

**FROM BABENHAUSEN TO SAUGATUCK:
THE ART AND ARCHITECTURE OF
CARL HOERMAN***

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Carl Hoerman was a versatile and talented artist, and in presenting this paper I hope to pay him some measure of tribute and help to make his work more widely known. However, I also hope to offer a preliminary assessment of Hoerman's many-sided genius in terms of the milieu in which he worked and the influences which affected his artistic development.

Carl Hoerman was born in Babenhausen, Bavaria, a picturesque village about twenty miles southeast of the city of Ulm. Overlooking the village is a castle, the residence of the princes of Fugger-Babenhausen. It was in this setting that Carl Hoerman was born on April 13, 1885, one of the several children of Simon and Theresa (Kaufer) Hoermann. Born into a family of craftsmen, Hoerman and his brothers were trained from boyhood in the art of woodcarving. He soon tried his hand at drawing, however, and while still in his teens attracted the attention of Prince Carl Fugger. Under the patronage of the prince, he was enabled to study at the Royal Art School in Munich.¹

In 1904, Hoerman emigrated to the United States and settled at Chicago, where he studied architecture for the next two years and worked for several Chicago architectural firms. In 1907 he married Christiana Ackermann, the daughter of a German-American family in Chicago, and the following year he became a licensed architect. In 1909 he opened his own architectural office in Chicago. During the next ten years he designed many private residences and a few commercial

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buildings. From around 1911 he and his wife lived in Highland Park, a suburb north of Chicago. Their house in Highland Park had been built to one of Hoerman's own designs.

In 1920 Hoerman gave up his architectural practice in Chicago and moved with his wife to Saugatuck, Michigan. Saugatuck, which is located at the place where the Kalamazoo River flows into Lake Michigan, is a lakeside resort in the midst of a land of pine woods and sand dunes. Even at that time Saugatuck had become something of an artists' colony as well as a resort for summer visitors from Chicago. When he first settled in Saugatuck, Hoerman started a tree nursery business, but in 1922 he gave this up in order to devote most of his time to painting.

In 1923, Hoerman built the Chalet, his residence, studio, and private gallery in Saugatuck. Located on a hillside and commanding a view of the Kalamazoo River, the Chalet is a monument to Hoerman's artistic versatility. In its many fascinating details, the Chalet reflects the hand and mind of a master craftsman, a craftsman whose range of skills included the arts of stonemasonry and leaded glass as well as woodcarving, architectural design, and painting.

After settling in Saugatuck, Hoerman gained both popular and critical recognition for his paintings of the sand dunes along the Lake Michigan shore. He continued to accept architectural commissions, but it was as a painter of landscapes that he was to become best known. There was a steady demand for his paintings and he produced nearly two thousand of them during his lifetime. Before the end of the 1920's he began to visit the American southwest and to paint desert landscapes. Eventually he established a winter studio, the "Casa del Desierto", at Riverside, California. There he gained particular recognition for his paintings of the Grand Canyon. A series of his Grand Canyon landscapes was purchased by the Acheson, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad and a number of his other paintings were acquired by museums and other public institutions. His work was also shown in numerous public exhibitions and won a number of awards. He did etching as well as paintings and in both his etchings and

paintings he sometimes represented architectural subjects as well as landscapes. During several trips to Europe he painted German scenes, often of architectural subjects. He also did a good deal of painting in Mexico, particularly at Taxco.

Carl Hoerman died at Douglas, Michigan near Saugatuck on November 8, 1955. He is survived by his wife, who continues to live at the Chalet. Christiana Hoerman is also a painter whose work has been recognized by a number of awards. Their only child, a son named Rowland, died in infancy.

In trying to convey some impression of the quality of Carl Hoerman's work, it is best that we first consider his painting, for it was as a painter that he was most productive and best known. He was, to begin with, a realist who was completely uninfluenced by the fashion for abstract art which prevailed during much of his career. In choice of subject matter he was primarily a landscape artist whose most typical paintings depicted the Michigan dunes, the Grand Canyon, the Mojave Desert, and the Rocky Mountains. Secondarily, he was a painter of architectural subjects, his most notable architectural paintings being those which he completed during his frequent visits to Mexico.

Although a realist, Hoerman's realism was tempered by a softness of outline and a fulsome use of color. In general, his paintings make effective use of large color masses and exhibit less concern for sharp definition in the rendering of details. Hoerman's artistic vision was essentially that of a twentieth-century realist and he was no doubt affected by the example of his contemporaries. His skilled handling of light and shadow, for example, recalls the work of Edward Hopper. His work probably stands closest, however, to that of Sheldon Parsons, an American regionalist whose paintings of New Mexico during the 1920's can be compared to Hoerman's work in both subject matter and intent.

As an architect, Hoerman was by preference a designer of private residence, though he sometimes designed small commercial buildings and once even designed a grain elevator. Two things about his domestic architecture are immediately

striking: the degree to which he drew inspiration from folk architecture and his love for graciously executed decorative detail. He had, in other words, rejected the example of the Bauhaus architects and others committed to an architecture characterized by severity of line, industrial producability of structural elements, and an avoidance of decoration. Everywhere in Hoerman's buildings one finds a variety of ornamental features, such as decorative motifs carved or painted on wood, painted mural panels surmounting doorways or set into alcoves, ingenious color effects accomplished in the stains applied to wooden surfaces, and even goldleaf decoration on some of the woodwork. His skill as a craftsman is everywhere evident in the decorative details which formed part of his architecture. Doors are decorated with intricate carved designs, windows are embellished with graceful patterns in leaded glass, and the stone steps, patios, and fireplaces which are incorporated into his architectural plans reveal his skill as a stonemason.

It can be seen, then, that Hoerman's craftsmanship played an important role in his architectural work. It will be recalled, however, that he was trained as a craftsman before he took up architecture, and it is therefore not surprising that he continued to exercise his skills as a craftsman apart from his architectural work. For example, he always made the frames for his paintings, frames which are unobtrusive but which reveal his versatility and skill as a woodcarver and as an expert in staining and finishing wood. His skill as a woodcarver, however, is best exemplified by the carved chests and pieces of furniture which he executed for his own use rather than for sale.

In seeking to understand Hoerman's work in the context of the time and place in which it was produced, the discussion which follows will focus particular attention on three problems. I will first of all try to characterize the architectural scene in Chicago at the time Hoerman arrived there in 1904. I will secondly discuss the Arts and Crafts movement as it existed in Chicago during this period and seek to interpret its relationship both to Hoerman's work and to Chicago

architecture in general. Finally, I will attempt to draw attention to the place of Romanticism in Hoerman's work and to relate his Romanticism to his use of Gothic motifs.

At the time Carl Hoerman began his study of architecture in Chicago in 1904, local domestic architecture exhibited two dominant tendencies which coexisted and which shared a large measure of mutual compatibility. On the one hand there was the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and those who shared his vision, a revolutionary architecture of open, interpenetrating spaces which was to exercise a profound influence on future building practice. On the other hand, there was a now almost forgotten group of Chicago architects who, though close to Wright in certain respects, had more in common with such contemporary British architects as C.F.A. Voysey and M. H. Baillie Scott. This group, which had its roots in the English cottage tradition, is perhaps best exemplified by the work of Robert C. Spencer, Jr. Spencer's work, like that of a number of his contemporaries, exhibits a characteristic interest in the decorative effects of such features as casement windows and half-timbering.²

If one now considers Carl Hoerman's architectural work in relation to the architectural scene which he found upon his arrival in Chicago, it should be first of all observed that Hoerman knew and greatly respected Frank Lloyd Wright. One can, in fact, observe a degree of Wright's influence on Hoerman's work. On the other hand, it was with the cottage architects that Hoerman can be seen to have had more in common. What he shared with them was not, however, a preference for specific architectural details, but rather an esthetic ideology which drew inspiration from similar sources. For Hoerman, like the cottage architects, looked to folk art and folk craftsmanship for inspiration. The difference between them was that architects like Spencer were immediately stimulated by the English country cottage, while Hoerman looked instead to the Alpine chalet.

The Arts and Crafts movement was a phenomenon which had begun in late nineteenth-century England, largely as a result of the ideas and example of the designer, writer, and

social critic William Morris. The movement, which began essentially as a protest against the esthetic and social evils of industrialism, put its support behind the production of hand-crafted household furnishings. In the particular style which it developed, the Arts and Crafts movement drew inspiration from both the medieval crafts tradition and from the English cottage crafts. The famous Morris chair, for example, was developed from a folk design found in rural England.

The Arts and Crafts movement had found its way to the United States by the end of the nineteenth century and within a few years American contributions had begun to significantly shape the movement. By the time Carl Hoerman arrived in Chicago in 1904, the Arts and Crafts movement was greatly in evidence there and Chicago had, in fact, become one of the centers of the movement in America.³

In certain of his work, such as his ornamental wall lamps with rectilinear designs in stained glass, one can probably discern a direct influence of the Arts and Crafts taste on Hoerman's work. More frequently, however, one comes upon similarities which are not so much the result of influence and imitation as they are the product of a shared purpose and basic agreement in esthetic principles. For just as Hoerman's architecture may be compared with the work of architects who, like Spencer, stood close to the Arts and Crafts movement, the same sort of comparison can be made with reference to Hoerman's decorative home furnishing. Like many of his contemporaries who were influenced by the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement, Hoerman's taste in the decorative arts embraced an appreciation for American Indian and Mexican handicrafts. Much of the unique quality of Hoerman's craftsmanship, however, can be traced to those influences which he brought with him from his native Bavaria. These influences include, first of all, the whole Bavarian tradition in woodcarving, a tradition in which Hoerman had received early training. It includes also a certain German historicism which may be seen, for example, in the medieval German street scenes which appear in his woodcarving as well as his paintings. Finally, his years as an art student in Munich

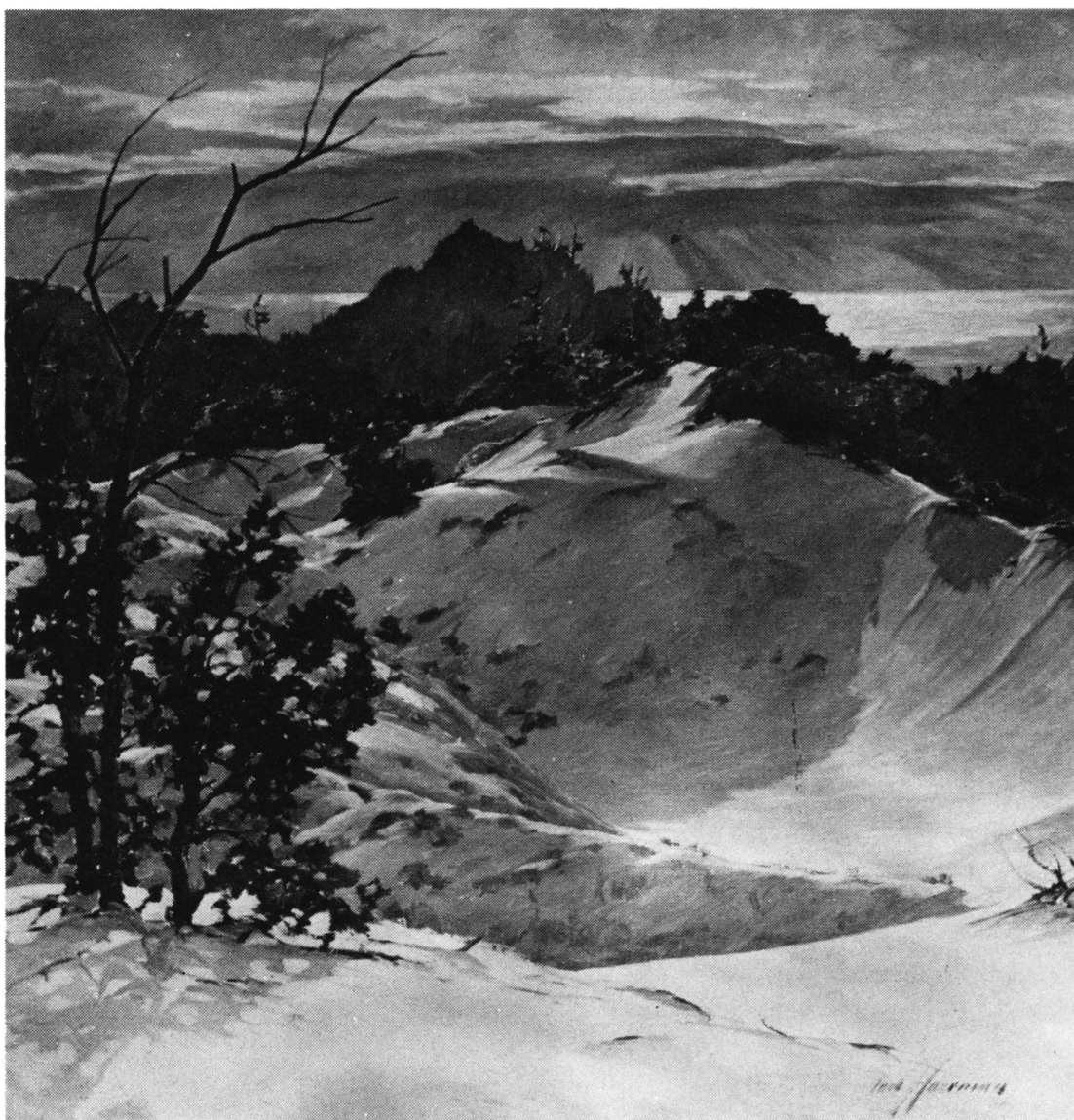
had coincided with the fashion for art nouveau, a fact which left a trace, though never a conspicuous one, in his work.

The Romantic taste and the nineteenth-century revival of interest in medieval architecture and decoration both exercised a profound influence on Carl Hoerman's life and work. Oddly enough, this side of his sensibility does not reveal itself as clearly in his paintings as it does in his architectural and craft work. One of the hallmarks of his architectural style, for example, is his recurrent use of a certain low Gothic arch over windows. Although this type of arch is by no means characteristic of either Alpine folk architecture or of the adobe style of the American southwest, Hoerman did not hesitate to use arches of this type as a decorative feature in both the Chalet at Saugatuck and in his adobe-style house at Riverside, California. The Chalet also incorporates a Gothic-arched stained glass church window and the theme is repeated in the leaded glass ornamentation on other windows in the same room. The Gothic arch motif can also be found in his wood-carving. For example, on one of the remarkable carved chests which Hoerman fashioned, a tracery of Gothic arches is superimposed upon each of the views depicted on the sides of the chest. On one side of this piece, the arches stand in front of a panorama of the Grand Canyon in such a way as to create the novel effect that the scene is being viewed from within a glass cathedral. The same chest has a carved depiction of Neuschwanstein Castle on the cover. Neuschwanstein also appears in a carved table which Hoerman made for the living room of his Saugatuck home. This castle, built between 1869 and 1886 by Ludwig II of Bavaria, is a fully Romantic architectural work, and Hoerman's admiration for the castle is consistent with the Romantic side of his taste. In the summer of 1927, Carl and Christiana Hoerman spent part of a European vacation near Neuschwanstein Castle, and it is possible that he was influenced by the way the murals at Neuschwanstein are fitted into the gabled recesses of the building. Similar painted panels were placed by Hoerman in two of his homes.

Another Romantic motif in Hoerman's work is the depiction of rustic street scenes with peasant buildings. Such scenes form part of the decoration on two of his carved chests and similar scenes are found in a number of his European paintings.



Carl Hoerman in his Saugatuck studio



Sand dunes near Saugatuck — a typical Carl Hoerman painting

Although most of Carl Hoerman's paintings show little trace of Romanticism, three of his paintings which he chose to display in the living room of his Saugatuck home are wholly Romantic in conception. The first of these is a moonlight scene depicting a young couple in a boat on what appears to be one of the Bavarian lakes. The other two paintings are allegorical, one depicting the death of Beethoven, the other representing an allegorical vision of war. The painting which represents the death of Beethoven brings to mind the fact that Hoerman was

an enthusiast for classical music, Beethoven and Berlioz being his favorite composers. I think it was the Romantic rather than the classic side of Beethoven which Hoerman most admired. It was Carl Hoerman's wish that the funeral march from Beethoven's Eroica Symphony be played at his funeral, and this wish was carried out.

At the outset of this paper I characterized Carl Hoerman as a many-sided genius and expressed the hope that his work might become better known. In paying tribute to Carl Hoerman, however, one must consider the whole man, not just the artist. It is not an exaggeration to say that to have known him was to have had one's life in some measure changed, for although driven by a restless and seemingly boundless capacity for work, he was a man who found time for a number of intellectual pursuits and who possessed a wide circle of interesting and devoted friends. Dynamic and animated in manner, he was an arresting conversationalist whose presence charmed and entertained everyone around him. In short, he was a man that destiny had singled out for greatness.

NOTES

1. For a number of biographical details, I am indebted to the sketch of Hoerman's life which appears in **The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography** (1967), vol. 43, p. 116.

2. Domestic architecture in Chicago before the First World War is surveyed in the works by H. A. Brooks cited in the bibliography. Some of Spencer's work is shown in Brooks (1975), though a fuller appreciation of Spencer's architectural ideas may be gained from a perusal of the articles which he contributed to the magazine **House Beautiful** around 1905. **House Beautiful** was at that time published in Chicago and played an important role in disseminating the ideas of both the Arts and Crafts movement and the cottage architects.

3. See particularly the article by David H. Hanks, "Chicago and the Midwest" (pp. 58-59 in Clark, 1972) as well as Adams (1901).

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GERMAN ANCESTOR HUNT

Dr. Robert E. Ward (21010 Mastick Road, Cleveland, OH 44126) wishes to trade information with persons who have researched the following ancestral surnames: **Böcker** (Neuenstein and Heilbronn); **Dill** (Durlach); **Eccard**, (Söllingen, and Grötzingen); **Frauendorf** (Klein-Zeisgendorf near Dirschau); **Freinz** (West Prussia); **Fults, Pfoitz, Pfultz, Folts, Fultz** (USA); **Fleischer** (West Prussia); **Hasin** (Neckargartach near Heilbronn); **Hohenstadt** (Obereisesheim near Heilbronn); **Hasenmüller** (Pforzheim); **Jaszinska, Jaszinski** (West Prussia); **Janson** (Obereisesheim near Heilbronn); **Kurz** (Grötzingen); **Leyerle** (anywhere in the world); **Lang** (Durlach); **Mausinger** (Söllingen); **Pfisterer** (Heilbronn); **Rössel** (Neckargartach near Heilbronn); **Röger, Roeger** (Heilbronn); **Ruf** (Grötzingen); **Schäfer** (Durlach); **Scheidt** (Grötzingen); **Schneider** (Altschweier); **Schmelcher** (Eppingen and Obereisesheim); **Tannemann, Dannemann, Dannemännin** (Pforzheim); **Ukal** (Mosbach); **Wolf** (Heilbronn); **Ziegler** (Altschweier).

GERMAN-AMERICAN GENEALOGICAL NOTE

The special 1977 issue (Sonderheft) of *Südwestdeutsche Blätter für Familien und Wappenkunde* contains an important article by Karl Ekmann on "The Emigration to the New England States from Places in the Vicinity of the Enz in the 18th Century" ("Die Auswanderung in die Neuengland-Staaten aus Orten des Enzkreises im 18. Jahrhundert").
