

I suppose I am qualified to speak on my assigned subject this morning, "The Development of the Arts in Smaller and Rural Communities," because it has always been one of my intentions to do what I could to further the American arts in places where they might not ordinarily be expected to flourish. Over the years I have developed several drives that have made it essential for me to engage in arts development.

Strangely, it has been those drives and convictions that have remained with me, and have remained in my consciousness since I was a small boy in Kansas. I noted the bleakness of our hometown buildings; my Dad was a lawyer-farmer Iola, Kansas, and the pile of red local-baked brick with belltower, clock and buttresses as they called "The Allen County Court House," was not, I am sure, in its appointments or pictures, very beautiful and it smelled bad. My Dad, who was a Kansas pioneer and who loved the tall grasses of the prairie country, didn't seem to mind the bleakness, or the absence of a sense of art. It was a part of the nature of those oldtimers to do so much for the economic and legal life of a region in the past century, and early years of this, to dwell much more on work that had to be done, and the transformation of the land that had to be achieved, and the bringing of justice to a dwindling frontier, than to mourn over the absence of the arts.

Some of course, did mourn. My Mom did. She was equally busy in her own way, as all farm women were, in fact she insisted on a piano in our parlor, and a shelf of great books representing excellent writers. I grew up on those and they set my levels of appreciation. She found the time. I, never knowing, what her self-sacrifices signified, to read to me from the classics: from Dickens, Thackeray, Emerson and yes, Longfellow and Lowell and Poe, especially among the Americans. I think too, Hawthorne and Melville. But when the good land was transformed and broken for crops, and the prairie grasses stopped weaving and bending, a change began to be noted. We would not have thought, even in my youth, that there might somehow be an arts developer or an arts agency to help my Mom understand her cultural hungers. Nobody would have hired a person like an avowed arts developer...and there were no Foundations, such as the Bladin at Grand Rapids, Minnesota to give funds and stimulate arts at the grass roots, though we had the Chautauqua. The adults wouldn't have known what to do with a person like young Kurt Lambrecht, foundation sponsored, who has now worked for three years in Northern Minnesota in a setting not so different in attitudes from what Kansas was when I was a boy. But little by little such things did happen. If there is anything in my brief message to you this morning of ultimate importance, it is this: No matter where you work, how large or small a setting; the key to your beginning something that may last in human lives is courage, vision. Compromise may be necessary, but vision can transcend all.

I recall writing a paragraph along somewhere in early college years, when the spirit of a kind of non-conformist missionary for the arts began to strike me, on the American scene and its spirit, I suppose I was not particularly knowledgeable in those far back days about the place of arts in backcountry

America. But I believe that my mind was working, fermenting then, toward certain goals that might somehow breed a better day for the housewife, for the creative younger person, or for the adults with some semblances of sensitivity that could embrace support of an arts movement in smaller places. I had been on the scene after the American theatre began its most important transition from a superficial, situation, plot-oriented theatre to what it somewhat swiftly became after about 1915,...a theatre which could embrace American subjects and themes and local talent on a basis of reality. I was present during the disturbing days of World War I and through subsequent cataclysmic years which drew into the Great Depression and hastened the trend toward participation in the Arts by the more common, and less wealthy kind of American public.

I recall I wrote, about 1950, "America, artists have not painted so often on your village corners, not have housewives written much poetry in full knowledge of the public. In the face of the terrible economic necessities of the frontier, perhaps there are not so many pictures by local or well-known artists hanging on the walls of homes in rural areas." But a change seems to have come upon us in later years. When I first came to Wisconsin it wasn't particularly gratifying to certain members of the tight, economic-bent society to realize that housewives, some male adults, a few kids, were actually writing poetry. These experimenters, the men particularly, were actually thought to be a little strange, non-virile, perhaps, or just womanish, to say the least. Now, though, no frequent accusation of non-virility or daffiness is put upon persons, male or female, for expressing themselves in any of the arts and crafts, in broad daylight, on a front porch, or a street corner. Perhaps we have actually passed out of the last of our frontier hangovers, our success stories, and are beginning to look for the inward, creative things. Even in our small communities and rural places we may be able to communicate with one another, and to become a more totally arts-conscious people in a short time.

I, personally, have always believed that the average person must for the sake of his own happiness, be familiar with and appreciative of at least one art. It could be music, or drama, or dance, or the visual arts and crafts. ART is presumed to have good effects on people who do it, or appreciate it. According to some philosophers, good art meets a human need for variety, escape and identification. It is true that popular art fills an ever-growing amount of leisure time. Probably a certain popular type of television program is an easy example. For me it gives over-surfeit, boredom, and restlessness.

A society may need something more. Especially one which definitely includes leisure as a value. It might need a whole set of aesthetic values to provide standards for the various kinds of popular culture. Maybe such diversity is discernible in those values which are not absolutely dependant on the buying power of numbers of product consumers or viewers.

I doubt that a worker in the smaller or rural community arts needs to be a very learned aesthete. But he must be able to bring standards to bear and be able to articulate them. Appreciation is learned and is not necessarily built into our genes. If it were, probably we would have, in the arts, so, so, many less financial or support problems. Unfortunately, a

ready-made audience has never been available. What is available are basic human wants and needs and the satisfaction of these, through the arts, is something that a leader in the arts ought to know and comprehend in the light of where he is working.

A careful look at the place where you wish to have an influence on receptivity to the arts, is a first step I have always recommended to persons working with me. I have always believed that a key point in estimating possibilities of receptivity to the arts in Rural America is: How well does the developer fit in? How well is he or she able to articulate purposes that can be attractive to different economic levels, or to different ethnic backgrounds? A key point in estimating receptivity to the arts in rural America seems to be: how well does the arts developer know himself? How well is he or she able to "fit in" and articulate?

It would be wrong to suggest that the perfect arts developer must be a deeply introspective person; but self-analysis is very important. The ability to know yourself, to know the limits of your strength and ability and what your chief interests are, are considerations about which it is impossible to say too much. Self analysis is a built-in feature of the job. Without self knowledge and a talent to estimate your ability to accomplish certain things; you have much less chance of success. You will know and you alone, what your chances are of standing firm under certain kinds of stress. Arts development is an occupation filled with stress, and usually moves from crisis to crisis. Your self-analysis should include your known abilities to deal with persons and situations in critical state. How are you likely to react if someone speaks to you in a certain way, or offers what sounds like harsh and maybe unjust criticism. How good are your controls? You might find, for example, that those whom you may have had to decline to help, or who resent your failure to get them funded; will feel resentment toward you as the source of their failure to start and to maintain programs. Someone, or a group may have wanted to improve a community facility. You found it impossible to help them. They feel that your failure has dealt them a hard and unfair blow. They might hit back. Thus, how good are you at knowing your abilities to explain, and to keep friendships. Almost everybody makes enemies, but perhaps the fewer the better. At best, enemies can lead only to splits of supporters and non-supporters. Somehow you must find within yourself strengths to withstand onslaughts or innuendoes, and to make those who unjustly oppose you support you in the end. Decision-making is an important part of your work. Decisions are at times hard to make. Sometimes you may take a hard point-of-view on compromise. You are not willing to give up your ideas or to temper them with the ideas of others. So you must know the limits of your willingness to make compromises with situations. Remember best, perhaps, that the person who cannot compromise, make changes in his hard line, is the hero who usually pays for his hard line. Arts Development, perhaps is a compromising profession. It does not necessarily call for tragic heroes. It is more like a friendly occupation calculated to effect needful changes in the community which leaves the minimum of bad tasters.

Your ability to look well, speak well, sensibly and not too much, will help. Extremes of almost anything, except work, may hurt your program. There are many persons still who look upon the arts developer as a "special" person

who may possibly lead community youth into undesirable activities. Strong relationships with families, then, is good insurance.

Most of us are sometime accused of being an outsider, maybe from the Big City who has come to fix up the small community. Sinclair Lewis's Carol Kennicott, though her background and education was good, had a rough time, and was regarded suspiciously by Main Street. It is so easy to overwhelm and to enjoy leadership. You may be perfectly sincere in believing that folks in Peter's Rapids or Moreville would be better off if they would just do things your way. If may not work. Rural people may not make the same distinctions in roles that urbanites may. Thus, the rural arts developer can't be identified as only that. He will need to create a multiplicity of roles for himself in the community to gain acceptance. If he is new to town, probably he ought to get right away connected with some non-arts activities, to strengthen his image as a citizen; not just an arts developer. And if he uses that term to apply to himself, not many will know what he is about, anyhow.

Yet, with all the gaps possible in leadership, in some ways, it is miraculous that we are not further behind in our nourishment of the arts at the grass roots. The tendency is still very strong in ordinary people to pick out those possessions and activities which will somehow, they assume, add to their standing and prestige. The arts haven't been particularly high on their list of chosen activities...though more now than formerly. With the wealthier class of persons, or those who have pre-conceived ideas about the necessity of acquiring art only by well-known professional artists, our progress has not been so rapid. The idea of the local, the amateur, the picture that brings the owner no prestige only pleasure in its hanging, is strong in a society which has placed a great emphasis on the material. I am happy to note that the local artists have abandoned a spirit of inferiority and have gone about their business of creating, and display, fearlessly and proudly.

X We have, from time to time, tried very hard to capture or to recapture our "folkish" roots. They may still be found, but the "folk" as they were once characterized as sort of happy peasantry, or the less well educated, perhaps, or those who passed on our remembered oral tradition, do not really exist as they once did. Communications have broken us down as a folkish people, though our urges and necessities are probably the same. Nevertheless it is less easy for the folklorist to collect than it used to be, or to identify certain folk forms as authentic. What remains is a pride in being part of a certain area or region, content to say that my ancestors pioneered here, and I look upon this as my homeland. I cherish what remains of the older kinds of drive and ways of speaking and doing.

But a new kind of amateurism and certainly a new kind of volunteerism is growing with us, a respected and often very respected kind that is increasing in public regard.

One would expect, actually that the American people, being the enterprising kind of often ethnic conglomerate that they are, would come forward with something very unique, someday, in relationship to the arts. Many scholars, I believe, think that this might probably have a sharp emphasis in the folk arts, since the majority of our citizens are descendants of

persons, or families who were not wealthy, had to practice the folk arts often as part of their daily life. They were often, in former locations, survivors in a setting that made life hard, and they were forced to supply the small folk-type luxuries, or necessities themselves. Oftentimes their tools were of this nature, or the kinds of chests in which they packed their prized belongings. Their music they brought along with them when they emigrated. And they brought their folk dances, and many times whole bodies of folk wisdom and patterns of speech which, in their American setting, became synthesized into those values by which they lived. They brought planting and harvesting lore, and small rhymes which set their value systems out in plain talk. In a sense their arts became their values. Much of this was preserved, and probably remains today the most significant body of an American folklore that we have.

They, our settlers of many American rural areas, indeed, carried a kind of mysticism and legendary belief in land, and in the imaginary or real figures that mythically influenced the land into their daily life. A hunger which existed when they arrived for a better kind of family existence, their own land, their own schools and church and their own ways of belief and freedom of action, probably has, over generations, created a base for a splendid kind of volunteerism which in many communities, has grown into the community's most valued asset. The reasons that lie behind individual willingness to give and sacrifice for the local arts have their basis in prides that involve their families, often, or in their hope that they may be contributing something of faith to a maturing America. I doubt that too many volunteers are the articulate expressers of a philosophy. They are mostly the workers who have divined somehow that an idea or an art which pleases, and can often satisfy creative deep longings is worth something, and can, with full partnership of all -- lead to spectacular results. Including: social changes; more attractive communities to life in and work in; happier and more fulfilled citizens; people with great sense of self-worth and pride possibly never before articulated.

I imagine that a consideration in any kind of appraisal of America in terms of community arts and their development would include those points made in the 1930's by a noted American sociologist Ed Brunner of Columbia. "How well," asked Professor Brunner, in a forward to one of the first books written on the arts in rural America: "The Arts Workshop of Rural America," "How well, are the people in the varied sections of the United States, interpreting themselves in terms of the beauty, the spirit, the problems and the inwardness of life in rural America." Brunner notes that "leisure is an affair of mood and atmosphere and not merely of the clock ... Learning to use leisure is not a chronological sequence of the clock, but a spiritual experience. In its ideal state it is unhurried, pleasurable, among ones own enthusiasms."

Leisure, to be sure, was not a really popular work among American working people until fairly recent times. I can well remember in my own boyhood farm community in Eastern Kansas, how shameful it was considered to even take a daytime nap. Some folks did, but were looked at a little askance by neighbors who were using all their energy in the cornfield, or the pigpen, or the cowbarn. The arts, as a leisure time activity weren't much considered, except maybe a Saturday night square dance or party-game socializing.

But little by little the change did come about which let an amount of pleasure into daily working life in terms of the arts. I suspect that it was chiefly two things that led to this change. It was the great Depression which created its own kind of leisure, not desirable, but nevertheless productive of some time that could be devoted to cultural activities. The Federal Theatre as lead by Halie Flanagan or the Federal Arts Project which bred a generation of fine American artists. And it was the emergence of the Federal Extension Service which had moved into local situations in American counties with large programs which, at least after 1914, when the Smith-Lever law was passed making funds available for work with farm women, and young people, in projects designed by a new kind of field worker, to improve homes and encourage creative spirits as well as improve farm-home situations economically. The plight of the hard-working farm woman, for example, who for at least three generations had suffered almost unbearable conditions of hard physical farm labor, was finally highlighted in early 20th century by Marth Van Rensallae of Cornell who placed a pedometer on the leg of an active farm wife, and found that she traveled on foot around her house and farm more than twenty miles each day. This fact probably known intuitively by many tired women in America was widely publicized, and did something to focus attention on programs which supposedly gave her both time and pleasure in creating simply things, painting a picture, or writing a poem; and at last a recognition by her family that these things were worthwhile. Summed up finally by Glen Frank, once president of the University of Wisconsin: "Agriculture is a life as well as a livelihood. There is poetry as well as production on a farm. Art can help us to preserve the poetry while we are battling with the economics of farming."

And of course, all such statements of approval, led quickly to the rise of many little and community theatres, to new emphasis on music, especially singing, and community bands and orchestras; and ultimately to a regional painting movement that blossomed in the Depression years and formed backgrounds and opportunities for many men and women who became famed subsequently as leading painters and arts of America.

I am not certain that the problems attendant upon the community arts are all that different today from what they were a generation or so ago when we were beginning to cut through the mists of apathy and antagonism. Leadership, adequately trained and exposed to excellent examples, has always been one of the leading problems; and I can see today the same sorts of patterns to meet that need being developed here and there. New kinds of demonstration and example projects, sometimes costly now, in an era when there is less money in institutions and foundations to finance these things, or to hire field persons who can teach and lead and to volunteers. Nevertheless there seems to me to be a greater willingness on the part of organized arts groups to participate in leadership preparation, and in audience and volunteer education than ever before. Conferences, exchange of ideas and dispensing of information are all critical. But the problems facing the individual who may wish to enter the lists of community arts as careers are certainly more complicated than ever. Vast technical changes; new equipment; new ways of interpretation; a mobile society and communication systems unreal in their expanse are parts of the new problem for the arts worker. But there are some basic things that do not seem

to me to have changed very much and which are the most important items in success or failure in leadership.

I would think, as through the years I have noted the progress of development of the arts in communities, that it is essential to become intimately acquainted with the traditions and assets of such institutions as state universities, land grant colleges, public libraries and municipalities and their governments, the public and private schools and business. The way it has been going in some states, a virtual circuit of theatres and galleries have been established by the regional colleges and universities. In Wisconsin we have 27 of these places, each in its own part of the state and looked upon with great pride by local and regional people. Virtual folk cultures have grown up around these cultural locations. And, where there were no theatres to mention, in outlying places when I came to Wisconsin 38 years ago, now there are actual theatres available to tours; or music halls, and galleries for both local artists of a wider reputation -- some in quite small places.

In some parts of the nation facilities have outstripped the programs which motivated their construction. Unfortunately many fine facilities often now have dark nights, or no art shown; and little leadership at the grassroots to use them properly.

But it is definitely better than it was in America. For a while we forgot the touring theatre days of the 19th century, at least, when there were so many small opera houses and theatres waiting to accept the stock companies and touring shows that did come through. But then we had a large network of railroads, and we viewed them as one of our greatest assets for promoting and spreading the arts.

Things are better now. We have a deep sense of national responsibility and a will to create partnerships among agencies and individuals. We have assurance that in smaller communities there is capable leadership to be discovered. That parents do want better opportunities for youth. There are programs for the aged in the arts; that small community values still can and do affect the national scene; that small communities are easier to work with -- communication is easier; that regard for arts at grassroots will effect arts at high levels of government; small town folk are bold when they get started; that they can raise money for the arts; older and younger persons mix well and willingly in smaller places; that local prides in ancestors, in local history can breed friendliness for the arts. And always there is this human miracle of courageous leadership with vision that flows from individual and setting, and can become of importance to everyone, everywhere.

Finally, I would hope that you delegates here might take this as a charge from me -- a sort of handing on of a role which I have greatly enjoyed. I believe we must face the future with courage and vision. The rural folk in America and those who are developing the arts in rural places, need not only to know that they have made a difference; but that the ball has very nearly been passed back into their hands. Note the changing demographics focusing attention on environmental issues, on transportation, on issues of growing populations and absentee or vacation ownership of land; of the issue of older people. I think it is up to you to set the tone of a new America, devoted once again to its grassroots; And to the new leaders and partners who appear to be returning to the land.