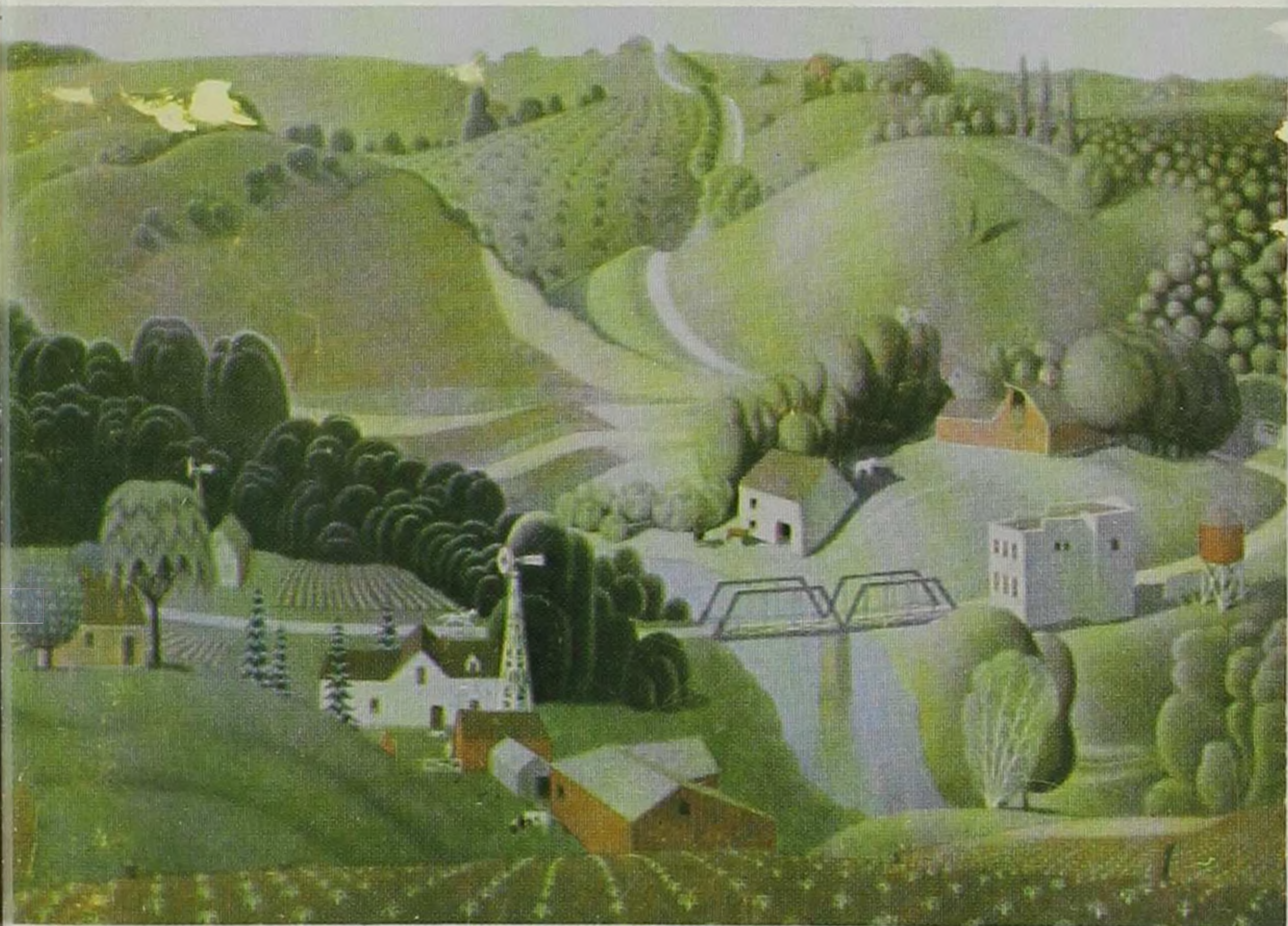


The PALIMPSEST



Stone City (1930)

Joslyn Memorial Museum, Omaha

A Grant Wood Sampler

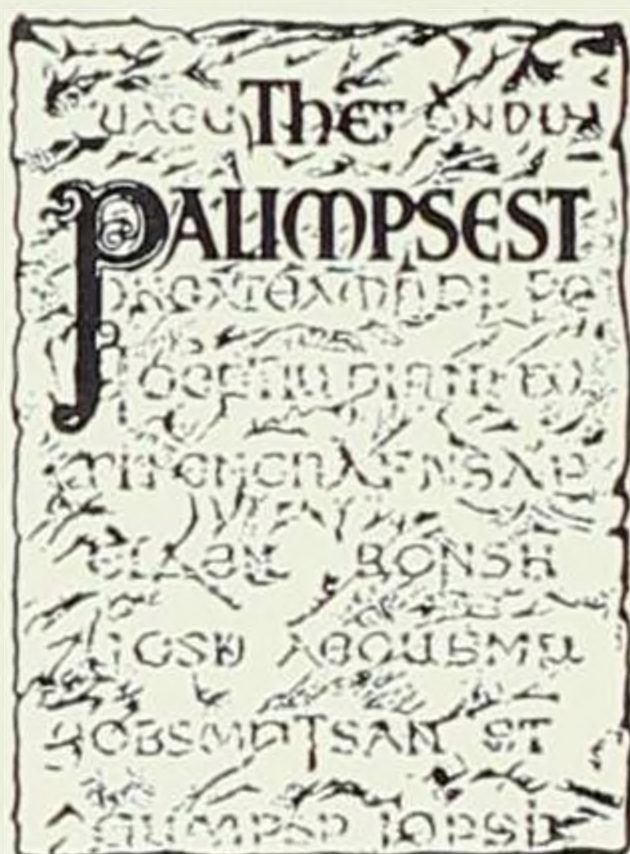
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Iowa City, Iowa

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SPECIAL GRANT WOOD ISSUE—ONE DOLLAR



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 record 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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A GRANT WOOD SAMPLER

EDWIN B. GREEN

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Illustrations

The author extends gratitude for the use of material to Park Rinard, former secretary to Grant Wood, to the *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, *Davenport Times-Democrat*, and *Cedar Rapids Gazette*. Special appreciation goes to Mrs. Nan Wood Graham, Riverside, California, who granted permission to reproduce the paintings and drawings of her artist brother.

Author

Edwin B. Green, retired managing editor of the *Iowa City Press-Citizen*, was a close friend of Grant Wood.

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THE PALIMPSEST

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Grant Wood of Iowa

The life of Grant Wood, who rose from an Iowa farm boyhood to become one of the world's most renowned artists, is one of the great success stories of American life in this century.

Gaining international attention in his lifetime as an artist who immortalized the scenes and people of his native state, he was to die at the peak of his career at middle age. But in the years since his death 30 years ago, his place in art history not only has endured but has been greatly enhanced.

Grant Wood was born on a farm near Anamosa, Iowa, on February 13, 1891. His father's people were Quakers who migrated to Iowa from Winchester in the Shenandoah Valley, Virginia. His mother's family name was Weaver, and her parents, of English Protestant origin, had come to Iowa by covered wagon from upstate New York in the 1840's.

The father was very strict. Once, when Grant was a boy, a neighbor lent him a copy of Grimm's *Fairy Tales*. However, the father made the boy

return the book, unread, saying: "We Quakers can read only true things."

From earliest childhood, the boy showed an interest in drawing. His first artistic efforts were depictions of Plymouth Rock hens setting on great mountains of eggs.

"The only drawing materials I could get," he said, "were the large sheets of cheap white cardboard that were enclosed in the wooden boxes of huge square crackers that father bought in Anamosa. . . . My studio was underneath the oval dining room table which was covered with a red checkered cloth. The cloth hung with nice arched openings on both sides."

The boy's childhood was exceptionally vivid in sense impressions and observations of nature.

An article in *The Anamosa Eureka*, April 15, 1901, reveals that: "Master Grant Wood, only ten years of age, reports that he has found 55 varieties of birds in his neighborhood. His communication on this subject is very interesting and shows he is an observing, thoughtful, wide-awake boy."

When Grant was 10 years old, his father died and the mother and four children—Frank, Grant, Jack, and Nan—moved from the farm to Cedar Rapids. It then became Grant's responsibility to help earn the family livelihood. People in Cedar Rapids often recalled years later what he was in those days, a painfully shy youngster who raised the earliest sweet corn and tomatoes for sale,

mowed lawns, took care of horses, and milked the neighbor's cows.

Grant Wood was known during this period as "the kid who took care of Doc Lord's horse."

Through necessity he became proficient in many practical lines. He was a born craftsman and he loved to work with all kinds of material. He experimented with carpentry, modeled figures out of blue clay he dug from nearby creek beds, tried his hand at metal working, and learned the fundamentals of building. All his experience was later to be useful to him in his work. He painted his greatest pictures in much the same methodical way he would build a house, making each material serve its special part.

However, his chief interest through these years was in drawing and painting and he always returned to this. He worked in a very close, meticulous style that was the result of careful observation of nature and an innate sense of design.

When he was in the eighth grade of Polk school in Cedar Rapids he won a prize in a nationwide contest conducted by a manufacturer of drawing crayons. His drawing was a careful study of a sprig of oak leaves.

Upon his graduation from high school in 1910, he went to Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he worked and studied at the Handicraft Guild.

After a summer spent as an apprentice in metalcraft and a student of design, he was given a job

as a professional craftsman in the Guild's shops. During part of this period he earned his lodging by acting as night watchman for an undertaking establishment.

In the fall of 1911, he returned to Cedar Rapids and got a job as machinist's assistant in the Rock Island Railroad shops. An accident compelled him to quit this work and he next taught country school for a term in the Rosedale district, six miles from Cedar Rapids.

In the summer of 1912, Wood established a small handicraft shop in Cedar Rapids. At this time he was trying to get enough money ahead to attend art school.

In that fall he enrolled at the University of Iowa for part-time study in art. The following year he went to Chicago where he worked as a professional craftsman and jewelry designer in the Kalo shop by day and studied painting at the Art Institute by night.

In the summer of 1914, Wood, in partnership with a man named Christopher Haga, started an independent handicraft shop in Chicago. However, after an encouraging beginning, this business collapsed as a result of the European war.

Then followed a particularly difficult period in the city when the artist, unable to get a job, lived on practically nothing in order to continue his studies at the Art Institute night school.

In the winter he returned to Cedar Rapids to

find his mother and sister in impoverished circumstances. No steady work was to be had and Wood earned the family living by doing odd jobs of all kinds. He and his mother and sister had no place of their own to live so the artist, with typical resourcefulness, bought a lot for a dollar down and a dollar a month and built a shack, 10 by 16 feet. Here he lived with his mother and sister for two years. Later, for helping to build two houses, he was given a suburban lot. He borrowed money on the lot and built his own house, cut the rafters, poured the cement floors, and plastered the walls with his own hands.

He went into the army in 1917 and was stationed first at Camp Dodge in Des Moines, later in the camouflage division at Camp Leach near Washington, D.C.

At army camp, Wood started making quick portrait sketches of his fellow doughboys during odd moments. Soon there was a great demand for his work and the artist eventually charged for the sketches—two bits a head for buck privates, a dollar a head for officers.

With the signing of the Armistice in 1918, Grant Wood returned to Cedar Rapids and got a job teaching art in the public schools. For seven years he taught school, saving money to travel in Europe. All of this time he had been painting in his spare time, producing, however, nothing of unusual significance.

Between the years of 1920 and 1928, he made four trips to Europe. He studied at the Academie Julien in Paris and traveled in France, Italy, Germany, and other countries. With Wood on some of his trips to Europe was Marvin Cone, who also became a well-known Iowa artist, and who had been his closest friend when both were students at Washington High School in Cedar Rapids.

During these trips abroad, Grant Wood painted scores of pictures—dreamy, old-world landscapes after the manner of the old French Impressionists. These he brought back and sold to his fellow townspeople in Cedar Rapids.

In 1926, 47 of Wood's paintings were exhibited at the Galerie Carmine in Paris but the show produced no reviews in the United States.

Wood had no knack for languages and during his European travels, he never learned to speak a foreign tongue. But he became ingenious at making himself understood by a gesture and facial expressions. And if these methods didn't work, he got out his sketch pad and drew pictures.

It was in 1924 that Wood moved into a studio in the upstairs of a barn at the John B. Turner & Son mortuary in Cedar Rapids. This studio was provided by David Turner, the mortician, who was a friend and patron of the artist. Turner was to acquire the largest single collection of Grant Wood paintings in existence in Wood's earlier Impressionistic style.

Wood's mother and sister, Nan, lived with him in his studio home at 5 Turner Alley for 11 years. Wood completely remodeled the studio and it became a social center for his many friends and admirers. A few years later, when Wood was working in a new style, he painted, "John B. Turner, Pioneer," a portrait of David Turner's father.

In 1928 the artist went to Munich to supervise the manufacture of a stained-glass window he designed for the Cedar Rapids Memorial Coliseum.

During this trip the groundwork was laid for a drastic change in his painting. For some time, he had been dissatisfied with his work. The casual Impressionistic landscapes he was turning out were pleasant enough but lacked the form and expressiveness he wanted to get into his work. During this period he studied the European primitives in the German museums and was impressed by the emotional impact they got into their work. These naive artists of centuries back had used Biblical subject matter but had interpreted it in terms of their own environment—in terms of the landscapes and characters they knew. Wood felt here was a lesson he could adapt to his own work.

Wood was also fascinated by the meticulous craftsmanship and exquisite sense of design of the primitives. This was a kind of work in harmony with his orderly and imaginative mind. Seeing it suggested to him the idea of reverting to the precise style of painting he had used as a boy.

Upon his return to Iowa, Wood looked upon the landscape, the people, the familiar objects in a new light. It was a reality he had seen before but now it had taken on a new meaning. So the artist settled down to paint the American characters and scenes he knew so well, not in casual, impressionistic terms of sunlight effects, but in a precise, strongly designed style that was to mark his work from that point on.

One of his first pictures in this new direction was the portrait of his mother, "Woman With Plant." In this picture, his mother, an aged woman, is shown against the background of an autumn midwestern landscape. This tribute to his mother, to whom he was very devoted, brought him his first substantial recognition in the art world.

The artist was now started in the field that was naturally and inevitably his own—the depiction of his own surroundings and people.

"At first," he said, "I had difficulty in finding subject matter. I felt I had to search for old things to paint—something soft and mellow—but now I discovered a decorative quality in American newness."

Such commonplace things of American rural life as ric-rac braid on dresses, wire fencing, overalls, and methodically spaced cornfields attracted his attention.

Thus, in the late 1920's, as it turned out, Wood's fame began to rise. It was the pre-depres-

sion era when imitation of French Modernism was the overwhelming vogue in American art. Grant Wood was to become one of the pioneers in the building of the indigenous American Art movement which blossomed forth in the 1930's.

In 1930, Wood's painting, "American Gothic," was exhibited at the Art Institute in Chicago. It was a picture of a pious, bald-headed villager and his grown-up daughter. In the background, corresponding to the long angular faces of the people, was a house of that hybrid-Gothic variety common in rural Iowa.

Wood had seen the Gothic house on a trip to Eldon, Iowa, the year before. Greatly impressed, he sketched it. Months later, he decided to use his sister, Nan, and his dentist, Dr. Byron H. McKeeby of Cedar Rapids, as his models.

"American Gothic" won the Norman Wait Harris bronze medal and a \$300 purchase award at the Art Institute's Annual Exhibition of American Painting and, in addition, became an immediate sensation.

Up to the moment when "American Gothic" won its prizes, Grant Wood was little known as an artist outside his own home town of Cedar Rapids. But when this painting burst on the art world, Grant Wood, then 39, became world famous overnight.

Then, in a particularly productive two-to-three year period, Wood followed up his initial success-

es with a series of highly individual landscapes, portraits, and genre paintings which established him firmly in the front rank of American artists.

Among his best known works of this period are "Stone City," "Portrait of Susan Angevine Shaffer," "Arnold Comes of Age," "Midnight Ride of Paul Revere," "Birthplace of Herbert Hoover," "Young Corn," "Fall Plowing," "Daughters of Revolution," "Arbor Day," "Adolescence," "Dinner for Threshers," "Portrait of Nan," "Victorian Survival," and "Self-Portrait."

Wood was the nation's leading exponent of regional art long before the Public Works of Art Project was started. He had established, in 1932 an independent art colony at Stone City, an abandoned Iowa stone quarry town near Anamosa. Artists lived in colorfully painted ice wagons surrounding the old stone Green mansion and there were public outdoor sales on week-ends. After two summers, financial and other difficulties ended the colony.

When the Public Works of Art Project was established, Wood became its director for Iowa in 1934, refusing any salary for this work. A group of PWAP workers, under Wood's direction and working from his designs, executed a series of murals for the Iowa State University library at Ames. The murals were acclaimed by critics and gained national attention from such publications as *Fortune* and the *New York Times*.

Grant Wood became a lecturer at the University of Iowa in Iowa City in 1934 and a year later was made an associate professor. He was given full professorship in 1939 and received a special appointment as professor of fine arts in September, 1941, when he returned to the university after a year's leave of absence. During his seven years of university teaching, he gave advanced instruction in painting.

In 1935, he married Sara Sherman Maxon, a voice teacher and Lieder singer. They lived in Iowa City until their divorce in 1939.

In 1937, Wood began producing work for the public in a medium new to him—lithography—and he pursued this for the next few years in addition to doing an occasional painting. Some of his best-known subjects in this medium were: "Seedtime and Harvest," "January," "Honorary Degree," "Fertility," "March," "February," "July 15," "December Afternoon," and "Family Doctor."

For his work and influence in promoting creative art in American education, Wood was awarded honorary degrees by the University of Wisconsin, Wesleyan University, Lawrence College, and Northwestern University.

In addition to his painting and teaching, Wood lectured throughout the United States for several years and was noted for the wisdom and salty humor of his remarks from the platform.

Grant Wood's place in the art world was entirely his own. As Edward Alden Jewel wrote in the *New York Times* at the time of Wood's first New York one-man show at the Ferargil Galleries in 1935:

Grant Wood's approach to the American scene is unique; so is the style that has developed into so arresting a vehicle of expression. He is a genuinely creative spirit; an artist of real power and originality; a man who has seriously taken the trouble, besides, to learn and to perfect his craft.

Wood also was a prime favorite with the American public. His work was the most popular of the American artists exhibiting at the Chicago Century of Progress exhibitions. His best known paintings were widely reproduced in newspapers and periodicals. His lithographs, distributed by Associated American Artists of New York under their democratic plan of selling original prints by leading American artists at \$5 each, were in enormous demand. In many cases, the entire issue of a Grant Wood print was exhausted within a few days after it was put on the market.

Public response was admittedly important to Wood, who had no time for esthetic snobbery and wanted his work "to mean something to the public at large, not just a hypersensitive minority."

Wood did not fit the popular conception of an artist. Far from being a temperamental recluse, he was an easy-going, friendly person—stocky,

round-faced, and eternally deliberate in everything he did. In his calm, humorous eyes and his slow, dry speech, one sensed his relationship to the people he had depicted in his paintings.

The Iowa artist drew his share of brickbats as well as bouquets. He was subject to bitter attack, as well as to high praise, by certain fellow members of the art and educational professions.

According to Arthur Millier, art critic of the *Los Angeles Times*, writing in 1941, there were two chief reasons for these attacks.

The first was "rampant professional jealousy." The second was "his denial of phony Bohemianism."

"Grant Wood's love for the customs of his own folk is real," wrote Millier. "He has roots in his own region and his subjects mean something deep to him. The average American responds to this. Whereas the hostile critics and jealous artists are still Bohemians, instinctively at war with anything so sure of itself as the calm, orderly art of Iowa's and America's great painter, Grant Wood."

In his craft, Wood was a slow and most painstaking worker. His output was very limited, but his paintings were always in great demand and brought prices said, in some cases, to be as high as \$10,000 in the post-depression era.

Painting a picture was a long-drawn-out affair with Wood. He decided very quickly what he would like to paint and then might take a year in

thinking it over. Invariably he made several drawings for the sake of composition and at least one very careful finished drawing with a good deal of regard for values. He was particular that his drawings be authentic in every way, even going so far as to consult mail order catalogs for details of farm implements, women's clothing or wallpaper.

The actual painting was stretched over a considerable length of time. Sometimes he would work from 14 to 18 hours a day for seven or eight weeks. He applied paints in coats and spoke of them as such in the manner of a house painter. When finally finished, there might be seven or eight layers of paint beneath the surface, any one of which might have satisfied one less meticulous.

Grant Wood was a man of many interests and skills. He was almost as much at home in woodworking, metalcraft, and building as he was in painting. He was a talented furniture designer and a proficient sculptor. And, with the heritage of farm people in his blood, he had a love for the soil and an intimate knowledge of growing things. Gardening was his favorite diversion, and during any good evening in the spring, Iowa Citians would see him working in the large flower garden he kept at his Court Street home.

A gentle, easy-going man, Wood, nonetheless, was the center of several national controversies.

When "American Gothic" was first reproduced,

a storm of censure fell upon Wood's head from Iowans who felt that they had been unfairly represented by the artist. One woman telephoned the artist and said he ought to have his "head bashed in." Later, when they got used to his work, Iowans became proud of the artist of the cornbelt.

In 1932, when Wood exhibited "Daughters of Revolution," his celebrated painting of three grim-lipped, intolerant Daughters sipping tea before a reproduction of "Washington Crossing the Delaware," stirred up another nest of hornets. However, as time went on, the laughter drowned out the denunciations, and eventually, the more liberal Daughters themselves acknowledged the humor of the satire.

In 1940, Wood tossed another bombshell to the literal-minded, with his painting, "Parson Weems' Fable," a humorous and imaginative version of the time-worn myth of George Washington and the Cherry Tree.

In addition to being a top-rank artist, Wood was one of the most colorful personalities on the American scene. To his lovely, old brick house at 1142 East Court Street in Iowa City came the celebrities of the nation—poets, painters and statesmen—to visit with this modest, soft-spoken Iowan whose observations of life had a rare wisdom and dry humor. Among those entertained by Wood were such distinguished persons as Henry Wallace, John Dewey, Lawrence Tibbett, Chris-

topher Morley, Carl Sandburg, John Mason Brown, and many others.

The artist also had many friends in his own profession who stopped to visit him en route across the country—men like Millard Sheets, Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, James Chapin, Arnold Blanch, Adolf Dehn, Doris Lee, and Yasuo Kuniyoshi—all distinguished American painters.

In the summer of 1941, fatigued from the pressures that came to him from his high ranking as a leading American artist, from petty attacks on him, and because of ill health, he spent the summer at Clear Lake, Iowa, using an old abandoned railroad depot for a studio. It was here that he finished what were to be his last major oil paintings, "Spring in Town" and "Spring in the Country."

Returning to Iowa City in the fall, he was under doctor's care. Failing to respond to treatment, he entered University Hospitals. On December 19, he underwent exploratory surgery resulting in the discovery of hopeless cancer of the liver.

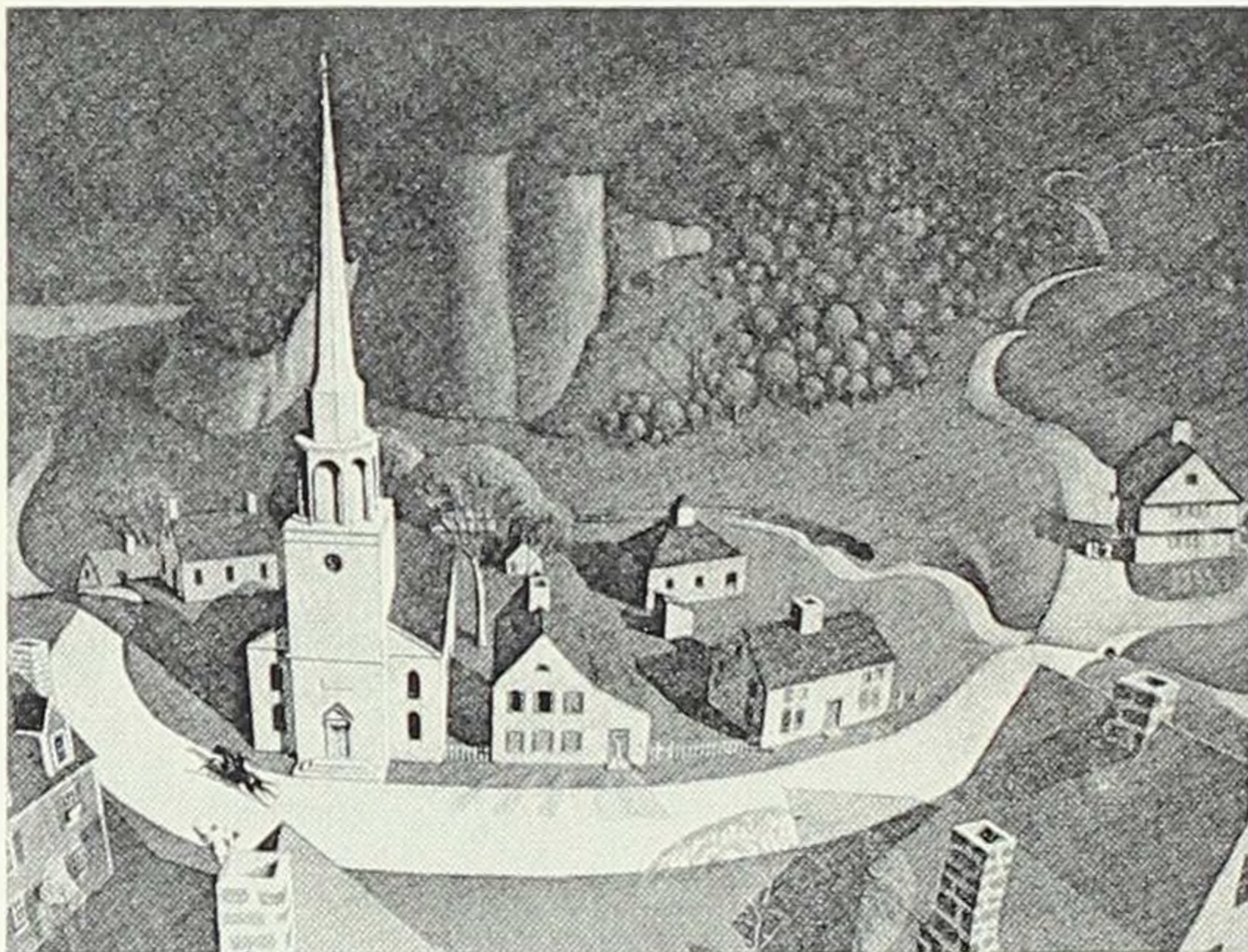
Wood remained in the hospital for the next eight weeks, never regaining enough strength to paint. He died there at 10 p.m. on Thursday, February 12, 1942, two hours before his 51st birthday. He was buried beside his mother on the Weaver lot in Riverside cemetery at Anamosa, his birthplace, after funeral services at the Turner mortuary in Cedar Rapids.



Chicago Art Institute
American Gothic (1930)



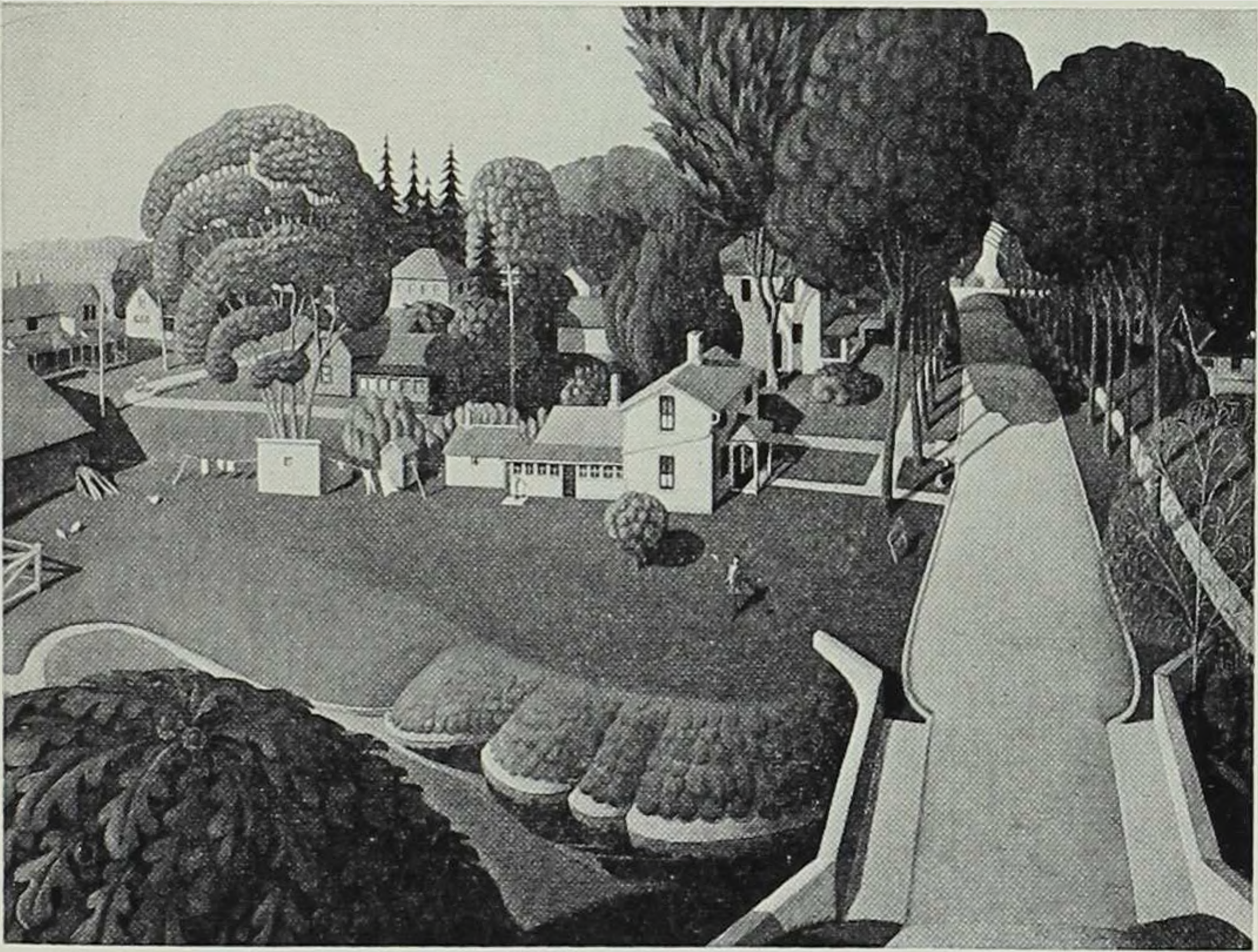
Cedar Rapids Art Association
Woman with Plant (1929)



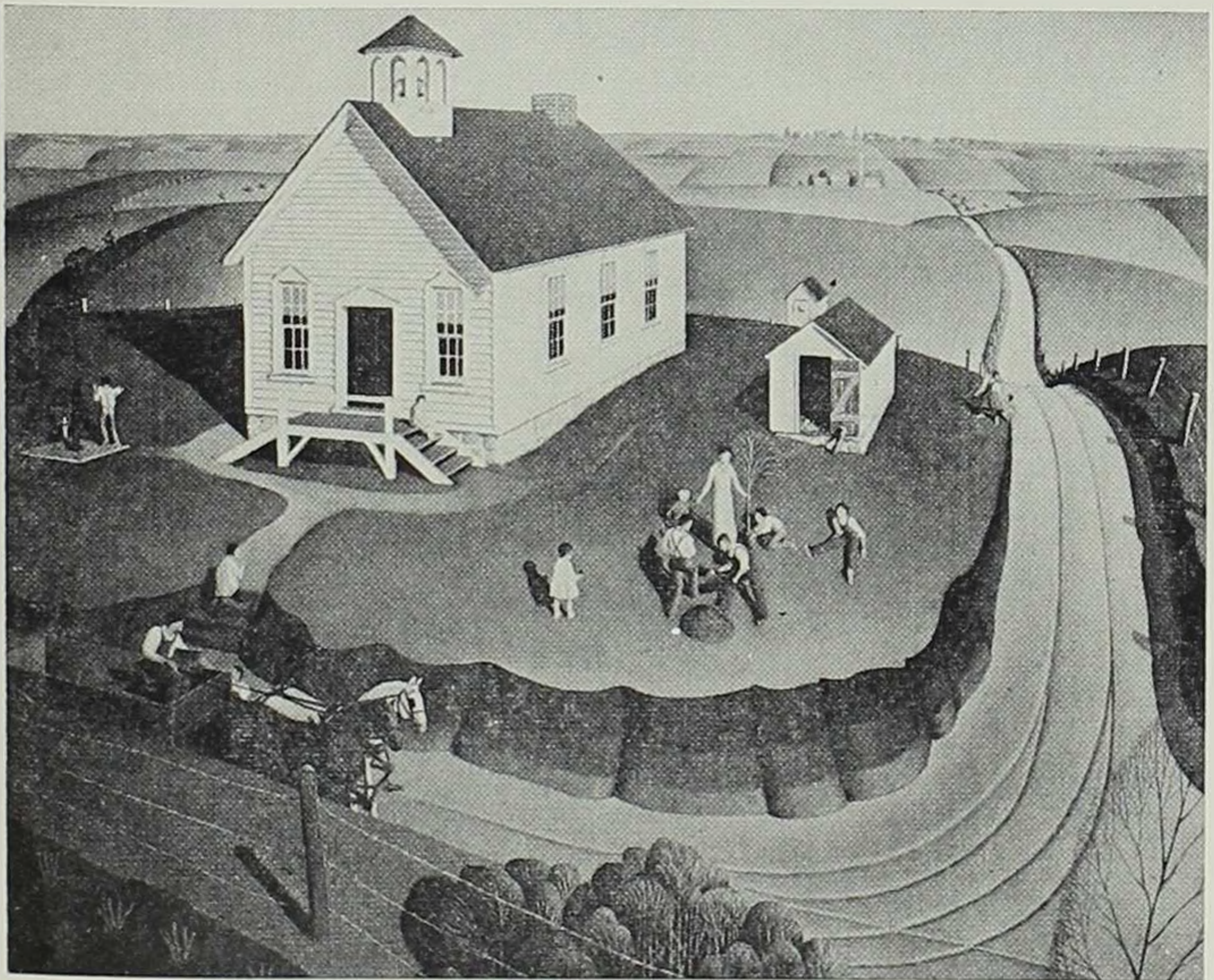
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Midnight Ride of Paul Revere (1931)



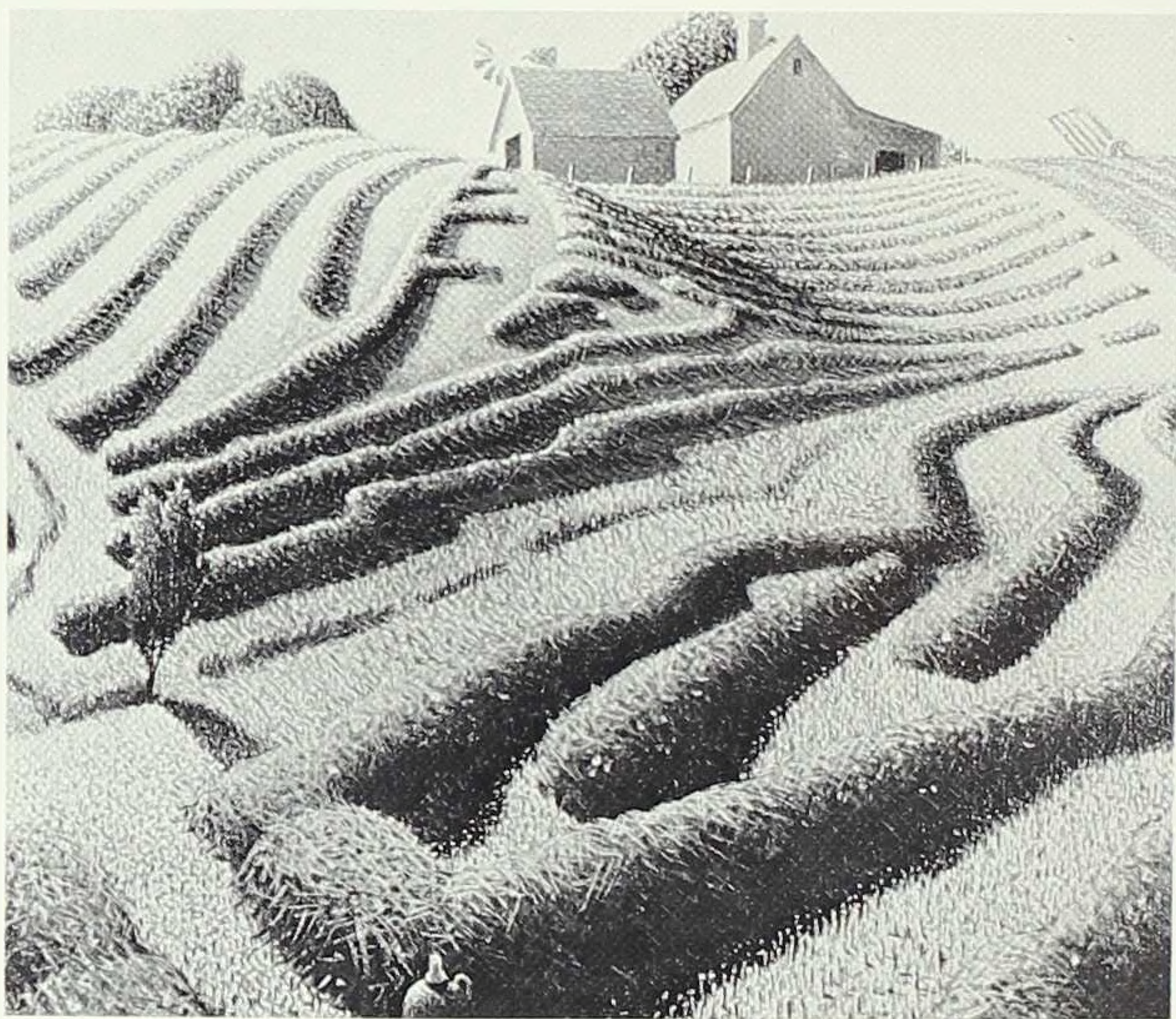
Grant Wood with his art class at the University of Iowa



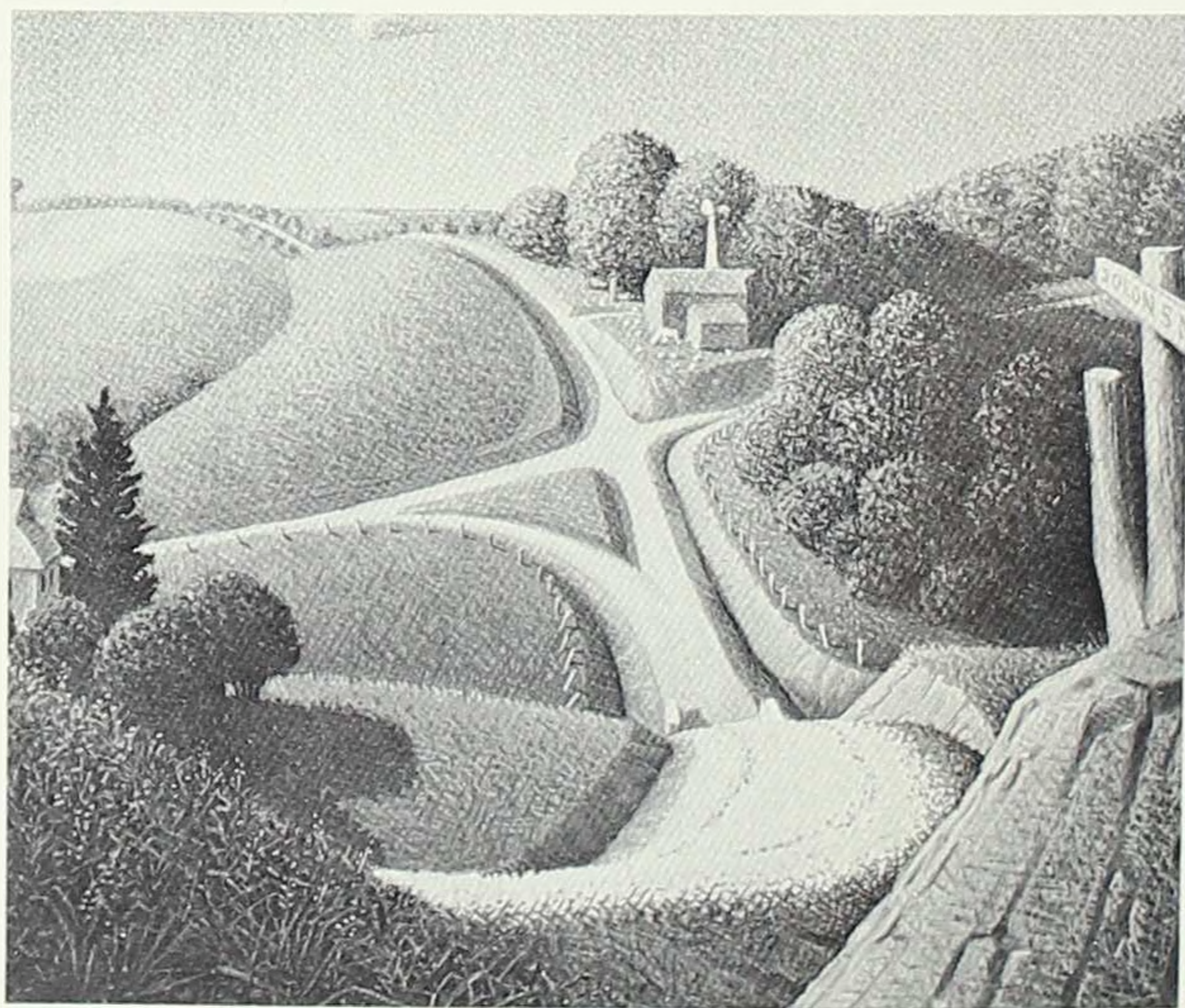
Hoover Home (1931)



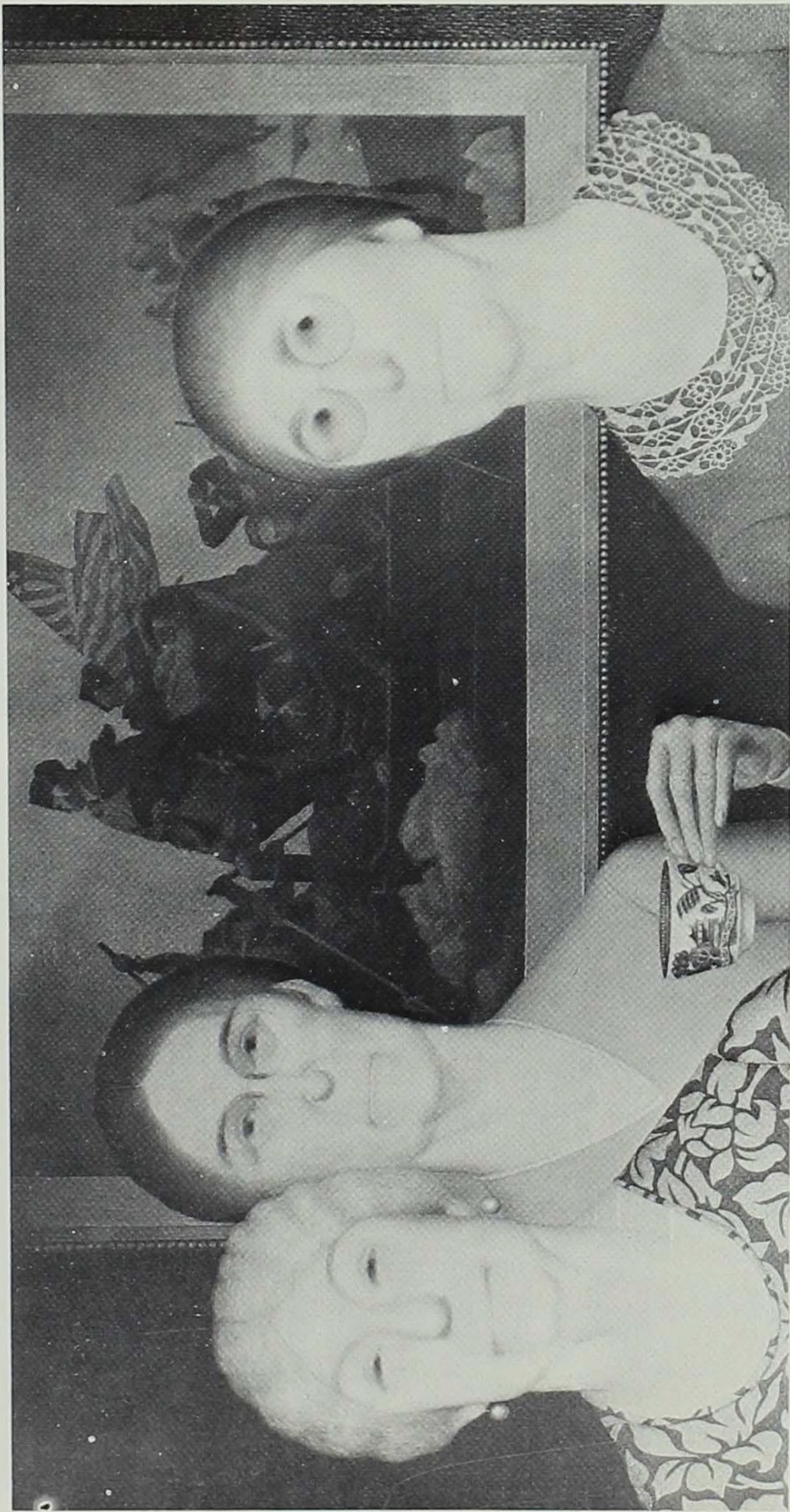
Arbor Day (1932)



Haying (1939)

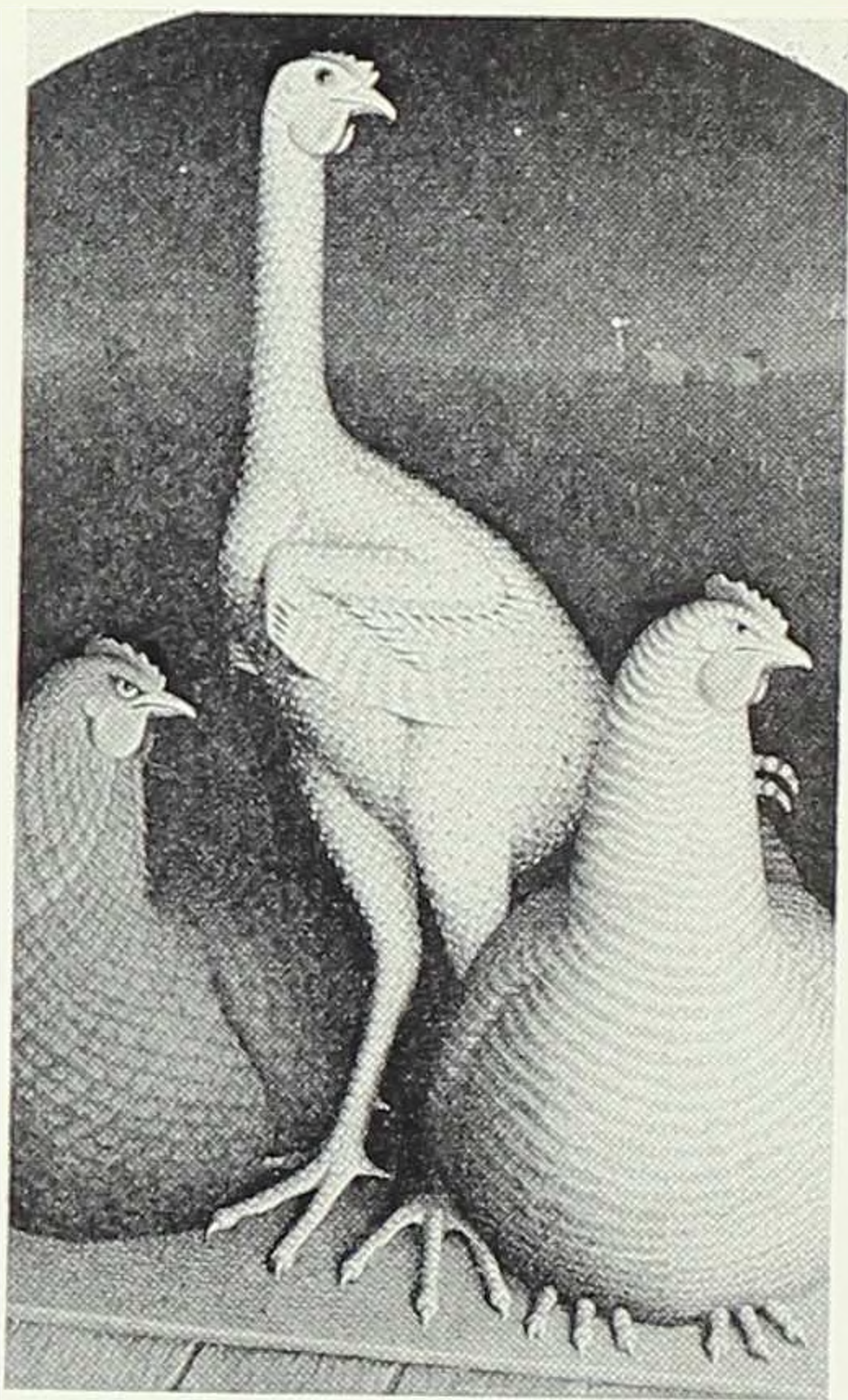


New Road (1939)



Daughters of Revolution (1932)

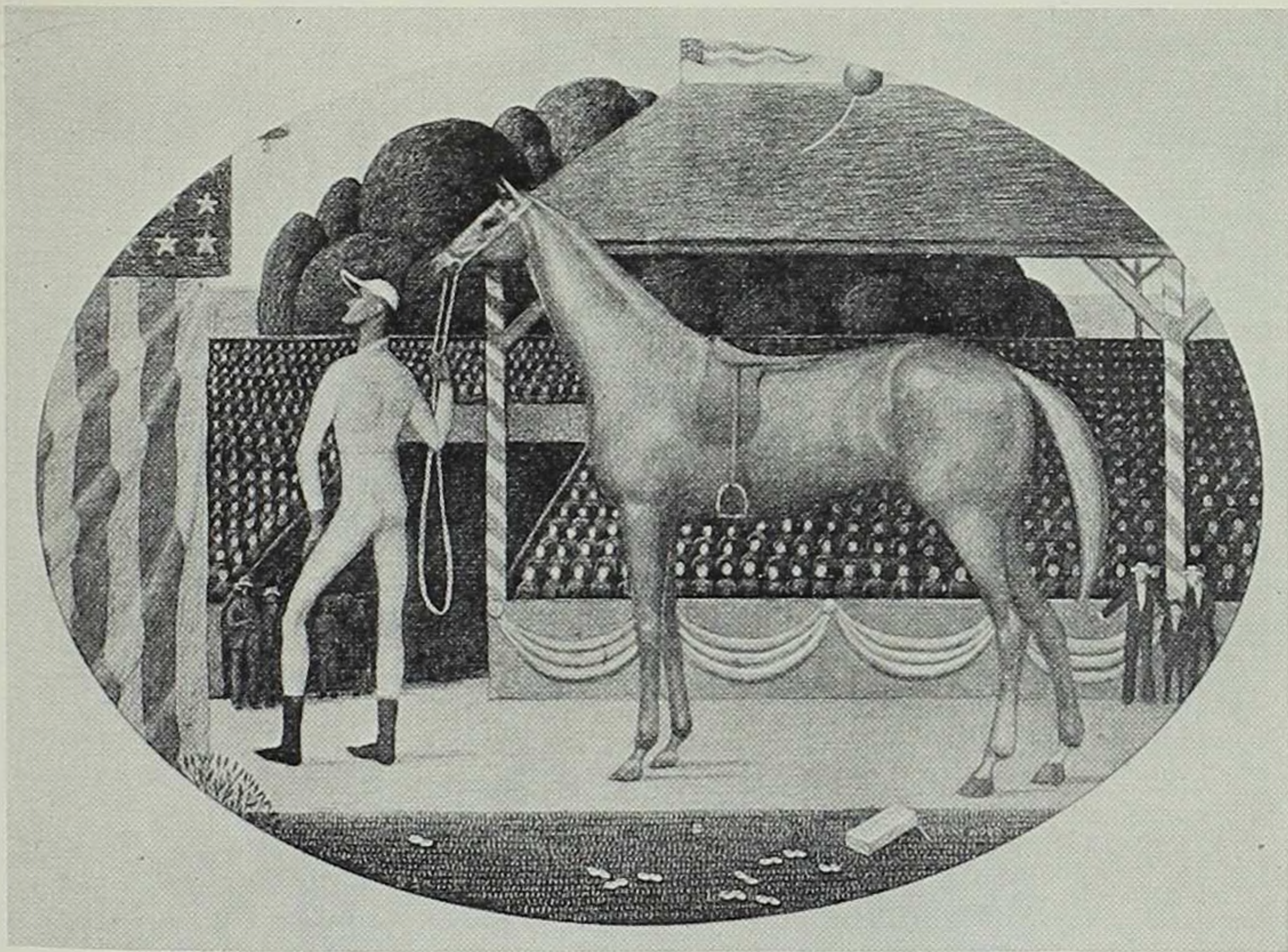
Cincinnati Art Museum



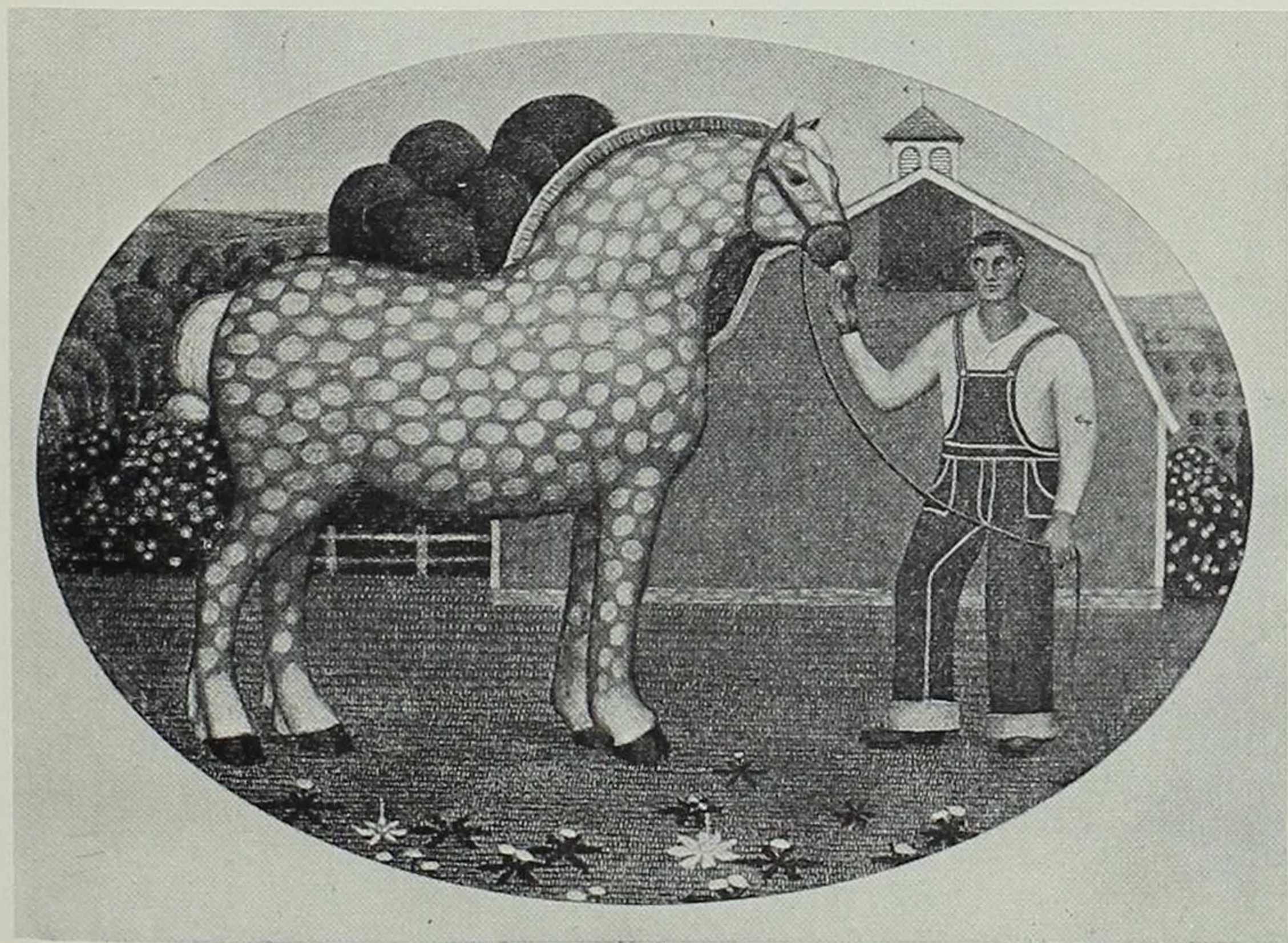
Abbott Laboratories—North Chicago
Adolescence (1940)



Appraisal (1931)



Racehorse (1933)



Draft Horse (1933)

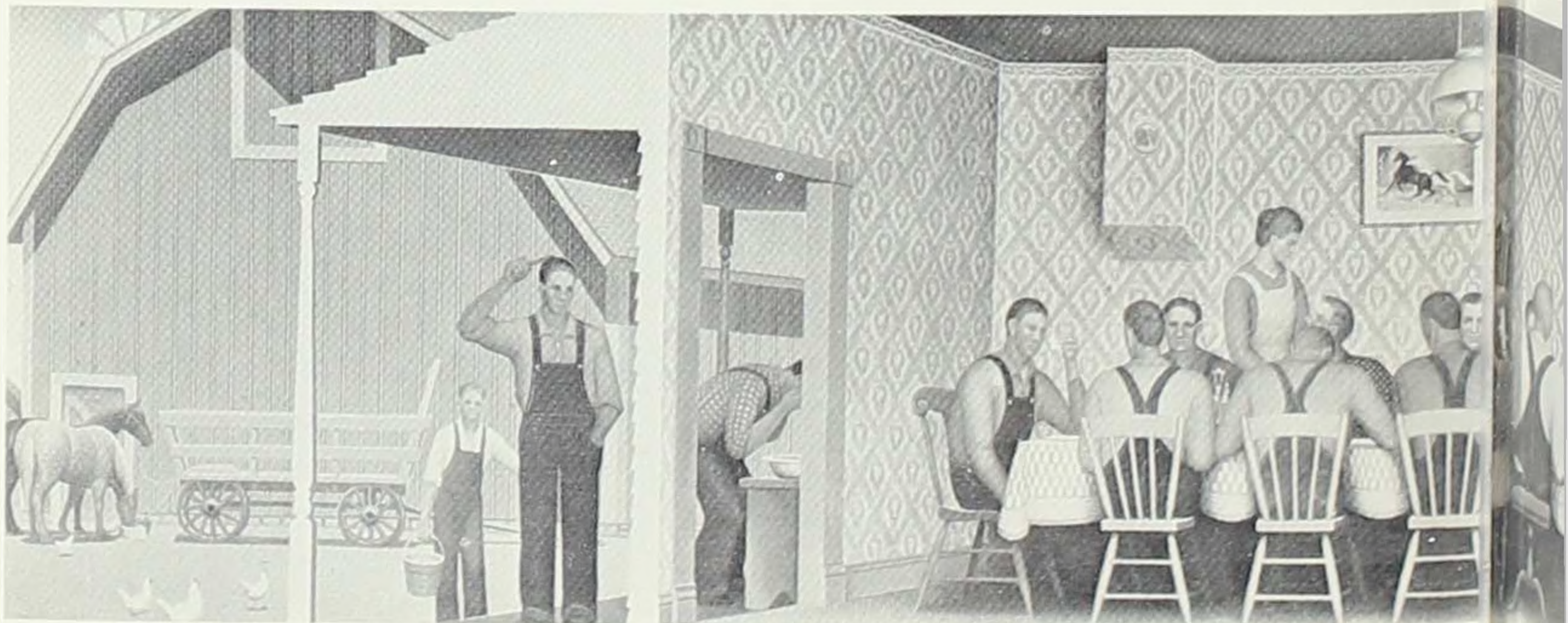


Vegetable (1938)



Fruit (1938)

The only colored lithograph by the Grant Society
Courtesy of the Society



Dinner for the men



Wild Flower (1938)

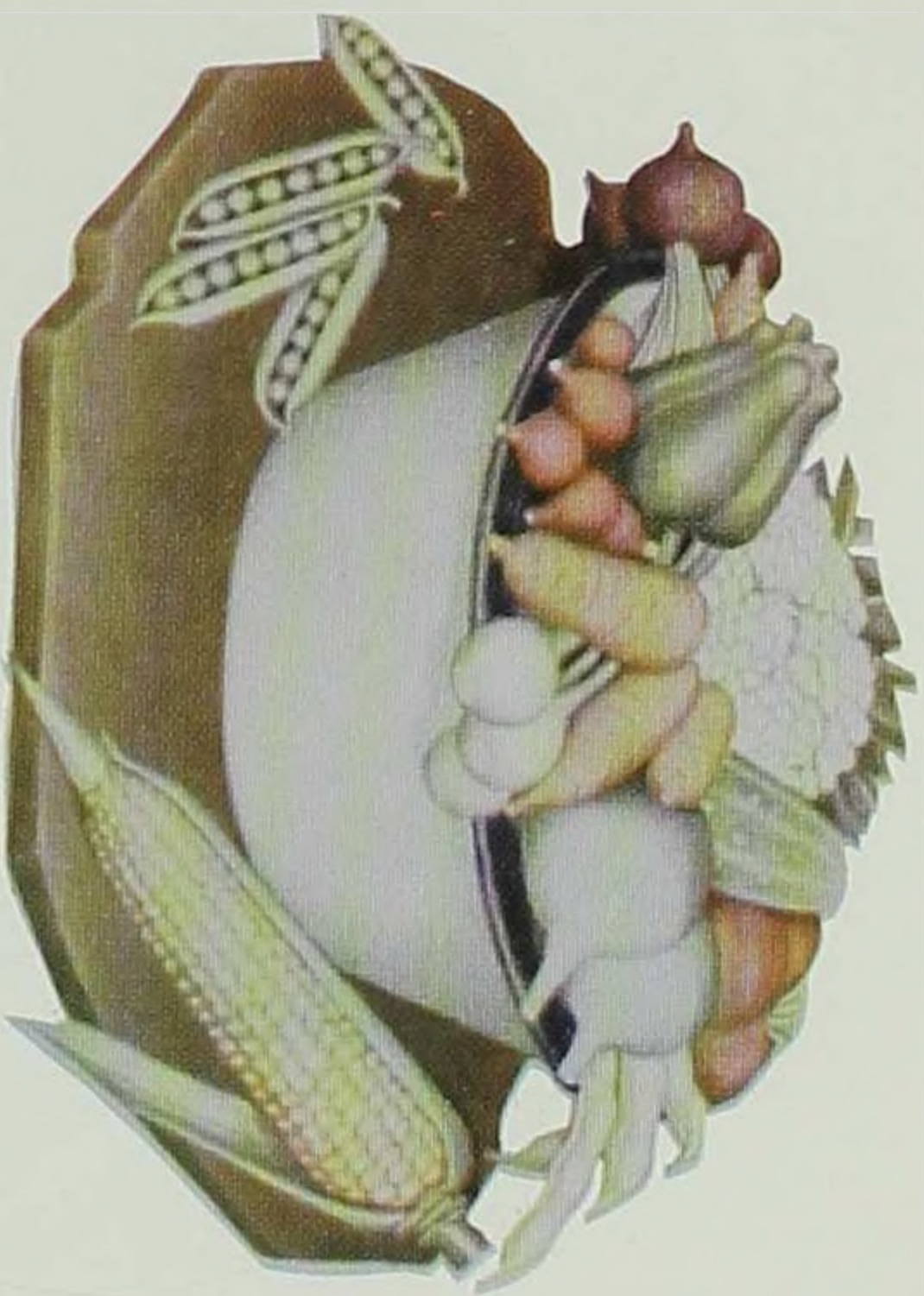


Tame Flower (1938)

Grant Wood ever made.
ated Artists, New York



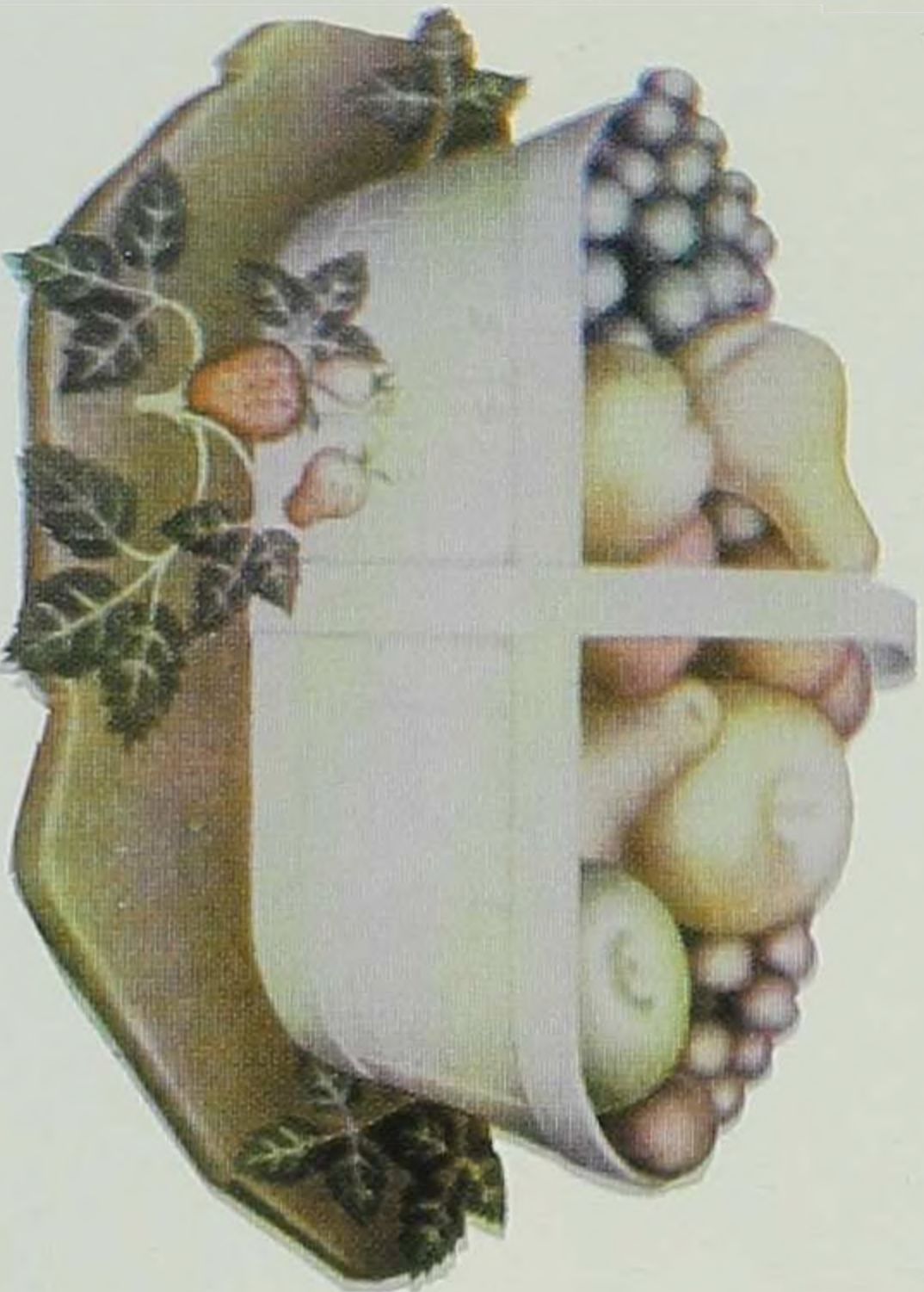
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Vegetable (1938)



Wild Flower (1938)

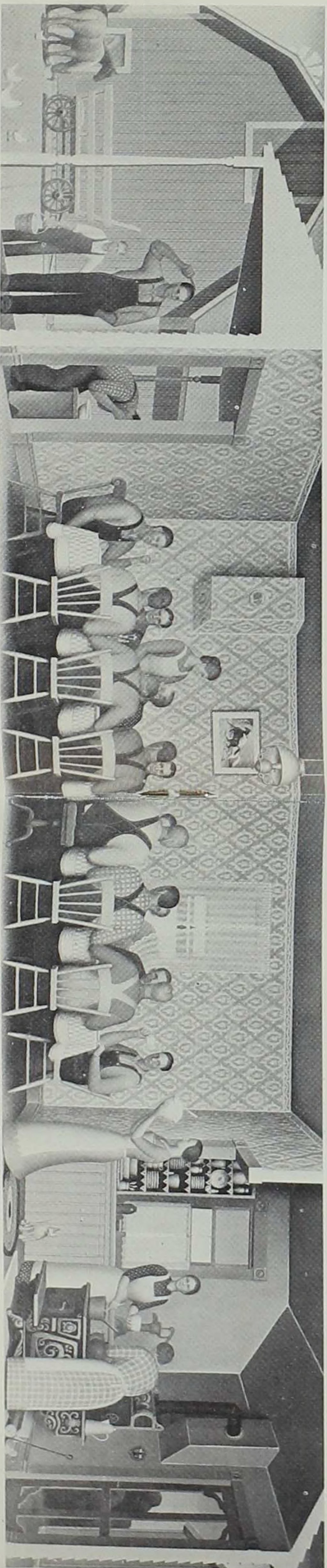


Fruit (1938)



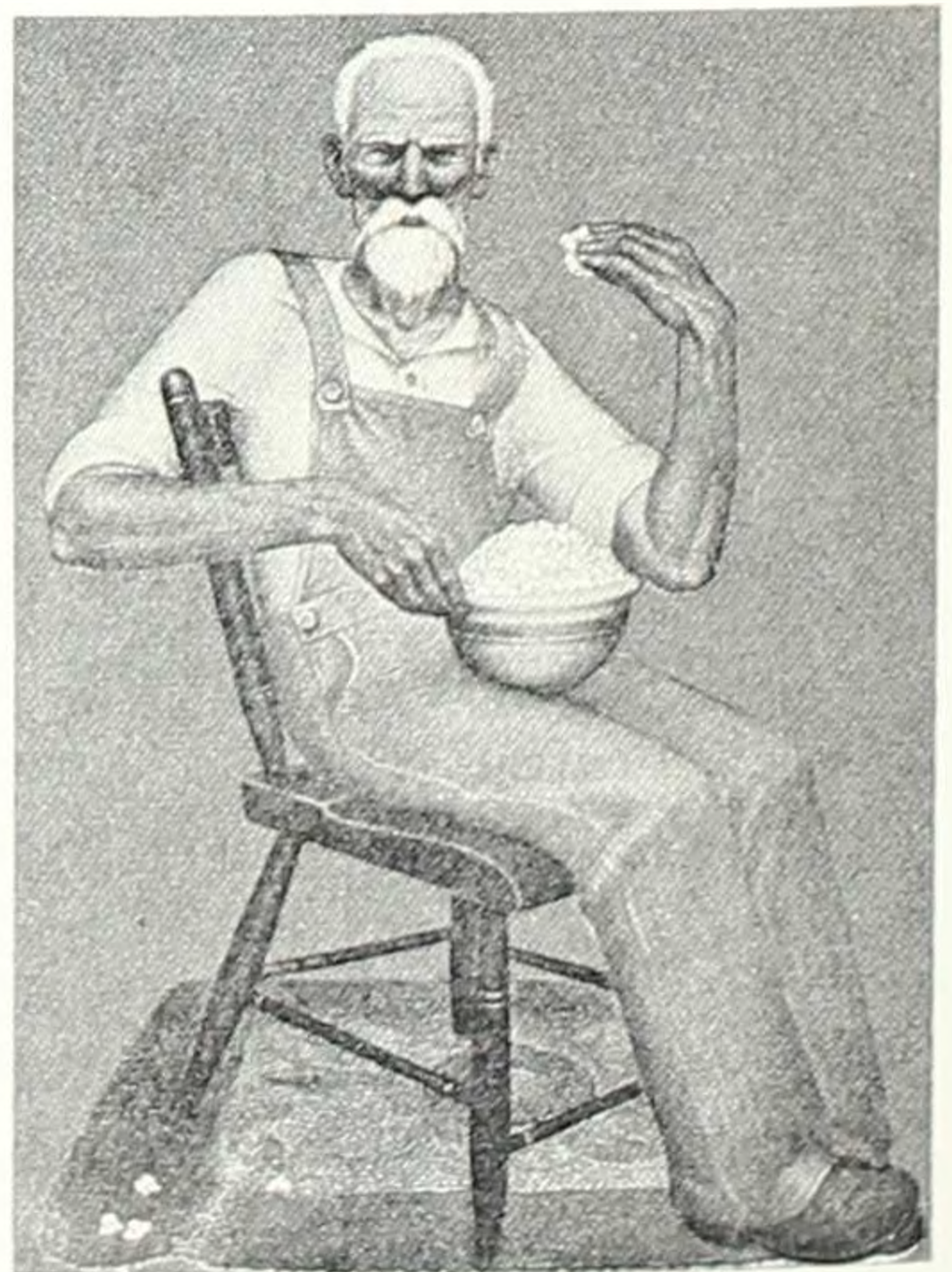
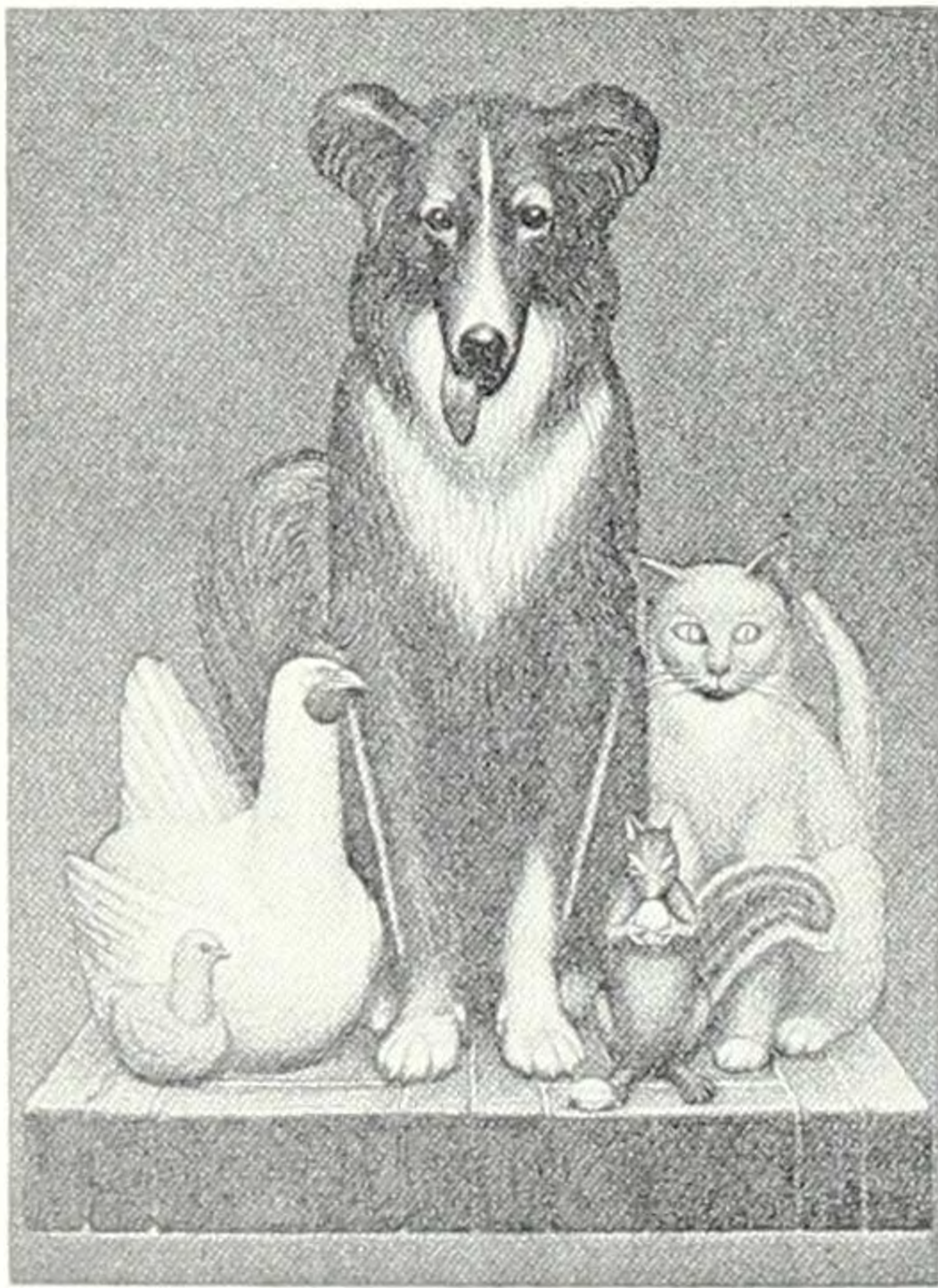
Tame Flower (1938)

*The only colored lithographs Grant Wood ever made.
Courtesy Associated Artists, New York*



Dinner for Threshers (1934)

FARM ON THE HILL



From Madeline Horn's Farm on the Hill, Scribners

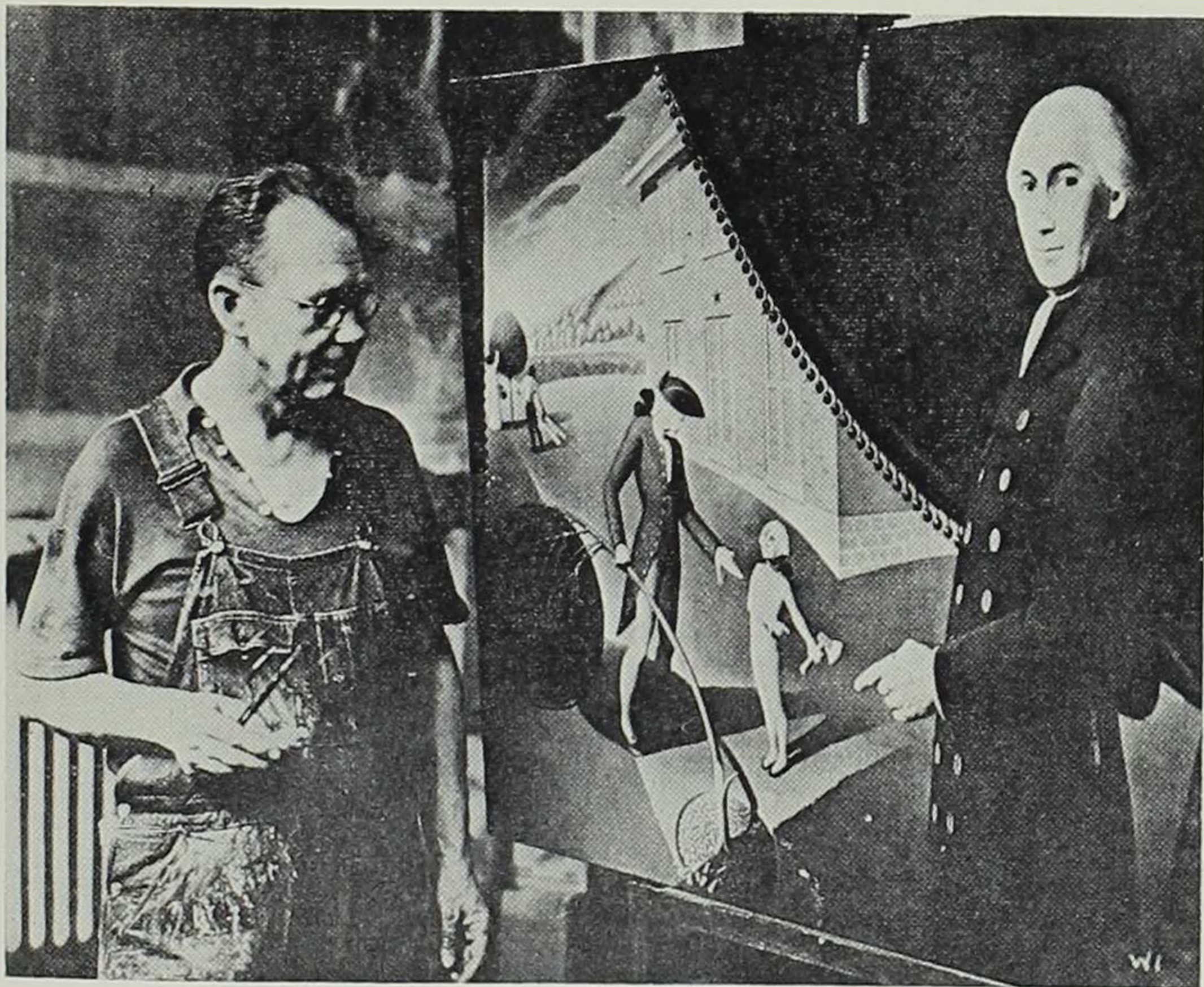
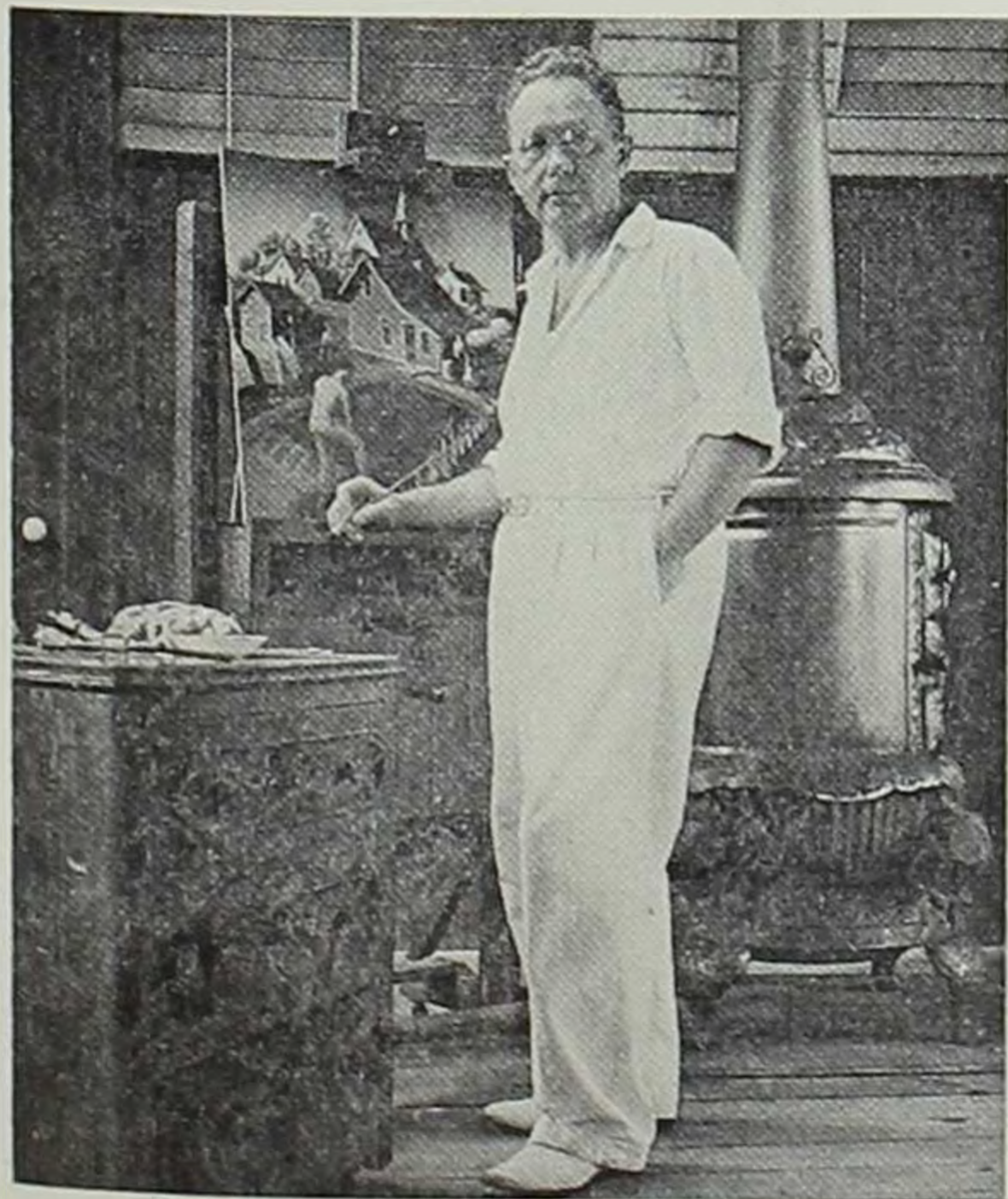


Photo Cedar Rapids Gazette

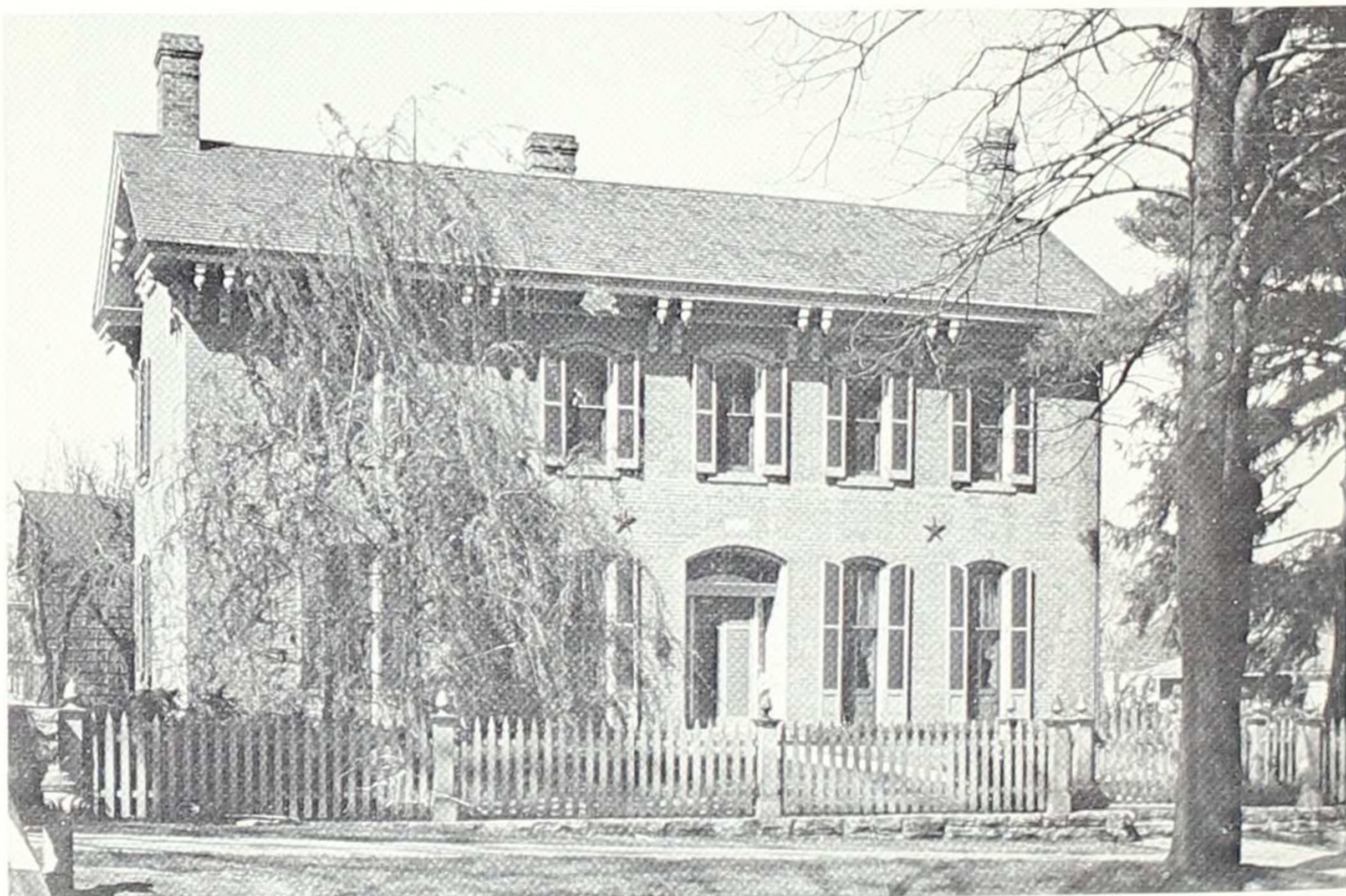
Parson Weems Fable—Washington Cherry Tree (1939)



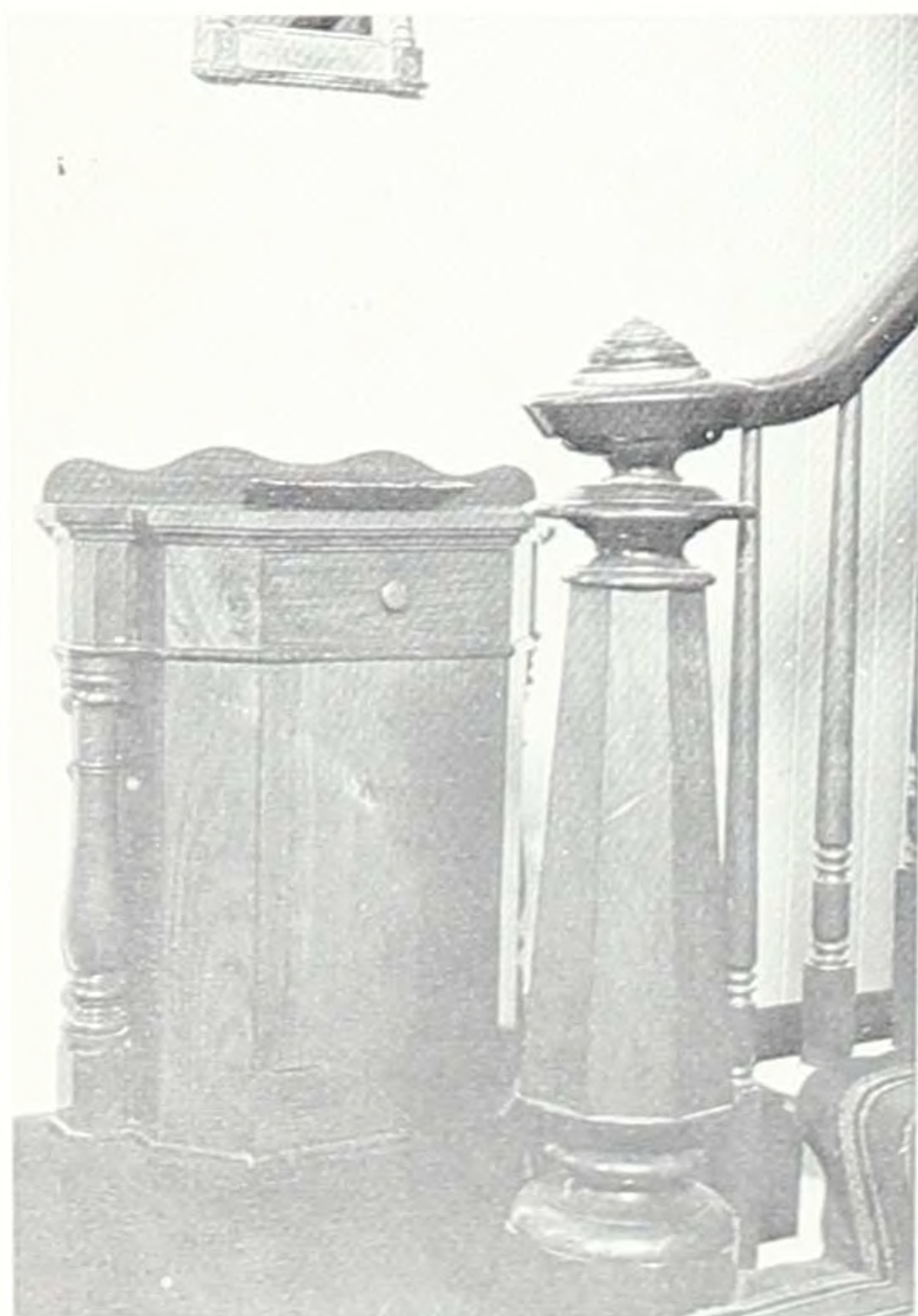
Done in Studio at Clear Lake
Spring in Town (1941)



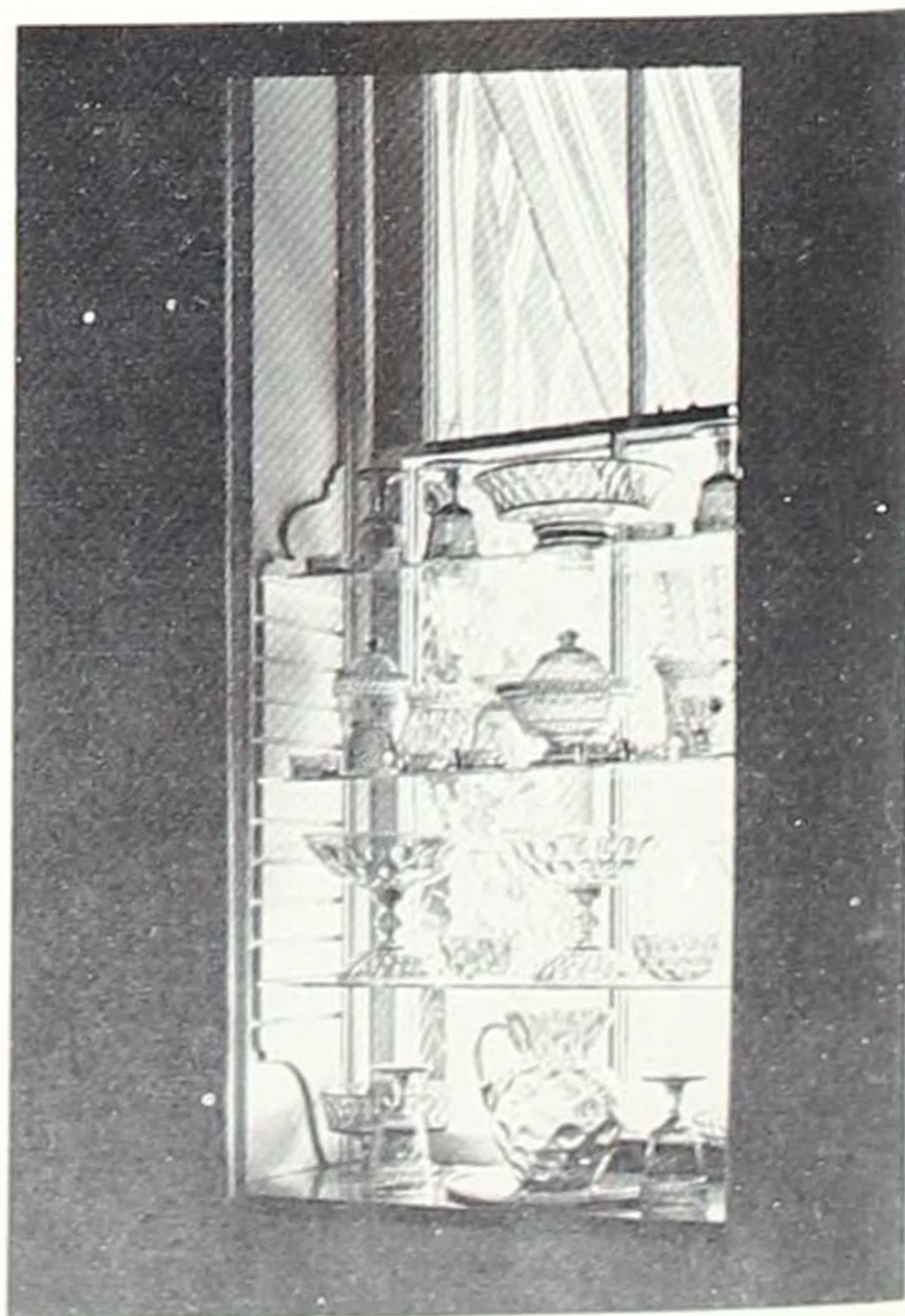
Done in Turner Alley, Cedar Rapids
Daughters of Revolution (1932)



One of Grant Wood's finest artistic endeavors was his restoration, beginning in 1936, of the old Oakes Victorian house built in Iowa City in 1858.

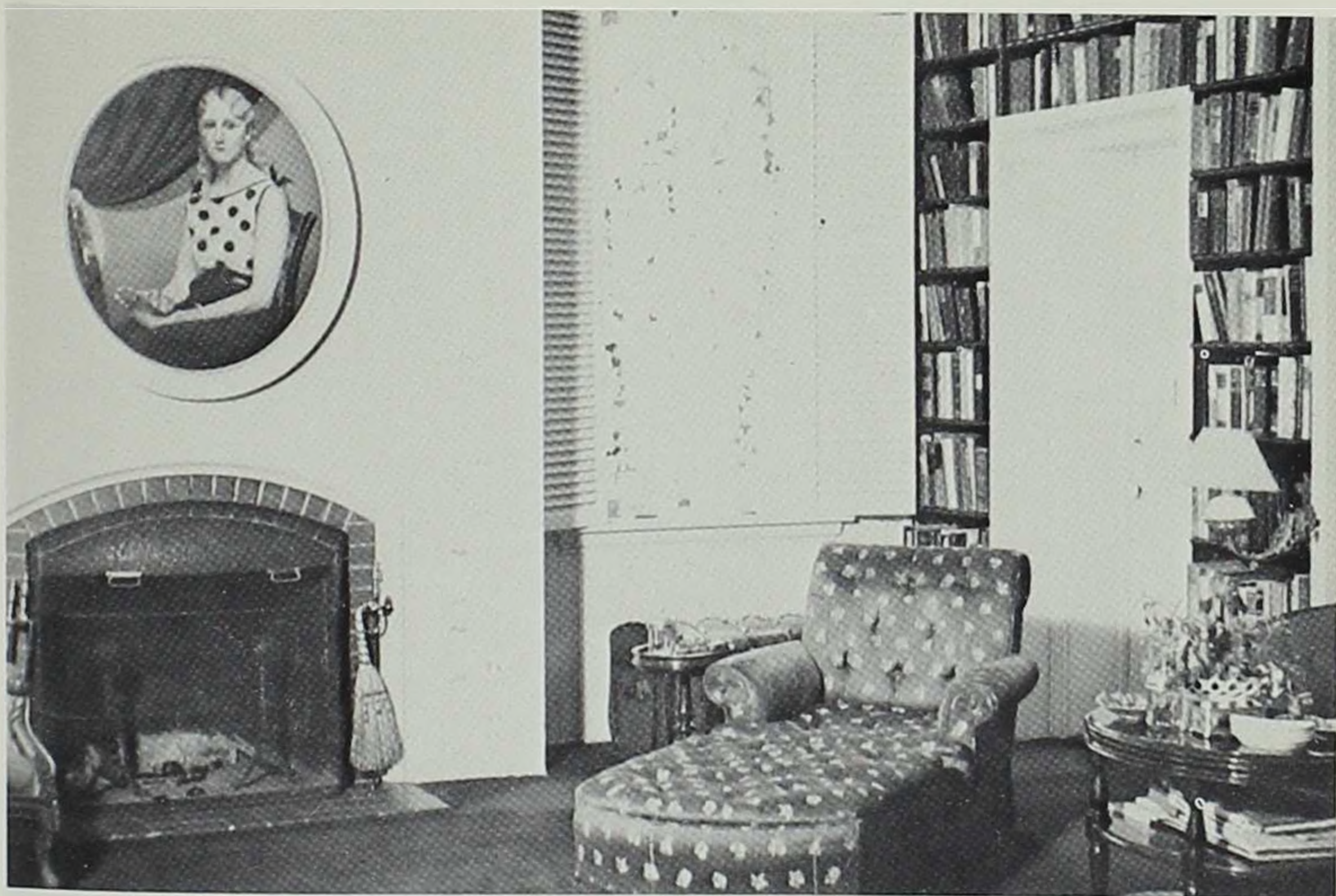


The artist designed an overshoe bin to stand at the foot of the stairs inside the front door.

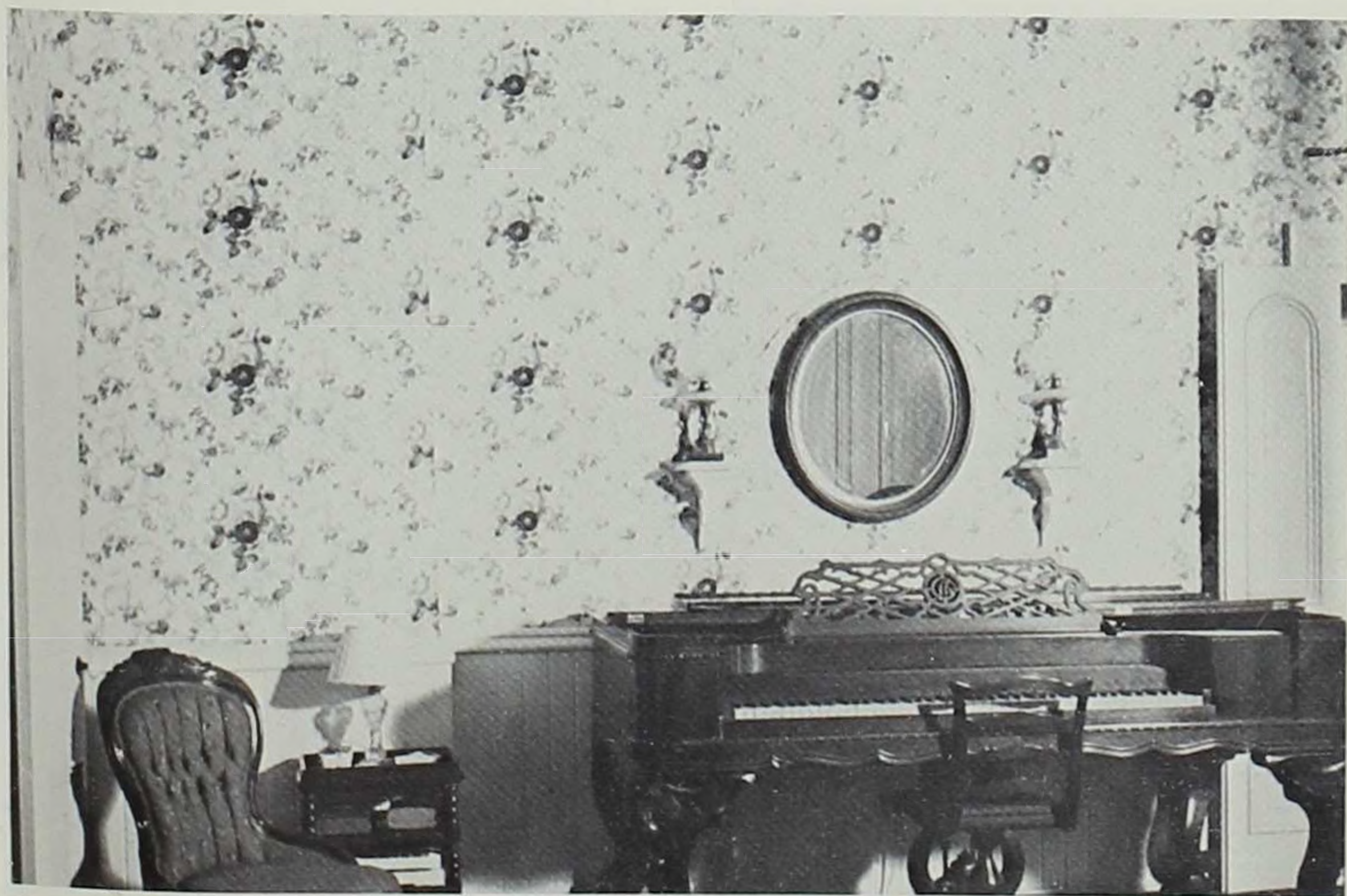


Glass shelves in a dining room held a collection of amber glass.

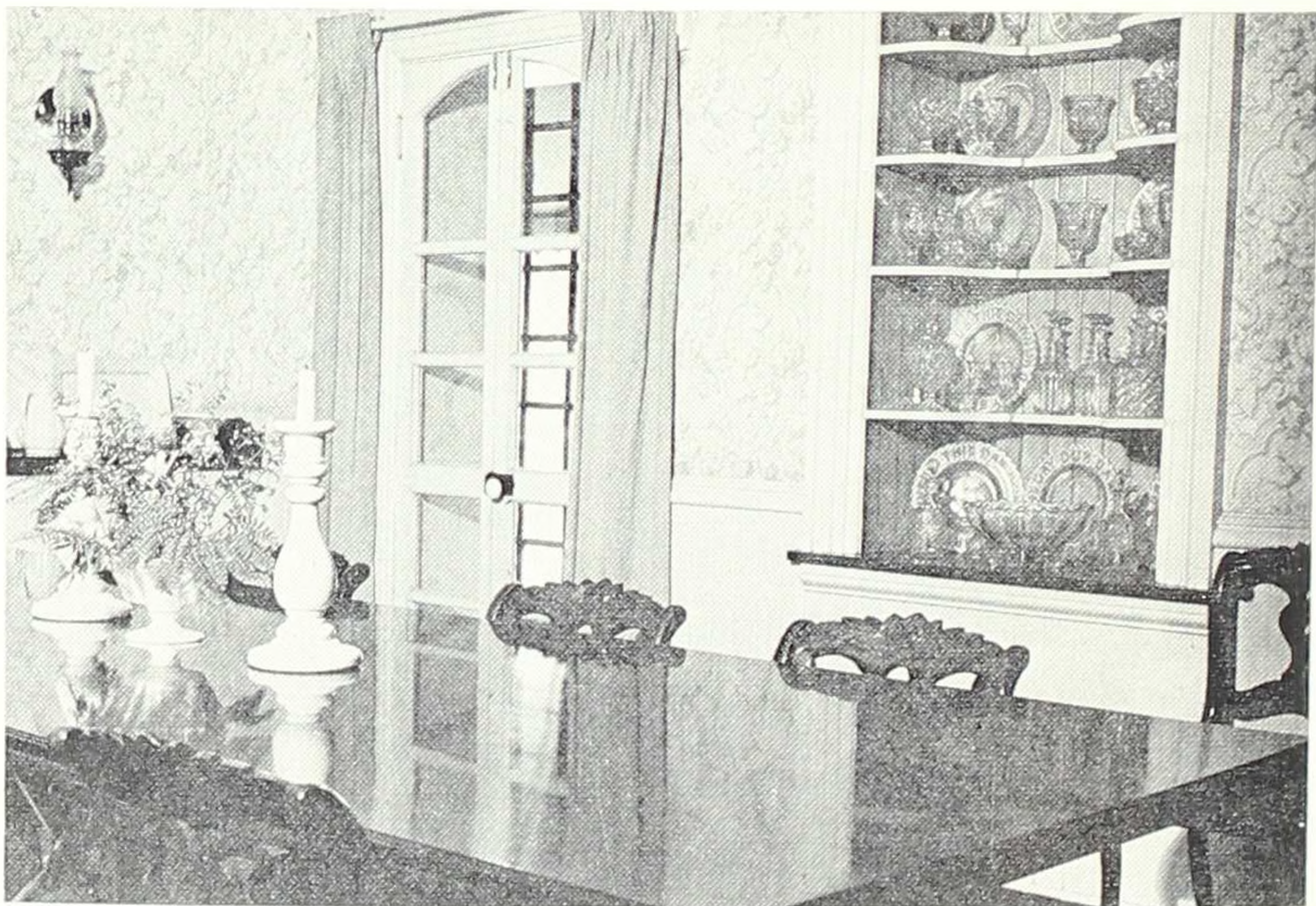
Photos Courtesy Iowa City Press-Citizen



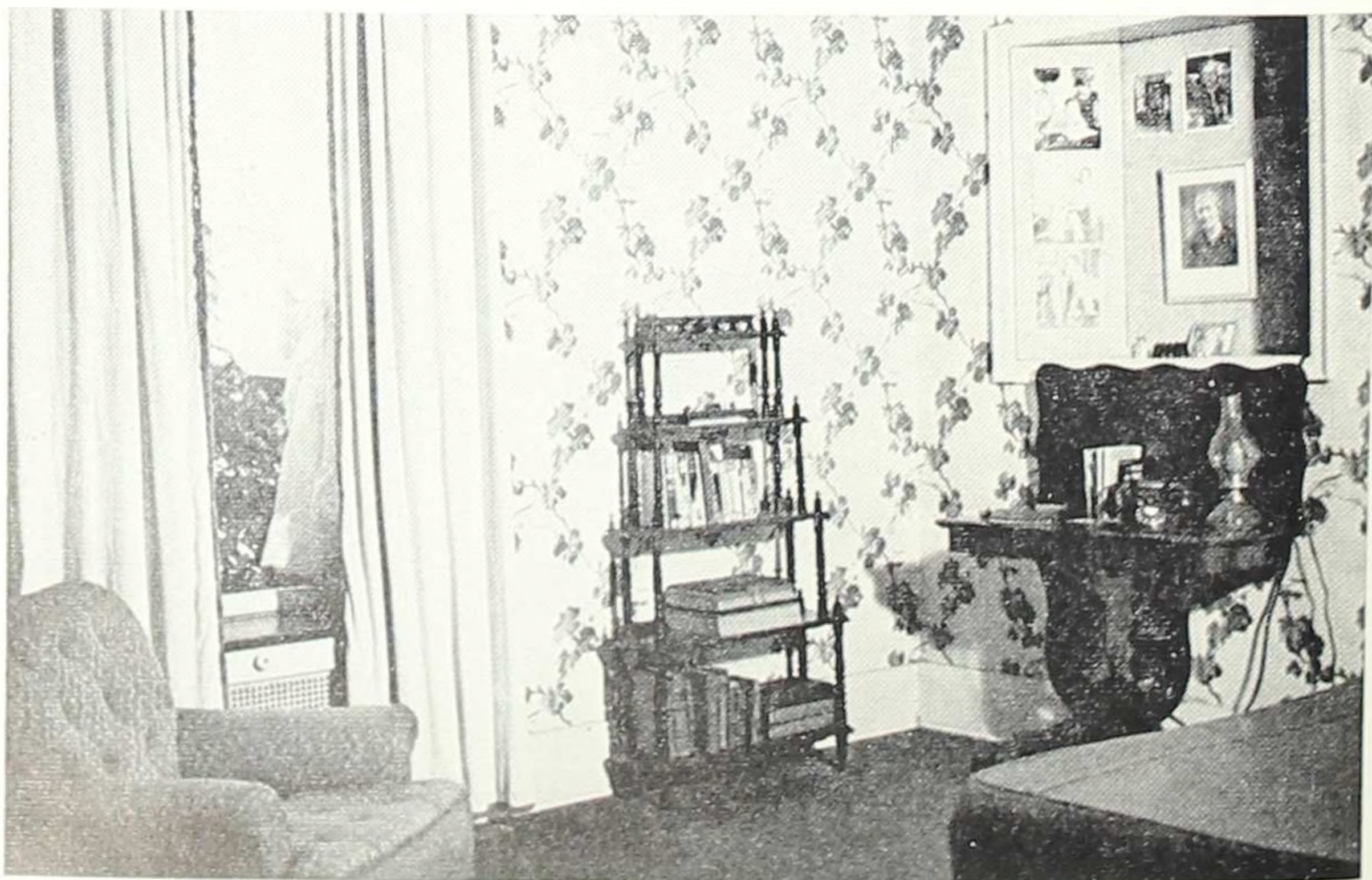
Grant designed the arm chair, built the bookcase, hammered out the fireplace copper hood, and designed the tables in the living room corner.



An old rose-wood piano fit in perfectly with the Early American furnishings and imported wallpaper of Victorian design.



Grant Wood designed his huge dining room table, using cast-iron supports from old store counters as legs. An open cupboard contained a large flint glass collection.



A corner of the bedroom contained an antique pedestal table, a whatnot for books, and a wall alcove for his personal photos, including one of his mother.

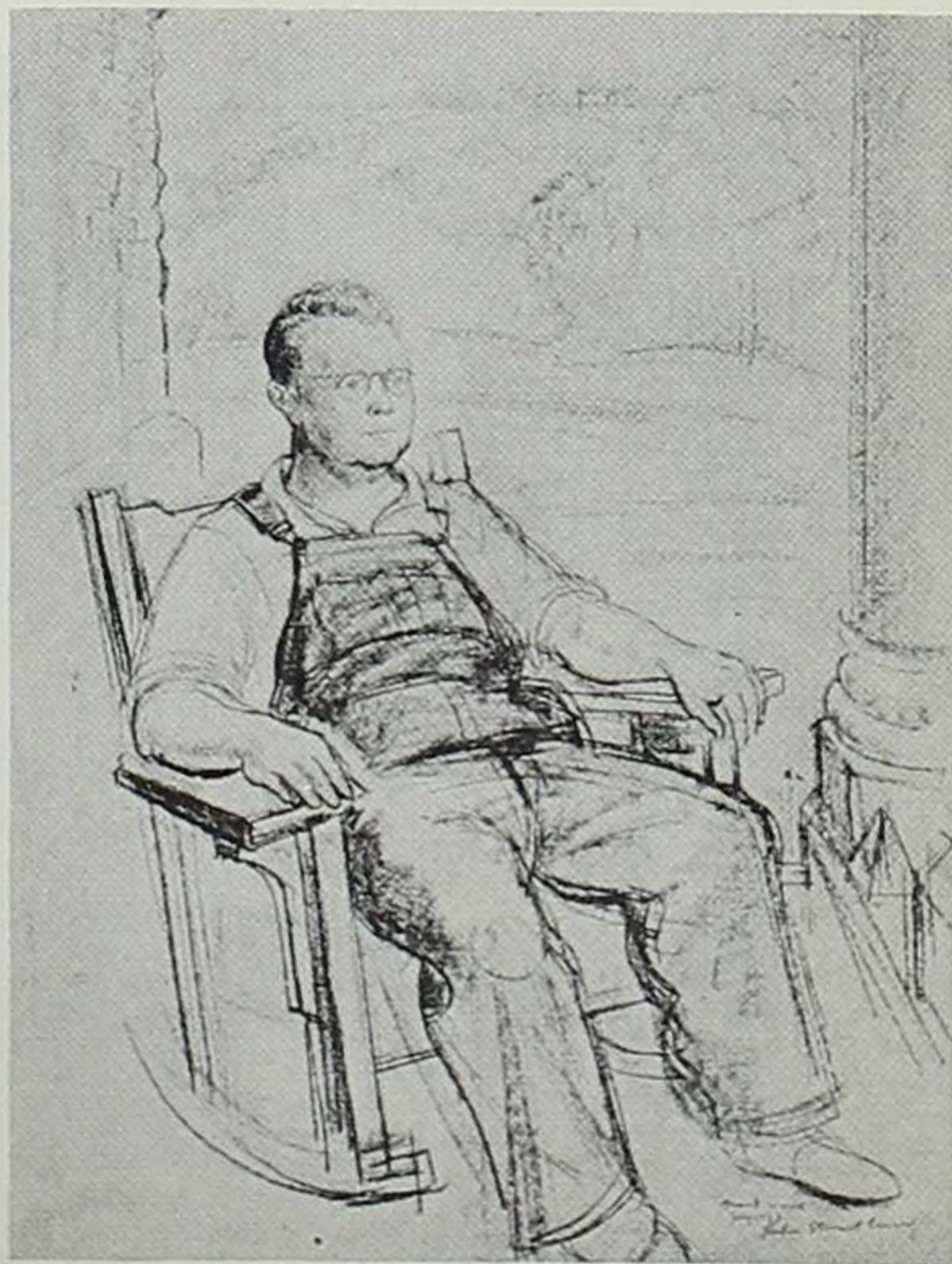


December Afternoon (1941)

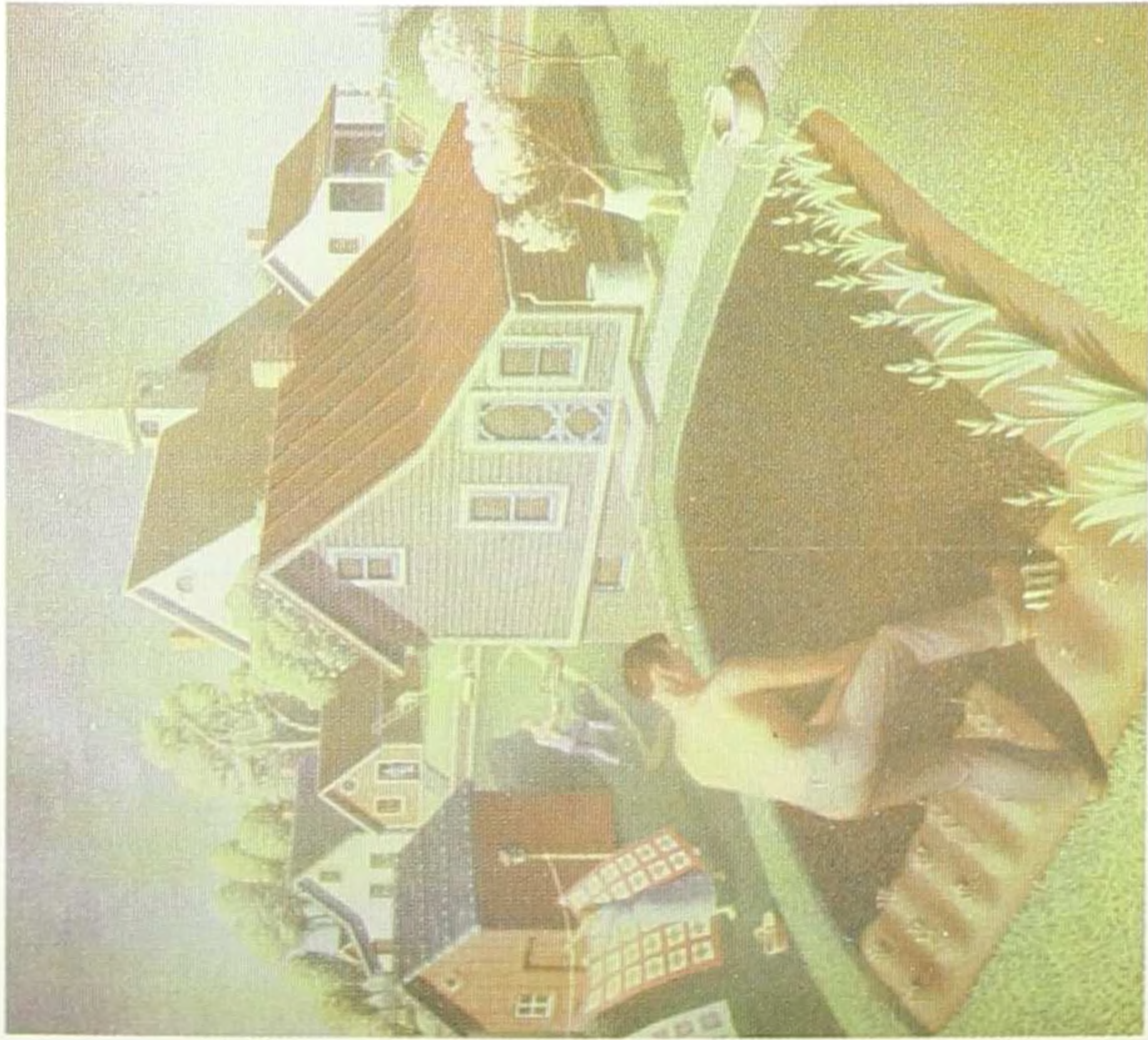


Davenport Municipal Art Gallery
Self Portrait (1932)

Grant Wood



Joslyn Memorial Museum, Omaha
John Steuart Curry Portrait of Wood (1933)



Sheldon Swope Art Gallery, Terre Haute
 Spring in Town (1941)



William Benton, Southport, Conn.
 Portrait of Nan (1938)

Tributes and messages of sorrow came from across the country from all walks of life. But all that might be said of him was said simply by his close friend, George D. Stoddard, then dean of the University of Iowa's Graduate College:

"Grant Wood painted what he knew and loved—and at times he had a little fun. Since he was modest and friendly, he was often misunderstood. He never defended himself or his work, but he believed in, and fought for, the right of his fellow artists to paint the American scene. Grant Wood was Iowa's best gift to the country. . ."

Some Colorful Anecdotes

Grant Wood's recollection of his early childhood was very vivid and many of his pictures were painted directly out of memories of his early years on the farm. "Dinner for Threshers," for example, and "Arbor Day," were subjects the artist knew from early experience.

★ ★ ★

Many older residents of Cedar Rapids remember Grant Wood as a painfully shy youngster who raised the earliest tomatoes and sweet corn in town and sold them from door to door.

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When Wood returned to Cedar Rapids from his first trip to Paris in 1920, he amazed the townspeople by the red beard he had grown on the trip. Despite the ribbing of his friends and despite the discomfort of the stiff and unruly whiskers, the artist kept his beard for several months.

"I finally shaved it off," he chuckled, "when I heard that my junior high school pupils were taking up a collection to buy me a razor."

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Once, when he was living in Cedar Rapids, Grant Wood needed some work done on his teeth

and he arranged to trade his family dentist, Doctor McKeeby, a painting for the dental work. The painting the dentist selected was of a famous bridge that Wood had sketched in Paris.

"A bridge for a bridge," chuckled the artist. "That's a square deal."

Doctor McKeeby was the man who posed for "American Gothic."

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At the art exhibition at the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines one year, Grant Wood saw an old farmer standing in front of the artist's famous landscape, "Stone City."

"The farmer would get up close to the picture, inspect it, and back away shaking his head," said Wood. "I thought if I went up and stood by him, he would say something about the painting. Sure enough, he did. Pretty soon, he shook his head vigorously and said: 'I wouldn't give thirty-five cents an acre for that land'."

* * *

Grant Wood had a keen sense of humor and was one of those rare persons who enjoy a joke on themselves.

Conscious of the fact that his snub nose and pink face gave him the appearance of a cherub, he once went to a costume party in Cedar Rapids as an angel—with wings, pink flannel nightgown,

and a halo supported by a stick thrusting up from his back.

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Wood had a friend in Cedar Rapids who had a big double house he had redecorated but which, for some reason, he could not rent.

"What that house needs is personality," Wood counseled his friend. "Try something unusual—say, goldfish."

The friend followed Wood's advice. He installed the goldfish and put a large sign in front of the house, advertising: "A GOLD-FISH IN EVERY ROOM."

Almost immediately the friend rented his house and his troubles were ended.

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When Grant Wood was painting his fantasy, "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere," he wanted a model for the horse and had found nothing that suited him. One evening when he was visiting at the home of a friend, he noticed a rocking horse that one of the children had left in the living room.

"There's my Paul Revere's horse," said Wood, and forthwith took it back to the studio and used it in his painting.

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Once at a dinner in New York, Wood found himself seated next to a vague and fluttery eastern woman who was under the impression that Indians

still roamed the Iowa prairie. Her ideas of farm life, too, were a bit vague and urban.

"Oh, Mr. Wood," she said enthusiastically, "I am so fond of your pictures—the one entitled 'Luncheon for Threshers'."

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Once Grant Wood told Henry A. Wallace that he had a plan to raise the clover crop in America by a quarter without increasing the acreage.

"What is your plan?" asked the then Secretary of Agriculture, greatly interested.

"I would grow four leaf clover exclusively," said Wood.

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The painting Grant Wood was planning, shortly before his death, was a portrait from memory of his father which the artist had hoped to complete as a companion piece to his famous portrayal of his mother, "Woman With Plant." Wood's Quaker father, Francis Maryville Wood, died when the artist was 10 years old.

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Because so many visitors came at all hours to the artist's studio at No. 5 Turner Alley in Cedar Rapids, Grant Wood painted a whimsical clock on its glass panel with a pointer to turn to indicate that Grant Wood—is in—is taking a bath—is out of town—is having a party.

Grant Wood died thinking he was a year younger than he actually was and as a result the obituaries at the time of his death listed his birth year as 1892. Even his gravestone carries the 1892 date. The error was later discovered and it was then recalled that Grant as a boy of 8 had scratched an inscription on a stone in the cellar of the family's home near Anamosa which read: "Grant Wood was born here February 13, 1891."

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Grant Wood's portrait of his mother has been known by two names, "Woman With Plant" and "Woman With Plants." Even though the plural form is written in Grant's own handwriting on the back of the painting, Nan, his sister, believes he absent-mindedly put the S on it. In the portrait, his mother holds only one plant, so the singular form has become common usage.

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As a Christmas greeting one year, Grant made plaster-of-paris casts of a sculpture he had done of his own face and sent them to friends without identification. But so perfect was the likeness that no one had to guess who it was.

★ ★ ★

Grant had great respect for a local carpenter, J. L. Coon, who did considerable work in his house

in Iowa City. Though the carpenter always called him Grant, Grant always called the carpenter, Mr. Coon.

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Art Critic Thomas Craven, in an article in *Scribner's Magazine* in 1937, told of the time when Grant was 23 and lived with his mother and sister for two poverty-stricken years in a shack Grant had built himself. Describing the first Christmas in the shack, Craven quoted Grant Wood as follows:

"I wanted to paint pictures but I had no time and no materials; my sister, Nan, was at the age when a girl should have pretty things—she had none; and Mother, who was always ailing, wanted better health. We had been living on rabbit meat—I had trapped the rabbits and roasted them in an outdoor fireplace. I could never look another rabbit in the eye. We longed for something more like Christmas, and Mother, who was blessed with a grand imagination and a sense of humor, had an idea; we would create a duck! I brought home a piece of round steak and a smooth, hard stick. She wrapped the steak around the stick and covered it with muslin, making the body neat and firm and carefully stitching the edges of the cloth together. Then I carved the end of the stick into a duck's head, carved it beautifully, gave it lots of style and design. After the meat was roasted and basted to

a golden brown, I touched up the head with bright water color. We were all so amused and merry—and so hungry—that we imagined we were eating a real duck."

* * *

It was Thomas Craven, a well-known art critic of the 1930's, who called Grant Wood's portrait of his mother, "Woman With Plant," a "veritable masterpiece."

"In draughtmanship and in sheer control of the medium," Craven wrote, "this picture is superior to Whistler's Mother; and in vitality and the enduring substance of sacrificial devotion, it reduces the Whistler tribute to a fragile silhouette."

Craven selected "Woman With Plant" to represent the Iowa artist in "A Treasury of Art Masterpieces" which he edited.

* * *

Grant Wood brought his Mother a cameo brooch that he had purchased in Italy because the face in the brooch looked like his sister, Nan. He had Nan wear the brooch when she posed for "American Gothic" and his Mother wore the brooch earlier for "Woman With Plant." The brooch was purchased in recent years from Nan by the Davenport Municipal Art Gallery and is displayed there.

Grant Wood Chronology

- 1891 Born on a farm near Anamosa, Iowa, on February 13. Son of Francis Maryville and Hattie D. Weaver Wood.
- 1901 Letter published in *The Anamosa Eureka* tells of Master Grant Wood recognizing 55 different kinds of birds.
In March, his father dies.
In September, Hattie Wood and four children move from farm to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, 25 miles away.
- 1905 Grant Wood wins prize in national Crayola contest for colored drawing of oak leaf.
- 1910 Graduated from Washington High School, Cedar Rapids.
- 1910-11 Attended Handicraft Guild in Minneapolis, Minnesota, during part of this period. Studied design under Ernest Batchelder.
- 1911 Taught at Rosedale Country School.
- 1912 Attended evening art classes at University of Iowa for three months.
- 1914-16 Spent these years partly in Cedar Rapids and partly in Chicago. Worked at Kalo Silversmiths Shop in Chicago and

- attended evening classes at the Art Institute of Chicago. In 1914, he started a new handicraft shop with a partner but went out of business in 1915.
- 1918 Inducted into United States Army. Did camouflage.
- 1919 Taught art at Jackson Junior High School in Cedar Rapids.
- 1920-28 Made four trips to Europe, painting in France, Italy, and Germany. In 1923-24, he stayed abroad a year; studied for a short period in Academie Julien, Paris. Held several exhibits in Cedar Rapids, selling scores of the paintings he had done abroad. In 1924, he taught for a time at McKinley High in Cedar Rapids.
- 1927-28 Commissioned to design large stained glass window for Cedar Rapids Memorial Coliseum. Traveled to Munich, Germany, to execute design. Became interested in Flemish and German primitive paintings which helped to crystalize his thoughts about changing his style and approach. Began intensive work under this new influence.
- 1929 *Woman With Plant*, a portrait of his mother and his first painting in a new direction, exhibited in American show at the Art Institute of Chicago.
- 1929-30 Painted *Stone City* and *American Goth-*

ic. American Gothic entered in the Annual Exhibition of American Paintings at the Art Institute of Chicago where it won, in October, 1930, the Harris bronze medal and \$300 purchase award. It was widely acclaimed by the critics and public and brought international attention to the artist.

- 1930-32 Painted many of his best-known oils.
- 1932-33 Was a founder and moving spirit of the Stone City Art Colony.
- 1934 Named director of Public Works of Art Projects in Iowa. Became Associate Professor of Fine Arts at University of Iowa.
- 1935 Married Sara Sherman Maxon. Had one-man shows at Lakeside Press Galleries, Chicago, and Ferargil Galleries, New York. Moved to Iowa City where he purchased a home.
- 1935-40 Continued teaching; lectured in all parts of the United States; worked on paintings and lithographs.
- 1939 Divorced from Sara Maxon Wood.
- 1940 Took a year's leave of absence from university teaching. Made lecture tour, painted.
- 1941 Spent Summer in Clear Lake to paint.
- 1942 Died of cancer on February 12 in Iowa City, two hours before his 51st birthday.

His Fame Lives On

In the 30 years since his death, Grant Wood and his art have remained vigorously alive in the public consciousness and in art history.

His works—the oils, the drawings, the lithographs and all—still are sought after eagerly, some of them bringing prices unheard of at the time they were done. Museums have acquired his paintings and he is now represented in many of America's leading art repositories.

As an example, there is the well-known satirical and humorous oil, "Daughters of Revolution." Originally owned by Edward G. Robinson, the actor, it was later purchased by Aristotle Onassis, the Greek shipping magnate. Now it seemingly has a permanent home with its purchase by the Cincinnati Art Museum.

Many exhibits of Grant Wood's work have been held throughout the country in the years since his death. Such shows remain extremely popular with the public. Efforts to hold a retrospective exhibition of his art last year at the University of Arizona went for naught, however, because so many owners of the major paintings were reluctant to loan them due to their increasing value and their fragility.

Grant Wood and Iowa have been synonymous terms in many parts of the world for three decades or more. The mention of one has suggested the other to people in other states and lands. In many cases, whatever knowledge people have had of Iowa has come from their familiarity with Wood's landscapes.

Thus the world has come to know of the rolling prairie land and fertile fields of eastern Iowa, and of their customs, through the stylized landscapes and meticulous portraits that Wood has painted.

It is generally conceded that the durability of Wood's art is due to his universal themes. At the time of his death, an editorial in the *Detroit (Michigan) News* said in part: "What made Grant Wood an outstanding figure in American painting was the number of people, and the variety of them, who felt his art had something for them. He communicated to thousands a great deal of what he felt about places and people we have lived in and with, and his appeal was as nearly universal as that of any American painter of this century."

Wood is the only artist in the history of Iowa ever to gain a pre-eminence in the art world and a secure place in the history of American painting. While the state has produced many highly recognized artists, none has ever, up to now, achieved the world attention that came to Grant Wood during his lifetime and since his death.

Wood himself was to experience only 12 years

of fame. He was 39 when "American Gothic" made him world famous in 1930 and he died in 1942. But in those 12 years, his creative genius and originality produced painting after painting that brought renewed acclaim.

After nearly 42 years, Wood's masterpiece "American Gothic," now in the collection of the Chicago Art Institute, has become a phenomenon in the art world. It has been called the most famous American painting of the century.

Recording a fabulous history of its own through the years, it is now an American folkpiece, deeply entrenched in this country's culture.

It has become the most caricatured painting of all time. Parodies of it have appeared constantly for years in advertisements, in movies and on magazine covers. Take-offs of the painting have been common in greeting cards for all occasions—even in early 1972 on a Valentine card.

The two figures in the painting have been favorites with political cartoonists, whose cartoons appear on editorial pages in newspapers and magazines. One, a lampoon of the then President of the United States and his wife decorated the cover of a record album. Other presidents have been used in parodies of the painting.

In the late 1960's, this painting became familiar to a third generation when children came to know it through a cornflakes commercial on television with the two parodied characters talking.

The "American Gothic hairdo" was proclaimed in 1970 and gaunt faces sometimes are described as "American Gothic faces." Journalist C. L. Sulzberger once described Premier Golda Meir of Israel as looking like "a benevolent Grant Wood farmer's wife."

In November, 1970, the Museum of Art at the University of Iowa, held an exhibit devoted entirely to the popular uses made of this Wood painting. Entitled "Through the Years With American Gothic," this exhibit was taken over by the Iowa Arts Council with showings scheduled throughout Iowa for most of 1972.

Plans now are underway to restore the original "American Gothic" house at Eldon, Iowa, as a public attraction and historical landmark.

There was a tendency for years to lump Artists Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Stuart Curry together as "regionalists" because each dealt in subject matter close to his own surroundings but with nothing else in common. This inclination has subsided and the three artists usually are classed as American Scene painters in art history books of recent years.

Grant Wood was first and last an Iowan. He lived all of his life in eastern Iowa, residing near Anamosa, and in Cedar Rapids and Iowa City. He found complete satisfaction and continuing inspiration close at home and in the people around him. He once admitted that he had to go to France

to appreciate Iowa, referring to the four trips he made to Europe in the 1920's when he was struggling to master his own style.

Grant Wood public schools are common now in Iowa, an honor that surely would have pleased this native son since he himself had served as an Iowa schoolteacher for several years early in his career.

EDWIN B. GREEN



GRANT WOOD



Such dull fields; corn shocks
And drab pasture lands;
"Beauty cannot spring," they said,
"From plow-warped hands!"

Farm-towns with grey streets;
Cities, new and raw;
"Loveliness is choked," they cried,
"Where things hold flaw!"

Feet ached from furrows~
The rivers crept by:
Dusty wastes of hillside loam
Tortured man's eye.

Stiff prairie cities;
Rambling, crude & fresh:
Nothing here that fancy's net
Dared to enmesh.

But hearts hold soft clay~
And rooted in the knolls
Is seed which the sun plants
To grow rich souls.

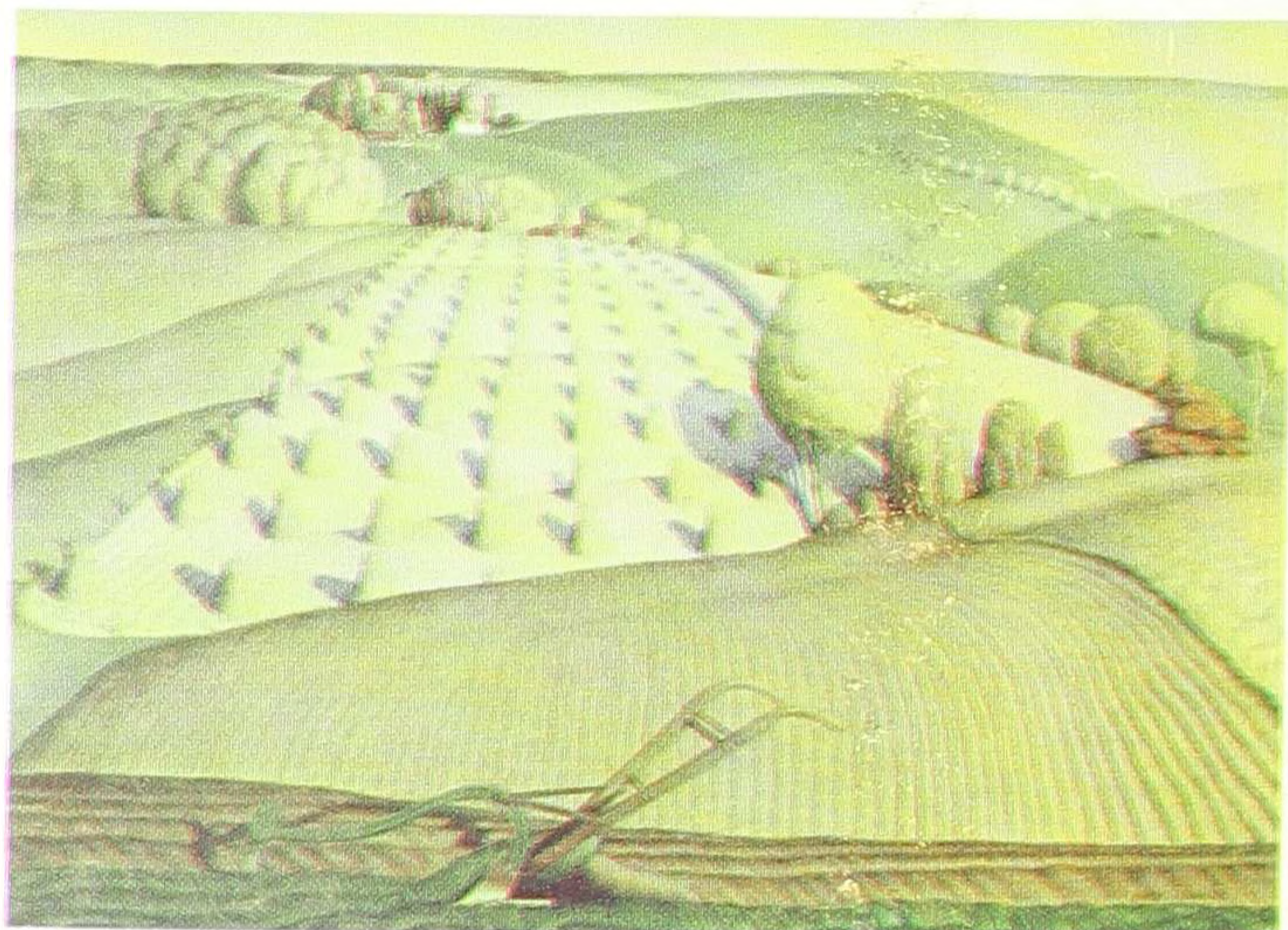
Slow years have queer ways
To ravel out a skein
But time found a new son
Dreaming on the plain.

Mastering such pigments
As prairie skies spill:
He made autumn sunsets
Blush to his will.

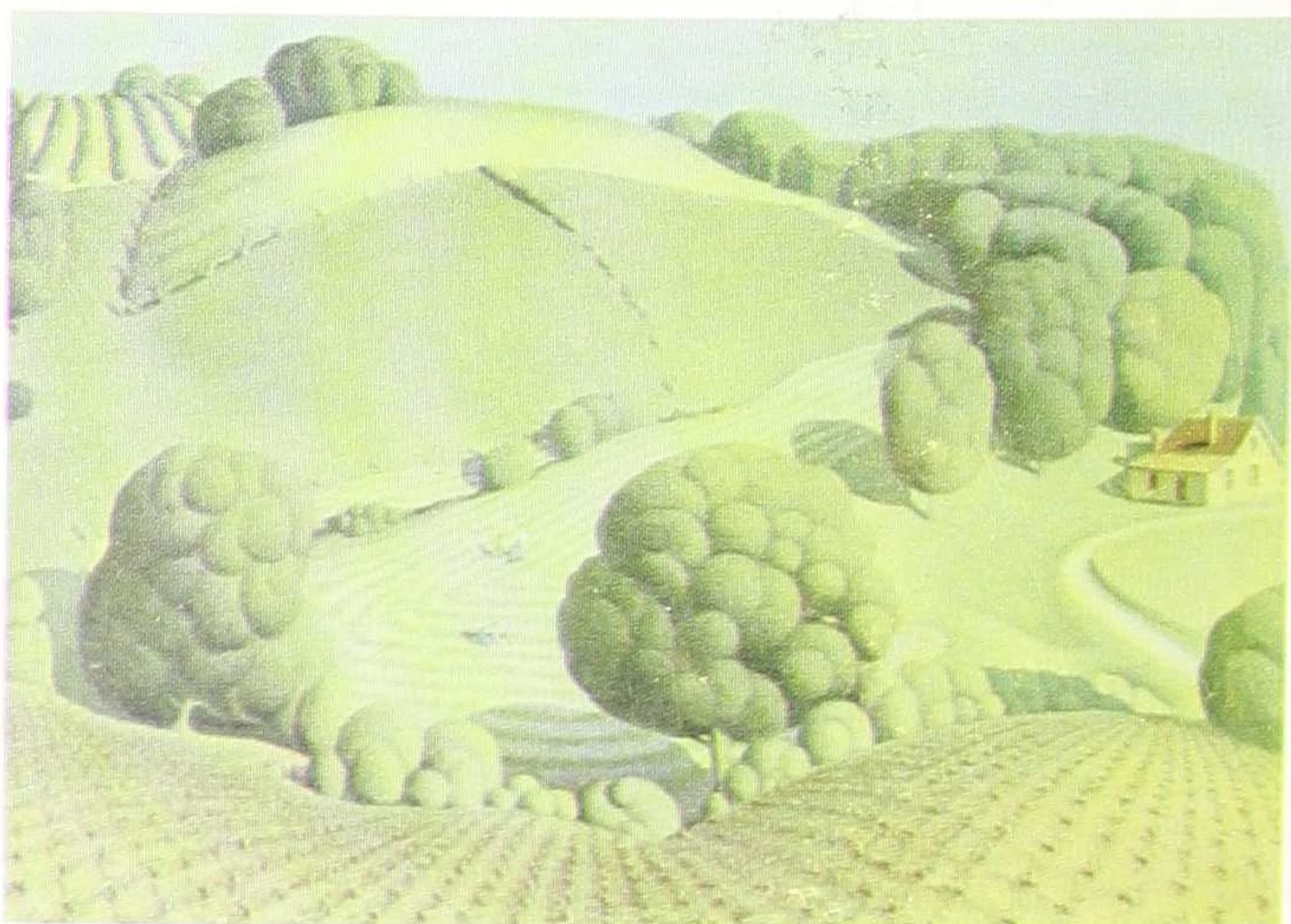
He captured the wood creek,
Brimming full of notes;
He shaped from the lithe birch,
Silken swan throats.

Men from the loud marts
Brought their silver hint:
Glad that such a genius hand
Gave their world tint.

Men, full of toil-sting,
Came to loiter long;
Prayerful that their barns & stacks
Had thus found song.



Fall Plowing (1931)



Cedar Rapids Community School District

Young Corn (1931)