

Northern Reflections



How small towns from Montana to Minnesota see themselves in art and decor

Janet and Aldo cross the prairies

- In August, we spent two weeks driving from Helena, Montana to Detroit, Michigan. We took particular pleasure in stopping in small towns.
- Many of these communities have gone, or are still going, through hard times. With old industries gone or shrunk, they are struggling to redefine their purpose.
- The love for their history and traditions, their joys and hopes transpire in murals and monuments, in facades and inside decor.
- For this album, we selected a community from Wisconsin and one from Minnesota, as well a broad region of Montana.
- For each of them, a first photo intimates the setting. Four more highlight the art. A portrait of residents with whom we had meaningful personal conversations concludes the section.

Our route (approx. 1,850 miles = 2,980 km):



Front and back cover: 1. Segments of a mural in the Ashland County Information Center, 2. Riding the carousel in Helena.

Janet and Aldo Benini, August 2018

Central Montana – Great Falls, Lewistown, Roundup



A ranchers' ethos

- In these immense spaces filled with pastures, crop land and widely separated towns, you will not find much in the way of visionary self-expression.
- In Roundup, the patrons of a saloon dance in shuttered windows, across the street from a cowboy cut-out that softens the sight of a demolition gap.
- In Lewistown, the enlightened lady has faded. The main street bank knows its customers by their cattle brands. A tightly-knit religious farmer commune teaches their children the ancient calligraphic hand (Fraktur) of their hymnal and Holy Bible.
- A historic marker – an official document – substitutes might for right, in the victor's unrepentant stance. The Indian and buffalo had to cede to the cowboy and longhorn.
- Survivors of the defeated linger in museums and casinos, reservations and city streets. In Great Falls, two homeless Indians are resting in front of the Plains Indian memorial.

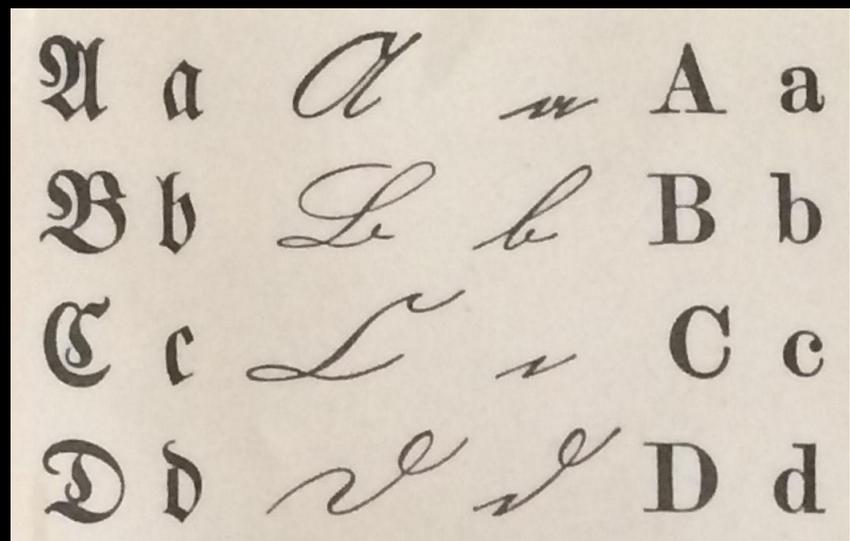
PAPPAS & LOUCAS BLOCK



NORTHERN TREASURES
THRIFT STORE









Fort Maginnis Historical Marker,
Fergus County MO, on US Highway 87

“This country was great buffalo range before that time, but cattlemen were bringing in stock from the western valleys and the Texas longhorns were being trailed in from the southeast. There wasn’t room for both cattle and buffalo, so the latter had to go. The soldiers were to protect the cattle from being mistaken for buffalo by hungry Indians, to encourage settlement .. and to patrol the [road]. By 1890 the post was no longer needed, the threatening Indians having been relegated to reservations, and the fort was abandoned with civilian blessings.”

Bighorn sheep, part of a monument for
the Plains Indians, Great Falls, MO



Great Lakes harbor town: Ashland, Wisconsin

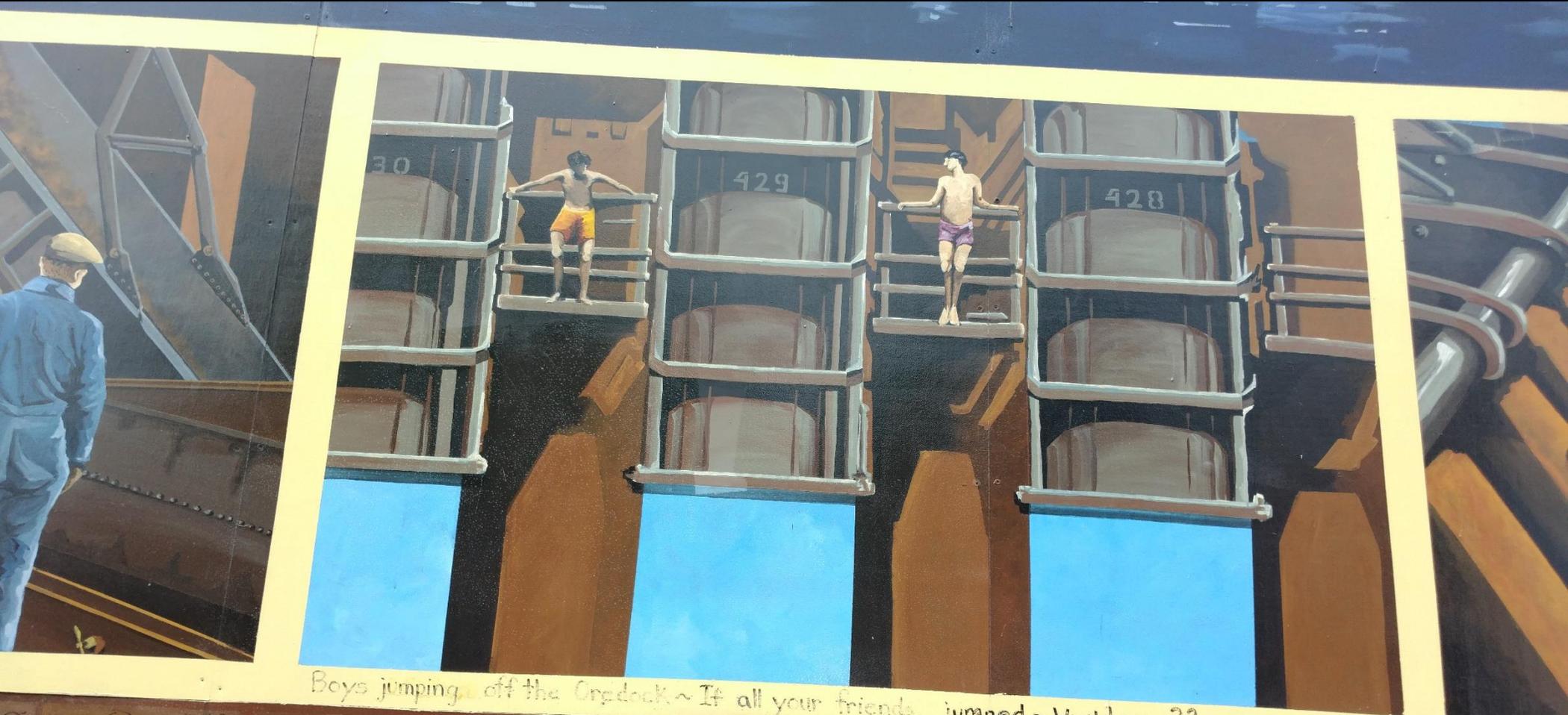


Taking the plunge

- Ashland was once a proud iron ore transit harbor on Lake Superior. The last ore ship left in 1965. The population has since slowly declined.
- Rich murals immortalize workers and higher ups, daring boys and fashion-steeped girls.
- Will the plunge from the steely dock into soft tourism succeed as Ken and Barbie roll into town?
- Yes, shuttered stores are reopening, but good jobs are still few and far between.



Oreproducers: Back row - Ray Mitchell, Jack Dwyer, Fritz Kowalski, Joe Winkler - Front row - Frank Kuznetsov, Jack Green, Joe Mitchell: N



Boys jumping off the Oredock ~ If all your friends jumped ~ Would you??

Kids enjoy

Capt. F.M.
Saarinen

Laura & Justin
Bohn

The MacGregor
Family

Ron & Sue
Wiberg

Delanie &
Harrison Phillips

Libby & Charlie
Phillips

In Mem. of
Lucy Mieloszyk

Chris &
Paulina



PRENTICE
RY FROM

IN MEMORY OF
TAD & BARBARA BRETING

IN MEMORY OF
MARIAN ROETTGER

IN MEMORY OF
LIBBY RIKKOLA

THE WOMEN OF
THE PRESTIL FAMILY

PAT MOORE

DON MOORE

KRISSANNE
OBR



This luminous young lady attracted us. College-educated, she has been able to find only a part-time job that pays around \$10,000 a year. To preserve her serenity, she works hard on her physical and mental fitness, including walking ten thousand steps a day.



Inland manufacturing community: Wadena, Minnesota



Calling all nations

- Wadena County went seventy percent for Trump. Yet, the town's murals celebrate patriotism, internationalism and a self-critical, almost subversive streak side by side.
- The backdrop to Chief Wadena's forced signing away of Indian lands ties genocide to capitalism. In the Civil War, the sacrifices of the Minnesota regiments helped save the Union and emancipate the slaves.
- A flurry of flags and a festival of dresses unite the peoples of the world on a full fifty meters' length of wall space.
- Few visitors will have heard of taconite. Wadena treats them like engineers eager to step into the guts of its main industry. And at the day of our visit, the Corn Festival expressed the same pride of producing valuable things.
- The Dairy Queen staff represent the genuine friendliness that accompanied us everywhere.



Two Bulls
08

BALL'S BLUFF * ANTIETAM * PETERSBURG 1 ST. * BULL RUN * GETTYSBURG * GLENDALE * DEEP BOTT

REAMS STATION



Col. Daniel Bond



Capt. Wilson Farrell



1st Sgt. James Wright



Pvt. Nelson Doran



Col. George Sayer



Sgt. Geo. A. Williams



Pvt. Alonzo H. Pickle



Capt. John Perom



Col. Thomas Dunham



Sgt. Joseph Trevor



Pvt. Isaac L. Taylor



Lt. Col. Charles Adams



Col. Thomas Nelson



Pvt. George Madan



Col. Emmet L. Miller



Pvt. Philander



1st Lt. Wm. H. Dooley



Pvt. Chas. E. Baker



Sgt. A.P. Carpenter



SOUTH MOUNTAIN * MINE RUN * FREDERICKSBURG * CHANCELLORVILLE * VIENNA * SAVAGE STAT





A segment – about a quarter – of the long mural.

Reserve Mining Co.

Crude Ore Trucked from Mine
↓
42-in. Gyratory Crusher
↓
30-in. Gyratory Crusher
↓
Bins
↓
7-foot Cone Crushers
↓
Bins
↓
Rod Mill.

Wet Magnetic Cobbers
↓
Tailings ← Waste
↓
Concentrate
↓
Ball Mills
↓
Magnetic Cobbers
↓
Tailings ← Waste
↓
Concentrate

Babbitt Test Plant

Classifiers
↓
Fine Thickeners
↓
Wet Magnetic Separators
↓
Tailings ← Waste
↓
Concentrate
↓
Fine Coal
↓
Thickeners
↓
Filters
↓
Bins
↓
Bentonite
↓
Balling Drums
↓
Pelletizing Furnaces
↓
Screens
↓
Coarse Bin
↓
Fine Ball Mill
↓
Railroad Cars



Taconite Processing



What we have taken home

- Our brief incursions into these communities were not scientific, representative, or a thematic panorama. We talked mostly with people who gave us directions or sold us goods and services. But, we looked and listened carefully.
- While our conversations were random, the public art is inherent and stable. Although it often avoids controversial themes, it does give a window into the soul of a community.
- The common trait that ran through virtually all of these encounters was the genuine modesty and friendliness of the people under the gaze of their varied artistic self-images.
- Grateful and happy, we have taken home reflections of a regional character that reveals insights into our own lives, as well as those of people we met.

