



Art and Beauty in the Heartland: The Story of the Eagle's Nest Camp at Oregon, Illinois, 1898-1942

Jan Stilson

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Lorado Taft and several artist friends from Chicago joined together to form an art association at Oregon, Illinois in 1898. They called it Eagle's Nest. They referred to it as camp, for in the early years camping was their principle lifestyle. This "camp" lasted for forty-four years, providing enrichment for the artists and for the residents of little Oregon who always enjoyed having the artists come to town. The artists worked and relaxed at camp. They also reached out to small towns to teach folks about art appreciation. Midwestern residents were hardy country folk who didn't pay much attention to details of beauty. There were no parks, no public monuments, and often people did not even notice a beautiful sunset. The artists at Eagle's Nest Camp spread the message of beauty in each hometown, school, Women's club, art group or community function they attended. Simply put, they were art missionaries. By teaching appreciation of beauty, they started a trend in community betterment and beautification that caught the imagination of the people, the patrons of art, and the Governor of Illinois, Frank O. Lowden, a resident at Oregon. Within these pages are the letters of Dwight Perkins to his wife about life at camp, the stories of Hamlin Garland's romance with Zulime Taft; the mischievous antics of little Charlie Browne, the joys and sorrows of Lorado Taft as he promoted art in Chicago and elsewhere, the building of the monolithic statue, "Black Hawk" on the banks of the Rock River, a review of the Black Hawk War, and the story of Margaret Fuller who so greatly influenced the artists. And more, much more.

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