

An Arts & Agriculture Project Final Report

Submitted by
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1. The Need as Originally Perceived:

We originally felt that Americans in general, and more specifically young people, had a very weak sense of history. Even in Wisconsin, where we have a strong history of arts involvement at the local level in every part of the state, we felt that few people knew of the work of John Steuart Curry, the first artist-in-residence of any major university, who traveled throughout the state, developing the artistic talents and abilities of rural farm men and women, laying the foundation for the Wisconsin Rural Arts Program. What we have learned so far is that our original perceptions were well founded: describing the history of Wisconsin's rural arts program is new information to artists and to agricultural workers alike. All of the exciting, ground-breaking efforts by the University of Wisconsin's Department of Agriculture during the 1930's and 1940's are part of a past which today hardly anyone remembers or appreciates. But many are hungry to hear it.

2. The Solution – the Overall Goal:

This project, bringing together the efforts of arts and agriculture workers, provided a wonderful opportunity to fill in part of an historical void relating to the arts in rural Wisconsin. The overall goal of the project was to tour an exhibit of historical artwork by Wisconsin rural artists developed under the guidance of John Steuart Curry. The project initially exhibited the artwork at the Northern Lakes Center for the Arts in Amery, Wisconsin, during May, 2006 and subsequently at the first of six forums held by the Wisconsin Academy of Arts, Letters and Sciences focusing upon the future of farming in Wisconsin, held at UW-Stout in Menomonie, Wisconsin, also during May, 2006. The conference gathered nearly one hundred local artists and agricultural workers from every part of the State. The exhibit will also be displayed in five more forums planned for the remainder of 2006 and 2007 and plans have begun to be implemented for the collection to be exhibited in local art galleries throughout Wisconsin, as well as in public libraries, historical museums and other appropriate rural venues. As a catalogue of the work, the exhibit will be accompanied by a reprinted copy of John Rector Barton's book, *Rural Artists of Wisconsin*, published in 1948 as part of Wisconsin's centennial celebration and dedicated to the memory of John Steuart Curry. The book has been reprinted for purchase by local public libraries, public schools and other interested individuals. The exhibit and the reprint of Barton's book were discussed in an extended interview on Wisconsin Public Radio aired on May 25 as part of its "Spectrum West" programming and will be included in other appropriate forums and conferences to be held at various places throughout Wisconsin.

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3. Specific Objectives Accomplished/ Dates:

Original Objectives:

Projected Due Date(s):

A. Copy original historical artwork

January, 2006

- (30-35 pieces)
- B. Mount, mat and frame artwork Feb.-Mar., 2006
- C. Build related touring materials April, 2006
(boxing, etc.)
- D. Reprint *Rural Artists of Wisconsin* Jan.-April, 2006
- E. Develop related printed materials Jan.-Feb, 2006
(brochure, etc.)
- F. Organize initial exhibit and Mar.-April, 2006
May conference
- G. Organize/implement tour schedule May, 2006
(Monthly – ten sites annually)

Actual Accomplishments: Completion Date(s):

- A. Secured approvals to reprint the book and reproduce the artwork February, 2006
(This took much longer and involved much more time than originally planned)
- B. Copied original historical artwork May, 2006
(39 pieces – significantly more than originally planned)
- C. Mounted, matted and framed artwork May, 2006
- D. Built related touring materials May, 2006
(boxing, etc.)
- E. Reprinted *Rural Artists of Wisconsin* Jan.-May, 2006
- F. Developed related printed materials Jan.-Feb, 2006
(fliers, etc.)
- G. Organized initial exhibit for Mar.-April, 2006
May conference
- H. Participated/presented at May conference and was interviewed May, 2006
on Wisconsin Public Radio
- I. Organized/implemented tour schedule Beginning May, 2006
(Monthly – ten sites annually)
- J. Organized participation in other Beginning June, 2006
appropriate conferences and gatherings to promote the project

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4. Groups/Individuals Involved and Benefits:

This project has involved and brought together groups and individuals who have not closely associated in the past. The Wisconsin Academy's forums on the future of farming in Wisconsin have brought together an amazing panorama of artists, farmers, extension and agricultural service workers, young and old, to discuss this issue so important to Wisconsin's future. The first forum, held at UW-Stout in Menomonie, Wisconsin during May gathered nearly one-hundred people and provided an excellent opportunity for presentation and discussion of this project. The artwork was displayed throughout the

day and very ample time was provided for special discussion of the project and the historical portrait of farming in Wisconsin it portrays. The conference also provided an excellent opportunity to arrange future book sales and touring arrangements.

The next presentation of the project will be held at the Fourteenth Annual Conference for Local Arts Agencies in Northwestern Wisconsin to be held at the Northern Lakes Center for the Arts June 23. Annually the Center gathers arts, civic and general public representatives from northwestern Wisconsin to discuss important arts issues of local concern. This year the Rural Culture and Agriculture project will be on the agenda of this conference. The next exhibit of the artwork has been arranged for display at the School of the Arts in Rhinelander, Wisconsin, to be held during July 23-29, 2006. This will provide an opportunity for artists, 4-H workers and Extension leaders from throughout the State to view the collection. The Rhinelander School of the Arts is another activity within the UW Department of Liberal Studies and the Arts. During August, the exhibit will be part of the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program (SARE), which will be holding its national conference in Wisconsin this summer. During the summer as well, arrangements are being made to identify and exhibit rural 4-H artwork to be included along with the historical artwork at appropriate venues. During spring of 2007, the exhibit will be displayed in the gallery of the Wisconsin Academy of Arts, Letters and Sciences in Madison. The collection has received wonderful responses and comments wherever it has been displayed – we are well on our way to realizing our original intent and objectives.

It has already become clear that this project can play an important role in an effort to fill a void relative to the perception of rural agricultural life on the one hand and rural cultural development on the other in Wisconsin. Arts development in rural areas has a long history which needs to be more completely and more carefully documented. While seeking out permissions to reproduce the exhibit, it was discovered, really quite by accident, that one of the original artists was still alive. She was a young woman during the 1940's and still does her artwork. She is one of those still living who remembers what it was like to work with John Stuart Curry. In fact, she still has in her possession a portrait of Curry which she began before his death and which remains unfinished to this time. Her story and her memories somehow need to be recorded and preserved, but that is probably another project for another time. I suspect the present project will uncover others. This work will continue.