

"We hope...that the younger generation will enjoy and appreciate all the good things they have now, that we older folks did not have when we were young. I am trying to bring up a little of the past with my painting."

*Arnold Kramer
February 11, 1972*

There are many ways to train for being an artist. But Arnold Kramer didn't use any of them.

Some artists, as boys, study sculpture: Arnold made baseball bats for his brothers' baseball team. Some artists plan their canvasses with care: Arnold carefully planned where the crops would be planted on his 160-acre farm. Some artists paint murals: Arnold painted the barn.

Arnold was 31 when he married his Rose, and they built a home north of Seaforth. They had five children, and except for losing their son, Myron, had a full, happy and successful life. They worked very hard together and at times, especially during the '30's, money was very scarce.

Even though he didn't know it, Arnold for 80 years was getting ready for his artistic career. That's because he was remembering things so well; for over 20 years now, he's been busy translating his memories into pictures.

One thing about Arnold the artist: he never starved in a garret. He worked on over 300 paintings within easy reach of the kitchen stove and the voice of his Rose in their Wabasso home. Even now, at his daughter Fern's where he makes his home, he has his easel set up in the dining room.

In spite of his 90 years, Arnold isn't through dreaming and making plans. He wants to take his paintings from town to town, so people can see them. "A painting is no good sitting in a box," he says.

The exhibition tours arranged by Southwest Minnesota State College have become the means by which Arnold's works can travel about, carrying their unique charm throughout the countryside he loves.

(The above comments are taken from an article written by Mrs. Ken Parsons, one of Kramer's four daughters.)



Minnesota's "Grandpa Moses"

Southwest Minnesota State College takes pride in its KRAMER COLLECTION, for the heartbeat of rural America is portrayed on these canvasses. Mr. Kramer, in his unique style, depicts farming procedures used at the turn of the century and long ago forgotten by most; he captures prairie fields and sky.

Arnold Kramer's paintings are more, however, than history and art delightfully combined. They're colorful pieces of man's life - a man blessed with hard work, family and friends - right here in Southwest Minnesota.

Southwest's KRAMER COLLECTION

Johanneck Threshing Rig, 1910

Coal was burned to heat the water for steam power. The tender held the coal on top; the water tanks were below. In his pictures Mr. Kramer often disregards perspective. Here the machine dominates - an illustration of mechanization's impact on the daily lives of men.

Spring Seeding, 1895 - 1900

Using a four-horse drag, farmers tilled the land and used the harvest to seed the next crop. The seed-grain was taken out with a wagon and sacks laid along the field's edge. The checkerboard of prairie colors, black and beige-gold, is a sight well-loved to this day in Southwest Minnesota.

Fording the River, 1894

Before the bridge was built across the Minnesota River near Belview, Minnesota, farmers had to ford the river to take their grain to market. Long trains of wagons traveled at one time, the drivers often riding together for company and the driverless wagons following in turn. Kramer's childhood memories seem to be happy ones: here the children play while the adults work. (Notice the fish - the artist's love for detail.)

Our Kitchen Cabinet

Kramer began to paint in the early 1950's. This still life, done about 1958, represents this early period in his work.

First Frame House in Redwood Falls, 1865

Frame houses replaced log houses at this time. In Kramer's picture the people portray the time as much as the house does; looks like the family has gathered on the front porch to be "snapped" by a photographer.

Cultivating Corn, 1912

Each man had one team of horses to a single-row cultivator. Rose Kramer, Arnold's wife, walked a mile and a half to bring the lunch. Lunch boxes appear often in Kramer's pictures: he enjoyed the lunch breaks!

Sears Roebuck Company

This old depot was the birthplace of Sears, Roebuck and Company. In 1961 the building was moved to Redwood Falls Fair Grounds to be used as a museum. Several boys wandered inside to play; they discovered some wasps and lit newspapers to kill them. The fire got out of hand, and the depot burned down.

Draining the Sloughs, 1900

The turn-of-the-century procedure shown here is unknown by most people today. Cables hitched to the ditching plow were pulled by horse power. Water drained into the ditch, making a water-logged field usable again.

Well Digging, 1891

Wells had to be dug by hand. One man went down into the well to continue digging. He filled the bucket, and another man cranked the roller to bring the bucket up. A third man emptied the bucket and lowered it again for another fill. The process went on until they struck water - sometimes several days.

Horse Power Threshing, 1896

Farmers used 12 horses on the horse power; the power was conveyed to the threshing machine by tumbling rods. The bundles were pitched onto the platform, bands were cut, and one man fed bundles into the cylinder. (Note the arrival of lunch!)

The Home Place

This portrait of the Kramer farm is a splendid example of the blend of earth, sky and detail that is typical of the Kramer style. Captured here is life in the country: work in the field while the sun shines, a game of baseball in the back yard, and supper beneath the willow tree.

The Old Haunted House

The spirit of the past beckons from blackened windows and invites the viewer to envision the ghosts of playing children, the bustle of farmyard activity. Notice the contrast between Kramer's "Old Haunted House" and "Well Digging." The old house stands along with the water pump, while everything else has vanished, even the chimney.