

# The Robert E. Gard

---

# READER

---

To Change the Face of America  
*From writings by Robert E. Gard*

Afterword by Maryo Gard Ewell

Career Notes on Robert E. Gard

Selected Bibliography

*The Robert E. Gard Reader: To Change the Face of America, From Writings by Robert E. Gard.*  
Eds. Margo Gard Ewell and LaMoine MacLAughlin. Cleveland, Ohio: MSL Academic  
Endeavors, 2010.

**EISBN:** 978-1-936323-01-2

This digital edition was prepared by MSL Academic Endeavors, the imprint of the Michael  
Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University, 2014.



---

## AFTERWORD

---

Robert E. Gard was my father. What a way to grow up.

Consider my tenth birthday, for example. I had four friends over and my folks were very mysterious about what was going to happen. When my friends arrived, we were led to the back yard. Three large pieces of cardboard had been propped up against trees—they read, Act One, Act Two, Act Three. We were told that the name of the play was to be “The Diamond in the Corn.” We were provided with a big piece of quartz and a box of old clothes. We were told that we had one hour, and that our parents would be over to watch the play at 4:00. Of course, we invented and produced a play. I see now that my parents were teaching me, however subtly, to understand that creativity begins at home, and that creativity can transform the most ordinary acts of daily life.

I remember accompanying my dad on field trips when I was a little girl. I remember some of the people he interviewed, and some of the people he schemed with, as he built the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association. I remember hanging posters and selling tickets for Wisconsin Idea Theater touring productions. I remember that when I was old enough to drive, I drove writers-in-residence—people like Marc Connelly or Studs Terkel—to their next writing workshop.

I had no idea what I was growing up with, really. In 1957, when I was nine years old, I spent a lot of time at the Women’s Club of Madison where my parents were putting on a show: my mother the producer, my father the coordinating writer-director. The show, “Man and His God,” was intended to bring all of the faith groups of Madison, Wisconsin, together to work on a pageant that would investigate the relationship between human beings and something greater, some “Other.” Gard had written:

*In this day... of conformity and mediocrity, and of a seeming general*



***I remember  
accompanying  
my dad on field  
trips when I was  
a little girl...***

*willingness to accept less than the best, introspection seems called for... The great underlying desire of the Women's Club [is] to draw all the peoples of a fragmented... community together, regardless of race, color or creed, through universal and unselfish regard for a Creator.<sup>2</sup>*

Five hundred people from twenty-four faith groups worked together, sharing the planning, writing, acting, dancing, singing, mask-making, and administrative tasks. A writer from the Milwaukee Journal said:

*On what stage could you see St. Paul in company with Adam and Eve, Mephistopheles, Buddha, ancient Jewish prophets and the gods of Greek and Scandinavian mythology? Where could the sonorous words of the Old Testament be heard interspersed with a Japanese "noh" play, readings from the sacred Hindu scriptures, and poetry by such diverse authors as Aeschylus, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Christopher Marlowe?... All these ingredients and more have been*

<sup>2</sup> *From the Women's Club scrapbook*

woven into a precedent-breaking production entitled “Man and His God”... Not a play, not a pageant in the usual sense, “Man and His God” is something new in modern theater.<sup>3</sup>

When I was a college student, I had a summer job helping out in a small town in Wisconsin. The multi-faceted project involved the Milwaukee Repertory Theater relocating for the summer and offering its summer season, not in Milwaukee but in Spring Green, a farming town of 1,100 people west of Madison. The summer also included acting and dance for young people and adults, exhibits, classes. It birthed a community theater. It even featured a noon physical fitness program intended to bring the business community and the artists together. It all sounds commonplace now, but in 1967 such community arts development programs were extraordinary. I didn't know at the time that my summer job, and that whole program, were made possible by the fledgling National Endowment for the Arts' first-ever “Access” grant, awarded to my dad's Office of Community Arts Development in the University of Wisconsin's College of Agriculture. So revolutionary was this idea that Mrs. Lyndon Johnson herself came to Spring Green on a site visit.

The list of activities I witnessed goes on and on: The huge intercultural pageant/festival in Milwaukee each year with Gard as writer-director. The writing clubs dotting the Wisconsin landscape. The original shows drawn from Wisconsin history, written first by Gard, and later by his associate, David Peterson, aired on WHA radio or touring to county fairs or state parks. The birthing of arts councils by Gard and his associates, Michael Warlum and Ralph Kohlhoff, throughout Wisconsin. The summer musical productions of shows like “The Fantasticks” at the University of Wisconsin Badgers football stadium.

Bob Gard was always writing, working on a portable Olympia typewriter in an office in our basement; a portrait of Wisconsin's turn-of-the-century Progressive Governor “Fighting Bob” LaFollette hung above the desk. Two hours before breakfast, every day, he wrote. Many of his books were about Wisconsin. Some were stories for young people. Some were just plain uncategorizable. (For instance, University, Madison, USA tells the history and lore of the University of Wisconsin-Madison but includes a fictional thread about a professor during the campus upheavals of the 1960's. This book, one of my favorites, being neither pure fact nor historical fiction, is hard to categorize and thus is often forgotten—yet it's a wonderful cultural insight into the University at a dramatic time in its history.) All of Gard's books are characterized by sensitivity to places and love of the human beings who live in them, in the context of an emerging, Progressive democracy. It is from this sensitivity to place, this humanistic response to the world, this connecting of creativity to democracy, that his philosophy of community arts development is drawn. That's why, in this Reader, the com-

<sup>3</sup> “Great Religions Basis for Community Drama Project,” *Milwaukee Journal Women's Section*, April 28, 1957, pp. 1-2

munity arts section includes reflections on places and people. In “Notes for Writers,” Gard insists that a writer must understand his or her own roots before aspiring to great writing; similarly, he believes that the community arts activist must articulate a philosophy in which personal activism is rooted.

I don’t believe I have ever met such a big thinker. My father had ideas for personal life and for public life that went way beyond anything I’d encountered. When I was about twelve years old, I asked him why he was studying to become a Deacon in the Episcopal church. He responded that it was the same impulse that drove him to the theater: “They are both about the myth of man.” I am only now coming to understand the profound philosophical ground he was tilling.

When I left home for college and graduate school, majoring in social psychology and organizational behavior, I thought I’d left the arts behind. Then, in a public health class, Yale professor Seymour Sarason said something like this: “I’ve come to believe that the truly healthy community is one which cares as much about the creative and spiritual health of its members as about their physical health.”

That was the moment. Everything came together for me, and I saw how my father’s drive to enable the creative spark in all people to blaze up, his drive to help “bring all the peoples of a fragmented community together,” his drive to help the arts “flourish in small places as well as large... according to the will of the people,” his linking of the arts to democracy—I saw how it could all come together. It was a big idea, a thrilling idea, and I wanted to be part of it.

I never asked a lot of the questions that I should have. Still, how lucky we are that Gard wrote things down. *Grassroots Theater*, published when he was 45 years old, poses his aspirations; the *Arts in the Small Community*, 15 years later, made his ideas usable to practitioners; and *Coming Home to Wisconsin*, written in reflection after he retired, assesses the meaning of what he tried to do.

Many people are taking work that Gard and others did—whether they can attribute it or not—to new places. The community arts movement in America is thrilling today. Public support of art-making by all peoples is no longer a new idea. Art that relates to place, culture, and history is widely accepted. Articles are being written about organizational viability being linked to community relevance. Major foundations and the National Endowment for the Arts are talking about participation, not mere spectatorship. Technology is allowing people to participate and collaborate in creative exploration as never before. There are centers for the arts in tiny places as well as in urban areas. People are recognizing community arts as a contemporary art form. (Remember: “Not a play, not a pageant in the usual sense, ‘Man and His God’ is something new in modern theater”?)

Gard would be thrilled by it all. And he'd be the first to remind us that we will never really finish our work, for we are now and always about moving forward, about trying to create the America in which the vision of a spiritually healthy and "defragmented" democracy moves ever closer to reality.

If you try, you can indeed  
Alter the face and the heart  
Of America.<sup>4</sup>

*Maryo Gard Ewell*  
*Gunnison, Colorado*  
*July 2010*

<sup>4</sup> Gard et al, *The Arts in the Small Community* p 98

---

## CAREER NOTES ON ROBERT E. GARD

---

Robert E. Gard was born in Iola, Kansas, July 3, 1910. He was educated at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, and at Cornell University, Ithaca, New York. He taught playwriting at the University of Kansas and at Cornell and became a Fellow of the Rockefeller Foundation, Humanities Division, holding numerous Rockefeller Foundation grants for many years. With Professor Alexander M. Drummond, he helped establish the New York State Playwriting Project and assisted in creation of a statewide training program for New York State playwrights. In 1942, after teaching playwriting at the Banff School of Fine Arts in Canada, he founded and directed the Alberta Folklore and Local History Project, in association with the University of Alberta at Edmonton and the Rockefeller Foundation.

Robert E. Gard also helped in the formation of the Provincial Archives of Alberta in 1945, and his collections, assembled from first-hand accounts of pioneers still living, constitute today one of the rare collections of the University of Alberta.

In 1945 he received an offer to join the faculty of the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and took up residence there in the fall of that year, at which time he established the Wisconsin Idea Theatre. This was a cultural program designed to serve the entire state, and reflected popular concepts of Wisconsin theatre and literature as brought to the state and foreseen by the pioneers.

In Wisconsin, his chief areas of activity had been in the theatre arts and in creative writing, with a strong side activity in collecting and publishing the folklore of the state. In 1967 he organized and instituted the functional area of Arts Development under the aegis of the University-Extension. He had remained a specialist in the arts in smaller communities and rural areas.

In 1945 the Wisconsin Idea Theatre Conference came into being as a result of Gard's work. The Conference represented virtually all theatre interests

in the state. In 1948 he established the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association. Both organizations became key to the furthering of native literature and lore of Wisconsin. He remained as director of Arts Development until, at age 70, he retired from all administrative duties.

The state's first Wisconsin Arts Foundation and Council came about in part through Robert E. Gard's efforts, and he served as its first president. The organization is said to have been the first official state arts council and foundation in America. He also founded the National Community Theatre Center in 1958 and conducted a national survey of the American Community Theatre in 1957–58 for the Rockefeller Foundation. He established the nationally-known Rhinelander School of Arts in 1964, the Wisconsin Institute of Nationalities in 1966, and was appointed by Wisconsin Governor Warren Knowles as state chairman of the Nationalities Committee.

During more than ten years he wrote and directed large spectacle shows for the International Institute of Milwaukee County, which drew yearly audiences of more than 80,000. Governor Knowles also appointed Gard a member of the Portage Canal Committee, which determined uses for the historic waterway. He worked closely with the community of Portage on matters relating to its significant historical heritage and to the contemplated restoration of old Fort Winnebago.

As well as being founder of the Wisconsin Regional Writers Association, Gard was one of its early presidents. He guided the organization for more than thirty-five years as its chief adviser. When the Council for Wisconsin Writers (which gives awards for outstanding books by Wisconsin authors) was formed in 1964, Gard was one of the initiators. He became its president, and so served for more than five years. He was field editor for Duell, Sloan and Pearce, a New York publishing house, and in 1968, in association with October House, New York, he created the book-publishing corporation called Wisconsin House, which has since been sold and incorporated into another publishing firm.

Gard was elected as a Fulbright Research Scholar to Finland in 1959. There, he conducted the first study ever made of the role of the Finnish playwright in the Finnish theatre. He was invited to lecture at the University of Helsinki, oldest and largest of the Northern European Universities, and was also asked to conduct a seminar in American Studies at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. He was invited several times to return to Finland as guest of the University of Helsinki, as lecturer at the Vaasa Summer University, and at other institutions. He was a United States State Department specialist in theatre arts, attended World Theatre gatherings, and has been an international adviser on the arts to several countries.

In 1953 the Rockefeller Foundation sent Gard to the British Isles to make a survey of grassroots arts in Britain. His work had significant value in subsequent



*Robert E. Gard,  
sketch by Ronald L. Daggett, Madison, Wisconsin.*

British-American programs, and he was invited to lecture and visit at Oxford and other British universities. Gard has been awarded the Gold Medal of the Finnish National Theatre for his work with Finnish playwrights, as well as the Medal of the University of Helsinki and the Jubilee Medal of the nation of Finland. His list of citations is long: Selection as a notable Wisconsin Author by the Wisconsin Library Association; Kansas Theatre Hall of Honor; Pabst \$1,000 award for service to nationality groups; \$1,000 award from the University of Wisconsin-Extension for Distinguished Service; Governor's Citation for Creativity; many citations of merit from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin; Distinguished Citizen Award from the Governor of Wisconsin; major citation from the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters; President of Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, 1977 (as well as terms as vice-president for letters and, later, arts); Member of the Finnish National Academy of Sciences and Letters; Honor Award from University of Kansas; National Chairman of Fulbright Theatre Committee; Distinguished Service Award, Wisconsin Theatre Association; Honorary Member, Wisconsin Regional Writers Association; Honorary Member, Wisconsin Fellowship of Poets; and many other awards and citations.

In 1967 Gard led a team which surveyed the American theatre for the National Theatre Conference. In the same year he received the first large grant made by the National Endowment for the Arts for work with the arts in smaller communities.

*The following is a partial list of his more than forty published books:*

- 1940 *Lake Guns*, Cornell University Press  
1945 *Johnny Chinook*, Longmans. Green and Co., New York  
1948 *Wisconsin Doorstep*, Longmans, Green and Co., New York  
1948 *Cardiff Giant*, Cornell University Press  
1949 *Theatre Adult Education*, National Adult Education Association  
1952 *Midnight* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, and Little, Brown and Co., Boston  
1955 *Grassroots Theatre*, University Press, Wisconsin  
1956 *A Horse Named Joe* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1956 *Life as an Indian* (Editor), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1957 *Scotty's Mare* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1958 *Run to Kansas* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1958 *Memories of Arlington, Vermont* (Editor), Duell Sloan and Pearce, New York)  
1959 *The One* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1960 *Community Theatre* (with Burley), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1961 *Devil Red* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1962 *Wisconsin Yarns* (with L. G. Sorden), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1964 *Puzzle of the Lost Dauphin* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1964 *Error of Sexton Jones* (Novel), Duell Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1965 *America's Players, highlights of American Theatre* (with Semmes), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1965 *Cardiff Giant* (Novel), Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1965 *Finnish Folklore*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York  
1967 *Theatre in America* (with Balch)  
1968 *Romance of Wisconsin Place Names* (with L. G. Sorden), Wisconsin House  
1969 *This Wisconsin*, Wisconsin House  
1970 *University, Madison, U.S.A.*, Wisconsin House  
1971 *Down in the Valleys*, Wisconsin House  
1972 *Wild Goose Marsh*, Wisconsin House  
1973 *Trail of the Serpent: Lore and Legend of Fox River Valley*, Wisconsin House  
1973 *Wisconsin Sketches*, Wisconsin House  
1974 *Woman of No Importance*, Wisconsin House  
1975 *Wild Goose Country*, Wisconsin House  
1976 *We Were Children Then*, Wisconsin House

- 1977 *An Innocence of Prairie*, Allison House  
 1978 *Time of Humanities*, Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters  
 1979 *The Deacon*, Allison House  
 1979 *Land, Home*, Wisconsin, Milwaukee Journal  
 1980 *Romance of Wisconsin Place Names* (Revised edition)  
 1981 *Coming Home to Wisconsin*, Stanton and Lee Publishers  
 1982 *Prairie Visions*  
 1990 *Napoleon's Ring* and *Beyond the Thin Line* (novels)

Robert E. Gard is also author of many articles, plays for radio, television and stage.

***Other Honors and Offices***

- State Folklorist of Wisconsin (By appointment of the governor)  
 National Theatre Conference  
 Foundation for Integrated Education  
 Who's Who in the Midwest  
 Dictionary of American Scholars  
 Who's Who in America  
 Who's Who in the East  
 Who's Who in the American Theatre  
 Playwriting Fellow, Rockefeller Foundation, 1938–40  
 Rockefeller Foundation Grant (RF), Cornell University, 1940–43  
 Rockefeller Foundation Grant (RF), Alberta, Canada, University of Alberta, 1943–45  
 Traveling Fellow, National Theatre Conference, 1946  
 RF Grant, University of Wisconsin, for special projects, 1948  
 RF Grant, University of Wisconsin, for special projects, 1950  
 RF Grant, Study: Cultural Arts in the British Isles, 1953  
 RF Grant, Arts Research, University of Wisconsin, 1952–55  
 RF Grant, Study: American Community Theatre,  
 1957 Fulbright Research Grant, Finland, 1959  
 United States State Department Grant, Vienna and Finland, 1961  
 National Endowment for the Arts Grant, 1966  
 RF Grant to Collect Oral History of Dr. David H. Stevens, 1976  
 Grants to work with Senior Citizens in Creative Writing,  
 1978–80 Many Humanities Committee Grants as director of projects

For more information, see <http://www.gardfoundation.org/works.html>

## ***Bibliography of Robert E. Gard's Works Found in This Reader***

- Gard, Robert E., Ralph Kohlhoff, Michael Warlum, Ken Friou and Pauline Temkin. *The Arts in the Small Community*, Office of Community Arts Development, University of Wisconsin, 1969. Reprinted by Americans for the Arts, 1984.
- Gard, Robert E., *The Big One*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1958.
- Gard, Robert E., *Career Notes on Robert E. Gard*. (manuscript).
- Gard, Robert E., *Coming Home to Wisconsin*, Stanton and Lee Publishers, 1982.
- Gard, Robert E. (text) and Dale O'Brien (photographs), *Down in the Valleys: Wisconsin Back Country Lore and Humor*, Wisconsin House, 1971.
- Overton, Patrick, ed. *Grassroots and Mountain Wings: The Arts in Rural and Small Communities*, Columbia College, 1992.
- Gard, Robert E., *Grassroots Theater: a search for regional arts in America*; with a foreword by David H. Stevens; and with an introduction by Maryo Gard Ewell. University of Wisconsin Press, 1955; reprinted Greenwood Press, 1978; reprinted University of Wisconsin Press, 1999.
- Gard, Robert E., *An Innocence of Prairie*, R. B. Allison, 1977.
- Gard, Robert E., *Johnny Chinook: Tall Tales and True from the Canadian West*, Longmans, Green and Co 1945. Reprinted by Tuttle, 1967.
- Gard, Robert E. and Maryo K. Gard, *My Land, My Home My Wisconsin: The Epic Story of the Wisconsin Farm and Farm Family from Settlement Days to the Present*, Milwaukee Journal, 1979.
- Gard, Robert E., *Notes for Writers Who Are Desperately Moved to Write*. (undated speech, manuscript).
- Gard, Robert E., August Derleth, Jesse Stuart, Frank Utpatel, and Mark Lefebvre, *The Only Place We Live*, Wisconsin House 1976.
- Gard, Robert E., *Prairie Visions: A Personal Search for the Springs of Regional Art and Folklife*, Stanton and Lee, 1987.
- Gard, Robert E. and L. G. Sorden, *The Romance of Wisconsin Place Names*, assisted by Margaret Kelk, Helen Smith and Maryo Gard. Wisconsin House 1968, revised edition 1980.
- Gard, Robert E., *This is Wisconsin*, Wisconsin House, 1969.
- Gard, Robert E., *University, Madison, USA*, Wisconsin House, 1970.
- Gard, Robert E. and Ed Mueller, *Wild Goose Country: Horicon Marsh to Horseshoe Island*, Wisconsin House, 1975.
- Gard, Robert E., Aaron Bohrod and Mark Lefebvre, *Wisconsin Sketches*, Wisconsin House, 1973.

## Colophon

*This book was designed by Shawn K. Simmons in 2010. The typeface Neutra, used for headlines and captions, was created in 2002 by House Industries designer Christian Schwartz, who was inspired by type used by modernist architect, Richard Neutra. The typeface Electra, used for the body of the text and quotes, was originally designed by William Adison Dwiggins in 1935 and was translated into digital form by C.H. Griffith in 1988 and is now distributed by Linotype GmbH. This book was designed and epublished using Adobe InDesign, PhotoShop and Acrobat CS5 on a MacBook Pro OSX.*