

The Farmers and Ranchers

“The eastern Kansas farmer is a thrifty and cautious, diligent descendent of the New England Puritan, physically and spiritually. The western Kansas farmer is a gambler, a go-getter. In western Kansas are many strains that did not come out of New England. The Mennonites live on the eastern fringe of western Kansas. They were Germans who lived a hundred years in Russia before coming to America and they have brought their own culture, their own civilization, which has persisted through all the 60 years of their Kansas exile!”

William Allen White in the *Introduction of the WPA Guide to 1930s Kansas*, published in 1939.

The first European people in Kansas didn't stay – they were travelers along the Santa Fe and Oregon Trails, on their way to “better” places. Kansas Territory was originally considered part of the “Great American Desert,” named such by Major Stephen H. Long when he went through in 1820, suitable only for hunters, trappers, and nomads. By the mid-1850s people were settling in Kansas despite its reputation. They were later spurred by Horace Greeley's Homestead Act of 1862 and a 1870s theory that “rain will follow the plow” which reinforced the idea of Manifest Destiny.

After 1865, ranchers moved into the high plains and cattle ranches began to boom in the 1880s. Kansas Cow towns included Abilene, with rail connection to Chicago, followed by Wichita, Ellsworth and Dodge City. Large Cattle Barons hired cowhands, both whites (English, Spanish, German, Swedish, and Danish) and nonwhites (Black, Mexican, and Indian). Social issues included range wars over fencing the plains, cattle vs. sheep and homesteaders.

Farming on the tall grass prairies began soon after the area was declared a Territory in 1851 and extended into the more arid areas of western Kansas in the wet years of the 1880s. Nebraska, Kansas, and Eastern Colorado became the major corn and wheat producers. Kansas farmers included large groups of European immigrants, including the Mennonites who brought Turkey Red wheat to the state.

Farmers and ranchers in Kansas changed from solitary figures to groups of “professionals” who worked together to deal with the social and economic hardships of the agricultural life. The first chartered Grange in Kansas was formed in Hiawatha in 1872. It was succeeded by the Patrons of Husbandry, the National Farm Alliance, the National Farmers Union, and, finally, Kansas Farm Bureau, which was formed in 1919 to deal with issues of social and economic decline, WWI production, the Depression, and the Drought.



John Stewart Curry

JOHN STEUART CURRY (UNITED STATES, 1897-1946)
Our Good Earth, 1942



JOHN STEUART CURRY (UNITED STATES, 1897-1946)

Our Good Earth, 1942

Lithograph on paper

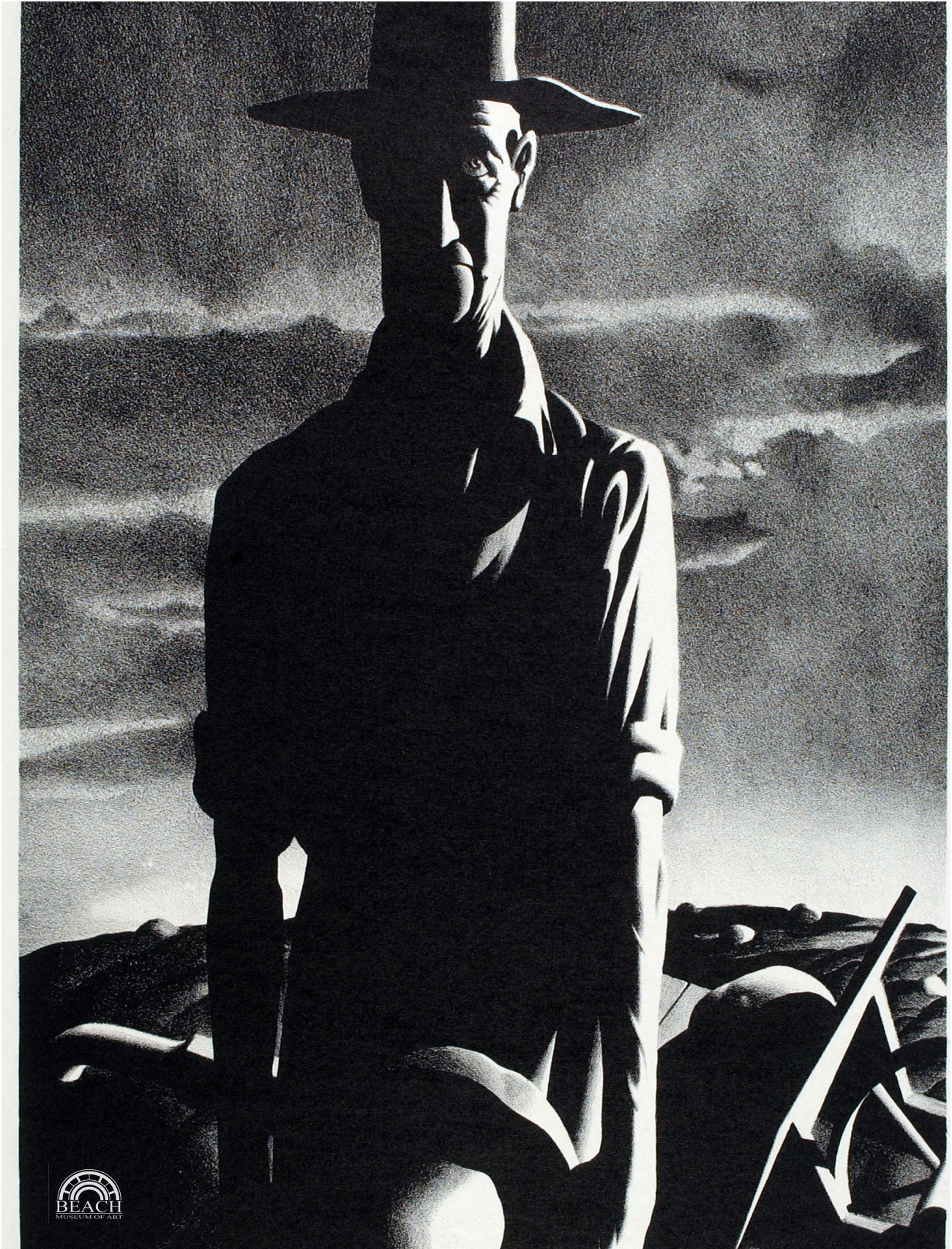
13 5/8 x 10 3/4"

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, bequest of Raymond & Melba Budge, 1992.123

The image of farmer as a heroic figure was common in Curry's work. In this scene, the monumental farmer can be understood as a symbol of the commanding power of American agriculture, as well as a paternal figure representing America's role in protecting the earth for future generations.

Our Good Earth is based on a painting Abbott Laboratories commissioned from Curry as part of a program to bolster public support for the United States' effort during World War II. It was suggested that Curry depict brave soldiers defending the land and create a scene similar in character to his dramatic mural, *Tragic Prelude – John Brown*, in the Kansas Statehouse in Topeka.

Curry himself noted in a letter to Reeves Lewenthal dated October 7, 1942: "Farmers are exerting an all-out effort and working 70-80 hours a week. There is no problem as we see it out here in getting farmers to work as hard as they can, for they are now doing exactly this." Curry felt that fear-mongering approaches to get people to support the war effort were unnecessary and instead created this straightforward image of a farmer surrounded by the fruits of his unceasing labor.



STEVAN DOHANOS (UNITED STATES, 1907-1994)
Man of the Soil, 1935



STEVAN DOHANOS (UNITED STATES, 1907-1994)

Man of the Soil, 1935

Lithograph on paper

12 3/8 x 9 1/2"

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of Pamela D. Kingsbury, 2000.259

Born in Lorain, Ohio, Dohanos is best known for his numerous *Saturday Evening Post* covers of the 1940s and 1950s, which portrayed aspects of the "American Dream" with a dry humor. *Man of the Soil* epitomizes the farmer of the period, beaten down by hard work, bad economic and climatic conditions, and constant worry.

"The typical posture is more nearly that of one who has fallen, headlong into deep water and has now arisen to stand feet apart, hands hanging a bit away from the body, back slightly bent, clothing dripping and with a facial expression which says, 'Oh, ain't this a mess!' The only difference is that the bath is not of water and the dripping is – just dirt."

A.B. Madison, "Mere Existence," *Fowler News* (25 April 1935)



JOHN STEUART CURRY (UNITED STATES, 1897-1946)
Workers and Tractors, ca. 1946



JOHN STEUART CURRY (UNITED STATES, 1897-1946)

Workers and Tractors, ca. 1946

Charcoal and ink on paper

14 3/4 x 39 1/4"

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, bequest of Kathleen G. Curry, KC2046

This preliminary scale drawing was for Curry's mural, *Youth Helps Rebuild the World*, completed for the Wisconsin State Fair in 1946. The grid superimposed on Curry's composition suggests that he used this drawing to transfer his design to a full-scale drawing (cartoon) of the image. The finished product was 8 feet high and 26 feet long. Kansas artist Robert O. Hodgell, who also assisted Curry with the mural in Topeka, was his assistant.

"Youth Rebuilds" was the slogan for the Civilian Conservation Corps (1933-1942). The suggestion that American youth would rebuild the world is alluded to in the ruins on the right hand side of the mural.



JOE JONES (UNITED STATES, 1909-1963)
Missouri Wheat Farmers, 1938



JOE JONES (UNITED STATES, 1909-1963)

Missouri Wheat Farmers, 1938

Lithograph on paper

10 1/2 x 8 3/8"

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, bequest of Raymond & Melba Budge, 1992.174

Jones was political activist and a member of the Communist party during the decade of the Depression. He gained national recognition as an important artist of the American Scene of the 1930s and 1940s for his depictions of laborers and farm workers. His views were greatly criticized by mid-western conservatives and he left St. Louis for New York in 1935. Early in his career he was closely associated with Thomas Hart Benton. His early work, including *Missouri Wheat Farmers*, was at the forefront of Social Realism, and by depicting laborers and farm workers he gained national recognition as an important artist of the American Scene. His WPA murals are found in several Kansas post offices, including those in Seneca, Anthony, and Hutchinson.

Jones created a number of images of farmers suffering during the 1930s. His work stressed the dignity of the farmer but also gives indications of the inherent difficulties of the profession. The artist wrote in February of 1938 of another work, *Drought Farmer*: "My farmer sitting among his problems is very melancholy and is unable to free himself of his plight because of his inability to substitute it with anything better." ("General Report of Work Done on Fellowship," February 1938, from papers at the Missouri State Historical Society)



J. R. Smith - Boston

By the Kaw Valley Loam



E. HUBERT DEINES (UNITED STATES, 1894-1967)
Joy on the Kaw Valley Loam, 1946

E. HUBERT DEINES (UNITED STATES, 1894-1967)

Joy on the Kaw Valley Loam, 1946

Wood engraving on paper

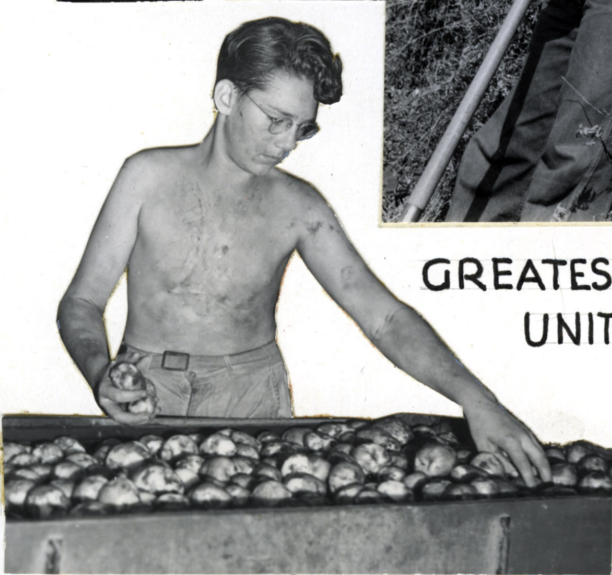
8 1/8 x 12 7/8"

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of the family of E. Hubert Deines, 1969.40

This print depicts potato picking along the Kaw River Valley, not far from Topeka, in an area that was well-known for its potato harvest. All members of the family participate in the activity, even young children.

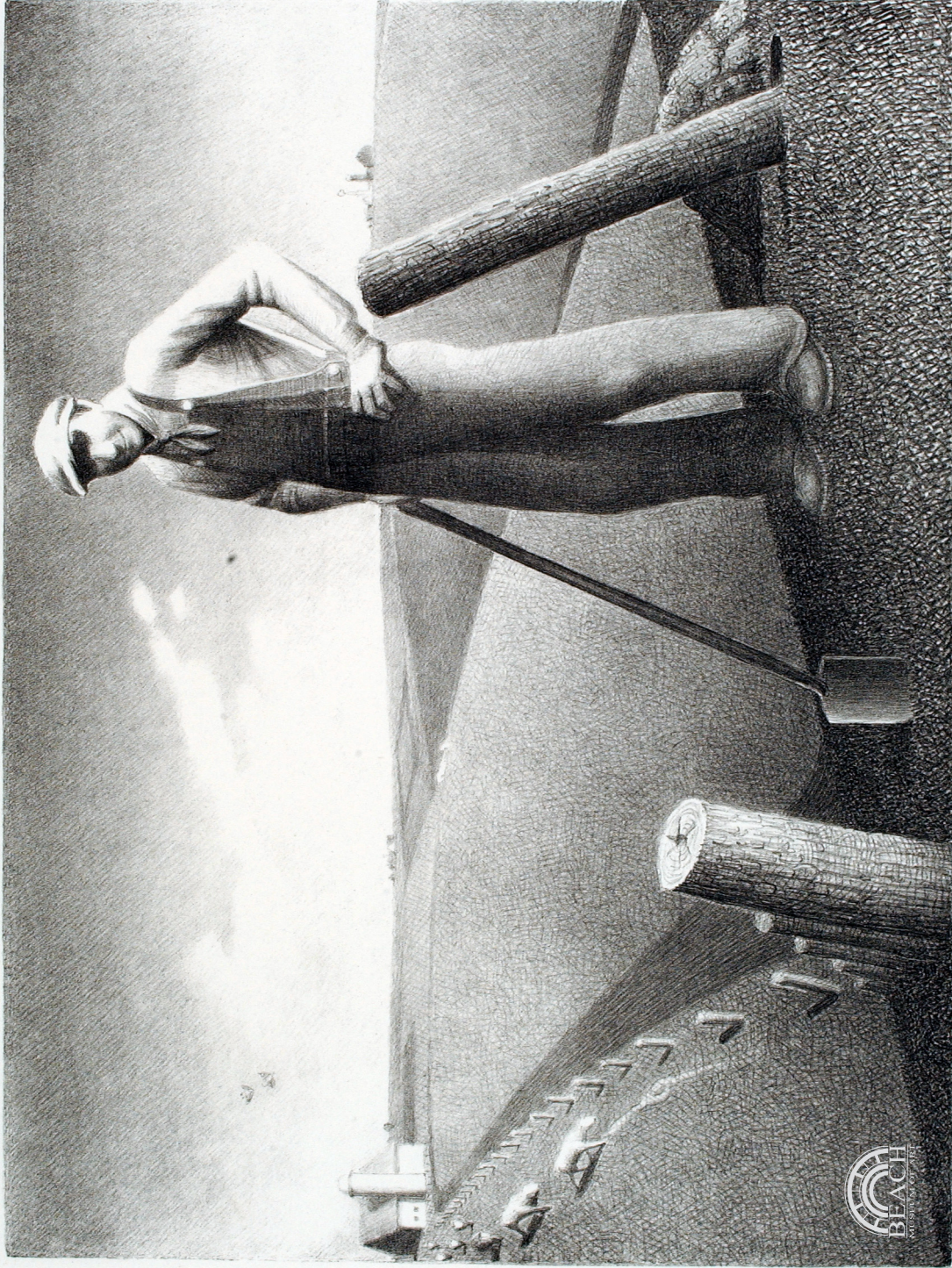
“Sons and daughter were loved and cherished, but boys were economic assets as well. Working in the fields, from shocking oats to driving tractors, was considered improper for ladies until the 1950s, as were construction and barnyard chores. (This was not true in all households.)”

Section 27: A Century on a Family Farm, Mil Penner, University Press of Kansas, 2002, p. 53.



GREATEST PRODUCTION CAME FROM
UNITED FARM FAMILY EFFORT





GRANT DEVOLSON WOOD (UNITED STATES, 1891-1942)
In the Spring, 1939



GRANT DEVOLSON WOOD (UNITED STATES, 1891-1942)

In the Spring, 1939

Lithograph on paper

9 3/4 x 12 5/8"

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, bequest of Raymond & Melba Budge, 1992.248

Farmers had to hand-dig postholes to a depth of two or three feet. Because posts were spaced about 10 feet apart, this translated to more than 1,000 hand-dug holes to fence a 160 acre plot.

“When I started out in western Kansas, the first thing I needed to become proficient at was digging postholes. We had miles and miles of fence on the ranch, and every year, unfailingly, thistles would blow out of last year’s wheat fields, pile up against our fences, and break them down. Often the wire would be tangled and scattered out across the pasture. ... We would start this job in March and hope to be finished in early May when the grass would begin to grow and the cattle would be testing the taste of the grass in every corner of the pasture.”

Voice of the Plains, John Cogswell, “Keeping up the Fences,” CA: Greenridge Press, 1987, p. 85.



CHARLES L. MARSHALL, SR. (UNITED STATES, 1905-1992)
Woman Tending Garden

CHARLES L. MARSHALL, SR. (UNITED STATES, 1905-1992)

Woman Tending Garden

Linoleum cut on paper

87 mm x 51 mm

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of Charles L. Marshall, Jr., 2003.212

Marshall was born in Atchison, Kansas, and graduated with a degree in architecture from K-State in 1927. His involvement in the arts ranged from being the liaison between John Steuart Curry and the Kansas state architect's office during the Topeka statehouse mural project, to serving on a wide variety of arts councils and authoring several publications. He was an inveterate sketcher, recording what he saw every day in drawings, watercolors, and prints. Marshall's body of work provides a historical glimpse of the buildings, scenery, and events once found in the state of Kansas.

“A garden bursting with luxuriant produce, like laundry hung out early on washday, reflected a woman's competence. ... Totally dependent on rainfall, success was never certain. Planting and hoeing were hard work, requiring every moment she could spare.”

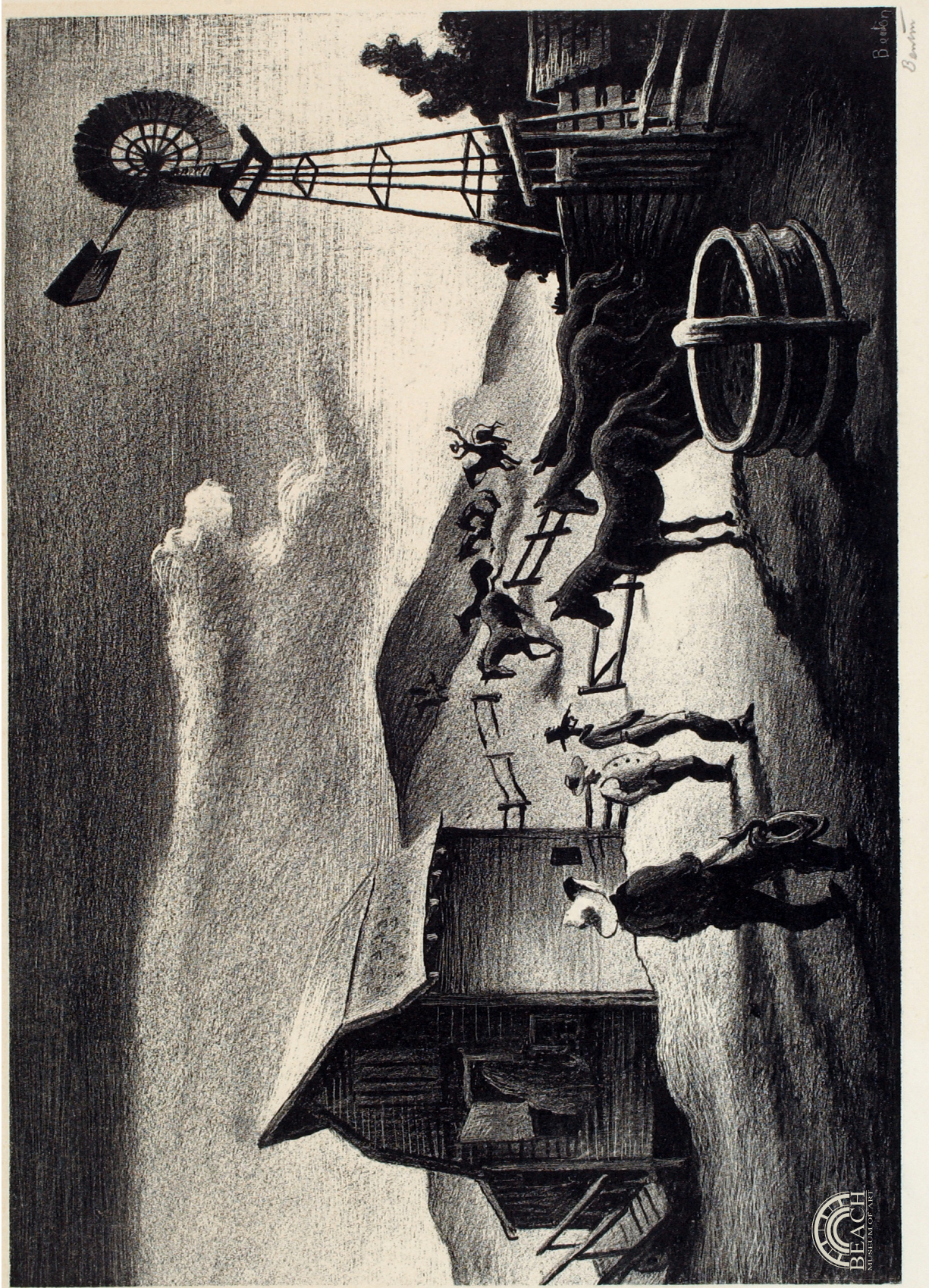
Section 27: A Century on a Family Farm, Mil Penner, University Press of Kansas, 2002, p. 106.



This 1943 photograph by Lowell Treaster, Assistant Extension Editor, shows a woman in the uniform of the Women's Land Army of the Crops Conservation Corps. Courtesy of the Morse Department of Special Collections, Hale Library, Kansas State University



Photographs of farmers and ranchers supporting the War Effort during the early 1940s. Courtesy of the Morse Department of Special Collections, Hale Library, Kansas State University



THOMAS HART BENTON (UNITED STATES, 1889-1975)
The Corral, 1948



THOMAS HART BENTON (UNITED STATES, 1889-1975)

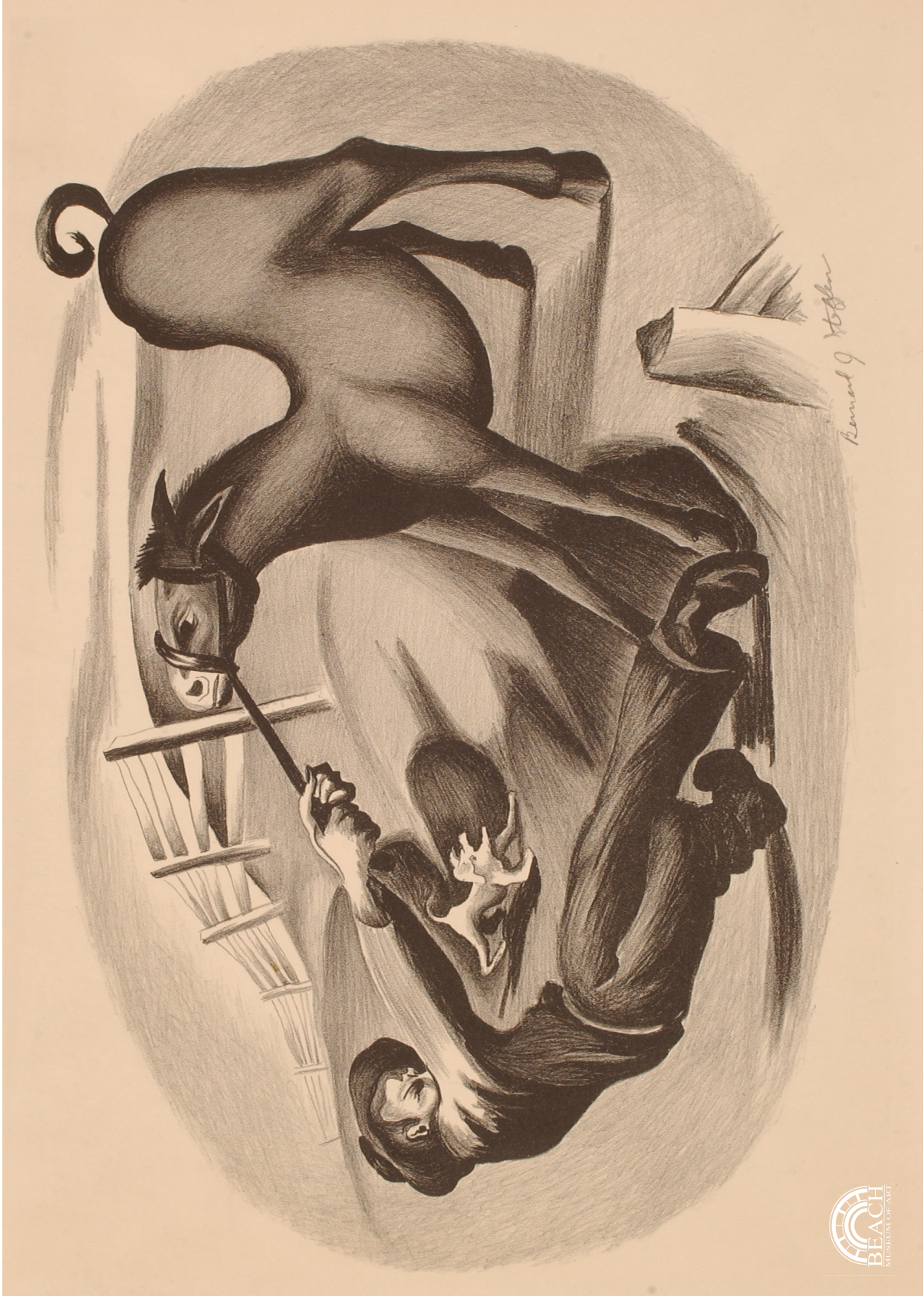
The Corral, 1948

Lithograph on paper

10 5/8 x 14 1/4"

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, bequest of Raymond & Melba Budge, 1992.111

Recalling this print, Benton wrote: "Scene in Western Nebraska – sand hills country. It was made during a trip through the plains country, Neb, the Dakotas, Eastern Wyoming and Montana – with Col. Graham U.S.A. and a veterinarian – buying quarter horses for French light artillery. Many drawings were done on this expedition. The trip was in the late summer of 1939."



BERNARD STEFFEN (UNITED STATES, 1907-1980)
Cantankerous Colt, 1938

BERNARD STEFFEN (UNITED STATES, 1907-1980)

Cantankerous Colt, 1938

Lithograph on paper

9 11/16 x 14 7/16

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of Steven Schmidt, Salina, Kansas, 1996.83

Steffen was born in Neodesha, Kansas, and attended the Kansas City Art Institute and the Art Students League in New York City, where he studied with Thomas Hart Benton. He also studied in Colorado Springs at the Broadmoor Art Academy and was a WPA muralist from 1934 -1941.

“Mom had an inexhaustible repertoire of true but grisly stories about children being kicked by horses or mauled by bulls. Her exhortations to caution only served to heighten the sense of adventure I felt in the barnyard.”

Section 27: A Century on a Family Farm, Mil Penner, University Press of Kansas, 2002, p. 112.



LEVON WEST (AKA IVAN DMITRI) (UNITED STATES, 1900-1968)
The Prairie Rider, 1933



LEVON WEST (AKA IVAN DMITRI) (UNITED STATES, 1900-1968)

The Prairie Rider, 1933

Etching on paper

8 3/4 x 7 7/8"

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, 1966.23

West grew up on the prairies of North and South Dakota, where the image of the solitary rancher would not seem out of place. The artist had planned to study business until 1925 when he met printmaker Joseph Pennell, who inspired West to dedicate his efforts to art. West spent the summer of 1932 as a guest artist for the state of Colorado, producing a series of etchings and watercolors depicting ranch life. Those scenes inspired this print, which was issued as the Prairie Print Makers' gift print for 1933. West also worked as a photographer under the name of Ivan Dmitri.

“So ride a little farther upslope, up where the wind sweeps clean under a big sky...a horse remains a work animal for herdsmen... and you can still dip cooking water out of a spring. Bunkhouse, cowboy, leather chaps...all still real...because they’re all still needed, along with cowboy skills. But the faces under the big hats still show the same old toughness, humor, and independence—essential spirit of the West.”

The American Farmer, Richard K. Seim, Farm Journal Inc. / Rand McNally & Company, 1974, pp 82-88.



JOHN STEUART CURRY (UNITED STATES, 1897-1946)
In the Corral (Cows with Calves), 1933

JOHN STEUART CURRY (UNITED STATES, 1897-1946)

In the Corral (Cows with Calves), 1933

Watercolor and graphite on paper

14 x 20"

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, bequest of Kathleen G. Curry, KC1877

The Cow-Boy

**Ho, for the cow-boy,
Brimming o'er with glee,
As merry as the larks
With their glad tut-i-lee;
Upon his little pony,
 Swift as any deer;
Everything within is peace,
 He has no cause of fear.**

Hours in Dreamland, James Wilkinson, Buffalo, NY: The Peter Paul Book Company, 1896, pp 98-99.



Clarence William Anderson (United States, 1891-1971)
Action Plus



Clarence William Anderson (United States, 1891-1971)

Action Plus

Lithograph on paper

10 1/2 x 13 1/2"

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, bequest of Raymond & Melba Budge, 1992.50

C.W. Anderson had an abiding interest in horses and occasionally judged events for American Horse Show Association competitions. This piece is probably from a series of Rodeo Sketches done by Anderson in the 1950s.

Rodeo has been a part of Kansas culture since the early 1880s when George Miller of Winfield, Kansas, staged one of the first roping and riding exhibitions in the West. Ranch rodeos, featuring full-time working cowboys, are held today in Medicine Lodge and at the American Royal in Kansas City. Events include bronc riding, cattle doctoring, wild cow milking, calf branding, ranch cutting, and double mugging.