



Brandywine Valley Murals

Big ideas and even bigger conservation challenges

Joyce Hill Stoner, June 6, 2015

Biggs Museum of American Art

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The Landing of Carteret, 1906-07 by Howard Pyle



Howard Pyle (1853-1911) the Delaware artist and book illustrator praised by European artists William Morris, Joseph Pennell, and Vincent Van Gogh, produced 17 illustrated books, nearly 80 magazine pieces, 3300 published pictures and decorations, and **four murals**.

He also taught more than 100 students, including N. C. Wyeth. Pyle taught his students to paint "REAL things, REAL surroundings, and REAL backgrounds." He demanded historical accuracy in details from buttons to architecture.

On December 2, 1907. Howard Pyle wrote to Cass Gilbert: "I would rather leave behind me a record of my work upon the walls of a national building than I would to realize any other honor that the world could give me."

Howard Pyle (1853-1911)





© 1996 Smithsonian Institution; Courtesy National Museum of American Art

Portrait
miniatures:
tiny, private,
intimate, and
personal.



Murals: Large, public, making a statement about history or politics, must be commissioned.
Lincoln Kirstein said, "If you're going to paint BIG, you need BIG IDEAS."



4 of 9 Murals in Pyle's home, 907 Delaware Avenue, Wilmington, 1905-07

To practice and teach himself about mural painting, Pyle painted a series of murals for his own home. Conceived as a backdrop for his daughter's coming-out party, they would also serve as "advertisements" to secure other commissions. Pyle described the murals as depicting Art, Music, Literature, and Drama.

The Genus of Art, 1905, by Howard Pyle

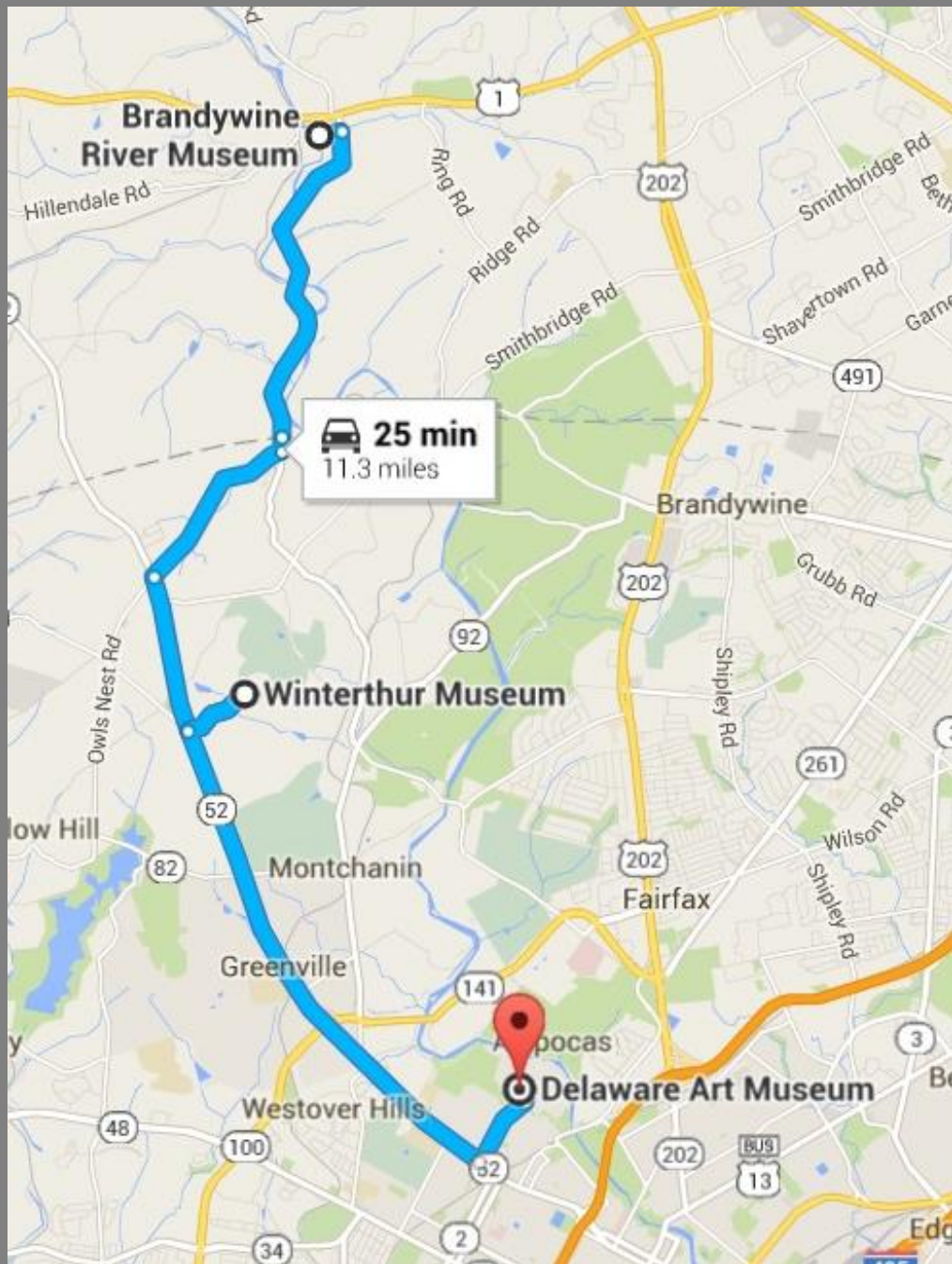


“Genus of Art, clad in semi-transparent golden draperies, is leading a procession of figures who are following admiringly after her. The picture is quite filled with blossoms” [Pyle from Abbott]. The first panel — Genus of Art, 1905 was exhibited in the galleries of the Society of Architects in New York that year — and that same year, Pyle received the commission for a large mural in the Minnesota State Capitol.

Battle of Nashville, 1906, Minnesota State Capitol

Pyle's strategy had worked!

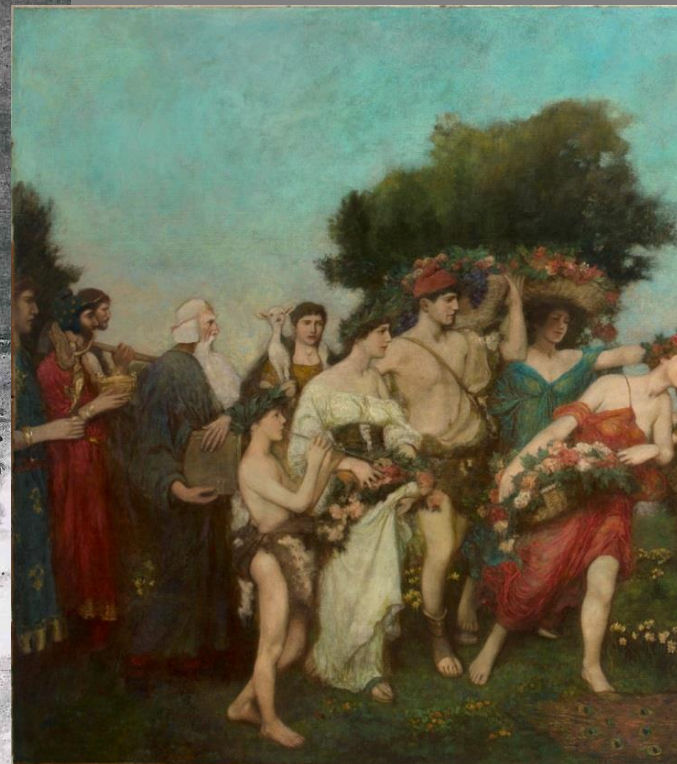
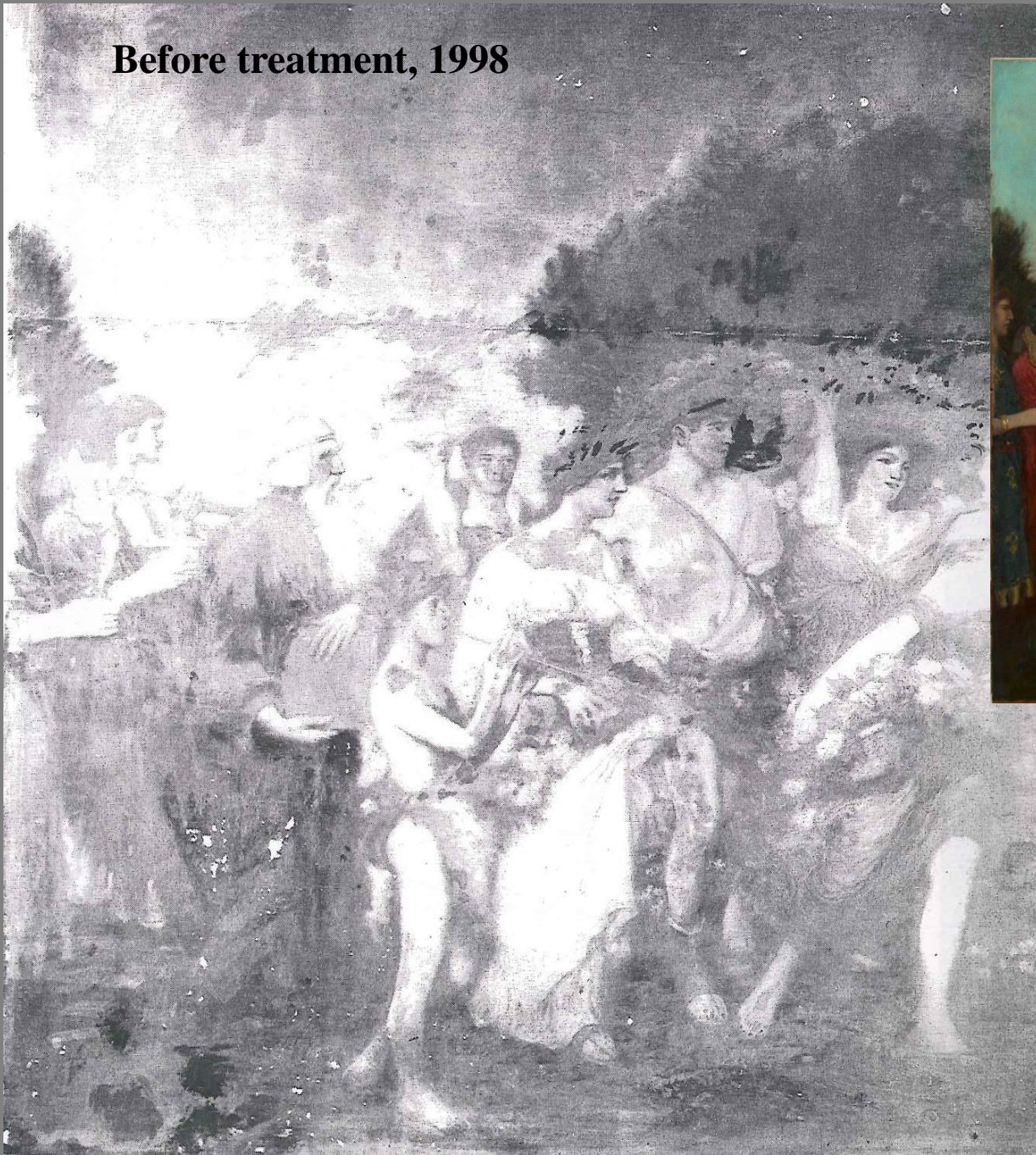




The murals were badly damaged by a fire in 1914 and then badly restored. They were moved to the second floor gallery of the Wilmington Public Library when Pyle's home was demolished to make way for Route 95. In 1923 Professor Pasquale Farina of Philadelphia supposedly used "special methods" to restore pigments that were brittle and crumbly. In 1969 the murals were given to the Brandywine River Museum, but kept in storage. In 1997, they traveled from the Brandywine River Museum to the paintings conservation studio at Winterthur for treatment by the UD-Winterthur painting majors.



Before treatment, 1998



After treatment

In 1999 the Pyle murals traveled to the Delaware Art Museum, where they were on display during a temporary exhibition.



Newell Convers Wyeth (1882-1945)



Howard Pyle's most famous pupil, N.C. Wyeth, purchased 18 acres of land and built a house in Chadds Ford, PA in 1911 with the proceeds from his Treasure Island paintings. His studio included a 220-pane Palladian window and a room for painting murals excavated into the hillside.

Just before he died in 1911, Howard Pyle wrote to Stanley Massey Arthurs: "I have just received your letter of April 5th, in which you tell me that Wyeth is going to paint a series of mural decorations. I think this is a very fine thing for him to do, and I am extremely glad of it."

Christine Podmaniczky, N.C. Wyeth curator at Brandywine River Museum of Art, explains that Wyeth saw mural work as a legitimate way for an artist to expand the confines of the illustrator's profession.



Views of N. C. Wyeth's studios, built shortly after 1911, Chadds Ford, PA



In November 1908 Wyeth wrote to his mother about a new scheme he had developed to paint a series of decorative paintings on the "Indian," and to "suggest to some architect the idea that such decorations would be appropriate in a library or capitol or some public building." In 1911 he adapted two paintings from earlier paintings depicting Native Americans (executed for Scribner's in 1909) for his first mural commission, decorations for the Grill Room of the Hotel Utica.

The murals were painted in his studio and shipped to Utica, where Wyeth adhered them to the wall. They were destroyed by 1933. A friend of the artist wrote, "I first saw the mural on the way to Newfoundland in 1914 and for years tried to buy it. However, when they attempted to take it down, the whole wall fell apart and the picture was completely lost."





19 x 60' N. C. Wyeth mural, *Apotheosis of the Family*, 1932, WSFS, Wilmington

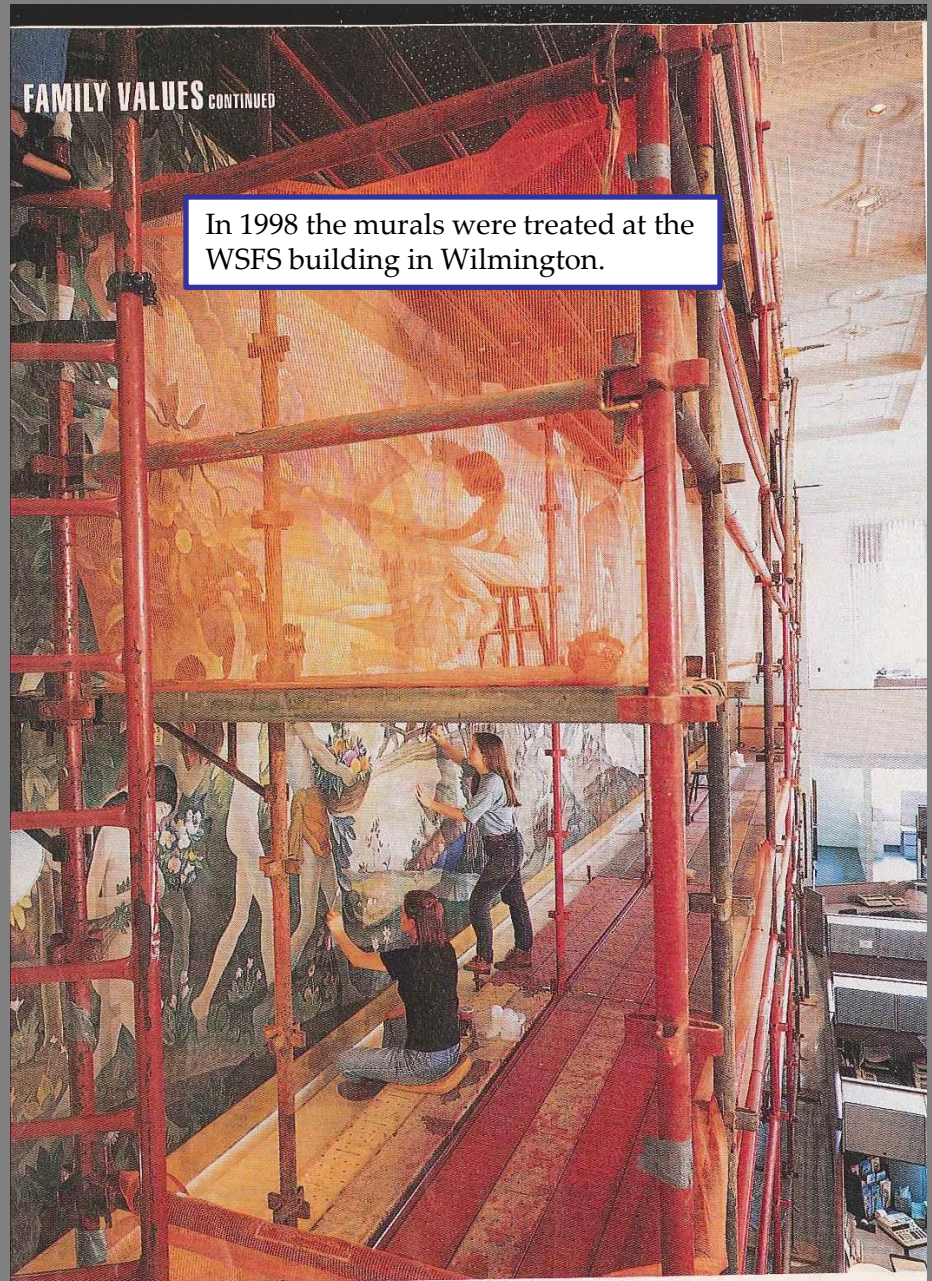
Wyeth's landscape subjects reflect an innate respect for the nurture of the land with no urban inclusions. This 60-foot mural was painted in five sections, with friends and neighbors posing.





The completed canvases were rolled, packed and transported to the WSFS Bank site. The Wolheim Brothers, from a New York company that specialized in hanging the murals, were hired to do the installation.

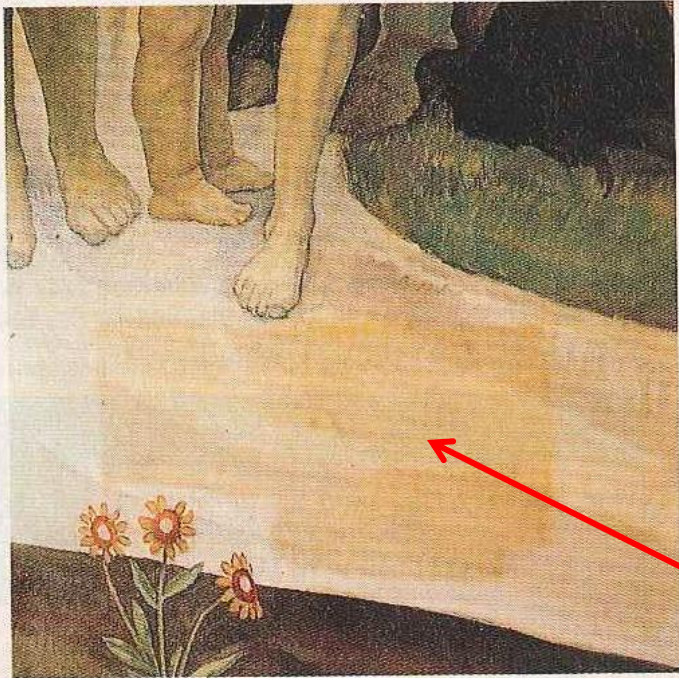
Years later, Andrew Wyeth told the following story: He had posed for the adolescent boy with the arrow in 1931-1932, when he was about 14. When his fiancée, Betsy, came to meet the family just before their wedding in 1940, his father, N.C., met the train and took her to see this "boy with no genitals."



FAMILY VALUES CONTINUED

In 1998 the murals were treated at the WSFS building in Wilmington.

IN THE BANK'S LOBBY, Judy Dion (seated) and undergrad Lisa Moberg work from three-story scaffolding. Conservator Barbara Buckley is above them; the feet climbing the ladder belong to grad student Alexis Miller.



A PARTIALLY CLEANED detail provides graphic evidence of the aging that afflicted the mural.

Cleaning tests revealed brighter colors after the grime was removed.

The treatment of the murals received national media coverage in *Life Magazine* and *The New York Times*, as well as locally in the *Wilmington News Journal*.

on, Del. July 5, 1998, Section C

arts hype for Vance C2

Arts

Lucinda Williams Got a news tip for Arts? Call 324-2855.

TOP ALBUMS

1. MP Da Last Don, Master P
2. It's Dark and Hell Is Hot, DMX
3. Never S-A-Y Never, Brandy
4. Capital Punishment, Big Punisher
5. "Dr. Dolittle" — The Album, soundtrack
6. Sparkle, Sparkle
7. "HavPlenty," soundtrack
8. Cool Relax, Jon B
9. "Bulworth," soundtrack
10. Anytime, Brian McKnight

Source: Billboard

A Wyeth gets a good washing

Armed with solvents and swabs, art professors and students restore N.C. Wyeth's 1932 mural at WSFS headquarters to its former colorful glory.

By GARY MULLINAX
Staff reporter

Alexis Miller is on a shaky scaffold 30 feet above the floor and she's not about to look down. Instead, she looks straight across a foot-wide gap at a pinkish cloud blown across the sky by a wind-spirit with flowing hair. She's also looking at the accumulation of grime and yellowed varnish that has discolored this image and every other space on the giant mural painted by N.C. Wyeth 66 years ago.

Miller is in the upper reaches of the Wilmington Savings Fund Society building to take care of the problem. Her tools are gel-based solvents, a stick and a wad of cotton. Off comes the old, to reveal a far brighter and more colorful painting than bank cus-

tomers and employees had seen before. Several others join her every weekday during banking hours in restoring "Apotheosis of the Family" to the condition it enjoyed when the mural was installed to celebrate the bank's 100th anniversary in 1932. They expect to finish in mid-August.

The mural — 60 feet long and 19 feet high — in the Wilmington branch at Ninth and Market streets celebrates the family, work and the changing seasons. We see the landscape in spring at the left of the mural, summer toward the center, then fall

and finally winter at the viewer's right. A young Andy Wyeth, N.C.'s son, modeled for the nude boy seen with a bow and arrow in the middle of the painting. All around the family are workers engaged in planting, harvesting, weaving and other activities. Most are nude or seminude.

When it was installed, the mural was thought to be the largest painting in the United States.

"You can see a night-and-day



Joyce Hill Stoner works on scaffolding to restore a 66-year-old N.C. Wyeth mural at the Wilmington Savings Fund Society building in Wilmington. She says the difference in colors is like "night and day."



Graduate student Alexis Miller (left) and Stoner survey the progress they've made.

change when we finish an area," said Joyce Hill Stoner, a professor with the Winterthur/University of Delaware program in art conservation. "N.C. used spectacular colors. There were

See MURAL — C4



The mural, titled "Apotheosis of the Family," celebrates family, the work ethic and the changing of the seasons, from spring on the left through winter on the right.



Jack Bostrom

New Sheen for a Huge 1930's Painting

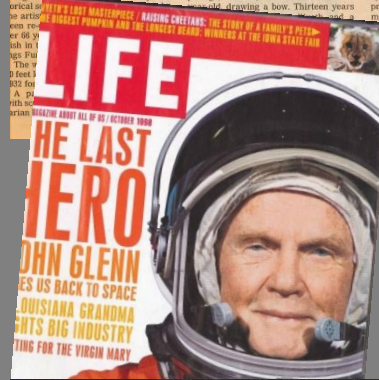
Figurative murals, inspired by allegorical scenes, were the most popular art form of the 1930s. The artist, who was 66 in 1932, had just finished a painting of a family in a landscape. The artist, who was 66 in 1932, had just finished a painting of a family in a landscape.

restoration work also includes rejoining together the five canvas panels make up the work, one of the largest public buildings in the nation. The region Savings Fund Society donated \$9 for the project.



N.C. Wyeth's "Apotheosis of the Family," painted for a Wilmington, Del., bank in 1932, is being restored. Left, Carole Havlic cleaning the work, which is one of the largest in a public building in the United States.

New York Times, 17 August, 1998



WYETH DELIBERATED for many months before settling on his principal subjects: family activities and emerging industry, both symbols of the American dream and the progress of civilization.

A YEAR OF MAN'S LABOR provides a visual record of the year's work, from autumn and winter on the far left, to spring and summer on the far right.

PRELIMINARY SKETCHES led to a final design of planting, sowing, plowing and harvesting, from left to right, to the mural's five canvases.

A PREEXISTING right of stone on which was etched along to allow N.C. to reach the middle and top of each canvas.

THE FIVE CANVASES are bound directly to the wall with white lead and oil paint, which acts as a powerful adhesive.

FROM THE FIRST sketches to the final unveiling in January 1932, the mural took a year and a half to complete.

"SYMPHONY" Absolutely! That's how a Delaware magazine described the mural in 1987.

RESTORATION, conceived as a 10-week project and conducted publicly by the bank's lobby, was completed on budget and on time.

THE "FRAMES" in a variety of shades of brown and black, which are used to hold the painting and are glued to the wall.

THE BORDER was so dry that restorers were amazed to discover that it is covered with red (and gold) pigments.

N.C.'s son Andrew posed as the boy bringing in the sheaves.

The model for the redheaded girl was N.C.'s daughter Ann.

STEWART posed for the area of the anchor and the sailing boat at left.

THE YORK OF GLEN at center represents, according to a contemporary account, "the struggle over the soil."

CAN YOU HEAR IT? A 1931 magazine claimed, "the gay little voices within 'heavily'."

CAN YOU SEE IT? Old Man Winter has nearly concealed among the trees, his face in shadow, the trees at far right.

N.C. Wyeth completed the Apotheosis of the Family—the huge mural commissioned to mark the centennial of the Wilmington (Del.) Savings Fund Society—in 1932. Glued directly to the wall, comprising the bank's entrance lobby, the painting spent the next 66 years succumbing to insect damage, mold, loss of varnish and every passing year. This summer, the five-canvas, 60-foot-long Apotheosis was at last returned to professional conservators and students from the University of Delaware.

Nemell Covers Wyeth was the first of the famous Wyeth painters. Born in Swedean, Mass., in 1872, he studied with the illustrator Howard Pyle and, like Pyle, found success illustrating books. Wyeth's series of children's classics for Scribner's remained in print today. N.C. always insisted upon the term "fine artist" rather than "illustrator" and outside the confines of his work in books, he let his ambition run. He completed his first series of murals, or "large decorations," for the Hotel Union in N.Y. in 1911, and he was more than eager when a Third National bank president, Frederick Stoner, approached him about an even bigger work across greater labor. Stoner's idea was to depict

PARTIALLY CLEANED small portions provide evidence of the aging that afflicted the mural.

FAMILY VALUES

THE NEWLY RESTORED, A GREAT MURAL CELEBRATES AMERICA'S IDEALS. PHOTOGRAPHY BY FREDERICK CHARLES

PHOTOGRAPHY BY FREDERICK CHARLES



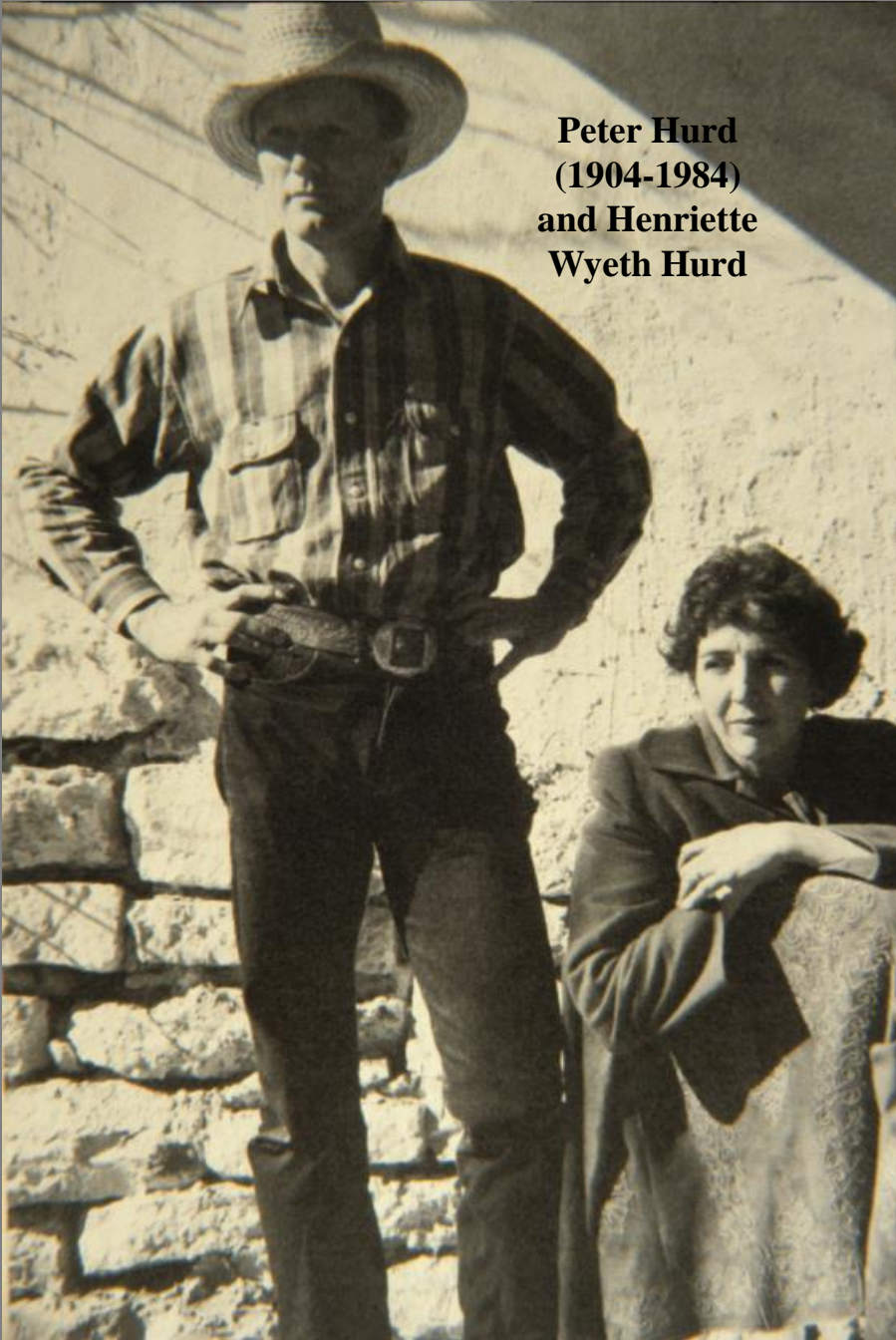
In 2005 WSFS announced that the bank would be sold to build a hotel.

In 2007-2008 the murals were taken down, covered with facing paper, rolled up, and taken to a warehouse for storage.



Unfortunately, the murals were rolled with the paint side IN, causing cracks in the paint surface.





**Peter Hurd
(1904-1984)
and Henriette
Wyeth Hurd**



Wilmington, Delaware home of Frederick Stone

Peter Hurd arrived to study with N.C. Wyeth in 1923 and married N.C.'s artist daughter, Henriette, in 1929. In 1932 Hurd was commissioned by Frederick Stone of Wilmington to create a four-part dining-room mural frieze of the Brandywine Valley in the four seasons.

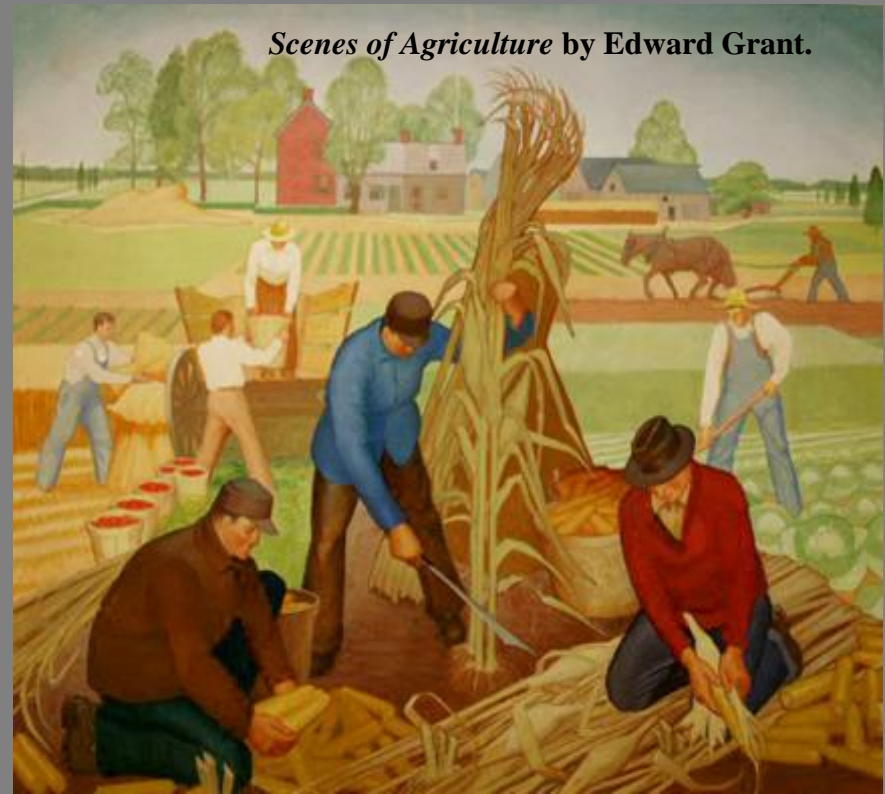
Hurd wrote in July of 1932 that he intended to create the mural in "thin oils on panel board." However, by September he had **completed one panel** of the frieze and noted: "It is my best decorative work thus far. I have discovered a wonderful new medium ...the gesso-coated panel of the renaissance painters....It is a marvelous surface to work on, and I have been able to get a colour quality and flatness hitherto unknown to me...with tempera color."

Hurd taught the tempera technique to N.C. Wyeth and to his young brother-in-law, Andrew Wyeth, who used it for the next 77 years.



**Murals for the Frederick Stone
dining room by Peter Hurd, 1932**

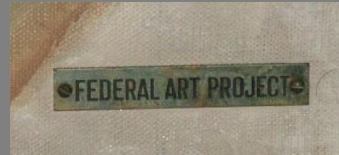
Murals hanging *in situ* in the John Bassett Moore School.



SMYRNA MURALS

In 2003 we were asked by Debbie Wicks, Superintendent of the Smyrna school district, to treat eight large murals in the John Bassett Moore School.

The murals were painted by Delaware artists Stafford Good, Edward Grant, and Walter Pyle, Jr. Five of the murals (the ones that hang in the library) were made and hung in 1936 with funding by the Federal Arts Project.



School Scenes, by Walter Pyle, Jr. 1936

John Bassett Moore School in Smyrna, mural treatments, 2003



Sun-Times, Wednesday, June 4, 2003 Page



Joyce Hill Stoner, a professor and senior conservator in the Winterthur University of Delaware Art Conservation Program, uses a swab to gently clean dirt and grime that has built up on one of the murals from John Bassett Moore School.

Funds sought for JBM mural restoration

The Smyrna School District is seeking sponsors to "adopt a mural" to help pay for restoration of the large paintings at John Bassett Moore School. The eight murals, painted by Brandywine River School artists Walter Pyle Jr., Stafford Good, and Edward Grant in the 1930s, are valued at \$250,000. However, through the years, dirt and grime has built up on the paintings.

The murals, which hung in the auditorium and library, were taken down before renovations started at the school. They have been shipped to a warehouse in Wilmington, the space donated by MBNA, where they will be restored - if the funding can be

raised.

So far, the district has received a \$10,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and donations of \$3,000 each from the JBM/SHS Alumni Association, Round Maple Farms (Dale Scuse and Michael Scuse), and the Wal-Mart Corporation.

The district is seeking at least five more sponsors of \$3,000 each, according to Superintendent Debbie Wicks. Each sponsor's name will be engraved on a plaque which will be placed next to the mural when they are rehung at John Bassett Moore School.

Businesses, groups, or individuals interested in adopting a mural should call Wicks at 653-8585.

Above from left to right: The Conservation team along with District Superintendent Debbie Wicks, Dick Appleton from MBNA, Paul Weagraff, State Deputy Director of Arts, Joyce Hill Stoner, and Brian Baade of WUDPAC.

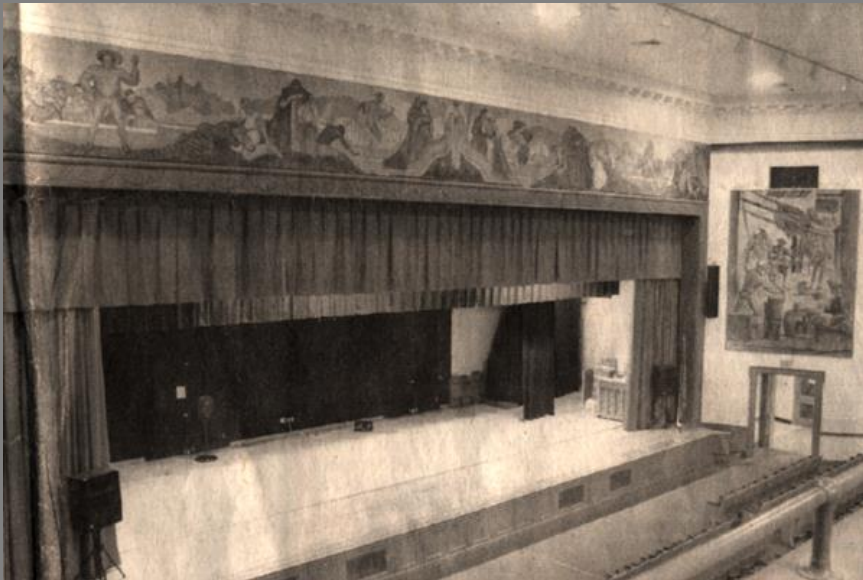
Above right: spot testing the murals.

Article from the *Sun-Times*, June 4, 2003

Composite image of the Shakespeare mural before treatment.



View from the balcony of the school auditorium, with the Shakespeare frieze above the stage. *Wilmington News Journal*, 10 September 2002.



Original article announcing the painting of the Shakespeare Frieze. Walter Pyle on left and Edward Grant on the right with C.W. Schantz's photo in the center. *The Smyrna Times*, March 2, 1938

In 1937, the superintendent of the Smyrna School District, C.W. Schantz, who had worked to arrange funding for the original five murals, was killed in a car accident. The school staff, faculty, and students joined together to pay tribute to him. Grant and Pyle, Jr. were brought back to the school and again funded by the Federal Arts Project to create the large Shakespearean Frieze that stretches the length of the proscenium in the auditorium as a tribute to Schantz.



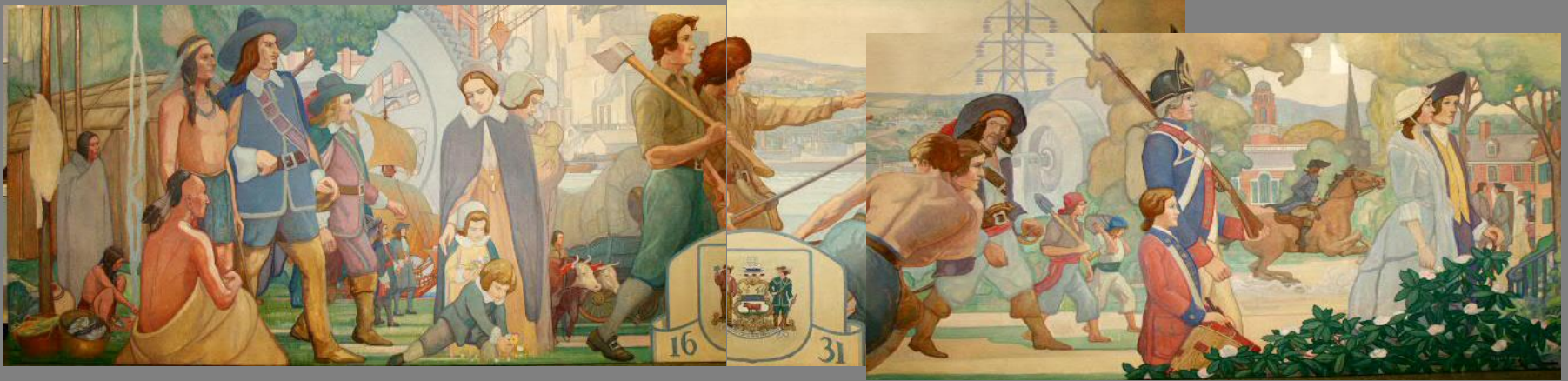
All eight Smyrna school district murals were created in a direct manner using similar materials. They were painted with very thinned-down layers of oil paint, as a cost-savings measure during the Depression, and without the final varnish layer for protection or saturation. They may have been intentionally left unvarnished for a dry “fresco” look. In several areas, charcoal lines of the under drawing are visible, such as in Falstaff’s left arm. Also, pencil gridlines visible through the thin paint show that the mural was enlarged from a smaller version of the composition.



Charcoal underdrawing is visible in Falstaff’s left arm.



Pencil gridlines are visible throughout this mural.



Stafford Good, b. 1888

Stafford Good studied at the Art Institute of Chicago and also with N.C. Wyeth.

He was a native of England and served in the Canadian Royal Engineers in World War I, spending three years in France. Andrew Wyeth said Stafford Good had only one good eye when he came to Chadds Ford to study with N.C. Wyeth. Good had a motorcycle with a sidecar and would give Andrew and his siblings presents and rides in the motorcycle.



**Edward Grant
(1907-1998)**

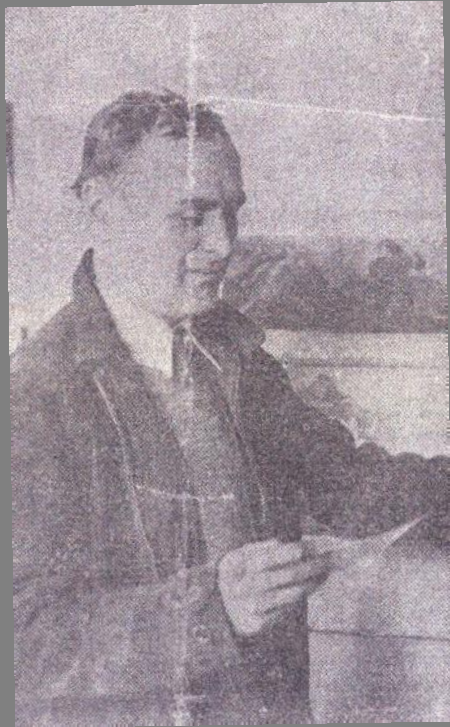


1/3 of the Shakespeare mural, painted with Walter Pyle, Jr., 1937



Edward Grant studied under Howard Pyle and N.C. Wyeth. Grant was art instructor in the Wilmington Academy of Art, the Studio Group, the Art Club, and the Rehoboth Art League. He was hired as a supervisor for Delaware's WPA/FAP Mural Program. In the early 1940s, the painter was hired as the artistic director of the Hercules Powder Company, where he remained until his 1968 retirement.

Walter Pyle, Jr. (1906-1986)



Another 1/3 of the Shakespeare mural, painted with Edward Grant



Walter Pyle, Jr. was the nephew of 19th-century illustrator, Howard Pyle. He was also the son of Ellen Bernard Thompson Pyle, who painted many successful covers for the *Saturday Evening Post*, and the brother of Caroline Pyle Wyeth (who married Andrew Wyeth's brother Nat). In fact, because his father died when he was young, he "gave away" his sister when she married into the Wyeth family. At the time there was a continuing rivalry between the artists in the Pyle family and those in the Wyeth family. When Walter Pyle, Jr. lost the blue ribbon in an exhibition at the Wilmington Society of Fine Arts to Carolyn Wyeth (Andrew's sister), he gave up painting and took up chicken farming.



Shakespeare frieze [*Titania*]

Grime removal tests on *School Scenes*

There was no varnish; so the grime, dirt, and 70 years of coal dust (as the school was heated by coal) had settled directly onto the painted surfaces.



Treatment space in the MBNA warehouse, Wilmington, I-95 and Route 7



Unpacking the mural

Making a photographic record



**Removing grime
using citrate solution**



Smyrna mural treatments, 2010.
Murals by Willard Borrow, 1940.s
Supervised by Dawn Rogala.

Vacuuming and removing debris and backing boards.



**Mural by Aaron Douglas
501 E. 10th St., Wilmington, DE**

Left: Before treatment

Right: After treatment

This mural could not be removed for treatment because it was painted directly onto the plaster wall.



**Aaron Douglas
(1899-1979)**



Aaron Douglas (1899-1979) was a Harlem Renaissance artist who created powerful images of silhouettes using pastel colors, interlocking abstract forms, and in this case, concentric circles.

Alain Locke called him the “father of Black American art,” and Dr. David Driskell has named him the leading artist of the Harlem Renaissance. In 1942 Douglas painted a mural with Haitian themes above and around the fireplace in the home of two of Wilmington’s prominent Black citizens, Dr. William and Grace Goens. Grace Goens was Douglas’s distant cousin, and he painted her portrait in 1944.

In 2011 the house was in private hands and no one was living there at the time. We were called in by Harmon Carey, who was raising funds to have it treated.

Consolidation and cleaning, summer 2011



Left: The signature and date were blached and flaking.

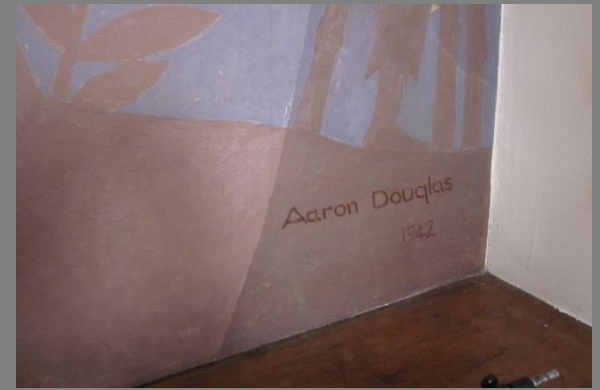
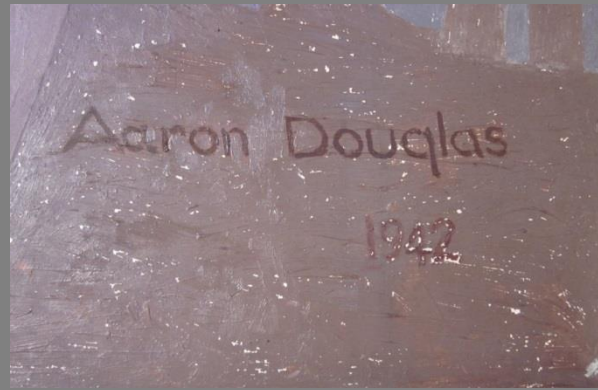
Center: After consolidation and cleaning.

Right: After retouching the small white losses with reversible inpainting materials.

Problems included moisture around the chimney, which needed to be fixed.



Old discolored retouchings.



Claymont Community Center murals by Walter Pyle, Jr., 1937-1939

First visit 2010, Treatment 2012-2014

Left: Agricultural Claymont

Right: Industrial Claymont



Mural panels being
transported to
Winterthur's
painting
conservation
studio, 2013



These murals depicted Agricultural Claymont and Industrial Claymont. Each mural was painted on five panels, which were removed from the wall and taken to Winterthur's painting conservation studio for treatment. The area highlighted in the photo on the left depicts the Claymont Community Center.



Industrial Claymont by Walter Pyle, Jr.

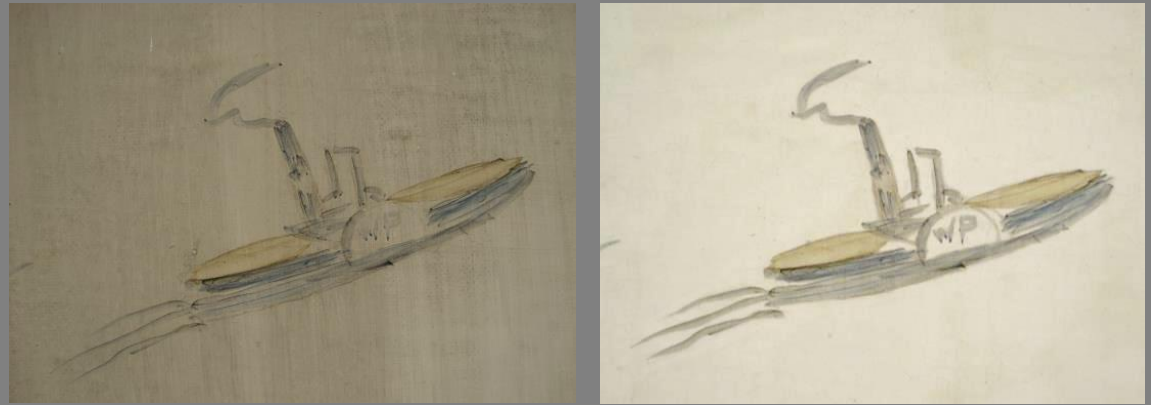
Delaware artist, Edward Loper, Sr. (1916-2011) pictured with the figure he had posed for when he was a 23-year old art student.



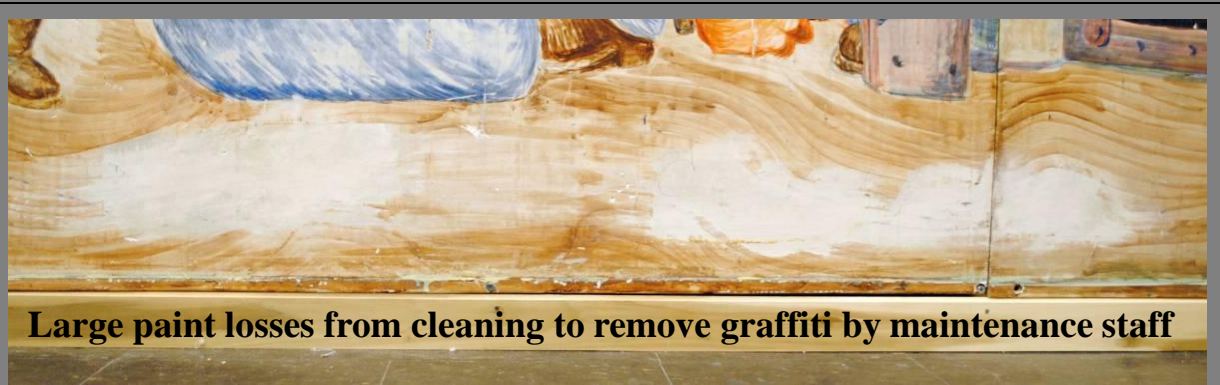
Typical graffiti



River with boat, before and after cleaning



River during cleaning process



Large paint losses from cleaning to remove graffiti by maintenance staff

Treatment issues included removing streaky dirt and graffiti from very soluble paint. Paint loss occurred in areas where cleaning staff had scrubbed off the graffiti.

Restoration expert, Richard Wolbers (right), designed cleaning solutions by creating microemulsions.





Before and after inpainting on the arm in *Industrial Claymont*

Before treatment, 2012, *Industrial Claymont*



After treatment, 2013



Wide-angle photo after re-installation of the murals

Cleaning the water-sensitive ground layer of the Claymont murals required using specially-mixed solvents and microemulsions. Conservators are continually conducting research and tests to determine the best cleaning materials and techniques and also the most durable and light-fast paints to recommend for use by muralists.

The next slide shows some of these research efforts on mural paints.

Re-installing the *Agricultural Claymont* mural, May 2014

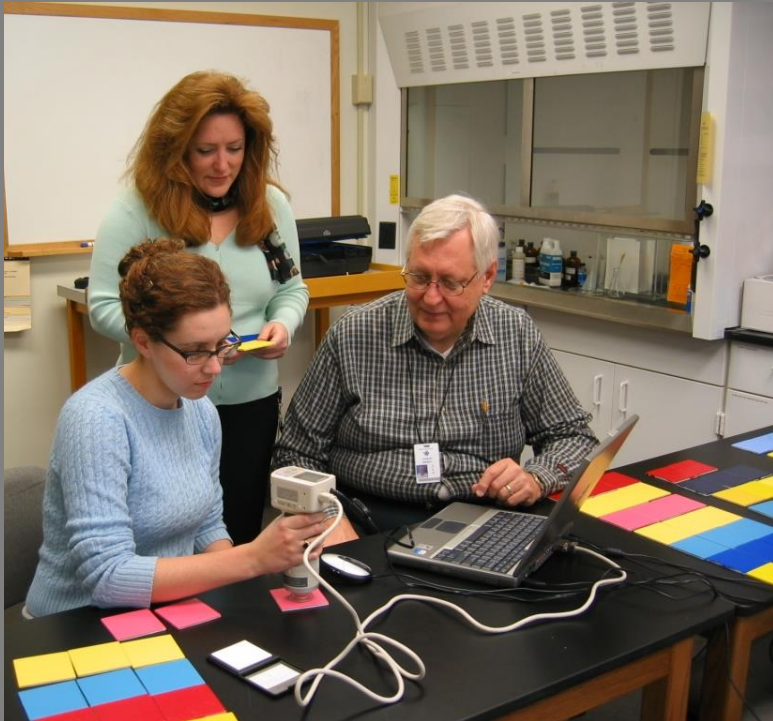




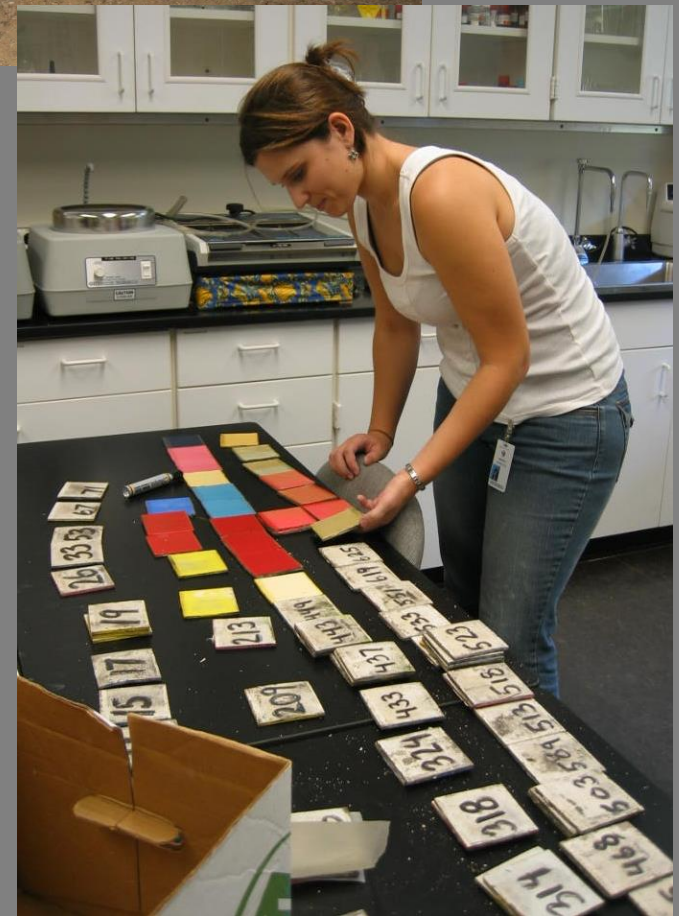
**Undergraduate honors student
Jessica Keister preparing paint samples**



**Paint
samples on
45-degree
angle racks
on the
Winterthur
grounds**



**Testing paints:
Jessica Keister,
Amber Kerr-
Allison, and Dr.
Joseph Weber**



**Amanda
Norbutus,
Preservation
Studies Ph.D.
graduate**



**Thank
you!**

