



ANTON GAG,

JULIE L'ENFANT & ROBERT J. PAULSON



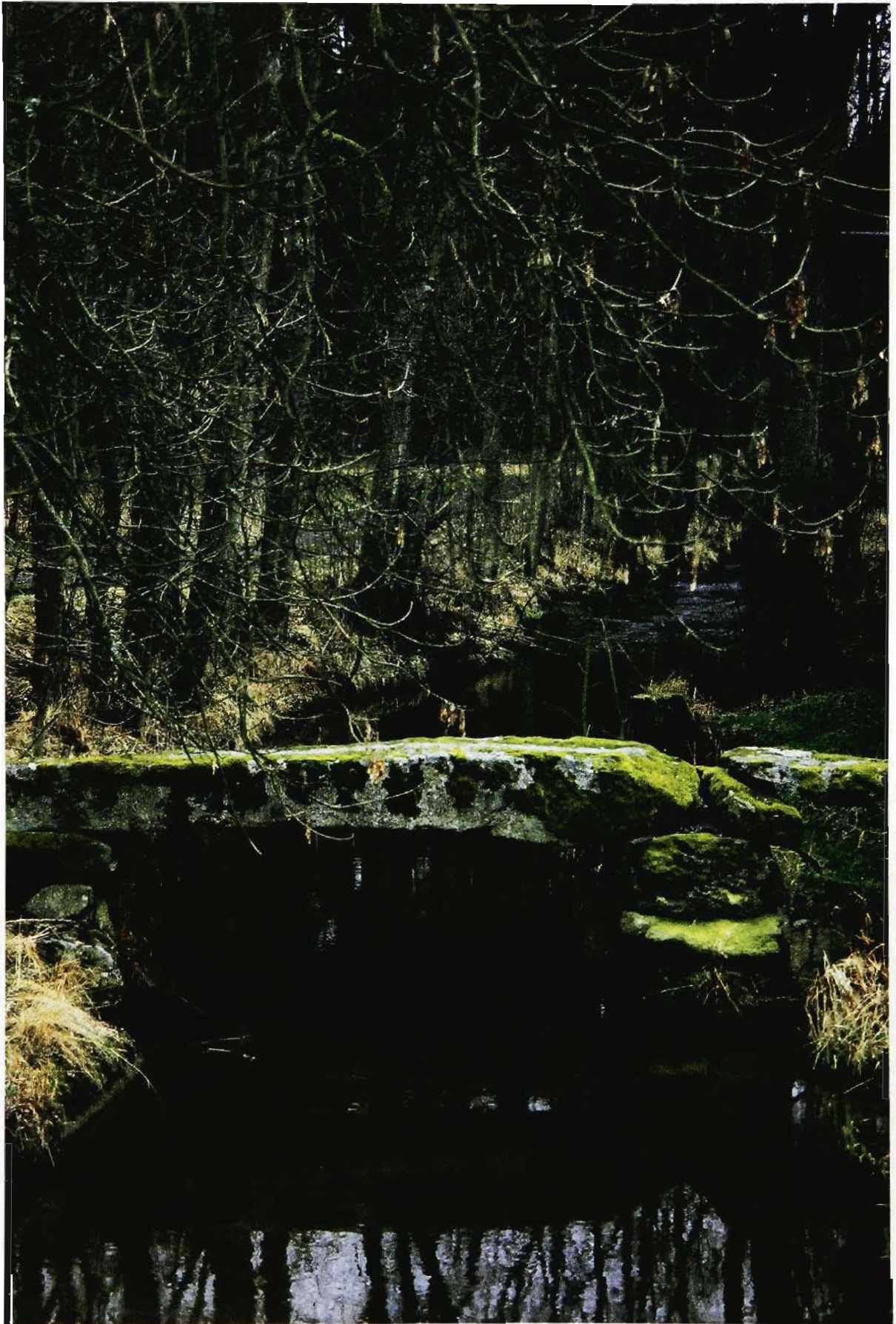
Anton Gag and his naturalist oil painting
Cows in the River, 1890s

BOHEMIAN



THE IMAGE OF THE “Bohemian” artist—popularized by Henri Murger’s novel *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* (1851) and Giacomo Puccini’s opera *La Bohème* (1896)—carries with it connotations of poverty, unconventional behavior, and questionable social status. To some residents of New Ulm, Minnesota, artist Anton Gag seemed to fit this stereotype: he was always poor, he had a reputation in some quarters as a womanizer, and he raised his children in a state of freedom considered alarming at the time. But Gag was also Bohemian in the original sense of the word. Born and raised in Bohemia, a province

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The brook and bridge near Gag's birthplace in Walk, Bohemia

of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now the Czech Republic), he was steeped in German-Bohemian culture. Both his life and art were informed by the liberal humanist values of that venerable European tradition. It is thus time to reappraise the career of this man too long known merely as a provincial painter and the father of another artist, Wanda Gág.¹

Gag had deep roots in the Old World. Born June 12, 1858, in Walk (Valcha), a picturesque hamlet of 15 homes in the county of Tachau (Tachov),² Anton was the last of five children born to George Gaag (as the family originally spelled it), a craftsman in wood, and Theresia Heller, the daughter of a sheepherder. Landless peasants, they lived in a broad valley between two mountains, one called Himmelreich. Anton and his siblings walked through a deep forest to the larger town of Pernartitz (Bernartice) to school and Catholic church. The children learned formal German at school, while at home and in their community they spoke the Bohemian dialect known as Böhmisches.

Young Gag developed a love of the forest, which geographically and culturally shaped the Bohemian mind and imagination. Its dark mystery constituted the source of fairy tales, superstitions, and a strong sense of family or clan. Wood was an important, and readily available, artistic medium, and the boy carved trees near his home. A central symbol in the romantic Bohemian nationalism was the Böhmerwald, the forest that divides Bohemia from Bavaria. Gag, who was known for his beautiful tenor voice, often sang songs of the Böhmerwald and told fairy tales about it.³

In 1873 Gag's family emigrated to America in search of greater economic opportunity. They followed his eldest sister Anna, who had preceded them by a year to work as a domestic servant for the John Seifert family in Cottonwood Township, a German-Bohemian enclave near New Ulm. The town had been founded in 1854 by Germans from Chicago, who were soon joined by others from Cincinnati. In the 1870s numerous German Bohemians settled there, attracted by the inexpensive land that resembled their homeland. Many lived in Gänseviertel, or Goosetown, a neighborhood by the river that had the look and sound of a peasant village.⁴

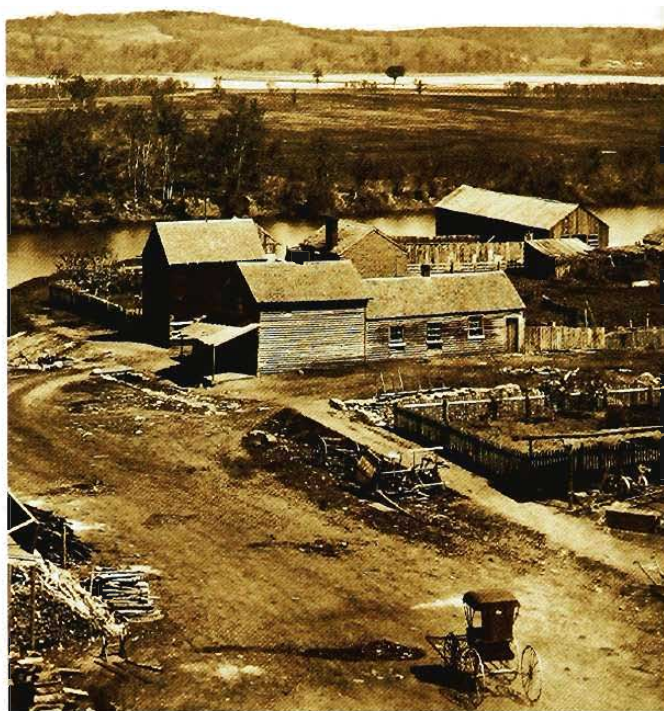
On May 30, George and Theresia Gag and three children—Margaretha, Joseph, and Anton—along with Vincenz Klaus, Margaretha's husband, arrived in Baltimore on the USS *Ohio* from Bremen, and a few months later they reached St. Paul. Apparently lacking money to proceed at once to New Ulm, they were obliged to stay in a rough neighborhood near the riverfront called the Upper Levee. Anton lived in a shanty

with his brother Joseph at Eagle and Franklin Streets. Census records label the buildings on either side as "ladies' boarding houses," a euphemism for houses of prostitution. Nearby was the notorious Bucket of Blood Saloon, one of the many taverns that served the shifting population of the river port.⁵

Yet the neighborhood had its picturesque aspects. The view from the doorway of the shanty down to the river was broad and pleasant. Several blocks away was Irvine Park, an elegant public space surrounded by fine homes. Up the hill was Seven Corners, a commercial hub in the city of about 30,000. It was in this colorful urban environment that Gag lived from age 14 to 19 or so, receiving what was, no doubt, a liberal education. He probably did not obtain more formal education, having spent as much time in school as most peasant youths, but he learned enough English to get along in this multilingual culture.

Gag's activities during these years in St. Paul remain unknown, although census records and city directories provide some tantalizing clues. The 1875–76 St. Paul city directory lists his brother Joseph as a tailor; Anton Gag and Vincenz Klaus are noted as living with him. Apparently the city stimulated Anton's ambitions, for the 1877–78 city directory again listed Joseph as a tailor but Anton, now called "Tony," has become an "artist." What training he might have had is not known. He was not, as might have been expected, simply following in his father's footsteps as a woodworker, however. According to Anton's daughter Wanda, he had drawn incessantly as a boy, using pieces of coal on wood, if necessary. As his own children would do, he drew while others played games. His parents "didn't know he was so good," Wanda told her own biographer years later. While it is unlikely that Anton received art training in St. Paul, he at least had the temperament of an artist as well as the charm expected of one. People frequently said he looked just as an artist should look. Apparently, however, he met with little artistic success, for the 1878–79 directory listed him as a cigar maker.⁶

AROUND 1880 GAG MOVED to New Ulm, where the rest of his family had settled. In 1876 his parents had purchased a lot for \$50 on the Immelberg, a wooded hill overlooking New Ulm that must have reminded them of the Himmelreich in Tachau. In 1877, however, the Gag paterfamilias was killed while digging a well on this property with son-in-law Klaus.⁷ It may have been Klaus, now working for August Schell, founder of the Schell Brewery, who encouraged Anton to move to New Ulm in 1879 or 1880 and take up lodging with his family on the Immelberg. Their well-to-do friend Schell soon



New Ulm's Bohemian neighborhood, Goosetown, about 1880

welcomed the young man into his genial social circle and became his first patron. One of Gag's early commissions was to decorate a guest house on the Schell property. The young artist painted three walls of the house's large single room with imaginative murals depicting the Bohemian forest, animals, and birds; on the fourth he created a mountain scene in relief, with a tiny village populated by dolls in native costume.⁸

In 1880 Schell sent Gag to an art school in Chicago, very likely the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts, which had just opened under the aegis of Marshall Field and other prominent midwestern businessmen. According to the *New Ulm Review*, the young art student sent four paintings back to New Ulm that were auctioned to raise money for his tuition. One of these works, *The Muses*, has the classicist subject matter and style typical of the European academic painting taught at the Chicago school.⁹

The young Gag also studied in Milwaukee for a few weeks that year. In the 1880s Milwaukee was a thriving commercial port flooded with immigrants from northern Europe, a German-speaking "Athens of the Midwest."¹⁰ A particularly popular form of entertainment in the city was the large-scale moving panorama which was scrolled for viewers to the accompaniment of music

and narration. To fill the demand for this kind of spectacle, panorama painters had been brought to the city from Germany, and perhaps Gag developed the idea and skills for his later large paintings about Minnesota history from these popular works.

After Gag's brief but stimulating *wanderjahre*, he returned to New Ulm to establish himself as a professional artist. He painted portraits and still lifes but made his main income—like many other nineteenth-century artists—from operating a photography studio. In addition, Schell's patronage expanded in 1885 with the building of Schell's Thal, an estate in the Cottonwood River Valley modeled on a German manor house. Gag executed a variety of decorative commissions for the house and grounds, including an elaborate fountain. At Thal, Gag met Ida Berndt, the daughter of prominent architect Julius Berndt, an early member of the local Turnverein, a German cultural organization. Their wedding on May 4, 1886, represented a significant crossing of social boundaries in a town where the Turners were the social and economic elite and the German Bohemians were comparatively poor. More importantly, however, it began a marriage that Anton would later describe to his daughter Wanda as "perfect."¹¹

The couple lived in a small brick house near the Schell brewery. Ida would walk part of the way with Anton each morning as he left for work; at the end of the day she would walk to meet him. The marriage seems to have spurred Gag's artistic ambitions: in January 1887 he visited St. Paul to purchase supplies and do research at the Minnesota Historical Society for a proposed series of paintings depicting the 1862 battle of New Ulm. Gag also interviewed survivors and visited a Dakota Indian reservation to gather material, collecting Indian artifacts and clothing that later became part of his studio paraphernalia. (Today his *Battle of New Ulm* hangs in the Minnesota State Capitol.)¹²

TRAGEDY SOON BEFELL the young couple, however. Only 13 months after their marriage, Ida died of a fever following childbirth, and a month later their infant daughter died. Anton was reported to be inconsolable. He wrote tragic poetry, including a poem expressing his thoughts of leaving New Ulm.¹³

It may have been during this time that Gag began the series of small, undated paintings of the landscape around New Ulm, particularly of the Cottonwood River and a culvert along the road to the Schell estate. This landscape, a broad river valley between two banks of hills, is remarkably similar to the Walk and Pernartitz environs, and by association with childhood scenes, it

must have provided some measure of solace for Gag, who frequently took long walks. Notable for fresh color and spontaneous handling, these little paintings have been linked with Impressionism, yet it is more plausible, in view of Gag's limited exposure to contemporary art, to understand them as spontaneous oil sketches done from nature, similar to those made by many artists. Gag's preoccupation with one particular landscape—his home and a locale remarkably similar to that of his boyhood—is actually closer to the practice of early nineteenth-century English artist John Constable than to the work of the Impressionists. Unlike Constable, however—and certainly unlike the Impressionists in France in the 1870s or America two or three decades later—Gag was not trying to appropriate new subject matter or new techniques. These oil-on-board landscapes, along with a few painted on the West Coast two decades later, remain the only examples of such spontaneous self-expression in his work.¹⁴

The importance to Anton Gag of these feelings in nature is demonstrated by some written thoughts, "Papa's Art Notes," found in Wanda Gag's papers. The passage opens with the description of a landscape after sunset. A leaf-filled hollow and other ordinary details fill the foreground. "How can such a plain, simple motif evoke such an overpowering impression in us? . . . It is just this that constitutes Art, and is the *poesie* or poetic spirit of the artist. How is that to be attained, you may cry, and the answer is by diligent observation, study, and practice." But art is difficult, the writer goes on; it requires cultivation and stimulation, which is to be found in nature. In vivid detail, the writer then describes the same scene at different times: on a fresh spring day, at noon in summer, after a sudden rain. A central point is that the artist must not only experience the poetic mood but also make a serious study of nature in order to know, for example, the types of trees being viewed.¹⁵

ANTON GAG'S ROMANTIC SPIRIT no doubt also contributed to his attractiveness to women. In New Ulm he had a reputation as a Lothario, especially after being sued for breach of promise by one Anne Ledrach in 1891. Gag made a spirited answer to the charges (according to the lively account in the *New Ulm Review*, the case "for the first time in the history of legal proceedings set up the defense that the man had been seduced by the woman"). Gag asserted that Ledrach had tried a similar ruse with another man and that she was unchaste. The sympathy of the jury lay with the plaintiff, however, who characterized Gag as "a man of considerable property and good standing in the com-

munity." The artist denied that he had "considerable property, or any property outside of his photographic outfit, and on which he is still indebted to a considerable amount." The jury awarded her \$500.¹⁶

A noteworthy element of the trial was Gag's strong plea of ill health. A month after filing his answer to Ledrach's charges, Gag departed for a sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan. His physician, L. A. Fritsche, declared in an affidavit to postpone the trial that for several years Gag had been suffering from "Neurasthenia . . . a nervous disorder which, unless arrested, gradually undermines the system and is likely to and

Gag and his first wife, Ida Berndt, 1886



almost certain to result in nervous mental as well as physical wreck and its consequences." Although a skeptic might suspect Gag was attempting to evade responsibility, it is plausible that such charges, with their threat to reputation and livelihood, provoked a genuine crisis in the sensitive young artist.¹⁷

Four months after the trial, on May 16, 1892, Gag married Elizabeth (Lissi) Biebl, the daughter of well-educated immigrants from Kscheutz (Ksire), Bohemia, only 30 miles from Walk. The wedding took place in the Biebls' Goosetown home, conducted by a justice of the peace. "This event was news to most of our citizens," declared an article in the *New Ulm Review* two days later, "for no announcement had been made of the wedding and few, if any, excepting the relatives were permitted to share the secret." The Biebls objected to their daughter's marriage to Gag on the grounds of his uncertain livelihood. The marriage license listed Anton's occupation as "photographer," and Lissi had been his studio assistant for several years.¹⁸

The bread-and-butter business of Gag's photographic studio was portraits, and, like most photographers of the day, he made numerous small cartes-de-visite and larger cabinet cards, including his own wedding photograph. A comparison of Gag's portraits with those of rival New Ulm studios shows greater spontaneity of pose in the sitters, particularly children, and more imaginative costumes and backgrounds. Lissi no doubt contributed significantly to this aspect of the business, for later she expressed her artistic nature by making inventive costumes for her family as well as clothes distinguished from the styles of the day by their unstarched grace.

In his studio Gag took various kinds of photographs. In 1890, for example, the *New Ulm Review* reported that he had made a large image of the nine surviving settlers of New Ulm: "Pictures of the group will be presented to Turner Hall, the new court house and the Catholic parsonage. Some day they will be valuable and interesting."¹⁹ In addition, Gag covered current events:



Gag's second wife, Lissi Biebl, in costume and holding an artist's palette, 1892

one surviving photo documents the unveiling of the Defenders of New Ulm monument in 1891. He also made "artistic" photographs involving staged scenes and sometimes employing photomontage. For example, one photograph in a wedding series for Alma and Lewis Krook combines two views of the couple, one in wedding costume looking at a book, presumably the Bible, and the other in everyday dress, apparently having a spat.

Gag was clearly interested in the technology of photography. He worked for years, for example, on inventions, including a camera to take pictures at night. An advertising card distributed at the Brown County Fair

of 1893 presented a collage of his cabinet cards on the front and, on the reverse, a statement about his work. In the spring of the same year he went to St. Paul to study "new features in photography," returning with "a good deal of new apparatus" including a new camera. The *New Ulm Review* also reported Gag's intention to build an addition to his photographic studio and "show the people of New Ulm some surprises in photography." A year later, however, he sold the operation to Albert Meyer and Joseph Sattler. The *Review* expressed regret over this decision: "To photography in the past years Mr. Gag made great progress and attained a reputation as an artist that was quite enviable. His work was always artistic, always studious. For these qualities his departure from the business of 'taken faces' will be regretted."²⁰

That same newspaper report announced Gag's intention to "take a much needed rest. . . . Later on he may devote his time exclusively to painting." This retirement from a successful business may indicate a reappearance of the neurasthenia or some other physical complaint, since the Gags now had particular need for reliable income: daughter Wanda was born in 1893, and soon afterwards the family began building a fine Queen Anne-style house on Washington Street. Accordingly Gag soon turned to other business ventures, joining with New Ulm artists including Emil Seiter, Alexander Schwendinger, and Christian Heller. In 1903 Schwendinger, Heller, and Gag decorated New Ulm's Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, built ten years earlier in the German Baroque style. Its altar and painted ceiling murals are reminiscent of church decoration in Bohemia. In 1898 the trio had done similar Baroque decorations for St. Patrick's Catholic Church in Zumbro Falls, and that same year Heller and Gag completed renovations of the Congregational church in New Ulm.²¹

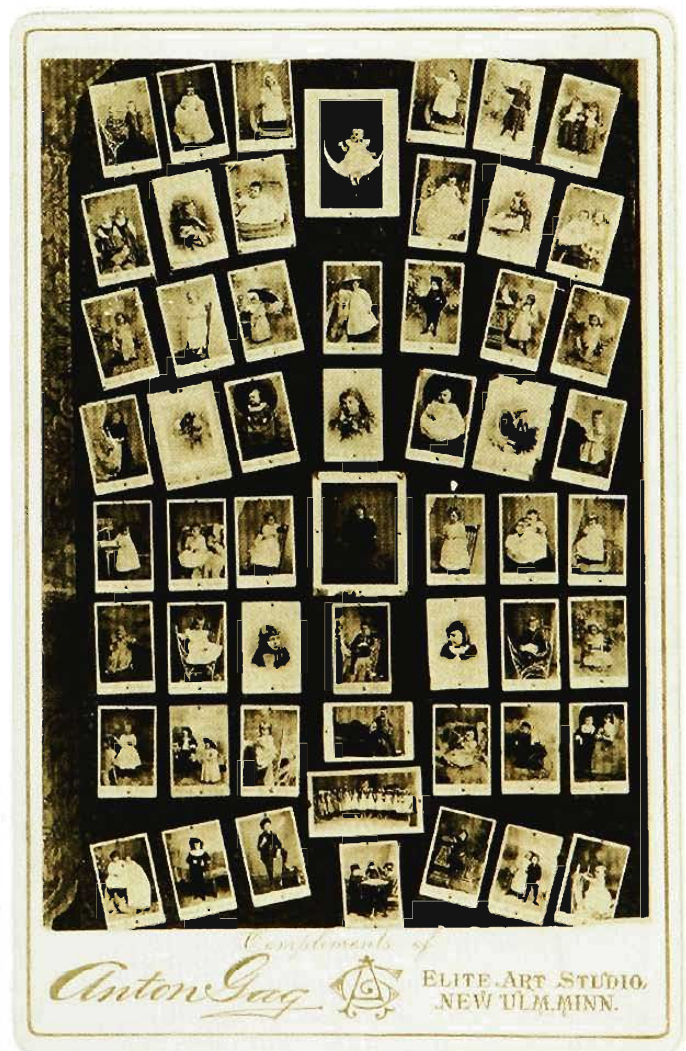
Gag also undertook commissions in churches on his own: in 1902, for example, he began frescoing and decorating the church in nearby Cambria. He may also have provided the frescoes above the altar in the Chapel of Our Sorrowful Mother at the Way of the Cross in New Ulm, a shrine with 14 stations along an uphill path. The project, initiated by Fr. Alexander Berghold and Sr. Flavia of the Order of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ, was completed in 1904.²²

Meanwhile Gag collaborated with Schwendinger and Heller on a work that brought them considerable attention: a large panorama on the 1862 Dakota War. Consisting of 11 panels, each 7 by 10 feet, painted on a single long roll of fabric, the paintings tell the story of the second battle of New Ulm, beginning with the attack on Fort Ridgely and climaxing with the mass

execution of 38 Dakota Indians. The work was remarkable for its dramatic power, according to the *New Ulm Review*: "A sight of this panorama will bring into sternness of reality the struggles which the pioneers of Minnesota endured." A second mention read, "The looker-on stands before it and hates to leave. The figures are natural, almost real."²³

Heller and Gag also collaborated on other ventures: an advertisement in the *New Ulm Review* on September 14, 1898, states that "Heller & Gag, the Leading Painters, do all kinds of painting, from house painting and decorations to portraits. Artistic frescoing a specialty." The firm, which sometimes employed up to 30 men, did a great quantity of work that was always first-rate.

Children's portraits graced this 1893 advertising card for Gag's Elite Art Studio.





Gag and other local artists created New Ulm's Cathedral of the Holy Trinity murals and altar.

Both Heller and Gag were temperamental and inclined to fling their brushes if the work was not precisely right, yet the casual business methods of the generous artists guaranteed that they never realized much profit.²⁴

The *Review* documents the wide range of the firm's decorative projects. On November 6, 1901, Heller and Gag completed a "very fine set of banners for the Burg cigar company advertising the Blizzard and Nan Wilkes cigars." They also made a sign advertising the Blizzard cigar for the side of the Model Drug Store, praised in the *Review* of November 26, 1902, as "the most attractive sign in the city." In the same year, New Ulm celebrated the fortieth anniversary of the 1862 battles, and Heller and Gag designed floats for the parade, work heralded by the *Review* on August 27 as "that of a genius and . . . the source of many compliment[s]." The reporter continued, "These gentlemen have made themselves illustrious by their art and though they are not appreciated as they should be, their work is none the less admired," a point that the *Review* frequently made.

Another important source of income for the firm was the interior decoration of homes. Gag decorated his own on Washington Street, which became the site of his studio and a demonstration of his skills for potential customers. Restoration of the home, now open to the public as the Wanda Gág House, reveals the artist's extensive painting. The front parlor has an 18-inch band of scrollwork done freehand with great artistry. Pocket doors leading to the dining room are wood grained to make pine look like oak. The ceiling of the dining room is sky blue and enhanced with clouds and cherubs whose eyes delighted the children by seeming to follow them around the room. The staircase leading to Gag's studio has a handsome ornamental gold border with a floral motif and a series of lions rampant near the ceiling. Because Gag could not at first pay the house's property taxes, the family did not occupy it until 1897, by which time he had resumed his photography business. (Today, the third-floor studio, for which he built a skylight, has numerous examples of his photographic work on view.)²⁵

ONE PARTICULARLY IMPORTANT patron for Heller and Gag was the New Ulm chapter of the Turnverein. The Turners promoted their "sound mind-sound body" principles through their schools, including kindergarten; the "turning school," a course of gymnastics for men, women, and children; and—most important to the general public in New Ulm—German-language theater productions. The theater reached a high point in 1873 when distinguished visiting soprano Mme. Methua-Scheller performed in Donizetti's *Daughter of*

the Regiment. Her artist-husband created sets for the production and decorated the bar of the Turner Hall with a series of murals depicting German castles. The mid-1880s saw another high point when one theater production traveled to Minneapolis and St. Paul, where it received good reviews, and another was so successful that the theater was thronged and many disappointed citizens turned away. Gag frequently photographed the actors and sets in the 1880s.²⁶

In 1896 the firm of Heller and Gag painted a "fine new drop curtain" for the Turner theater. The grandest opportunity came in 1901, however, when the Turnverein built a new hall, containing a state-of-the-art theater seating 800, for the extravagant sum of \$25,000. Heller and Gag painted the new drop curtain, referred to locally as the "Hallstadt scene," a peaceful harbor view based on a painting from Germany. They also painted woodsy scenery, visible in many photographs of Turner productions, that evokes the atmosphere of the Bohemian forest. In 1901 the two artists also restored and painted new murals in the Turner Hall bar.²⁷

Three years later Heller and Gag painted an asbestos curtain for the stage, the design for which included a portrait of the founder of the Turnverein, Frederick Jahn. The following year they were hired to decorate the interior of the theater, the walls of which had apparently remained unfinished. This commission was expected to boost attendance, which had been problematic. The project was so elaborate—costs exceeded \$1,000, and the artists are reported to have used 29,000 feet of lumber—that the Turnverein seriously debated whether it could afford to proceed. In the end, the association appealed to the public for subscription funds, and the project went forward. The decorative scheme included a large panel over the stage and a variety of wall paintings "designed by Heller & Gag to be one of their master pieces in the line of decoration." Kurt Bell, a resident of New Ulm, remembers images of Schiller, Goethe, and Shakespeare in the theater. The artists' work was praised by the *Review* as the finest in the state, done far more economically than comparable work in larger cities.²⁸

Meanwhile Gag continued to do easel paintings, sometimes for patrons, sometimes for his own creative pleasure. A brief survey of his more than 60 paintings suggests the traditional, even academic, orientation of these works. One of his most accomplished is *Cows in the River*. Far from resembling an Impressionist work concerned with the play of light on form, this painting, with its subdued tonality, echoes the naturalism of such artists as Jules LeBreton. Indeed, like the work of the French naturalists, it was probably based on a photo-



Gag's wedding portrait of Lewis B. and Alma Vogel Krook, which superimposed formal and informal likenesses

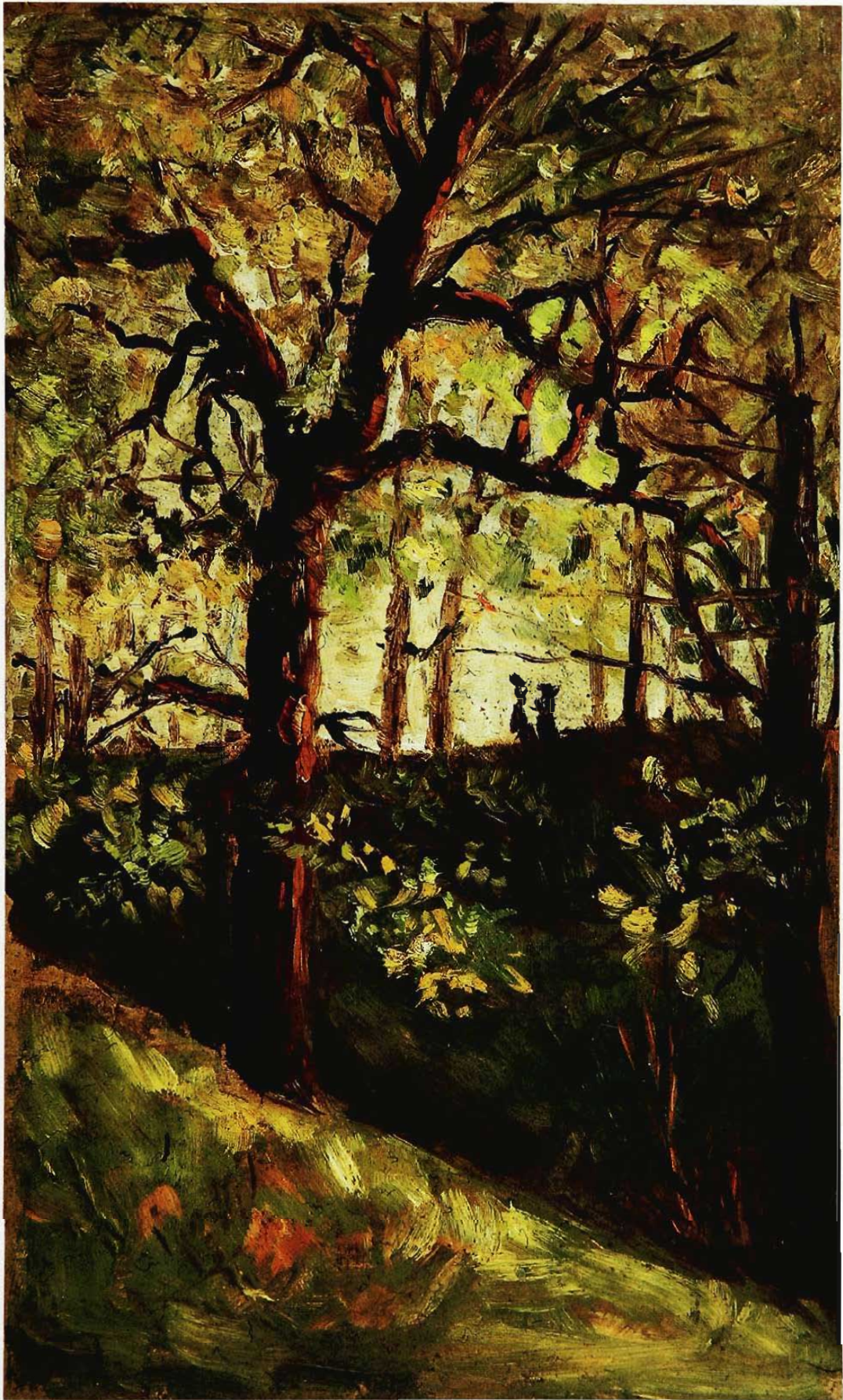
graph. Another factor distinguishing Gag's work from those by contemporary Impressionists is his use of imagined elements: an undated painting entitled *Goose Girl* depicts a girl walking down a path toward a distant church. No such view exists in New Ulm, but the scene is clearly reminiscent of the walk the young Anton and his siblings took along the brook to school and church.²⁹

Gag also did numerous portraits, both of New Ulm citizens and of picturesque "types" such as the young gypsy (actually the dark-eyed Wanda) or the *Old Man*, a view in profile reminiscent of an Old Master. Alma Scott's biography of Wanda Gág contains a poignant story of Anton's struggle to attain "a certain transparency" in painting flesh. "Over and over again he tried, using now this and now that procedure. Finally he turned to Wanda, as to a fellow artist, and said: 'I can't get it, my Wanda. Alex [Schwendinger] knows it—he learned it in Germany—but he won't tell me.'" Wanda felt "a great wave of sympathy for her father, but she could not help him at the time. In later years she realized that it was undoubtedly the well known technique of using transparent glazes for which her father had been groping."³⁰

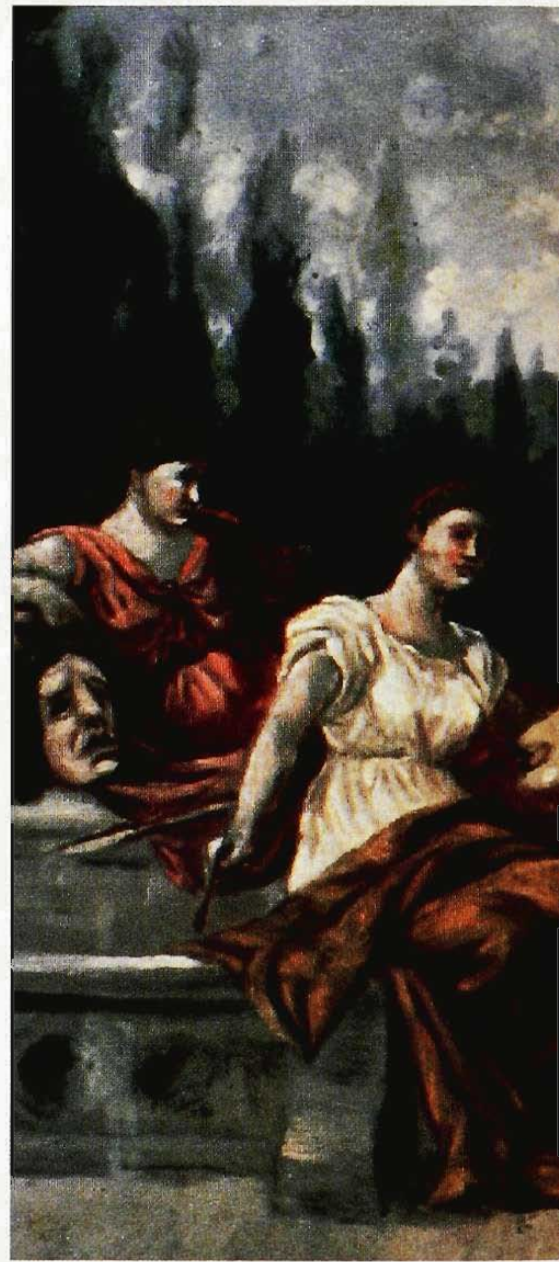
Even if Gag never mastered the difficult art of painting flesh to his satisfaction, he did achieve mastery of glazes. His still lifes, such as the undated *Box of Grapes*, are so realistic that they fool the eye; they are also remarkably luminous and seem translucent when lit from below. Gag also continued to do competent academic paintings, such as *Classical Scene* (1904), which depicts a woman in a garden. Other decorative works with cherubs or floral designs offer further proof of Gag's affinity for the Rococo style.

By 1906 Anton Gag's health was failing. Suffering from a lung complaint identified as occupational tuberculosis contracted from painting in cold, damp churches, he worked as hard as ever, apart from a trip to Oregon in search of a cure. In 1908, the 50-year-old Gag dissolved his partnership with Heller, who also fell ill with tuberculosis, then left New Ulm, and died. Before Gag's own death a short while later on May 21, he spoke these words to his daughter Wanda: "*Was der Papa nicht thun konst, muss die Wanda halt fertig machen*" ("What Papa was unable to accomplish, Wanda will have to finish"). The typescript of Alma Scott's biography of Wanda Gág contains these additional words:

She never forgot his words, the last spoken to her and perhaps his last conscious words to anyone, for soon after that he lapsed into delirium and talked ramblingly. Far into the night he talked about his art, of using a little of this color, a little more of that one,



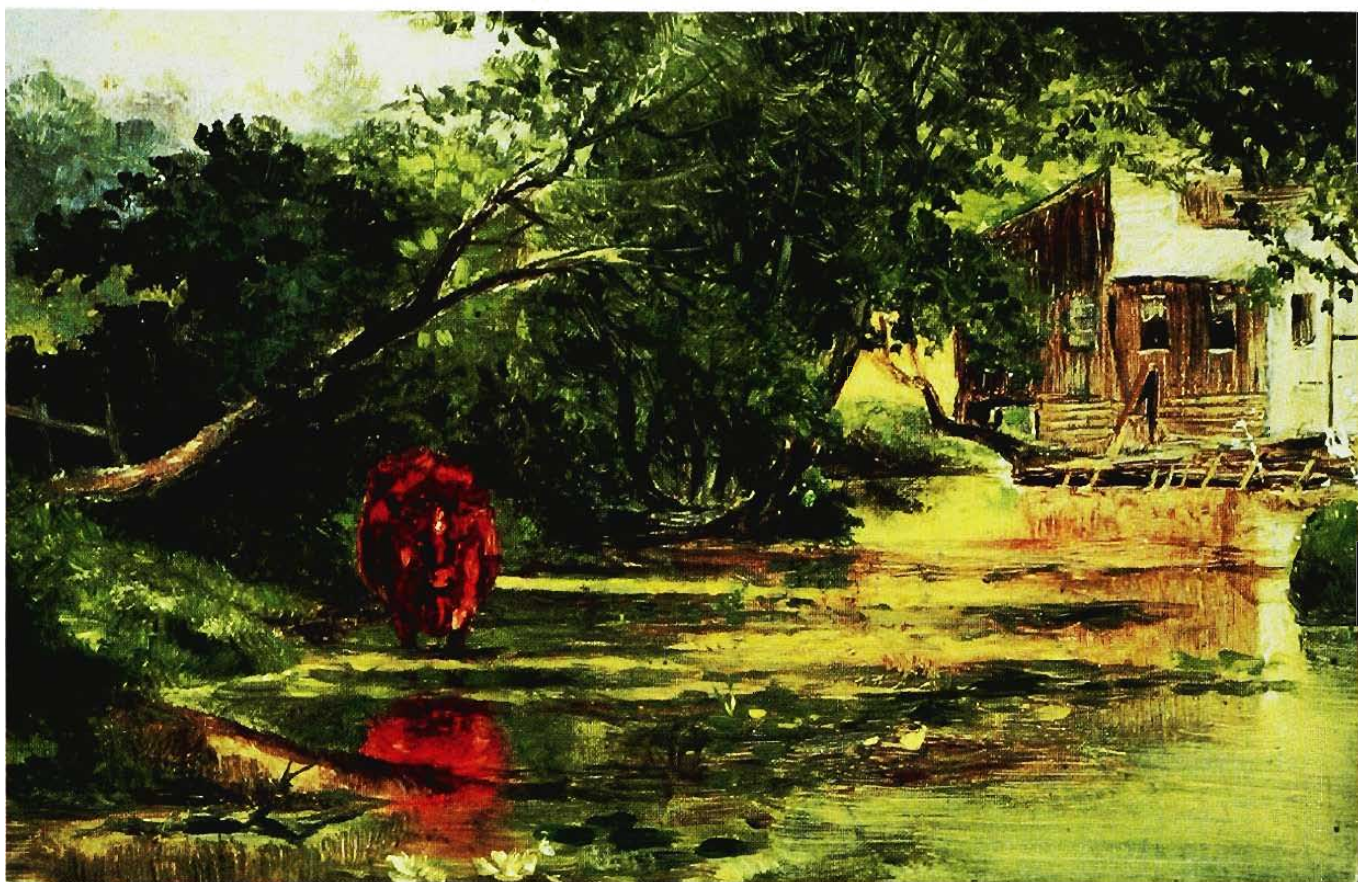
One of Gag's small New Ulm landscape sketches from nature, about 1890





Gag's youthful classicist oil painting, *The Muses* (1880)

The Gag family's New Ulm home, now the Wanda Gág House, and a detail of Anton's freehand decorative artwork



Gag's small sketch *New Ulm Scene: Cow in River*, about 1880

of lights and the depths of shadows; and so, mixing colors, and painting an imaginary scene of great beauty, Anton Gag died.³¹

PREVIOUS WRITTEN ACCOUNTS of Anton Gag as an artist stress his lack of formal training and isolation in New Ulm. They suggest that he was a provincial Impressionist *manqué* forced by his family responsibilities to work as an artistic jack-of-all-trades. Yet an understanding of his background and formative influences allows us to see his career in another light: as an artist in the venerable European tradition of the jobbing painter, the versatile craftsman who works in a variety of mediums to provide his patrons with beautiful and harmonious surroundings. Gag's contemporary, Pierre Auguste Renoir, similarly executed decorative commissions for his friends and patrons even after becoming famous as an Impressionist painter and took pride in the workman traditions of his birthplace, Limoges.

This same decorative tradition, often linked to the eighteenth-century Rococo style, was a key element of Art Nouveau, the eclectic style that swept Paris and other European cities in the 1890s.³²

Yet, apart from his inventions in photography, Gag's work showed little concern with fashion or innovation. Rather, he was concerned with truth and a poetic feeling for nature, interests that linked him to nineteenth-century Romanticism. This tradition and its conservative academic methods were central to German-Bohemian art. Fellow Bohemian Jan Prousek (1857–1914), for example, saw landscape art as a way to explore and express cultural ideals; unlike their counterparts in Paris at the time, neither man evinced much interest in exploring form.³³ Nor did Gag live the stereotyped, carefree Bohemian life. To Minnesota's deeply traditional artist Anton Gag, Bohemianism meant love of nature, especially the forest, love of art, and connections with kin that—despite a lack of material success—made him rich. □

NOTES

1. The term "Bohemian" was originally applied to gypsies, who were believed to come from Bohemia. Wanda Gág added the diacritical mark to her last name to indicate the broad pronunciation of the original double "a."

For critical assessments of Anton Gag, see Lyndel King, *Anton Gag: Impressions of an Immigrant*, exhibition pamphlet (New Ulm: Brown County Historical Museum, June 28–Aug. 2, 1986); Rena N. Coen, *Minnesota Impressionists* (Afton: Afton Historical Society Press, 1996), 45–46; Rena N. Coen, *Painting and Sculpture in Minnesota* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), 75–76. The most extensive biographical treatment of Anton Gag to date is Lyn Lacy's excellent 20-minute video, "Anton Gag: Immigrant Artist" (Minneapolis: Heritage Productions).

The authors thank Anton Gag's grandson Gary Harm and his wife Dolly for information and access to their collection; Darla Gebhard, research librarian at the Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm, for her tireless and invaluable help; and Allan R. Gebhard for his fine research in the *New Ulm Review*.

2. Anton Gag's birthplace was previously thought to be Neustadt bei Haid, Haid (Bor) being the main city of the area. Wanda Gág named Neustadt (Stráz), a larger town near Walk, as her father's birthplace. Robert J. Paulson obtained the birth records of Anton Gag and other members of his family from the State Archive of Pilsen (Plzen).

3. Alma Scott, typed manuscript for *Wanda Gág: The Story of an Artist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1949), 37, box 1, Alma Schmidt Scott Papers, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS), St. Paul. The manuscript's title page bears the following note: "Since many early incidents were deleted and do not appear in printed version, this manuscript may be of some future interest."

See Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), especially Chapter 2, for a thoughtful examination of the relation of the German forest to art, literature, and myth.

4. See La Vern J. Rippley and Robert J. Paulson, *German-Bohemians: The Quiet Immigrants* (Northfield: St. Olaf College Press, 1995), 29–75, on German-Bohemian immigration as an example of "chain migration" caused by the desire for greater economic opportunity. Chain migrants often came in family groups and lived in enclaves. On differences between these groups of settlers, see p. 143–59.

5. U.S., *Census*, 1880, Ramsey Co., St. Paul, Enumeration District 221, p. 16; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Oct. 25, 1887, p. 1C. 9C. No records connect George Gag with Eagle Street in St. Paul, so it is likely that he failed to find work and went looking elsewhere.

6. Scott manuscript, 46; stenographic notebook. Wanda Gág interview notes, Scott papers (hereinafter Scott notebook). This notebook with unnumbered pages contains information not in Scott's published biography.

7. George Gag's purchase of Outlot 395, abstract, and death record, Nov. 24, 1877, Brown Co. Court House, New

Ulm; obituary, *New Ulm Post*, Nov. 30, 1877. Wanda Gág would compare the Immelberg to the forests of the Old Country; Scott, *Wanda Gág*, 58.

8. *St. Paul City Directory*, 1875–76; obituary, *New Ulm Review*, Aug. 17, 1927; Scott, *Wanda Gág*, 6–7.

9. *New Ulm Review*, Aug. 11, 1880. The Chicago Academy of Fine Arts is the forerunner of the school of the Art Institute of Chicago.

10. Frederick I. Olson, "Community and Culture in Frederick Layton's Milwaukee," in 1888, *Frederick Layton and His World*, exhibition catalog (Milwaukee: Milwaukee Art Museum, Apr. 8–Aug. 28, 1988), 11–29.

11. Gag reportedly learned photography as an apprentice to a photographer in New Ulm; Gary Harm, interview by Julie L'Enfant, Minneapolis, Apr. 26, 1996; Scott notebook.

12. *Review*, Jan. 26, 1887; Scott, *Wanda Gág*, 22–23.

13. *Review*, June 22, July 27, 1887; Scott notebook.

14. Coen, *Minnesota Impressionists*, 45–46; Leslie Parris and Ian Fleming-Williams, *Constable*, exhibition catalog (London: Tate Gallery, June 13–Sept. 15, 1991), 51–191. Gag's nine small landscapes, most about 6 by 4 inches, are in the Minnesota Historical Society collections.

15. Brown Co. Historical Society. The fragment, which may be copied from another source, is titled "Notes by Anton Gag: On the Observation of Nature for the Education of a Painter"; it is written in German with two translations into English, one by Herman N. Radloff, 1989, another by Delmar Brick, 1993. Quotations are adapted from both.

The "Art Notes" passage distinctly echoes the ideas of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "A landscape-painter should possess various sorts of knowledge. It is not enough for him to understand perspective, architecture, and the anatomy of men and animals; he must also have some insight into botany and mineralogy, that he may know how to express properly the characteristics of trees and plants, and the character of the different sorts of mountains"; Johann Peter Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe*, trans. John Oxenford (London: Dent, 1970), 418. Anton Gag owned the illustrated works of Goethe, Schiller, and Heine, as well as many German art magazines; Scott, *Wanda Gág*, 21.

16. Plaintiff's complaint, *Anne Ledrah v. Anton Gag*, District Court, 9th Judicial District, Brown Co., Mar. 10, 1891, and defendant's answer, May 2, 1891, Gag file, Brown Co. Historical Society; *Review*, Jan. 13, 1892, p. 1.

17. Fritsche affidavit, June 10, 1891, Gag file, Brown Co. Historical Society. That Gag was genuinely ill is supported by a June 12, 1891, statement by Dr. J. H. Kellogg, supervisor of the Battle Creek sanitarium, that "Mr. Anton Gag is under treatment in this institution under my care and is necessarily detained from traveling in consequence of illness"; Gag file, Brown Co. Historical Society.

18. Marriage record, May 23, 1892, Gag file, Brown Co. Historical Society; *Review*, May 18, 1892; Scott, *Wanda Gág*, 25–26. According to Flavia Gág, Anton's daughter, the Biebls said, "What? An artist? He'll never make a living for our girl";

Flavia Gág, unpublished typescript biography, 9–10, Gary and Dolly Harm collection.

19. *Review*, Oct. 8, 1890.

20. *Review*, Mar. 29, May 10, 1893, May 30, 1894. When Gag applied for a patent, he found that someone had already patented his idea; Scott notebook.

21. The first mention of a firm is in the *Review* of Mar. 6, 1895: "Heller, Gag and Seiter have formed a partnership. This is a combination that everybody knows is able to do the very finest painting, frescoing and paperhanging, for they are artists all of them." See also Aug. 31, 1898. According to the *Rochester Post-Bulletin*, Oct. 24, 1975, p. 14, "The paintings, completed in 1898, were by three Austrians—Christian Heller, Anton Gag and Alex Schwendluger [*sic*]. They reportedly were friends of the pastor of the church at that time, The Rev. J. Schwartz. He was a native of Austria."

22. *Brown County Journal*, Oct. 18, 1902, p. 5; Catholic Diocese of New Ulm, "The Way of the Cross," n.d. The Scott notebook contains the following notation: "1903—Turner Hall curtain, etc. Way of Cross Built. 1904—Way of Cross finished."

23. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, Oct. 23, 1955; John L. Marsh, "Drama and Spectacle by the Yard: The Panorama in America," *Journal of Popular Culture* 10 (Winter 1976): 588–89; Coen, *Painting and Sculpture in Minnesota*, 75–76; *Review*, Jan. 18, Feb. 1, 1893. The panorama is in the MHS collections.

24. Scott, *Wanda Gág*, 48–50; Scott notebook.

25. James Boeck, curator of the Wanda Gág House, interview by Julie L'Enfant, New Ulm, Sept. 18, 1995. Gag's new photographic partnership with Albert Meyer at the Broadway Gallery was announced in the *Review*, Nov. 4, 1896.

26. Hermann E. Rothfuss, "The Early German Theater in Minnesota," *Minnesota History* 32 (Sept. 1951): 164–73; *Review*, Sept. 7, 14, and 21, 1887; Richard P. Runck, manager, Turner Hall, New Ulm, interview by Julie L'Enfant, New Ulm, Aug. 16, 1996.

27. *Review*, Apr. 8, 1896, Feb. 2, June 5, 1901; Scott, *Wanda Gág*, 50. The exact role of Heller and Gag in the murals, currently undergoing restoration, is a matter of conjecture.

28. *Review*, Apr. 4, July 4, Aug. 8, 1906; Richard Runck and Darla Gebhard, conversation with L'Enfant, Aug. 16, 1996.

29. See Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Beyond Impressionism: The Naturalist Impulse* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992). *The Goose Girl* is in a private collection.

30. Scott manuscript, 35–36; Scott, *Wanda Gág*, 29.

31. Darla and Allan Gebhard, conversation with Kurt Bell, Dec. 26, 1992. Gag file, Brown Co. Historical Society; Scott, *Wanda Gág*, 65; Scott manuscript, 83.

32. Renoir (1841–1919) began his career painting porcelain and lampshades in Limoges and later painted decorative panels and did other work for friends and patrons in Paris and Normandy; Barbara Ehrlich White, *Renoir: His Life, Art, and Letters* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1984), 92–95. See also Debora L. Silverman, *Art Nouveau in Fin-de-Siècle France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

33. Miroslav Cogan, "Das Isergebirge in den Zeichnungen von Jan Prousek," *Jahrbuch für Sudetendeutsche Museen und Archive* (Munich, 1991). Prousek, who studied briefly in Vienna and Munich, shared Gag's dedication to his Bohemian cultural heritage; his work was solitary and poorly rewarded until 1899, when he was commissioned to illustrate an encyclopedic work on North Bohemia.

The photograph on page 380 and the paintings on pages 387 and 390 are from the Minnesota Historical Society collections; the color photo on p. 378 is by Robert J. Paulson. The paintings on pages 376–77 and 388–89 are in the Gary and Dolly Harm collection. Allan R. Gebhard photographed the Gág house and interior artwork. The remaining images are reproduced with permission from the Brown County Historical Society, New Ulm.





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