

Vernon Grant One Of Century's Most Beloved Illustrators

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Winthrop College Archives

Snap, Crackle, and Pop — those three words launched one of the most successful advertising campaigns in American history. And the man who made it possible eventually came to live in Rock Hill.

In 1932, Vernon Grant was a successful commercial artist in New York, providing covers for national magazines like "Collier's" and "Ladies Home Journal" and hauling in advertising contracts from such well-known firms as Gillette and General Electric.

Grant knew that Kellogg's Rice Crispies cereal had a catchy slogan — "Snap, Crackle and Pop." But the product was not selling well in grocery stores. He has an idea — humanize the slogan by creating the characters Snap, Crackle and Pop. Kellogg liked the idea and bought it. Company stock sky-rocketed in value.

During the next decade, Grant made \$250,000 from Snap, Crackle and Pop advertisements, but never signed a contract with the company. In the early 1940s the commercial artist lost a court battle with Kellogg, which gave the company the rights to the three cereal gnomes. Instead of using Grant's creativity, Kellogg hired cheaper, less talented artists.

It was one of the few setbacks in the artistic career of Vernon Grant that has made him one of the century's best known illustrators.

Born in Coldridge, Neb. on April 23, 1902, Grant grew up in South Dakota in a sod house built by his father, a blacksmith.

Grant tried many things as a young man. He was a light heavyweight boxer at the University of Southern California, traveled the Chautaugua circuit during its heyday in the 1920s, studied art at Chicago's Art Institute, and from there headed back to Southern California to a job printing pictures for chewing gum magnate Bill Wrigley.

Grant's study at the Art Institute taught him that his future lay in the field of fantasy. Encouraged by his fellow students, Grant humanized the animal figures he drew, putting hats and shoes on them.

After moving from California to New York, Grant got his break when he signed an exclusive contract with N.W. Ayer, the advertising firm handling the Kellogg account. Hearing the radio commercials for Snap, Crackle and Pop, Grant's vivid imagination conjured up an image of what the characters would look like. The ad agency

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arranged a meeting between Grant and Kellogg. It took 15 minutes for the young commercial artist to sell his idea.

Grant had found the formula. His gnomes began to sell everything from batteries to automobiles, men's shirts to appliances. They also appeared in juvenile books Grant published himself.

During World War II, Grant served under Gen. George Patton's command and did a six-month stay with the traveling USO show, where he interviewed wounded troops in tent hospitals all over Europe.

Grant's war service, however, took a toll on his eyes. In a 1978 interview he recalled, "The fellows who needed me the most always seemed to be over in a dark corner. When I returned to New York, I found I could no longer see the work as I had before."

Before the war, he had married the former Elizabeth Fewell of Rock Hill, a Winthrop College art major, who was studying at New York University.

Grant, his wife, and two children moved back to Rock Hill where he built a rambling ranch house on 670 acres in Pinetucket Plantation. He began farming and raising cattle, something his father had done in South Dakota with considerable success. In one year Grant's farm produced 100,000 pounds of beef.

With the ranch running profitably, Grant turned his considerable talents to civic affairs, agreeing to serve as manager of the Rock Hill Chamber of Commerce. During his eight-year tenure many important things happened, perhaps the most significant being the organization of the city's famous Come-See-Me Festival.

To promote the event, Grant invented a new character — a frog named Glen. Each year for the past 25 years, Glen and an occasional gnome have appeared on posters proclaiming the spring festival. The artist once recalled with a laugh, "A lot of people in Rock Hill probably know me better for Glen the Frog than for my gnomes."

Vernon Grant, one of the country's most successful artists, died in July 1989. Much of Vernon Grant's art can be seen at the Museum of York County.