection. Nagel argues that Bingham's strong opinions and quick temper frustrated his desire to seek higher political office and, later in life, to become a diplomat in Europe. Nonetheless, the artist managed to channel his unfulfilled aspirations into a compelling series of political scenes. Among these were some of his best-known epic paintings, *The County Election*, *The Verdict of the People*, and *Stump Speaking*.

This biography is part of the University of Missouri Press's Missouri Heritage Reader Series. For a decade, the series has published books about Missouri's rich cultural heritage written primarily for

adult new readers. The emphasis of the series is not to present new scholarship but to make the state's culture and history available to a broad audience. Nagel's volume is a worthy addition to the series. It succeeds in making the complex story of Missouri's most famous nineteenth-century artist both accessible and engaging. Readers seeking a concise and solidly written account of the life of George Caleb Bingham and the politically charged times that fueled both his passions and his artwork will find the book rewarding.

A Home in the West, Or, Emigration and Its Consequences, by M. Emilia Rockwell; edited by Sharon E. Wood. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005. 142 pp. Illustration. \$15.95 paper.

Reviewer Annamaria Formichella Elsdon is associate professor of English at Buena Vista University. She is the author of *Roman Fever: Domesticity and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing* (2003).

The heroine of *A Home in the West*, Annie Judson, has serious misgivings about her husband's proposed relocation from Connecticut to the prairie, fearing the pain of leaving her family. Moved by his inability to thrive economically, however, she puts aside personal concerns and joins Walter on a daring journey to the West. Annie's worries fade away in the village of Newburg, Iowa, where the materialism of the Northeast is replaced by spirituality and humanitarianism, and hard work is justly rewarded. The Judsons establish a comfortable home, and Annie's last remaining conflict is eased when her family decides to join her in Iowa. Walter offers the novel's closing reflection on the prosperity of the frontier, along with a reminder that such rewards are available only to the "honest, persevering laborer" (140).

First published in 1858, *A Home in the West* is, as Sharon Wood asserts in her introduction, "probably the earliest [novel] to portray life in Iowa" (2). The novel's fictional Newburg draws on details from the real-life locations of Lansing and Dubuque, Iowa, giving readers a glimpse of the newly settled state's development in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the novel is noteworthy as an early articulation of the American Dream. Narrative strategies such as direct addresses to the reader and meditations on the wonders of frontier life make for provocative reading. Readers will recognize the conventions of the domestic novel manipulated to serve an expansionist project, making *A Home in the West* a compelling document for students of Iowa history, nineteenth-century literature, and women's studies.

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