

Picturing Utopia: Bertha Shambaugh and the Amana Photographers

Steven Hoelscher

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State. Through it all, we see this quiet, introspective artist struggle to express himself artistically and spiritually as art world tastes shifted from the neoclassicism of the beaux arts to the modernism of the international school.

Because of Petersen's use of local imagery, his belief in the cultural importance of the Midwest, and his brief association with the depression-era Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), it is tempting to label him a regionalist. Yet, as art historian Charles C. Eldredge points out in the catalog's introduction, Petersen's work went beyond regionalism. From the time he arrived in Iowa, Petersen turned his back on fashion to develop a personal style. The artist's inspiration seems to have come largely from his deeply held religious convictions and his wife Charlotte, whom Patricia Lounsbury Bliss describes as Petersen's muse.

During his years in Ames, Petersen often worked in local materials, occasionally carving sculpture from Iowa limestone and collaborating with Paul E. Cox, head of the university's Ceramic Engineering Department, to create works in clay. Art conservator Linda Merk-Gould's essay, while weighted with technical information, gives readers a behind-the-scenes look at the detective work and painstaking attention to detail that went into a recent project aimed at saving several of these works from the ravages of time and vandalism.

The inclusion of poems written by Michael Carey and Neal Bowers and inspired by the work of Christian Petersen emphasizes that, like their maker, these sculptures do not demand public attention. Petersen's quiet sculptures are best experienced where their placement and scale allow viewers to converse with them one-on-one.

Because the strength of Petersen's work comes from its introverted nature, making a public case for it is an onerous task. The three-dimensional intimacy that makes this work meaningful is inherently difficult to capture between the covers of a book. Given the degree of the challenge DeLong set for herself, it is disappointing that the end product is marred by the appearance of having been hastily assembled. Too often, the catalog's poorly edited text and uninspired graphic design weaken her admirable attempt to secure a permanent place for Petersen in the canon of American art.

Picturing Utopia: Bertha Shambaugh and the Amana Photographers, by Abigail Foerstner. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000. xiv, 148 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewer Steven Hoelscher is assistant professor of American studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of "The Photographic Construc-

tion of Tourist Space in Victorian America" (*Geographical Review*, 1998) and *Heritage on Stage: The Invention of Ethnic Place in America's Little Switzerland* (1998).

The cover of Abigail Foerstner's *Picturing Utopia* is striking and highly suggestive of its title. Posed underneath a dark cloth that surrounds the accordion-shaped bellows of a large view camera, a smartly dressed man is caught in the act of making an outdoor photograph. The photographer, with his back towards us and hunched over the tripod that supports his equipment, focuses his camera and all his attention on the scene before him. Four young women are the objects of his gaze. Their various poses—three sit comfortably on nature's carpet and one stands with an arm gently around a tall, thin tree—seem to imply peace and tranquility, as does their rapt attention; each stares directly into the camera's lens. The utopian moment is capped by the women's traditional headwear and by their soft smiles.

The "utopia" in question is the Amana Colonies of a century ago, and "picturing" describes the act of making photographs of the Amana inhabitants and landscapes. Not only does the cover illustration bring together these central ideas, but it also raises some intriguing questions: What was the purpose of making large format photographs (and not just family snapshots) of the Amana Colonies? Who was the photographer hidden behind the unwieldy camera and what was the relationship between the picturer and the pictured? Did the subject matter influence the look of the pictures? Was there any tension between the Amana ideal of tradition and photography, one of the most significant expressions of the modern world? Foerstner's book succeeds in answering some of these questions, and leaves others for future scholars.

Picturing Utopia's subtitle, "Bertha Shambaugh and the Amana Photographers," hints at the book's structure. Roughly half of the text is devoted to Bertha Horack Shambaugh—the amateur historian and professor's spouse who was one of the first chroniclers of Amana history. Before she married the historian and political scientist Benjamin Shambaugh (and for several years after their 1897 wedding), Bertha Horack made dozens of trips from Iowa City to photograph the nearby religious community. Foerstner describes the hundreds of photographs that emerged from the young woman's camera as good examples of the "social documentary" style pioneered by social reformers such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine. But, in Foerstner's telling, Horack Shambaugh seems less a reformer than a romantic interested in preserving a disappearing way of life; a more apt comparison might be Edward Curtis and his nostalgic vision of American Indians as "the vanishing race." Like Curtis, Horack Shambaugh saw the objects of her camera's gaze as "an example of a better world that freed itself

from both the excesses and materialism of the wealthy . . . and the hard times and labor strikes of the poor" (12). Unfortunately, and with no small degree of irony that the author leaves unexplored, Horack Shambaugh's photographs simultaneously recorded a disappearing "model society" (2) and helped facilitate the changes that led to its dissolution.

When the young, well-to-do woman began taking pictures in the Amana Colonies, photography was forbidden; according to Foerstner, Bertha Horack's determination to ignore the community's rules showed "remarkable spunk" and earned her "fond forbearance" of the Amana elders (39). In any event, a series of Amana men (and one woman) with varying levels of commitment to the Colonies also began testing the limits of community tradition. These "insiders"—Foerstner discusses the work of ten local photographers—took a remarkable range of photographs depicting scenes of home, friends, work and leisure activities, and religious practices. A diversity of styles and content characterize the Amana photographers. Some, such as William Noé, experimented with lighting to dramatic effect, mirroring the pictorial photography of Edward Steichen; others, such as the physician Christian Herrmann, approached the medium more as a means to record daily life. Whether or not the variety of photographic approaches was greater than in the population as a whole—as Foerstner suggests—is open to debate. But beyond question is the beauty and archival value of the photographs contained in this book.

Indeed, it is the expertly printed 74 photographic plates following the text that make *Picturing Utopia* such a delight. Not all of the prints may be considered superior in terms of technique and composition, but some rival the best that are part of the standard histories of photography, and all provide a window into one of Iowa's most fascinating communities. William Noé's photographs in particular stand apart as exceptionally well-composed portraits of people and places. This should come as no surprise, as Noé was often called upon to supply photographs for publicity. With the Great Change of 1932, photography was no longer suspect and soon became an active agent in promoting the Colonies as a major regional tourist attraction. The artistically composed scenes that emerged from Noé's camera reproduced qualities inherent in Amana society and ones that tourists wished to see: simplicity, harmony, and nostalgia for a better past.

By bringing together these photographs in one finely produced volume, Abigail Foerstner has performed a great service: *Picturing Utopia* is a worthy addition to the University of Iowa Press's important list of books devoted to the history of photography. Scholars will

probably wish that the author had spent less time describing Shambaugh's bourgeois lifestyle and more on a critical analysis of the photographs themselves. And students of the Amana Colonies, and of rural Iowa more generally, will most likely find the plates of greater utility than the text. Both groups should get a copy of *Picturing Utopia*, however, for the questions that it raises; its first-rate presentation makes the book an excellent resource for diverse readers.

Can She Bake a Cherry Pie?: American Women and the Kitchen in the Twentieth Century, by Mary Drake McFeely. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2000. x, 194 pp. Notes, index. \$24.95 cloth.

Reviewer Anne Kaplan is managing editor of *Minnesota History*. She is co-author of *The Minnesota Ethnic Food Book* (1986).

Like the fixings for a cherry pie, most of the ingredients for a work on this topic are staples. Thanks to work in women's studies, history, folklore, and anthropology, material abounds on the nature of women's work in general and cooking in particular. In addition, readers—especially women—will bring their own experiences to the table.

Mary Drake McFeely seasoned her library research with some interviews and a hearty dose of personal experience. She begins with America's nostalgic ideal: the women of rural Napton, Missouri, whose 1928 cookbook provided a window into a life of from-scratch cooking on wood stoves. These women worked hard, using recipes usually learned at a mother's knee. While yearning for conveniences, they had the sure knowledge at the end of the long day that "what they were doing was essential. It went without saying" (18). Throughout the twentieth century this stereotype, McFeely says, has been held up as woman's proper place, the ideal of female fulfillment, and the basis of a happy family and a strong society.

The book then flashes back to the mid-nineteenth century to chart the evolution of women's culinary roles. It chronicles iconoclasts such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, whose prescription for freedom from drudgery proved way ahead of its time. It rehashes the "scientific cooking" advances of women such as Fanny Farmer, who would make women scientists and management experts but still chain them to the kitchen. The twentieth century's burgeoning technology and convenience items did not free women from the kitchen. Instead, through two world wars, depression, and prosperity, corporate America and the U.S. government taught women to be good consumers, thrifty managers, and creators of ever more elaborate, if tasteless, foods. Women, according to McFeely, ceased being confident carriers of tradition as they

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