

ARTISTIC PORTLAND

City Holds Distinguished Place as Home of Sculpture

By Earl C. Brownlee

"Good citizens are the riches of the city."
Of course no one but Solomon himself would ever be credited with the authorship of such a truism as that, in spite of the very positive fact that it is from the mind of Colonel C. E. S. Wood of Portland.

By much the same token, Portland, among her own people, will be recognized as the home and shrine of art only after every other important city in the world has been credited with its full artistic appreciation and population.

Looking far afield for the bounties of the old world of art, we return, perforce, to our own fireside to find the city almost unconsciously cherishing some of the nation's foremost art—all set in a scene of natural beauty not duplicated anywhere.

In Paris one may expect to step around a dismal corner into full view of a bronze of rare charm and worth, but to do the same thing in Portland would shock us.

However, if the heart be steady, it may be well for the art lover to investigate the queer corners of his own balliwick. He will find, as one critic has said, "wasted in this young Western city a divine example of artistry."

Buried, if you must have the word, in a crossing at First and Ankeny streets, stands the Skidmore fountain, familiar to all Portland, yet known by few.

Skidmore fountain is one of the notable works of Olin Levi Warner, who ranks among the best in American sculpture. Appreciations of the work have been widely read, yet at home, artists agree, it is little appreciated. A well known critic said of the fountain at the time it was designed:

"Warner's latest work has crossed the continent (from the Eastern studio in which it was moulded) without having a proper showing here.

"The caryatids which keep the bowl from slipping from its central support are noble and exquisite maidens who reduce the architectural part of the fountain to a minimum by their size instead of being subordinate to the architecture—like the Greek caryatids.

"To come on a work like this in a new Western town must prove a charming surprise."

This artistic creation was the gift to the city of the late Stephen G. Skidmore and his friends. In one place upon the fountain is carved the sentence: "Good citizens are the riches of the city." That, which we have said might be credited to Solomon, was evolved by Colonel Wood, who was a member of the committee that selected and erected Warner's work.

Good citizens, appreciative of the real in art, have rewarded Portland by their keen sighted selections in art upon several occasions. The Skidmore fountain is the most notable of the city's bronzes, however, and is given its rank in the world of art in the following statement from a noted connoisseur:

"The men of Portland may well be proud of their fountain, for there is nothing so beautiful in statuary westward from Chicago. San Francisco has costlier fountains, and Mrs. Story's monument to Key, but nothing to compare with this."

It has been said by another that the fountain ranks with the very best in the nation. In any event, it has been quite sufficient to attract to Portland scores of artists, intent upon appraising and admiring it. These include young Victor Salvatore, a figure in art, who said: "This is a thing to be revered. It does not provide that beauty of water that is Niagara, but rather the poetry of water."

He referred to the all too infrequent display of the fountain in action, its beautiful veil of water playing gracefully.

Artists here declare they will never submit to the removal of the fountain from its rather remote site, for both artist and architect designed his work to stand just exactly where it is and much of the



THOMAS JEFFERSON, FAMOUS REPLICATED AT JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL

effect would be lost were it misplaced by removal.

Granting that the Skidmore fountain is the city's leading work, "The Coming of the White Man" gets the artists' praise as the next most worthy statue. This work was presented to the city by the heirs of the late David P. Thompson and stands on the highest eminence at Washington park, where the intent gaze of its two figures finds its object in the broad Columbia river gorge through which came the first white men to the great West.

"The Coming of the White Man" is one of the best of the very prominent works of Herman Atkins MacNeil, a leading American sculptor, and, as the critic said:

"Shows both genius and power. The artist was allowed freedom in carrying out his conception of what was appropriate and he succeeded admirably.

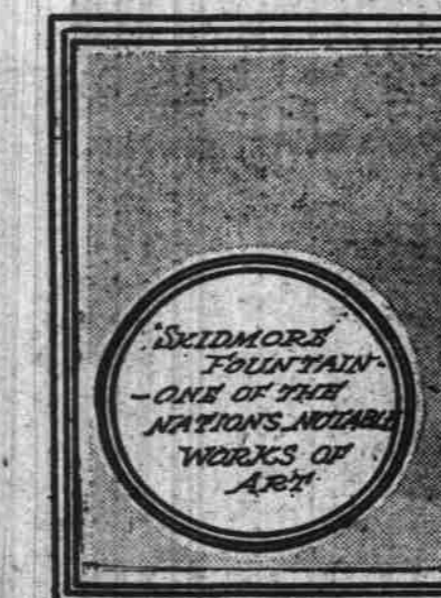
"Into the figure of Chief Multnomah the artist has put the pride of all the Indian tribes, as he has endowed the young brave with a youthful curiosity."

Artists generally, it is said, recognize in this statue, which has been seen by almost all Portland people, a distinctive and powerful production.

In the city are several other interesting and beautiful originals, but these two have attracted greatest attention, while "Sacajawea" and the soldiers' monument, a tribute to the heroes of the Second Oregon volunteers, have been widely praised. With the statue of Thomas Jefferson, a replica of the famous Karl Bitter bronze at the University of Virginia, a survey of the real and outstanding statuary in Portland has been completed.

"Sacajawea" was the gift to the city of the women of Portland through the Sacajawea Statue association, that the part woman took in the conquest of the Oregon country might be fittingly marked.

Miss Alice Cooper of Denver, Colo., executed the "Sacajawea" statue on commission from the Portland women and it was unveiled on July 6, 1905, as a Lewis and Clark centennial ceremony. It



represents an outlay of approximately \$7000 and, although in cost it is vastly less important than several other local works, it ranks greatly to the renown of its sculptor.

"Sacajawea" occupies a prominent knoll in Washington park, where the shapely arm of this trim Indian maid—an idealized arm of bronze—points westward to the sea.

Pointing "westward to the sea," the original Sacajawea guided the Lewis and Clark expedition on its historical journey into the unknown land. Sacajawea was a Shoshone Indian maid, a captive of the Blackfoot tribe, who lived a life that proves to be a sad, romantic history.

Most of the folk who come out of the East to enjoy the thrills of the wild and woolly West, return home with camera studies of Sacajawea, if they take no other token.

The city again distinguished itself, artists believe, in selecting Karl Bitter's statue of Jefferson to mark the site of Jefferson high school. The original, cast for the University of Virginia and now there, has been admitted to be a wonder work by sometimes envious sculptors.

The local statue is an exact replica of the original, and so far as is known, is the only replica. Seeking such a thing to place before the

big school, a Portland committee corresponded with Bitter's estate, hoping they might be allowed a cast from the original mold.

Fortune smiled, for the estate gave no thought to the monetary consideration and the replica was produced for Portland at actual cost, which totaled about \$1000, only a fraction of its real value, it is said. Bitter's work represents, authorities have said, the real Jefferson—the man as he would have wished to be pictured.

As a tribute to heroes and heroism the soldiers' monument in the Plaza blocks before the Multnomah county courthouse is even more notable than as a work of art, although it takes rank as one of the city's five best statues.

Splendidly located, the monument is one of the most pretentious to be found and represents, as it stands, a cost of about \$14,500.

Its creator was Douglas Tilden, whose works are known throughout the land. Tilden didn't do his very best on the Portland bronze, it is said, but it has, nevertheless, some highly important artistic features. Others of this sculptor's works are better known, such as his group, "The Mechanics," in Lower Market street, San Francisco, a thing of powerful execution.

Tilden, despairing at the job of keeping body and soul together through his contributions to a lag-



COMING OF THE WHITE MAN

ging interest in art, is now working in a San Francisco machine shop as a mechanic—and he testifies that he likes the grind.

So, although Portland presents only five important bronzes in the art display of the Pacific coast, the



SACAJAWEA, FAMOUS BRONZE IN WASHINGTON PARK



SOLDIER'S MONUMENT IN THE PLAZA BLOCK

city takes instant rank as a leading art center by reason of the care its people used in the selection of their works, and especially, perhaps, by reason of the presence here of the Skidmore fountain, whose artistic value has been heralded to artists and art lovers everywhere.

Meanwhile, artistic folk declare, the city's interest in art is not dead. Through a small, but very select, art museum and otherwise interest is kept warm and at every opportunity Portland's notable collection is being enhanced by valuable additions.