

Cementing His Political Views



S. P. Dinsmoor and the Garden of Eden

by Suzanne Hasselle-Newcombe

Hidden in the undulating folds of the Kansas prairie is the Garden of Eden. Tucked away in the small town of Lucas just off Interstate 70 between the relative metropolises of Salina and Russell, the Garden of Eden is a unique sculptural environment made from cement. It was built between 1905 and 1925 as the retirement activity of Samuel Perry Dinsmoor, a Civil War veteran, teacher, farmer, Freemason, and outspoken Populist. Despite the garden's popularity as a bizarre oddity and tourist attraction since 1915, relatively few visitors have stopped to ponder the wider political and cultural meanings of the sculpture.

It is easy to understand this oversight. The construction material of choice, cement, does not lend itself to precise detail. The images appear primitive, almost childlike. Cement figures of animals and people rest upon cement trees scattered around the edge of this small-town property. Reaching forty feet in the air is a bizarre arboreal representation of Genesis. Awkward eight-foot-tall figures of Adam and Eve join hands to form the arch of an arbor. Nearby the devil lurks in a cement tree with a pitchfork aimed at a small child. In other handmade trees, small children play, as a huge cement "All-Seeing Eye," containing an electric light that has been known to "wink" after dark, oversees Dinsmoor's creation. Platforms in the cement trees support sculptural vignettes of the brothers Cain and Abel, Abel's death, and Cain's flight to the land of Nod. Another scene depicts modern civilization—a Darwinian scene in which a cement bird is eating a cement worm and so on through a food chain that includes a fox, an Indian "brave," a soldier, a woman, and a huge cement octopus. In a corner is a cement crucifixion scene, but "Labor," not Jesus, finds itself on the cross. Two red, white, and blue cement flags fly from the tops of the cement trees. A third flag rests on the ground, removed for structural reasons from the top of a limestone log mausoleum that contains the semi-embalmed body of Mr. Dinsmoor. His body can be viewed by tourists, as Dinsmoor requested in life, for the cost of admission. In the bizarreness of Dinsmoor's presentation, it is easy to trivialize the profound passions of turn-of-the-last-century Kansas that inspired Dinsmoor's artistry.

During the past twenty years the Garden of Eden has gained national attention as an exemplary work of "grassroots" or "outsider" art. S. P. Dinsmoor's sculptures have been mentioned in many articles and books about this art category. However, relatively few works have focused upon Dinsmoor's sculpture singularly or in great depth.¹ The category of "outsider" art has been extremely useful in ensuring the preservation and restoration of Dinsmoor's sculpture.² However, comparison with other "outsider" artists has only minimal relevance to this man's message. Dinsmoor, being in the political minority, was an "outsider" in his contemporary society, yet the ce-

Suzanne Hasselle-Newcombe earned her bachelor's degree from Amherst College, Massachusetts; her thesis was entitled "Concrete Ideals: A Contextual Reading of S.P. Dinsmoor's 'Garden of Eden and Cabin Home.'" At present she is a master's degree student at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

1. The two notable exceptions are John Beardsley's piece on the Garden of Eden in his *Gardens of Revelation: Environments by Visionary Artists* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), and John Hachmeister's essay on the Garden of Eden in *Backyard Visionaries: Grassroots Art in the Midwest*, ed. Barbara Brackman and Cathy Dwigans (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1999). Both pieces deal with Dinsmoor sensitively and respectfully, Beardsley's commentary being especially insightful.

2. Members of the Kansas Grassroots Art Association led by John Hachmeister have maintained and restored the Garden of Eden since their purchase of the property in 1989 under the title of Garden of Eden, Inc. Much of the major restoration work was undertaken by Wayne and LouElla Naegle, who purchased the property in 1968 and re-opened it to tourists the following year.

ment expression of his ideology originates from his experience “inside” the political battlefields of turn-of-the-last-century Kansas. A genuine understanding of the artist’s Garden of Eden derives from a comprehension of his historical context. Seen from this perspective, Dinsmoor’s sculpture becomes a uniquely poignant paradigm of Populist and socialist imagery during this period in Kansas.

S. P. Dinsmoor moved to Kansas in the boom immigration of the 1880s, joining many other Civil War veterans already in the state. He lived in Lucas for more than twenty years before beginning the Garden of Eden and made a name for himself as a dedicated Freemason, a fervent Populist in a Republican stronghold, an entertaining debater, a creative and financially successful farmer, a teacher, an insurance salesman, and father. Dinsmoor’s biography interfaces with many of the state and national issues of his lifetime: the Civil War, Gilded Age politics, the 1890s depression, Populism, Imperialism, and the impact of the Industrial Revolution on the agrarian ideal. A careful examination of the Garden of Eden reveals a rich description of the person of Samuel Dinsmoor and the culture in which, far from being an outsider, he was immersed. The most appropriate place from which to start unraveling the historical significance of the Garden of Eden is with an understanding of the creator himself.

Dinsmoor was born in Athens County, near Coolville, Ohio, on March 8, 1843, to William A. and Laura Dinsmoor. Samuel was the second son and third child. Growing up in the rural Midwest, young Dinsmoor attended a small common school and aided his parents with the maintenance of the farm. Unfortunately, Dinsmoor’s pastoral youth was cut short by the advent of the Civil War. He joined Company B of the 116th Ohio Infantry at Tappers Plain, Ohio, on August 13, 1862. The nineteen-year-old Dinsmoor stood five-foot five, with a fair complexion, hazel eyes, and brown hair.³

Dinsmoor later claimed an extended experience of combat that included eighteen battles “plus skirmishes.” Nonetheless, he spent at least half of his three-year service as a regimental hospital nurse in Martinsburg, Virginia.

3. U.S. Census, 1850, Ohio, Athens County, Carthage Township; U.S. Army, Company Descriptive Book, Co. B., 116th Regiment Ohio Infantry, Samuel Perry Dinsmore [sic], August 13, 1862, Department of Veterans Affairs, “Pension No. 273 00 919 847/00 Dinsmoor, S.P.,” Medical and Regional Office Center, Wichita, Kans. (hereafter cited as Pension files).

Dinsmoor would have assisted in amputations and also watched both friends and unknown soldiers suffer agonizing deaths. For young Dinsmoor, the idealistic ebullience the people of Athens County had for their righteous cause undoubtedly was tarnished by his experience. After witnessing the surrender of General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox Courthouse, the twenty-two-year-old veteran returned to his Ohio home.⁴

Dinsmoor stayed in Athens County briefly but long enough to join the American Free and Accepted Masons (AF&AM), a group with which he remained actively involved throughout his life and whose symbols repeatedly appear in his Garden of Eden. Sometime in 1866 he moved to an area of Illinois upstream from St. Louis on the Mississippi River. As a landless young man, Dinsmoor probably worked as a field hand for several seasons. It is also possible that he furthered his education at this time, for in 1869 he began a five-term stint as a schoolteacher in Jersey County, Illinois. He would find education a lifelong interest, serving six years as a school trustee in Illinois and continuing his involvement in the school system when he moved to Kansas.⁵

On August 24, 1870, Dinsmoor married Frances A. Barlow Journey, a widow with four children under the age of ten. Samuel, now known as S. P. Dinsmoor, began farming his wife’s 341-acre riverside property near Grafton, Illinois. During the next ten years Frances would bear her husband four boys, and a daughter following not long after. Dinsmoor earned a respectable reputation in the surrounding community; one friend described him as “of temperate habits, honest and industrious.” In 1885 the *History of Green and Jersey Counties, Illinois* testified that “Mr. Dinsmoor is a gentleman of superior intelligence and an honored citizen.”⁶ It is unclear why Dinsmoor left his prosperous Illinois farm after eighteen years to move to Lucas

4. Samuel Dinsmoor, *Pictorial History of the Cabin Home in Garden of Eden* (Lucas, Kans.: n.p., 1927?), 56; U.S. Army, Roster of Ohio Soldiers, 1861–66: War of the Rebellion, 110th–140th Regiments—Infantry, Pension files; U.S. Army Company B, 116th Ohio Returns, Samuel Dinsmore [sic], *ibid.*

5. *History of Green and Jersey Counties, Illinois* (Springfield, Ill.: Continental Historical Co., 1895), 304; *Lucas Advance*, 1888–1900.

6. “Affidavit for Neighbors’ and General Purpose,” August 22, 1882, Pension files. *History of Green and Jersey Counties, Illinois*, 304; U.S. Census, 1870, Illinois, Jersey County, Grafton; *ibid.*, 1880, Illinois, Jersey County, Quarry Township. The census valued Frances’s farm at twenty-five hundred dollars; more average farms for the area were valued between one hundred and eight hundred dollars. Although Frances Journey was not the richest resident in Jersey County, she was quite well off.

S. P. Dinsmoor stands between his sculptures of Adam and Eve. Note the masonic apron on Dinsmoor's Adam (right) and the log-cabin style corners of Dinsmoor's limestone log house. Dinsmoor used this early image of the Garden of Eden as a postcard by around 1915.



in 1888, but he might have found the promises of the unparalleled prosperity that Kansas offered very seductive.

Dinsmoor moved to Kansas at the tail end of a boom of immigration to the state. Pamphlets produced by railroads and land speculators proclaimed the splendor of Kansas. One fairly typical pamphlet had the modest title: *Central and South Western Kansas, Garden of the West: Rich Soil, Beautiful Prairies, Fine Streams of Water furrowing the entire territory. Magnificent Cities of Modern Art Beautifying and Enriching this Garden of Eden.* A pamphlet for Russell County itself proclaimed, "Resources of Russell County Kansas! Cheap Farms! Healthy Climate! Mild Winters! Best Soil in the World! You can go to Russell County and Return for ONE HALF Fare."⁷

The settlers themselves just as ardently perpetuated this "garden myth" as did the speculators and railroad agents. Settlers chose place-names reflecting the prosperity they hoped that the area would bring. The newly founded town of Lucas, not far from Paradise Township, made no small claims about its fecundity and guarantee of future prosperity. On June 29, 1888, the local newspaper bragged:

Which town is located on the true site of the Garden of Eden? Lucas.

Which town will be the future capital of the State of Kansas? Lucas.

Where will the National Capitol be removed to? Lucas.

Where will the White Thrown [sic] be placed on Judgement Day? Lucas.⁸

Although Dinsmoor is unlikely to have seen this specific propaganda, the myth of Kansas as a fertile paradise was ubiquitous. The national press even jumped on the Kansas bandwagon; *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* reported, "Its capacity for crops is endless. . . . Its capacity for raising live-stock is simply unlimited."⁹

Even if Dinsmoor were cynical about these grandiose claims, Kansas would have seemed like a promising place for a fresh start. In the summer of 1888 he packed up his wife and children to head west. Frances's older children, now in their mid-twenties, remained in Illinois.

Immediately upon arrival, Dinsmoor invested eight hundred dollars in a farm just east of Lucas. The previous owners of the property had stayed only two years, perhaps

7. *Central and South Western Kansas, Garden of the West* (McPherson: Kansas Litho. & Print Co., 1888); *Resources of Russell County, Kansas!* (Russell, Kans.: Russell Journal Print, n.d.).

8. *Lucas Advance*, June 29, 1888.

9. Robert Hay, "The Central State: Its Physical Features and Resources," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 77 (June 1888): 46.

driven out by the hot, dry summer of 1887.¹⁰ Despite the short tenure of the previous landowners, Dinsmoor decided to try his hand in this new “Garden of Eden.” An experienced farmer, he probably was prepared to weather out a few seasons of bad crops. Solidly middle class, with a government pension from a Civil War injury and possibly holding cash from the sale of the Illinois farm, Dinsmoor was in a relatively good position to make his new Lucas farm a garden of Eden-like prosperity.

Lured by promises of bounteous farmland, salubrious climate, and easy living, boom immigrants to Kansas during the late 1880s soon faced droughts, poor crops, and mortgage payments that they could no longer afford. Railroads made most of their profit on local rates and raised the cost of shipping freight. During the 1890s railroads—the lifeline between frontier towns and every market—raised prices so greatly that the cost of transporting goods to market often exceeded the crops’ worth. Under these conditions, farmers could not repay their mortgages. Banks foreclosed on properties. No longer was it merely man against the land. Now farmers were pitted against railroad monopolies, the economic system, and banks. In 1889 the *Lucas Advance* still was reiterating a belief that its Russell County town was the “chosen land,” but the newspaper also noted that these were “hard times.” By 1890 the average debt of central Kansas farm property was 10 percent greater than its value. The questions of monopolies and of the proper size of government, issues that became central to Dinsmoor’s sculpture in the next century, were hot topics in the public consciousness during the 1890s.¹¹

Dinsmoor actively electioneered for the Populist Party in Russell County throughout the 1890s, seriously ponder-

10. John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and Populist Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), 30–31. Russell County Appraisers, Warranty Deed, “Levi and Roda Shirley to Samuel P. Dinsmoor, October 3, 1888,” warranty deed, Russell County Appraiser Office, Russell, Kans.

11. *Lucas Advance*, January 10, 1889; Jeffrey Ostler, *Prairie Populism: The Fate of Agrarian Radicalism in Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa, 1880–1892* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1993), 32; see also Peter Argersinger, *Populism and Politics: William Alfred Peffer and the People’s Party* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1974); O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism: Ideas and Men* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1969); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmer’s Alliance and the Populist Party*.

ing political techniques, economic theories, and Christian ethics. The goals of the People’s Party included government regulation of railroads, public ownership of transportation and utilities, a decent increase in inflation so farmers could repay their mortgages and debts, a graduated income tax, and postal savings banks to allow those with a moderate income to benefit from savings. Other key Populist planks were a flexible government-issued currency, the secret ballot system, direct election of U. S. senators, government managed banks, initiative and referendum, and the ability to recall public officials.¹² Beginning in 1890 the Populists were an immediate political success in Kansas and continued to be an important minority, and sometimes majority, in the state’s politics throughout the following decade. After 1900 the economic climate became more prosperous for farmers, and the party slowly trickled out of existence. The Progressive Era reformers coopted and legislated many of the Populist demands, but Dinsmoor remained committed to Populist ideals long after the party faded from prominence.

The People’s Party in Lucas was chiefly organized by S. P. Dinsmoor and his cohort Jacob C. Ruppenthal. The Republican *Lucas Advance* allowed Ruppenthal to publish a Populist column in the weekly paper. The newspaper’s editors viewed Ruppenthal as “a young man of good repute, a good scholar and a good teacher,” adding legitimacy to the party in Lucas. Ruppenthal would become a very prominent citizen in Russell County, gaining statewide attention as a lawyer and a judge.¹³ Nevertheless, Ruppenthal did not tone down Populist rhetoric for Lucas, proclaiming in the People’s Party column, “Monopolies must be crushed. Trusts and combines must die. Land must be rescued from the clutches of a few. America wants no rack rent system. Labor must occupy as high a place as capital. Transportation must be conducted by the government. The nation alone must issue money. The money power must live only in history. Stand up for your rights!”¹⁴ Ruppenthal and Dinsmoor both ran for local offices as Populists and served as delegates to party conventions and rallies.

12. Cecil Homes, “Pistol-Packin’ Pencil Pushers” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 13 (May 1944): 135.

13. “The German Element in Central Kansas,” *Kansas Historical Collections, 1913–1914* 13 (1915): 513. Ruppenthal, a lifelong resident of Russell, Kansas, was later known as a vocal Democrat in the twentieth century and provided much encouragement and assistance with the founding of the Kansas State Historical Society, which houses many of Ruppenthal’s meticulous files compiled throughout his long life in Kansas.

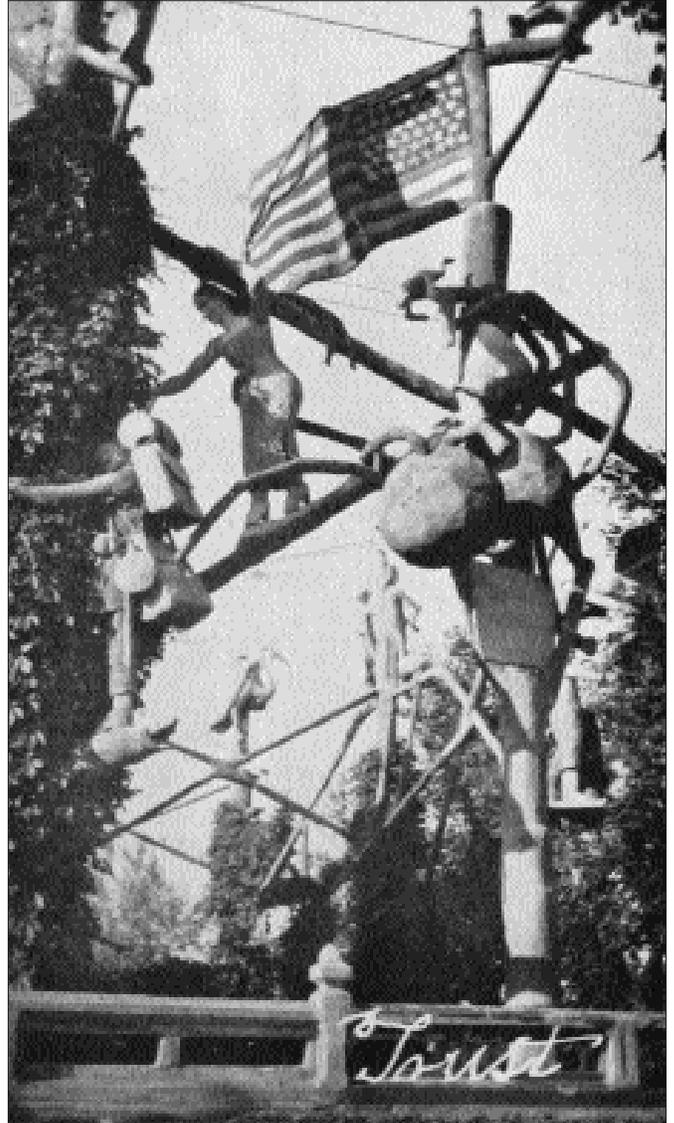
14. *Lucas Advance*, February 2, 1893.

Dinsmoor's "Trust" monster is visible behind the globe. Its tentacles reach out into the soldier's knapsack, around the woman's waist, and into the globe.

By 1892 Dinsmoor was perhaps the most vocal Populist in Lucas. One afternoon in May he came into the *Lucas Advance* offices to complain about the wet weather, theorizing that "the calamity howlers" were to blame. It was "the tears of the people, crying over the remains of the fossilized old parties." The newspaper took advantage of this rather ambiguous comment answering, "As Sam is one of the worst howlers in this community, he naturally rejoices in the woes of the people." Dinsmoor was as recognized for his political ideology in Lucas in the 1890s as he would be for his cement sculpture after 1915. Throughout the 1890s when the Populists claimed a majority in many Kansas counties, Russell County remained vehemently Republican. In the fall of 1892 Dinsmoor ran for township clerk on the Populist ticket and lost.¹⁵

During this same year Dinsmoor also founded a secret society for the express purpose of organizing against monopolies: the United Order of Anti-Monopolies (UOAM). Following the egalitarian idealism of some of the Populist movement, this secret society opened its doors to women and children over sixteen and to anyone interested in "the expiration of the deadly fungus growth Monopoly."¹⁶ On February 2, 1893, the *Lucas Advance* called the UOAM the "United Order of Anarchist's Meeting." In the next issue, the paper commented:

Owing to our little squib in last week's paper about the Anarchist meeting some of our subscribers feel very much aggrieved and one has stopped his paper. We really don't see that we have any apologies to make or anything to take back; . . . if the so called Anti-Monopoly club is not anarchistic in its tendencies, they had better teach different principles or close the mouths of some of the members of the order. While we are sorry to lose subscribers we are of the opinion the paper will continue to be published in



Lucas, unless perhaps we see where we can better ourselves.

On the next page the paper revealed exactly who had stopped his subscription: "S. P. Dinsmoor is no more a subscriber to this paper. He says he will no longer help carry the responsibility for what may be published in these columns. SO SORRY."¹⁷ The UOAM could hardly be considered anarchist as it was calling for an expansion of the federal government, but the ideals of the organization obviously were not popular with all the citizens of Lucas.

15. *Ibid.*, May 12, 19, October 20, November 10, 1892.

16. *Ibid.*, January 26, February 9, 1892.

17. *Ibid.*, February 2, 1893. The People's Party column also noted on this page, "The U.O.A.M. is flourishing." *Ibid.*, February 9, 1893.

The UOAM had its most vocal moment of protest during the summer of 1894, when three men, jointly accused but not convicted of murder, were removed from the county jail by a mob. The mob took the sentencing into its own hands and hanged the three men on a railroad bridge near Russell. Dinsmoor, as president of the UOAM, publicly declaimed the lynchers, asserting that the “said victims of mob violence had not been proved guilty of the terrible crime with which they were charged. . . . we are opposed to mob violence as being unjustifiable, dangerous to American liberty and subversive of the true principles of good government.”¹⁸ Dinsmoor’s call for legal justice was anomalous in the pages of the *Lucas Advance*. Although the organization itself seemed to fade out by 1895, Dinsmoor was still illustrating the society’s principles more than twenty years later in his cement sculpture.

Dinsmoor attended numerous county and state conventions as a Populist delegate including the seminal 1896 national convention in St. Louis. This year marked Dinsmoor’s first and only successful bid for political office in Lucas; he was elected justice of the peace of Fairview Township. In a surprisingly positive note, the *Lucas Advance* complimented Dinsmoor in this position for successfully minimizing the number of loose teams of horses on the streets of Lucas. During this year Dinsmoor held several rallies on his property, hosting crowds of up to three hundred people.¹⁹

Dinsmoor continued active campaigning until 1899. He lost a bid for representative in the Kansas house in 1898 and felt despondent after the defeat. Correspondence with J. C. Ruppenthal lifted his spirits after the election; as Dinsmoor wrote to Ruppenthal, “I was too dead to answer before I saw the light of resurrection morn. We are not DEAD but Sleepth [*sic*]. . . and when we wake in 1900 the

G.O.P.s will howl.”²⁰ Ruppenthal urged Dinsmoor not to retire from activism, writing that he wanted Russell County to be “represented by real Populists so that the gold Dems, and fusion traders without principles may not ruin the whole thing.”²¹ But the fifty-six-year-old Dinsmoor decided against ever running for office again. However, he continued to follow the Populist Party into the twentieth century. His approach was pragmatic. The name of a political party was less important to Dinsmoor than adherence to the platform goals of the early Populist Party.²² He followed with interest the new reform movements of the early progressive era and indeed, Dinsmoor remained optimistic about Populist ideals until his death, illustrating the party’s rhetorical images in the Garden of Eden.

By the early years of the twentieth century, an economic upswing and better crop conditions had eroded the popular support for Populism. As the Populist Party disintegrated, its torches were taken up by the varied arms of the progressive movement, the socialists, and the Social Gospel movement. Although these organizations generally shunned association with each other, each in its own way pushed for minimizing extreme disparities of wealth. The various “progressive movements” and the socialists were interested in further democratizing the U.S. political system, ending the policy of laissez-faire economics and placing governmental limits on capitalist expansion. The Social Gospel movement in Kansas perhaps is epitomized by the best-selling novel *In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do?* (1898) by Topeka minister Charles Monroe Sheldon. Sheldon called for the church leaders and parishioners to ask themselves, “What would Jesus do?” and behave accordingly. The various progressives championed many of the same projects Dinsmoor and the Populists had campaigned for in the 1890s. Dinsmoor’s blend of biblical–political images also was employed by many of the progressive organizations and actually was quite mainstream in early twentieth-century America.

Dinsmoor followed with interest the socialist newspaper *Appeal to Reason*. Printed in Girard, Kansas, it ex-

18. *Ibid.*, February 15, 1894.

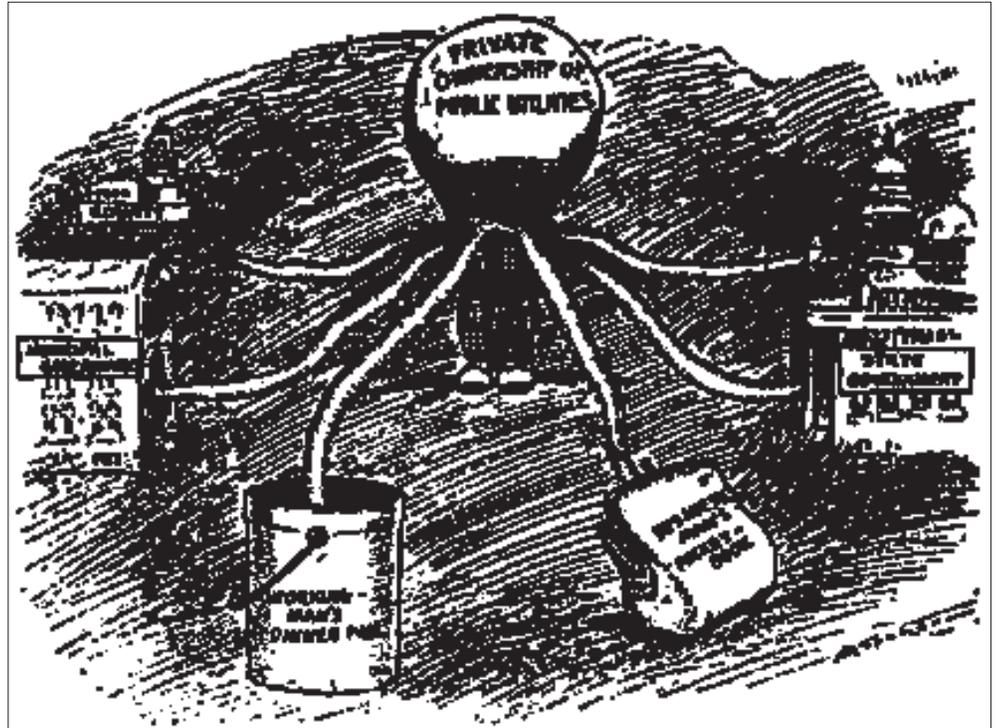
19. The 1896 election was the only one in which the Populists had any chance of electing a candidate. However, to many Populists the nomination of William Jennings Bryan as a joint Democratic–Populist candidate was a betrayal of true Populist principles. The Populist fusion with the Democrats that year revealed factions within the Populist Party, and it faded from national importance with Bryan’s defeat. The People’s Party remained an important force in Kansas until 1900 and maintained a presence until about 1905. See Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Movement in America*; see also *Advocate and News* (Topeka), during 1898–1907; *Lucas Advance*, July 23, August 6, December 10, 1896.

20. S. P. Dinsmoor to J. C. Ruppenthal, December 3, 1898, J. C. Ruppenthal Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

21. J. C. Ruppenthal to S. P. Dinsmoor, December 30, 1899, *ibid.*

22. S. P. Dinsmoor to editor, *Advocate and News*, April 12, 1901.

"A Hand in Everything—The Greatest Octopus of them All," by O. R. Fencer. Although in Dinsmoor's sculpture, the "Trust" monster does not actually engulf the figure of the man, in this cartoon the octopus's tentacles reach into the man's dinner container. As Dinsmoor explains in his guidebook, "You get the man's grub and you have got him." This cartoon appeared in *The Commoner*, April 17, 1903.



pounded a brand of freethinking socialism to a national audience.²³ Dinsmoor revealed his commitment to the socialist movement in a letter to the *Appeal's* editor in 1901:

The handwriting is on the wall . . . when they learn they cannot stop the onward march of education. They might as well lay their mortal frames across the mouth of the Mississippi—and try to flood the US signal station on the top of Pike's Peake [sic] as to stop the onward march of socialism. The more they oppose, the more opposition they will meet.²⁴

Although Dinsmoor proclaimed his commitment to socialism, his reform agenda remained the same. In 1901 he also wrote a letter to the *Farmer's Advocate*, the state organ of the Populist Party:

All monopolies of which the people complain have their foundation in chartered corporations. If we wish to prevent monopoly we must stop granting chartered rights to money-making industries. When a business becomes so large that it cannot be successfully operated by one or a company without chartered rights, it is too great to be turned over to private

23. The *Appeal to Reason* (Girard) was the only national political newspaper of its time to secure five hundred thousand subscribers and maintain its financial integrity without outside funds and often without advertisements—a significant achievement for any newspaper but especially a socialist publication. Paul Buhle, "The Appeal to Reason," in *The American Radical Press, 1880–1960*, ed. Joseph R. Conlin (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974), argues that the *Appeal* "was the most important evangelistic propaganda organ of the Left and the clearest expression of indigenous American Socialism."

24. *Appeal to Reason*, November 30, 1901.

greed. All such industries should be conducted by the town, county, city, state or nation. What is a nation, state, city, county or town for, if not to do that which the individual cannot do?

. . . The People's party needs no Moses to lead them or party fixers to fix them. Each true member is a leader and fixer, standing shoulder to shoulder, side by side, not in front, nor will they be pushed to the rear, and will thus be found moving on, holding in check the strong, helping up the weak until equal opportunities to every child in the nation and equal rights to every man and woman is given.²⁵

Until the end of his life, Dinsmoor would be propagating these same essential beliefs.

If the "march of education" was destined for success, perhaps Dinsmoor did not feel a need to be so active in promoting the cause. Discouraged by the anticlimactic end of a decade of intense campaigning, the sixty-two-year-old Dinsmoor and his sixty-five-year-old wife retired in 1905. He sold his farm east of town, bought the plot that would become the Garden of Eden, and began experimenting with materials for construction.²⁶

25. *Farmer's Advocate* (Topeka), August 30, 1901.

26. Dinsmoor sold the farm for four thousand dollars cash—the "best price that has been paid for farmland in Russell County." See *Lucas Sentinel*, May 28, 1905.



"Say, Mr. Worker, haven't you been in the grip of this monster long enough? Why not try the knife on him?" by T. Lockwood, published in the *Appeal to Reason*, January 9, 1904. As did this illustrator, Dinsmoor firmly believed that the ballot, particularly with the passage of initiative and referendum, could remove the legal grounds for monopolies and create a society with more equality and fair competition. The "Trust" monster in Dinsmoor's sculpture rests upon a branch of "chartered rights," rights that the voters have allowed to be put into place by the legislatures. In Dinsmoor's "Goddess of Liberty" sculpture, the limb of "chartered rights" is being cut by a saw marked "ballot."

local paper. The *Lucas Sentinel* prophesied that Dinsmoor's cabin "will be the principle attraction of the city when it is finished."²⁹ After completing the Cabin Home, Dinsmoor looked for something else to do with his time and energy. He remained active and held offices in both the Grand Army of the Republic and the Freemasons. In September 1909 Dinsmoor offered his Cabin Home for sale, putting an attractive photograph in the *Lucas Independent* and "several eastern papers" to advertise. But apparently no one offered an amount that Dinsmoor could not refuse, so he began to play again with cement.³⁰

He started with the grape arbor leading from the back porch to the road. In the arbor, he built a little face and hand in the position of waving to his wife in the kitchen window. His success with this playful figure must have inspired him to try more human figures. At the end of the arbor facing the street, Dinsmoor made Adam and Eve, two eight-foot-tall cement human figures with marbles for eyeballs. Dinsmoor often told curious reporters that Eve was modeled on the women who walked by as he worked in the yard. Dinsmoor's Adam wears masonic insignia, perhaps signifying the fact that the Freemasons believe Adam was the founding father of their organization.³¹ After he completed Adam and Eve, Dinsmoor began to build cement trees. In one interview Dinsmoor explained that he originally built a cement tree for a Virginia creeper that was "wandering aimlessly along the fence." Soon he had built several cement trees and was working on the entire Garden of Eden scene. By 1915 the Garden of Eden portion of the yard was completed, and trees and some figures were present on the north face of the property as well. It is not clear

29. *Lucas Sentinel*, March 29, 1907.

30. *Lucas Independent*, August 5, September 16, 30, October 14, 21, 1909.

31. Masonic introduction to the *Holy Bible*, in the possession of Richard Brozek, Lucas, Kans. Richard Brozek is related to Dinsmoor's second wife, Emilie Brozek.

In the summer of 1906 Dinsmoor set to work on a cement fence for his property. The community watched with interest his progress with the novel fence material:

S. P. Dinsmoor is building a cement fence which will be the noblest fence in town when it is finished. He is doing the work himself and claims that it will not cost him much as his own time is not worth anything. He is quite a genius. He can do anything he tries and make anything he wants.²⁷

The local citizens could not have anticipated the length to which Dinsmoor would take his creativity and skill in construction. As Dinsmoor was creating his cement fence, he conceived the idea for a "log cabin of stone," but he offered as yet no hint that his retirement activities would lead to a recapitulation of Populist ideals in cement.²⁸

This next project, a "Cabin Home" made with the locally abundant limestone, met with equal praise from the

27. *Lucas Independent*, July 20, 1906.

28. *Ibid.*, July 27, 1906.

The statue of the "Trust Monster" was most likely made around 1918–1919. Kansas women gained the right to vote in 1912, but national suffrage did not come until 1920. Dinsmoor was known as a vocal supporter of women voters and welcomed them into his United Order of Anti-Monopoly "secret society" as early as 1892.

whether Dinsmoor intended a reading of his Eden in an ironic comparison to the claims of the 1880s propaganda brochures, but in light of the blatantly political sculptures that follow, this interpretation seems appropriate.³²

The Garden of Eden was becoming a mecca for tourists. With a striking display of electric lights on his sculptures, Dinsmoor lured people off the train when it stopped in town. The light inside the "All-Seeing Eye" winked at night. He made the sculpture interactive by continuing the pipe that supported the "Tree of Life and Death" into his basement. This allowed him a ventriloquist's trick—he would project his voice from out of the sculpture's mouth, high above any spectator. Newspaper articles commented that these voices usually got people moving on, especially at night. He often gave his sculptures the following dialogue:

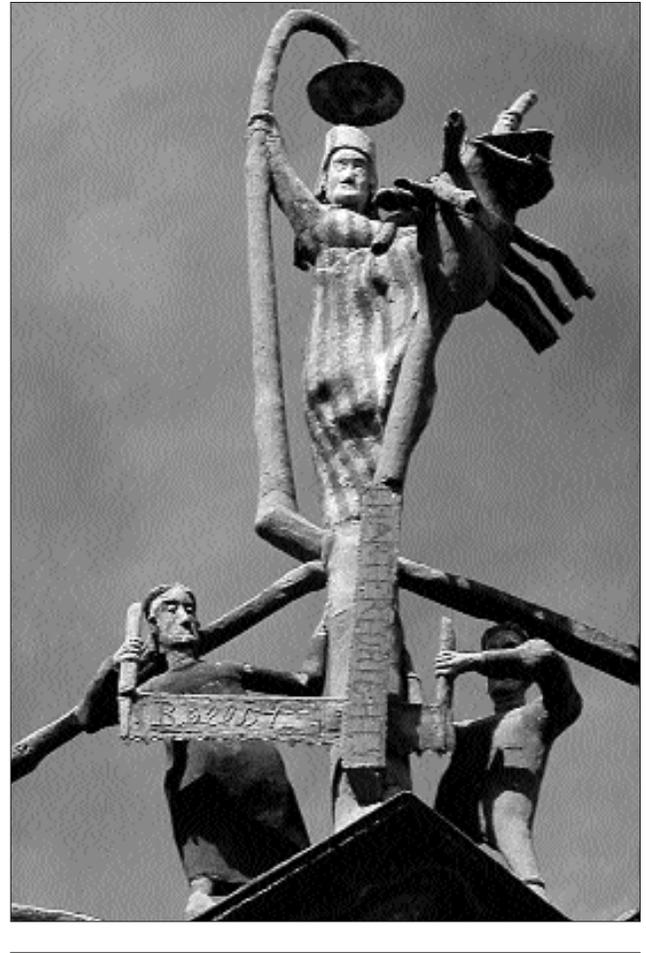
Angel: "Cain, you son-of-a-gun, where's Abel?"
 Cain: "Darned if I know. Am I my brother's keeper?"
 Devil: "I should worry. . . ."³³

Dinsmoor thus revealed a liberal, freethinking interpretation of the Bible, teasing his audience with allegorical morals.

In 1915 Dinsmoor made postcards from photographs of the sculptures to sell to tourists: twenty different views were for sale at five to ten cents apiece. He also built himself a cement casket, complete with masonic insignia. He would pose in this for tourists, and he once took a double-

32. "Garden of Eden in His Front Yard," newspaper clipping, scrapbook collection, Wayne and LouElla Naegle, Lucas, Kans. Dinsmoor was well known for creating extemporaneous, humorous explanations for his creations, and most quotations by him concerning the Garden should be read with this understanding. Many of the newspaper articles quoted were found in the Naegle scrapbooks and did not contain full citations.

33. Quotation from "Garden of Eden in His Front Yard," and "Garden of Eden in Cement: The Work of a Kansas Heretic," *New York Sun*, January 2, 1916. "Dinsmoor's Quaint Garden of Eden at Lucas is Mecca for Thousands of Tourists and Visitors," *Salina Journal*, July 18, 1920; "Old Man's Fancies Worked Out in Concrete," *Lucas Independent*, reprinted from *Cement World*, January 21, 1915; "Garden of Eden in Cement makes Kansas Home Weird," *Kansas City Post*, November 4, 1917.



exposed photograph of himself in the casket and looking at the casket, which he sold as a postcard. One local remembers Dinsmoor as always wearing the three-piece suits he donned for the postcard photographs. The artist was attracting quite a crowd and enjoying every minute of the attention.³⁴

From 1914 to 1920 Dinsmoor made most of the money he needed both to support his wife and create sculptures by charging tourists a quarter for a tour of the Cabin Home and another quarter to tour the grounds. By March 1917 Dinsmoor was boasting more than thirty-two hundred paying visitors.³⁵ But prior to this entrepreneurial success Dinsmoor had always appeared to be relatively well off

34. These original postcards have been reconstructed and currently are on sale at the site. Jerri Brown, interview by Ann Cobb, March 14, 1990(?), undated tape recording in possession of Ann Cobb, Lawrence, Kans.

35. "Garden of Eden in Cement, The Work of a Kansas Heretic"; *Lucas Independent*, March 29, 1917, June 9, 1920. In 1920 a tax collector demanded tax for the admission fees. In response, Dinsmoor dropped the admission fee but pressured the tourist to buy four post cards for a dollar before leaving the property.

compared with his neighbors. Some speculated that Dinsmoor was receiving a “double pension” or having other less-than-honest means of making money. In fact, the availability of Dinsmoor’s money stemmed from several factors, the most important being his first wife’s property, his pension, and an entrepreneurial spirit. Dinsmoor was always experimenting with new gadgets to make life on the farm more efficient, he charged for the use of his horses as studs, and he sold various forms of insurance to the community. His pension claim stemmed from injuries received falling off a horse during regular duty rounds while in the Civil War, but there is no evidence that he received a double pension or that he otherwise manipulated the system.³⁶

Dinsmoor tried to interest the city of Lucas in creating a park out of his sculpture, expanding it and offering it to the city upon his death. The city council defeated the request on a legal technicality, revealing ambivalence and even hostility toward the city’s most alluring oddity.³⁷ At this time, Dinsmoor also was trying to market a slide show based upon his Garden of Eden with Lawrence Gilbreath, the new manager of the motion picture theater in Lucas. The two created flyers marketing “pictorial views and a snappy lecture” by “Samuel P. Dinsmoor, The Cement Wizard of the World.” The slide show was a success in the local area but not very well received at screenings in Kansas City and Dinsmoor’s former home of Grafton, Illinois.³⁸ Despite his lack of success at large-scale expansion, Dinsmoor kept busy by adding new cement constructions and guiding tours around the property; during the fall of 1916 fifty to one hundred people were dropping by every week.³⁹

36. “S. P. Dinsmoor received notice of an increase in his pension, two dollars per month,” *Lucas Advance*, December 27, 1894. For examples of Dinsmoor’s business ventures, news of which appeared in local newspapers, see “Black Prince will stand,” *ibid.*, April 21, 1892; “A feed cooker arrived at Lucas last week consigned to S. P. Dinsmoor who is an agent for the same. It was put to making steam in Deeble’s blacksmith shop last Saturday for the benefit of those wanting a cooker and the amusement of small boys,” *Russell Reformer*, March 12, 1897; Dinsmoor gave home and farm loans and sold insurance for the Hartford and Springfield Insurance Company, *Lucas Independent*, August 5, 1909. Dinsmoor’s letterhead of the late 1890s implies that he was offering loans and selling insurance for the Columbia Fire Insurance Company of Omaha, Nebraska, in September 1910.

37. *Lucas Independent*, December 16, 1916; Lucas City Council Minutes, February 8, 1916, City Office, Lucas, Kans.

38. “Lawrence Curtis Gilbreath presents Samuel P. Dinsmoor, The Cement Wizard of the World,” broadside, Naegle Collection; Mrs. Lawrence Gilbreath, interview by Bob Voth, 1972; Bob Voth, “S. P. Dinsmoor and His Populist Garden of Eden” (unpublished research paper, Bethel College, North Newton, Kans., 1971), 28.

39. *Lucas Independent*, September 4, 21, 28, October 5, 12, 26, November 9, 16, 30, 1916.

Although the cement Garden of Eden can be accurately understood as a political illustration reflecting the ironies of Kansas as the biblical Garden of Eden, there is no indication that Dinsmoor originally conceived of the sculptures with a conscious political agenda. The playful cement creations originally marked his retirement from politics. In 1914, however, as Dinsmoor worked on the trees on the northern side of the property, something happened to make him give his playful sculptural work a powerful, political agenda. The immediate inspiration for the complete “modern civilization” sculpture came from one specific event: the 1914 Ludlow Massacre.⁴⁰

The massacre occurred when, on April 20, 1914, National Guard troops, paid by the Rockefellers who owned the mine in Ludlow, Colorado, opened fire on the tent-towns of striking miners and their families. Thirteen miners were killed, and in further atrocities, the National Guard set fire to the tents at dusk. The miners’ families living in the tents fled to the hills, but not all escaped. The next day the charred bodies of eleven children and two women were found in an iron pit. When the massacre received the attention of the national and international press, President Woodrow Wilson sent in federal troops to restore order. Although this action abated further conflict, the miners’ demands remained largely unanswered and their union unrecognized.⁴¹

This tragedy reinforced Dinsmoor’s antimonopolistic beliefs, increasing his frustration at what the great American flag had come to represent. After learning of the Colorado massacre, Dinsmoor turned his “Garden Home” into an expression of his own frustration and disgust with American policy.⁴² He returned to the potent images from his campaigning days to illustrate his reawakened sense of political urgency.

On the north face of Dinsmoor’s Garden of Eden, towering over the “chain-of-life” scene, is a huge grotesque oc-

40. “Garden of Eden in His Front Yard.”

41. Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States: 1492–Present* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1995), 347–49; *Appeal to Reason*, May 2, 1914.

42. “There’s one thing missing,” says the sermoner in cement. “It is a girl. There ought to be a girl after the soldier. There always is. Then I am going to have something after both. It will be an octopus. I thought of that when the Colorado mine trouble came up. The octopus will be supported by limbs of a tree which will represent the natural resources that it has grabbed in this country, and with its arms it will be reaching after everything in sight, including the girl and the soldier.” See “Garden of Eden in His Front Yard.”

Thomas Nast's cartoon "Trust" appeared in *Time*, July 27, 1889.

topus. Its Cyclops-eye and amorphous cement body lurk over a large cement globe. The cephalopod's tentacles jut possessively into the globe, around the Panama Canal and the North Pole, wrapping around a woman's waist and a small baby, into a man's knapsack, and into cement forms labeled "bonds" and "interest." Dinsmoor labeled this octopus-monster "Trust." Although the octopus appears almost omnipotent in this sculpture, Dinsmoor reveals the "Trust's" weakness: a small limb labeled "chartered rights" supports the huge creature. Dinsmoor's political message comes out in his guidebook that was last revised toward the end of the 1920s:

Money, transportation, manufacturing, coal, oil, land and lumber, we have chartered away, which has gone to the trusts. The trusts stand on chartered rights. Take away the chartered rights of any trusts or monopoly on earth and it would melt like a snow ball below. But we are granting more chartered rights, creating more monopolies and then we are whining over the trusts. Aren't we a fool set of voters? They are protected by the Star Spangled Banner. That flag protects capital today better than it does humanity.⁴³

With this image Dinsmoor illustrates his opinion, consistent with Populist ideology, that legislative tolerance permits the existence of trusts and that the existence of monopolies can be undermined with modified legislation. Dinsmoor's message in his guidebook was little changed from the 1901 letters to the *Appeal to Reason* and the *Topeka Farmer's Advance*. This octopus image was central to the rhetoric of Populists, Socialists, and other antimonopoly campaigners.

William Jennings Bryan's newspaper *The Commoner* included several such octopus motifs. A particularly good ex-



ample is a cartoon by O. R. Fencer that ran on August 12, 1904, entitled "A Hand in Everything—The Greatest Octopus of them All!" Another image depicting a graphic octopus as the "monopoly monster" ran in the *Appeal to Reason* on January 9, 1904. However, the most famous such image representing trusts comes from Frank Norris's novel *The Octopus*, published in 1901. This book tells of wheat farmers in the Central Valley near San Francisco who are exploited and eventually evicted by the railroad tycoons. The tentacles of the railroad "octopus stretched all over America." Despite its California setting, Norris's "Epic of the Wheat" easily could have been set in Kansas; the winter wheat brought by Russian immigrants was a staple crop at this time, and the railroads, being the most practical means of long-distance transportation in the early twentieth century, exerted a strong influence on the

43. Dinsmoor, *Pictorial History of the Cabin Home in Garden of Eden*, 35.

Kansas economy.⁴⁴ Dinsmoor, however, expanded the image of the octopus to include all monopolies or major industries, utilities, and transportation that were not responsive to the needs and concerns of their employees or the populace.

The image is repeated yet again in the Garden of Eden, but this figure is smaller, shrunken to the size of an overgrown spider, helpless against other powers. This creature is attacked from above by the towering cement “Goddess of Liberty,” who is garbed in a colored cement star-spangled banner and armed with a long cement spear. With her spear she stabs the struggling “trust monster” below, protecting a man and woman on a lower branch from the reach of its tentacles. The man and woman stand below the “trust monster” on this cement tree, level with the limb of “chartered rights” that supports the monstrosity. Using a strong cross-saw marked “ballot,” the man and woman intently saw away the limb of “chartered rights.” Dinsmoor vividly explained:

That shows how we can get away with the trusts and if we don't get away with them by ballot, they will be shot away with the bullet, as they were in Russia. They are getting too big. They have got all our sugar.⁴⁵

Dinsmoor's image of the “Goddess of Liberty” has a long history in American iconography and the political cartoons of the Populist and Socialist movements. One of the first symbols of the standards and ideals of the American colonies, “Columbia,” usually was depicted cloaked in an American flag, wielding a sword of justice. Her name comes from Columbus's discovery of America, which early nineteenth-century Americans viewed as marking the beginning of a new age of democracy in the world. She represents the idealism of America—the tenets of life, liberty, and fraternity among her citizens. Columbia was a favorite motif of Thomas Nast, arguably the most influential car-

44. “A Hand in Everything—The Greatest Octopus of them All!” *The Commoner* (Lincoln, Neb.), August 12, 1904; *Appeal to Reason*, January 9, 1904. Ruppenthal urged Dinsmoor to read Bryan's *The Commoner* as its political ideology was in line with theirs. See J. C. Ruppenthal to Samuel P. Dinsmoor, February 15, 1901, Ruppenthal Collection. Other octopus images include, “But ARE the People Powerless?” *The Commoner*, August 11, 1905. For a summary of Norris's *The Octopus* and its context, see Joseph R. McElrath Jr., *Frank Norris Revisited* (New York: Twayne Publ., 1992), 91–105.

45. Dinsmoor, *Pictorial History of the Cabin Home in Garden of Eden*, 37.

toonist in American history, who used the figure frequently in his illustrations of the Civil War for *Harper's Weekly*.⁴⁶

The icon gained more fame when adopted by the French sculptor Auguste Bartholdi for the Statue of Liberty. The original title of the statue, *Liberty Enlightening the World*, reflects the noble idealism of the United States' founding creed. But by the time the Statue of Liberty was dedicated in 1886 the influence of monopolistic business on politics and the American economy was very strong. The Populists, socialists, and other reformers believed that the Goddess of Liberty should defend the liberty and freedom for individual citizens over the rights of big businesses and commerce.⁴⁷

Thomas Nast drew a Statue of Liberty covered with placards of trusts and carrying the sign “The Home of the Trusts and Land of the Plutocrats” on her outstretched hand. In 1898 the *Appeal to Reason* printed a song addressed to the Goddess of Liberty:

Goddess of Liberty, follow,
Follow me where I lead;
Come down into the sweat shop
And look on the world of greed!
Look on the faces of children,
Old before they were born!
Look on the haggard women
Of all sex graces shorn!
Look on the men, God help us!
If this is what it means
To be men in the land of freedom
And live like mere machines!⁴⁸

Dinsmoor clearly believed that the existence of powerful monopolies put democracy in America in great peril. But the Goddess of Liberty was not the only symbol of America profaned by corrupt politicians and big businessmen; the flag itself was betrayed. According to Dinsmoor, the colorful American flag that sails above the first “Trust” octopus “protects capital today better than it does humanity.

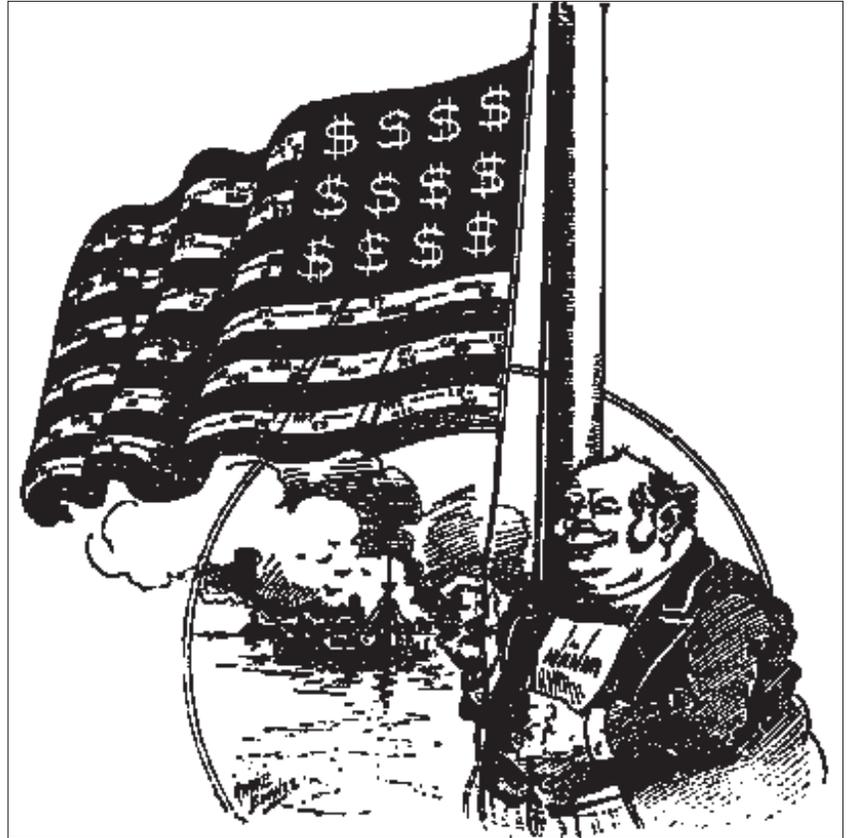
46. See, for example, “Our Flag,” *Harper's Weekly*, July 16, 1863; “Tattooed Columbia,” *ibid.*, September 14, 1872; see also Stephen Hess and Sandy Northrop, *Drawn and Quartered: The History of American Political Cartoons* (Montgomery, Ala.: Elliot and Clark Publishing, 1996), 28–31.

47. Michael Grumet, *Images of Liberty* (New York: Arbor House, 1986).

48. *Appeal to Reason*, December 17, 1898.

"A Reign of Infamy" by Andre Bowles was printed in the *Farmer's Advocate* (Yates Center), April 25, 1898.

The caption of this cartoon quotes a speech by Congressman Lantz of Ohio: "Whilst our flag is being defiled at home by the administration, the stars now represent dollar marks, the stripes represent the quotations from the stock ticker." The cartoon refers to America's self-serving attempt to "liberate" Cuba from Spain.



It drafted the boys but asked the money to volunteer. See the difference?"⁴⁹

The image of a corrupted American flag was an important theme in Populist imagery. One cartoon that illustrates the same image as Dinsmoor's flag appeared in the Yates Center *Farmer's Advocate* on April 25, 1898. The illustrator captured this image of the American flag with dollar signs and stock ticks being raised over Havana by a grinning Congressman Mark Hanna, a champion of U.S. imperialism. Dinsmoor characteristically affirmed American values, while repudiating forceful imperialism, like the deceptive "aid" the United States government gave to Cuban revolutionaries. In 1899 Dinsmoor delivered a Decoration Day speech in Lucas during the period in which America was forcefully annexing the Philippines. Dinsmoor declared to his fellow citizens that he favored "raising the [American] flag over every people on earth . . . with their consent."⁵⁰ The socialist *Appeal to Reason* also used the banner of the American flag to represent the "true" ideals of the American republic.

The most socialist of Dinsmoor's sculptural images is his incomplete "Crucifixion of Labor" on the eastern side of the property. This was the last sculpture Dinsmoor made (around 1924) before he laid down his trowel due to his increasing visual impairment from cataracts.⁵¹ In Dinsmoor's

sculpture the figure of Labor is being crucified by the figures of a Lawyer, Doctor, Preacher, and a Banker. These are the figures who, in Dinsmoor's words, are "the leaders of all who eat cake by the sweat of other fellow's face."⁵² Dinsmoor's comments and sculpture reflect the prevalent views of American socialism in the early twentieth century.

In his most famous speech, William Jennings Bryan, the 1896 Populist-Democratic candidate for president, declared: "You shall not press down upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold."⁵³ Following the Populists, the socialists hoped to bring a "true" kingdom of God to America, a real fraternal bond of mankind under the American flag. The

49. Dinsmoor, *Pictorial History of the Cabin Home in Garden of Eden*, 35.

50. Quotation from Ruppenthal, paraphrasing his friend Dinsmoor: "Think up a good resolution on expansion for our county convention and we will put it into the platform. Something like you announced at Lucas on Decoration day about raising the flag over every people on earth, etc. with their consent." See J. C. Ruppenthal to S. P. Dinsmoor, August 10, 1899, Ruppenthal Collection.

51. Dinsmoor wrote to the Pension Office in 1926 that "I have not been able to tie my shoes [sic] for almost a year. . . . For two year I have not been able to read the headlines of a newspaper. So far as reading or counting money I am totally blind nor can I tell a darkie from a white man by my eyes." See Samuel P. Dinsmoor to Winfield Scott, November 6, 1926,

Pension file. Dinsmoor also received the help of an African American man, Thomas Banks, and employed, at least seasonally, some of the local schoolboys to help him make his figures and mix the cement. See Brown interview.

52. Dinsmoor, *Pictorial History of the Cabin Home in Garden of Eden*, 47.

53. William Jennings Bryan, "Cross of Gold Speech," in *A Populist Reader: Selections from the Works of American Populist Leaders*, ed. George Brown Tindall (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 211. The "cross of gold" refers to practice at the time of pegging the value of the dollar to gold reserves. Bryan and many Populists argued that the dollar should instead be pegged to silver reserves, which, being worth less, would decrease the amount of farmers' debt repayments in real terms.



"Labor Crucified." Dinsmoor himself forms the head of the figure of the "Lawyer" demonstrating his omnipresent sense of humor. The African American standing by the sculpture is Thomas Banks who, with his wife, lived and worked on Dinsmoor's property during the 1920s. Dinsmoor had long caused controversy in the area for his acceptance of African Americans. He hosted a picnic on his property in 1896 for the "colored people" of Lucas. Although state-level Populists had long courted the African American vote, the eight African Americans who lived in Dinsmoor's township could hardly be worth the effort for votes. Dinsmoor must have intended a purely ideological statement.

The Garden of Eden side of the yard shows an uncomfortable tension between a literalist interpretation of Genesis and a figurative, allegorical one. Masonry itself stresses the symbolic over a literal interpretation of God's word. The masonic introduction to the Bible underscores the symbolic understanding of God's truth as the explicit purpose of Freemasonry: "Freemasonry is essentially the science of symbolism; a system of morality developed and inculcated by the science of symbolism."⁵⁶ Masonic symbolism allows for an intuitive understanding of important moral and philosophical ideas without reducing the ideas to logical concepts. Dinsmoor almost certainly drew from this masonic, metaphoric understanding of the Bible in the creation of his sculpted figures.

The directional orientation of Dinsmoor's sculpture, from the exile from Eden in the west to the "Goddess of Liberty" and the "Crucifixion of Labor" in the east, parallels masonic ritual and symbolism. The masonic initiate, in the "darkness of his ignorance," must stand on the western side of a Masonic Hall. The East represents wisdom and light; senior members sit in the east, a privilege earned after a successful journey "in search of light" through the lodge ranks. The North represents darkness for the Masons and it is here that Dinsmoor expresses a rather dark view of "modern civilization." It is in the east that Dinsmoor's redemption of civilization, and mankind comes in the form of the "Goddess of Liberty" and the "Crucifixion of Labor."⁵⁷

The mausoleum is placed at the northeastern corner of the property, the coordinate where Masons place their cornerstones. This position epitomizes the masonic journey

idea of labor crucified made its way into radical cartoons of the twentieth century as well. The *Appeal to Reason* often highlighted Christ as a savior of the poor, bringing a sense of religious righteousness into the socialist cause. "The Crucifixion of Labor" was the title of an occasional column in the *Appeal to Reason* that contained the results of violent strike suppressions and other company perpetrated atrocities. In 1913 the *Appeal* ran a graphic cartoon of the "Crucifixion of Labor" complete with vivid blood running down from the crown of thorns.⁵⁴

Images and metaphors of the Freemasons also abound in Dinsmoor's sculpture. Dinsmoor was a lifelong, active member of the American Free and Accepted Masons, holding leadership positions in both Jerseyville and Lucas.⁵⁵

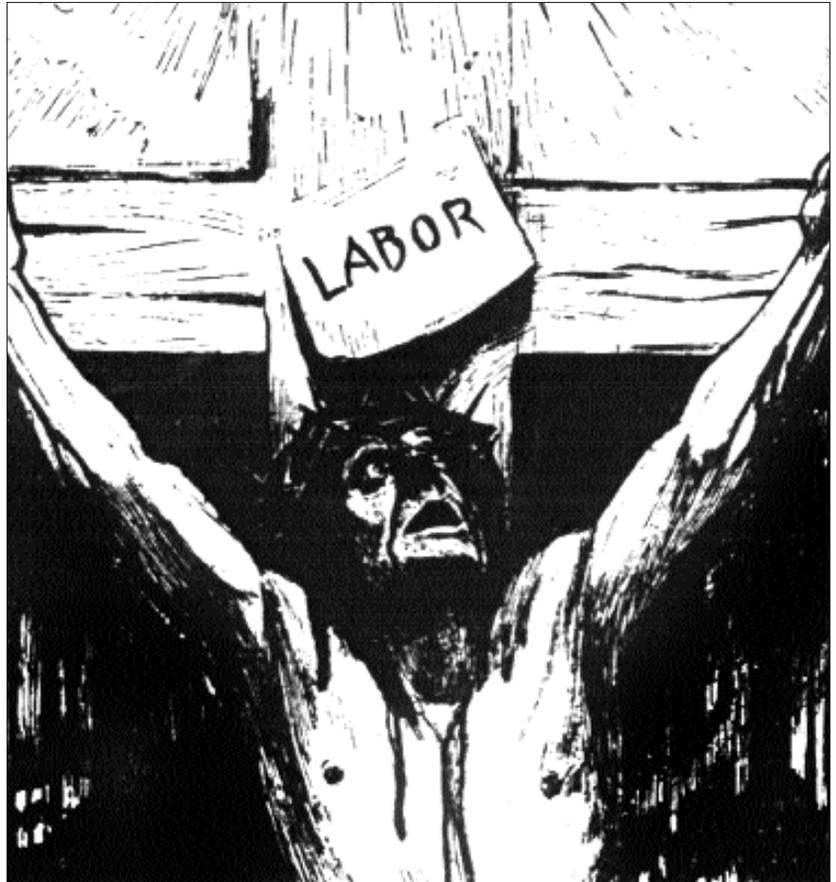
54. See *Appeal to Reason*, January 28, 1899, December 30, 1913.

55. *Register of the A.F. & A.M. No. 198*, in possession of Richard Brozek.

56. *Holy Bible*, 10.

57. *Ibid.*, 31, 38

This cartoon, "The Crucifixion of Labor," ran in the Appeal to Reason, December 30, 1913.



from darkness into life. The masonic cornerstone should be made out of a more durable material than the building itself, outlasting the building. According to the instructions in the masonic Bible, this had the purpose of:

Reminding the Mason that when this earthly tabernacle of his shall have passed away, he has within him a sure foundation of eternal life, a corner-stone of immortality emanating from the Divine Spirit, and which will survive the tomb, returning to his Creator and God, above the decaying dust of mortality and the grave.⁵⁸

The Freemasons explicitly believe in rebirth after death and that a man will be judged by the ethics of his actions in this life. Dinsmoor's strange, cement Garden of Eden was likely his idiosyncratic effort to create a more ethical, fraternal society in this life.

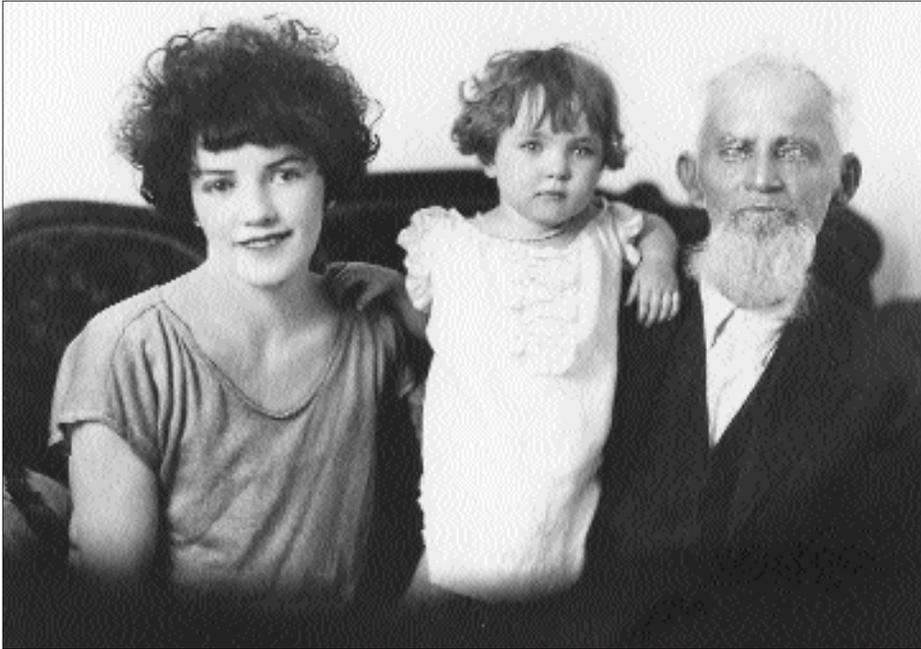
The Garden of Eden is no idyllic garden paradise. Although cement did not have such strong industrial connotations as it does today, it is still a coarse material in which detail can only be roughly constructed. Its dull, lifeless color does not reflect most images of a glowingly green and fertile biblical Eden; likewise, the Kansas that immigrants found was only a simulacrum of that land. Dinsmoor's cement material reflects the tension between the "garden myth" of the newspapers and pamphlets and the more grim reality of farming in Kansas. Throughout the Garden of Eden, Dinsmoor aptly assimilated and manipulated the

images of his society. Dinsmoor's vision is deeply rooted in the cultural environment that surrounded him in life.

Many locals remember Dinsmoor as much for his pretty, young, second wife as for his sculptures. Dinsmoor's first wife of more than forty-five years, Frances, died in 1917 at the age of seventy-eight after an extended illness.⁵⁹ Emilie Brozek, a seventeen-year-old Czech immigrant, moved in with S. P. Dinsmoor sometime in 1921 as a housekeeper. Three years later, on April 22, 1924, Dinsmoor scandalized Lucas by marrying the girl, already several months pregnant with his child. She was twenty, he was eighty-one. The couple's daughter, Emily Jane, was born on September 4, 1924. Although he personally had stopped giving tours by this time, Dinsmoor would happily chat with visitors after Emilie took them around the property. It did not take long for the newspapers to notice "Eve" as a new gimmick for the Garden of Eden. In 1927 Emilie told a reporter that "she would not exchange her lot

58. *Ibid.*, 38.

59. *Lucas Independent*, March 29, 1917.



Dinsmoor poses with his second wife, Emilie, and their daughter Emily Jane.

with anyone.” And Dinsmoor claimed that the sixty-year age difference created no problems for his marriage—he felt no older than his wife. The couple’s second child, John William, was born on January 8, 1928.⁶⁰

In 1929, after Dinsmoor went completely blind, he drafted a new will in which he made explicit his intentions for his Garden of Eden. Dinsmoor specified that it was not to contain “any picture show, dance hall, or any other amusement” for it “is purely educational from the Stone Log Cabin to the Mausoleum and should be kept for that purpose.”⁶¹ This belief in the power of education comes

60. Emilie Brozek was born January 17, 1904, in Roudnice, Austria–Hungary, a city northwest of Prague. Her family considered themselves to be ethnically Czech. Emilie immigrated to the U.S. on March 19, 1907 entering at Galveston, Texas, on the *Koln*. She remarried in 1941 to Casey Rounkles. See John W. Dinsmoor to author, January 29, 2001. Dinsmoor’s marriage to his housekeeper is not so incongruent with his socialist-Christian ethics if one considers that he had been a vocal supporter of women in politics and of a woman’s right to “make up her own mind” about issues. “Certified Copy of Marriage Record” and various letters, Pension file; untitled article, Naegle Collection; *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, July 31, 1927; John W. Dinsmoor to author, May 10, 2000.

61. “Last Will and Testament of S. P. Dinsmoor,” December 30, 1929, Russell County District Court, Russell, Kans. Dinsmoor willed out forty-five hundred dollars to various family members, leaving the rest of his estate to his widow. In addition to the city property on which the couple lived, Dinsmoor still owned forty acres near town and eighty acres in a neighboring county. However, Dinsmoor did not have many liquid assets for the maintenance of Emilie and the children. After Dinsmoor’s death, Emilie wrote many letters to the Department of Veteran’s Affairs trying to secure a source of income for her family and testifying to her financial hardships.

from decades of Populist and socialist rhetoric that education will persuade the masses of the need for legislative limits in America to prevent rule by a rich oligarchy. Despite its more common identification as a bizarre road-

side attraction or work of grassroots art, the Garden of Eden remains an important educational document recording the Populist critique of rampant capitalism.

Dinsmoor died on July 27, 1932. His funeral was carried out, as requested, by his masonic brethren. Emilie continued to live on the property through the Great Depression. When economic necessity forced her and her second husband to leave Lucas, the youngest daughter of Dinsmoor’s first marriage, Laura Elizabeth (Mrs. Harry) Mansfield, and her husband bought the property. The new owners did not give tours; instead they rented out rooms as apartments, often to local schoolteachers. In 1967, after the death of his wife, Harry Mansfield offered the property to Wayne Naegle, a local merchant. The Naegles restored the property and reopened the site to tourists in 1969. In 1989 they sold the Garden of Eden to the Garden of Eden, Inc., a group of grassroots art enthusiasts who organized to preserve and maintain the site.⁶² To this day Dinsmoor’s face can be viewed through his glass-covered casket for a small fee, attracting visitors to see this strange place just off the Kansas highway.

62. “S. P. Dinsmoor Dead,” *Lucas Independent*, July 27, 1932. For information on Dinsmoor’s masonic funeral, see Richard Brozek, interview with author, August 25, 1999. Cathy Dwigans and Ray Wilber, “Survival of Grassroots-Arts Environments,” in Brackman and Dwigans, *Backyard Visionaries*, 177; Joseph Muecke, “A Strange Concrete ‘Eden’ in Kansas,” *Kansas City Times*, July 11, 1958; Wayne and LouElla Naegle, interview by author, August 26, 1999.

Dinsmoor and wife, Frances, are seated in the foreground. Children from left to right, standing: Samuel Anderson, Charles Andrew, Laura Elizabeth (Bess), Thomas Barlow, and James Franklin. This photograph was taken around the time of Dinsmoor's retirement and move to within the city limits of Lucas.



Samuel Dinsmoor drew upon the radical critiques of his contemporary society to put his personal political passions into cement. He cared deeply about the kind of life he was living, about his moral responsibilities to his neighbors. Dinsmoor wanted to ensure America defended the ideals that it claimed to represent. Every person should have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Dinsmoor believed that America should protect true republicanism among its citizens by safeguarding politicians from the influence of a few rich businessmen. The United States government, Dinsmoor believed, had a duty to ensure that every citizen had an opportunity to earn a decent living for decent work; in the case of farmers, this meant protection in times of economic and climatic crisis.

Dinsmoor's profundity tends to be obscured by his showmanship. His moral imperative gets lost in his artistic uniqueness. Yet his very strangeness ensures his audience. True to Populism even after death, Dinsmoor, through his sculpture, addresses his message not to the annals of philosophic or political theories, but to anyone with a bit of free time and a car. The Garden of Eden is the work of a man who wanted to make sense of his country, his God, and his morality. Dinsmoor's sculpture is a concrete testament documenting his struggle to recreate a more just

society, to make sense of his part in the universe, and to educate future generations with his moral convictions. Dinsmoor's intent was to be accessibly didactic and to provoke and challenge his visitor. Through his cement images, Dinsmoor asks viewers: What do you believe in? What moral, social, and economic order do you want the United States to follow? What are you doing to engender equality, fraternity, and liberty in this country? How are you sharing your convictions with others? Dinsmoor's passion was strong enough to ensure that his philosophical and political beliefs in equality and the fraternity of mankind would be pondered long after his colorful presence left his unique garden. 