

1947

## Christian Petersen Shapes 3-Ton Coeds

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### Recommended Citation

Lund, Jean (1947) "Christian Petersen Shapes 3-Ton Coeds," *The Iowa Homemaker*: Vol. 27 : No. 3 , Article 8.  
Available at: <http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/homemaker/vol27/iss3/8>

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# Christian Petersen Shapes 3-Ton Coeds

by Jean Lund

**A**N ENTRANCE way to invite people in is the present project of Christian Petersen, Iowa State sculptor.

Within his small, cheery studio in Veterinary Quadrangle, the entrance figures are gradually taking shape as bits of stone fly under his skilled workman's chisel. A pot of coffee perking on a small hot plate, a green visor and hammer complete his working equipment.

As statues of animals and people watch on in cold approval, Petersen nimbly shapes his first two figures which he calls the "Iowa State heavyweights." Two women originally weighing 7 tons seem astonishing, but are actually typical of other statuary made of the heavy Indiana limestone.

Petersen's "heavyweights" are typical coeds, dressed informally in sweaters and looking at a book together. Beside them another woman is reclining while reading a book. Each figure is over 6 feet high.

Low brick walls topped by sculpture and covering about 35 feet present a general picture of one side of the entrance way. The overly large figures are necessary since "human proportions seem undersized outdoors," Petersen explained.

Six students—five women and one man—will be included in this final group, judging from a small scale model in Petersen's studio. The entire wall will be parallel to the proposed new women's dormitory, Linden Hall, to be located at the intersection of Beech avenue and Lincoln way.

A second wall across from the one described will include mostly men students at work on laboratory problems. This will represent "Science with Practice."

## *Plaster of Paris Models*

Plaster of paris figures serve as models for Petersen as he chisels and hammers the gigantic blocks of stone down to slightly larger-than life size figures. With one eye on his model, seldom a real person, and the natural talent for all art work he's had since a child, he proceeds from there.

As a member of the Department of Applied Art, Petersen teaches the basic principles of sculpturing to 20-30 students each quarter. Lesson No. 1 is learning to see things in three-dimensional proportions and then shaping them that way.

Petersen arrived from Dybbol, Denmark, at the age of 21. Settling in Newark, N. J., he attended the Newark Technical School where he received basic training as a steel engraver. Through this training as a designer and engraver he managed to pay his way through school alone.

It was in Attleboro, Mass., that Petersen first took his one time hobby, sculpture, seriously. Here he set



Christian Petersen grouped this Indian woman and three others around the Union fountain to represent the influence of corn on civilization

up his first studio and concerned himself with making statues, memorials and individual bust work. To help maintain his shop he did small amounts of engraving on the side.

First called to the mid-west to design a Banker's Life medal, Petersen remembers being immediately attracted to the country. From then on, he said, "I made up my mind I would return here one day to live."

#### Panelled Wall

Arriving at Iowa State in 1934, Petersen's first task in sculpture was designing the Dairy Industry court panelled wall. Either side of the library stairs boast another well-known bit of his sculpture, the figures of a young man and woman reading.

Though recognized as an outstanding sculptor with many statues to his credit, Petersen is still looking forward to doing his masterpiece.

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