

overcoming the many challenges involved in settling western Kansas (e.g. supplies, land matters, survival), these men represented the differing approaches to racial uplift and justice found among blacks in the post-Reconstruction era. Hall was a well-educated journalist by trade, who also developed a land location business with McCabe and became politically active at the state level. His writing skills promoting racial uplift—and more specifically, the hard working colonists—appeared in publications like *Colored Citizen*. But, in an interesting example of intra-group conflict, he drew a firm line against receiving superfluous aid (from whites) so as to differentiate their striving from the more struggling and destitute Exodusters.

McCabe, like Hall, was freeborn and believed that racial justice could really only be achieved through political advocacy and legislation. He held several political offices including county clerk. Then, notably, in 1882 Kansas Republicans nominated McCabe (on the fifth ballot) for the state auditor position, representing the first time northern Republicans nominated an African American for state office and attracting attention from outside the state. McCabe won the election as well as a second term in 1884. Later he founded Langston University in Oklahoma.

Of the three men, John Niles was the only one formerly enslaved. He was also the most controversial and prone to fraud. He nevertheless commandeered much-needed provisions for Nicodemus residents at an early crucial moment. Niles's pursuit of slave reparations ultimately resulted in him being the first black man to convince the U.S. Senate to consider a petition on the matter.

Hinger's deft use of African American newspapers in Kansas reveals an intriguing political history focused on the seeking of racial justice during a period typically dominated by state-building and homesteading. Yet, a little more grounding in the building up of Nicodemus, interactions among residents there, and its relationship to the larger agricultural development of the state would add meaningful and contextual substance to the story. For example, we only catch a glimpse of the tensions between cattlemen and homesteaders in the fight to establish a school in Graham County just prior to the black colonists' arrival. But Hinger has produced an important contribution to the narratives of Kansas and African American histories, which, among other things, expands the way that we need to interpret the building up the Great Plains.

Ginette Aley, Ph.D.
Adjunct Professor, Washburn University
Online Adjunct Professor, Purdue University

Frank Mechau: Artist of Colorado

Cile M. Bach

Boulder: University Press of Colorado, Timberline Book Series, 2016. Introduction, appendix, illustrations, notes, photographic credits, catalog of works, index, 135 pp., \$39.95 hardcover.

In Ogallala, Nebraska, stands an unassuming post office made special as one of a dozen in this state to receive a mural under a New Deal federal art program. The mural is the work of Frank Mechau (1904-1946) and displays all the elements of the vitality he put into his art. Mechau is credited with introducing a Western school of regionalism inspired by the "American Scene." Mechau's work reflected the ideal of creating realistic art representing each region's distinctive character.

In his paintings, murals, and drawings, Mechau displays a mastery of light and shadow, color, bold strokes, lines, and movement. He captures places, events, history, culture, and people as subject matter, mostly grounded in the Western Slope of Colorado, his home. As an instructor, he mentored students at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. Three of his most gifted students went on to create Nebraska murals in Auburn, Albion, and Geneva. Another Mechau painting is in the collections of the Sheldon Museum of Art in Lincoln.

This book represents the broad range of Mechau's works during his short but productive career. It draws not only from the art itself, but also letters, notes, personal photographs, and journals that not only give the reader a sense of his artistic process, but of the life that inspired so much of his work. The book is richly illustrated with color selections of Mechau's art. His family contributed a foreword, a tribute to the spirit, humor, and joy of a devoted father.

The first edition of this book has long been out of print. This new edition is generously illustrated with color images of Mechau's murals, paintings, and other works which have rarely been published. It also includes a catalog of his works. The book is highly recommended to readers who will relish Mechau's western art and learn about the man who captured the spirit of the Great Plains.

L. Robert Puschendorf
Nebraska State Historical Society
Author, *Nebraska's Post Office Murals: Born of the Depression, Fostered by the New Deal (NSHS, 2012)*