

The **P**ALIMPSEST

JANUARY 1949

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Art Centers in Iowa

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THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

THE MEANING OF PALIMPSEST

In early times a palimpsest was a parchment or other material from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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THE PALIMPSEST

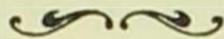
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Historical Survey

With the rise of cultural regionalism in the twentieth century, Iowa along with the rest of the Midwest became increasingly conscious of local talent. In literature this idea took shape in such publications as John T. Frederick's *The Midland*. In art it produced such painters as Grant Wood. Synonymously with this growing awareness that art was not for eastern cities only, another idea developed: that art is not alone something for a few painters who can afford it or are lucky enough to have a patron. By now it is understood that art is for everyone the creative expression of life around them.

It is this new conception of art as something not to be set off by itself that has led to the creation of art centers in Iowa. In the classes at these centers children of six, eight, or ten, and retired businessmen of sixty-five have an equally good time. They have learned that pictures are not only to be looked at in some metropolitan museum during a spare half-hour between trains, but also some-

thing which they themselves can paint, just as they can learn ceramics, metal work, weaving, and other crafts. Iowans have learned to use their hands for more than whittling, and as they learned, art has become a part of Iowa culture.

An important part of this development is a new definition of an art center and its place in community life. There was a time when rural areas and small urban communities such as are found in Iowa had few opportunities to study and enjoy the visual arts. It was, in fact, one of the weak spots in American culture. Since then the art center has been recognized as indispensable to a well-rounded community cultural program—just as indispensable as the public library. But this new cultural stature for art has come along with a change in the conception of an art center. It is no longer a place limited to passive visual participation in art exhibits. Now it includes an active study of crafts, techniques, and various art media, besides a program of classes, forums, demonstrations, and lectures. Eventually the application of art principles growing out of such a program will inevitably carry over into the home and the community. If one of the functions of fine arts is “to bring order and design into the visual aspects of the environment created by human society,” then art centers have a real function to perform for Iowa culture.

Some Iowa art centers go back nearly forty years. Dubuque, for example, except for an interval of two years during World War II, has been active since 1910. The Art Association there started with only ten members, which have increased to 125 in 1948. Even in those early years the Association managed to sponsor lectures by men from the Chicago Art Institute and the fine arts department of the State University, to send members to the Stone City artist's colony in 1932, and to conduct classes as well as five or six exhibits a season.

At times Dubuque had a paid director. Adrian Dornbush, for example, was, in the mid-1920's, the head of the "Little Institute" with a gallery in the old engine house on Locust Street. More recently a Junior Art Association was formed under the sponsorship of the Association. The Rt. Rev. Msgr. J. M. Wolfe later became the chairman and has conducted its activities for many years. Its aim is to encourage originality in art among school children, and an exhibition of student work is held every year.

As yet the Dubuque Art Association has no building of its own. Meetings are held in the art room of the Public Library where pictures belonging to the Association are hung and visiting exhibitions are shown. According to the current president, Mr. John Heeb, the aim of the Dubuque As-

sociation is "to develop a deeper appreciation of art, to bring worthwhile work to the locality for all the Public." To accomplish this, a six-month program has been arranged for 1948-1949 with exhibitions, lectures by experts, and a local artist's show from a tri-state area.

Not all Iowa art centers can be fully reported here and some will necessarily be described only briefly where there is a special reason for their continued support. Cedar Rapids and Cedar Falls, for example, have the proximity of art departments in Coe College and Iowa State Teachers College to stimulate art activities.

Cedar Rapids has had an art association, established in 1911, almost as long as Dubuque. Later the Little Gallery opened there under Edward B. Rowan in 1928 with funds from the Carnegie Foundation and was intended as an example for similar galleries in other towns of its size. For a period in the depression years (1932-1934) it was Grant Wood and the Stone City Colony which made the city art-conscious. Now both of these are gone and Cedar Rapids is dependent chiefly on the proximity of Marvin Cone on the staff at Coe College and a well-developed public school art program to keep alive this heritage.

The Cedar Falls Association on the other hand is fairly recent. It was established in 1940 and in

late fall of the following year it inaugurated the annual Northeastern Iowa Artists Exhibit in a gallery donated by the Nuhn family — Mrs. W. C. Nuhn, Ferner Nuhn, the writer, and Marjorie Nuhn, the artist. Its program includes classes as well as exhibits and an annual auction of original work by members.

Both these communities, however, receive special stimulation just as Iowa City does from the excellent department of fine arts at the State University and as Mt. Vernon does from the Armstrong Hall of Fine Arts at Cornell College. But whatever the impetus, art interest in Iowa has been growing steadily. For a period in the thirties and early forties WPA funds gave it a boost. Earlier, as in Davenport, special bequests from art patrons provided the initial focus.

Another example of a bequest that was responsible for a municipal art center is at Fort Dodge. There the Blanden Memorial Art Gallery, the gift of Charles G. Blanden, was opened in 1932. What was unusual about the bequest was that Mr. Blanden, a businessman, financier, and patron of the arts, had not lived in Fort Dodge for forty years. However, he maintained a continuous interest in the city where he had once (1887-1888) been mayor, and after the death of his wife, who had formerly taught school in Fort Dodge, he presented the money for the Gallery

as a memorial to her. The question of a site for the Gallery was solved by the heirs of the estate of Woolsey Welles, a pioneer settler in the area, who gave land for the building. The Gallery, designed by E. O. Damon, was officially opened June 5, 1932, with a triple exhibition of: (1) paintings owned by Fort Dodge residents, (2) paintings by former residents of the city, and (3) paintings by the current members of the Art Guild.

The Gallery is municipally-owned, with a board of trustees appointed by the Mayor. Open every Sunday afternoon, it also shows exhibitions sponsored by the Fort Dodge Federation of Arts, the Fort Dodge Art Guild, and the Camera Club. The exhibitions are still of both out-of-state and local artists. In the last two years exchange exhibits with Cedar Falls and Cedar Rapids have been arranged. A review of a year's activities indicates that the Blanden Gallery is an active force in the cultural life of Fort Dodge.

One of the most recent art centers is the Central Iowa Art Association at Marshalltown which was organized in 1946. For the first year classes and exhibits were held in the Public Library. Then the Marshall County Board of Supervisors permanently donated rooms on the third floor of the Courthouse. Now the Association has a 40-foot studio in addition to a large gallery for its monthly exhibitions. The rooms are open every

day with children's classes and oil and watercolor classes for adults taught by one permanent instructor and outside instructors from the State University, State Teachers College, the Des Moines Art Center, or Coe College. In 1946, the first year, the membership reached 300; by 1949 it had increased to 500.

A few Iowa art centers have an interesting enough history to warrant separate treatment and they will be discussed in the following articles. It is, however, evident from this brief survey that art has a definite place in Iowa culture. Initiated by a few individuals, given a brief shock-treatment by WPA funds in the late thirties, art has by now fully recovered from the letdown of World War II to take its place beside music and literature in the life of this State.

JEAN B. KERN

First Municipal Gallery

Davenport has long been a friend of the arts and sciences. The Academy of Science opened its own building back in 1878. The city helped sponsor a Tri-City orchestra as early as 1916. In 1921 Davenport residents raised \$31,000 to entertain the National Federation of Music Clubs. It is not too surprising, then, that four years later Davenport opened one of the first municipally-owned and operated public art galleries in the United States. The story behind this achievement is worth telling.

Early in 1925 the city of Davenport accepted a gift of over 300 paintings from the private collection of C. A. Ficke, a prominent attorney and former mayor. However, the gift was made with the provision that the city should make it the nucleus of "The Davenport Municipal Art Gallery." It also required that a suitable building and some funds be provided for the maintenance of the Gallery. In order to make a public project of this, it was necessary to introduce a law in the Forty-first General Assembly "authorizing the establishment of municipal art galleries in cities acting under special charter having a population of fifty thousand (50,000) or more, providing for the appoint-

ment of a board of art trustees for the management of such galleries, and fixing the duties, powers and responsibilities of such board."

Following the enactment of this law, the newly-appointed board of nine trustees was faced with the problem of finding a building suitable for use as a Gallery. It was at this time that the old Armory building and skating rink belonging to the city was turned over to the Board, and funds were appropriated to remodel it into a Gallery and to hire a Director and the necessary staff. The Davenport Municipal Art Gallery was consequently opened to the public in October, 1925.

This was just the beginning. The Gallery in less than three years became such a part of the community life that newspapers boasted in paid advertisements about Davenport having "The First Municipal Art Gallery in Iowa," and cartoons about the Gallery's activities also appeared in the local papers. The original collection of C. A. Ficke was evaluated by Mr. Harshe, an expert from the Chicago Art Institute, and found to contain the largest group of Mexican colonial paintings in this country with representative examples of such painters as Echave, Juarez, and Arteaga.

To this collection other purchases have been added, purchases which were made possible by additional donors such as Dr. C. T. Lindley, Clara Brandt, and L. W. Ramsey. Funds were also

available for purchases from the Friends of Art, an auxiliary organization which incorporated in 1928 to help the Gallery program with financial assistance from its membership dues. Recently, a donor program has been worked out by the Board and the Director, creating a plan for the disposal of gifts for purchases. Recently also this building-up of the permanent collection has been linked with the children's art program, which will be described later.

How much is the Davenport Gallery used? The attendance figures for 10 months in 1946-1947 (the Gallery is closed each summer during July and August) ran as high as 31,400. Naturally the greatest assets are the studio space and the exhibition rooms. But these are by no means all. The Gallery has become almost as much a part of the public life of the city as the public library and the city parks. For example, pictures from the Gallery are circulated on loan to other civic buildings such as the YMCA and the Chamber of Commerce. The Gallery is also available for use by clubs and for small musicales. It sponsors lectures and films on art or related subjects. It is used for Sunday teas and lectures. It has sponsored exhibits of national importance such as the Britannica Collection (April, 1947) and the Gallery holds annual exhibits of local and regional artists. There is an art library containing material

on the history of art which is available for circulation, and finally there is a community art room which sponsors an art fair to encourage the sale of work by local artists and to make such work available to the public.

Thus it is evident that the public comes to the Davenport Municipal Gallery. It is also evident that the Gallery projects its activities into the community. One of the most interesting and important phases of this is the children's program on which a great deal of time and thought has been spent.

Since the Gallery is municipally owned, the selection of children for the Saturday art classes has been put on a democratic basis. There is a quota system worked out so that one out of every 150 school children may have instruction. Selection of these children who range from 7 to 18 years is made on the basis of suggestions from the individual schools which send a list made up of pupils showing particular interest and talent in art. There is always a waiting list beyond the number accepted — a number which has at the present grown to 130. The children are charged 50 cents for their materials, but their instruction is paid for by the Friends of Art. So great is the enthusiasm for these classes, that the Gallery hopes to be able to expand this program to include all children who are interested in art whether or not

they have any initial talent in drawing or painting.

These Saturday classes are by no means the extent of the program for children. They are encouraged also to attend traveling exhibits and tours are arranged for the schools of Davenport, Rock Island, and Moline as well as for rural schools of the area. Special groups such as Camp Fire Girls and Girl Scouts also have tours arranged for them. For two years now all children of the 4th, 5th, and 6th grades have been coming to the Gallery to help select a painting for the permanent collection. In November of 1946 the children even contributed nickels and pennies toward the purchase of Aaron Bohrod's "Merry Go Round" which they chose as their favorite from a current exhibition. The next year they selected Fletcher Martin's "The Matador"; the Gallery, however, on that occasion purchased the canvas. In the words of the Director, Elizabeth A. Moeller, "We are employing the democratic process of having our people help us in the selection of some of our acquisitions — quite in contrast to what was once done in galleries."

The unique way in which school and Gallery work together in Davenport was recently publicized in the February, 1948, issue of *School Arts*. The Rock Island schools have responded to the Gallery's excellent program for children by sponsoring an art essay contest. Children come to the

Gallery, study the paintings (usually during a show of local Rock Island artists), and then write competitive essays for which awards are made to the schools as well as to the individuals. It is hoped that this program eventually will lead to a child's gallery as well as to informal classes for all children who are interested in art.

The program of instruction at the Davenport Gallery is not limited to children. There are currently three adult art classes in painting, in design, and in figure and portrait drawing. For two of these classes college credit is given and instructors are borrowed from the art department of St. Ambrose College.

One of the most interesting exhibits at the Davenport Municipal Gallery is the one for "Art and Artists along the Mississippi." The first was held in 1940, with a second in 1941, after which the exhibit was given up during the war years. Plans are underway, however, to revive this show in 1949. Designed for artists along the Mississippi Valley from Minneapolis to New Orleans, it has shown both amateurs and established artists such as Emil Ganzo, Grant Wood, John Steuart Curry, Aaron Bohrod, and Thomas Benton. Related naturally to the development of regional consciousness in the Middle West, this show at least furnishes an exhibit outlet for the many local artists who until fairly recently were dependent on

eastern galleries to furnish opportunities for their work to be shown.

The Davenport Municipal Gallery, through its classes, exhibitions, tours, circulating art library, and lectures on art appreciation has become a vital part of the cultural life of the entire community. It still has problems but its possibilities are much greater than its problems. Gradually the Gallery rooms have been relighted and redecorated, permanent storage racks have been built, and a conservation program for at least the most valuable items of the permanent collection has been put into effect. The old armory and skating rink at 120 West Fifth Street has come a long way in the last twenty-five years.

JEAN B. KERN

WPA Project Ten Years Later

Back in the depression days of the 1930's nearly everybody was getting some kind of federal aid — even artists. The WPA federal art project was devised particularly to aid writers and painters, though other arts such as drama were also included. Iowa was soon a part of this program. A State director was appointed, and WPA centers were set up at such cities as Des Moines, Mason City, Ottumwa, and Sioux City. None of these, however, survived the withdrawal of federal funds except Sioux City.

There are several reasons for the healthy state of the Sioux City Center. First of all it was a community project which touched more than just a few artists or art patrons. This seems to have been true from the very beginning, but it needs some explanation.

There was interest in art at Sioux City even before WPA days. Men such as E. E. Lewis, attorney and realtor, had entertained Lorado Taft and the early settler, George Kingsnorth, had a daughter who was interested in painting. Alice Kingsnorth Lawler promoted art for over half a century in the pioneer river town. It was in a small public art gallery which she founded in the

main library building that Roy Langley, later Director of the Center, first taught his children's art classes, the nucleus for the present art center.

When WPA funds were later available for federal art centers in such midwest cities as Sioux City, the Junior League which had provided scholarships in art classes, along with some artists and other interested people formed a Sioux City Art Association with a small subscription assessment and petitioned federal assistance for a WPA project. The new organization represented a reorganization of the former Sioux City Society of Fine Arts which Mrs. Lawler had founded.

The problem of finding a building was solved by the Williges brothers, a local retail and wholesale fur company. The Williges sons gave, in honor of their father, August Williges, some spacious and fireproof rooms for the Art Center in the basement of their centrally-located, downtown building. The space was donated rent-free and that policy has been continued ever since.

Everybody then became interested in the new Center. The two newspapers supported it enthusiastically. One hundred and fifty people — businessmen, Junior Leaguers, a teacher-supervisor of the public schools, and numerous volunteer workers all donated spare time and energy to helping the project get underway. Electricians and carpenters on WPA payrolls donated additional

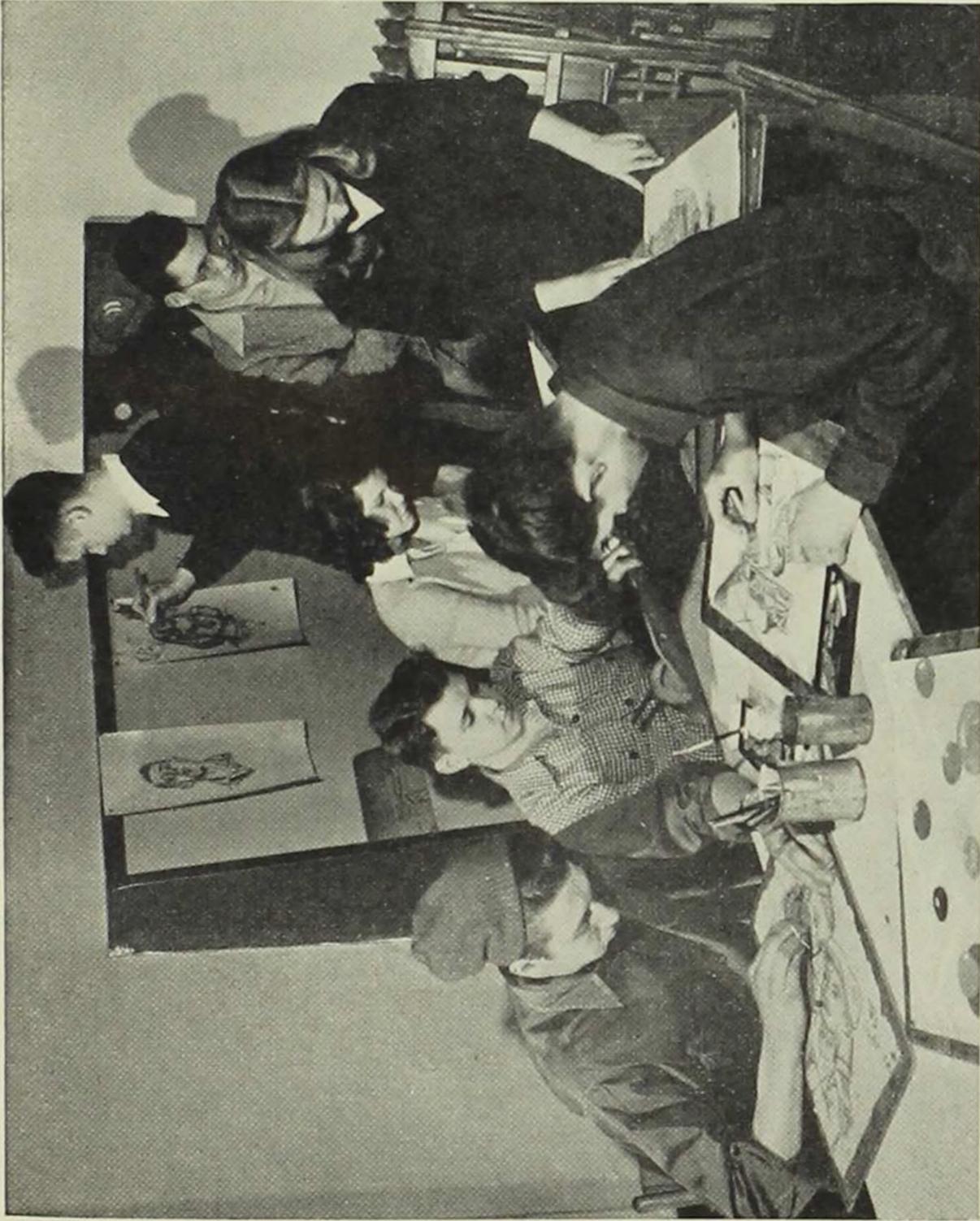


PHOTO BY DAVENPORT DEMOCRAT AND LEADER

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS AT DAVENPORT MUNICIPAL GALLERY

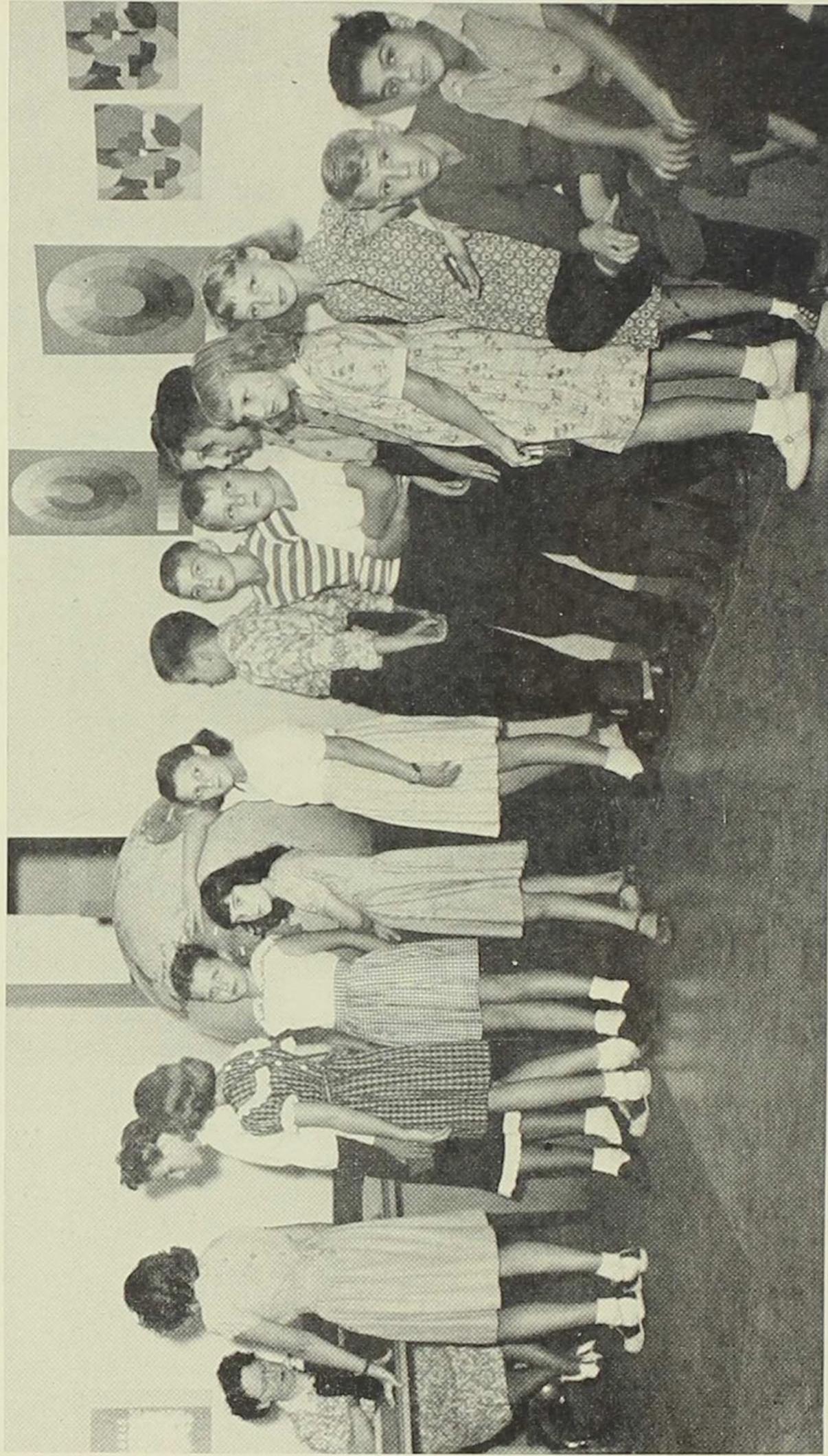


PHOTO BY SIOUX CITY JOURNAL

CHILDREN WAITING TO REGISTER AT SIOUX CITY ART CENTER

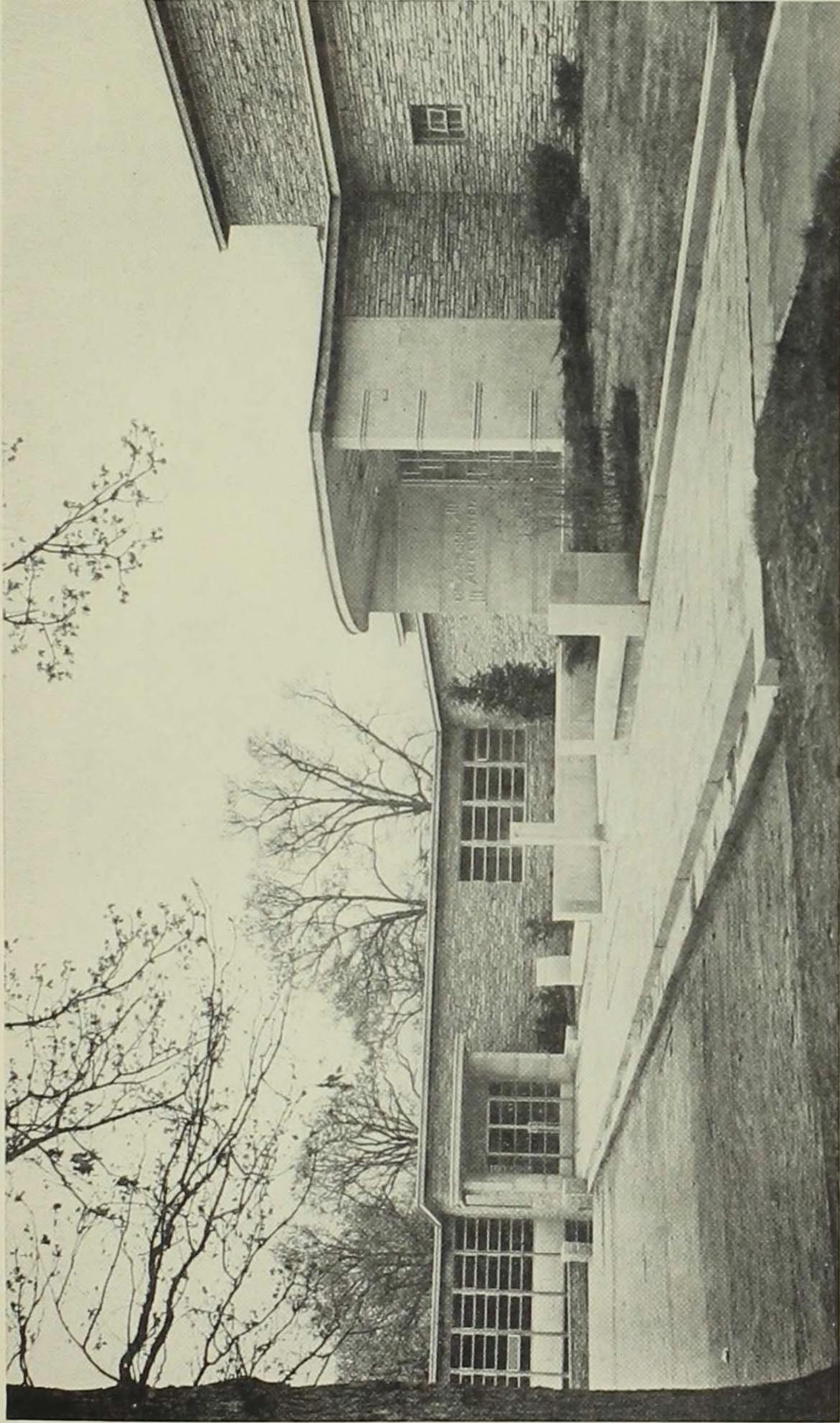


PHOTO BY MARION PEASE

DES MOINES ART CENTER

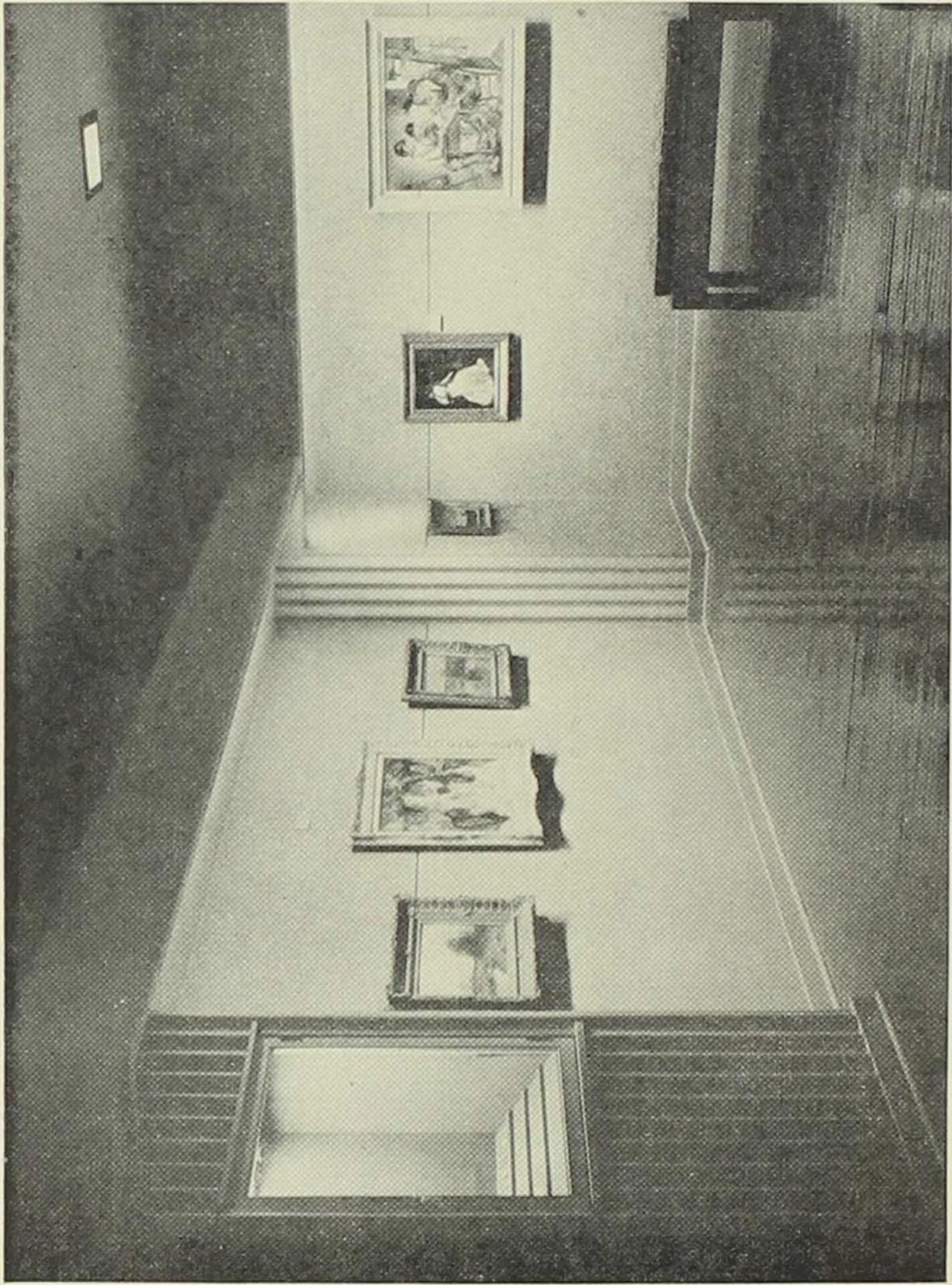


PHOTO BY DAVENPORT DAILY TIMES

DAVENPORT MUNICIPAL GALLERY

hours amounting to two days of free labor. Seventeen members of the Master Plumbers and Steamfitters Union, Local 18, took a Saturday afternoon off and donated their labor to install needed equipment throughout the galleries, classrooms, carpenter shop, weaving room, and poster shop. Young people from the National Youth Administration volunteered help also, and the manual training classes in the public schools helped build easels and equipment.

It was inevitable with so many helping, that interest in the new Center should stay at fever pitch. More than 2,000 came to the opening on February 20, 1938: 300 stopped to register for classes. The State Director of the WPA art project, Francis Robert White, was present along with distinguished visitors from outside the State. Everyone who had helped was consequently interested in the program and success of the new Center. Roy Langley who had taught art to the public library classes became one of the first instructors of the Center, and more recently has served as Director, until he was replaced in the summer of 1948 by Mr. Carl F. Riter, the present Director. The teaching staff of the Center has varied from one to twelve in more prosperous times.

WPA funds have long since been withdrawn and the Center is now supported from three sources. Part of the money comes from the city

with a one-sixteenth mill levy in city taxes. From this tax about \$4,500 is received annually. Tuition fees yield \$800 a year and the rest is made up from membership fees. A membership in the Sioux City Art Center Association has annual dues of \$5 for an associate, \$10 for an active patron, \$25 or over for a patron, and \$100 for the institutional patron. Thus the Sioux City Center is supported partly by taxes, partly by membership dues and partly by gifts from art patrons. Its budget is therefore not so secure as the Davenport Municipal Gallery, but the fact that it has tax funds at all for its use is witness to the interest which was built up in the city at large at the initial organization.

How much is the Center used? During the season, 1948-1949, it had 125 children between the ages of 9 and 12 enrolled in Saturday morning classes with 100 more on the waiting list because of lack of equipment and instructors. The children pay part of the cost of their materials, but the Center furnishes some materials and the instruction. Thus the expense to the child is low enough to enable all who are interested to apply. The average attendance at a Saturday class is 85 which precludes much individual instruction. Emphasis is put on good drawing, the use of color, and composition in the initial instruction which includes drawing and painting in various media.

Outdoor classes are held when the weather is favorable and a variety of experience and subject matter is thus made possible to the children. They respond to it enthusiastically, releasing their imaginations in creative work that offers a very wholesome way to spend an otherwise idle Saturday morning.

There are ten other classes offered at the Center besides a class for teen-age young people, for which regular tuition is charged. In addition about 90 adults take work in life drawing, beginning and advanced painting, water color, silk screen, lithography, ceramics, color and design, photography, and crafts. All kinds of people with all kinds of other interests attend these classes. Stenographers, housewives, businessmen, farmers, and farmers' wives mingle in the classes, which for some are an escape from the typewriter, for others a sedative to jangling nerves, and for all a widening of their cultural horizon.

Unexpected talent has frequently appeared in these Art Center classes. Two housewives, Mrs. Alphid Olson and Mrs. Winifred Story, who never before had had a brush in their hands, began to place repeatedly in the six state competitive shows at the Joslyn Memorial Gallery in Omaha. A high school girl, Mary Editha Webster, whose entire training had been at the Sioux City Art Center, placed fourth in a national com-

petition with 700,000 entries conducted by the *American Magazine* youth forum. During World War II, soldiers from the flying fortress base at Sioux City painted at the Center and sometimes won prizes in the shows.

To encourage local talent the Art Center Association has recently established an annual scholarship providing for free instruction in a minimum of three classes per week. The Association named this award the "Williges Scholarship" in honor of the family which has given the Center its building space since 1938.

The Center has become the focus of other creative activities in Sioux City. Musicales are held there frequently. A creative writers' guild and a Camera Club also hold meetings there, and other cultural groups such as the Garden Club and the Bird Club make use of its facilities. Art enthusiasts hold a monthly dinner meeting at the Center at which a program related to the arts is presented.

Moreover the entire city has grown art-conscious in the last ten years. Sioux City homes show Iowa landscapes and an occasional portrait. Murals have appeared in clubs and recreation rooms. Two women's organizations have instituted art shows at the Center to encourage local artists. The art department of the Woman's Club has, for example, inaugurated an all-Iowa water color show with prizes and a traveling exhibit of

the 40 best pictures entered. Judging for this show is done by some prominent art authority brought to Sioux City by the Woman's Club for that purpose. This annual Iowa water-color show is the only traveling exhibition that originates in Iowa.

The American Association of University Women also has sponsored a tri-state (Nebraska, South Dakota, and Iowa) competition in oil painting. This year their Northwest Iowa Oil Show will be expanded to include the entire State. The Exhibition, scheduled for April 30-May 31, 1949, will be called the "Iowa May Show" and will be open to all Iowa artists. The first prize at this Exhibition will be \$100 and additional prizes will also be awarded by Eugene Kingman, Director of the Joslyn Memorial Art Museum of Omaha, Nebraska, who will judge the show.

Besides these two annual competitive shows, the Center's program includes a large schedule of traveling exhibitions on the average of two a month from September through May. These exhibits may be one-man shows, loans from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, or shows selected from prominent galleries. To accompany them the Center has a program of conducted tours, illustrated lectures, gallery talks, and demonstrations to establish a basis from which visitors can judge and appreciate works of art.

Thus the Sioux City Art Center, begun in 1938 as a WPA project, has grown to a community art center composed of 5 classrooms, 3 galleries, and an office, with a well-rounded program of classes, lectures, and exhibitions. In the words of its new Director, Carl F. Riter, "The high enthusiasm of Sioux Cityans already associated with the Art Center is a real indication of its potential values to the entire community."

JEAN B. KERN

The Des Moines Art Center

The largest and newest art center in Iowa is the Des Moines Art Center which was officially opened to the residents of the State on June 2-4, 1948. Designed by the Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen, founder of the Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, the new building is a warm stone structure fitted to the contour of the rolling lawns of Greenwood Park. Architecturally it is something of which the State can be proud. The classrooms are new, light, modern, and airy. There is a large lobby, comfortably furnished and filled with reflected light from a pool just outside. It has galleries for both small and large exhibitions, with movable partitions. It has an auditorium which will seat 250 for concerts and lectures, rooms for club meetings, three kitchenettes with facilities for teas, a library, and meeting space for art forums and art clinics.

How does Des Moines happen to have one of the best modern museums in the Midwest? The credit goes originally to James Depew Edmundson who when he died in 1933 provided in his will for the construction of a municipal museum as a gift to the city of Des Moines and to the people of Iowa. When construction of the proposed art

center was delayed by the war, Edmundson's bequest was wisely invested by the trustees of the estate so that at the time the building was finished in 1948 at a cost of \$700,000 there was still \$100,000 left over to be used for purchases for the permanent collection of the Center. Thus an Iowa pioneer boy born in a log cabin but destined to rise in almost Horatio Alger fashion to an eminent position as a banker, financier, and patron of culture is responsible for Iowa's having one of the handsomest buildings of its kind in the country.

While it is perhaps significant that Edmundson, who commissioned the Sherry Edmundson Fry Statue of Chief Mahaska for Oskaloosa, is the man responsible for the present art center building, it is clear that the Center was not built in a cultural vacuum. The Des Moines Association of Fine Arts was organized back in 1916. In its articles of incorporation drawn up a few months later (in 1917), it was stated that the general purpose of the Association was to be "the founding and maintenance of an institution of art" at Des Moines. It had become a matter of public pride with these founders of the Association that Des Moines should not fall behind Kansas City, Omaha, or Minneapolis in its appreciation of the fine arts.

For more than twenty years after the founding of this Association, its activities were limited to

the gradual accumulation of paintings. It was not until 1938 (five years before the Edmundson fund was available for use) that it was decided to find temporary housing for art activities. It was then that the second floor at 610 $\frac{1}{2}$ Walnut Street was decided upon as a centrally located headquarters. After remodeling was completed, the center was opened November 14 with a one-man show by Russell Cowles, a former Des Moines artist. There was also a WPA collection of 50 prints (etchings, lithographs, linoleum, and wood-blocks) direct from a first showing in Washington, D. C., the week before.

For ten years the Walnut Street Center continued as the focus of art interest in the community. Augmented at first by WPA funds, given consistent support by articles in the *Des Moines Register and Tribune*, it was a successful stop-gap until the recent opening of the new Center in Greenwood Park. During the years of World War II it enjoyed unusual success as a service center and recreation outlet particularly for the many WAC's in training at Fort Des Moines.

The provisions of Edmundson's will set three chief restrictions on the use of the money for the new Art Center: (1) The money could not be touched for ten years. (2) If no provision was made for the prospective building by this date (1943), the sum was to go to Penn College at

Oskaloosa. (3) The building was not to be closer to the city center than west of West 14th Street to avoid the smoke of downtown Des Moines which would be too serious a hazard to the storage of valuable paintings. Thus with a time-limit and a place-limit, the Association had its problems. An earlier site along the Des Moines River had to be abandoned because of the will's stipulation about the location of the Center. Greenwood Park was finally chosen as the best area, because while not central, it presented appropriately attractive and spacious environs for the proposed building.

Construction, because of war restrictions on building materials, was not possible in 1943 when the money became available. Finally in May, 1946, it was possible to begin on the elaborate plans drawn up by Eliel Saarinen to be executed by a Des Moines firm, Brooks and Borg. The plan for the building of dolomite stone from Lannon, Wisconsin, involved many modern features such as ceiling-high northern windows for the studios, radiant heating from pipes in the floor, aluminum casements for the windows, sound-proofing for the classrooms, air conditioning units concealed under paneling on the ceilings, and gallery walls of double thickness in the two main galleries — the walls to be covered with burlap.

Building was of course hindered by postwar

shortages of materials and by increased costs which went far over the original estimate. Despite all these difficulties, the building was completed in a little less than two years and the official opening was scheduled early in June, 1948, with a special reception for the Association members and guests on the evening of June 2. The reception was opened with a short program in the Center's auditorium during which Forest Huttenlocher, president of the Edmundson Art Foundation, and chairman of the museum building committee, formally presented the Des Moines Art Center to Mayor Heck Ross. In the presentation the words of J. D. Edmundson's will were used: "I give this museum to the city of Des Moines and to the people of my native state."

Over 3,500 attended the opening that Wednesday evening last June and stayed to look at the largest exhibition of paintings which had ever appeared in Des Moines. Paul Parker who served as director from 1945 until his resignation in the summer of 1948, had gathered together 200 pictures representative of the last 100 to 150 years of European and American art. The show also included the ceramics of Daniel Rhodes, a former Iowan, four paintings by the late Grant Wood, paintings by Marvin Cone of Cedar Rapids, by William Palmer, and Russell Cowles, former Iowans, and from the State University of Iowa,

sculpture by Humbert Albrizio, prints by Mauricio Lasansky, and paintings by Stuart Edie and James Lechay. Thus Iowans had for the first time an opportunity to view the work of their own contemporaries against that of such artists as Renoir, Matisse, Manet, or Picasso.

During the following two days, there were lawn luncheons at the Center for out-of-town guests, several parties, and a dinner at the Hotel Fort Des Moines where Daniel S. Defenbacher, director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, gave the principal address on "Sanity in Art." Visitors were startled by the modern beauty of the Center itself, and the *Des Moines Register* predicted it would "become the center of Art and related cultural activities in Iowa."

The Center has been open now for six months and already it has a sizeable program in operation. A monthly bulletin keeps the 2,550 members informed of the schedule of lectures, classes, exhibitions, and other activities. There is a children's art program under the direction of Mrs. Elizabeth B. Raseman, classes in ceramics under William E. Ross, painting, drawing, and sculpture taught by Edgar Britton, and Art Forum Clinics once a month conducted by James Hunt, primarily for practicing artists but open to the public. Two evenings a week classes are offered in ceramics, life, drawing, painting, sculpture, weaving, and

design to any interested persons. Memberships in the Art Center Association do not include admission to these classes, but the class fees are the same for non-members as for members. While fees are charged for classes, the galleries are free at all times, and are open Tuesday through Saturday from 11:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M., and on Sundays and holidays from 1:00 P.M. to 6:00 P.M. The museum is closed to the public each Monday.

Exhibitions have been planned at the rate of one a month and include pottery, one-man shows of paintings, and an Art Fair held October 11-17 for Des Moines artists. This last event, planned by the Art Forum, gives an opportunity to local practicing artists both to exhibit and sell their work. During the month of November a show by Des Moines artists was scheduled. Limited to 80 entries, this show was judged by Dwight Kirsch of the University of Nebraska and offered \$100 in prizes. In December a one-man show was held of the painting of Karl Mattern, professor of art at Drake University. Every Tuesday and Thursday at 3 P.M. there is a lecture on the current exhibitions by members of the staff.

Richard F. Howard, appointed as the new Director of the Center in November, 1948, assumed his duties early in 1949. Formerly the Director of the Dallas, Texas, Art Museum, the new Di-

rector has been recently in Berlin in charge of the art restitution activities of the military government in Germany.

The Des Moines Art Center is not municipally supported by the city council as Davenport is or as Sioux City is in part. Instead it is dependent on memberships which range from \$5 for an active membership to \$1000 for a patron membership. An adequate staff and a comprehensive program must be maintained entirely from these memberships and contributions. However there are separate funds available for the purchase of works for the Center's permanent collection. Even after spending \$700,000 for the Art Center building the Edmundson foundation will have about \$100,000 left for a purchase fund. Added to the income from this is \$20,000 a year income from the Coffin trust which can be used exclusively for the purchase of art works. Mrs. Winnie Ewing Coffin who died in 1937 is responsible for the additional bequest. While not too large a sum, this total is enough to make possible gradual additions to the permanent collection.

In the present permanent collection are some fifty paintings of the old Fine Arts Association collection, ownership of which was transferred to the new Center. Except for a painting by George Bellows called "Aunt Fanny," purchased several years ago, most of the collection is built around

such American painters as E. W. Redfield, Gardner Simons, and Elmer Schofield. However, there are a few paintings of real value in the Center's collection. Of these, "Saint Francis with Brother Rufus" by the sixteenth-century Spanish painter, El Greco, is the most famous and the most valuable. It was a gift to the Center last year. Two other gifts, a water color by the French impressionist, Paul Signac, and a study of an old man by John Singer Sargent are worth mentioning. In sculpture, a bronze head by Rodin is probably the most important piece in the permanent collection. It is evident from this very brief catalog that the Center has a very modest collection of valuable works of art, so that one of its foremost problems in the years ahead will be its acquisition policy.

The extent of the Des Moines Art Center program will finally be determined by the interest and support of its members. At present it is able to boast one of the largest participating memberships of any museum in the country, totaling 2,550 in 1948, when the Center opened. Whether the membership can be maintained at this high level, now that the initial excitement of the opening has passed, will depend on the combined efforts of the Director, the staff, and the trustees of the endowment funds who must produce an art program which can catch, hold, and develop the public's

interest. As George Shane, the art critic of the *Des Moines Register*, has said: "The Art understanding of the community is accelerated as those living within the community are exposed to good painting and sculpture." Iowa has an Art Center of which to be proud, one which can compare favorably with all those in the cities of the Midwest. The question now is all in the future: How much can Iowa make of this advantage? The aim of the Art Center is "to provide the maximum facilities for the broadest possible public participation in the enjoyment of all the visual arts." The extent to which this aim will be accomplished will be determined by the residents of Des Moines and the people of Iowa.

JEAN B. KERN

The State Historical Society of Iowa

IOWA CITY IOWA

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