



IN HIS STUDIO, artist Edward Brewer puts finishing touches on a fanciful painting of the Statue of Liberty rising over New York. It was one of eighteen calendar subjects he did for the former Jensen Printing Company of Minneapolis.

MINNESOTA PROFILES

Edward Brewer

Illustrator and Portrait Painter

Patricia Condon Johnston

EDWARD BREWER of St. Paul was Minnesota's answer to famed illustrator Norman Rockwell. From 1911 until 1926 Brewer created the enormously popular full-page Cream of Wheat advertisements that appeared monthly in dozens of national magazines. The folksy ads for the Minneapolis company have become collector's items. And Brewer's reputation as an illustrator has been given a fresh coat of polish.

The son of one of this country's finest portrait painters (and the father of a talented portraitist), Edward Brewer was also a gifted muralist and portrait painter. His paintings of business, academic, and political leaders in Minnesota are included in numerous public and private collections. Several other examples of his work — portraits of governors and one of Abraham Lincoln — are in the Minnesota State Capitol in St. Paul.

¹Ray Allen Billington, comp., *Allan Nevins on History*, 174, 179 (New York, 1975).

²The author wishes to thank Edward Brewer's children, Edward Lucien Brewer, Barbara Brewer Peet, and David Brewer, for their generous help in making this article a reality. Barbara Peet, especially, deserves special thanks for spending several days with me, sifting through the many boxes of letters, other papers, and photographs (hereafter cited as Brewer Papers in the possession of Barbara Brewer Peet, St. Paul) that were salvaged when Brewer's studio burned shortly before his death. She also supplied much personal family history during conversations with the author from November, 1978, through January, 1979. These will henceforth be cited Barbara Brewer Peet interviews.

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When he died in 1971 at the age of eighty-eight, Ed Brewer was something of a living legend. He was Minnesota's dean of portrait painters. And his colorful past as a commercial artist was beginning to catch up with him.²

The Cream of Wheat ads, spanning the first quarter of this century, tell the story of one of the most successful

WITH THIS ARTICLE Minnesota History launches a series of biographical sketches of interesting Minnesota men and women from various walks of life whose achievements are deemed sufficient for them to merit profile treatment. Besides presenting the salient facts of the subject's life, each profile will also attempt to characterize the person and assess the significance of his or her work.

The editors proceed with this series on the basis of two assumptions: (1) that people like to read about people and (2) that biography is one valid way of studying the past if one does not depend entirely on it. Allan Nevins warned that excessive dependence on biography "easily distorts history," but he also wrote: "The advantages of biography as a tool for examining the past are not to be underrated. A good biography humanizes history. Most people are not much interested in past times as a huge impersonal machine; they are interested in how human beings like themselves acted."¹ Future profiles in this series will cover others in the arts and people in business, politics, and religion, among many other fields. The editors welcome submissions of profiles on various men and women in Minnesota history.

— Ed.

advertising campaigns in the annals of American enterprise. The man behind the ads was Emery Mapes.

The Cream of Wheat Company, long a Minneapolis institution, grew out of a small flour mill in Grand Forks, North Dakota, one that was floundering following the panic of 1893. The cereal came into being much by accident; the account of its beginnings sounds something like a fairy tale.

The Grand Forks milling business, reduced almost to bare bones during the economic crunch, was owned and operated by a small group of men, including Mapes. A second hero in the drama was head miller Thomas Amidon, the man who provided the product to be advertised. For some time this thrifty miller had been taking the middlings of the wheat berry home to his wife who made a pleasing breakfast porridge from them. As the business faced ruin, Amidon went to his partners with the suggestion that perhaps the cereal could be marketed.³

What then happened was recorded by a company historian: "The funds of the milling company were now so low that Amidon had to cut the cardboard for the cartons by hand, label the packages himself and crate them in wooden boxes made up from waste lumber. With no money to spend for package design, Mapes, who had once been a printer, found among his stock of old printing plates a suitable illustration to brighten up the package. It revealed the figure of a colored chef holding a saucepan over his shoulder and was the ancestor of the company's present-day widely known trademark."⁴

Ten cases of the cereal, called "Cream of Wheat," were made up and shipped, without advance notice, with a regular car of flour to the mill's brokers in New York. It was an immediate success. The brokers telegraphed: "Forget the flour. Send us a car of *Cream of Wheat*." Flour production was halted, and the mill turned its entire facilities over to making the cereal. Even so, by 1897 the demand for Cream of Wheat, fast becoming an American staple, was straining the capacity of the small plant. In a move that has since been considered brilliant, the firm relocated in 1897 in Minneapolis, then the best source of raw materials and a good shipping point to other parts of the country.⁵ (When the original Minneapolis plant soon was outgrown, too, the company moved to its own new building at First Avenue North and Fifth Street. It remained there until 1928 when it moved to its present site at 730 Stinson Boulevard. It now is part of the National Biscuit Company.)

Mapes first began advertising in 1896 while the plant was still in North Dakota. The earliest paintings used in the ads bear no signatures. But after the turn of the century Mapes began reaching out, drawing on the talents of celebrated eastern illustrators such as James Montgomery Flagg, Philip R. Goodwin, Jessie Willcox Smith, and N. C. Wyeth. In 1906 Wyeth wrote to his

mother: "Mr. Mapes of the Cream of Wheat Co. telegraphed for me to run up and see him at the Waldorf-Astoria. He is the owner of that famous cereal co., and is a man of immense wealth. I have just completed two pictures for him, \$250 each, which he is immensely pleased with."⁶ (These two paintings — "Where the Mail Goes Cream of Wheat Goes" and "The Bronco Buster" — currently hang in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.) The imaginative ads, without type or text, appeared monthly — usually inside the front cover — in such leading magazines as *Collier's*, *The Modern Priscilla*, *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Leslie's*, *The Etude*, *Needlecraft*, and *Saturday Evening Post*.⁷

Ed Brewer's first Cream of Wheat ad, entitled "Dat's Mah Boy," was published in 1911. "One day," Brewer wrote, "Mr. Emery Mapes . . . sent his car to my studio, asking that I call. He told me that he had been in the habit of going to New York every year to arrange for work from many of the leading illustrators, but that he would much rather patronize an artist who was right here in the Twin Cities."⁸ Thereafter, except for a period during 1912 and 1913 when his personal life often kept him from his work, Brewer produced paintings that were used almost monthly until the company changed its advertising format some fifteen years later.

Like Norman Rockwell, Brewer painted to extraordinary advantage from his own surroundings, usually drawing his ideas from simple and familiar things and experiences close to home. His zest for living enabled him to find inspiration in the commonest of everyday occurrences. "One morning," he wrote, "I entered the kitchen of our summer cottage with a fine bass for breakfast. My wife, in reaching for a package of breakfast food, discovered it to be empty." The idea was quickly transferred to canvas and appeared in the magazines as "Empty, By Heck!"⁹ He frequently used his picturesque studio as a backdrop for his illustrations. Its wealth of antique furnishings appear as "props" for his figures. More often than not the bright-faced children in his paintings were his own or those of his neighbors.

³For brief histories of the Cream of Wheat company, see *The Story of "Cream of Wheat"* (Minneapolis, Cream of Wheat Corporation, n.d.) and Hannah Campbell, *Why Did They Name It . . . ?*, 35–37 (New York, 1964).

⁴*The Story of "Cream of Wheat,"* 2.

⁵Campbell, *Why Did They Name It . . . ?*, 36.

⁶Betsy James Wyeth, ed., *The Wyeths, the Letters of N. C. Wyeth, 1901–1945*, 187 (Boston, 1971).

⁷The author has a personal collection of more than 200 different Cream of Wheat advertisements clipped from period magazines, some sixty of them by Edward Brewer.

⁸Edward V. Brewer, *Composing an Advertising Illustration*, n.p. (Minneapolis, 1918). This was a booklet published by the Federal School of Commercial Designing in Minneapolis. A copy is in the Brewer Papers.

⁹Brewer, *Composing an Advertising Illustration*, n.p.

Brewer himself once appeared in a Cream of Wheat ad — called "A Proud Day for Rastus." Published in 1914, the picture is a self-portrait of the artist sculpting a clay bust of the Black chef. It was true to life; Brewer did make such a bust. Earlier advertisements, both Brewer's and those of other artists, had always shown the chef full-face. Now, with his three-dimensional model, Brewer began to paint him from a variety of angles. This ad was also the first to dub the figure (who had been nameless) "Rastus."

The earliest Brewer ads, though highly effective, were usually fairly sparse, economical compositions and often concentrated on a single figure. As the 1920s approached, however, his work improved noticeably. His backgrounds became more elaborate and complete. And toward the end of the series, the faces of his figures, which had started as characterizations, became portraits. There is no mistaking his son David in many of these later advertisements. And his daughter Barbara is the make-believe queen in a 1923 Christmas piece, "To the Queen's Taste."

Possibly the finest picture Brewer painted for Cream of Wheat ads was one of the very last. A poignant portrayal of David posing as a newsboy beside a monument to Abraham Lincoln (see cover), the painting was titled "Mighty Oaks from Tiny Acorns Grow" and became the best known of his advertisements. It was also the special favorite of his wife Ida, and during the last years of her life — she died of cancer on October 6, 1961 — Brewer tried repeatedly to buy back or borrow the original painting from Cream of Wheat. After much deliberation on the part of company officials, the picture was finally returned. But, Ed would tell in later years, Ida had not lived to see it come home.¹⁰ It is the only original Cream of Wheat painting by Brewer that remains in the family. Other original pieces are housed in the corporate offices of the Nabisco company in East Hanover, New Jersey, which purchased Cream of Wheat in the early 1960s.

EDWARD VINCENT BREWER was born in St. Paul on April 12, 1883, the second of six sons of Nicholas Richard and Rose Koempel Brewer. There was every reason to believe even then that he would become an artist, as would two of his brothers. He grew up in an atmosphere dedicated to the pursuit of painting. His father before him was forging the trail Ed would follow. The father's story, and that of Ed's childhood, is told in Nicholas Brewer's autobiography, which the latter published privately in 1938 when he was eighty-one.¹¹

Nicholas Brewer had been born in 1857 in a log cabin

¹⁰Information in this paragraph is based on conversations the author had with Brewer in 1967.

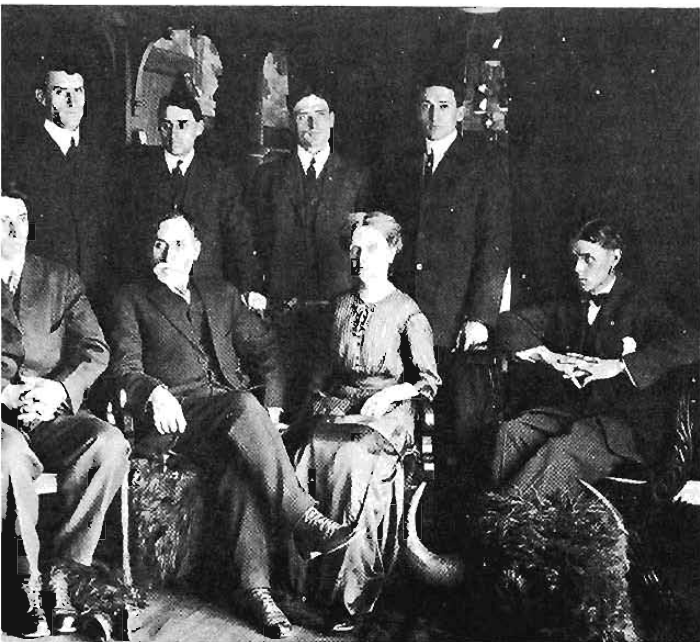
¹¹Nicholas R. Brewer, *Trails of a Paintbrush* (Boston, 1938), Barbara Brewer Peet interviews.



PHOTOGRAPHS often helped Brewer get the effects he wanted for the simple, folksy themes he frequently used in his Cream of Wheat ad illustrations. Above, his daughter Barbara (second from left) and other youngsters strike a snowball-throwing pose for Brewer. The resulting painting he produced is shown below. Entitled "Well Fortified," it had a 1923 copyright and appeared in magazines in January, 1924.



WELL FORTIFIED



NICHOLAS R. BREWER (second from left, front row), a famous artist in his own right, and his wife Rose posed with their six sons for this family portrait. The four in the back row (from left) are Edward, Reuben, William Wallace, and Adrian. Flanking the parents are Francis Angelo (left) and Clarence, a twin of Adrian's. Reuben and Adrian were also painters, and Clarence was adept at producing frames for "the Brewery."

on the north branch of the Root River near High Forest, Olmsted County, in southern Minnesota. He had sketched from early childhood, and his mother had encouraged his interest in art. But there had been no money to send him to art school. Instead, as Nicholas told it, when he was eighteen his father gave him a wagon filled with forty bushels of wheat, a grubstake of sorts, which the youth drove to Rochester and sold for \$34.00. Then he boarded a train for St. Paul. There he was sure he could learn more about drawing and painting.¹²

However, St. Paul in 1875 possessed neither art nor artists, and the only teacher he could find was a German named Henry J. Koempel who painted copies of pictures and decorated churches. Koempel agreed to give Nicholas art lessons at fifty cents a session and hired him as an apprentice when he could. Mostly, though, young Brewer depended on painting houses and fences to pay his rent. Then in May, 1879, in a Roman Catholic ceremony at Assumption Church in St. Paul, Nicholas Brewer married Koempel's daughter, Rose.¹³

Nicholas was destined to become a fine painter. His landscapes and portraits were later exhibited, in cooperation with numerous museums and art leagues,

throughout the country. Among nationally prominent figures who posed for his portraits were Ignace Paderewski, Ulysses S. Grant, Henry Ward Beecher, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. But success did not come easily.

As soon as Nicholas was able, he and Rose and the first of their sons moved to New York so he could meet, and study with, respected artists. Rose, however, could not adjust to the New York scene. She belonged to a large, close-knit family, and her health deteriorated noticeably as the time lengthened that she was separated from her kin. For a time at least, Brewer had to resign himself to returning to St. Paul. Although he preferred landscapes, he was becoming adept at portraits, which sold more easily, and was able to secure commissions in the Twin Cities until he felt the family was ready to try going back to New York. But the second move proved no more successful than the first, for the same reason, and once again the Brewers returned to St. Paul. Curiously, the Brewer family, which was increasing in size, would move to New York and back a total of five times. In later years, Nicholas worked out a compromise: he maintained a studio in New York and his family in St. Paul.¹⁴

During one of the interim periods in St. Paul, Nicholas established an art school (the first of its kind in Minnesota) in the Seven Corners area. He furnished it meticulously, purchasing numerous antique casts of the Venus de Milo, Michelangelo's David, heads of Vitellius, Germanicus, St. Francis, and others, as well as anonymous torsos, feet, and hands. He put together, too, a handsome collection of brass pots, kettles, jugs, and the like to tempt students to do still lifes. He also saw to it that there was a model throne for the figure model in the life class as well as plenty of draperies and costumes. The studio, he thought, compared quite favorably with anything he had seen in New York.

Even so, few of his students remained with him for long. Nicholas was a demanding teacher who insisted especially that students not copy pictures — as was a common practice in art classes in local academies and private schools — but instead create their own. He had been taught to do this in New York, and he would not lower his standards. Consequently, the fledgling studio did not provide much income. Then, shortly after the school opened, came the panic of 1893, the worst financial disaster the country had seen. Banks and businesses closed one after another. And paintings and art schools became superfluous commodities.¹⁵

THE BREWERS moved to a small farm at Stacy, Min-

¹² Brewer, *Trails of a Paintbrush*, 23, 25, 31–32, 53.

¹³ Brewer, *Trails of a Paintbrush*, 55–57, 64–68.

¹⁴ Brewer, *Trails of a Paintbrush*, 82, 101–103, 202.

¹⁵ Brewer, *Trails of a Paintbrush*, 104–106.

nesota, where Nicholas' parents were living. There, between chores, Nicholas found time to paint landscapes. Occasionally one could be traded for a horse or a pig. And the experience was good for the boys. Edward in particular became completely engrossed in the country atmosphere. "It was useless," Nicholas said, "to send him on an errand; he was sure to forget it and wander off chasing butterflies, poking after frogs, or robbing birds' nests." But he also mentioned Ed's "predilection for drawing and sketching" and added: "He had a manner of scrawling his name at the top of his paper, saying, 'Well, I have to make my name first!'" and it was Nicholas who saw to it that Ed later attended the Art Students' League in New York.¹⁶

Many years later — at the tail end of World War I, by which time he had already achieved national recognition for his Cream of Wheat ads — Ed Brewer wrote the short, largely biographical, booklet (see footnote 8) for students of the Federal School of Commercial Designing in Minneapolis (now Art Instruction, Inc.). In it he explained his decision to become a professional artist:

From the age of sixteen to twenty-one I worked in offices in St. Paul at general clerical work on meagre salaries, but the joy of this kind of work did not present itself. Therefore when my father suggested that I go to New York with him and attend the Art Students' League I took on a new lease of life. At the League I studied antique drawing under Kenyon Cox for a month and life drawing for another month under Frank V DuMond, when I was admitted to the illustration class under Walter Appleton Clark. At the end of another month vacation arrived and having taken "first" in the concour[s] for that month, we decided that I had some talent, at least.

I returned home and spent the summer painting fish, birds, and wild life. I also made a water-color pastel drawing which it seemed to me should be on the March cover of the Ladies' Home Journal. Of course I expected they would come to meet my painting at the station, and as I look back now at the strange fate of that cover it

amuses me. The letter for which I ran two miles every day for a week actually contained a check for forty dollars, although the picture finally appeared over another artist's name. However, this was forty dollars' worth of encouragement.¹⁷

Brewer was back in New York the next fall, knocking on doors, looking for commercial assignments. Wildlife was still his favorite subject matter, and the prospects for selling it looked good. A classmate of his at the Art Students' League — Lynn Bogue Hunt — was doing numerous ads and posters for gun and ammunition manufacturers like Remington, Winchester, and United Metallic Cartridge. But finding work in that fall of 1902 was not as easy as Ed had expected. Reluctantly, he took another clerical job, this time at the New York Edison Company, but he spent most of his spare time "making hunting pictures and speculative covers." He called on likely clients during his lunch hours. Finally, in one week he sold two paintings for \$90. Elated, he quit his job and opened a studio.

In 1905 Ed returned to St. Paul to marry Mayme Smith of that city. His parents had quit the farm and were back in St. Paul. Family members have suggested that his mother, Rose, had had a hand in arranging this first marriage. Mayme went to New York with Ed, and in 1907 their son, Edward Lucien, was born.¹⁸

Brewer's career was now on the upswing. He turned out numerous sporting magazine advertisements and illustrations, including work for firearms manufacturers. He did both catalog covers and inside illustrations for Abercrombie and Fitch and the Browning Brothers Sporting Goods Company. He also produced magazine covers for *Life*, a periodical that predated the modern *Life*, and *Field and Stream*. Before long he had worked himself up to art editor of *Field and Stream*. (Young Francis Lee Jaques, who later became Minnesota's most-respected wildlife artist, was also testing the New York waters. The two became acquainted when Jaques submitted artwork to *Field and Stream* and remained lifelong friends.)¹⁹

The New York years came to an abrupt end, however, when Mayme Brewer, who had been ailing, was diagnosed as having tuberculosis. Ed and his family, following the familiar pattern set by his parents, settled again in St. Paul. For a while they stayed with the Nicholas Brewers; the father's fortunes were just then at high tide, and his magnificent Casa del Rio on Mississippi River Boulevard was near completion and ready for occupancy. After that Ed's family took an apartment on Oak Grove in Minneapolis where he set up a studio. The Cream of Wheat account became a reality now, and there were other commissions as well. The Minneapolis Commercial Club, for example, ordered six wildlife murals, each 5-by-15 feet, to be hung in its headquarters at the Radisson Hotel.²⁰

¹⁶ Brewer, *Trails of a Paintbrush*, 114–115, 173 (quotes).

¹⁷ Brewer, *Composing an Advertising Illustration*, n.p. This is also the source for the next paragraph.

¹⁸ Edward Lucien Brewer to Patricia Johnston, January 22, 1979, letter in latter's possession.

¹⁹ Barbara Brewer Peet interviews. Copies of Brewer's advertisements and illustrations, as well as catalog and magazine covers, are in the Brewer Papers.

²⁰ Patricia Johnston telephone interview with Edward Lucien Brewer, Lakeside, California, January 26, 1979. An undated, unidentified news clipping describing the Commercial Club murals is in the Brewer Papers.



ALL SET for a spin in their fancy motorcycle and sidecar are Ed Brewer, his first wife (the former Mayme Smith), and their son, Edward Lucien, who was born in 1907 and now lives in Lakeside, California.

But Mayme was steadily declining, and late in 1911 Ed moved his small family to El Paso, hoping the sunny western Texas climate would hasten his wife's recovery. The winter months were certainly more tolerable there, but even so Mayme succumbed on May 19, 1912. With a heavy heart and a small son, Ed returned to St. Paul. Although he dreamed throughout his life of going back to New York, he never worked there again.²¹

ON FEBRUARY 24, 1914, Ed Brewer took a second bride, Ida Kueffner, the daughter of a St. Paul lawyer. She shared Ed's interest in art. Ida was a graduate of the Chicago Institute of Art and had taught children's classes at the St. Paul Gallery and School of Art. She had also worked for a time painting stained glass for the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company in St. Paul and had recently opened her own studio where she could complete private commissions. A promising artist herself, Ida nonetheless gave up her career when she married Brewer.²²

The couple had two children, Barbara and David. On occasion Ida found excuses to go back to her drawing board. She did produce several illustrations to accompany a serialized story in *Everybody's Health*, a Minnesota publication, in 1933 (her husband's touch is evident in the drawings, however)²³ But mostly, daughter Barbara recalls, Brewer gave his wife little encouragement to paint. She contributed substantially to his work, though, by doing research for him, particularly when he was working on historical murals.

The Cream of Wheat ads provided a major portion of the Brewers' income up to the mid-1920s. After that there were both good times and lean times — the life of a free-lance artist always being somewhat chancy. Ed prepared advertisements for an endless variety of products, including Halligan's Chocolates, Toro lawn mowers, and the "Gotzian Hiawatha Shoe for Children." Both Brewers collaborated on an illustrated cookbook for "Aristos — the Never-Fail Flour." Ida developed and tested the recipes. In the early 1930s, Brewer did some large poster paintings for the Northern Pacific Railroad. One summer Ed asked for railway tickets and lodging in lieu of pay, and the whole family went west for several weeks, staying at the Paradise Lodge at Mount Rainier, a Northern Pacific facility.²⁴

In 1933 Ed received a commission to paint a large mural picturing the early days of the West for the Spokane and Eastern Trust Company building in Spokane, Washington. Bankers there were impressed with pictures he carried showing several of the imposing sixteen-foot murals he had recently completed for the Batavian National Bank in La Crosse, depicting the birth and growth of that city. This Wisconsin series begins with a panel showing Indians playing lacrosse on the site of the present city and ends with a modern bird's-eye

²¹ Edward Lucien Brewer telephone interview.

²² Barbara Brewer Peet interviews.

²³ A copy of this publication is in the Brewer Papers.

²⁴ Barbara Brewer Peet interviews. Copies of the advertisements mentioned and others are in the Brewer Papers.

BREWER is pictured with his second wife (the former Ida Kueffner) whom he married in 1914. They had two children, Barbara and David. Ida was an artist herself but gave up her art career after their marriage.





THIS HUGE MURAL, one of a series Brewer did for a La Crosse, Wisconsin, bank depicting that city's birth and growth, shows Indian spectators in foreground watching a spirited game of lacrosse below.

view of La Crosse from its sentinel mountain, "Old Granddad."²⁵

Brewer completed most of the mural work in his own studio. He had rigged up a roller arrangement which held a canvas up to eighteen feet high, enabling him to paint always at eye level. When the canvases were finished, they were delivered to their destinations and hung. The murals usually had a historical theme, but Brewer also did an imaginative series of fairy-tale murals for the Leamington Hotel in Minneapolis. (In general, Brewer's murals are reminiscent of those of N. C. Wyeth, considered by many to have been the best of American illustrators, whom Brewer consciously sought to emulate.)²⁶

Brewer also did diorama backdrops at the Bell Museum of Natural History at the University of Minnesota. When the animal habitat groups were moved from the old zoology building to the new museum in

²⁵ Undated news clipping from the *Spokane Daily Chronicle* in the Brewer Papers; *La Crosse Tribune*, February 8, 1929; Brewer, *Trails of a Paintbrush*, 174.

²⁶ Barbara Brewer Peet interviews.

²⁷ Patricia Johnston telephone interview with Walter J. Breckenridge, former director of the Bell Museum, January 3, 1978.

²⁸ Patricia Johnston telephone interviews with Gordon Jensen of the Jensen Printing Company and his mother, Mrs. Charles H. Jensen of Minneapolis, in January, 1979.

1940. Brewer was commissioned to extend the backgrounds for several of the exhibits which had been in smaller cases. Matching his colors precisely to those of the old backdrops, he enlarged the paintings for several of the groups still on display, including the Heron Lake bird group originally painted by Louis Agassiz Fuertes. Brewer also created complete backgrounds for the new eagle and raccoon groups.²⁷ It was the kind of work his friend, Lee Jaques, was doing at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. In later years, Jaques also did backdrops at the Bell Museum. The author once saw a painting, now in private hands, that was a sketch for one of the diorama backgrounds at the Bell. It was signed Jaques/Brewer. Jaques had started it; Brewer had finished it.

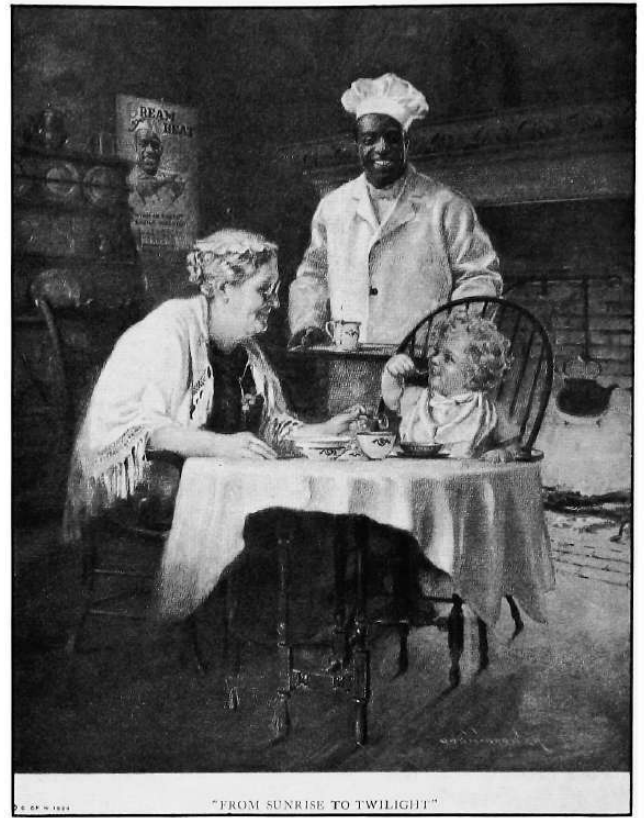
For some twenty years starting in the early 1940s, Brewer made annual calendar paintings, scenes of historic Minnesota, for the Jensen Printing Company in Minneapolis. His popular version of the Hastings Spiral Bridge, a perennial favorite and one that has been reprinted numerous times, was one of these. He also produced calendar pictures of such subjects as the Falls of St. Anthony, the Sibley House in Mendota, Red River ox carts, and the Minnesota State Fair. The calendars, printed in quantities of about 2,000 each for distribution to Jensen's friends and customers, have become collector's items. Most of the original Brewer paintings are owned by Mrs. Charles H. (Jean) Jensen, the widow of the head of the firm.²⁸

REAL BEARS? No, stuffed. Brewer posed with them while painting backgrounds for animal habitat groups at the Bell Museum of Natural History on the Minneapolis campus of the University of Minnesota. He extended backgrounds of exhibits when they were moved in 1940.





A GAME of "some like it hot, some like it cold" between contrasting partners was featured in a Cream of Wheat ad for magazines in February, 1924.



"FROM SUNRISE to Twilight," a 1924 painting, was set in Brewer's favorite lower room. The metal arm in the fireplace was from Lincoln's funeral car.

Reprints of Cream of Wheat cereal advertisements by permission of Nabisco, Inc.

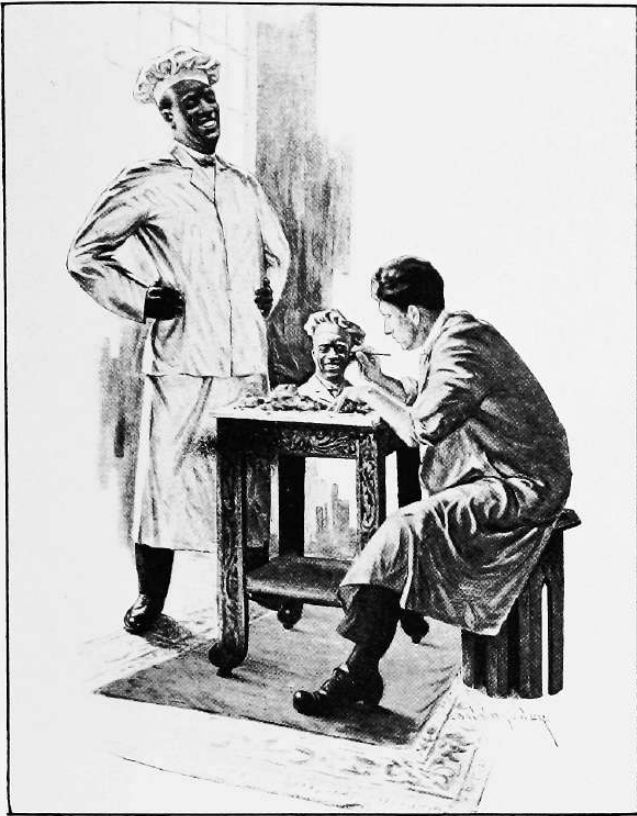
"KEEPING WATCH," an appealing version of a universal theme, was painted by Ed Brewer for the 1922 Cream of Wheat Christmas ads in various magazines.

"DAT'S MAH BOY," published in the Christmas, 1911, Cream of Wheat ads in various magazines, was Brewer's first painting for the company. Many were to follow.



"KEEPING WATCH"
Painted by Ed. P. Brewer for Cream of Wheat Company. Copyright 1922 by Cream of Wheat Company





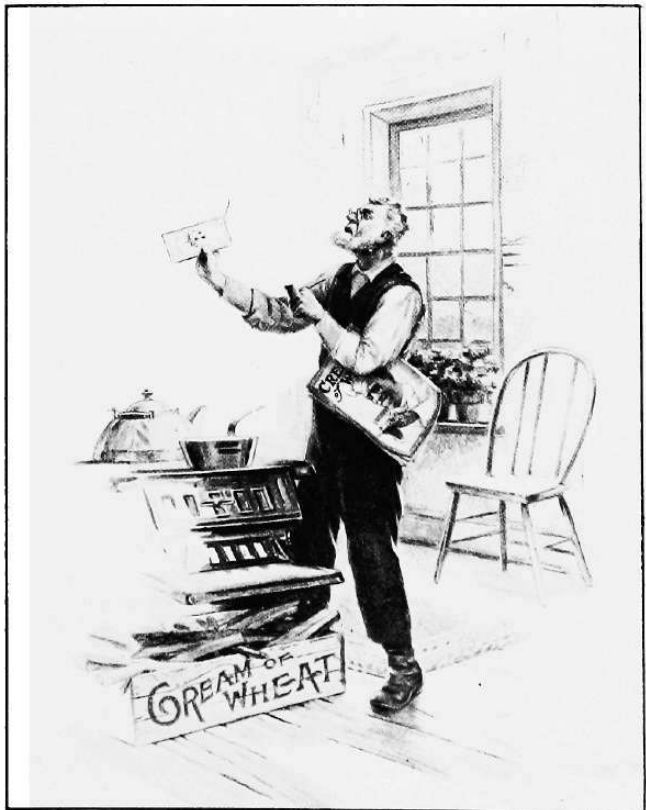
BREWER HIMSELF appeared in the 1914 ad, "A Proud Day for Rastus." In this self-portrait, he produces a sculpture (which he really did) of the famed chef.

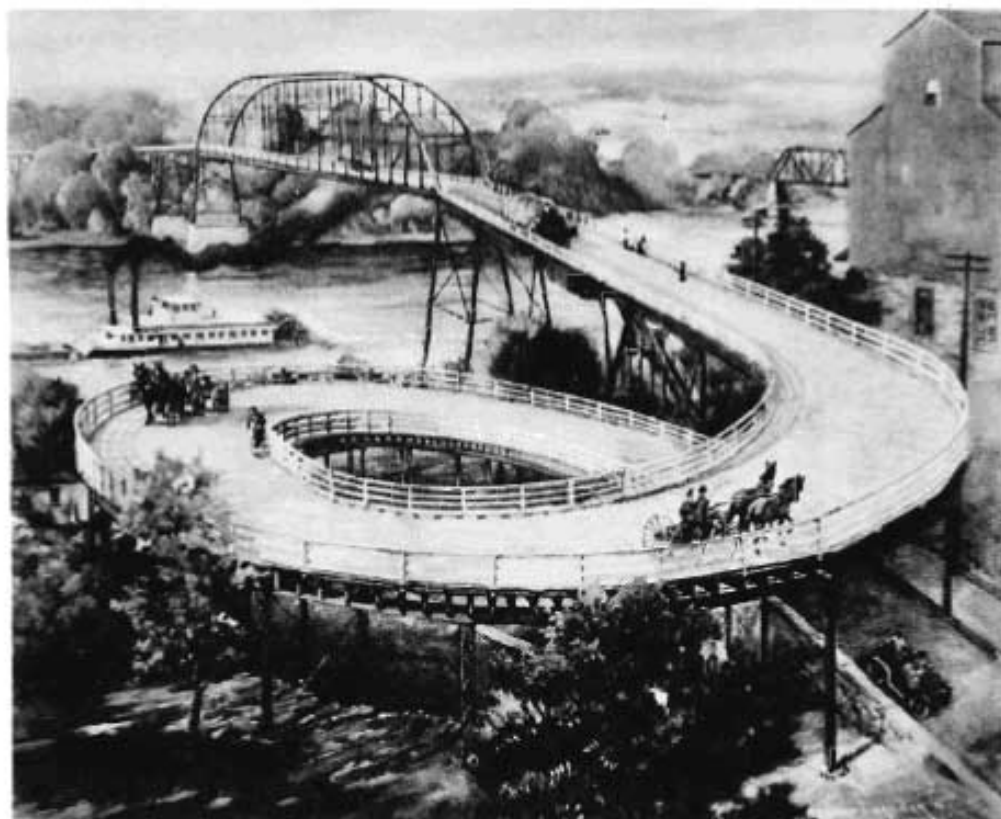


TYPICAL of Brewer's illustrations of bright-faced children was this one of 1923, entitled "Right Over the Home Plate." His son David was probably the model.

BREWER'S DAUGHTER Barbara played a royal role for this painting — "To the Queen's Taste" — for the 1923 Christmas ad. As usual, the chef serves the cereal.

"EMPTY, BY HECK!" was the title of this 1915 illustration for Cream of Wheat. It shows how Brewer created effective pictures from his surroundings.





WIDELY KNOWN is this Brewer painting of the famed Spiral Bridge at Hastings, Minnesota. Completed in 1895, the "Spiral" was the south approach from the Hastings business area to the high span over the Mississippi River. Eventually outmoded for modern traffic, the Spiral Bridge was succeeded in the early 1950s by the present Highway 61 bridge.

This was one of the paintings Brewer did for the Jensen Printing Company calendars and is reproduced by permission of Mrs. Charles H. Jensen of Minneapolis, who owns the original.

BUT ED BREWER became best known, in Minnesota at least, for his portraits. One of his first clients was Emery Mapes, Cream of Wheat president. After that, members of the Dayton, Cargill, and Heffelfinger families posed for him. He painted Elias F. Lyon, dean of the University of Minnesota School of Medicine; Georg Sverdrup, president of Augsburg College; Victor Nilsson, music critic at the *Minneapolis Journal* for more than thirty years; and Myndall Cain, beauty consultant. In all, he produced more than 200 oil portraits. In 1930 the Ramsey County Bar Association commissioned him to paint twenty-nine portraits of district judges. The paintings were hung in the new City Hall and Court House. His paintings of Governors C. Elmer Anderson and Elmer L. Andersen hang in the Minnesota State Capitol.²⁹

Sometimes Brewer painstakingly made his own frames. Other times they were carved by his brother, Clarence, who made a business of producing frames for the four painting Brewers (Nicholas, Ed, and his two brothers, Adrian and Reuben — a group that sometimes dubbed itself "the Brewery").³⁰

Nicholas, the father, had complained in his autobiography of the difficulties he encountered in trying to depict people as they wished to be seen. Ed, however, had solved this dilemma. In a letter written in the 1960s to a prospective client in Illinois, he described his method of

painting portraits and also divulged his fee: "I . . . work from projected color films of which I sometimes take as many as 30 or 40. In this way the patron can see what pose, expression or lighting is most pleasing to him. This eliminates the guess work and makes for a far better portrait. Most artists prefer this way of working where a perfect likeness is important. . . . My prices are \$2500 for a 3/4 length." (The Ramsey County judges, by way of contrast, had been done for \$100 each at a time when Brewer needed the money.)³¹

Barbara Brewer Peet, herself a third-generation St. Paul portraitist, describes her father's portraits as "forceful" and "realistic" — painted in a "strong, sure style." "Somehow," she says, "he made the flesh glowingly alive; [his] hands and figures were 'painterish' but very real — solid." Some of his favorite portraits were those of older people whose lines and wrinkles seemed to make them more beautiful. And while he usually worked from

²⁹ Barbara Brewer Peet interviews, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, March 8, 1931.

³⁰ Barbara Brewer Peet interviews, Brewer, *Trails of a Paintbrush*, 175.

³¹ Edward Brewer to J. H. Beaumont of Decatur, Illinois, undated, unsigned letter in the Brewer Papers; a brief sketch of Brewer written by Barbara Brewer Peet for the author in 1979, now in author's possession.



A COVERED WAGON heading West was the centerpiece of this sizable mural Brewer painted for the Spokane and Eastern Trust Company in Spokane, Washington. In his autobiography, Nicholas Brewer said Edward entitled this painting "Builders of the Inland Empire," portraying "the conquest of the covered wagon of early days."

IN HIS ROLE as a portraitist, for which he became particularly well known in Minnesota, he is pictured painting the likeness of Judge R. D. O'Brien (shown posing) in 1931. The Ramsey County Bar Association commissioned him to do twenty-nine district judges.

photographs, she explains, his portraits are far from photographic. "He used all of the art and skill possible to a painter to be selective and creative to produce a fine painting."³²

Perhaps the most unusual (and also the most conspicuous) portrait Brewer painted is one of Abraham Lincoln that hangs behind the speaker's chair in the house chambers at the Minnesota State Capitol. It attracts considerable interest not only because of its location but also because of its origins and its possible involvement in a mystery of sorts. The painting is a copy Brewer made of an original portrait of Lincoln by George P. A. Healy, who portrayed many nineteenth-century personages. Lincoln posed for the Healy portrait in 1864. After Lincoln's assassination, according to one account, Healy gave the portrait to the president's close friend, Elihu Washburne. Other members of the



³² Barbara Brewer Peet sketch (see previous footnote).



BREWER'S HOME was this English-style estate at 387 Pelham Boulevard, St. Paul. The main portion at left had been the dam-keeper's lookout on the Mississippi River below and was hauled up in 1918. The artist's studio was at right. "Baron Brewer," as he was fondly called, liked to show people his place.

Washburn family became pioneers in the milling industry in Minnesota, and when the State Capitol was completed in the early 1900s, the portrait was lent to the state. It was returned to Washburn family heirs in New York in 1932, but before it was sent Brewer was commissioned to copy it.³³

During the John F. Kennedy administration, a similar portrait of Lincoln appeared in the White House. Friends told Brewer of having seen the painting, but also that it had been altered. The captain's chair on which Lincoln was seated had been replaced with an ornate gold seat. His curiosity aroused, Brewer went to Washington to see if the Lincoln portrait was the original Healy. That painting, he knew from having seen it when he copied it, had been done on a canvas of damask curtain. He was permitted to see the painting and thought it to be the original, but then he was not allowed an opportunity to confirm what he thought. "I am dead certain," he said, "I detected the unmistakable pattern of the damask curtain, but when I asked to examine the back, I was denied permission." Was it indeed the Healy painting? If so, why had it been altered? And if such was the case, then the Brewer painting, as the only accurate record of the original Healy, seems to take on significant historical importance.³⁴

BREWER WAS already in his mid-eighties and a widower for the second time when I first met him in the

spring of 1967. He was playing host for an annual music teachers' picnic in the backyard of his home at 387 Pelham Boulevard in St. Paul; I was one of the music teachers. His age would have been hard to guess, and he preferred to keep it to himself. He was still a handsome man, slender and graceful, and in no way decrepit. He was warmly personable by nature and more than a bit of an optimist. His present station in life obviously gave him great pleasure.

The house had been his and Ida's. For the most part, it was his own splendid concoction. The main floor had been the dam-keeper's lookout on the Mississippi River just below the property. When the Ford locks were built, the dam was removed, and Brewer had had the house hauled up to his acreage by a team of horses. That was in 1918. It sat on the front of his lot while he fashioned a lower walkout level into the hillside behind it, facing the river. Then the top floor was pushed backward onto its new foundation. He finished the exterior in brick, stucco, and timbers to resemble a Shakespearean cottage, built a matching studio, and added rose gardens to the grounds. By the time he was finished he had turned the whole layout into a reasonable facsimile of an English-style country estate. He called it "Not by a Dam Site." His neighbors referred to him affectionately as "Baron Brewer." And he took a keen delight in sharing his "court," playing tour guide for the members of local garden clubs and house tours, all of them anxious to see how this state's foremost portrait painter lived.³⁵

Both the house and the adjoining studio were crowded with paintings, his own and some by his father, and Ed's personal collections of antique furnishings (many of these pieces appear in his paintings). The downstairs parlor, entered through terraced gardens that overlooked the Minneapolis skyline across the river, was his favorite room. Again, it was his own doing, and he immortalized it in a 1924 Cream of Wheat painting, "From Sunrise to Twilight." The walls were "Brewer travertine." Plastered with a mixture he made mostly from oatmeal, they had the appearance of pock-marked stone.

He knew the history of every chair and footstool,

³³ Gareth Hiebert, "What Happened to Abraham Lincoln's Chair?" in *St. Paul Sunday Pioneer Press*, February 12, 1967, first section, p. 15.

³⁴ Hiebert, in *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, February 12, 1967. Another version is given in *The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Healy's Sitters*, 56 (Richmond, 1950): "Healy's last portrait of the Great Emancipator presides over the State dining room at the White House. The portrait of 1867 . . . was painted for Elihu B. Washburne, an intimate friend of Lincoln. It is a replica of the Lincoln which Healy depicted in *The Peacemakers*, and which in turn was based on the last portrait painted from life, dated 1864."

³⁵ *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 22, 1967, p. 17 (Oliver Towne column written by Gareth Hiebert).

every ornamental detail. The fireplace mantel came from Dennis Ryan's St. Paul home (he built the Ryan Hotel that eventually was torn down). There was a lamp purchased right from the stage set of a play Brewer saw in Minneapolis. A Chinese temple gong was from the H. J. Heinz collection. Most prized of all was the metal arm in the fireplace from which he usually suspended a cooking pot. It was once part of the railing on Lincoln's funeral car on the train that carried him home to Springfield, Illinois. Nicholas Brewer had obtained it. (Thomas Lowry, Minneapolis business leader and "Streetcar Man," purchased the funeral car in 1905 and moved it to Minneapolis. It was destroyed in 1911 during a grass fire in Columbia Heights.) In Brewer's studio there was an unfinished portrait of First National Bank President Philip Nason of St. Paul on his easel.³⁶

Some weeks later Brewer mended a painting for me. It was an aged and fragile oil that had been stored in our basement. I had managed to poke a hole through it in attempting to move it. Although I doubt that he remembered me from the picnic when I phoned, he probably noticed the panic in my voice. Minutes later he was at our door to pick up the painting. When he returned it several days later, he had not only repaired the tear so it could not be seen but had cleaned the entire piece as well. His fee, he said, was \$15.00.

He became a good friend. Sometimes my husband Charles and I saw him at his house; other times he had dinner with us. On those occasions our three children, then in the primary grades, could barely contain themselves until after dinner when they knew he would show them "how money slips through your fingers" — his favorite trick. One at a time the youngsters would be asked to hold out a thumb and forefinger, about an inch apart. Then Ed would hold a dollar in midair between the outreached fingers and tell the child that if he caught the bill when Ed let it go it was his to keep. Tiny fingers often did not react quickly enough, but each child usually ended up with a dollar bill anyway.

In those days Ed drove a very long and very sleek gold-colored Cadillac. He had had to extend his garage to accommodate it. Somehow the big automobile

seemed to make up for the time, during the Great Depression, when a hospital had taken his much more modest car for a bill he was slow in paying.³⁷

During August, 1967, Brewer was written up in Gareth Hiebert's "Oliver Towne" column (see footnote 35). My husband and I saw him the evening the article appeared in the paper. We expected him to be in high spirits because the piece had been highly complimentary. Instead, he pretended to be peeved. Hiebert had mentioned that Brewer was eighty-four. "People will think that I'm too old to paint," he fretted. And he was still soliciting commissions.

But the truth was that age was catching up with him. He was beginning to have trouble with his portraits. It was the paint, he said. They were not making it as they used to. And he would send to Holland for new paints. But the Dutch paints did not perform any better for him. One of his last commissions was a portrait of Totten Heffelfinger. Actually, all that was wanted was a copy, brush stroke for brush stroke, of an earlier Brewer portrait of Heffelfinger. But it did not go well, and the deadline for its completion was approaching. Finally, his daughter Barbara suggested that perhaps she might do the copy. Although the idea did not appeal to Ed, Barbara in the end set up her easel next to her father's in his studio, with the painting to be copied between them. It was Barbara's painting that went to the Heffelfinger family.³⁸

Edward Brewer's amazingly prolific artistic career had spanned more than six decades. He had proved himself a master portrait painter. There was no question, either, that his murals were outstanding examples of the genre. And his commercial commissions were beginning to be recognized as those of an uncommonly gifted illustrator.

His professional life had been as he would have had it. Once established in the Twin Cities with the Cream of Wheat account, he had always been able to earn his living by painting. It meant a lot to him. He firmly believed that to be an artist was a full-time commitment. "If you must punch a clock," he once told a group of aspiring artists, "let it be grandfather's clock on the stairway in your own studio."³⁹

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³⁶ *St. Paul Dispatch*, August 22, 1967, p. 17.

³⁷ Edward Brewer to David Brewer, letter written in 1963, in *Brewer Papers*. Brewer's letters to his children are particularly noteworthy because he frequently illustrated them.

³⁸ Barbara Brewer Peet interviews.

³⁹ Brewer, *Composing an Advertising Illustration*, n.p. (last paragraph).



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