

NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM ON CD (MS WORD FORMAT)

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE (must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)

Street address: 917 ~~XXX~~ Dickinson Street

Postal code: 19147

Councilmanic District: First (1st)

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: "Iron Plantation near Southwark--1800"

Common Name: as above

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☐ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☒ Object mural inside
of U.S. Post Office

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☐ good ☒ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown n/a

Current use: Decorative.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION not applicable.

Please attach a plot plan and written description of the boundary.

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a description of the historic resource and supplement with current photographs.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1938 to 1938

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1938

~~Architect, engineer, and/or designer:~~ Artist: Robert E. Larter

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: n/a

Original owner: United States Dept. of Treasury

Other significant persons: -----

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☒ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☐ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☐ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☒ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach

9. NOMINATOR

Organization ----- Date -----

Name ~~XXXXXX~~ Celeste A. Morello, MS, MA Email -----

Street Address 1234 South Sheridan Street Telephone 215.334.6008

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19147-4820

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 10/28/2021

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 12/16/2021

Date of Notice Issuance: 12/17/2021

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: US Postal Service

Address: PO Box 701

City: Columbia State: MD Postal Code: 21045

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: 1/19/2022

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: 2/11/2022

Date of Final Action: 2/11/2022

☒ Designated ☐ Rejected

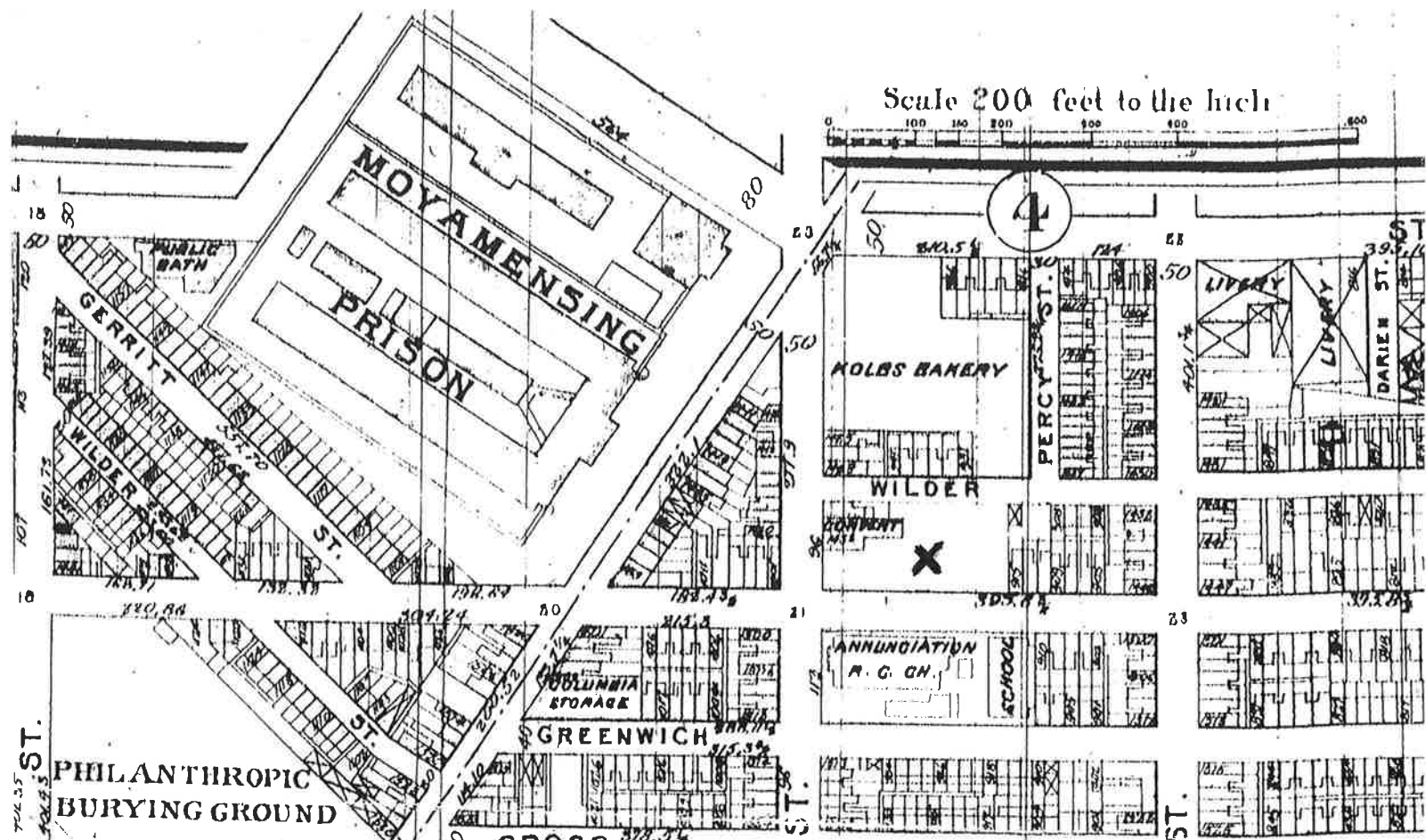
3/12/18

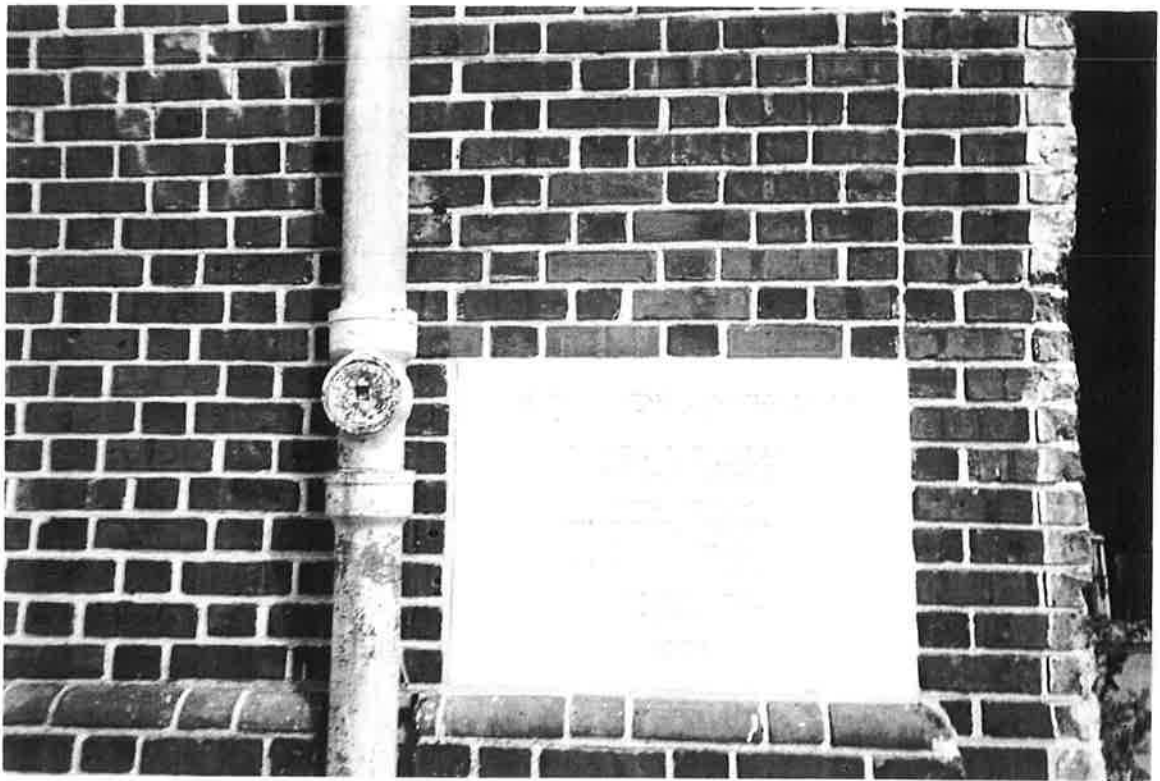
LOCATION of NOMINATED MURAL



The Sanborn Atlas (below) gives information on how the neighborhood for the new Southwark Post Office had appeared for a "Colonial-themed" architectural design on the building, then the the nominated mural's styling.

SOUTHWARK POST OFFICE: 917 DICKINSON STREET





The Southwark Post Office's cornerstone (at southeast) named Department of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. as the administrative authority over James A. Farley, the U.S. Postmaster General in "1935." Victor D. Abel (1887-1949) was the AIA member selected to design the Colonial Style post office building. According to architectural historian Sandra L. Tatman, Ph.D., Abel spent his personal and professional life between Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia, working in the private and government sectors. From 1908 to 1936, Abel designed for various architectural firms. But in 1917, according to Tatman, he seemed to specialize more in government-sponsored public housing, a rather new program in social welfare. Abel may have been in Washington, DC "as a consultant for the Procurement Division of the Public Buildings Administration" when he designed the Southwark Post Office. Abel apparently had influence in this nominated mural's subject and styling for the 26 year old Larter to create a painting to correlate to Abel's architectural design.

The Flemish bond masonry also recalls the 18th century.

DESCRIPTION:

The nominated mural by Robert E. Larter, "Iron Plantation near Southwark--1800" is an "object" as defined by the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 14-203:

A material thing of functional, aesthetic, cultural, historic, or scientific value that may be, by nature or design, movable yet related to a specific setting or environment.

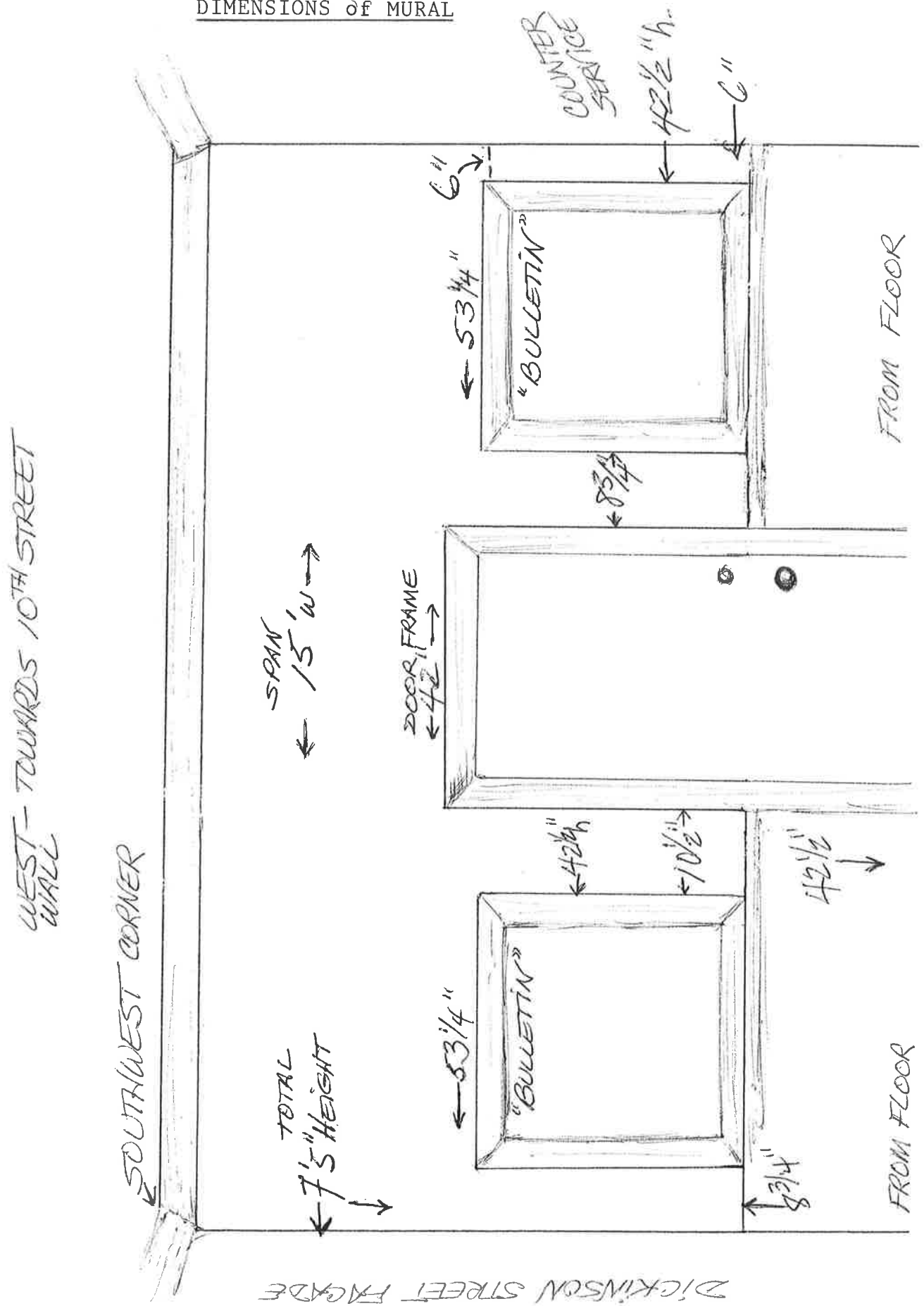
This "New Deal" mural is affixed to the west wall of the Southwark Post Office¹ and appears to have been done in oil paint upon canvas that was glued onto the wall. It is signed.

The composition is a scene of male figures in britches and 18th century attire at work alongside cattle, an overseer on horseback in 18th century garb, some buildings in the distance and some minor figures. Brown hues dominate the composition which is anchored by the deep black horse towards the center and softer shades of black in the workers' britches on either side of the horse. Of note is the plantation manse which architecturally resembles the Southwark Post Office. There are some irregularities, such as the hound dog caught in the air and three birds flying at the waist-level of one of the workers. But the main irregularity is that the viewer really cannot identify the activities in this mural. Iron foundries need a water source and disposal site and none are captured here. There also is no blasting furnace with fire; only some smoke, which belies why the two males are shirtless. Of the workers to the right, what they are holding and what they are doing is not discernable.

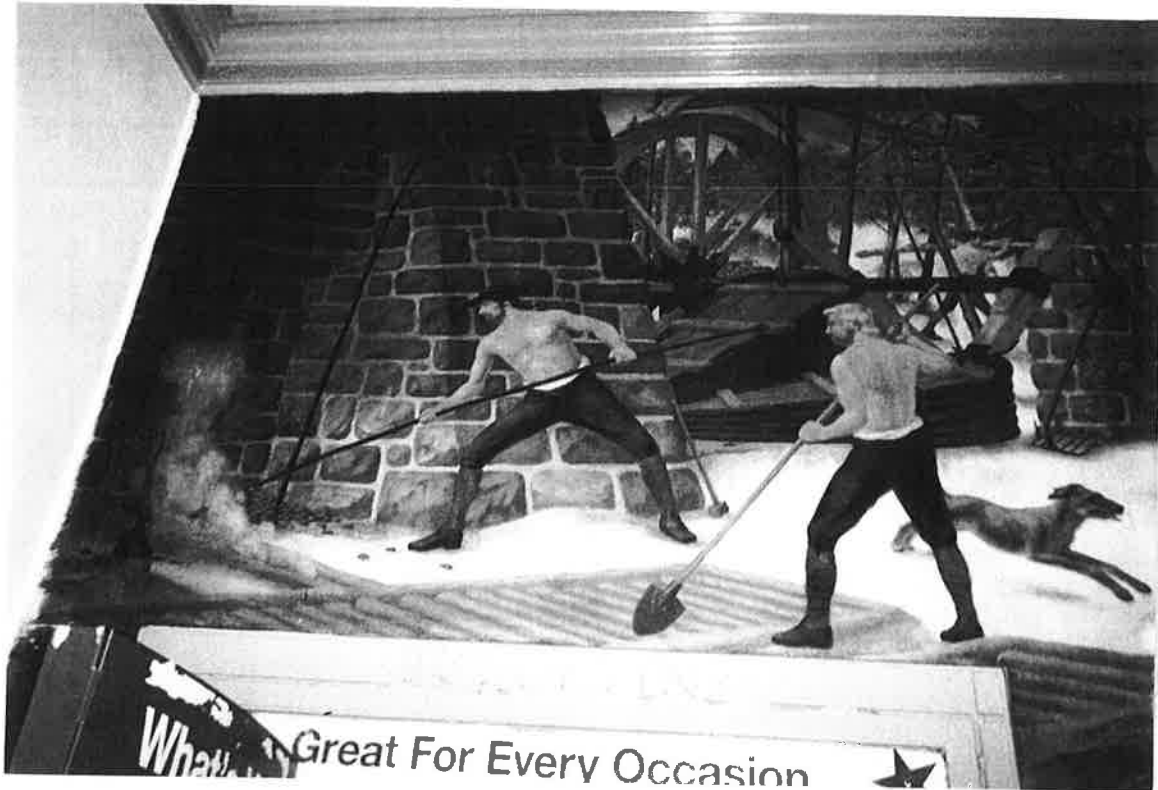
Otherwise, the figures are anatomically-correct, but not modeled: this may have been the artist's intention to feign the mid-18th century style of American artists who fell behind the Rembrandts, or contemporary van Dykes to make way for Copley here.

¹ The east wall's mural, "Shipyards at Southwark" was removed.

See final article in Appendix for more information about the east wall mural



THIS MURAL is on the POST OFFICE's WEST WALL



Top: Far left of mural; Bottom: Far right.



WIDER VIEWS of MURAL



Photographs (Staff Supplemented)



Figure 1. Southwark Station Post Office, October 2019. Source: Google.



Figure 2. Subject mural inside of Southwark Station Post Office. Source: Jimmy Emerson, DVM, Flickr.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/auvet/15623853681/>



Figure 3. Left side of mural. Source: Linh Dinh, <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/southwark-station-post-office-murals-philadelphia-pa/>.



Figure 4. Right side of mural. Source: Linh Dinh, <https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/southwark-station-post-office-murals-philadelphia-pa/>.

STATEMENT of SIGNIFICANCE:

The nominated mural from 1938 is one of the many "New Deal" paintings commissioned by the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts. It is not a "Works in Progress (WPA) mural, as at Family Court. The instant mural is the remaining art in the Southwark Post Office in South Philadelphia executed by a 26 year old artist, Robert E. Larter (1912-1970). The post office was constructed in 1935 from the design of a colonial-era building by Victor D. Abel (1887-1949), which seemed to have influenced the styling of the mural.

The importance of this mural, as well as other post office murals from 1934 to just before the United States' entry into World War II (1941) is pure Americana. Philadelphia-born artist George Biddle (1885-1973) arrived at an idea of the federal government sponsoring art projects to bring original art to the public during the Depression.² Biddle wrote to his old Groton classmate, President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 and proposed his idea as a way for the New Deal programs, i.e., "...the social ideals that you (FDR) are struggling to achieve" may be more fully accepted. Post offices were the best, most publically-accessible buildings to display the art. After mulling on the idea, Roosevelt appointed a staff at the Treasury Department; a jury would select the artists and art work. But there were restrictions on what the public would see (and what the Federal Government would pay for.) The subject matter of each mural was supposed to portray what identified the community--with nothing violent or horrific or offensive to younger people. Here, at the edge of the former Southwark District, Larter composed a scene of "iron workers" because prior to Consolidation, to the end of the 19th century, the old Southwark area was where two of the nation's most productive iron foundries had existed: the Pascal Iron Works, later, "Pascal Iron Works-Morris, Tasker & Company"(fd.1821) and the Merrick or Southwark Iron Works (1828). Neither date to

² Biddle memorialized his involvement in publishing "An American Artist's Story" in 1939 to verify that the program was of his concept and how he communicated it to Roosevelt in 1933.

the "1800" year that the artist assigned to the mural.

The nominated mural is unusual in coordinating with the architecture of the post office building--which most other murals did not do. The narrative of the composition was to revive the past of Southwark as well as recall Philadelphia's history as one of the "leading manufacturers in this country" of iron products, from the 1820s, past the Civil War to where Southwark became known as "the largest manufactory of iron in the United States."⁴ Boosting local industries to evoke civic pride during the Depression was one goal for the murals. Another was to exhibit original art to those who otherwise would not have seen any. In 1938, the Southwark Post Office would have served a mostly workingclass group of mainly Italian, Irish, Slovak and some German ancestries,⁵ descendants of the New Migration (1880-1920). Moyamensing Prison was one-half block away, casting a gloomy pall over the area. Just who could appreciate Larter's work was a guess when overall, critics of the Treasury Department's program decried it before the program ceased.⁶ Therefore, the limitation in the time of this post office art brings its historical context into significance. Moreover, Larter had been in the company of artists who had renown, such as Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood whose work epitomized American art in the 1930s.⁷

The Southwark Post Office mural merits designation to preserve its intent and place in American history. It was part of a national program to benefit the public during the Depression, and it recalls local history, now gone.

Celeste A. Morello, MS, MA
October, 2021
(Still during COVID limitations)

³ Freedley, Edwin T., Philadelphia and Its Manufactures. Edward Young, 1859, p. 321.

⁴ Scharf and Westcott, History of Philadelphia. 1884, p. 1148iii.

⁵ The neighborhood was mainly Roman Catholic: parish records, Annunciation, BVM; St. John Nepomocene; St. Alphonsus.

⁶ McKinzie, R.D., The New Deal for Artists. Princeton U. Press, 1973, pp. 72; 179.

⁷ Ibid., p. 73.

The Southwark Post Office's mural, "Iron Plantation...."

(a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation.

Decorative art in federal buildings is part of the American heritage.⁸ At first, sculpture was placed in Independence Hall during President George Washington's term, then portable oil paintings were installed in the new Capitol's Rotunda in Washington, D.C. as early as 1817. Art has been commissioned to articulate the aspirations and spirit of nationalism at a time when the country was still expanding westward. The pervasive theme of the federally-funded art has been in establishing a true "American" philosophy that is independent of any foreign influences--one that arose from a freedom of political or monarchical constraints.⁹ In the 1930s, as the nation sought ways to maintain unity through rough economic years, President Franklin D. Roosevelt heard from one of his classmates, George Biddle (1885-1973), from the elite Biddle family of Philadelphia. Biddle turned to art after leaving his legal studies at Harvard. He spent some time at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts where he would exhibit his work from 1916 to 1966. Eventually, Biddle would finish his law degree, but also pursue art studies in Paris, later in Munich before service in the American Army during World War I. The "New York Times" obituary described Biddle's work in art as critically "sympathetic" and his other works having "a satirical view of American life." Biddle's murals for the Department of Justice Building in Washington, D.C. were deemed "inartistic" in "depiction," but perhaps at the time, the American public did not want to see realistic capturings of American life as the Depression affected many in the early 1930s.

⁸ See Kennon, Donald (Ed.) The U.S. Capitol: Designing and Decorating a National Icon. Athens; Ohio University Press, 2000.

⁹ "Journal," J.B. Antoine de Verger, noting Columbus monument there in 1782. Brown, M., American Art. Abrams, 1979, p. 142 noting that "Congress voted \$32,000 as a commission for four (Trumbull) paintings for the Capitol Rotunda" in 1817. Also, Riley, EM, "The Independence Hall Group," in Transactions APS, p. 17, 75n on artist Robert Pine's "most illustrious scenes of the late revolution" in Independence Hall's Assembly. (citing "Penna's Packet" Nov. 15, 1784.)

11.8.73

THE NEW YORK TIMES, TH

GEORGE BIDDLE'S DEATH in 1973
VERIFIED THAT HE CONCEIVED THE IDEA
FOR POST OFFICE ART.

WHO WAS WHO IN AMERICAN ART
(1999)

BIDDLE, George [Painter, muralist, sculptor, writer, critic, lecturer, graphic artist] b.1885, Philadelphia, PA / d.1973, Croton-on-Hudson, NY.

George Biddle

Addresses: Croton-on-Hudson, NY. Studied: Harvard Univ., B.A., 1908, L.L.B., 1911; PAFA; Académie Julian, Paris, 1911; Munich, 1914-15 with Prof. Heinemann; PAFA, 1912-13.

Member: Am. Soc. Painters, Gravers & Sculptors (vice pres., 1934); Nat. Soc. Mural Painters (pres., 1935); Mural Artists Guild (pres., 1937-38); Nat. Soc. Arts & Letters (vice pres., 1962); Soc. Am. Graphic Artists; Am. Artists Congress; Artists Union; Artists Equity; Inst. Arts and Letters; Woodstock Artists Assoc.; AIC. Exhibited: PAFA, 1916-66; NAD, 1916-48; Corcoran Gal. Art, 1916-19, 1930-47, 1958 (solo); S.Indp.A., 1917, 1927, 1928, 1936; Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, 1918; New York City Art Center, 1926; Am. Inst. Graphic, NY, 1927; Detroit Inst. Arts,

1928; AIC, 1932-33, 1936, 1942; Carnegie Inst., 1935, 1950 (solo); WFNY, 1939; John Herron Art Inst., 1943; Santa Barbara Mus. Art, 1944; Phila. Mus. Art, 1947; Brooklyn Mus., 1948; NYPL, 1940 (solo); Calif. Pal. Legion Honor, 1953 (solo); Univ. Southern Calif., 1955 (solo); RISD, 1961 (solo); Univ. Delaware, 1963; MMA; WMAA; BMFA; SFMA; San Diego FA Soc.; Los Angeles Mus. Art; Library Congress; retrospective of prints circulated by U.S. Information Agency in Japan, India, Italy and other European countries; Harco Gal., San Francisco, 1996 (solo); Salons of Am. Awards: Huntington Hartford Foundation fellowship, 1954; Edward MacDowell Colony art award, 1956; purchase prize, Brandeis Univ. Work: Mod. Mus. Art, Tokyo, Japan; Butler Inst. Am. Art, Youngstown, OH; Fogg Art Mus., Cambridge, MA; CGA; Walter E. Chrysler Collection; U.S.P.O., Brunswick, NJ; MMA; WMAA; MoMA; PAFA; PMA; BMFA; SFMA; San Diego FA Soc.; LACMA; LOC; NYPL; AIC; Newark Public Library; CPLH; Kaiser Friedrich's Mus., Berlin; Galeria d'Arte Moderna, Venice; John Herron Art Inst.; Denver AM; Dallas Mus. FA. Commissions: fresco & sculpture (with Helene Sardeau), Supreme Court Bldg., Mexico City; fresco, Nat. Library, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; murals, Justice Bldg., Washington, DC (now removed to the Univ. of Maryland). Comments: Social realist painter. Pivotal figure in the creation of Federal Arts Programs during the Depression. In 1933 he wrote to his friend and former Harvard classmate, Pres. Franklin Delano Roosevelt, urging him to implement a government project employing artists. Biddle's first federal mural commission, "The Tenement," (c. 1935, now at Univ. of Maryland) for the Dept. of Justice Building in Wash., DC, sparked a controversy because of its "inartistic" depiction of poverty. Positions: teacher, various schools, including Colorado Springs FAC, 1936-37; chairman art advisory committee, War Dept., North Africa, 1943; art advisory committee, State Dept; member, Fine Arts Commission, 1950; member, Nat. Commission for Effective Congress. Publications: author, "An American Artist's Story" (1939); author & illustrator, "Adolphe Borie;" "Boardman Robinson;" "Green Island;" "Artist at War;" "George Biddle's war drawings," 1944; author & illustrator, "The Yes and No of Contemporary Art," 1957; author & illustrator, "Indian Impressions," 1960; author & illustrator, "Tahitian Journal," 1968; contributor, national magazines. He painted impressionist works while living in Giverny, 1915-16, and later traveled to Tahiti (residing there 1920-22) and Bermuda. Sources: WW73; WW47; Baigell, Dictionary; 300 Years of American Art, vol. 2: 805; P & H Samuels, 44-45; Bruce Weber, The Giverny Luminists: Frieske, Miller, and Their Circle, 18-19; American Scene Painting and Sculpture, 56 (w/tepro); Crotty, 91..

George Biddle, Artist, Is Dead; Muralist and Painter Was 88

Organized Depression Arts
Project — Best Known for
Work in Justice Building



George Biddle

George Biddle, the muralist and portrait painter who helped organize Federal arts projects during the Depression, died Tuesday at his home in Croton-on-Hudson, N. Y. He was 88 years old.

As a muralist he was best known for his five fresco panels in the Department of Justice building in Washington. "It was a good job, the best he ever did," according to John Canaday, art critic of The New York Times. "It depicted the everyday people of this country with extraordinary dignity, and it still stands up today."

Mr. Biddle also executed scores of portraits, including those of such artist friends as Raphael Soyer and Yasu Kuniyoshi. Over the years his style and his approach to art changed several times.

"I am old enough to have experienced or participated in the important art movements since the turn of the century," Mr. Biddle said several years ago. "These were French impressionism; the American Ashcan school; the school of Paris and cubism during those early and exciting days when it first exploded on the world; regionalism; the Mexican mural movement; the New Deal subsidy of art — what we may loosely lump together as the social-conscious trend of the twenties and the early thirties; and the postwar currents of contemporary art."

Viewed as Conservative

Mr. Biddle never quite reconciled himself to abstractionism, and in recent years he faded from public view. A number of more modern artists and critics came to see him as a conservative or even a reactionary in art terms.

A member of the illustrious Biddle family of Philadelphia, Mr. Biddle was born there Jan. 24, 1885. Liked his younger brother, Francis, who was later Attorney General of the United States, he attended Groton and graduated from Harvard College.

He went on to Harvard Law School and eventually took his degree in 1911. Illness delayed graduation for a year, which he passed in Texas, where he found his metier. He pursued it in Paris at the Julien Academy and later at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.

Mr. Biddle returned to Paris to paint, served in the United States Army in World War I and then journeyed to Tahiti to "isolate myself from temporary art currents in order to catch up with lost time."

thing isolated from it." It was a credo he was to follow for the rest of his life.

Returning to New York, Mr. Biddle held number of one-man shows, which critics received sympathetically. His paintings reflected his Polynesian experiences as well as a satirical view of American life. He then shifted to mural painting, in which he earned a high stature.

With many of his artist friends on the breadlines in the Depression, Mr. Biddle in 1933 wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt proposing that the Federal Government support mural painting. Although the Commission on Fine Arts was initially opposed, Mr. Biddle persevered, and later that year a work-relief program was established. In six months some 15,000 paintings were produced, many of which found their way into Government buildings all over the country. The project was later expanded and remained in effect through the thirties.

'Artist at War'

In World War II Mr. Biddle organized squads of artists who did battlefield paintings. Parts of his own collection were published in 1944 in "Artist at War" and showed portions of the fighting in Italy.

Mr. Biddle executed a number of big murals on commission, including those for the National Library in Rio de Janeiro and the Supreme Court building in Mexico City. His pictures hang in many important museums, including the Musée of Modern Art and the Whitney, both here; the Fogg Art Museum in Cambridge, Mass., and the Corcoran Gallery in Washington.

Mr. Biddle married three times. His wives were Nancy Coleman, Jane Belo and Helen Sardeau, a sculptor. He is survived by a son of his second marriage, Michael, a New York artist.

The nominated mural, however, is rarely mentioned in the "New Deal" mural literature, which does not suggest it lacks importance. The discussion herein will highlight what the nominator found that merit the designation.

First, the Southwark Post Office mural conforms to the Treasury's preference for "American scene" subjects. Here, Larter had composed what is a genre painting, which art historian H.W. Janson defined as:

A work of art, usually a painting, showing a scene from everyday life that is represented for its own sake.¹⁰

The Treasury Fine Arts Section staff also wanted subjects which related to the locale's history. For such a broad, diverse urban-to-suburban-like expanse as Philadelphia, each post office enhanced by a mural at that time could focus on anything proximately historic and meaningful to the community. If Larter changed his art style to correlate to the post office building's design in a colonial interpretation, Larter could use as an example John Greenwood's "Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam" (1758)(P.15) It was near the dating of the buildings captured in Peter Cooper's "South East Perspective" of Philadelphia (c.1730). These styles were pre-Revolution, somewhat unsophisticated in execution, but noteworthy. Greenwood's work was called "the only true example of a genre painting from the Colonial period"¹¹ while Cooper depicted some distinctive architectural details common among workingclass residences of the time.¹² Abel the architect seemed to have relied upon Cooper and what had been along the Delaware River in Queen Village¹³ and Pennsport in 1935 prior to the construction of Interstate 95. (See p. 18)

¹⁰ Janson, HW, History of Art. Abrams, 1979, p. 744.

¹¹ Brown, op.cit., p. 91. See page 15 for image.

¹² Smith, Robt., "Philadelphia Architecture:1700-1900" in Transactions, APS, Vol. 43, Part I, 1953, pp. 290-291.

¹³ These were destroyed, but are referenced in Webster, R., Philadelphia Preserved. Temple U. Press, 1981; photos at PHC.

The Southwark Post Office mural's character is profoundly different than what his contemporaries were painting in other post offices. (See p.163) Larter combined the two artistic movements that were evident in the 1930s, as American artists asserted a "home-grown" style divorced from European influences. Brown and other art historians tracked the two art styles as

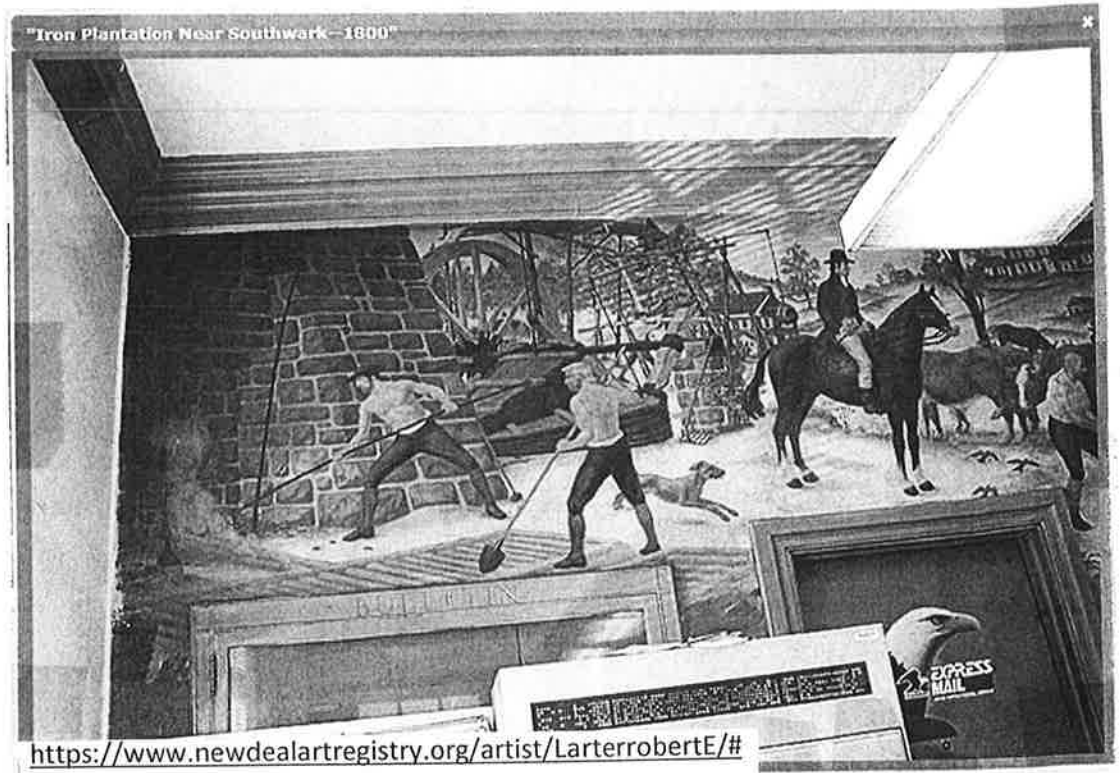
- 1) Realism, "a cheerless, depressing, but nostalgic" expression and,
- 2) Regionalism, "an art of the rural country, rather than the grim, industrialized city."¹⁴

With Southwark, where the post office was located at the far western edge, Larter may have been guided by Abel and other local Treasury representatives for a subject for this wall, as well as for the east wall (which was more historically-accurate to dating). Larter was from outside of Pennsylvania; Bach noted that Abel and the "Treasury's superintendent" had "insisted on very specific changes in Larter's sketches"¹⁵ which may have been influenced by the building's design as well.

Southwark is one of the earliest settled areas in what is now the City of Philadelphia: Southwark had been in the County of Philadelphia before Consolidation. Development was concentrated along the Delaware River; the western part of Southwark was farmland when in 1835, Moyamensing Prison was laid out on the border of Southwark and Moyamensing Township on Passyunk (Road) Avenue. The Southwark Post Office's cultural and social development seemed more aligned with that area, almost 10 blocks from the Delaware River, and developed after Moyamensing Prison's opening. The demographics of

¹⁴Brown, op.cit., pp.444-452. Brown specialized in this period and published a few contemporaneous writings on "Cubism-Realism" and on artists Edward Hopper and Charles Burchfield.

¹⁵Bach, Penny Balkin, Public Art in Philadelphia. Temple U. Press, 1992, p. 104.



Larter's 1938 mural's figures suggest movement, just as those in Greenwood's 1758 scene (below). Similarities include the attempts at modelling, accuracy in attire, a composition that moves with the figures' positioning, loss of weightiness in the figures--but the figures communicate.

109 John Greenwood. *Sea Captains Carousing in Surinam*. c. 1758.
Oil on bed ticking, 37 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 75 $\frac{1}{4}$ ". St. Louis Art Museum





Figure 62. George Harding, panel of "Custom and Court Activities." Custom House, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.



34 Fletcher Martin's executed mural in the Kellogg Post Office, showing the arrival of a prospector named Kellogg

CONTEMPORARY ART STYLES OF OTHER POST OFFICE MURALS.

(Images from (Top) Marling; Above: McKinzie; Right: Park & Markowitz.)

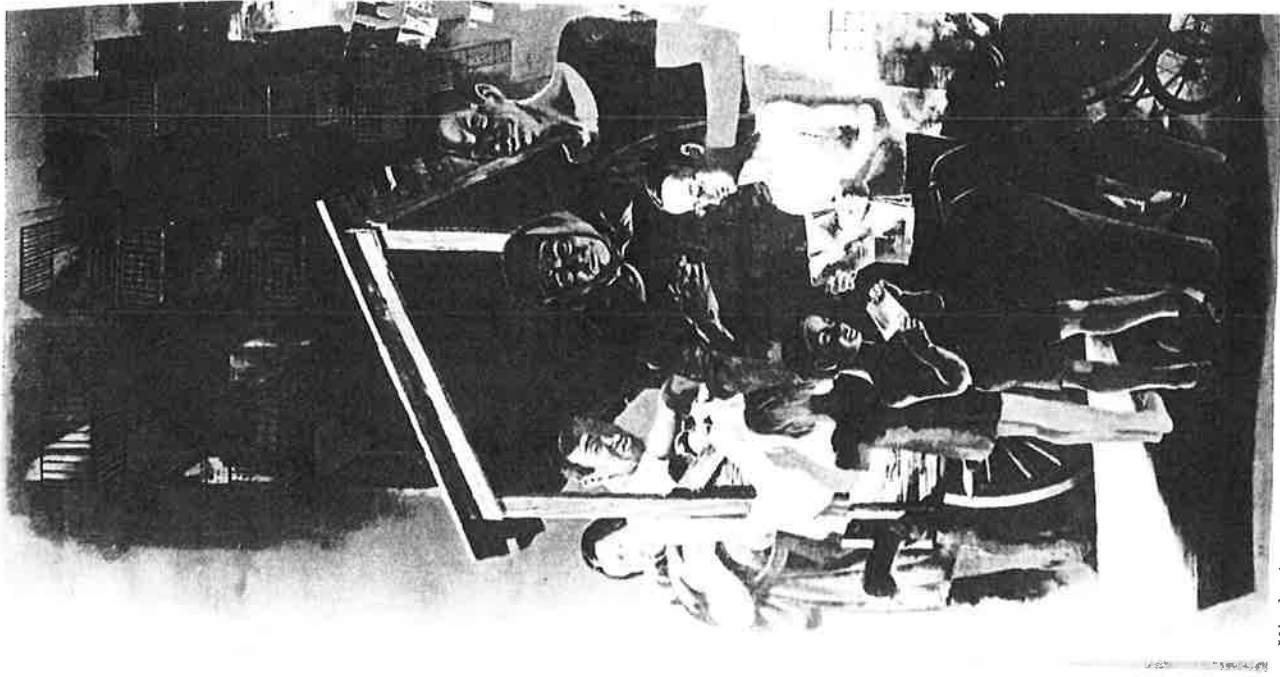


Figure 59. Kindred McLeary, "The Lower East Side," New York, New York.

the Southwark Post Office's location in 1935 were those around Annunciation, Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic church (fd. 1860), and some from the Slovak St. John Nepomucene Church (across from "Pat's King of Steaks" even then). Some residents were descendants from the second generation Irish Catholics who moved southward from St. Paul's R.C. Church¹⁶ into brick rowhouses

Any "art" displayed to these locals would have been primarily religious art from the Catholic churches and schools. What George Biddle believed as art conveying Roosevelt's "New Deal" ideology, others had an altruistic concept that post office art was brought to those who had never seen original art, and that "exposure¹⁸ to the fine arts...brought spiritual and emotional betterment." The political and social aspects of the New Deal murals' character to Park & Markowitz were surmounted with their observation that "Both New York and Philadelphia are distinguished by ambitious series of murals about contemporary life and cities as centers of industry and commerce."¹⁹ Part of this statement concerned the George Harding murals in the U.S. Custom House and his neighborhood murals in the post office in North Philadelphia. (Again, ignoring Larter's two murals here.)

McKinzie first noted that prior to the painting of the murals, some "critics demanded that art conform to architecture"²⁰ and this may explain Larter's subject matter and styling. Abel's design was appropriate to the tight brick rowhouses, none of which showed any diversity in design. It's subtle and ripe for architectural discussion, but here the architecture can be matched to Larter's depiction of "iron working" from "1800" to appear as if part of the overall scheme of colonial design.

¹⁶ Parish files. CHRC. Morello, CA. The Times and Peoples of St. Paul R.C. Church, 1843-1993. Jefferies & Manz. 1992.

¹⁸ McKinzie, op.cit., 72.

¹⁹ Park, M. and Markowitz, G., Democratic Vistas. Temple U., 1984, p.78.

²⁰ McKinzie, p. 70.



(Above) Peter Cooper's c. 1730 painting of what could be Southwark shows pitched roofs forming gables on mostly two-story residences. Architect Victor D. Abel would use a brick belt course in his Southwark Post Office design; multi-paned windows in alignment and detached buildings--not rows--formed the historical accuracy of Abel's design.

Cooper's simplistic rendering would have gone well with the Southwark Post Office, but Larter accomplished such characteristic styling in portraying an "American Scene" genre, somewhat realistic, and capturing a significant part of Southwark's history (albeit later than 1800) to exemplify the iron industry in Philadelphia and in Pennsylvania. Lembeck wrote that "...the most important of Pennsylvania's abundant resources were iron ore..."²¹ This was the desired effect.

²¹Lembeck, David, "Rediscovering the People's Art: New Deal Murals in Pennsylvania's Post Offices." in (on-line edition) Pennsylvania Heritage. Summer, 2008.

Bach noted that "mural painting was influenced--and often controlled--by architects" with earlier murals especially when the T-Square Club brought artists and architects together, then after the National Society of Mural Painters formed in 1895. While Abel undoubtedly aided Larter, a 26 year old, just a few years from his graduation at Yale University, Larter's two murals seemed purposely done not in the prevailing contemporary style. But the artist did have the "realism" and "regionalism" afforded by a community such as this far-off part of Southwark.

Interest in the New Deal post office murals, especially the instant Larter work, was found on-line in at least two sites and in a site associated with the Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission. (See Appendix.) The scope of Lembeck's study was on "Pennsylvania's eighty-eight" post office works of art (including sculpture) which placed our Commonwealth second to New York (State) in the 1,200-plus New Deal art for post offices. Presently, there is only one Larter mural on display and it is in need of repair in several areas. Larter was known more in Kansas in his years after the Southwark Post Office murals, and his near-anonymity among others in 20th century art is not evident in the sparse and few accounts of his life. One biographical listing²¹ wrote that Larter was teaching at Washburn College in Topeka, Kansas in "1938" which implies (if correct) that Larter had a job awaiting after he finished at Southwark Post Office. He also was said to have painted another post office mural (Oswego) in "1940. His portfolio, exhibitions and commissions were insufficient for his listing in Mantle Fielding, Benezet and the Dictionary of Art. Bach's research into the National Archives file on Larter revealed that his experience at the Southwark Post Office was met positively by locals.

²¹ Craig, Susan V., Biographical Dictionary of Kansas Artists (active before 1945). (Craig is the Art & Architecture Librarian at the University of Kansas and compiled this information.) on-line.



POST OFFICE MURALS DISPLAYS

The Southwark Post Office mural (above) has irregular dimensions--mainly to accommodate the building's interior plan. Larter's work involved figuring what would be in the narrow parts between the door and "Bulletin" boards, samely as the ones elsewhere in Pennsylvania featured in Lembeck's 2008 article.

In this manner, the post office murals served a decorative purpose.



U.S. Post Office Building, Selinsgrove: adorned by George Warren Rickey's tempera on canvas, Susquehanna Trail, since 1937.



U.S. Post Office Building, Muncy: John W. Beauchamp's Rachel Silverthorne's Ride (1938) depicts a local heroine warning of an imminent British-allied Indian attack in 1778..

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION of SOUTHWARK POST OFFICE'S MURAL:

Throughout the literature on the New Deal post office art, the critics' comments provided information on local social attitudes towards the art work which the federal government wanted for their communities. McKinzie documented the squabbling among Treasury staff on subjects to be depicted, and Raynor admitted that "Many local communities deemed the approved designs unacceptable due to theme, content, method of expression or design elements." None of these remarks were recorded about the Southwark Post Office's murals. However, the subject of the "Iron Plantation near Southwark--1800" is chronologically inaccurate.

Lembeck had reported that "iron ore" (along with anthracite) was among Pennsylvania's most important natural resources. Only a few generations ago, the southeastern region in and around Philadelphia knew of Bethlehem Steel, Lukens and Coatesville Steel, and then Camden Steel as havens for immigrant labor especially from the 1890s to the 1990s. When iron forging for the new city of Philadelphia began was unknown, but William Penn was documented as recognizing "The existence of mineral of copper and iron in divers places in the province," in 1683.²² Scharf & Westcott's History (1884) noted a Thomas Rutter in Germantown who had a foundry in 1716-1717, "the first iron work in Pennsylvania"²³ before Valley Forge (1742), Hopewell (1744) or Hereford Furnace(1745)--all marked by the Commonwealth. From where City and County residents were able to get an iron worker to shod a horse or provide everyday articles had not been recorded. The 1884 History wrote that a "Pascal's furnace" was located on the northwest corner of 8th and Walnut Streets in "1747" and by "1787" George Washington boasted that "Pascal's" was the "largest and best in America."²⁴ A "Joseph Paschall" provided

²² Scharf & Westcott, op.cit., p. 2248iii.

²³ Ibid.; p. 2250iii.

²⁴ Ibid., pp.2248-2252iii.

Freedley, Edwin, Philadelphia and Its Manufactures. 1859, p. 321 was Scharf & Westcott's source and repeated in the History.

an "open stove" where there already were "soapstone stoves" in 1800 in the Loganian library at the original Library Company of Philadelphia.²⁵ The 1884 History recorded "In 1810 there was one steel manufacturer in the city and one in the county of Philadelphia"²⁶ but it was not specific to "Southwark" or any other district in the County. The Joseph Paxson Directories of 1811 and 1819 did not list any iron foundries in the City or County--this included any individual employed in iron.

The Pascal (or "Paschal" or "Paschall") name seemed the most reputable in iron working for most of the 18th century, but from about 1790 to 1821, it is rare to see any "Pascal" or any family member with a variation of the name, listed in the Directories. When Stephen Morris decided to embark in iron as a business in 1821, he took on the name "Pascal Iron Works--Morris-Tasker & Company" perhaps to establish credibility. His company would manufacture stoves and grates, then after 1835, "gas-pipe."²⁷ Morris' partner, Thomas T. Tasker would invent a "hot water furnace."²⁸ (Their names are on the streets below Dickinson, running east-west.) The immensity of their "iron plant" near Moyamensing Avenue is on their advertisements, although one would have to imagine an entire city block consumed by the foundry. Pascal-Morris-Tasker's competitor was the "Southwark Foundry" which had other names since its founding in "1821" and incorporation in "1836."²⁹ These were enormous industries in Southwark, with others such as Burrows Savery & Co. at Front and Reed Streets (also in Southwark) and smaller firms. Therefore, while "1800" is unproven for any "Iron Plantation" or any industry in iron in Southwark, after 1821, iron manufacturing to the far east of the present Southwark Post Office ignited many other iron manufacturers to come to Southwark.

²⁵ Peterson, Chas.E., "Library Hall..." in Transactions APS, Vol.43, Part 1, 1953, p. 138, 75n.

²⁶ Scharf & Westcott, p. 2251iii.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 2252iii.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "The Philadelphia Inquirer," August 24, 1930. See p. 24 herein.

The Treasury Department's Fine Arts Section which oversaw the post office art program, preferred subjects for the art which combined industry particular to the state through the local site's historical relationship. Below, the Pascal Iron Works satisfied that: located 5 blocks from the Southwark Post Office, Pascal's would have been a major employer for area residents. The etthings on the adver-

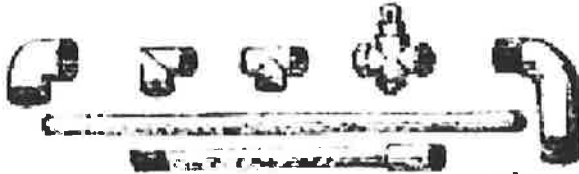
tizements show the immensity of the plant. (From M'Elroy's Directory, 1859)

Pascal's was revived by Stephen Morris; the Pascal's from the late 1700s was not listed in 1811 and in 1819 publicly (in Paxson's or elsewhere), but it carried a reputation in iron processing. Morris' company was established in 1821, the earliest iron plant in Southwark where eventually many other smaller firms would arise after Pascal's and Merrick's Southwark Foundry showed very productive results.

PASCAL IRON WORKS.

WELDED WROUGHT IRON TUBES

From 4 inches to 1 in calibre and 2 to 12 feet long, capable of sustaining pressure from 400 to 2500 lbs. per square inch, with Stop Cocks, T. L., and other fixtures to suit, fitting together, with screw joints, suitable for STEAM, WATER, GAS, and for LOCOMOTIVE and other STEAM BOILER TUBES.



Manufactured and for sale by
MORRIS, TASKER & MORRIS.
Warehouse S. E. Corner of Third & Walnut Streets,
PHILADELPHIA.

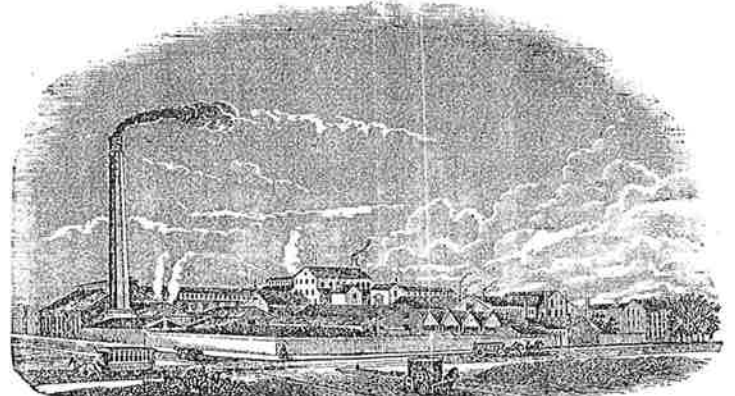
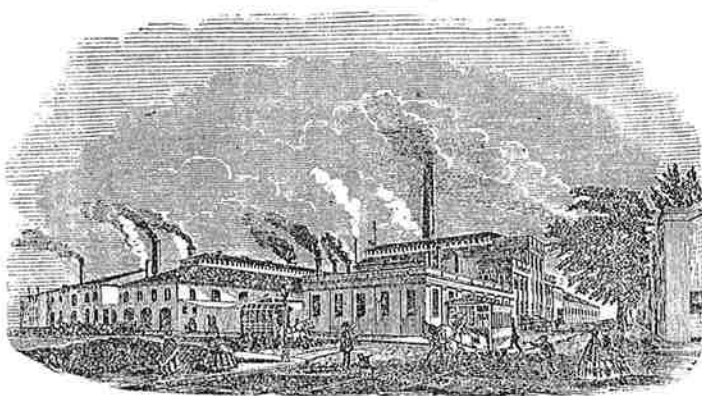
The Pennsylvania Inquirer (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania) • January 18, 1842 • Page [3]

STEPHEN MORRIS,
THOS. T. TASKER, Jr.,
CHAS. WHEELER,

PASCAL IRON WORKS.

ESTABLISHED 1821.

{ S. P. M. TASKER,
H. G. MORRIS.



MORRIS, TASKER & CO.,

MANUFACTURERS OF

Lap-Welded American Charcoal Iron Boiler Flues—from 1½ to 10 inches outside diameter, cut to definite lengths.

Wrought Iron Welded Tubes—from ½ inch to 8 inches inside diameter, with screw and socket connections, for Steam, Gas, Water, or other purposes; also, fittings of every kind to suit the same.

Wrought Iron Galvanized Tube—strong and durable, designed especially for water purposes.

Cast Iron Gas or Water Pipe—1½ to 24 inches in diameter, and branches for same, &c.

Gas Works Castings, &c., &c.

WORKS—South Fifth St., bet. Tasker & Morris.

OFFICE—209 S. Third St., PHILADELPHIA.

20

ADVERTISEMENT

The other large ironworks plant in Southwark was farther from the Southwark Post Office--about 9 blocks--but no less influential. The company, said to be founded in "1828" by Samuel V. Merrick, was "not incorporated until 1836" and remained at the same location. It employed hundreds of workers for the strenuous, often hazardous work. "The Evening Bulletin" (November 2, 1919) called the Southwark Foundry "One of the substantial and leading industries in Philadelphia" with "600" workers in an environment involving "safety devices," a "welfare committee," "Southwark Building and Locan Association," socials at "Southwark Hall," "Southwark School" and a paternalism from President William H. Harman who began his career at Camden Iron Works.

ADVERTISEMENTS.

61

J. VAUGHAN MERRICK. WILLIAM H. MERRICK. JOHN E. COPE.

SOUTHWARK FOUNDRY,

Corner Fifth & Washington Avenue, Philadelphia.

ESTABLISHED 1836.

MERRICK & SONS, ENGINEERS & MACHINISTS

MANUFACTURE

High and Low-Pressure Steam Engines, for Land, River and

MARINE SERVICE.

BOILERS, GASOMETERS, TANKS, IRON BOATS, &C.

Castings of all kinds, either Iron or Brass.

IRON FRAME ROOFS,

FOR GAS WORKS, WORKSHOPS, AND RAILROAD STATIONS.

RETORTS AND GAS MACHINERY,

Of the latest and most approved construction.

Every description of Plantation Machinery, such as Sugar, Saw & Grist Mills.

VACUUM PANS.

Open Steam Trains, Defecators, Filters, Pumping Engines, &c.

SOLE AGENTS FOR

N. Rillieux's Patent Sugar-Bolling Apparatus,

NASMYTH & TOWNE'S (CONDIE'S) PATENT STEAM HAMMERS,

And Aspinwall & Woolsey's Patent Centrifugal Sugar-Draining Machines.

AMES' PATENT "STAR" OPEN STEAM PANS.

Having made arrangements with MESSRS. JOHN W. & R. LYNN, SHIP BUILDERS, they are prepared to execute orders for

IRON SHIPS, OF ANY SIZE,

BOATS OR STEAM TUGS,

WITH DESPATCH.

TUGS, both of Iron or Wood, will be kept constantly under construction or on hand.

Boat Yard, at Reed St., Delaware River,

**SOUTHWARK FOUNDRY
ABANDONS QUARTERS
FOR EDDYSTONE SITE**

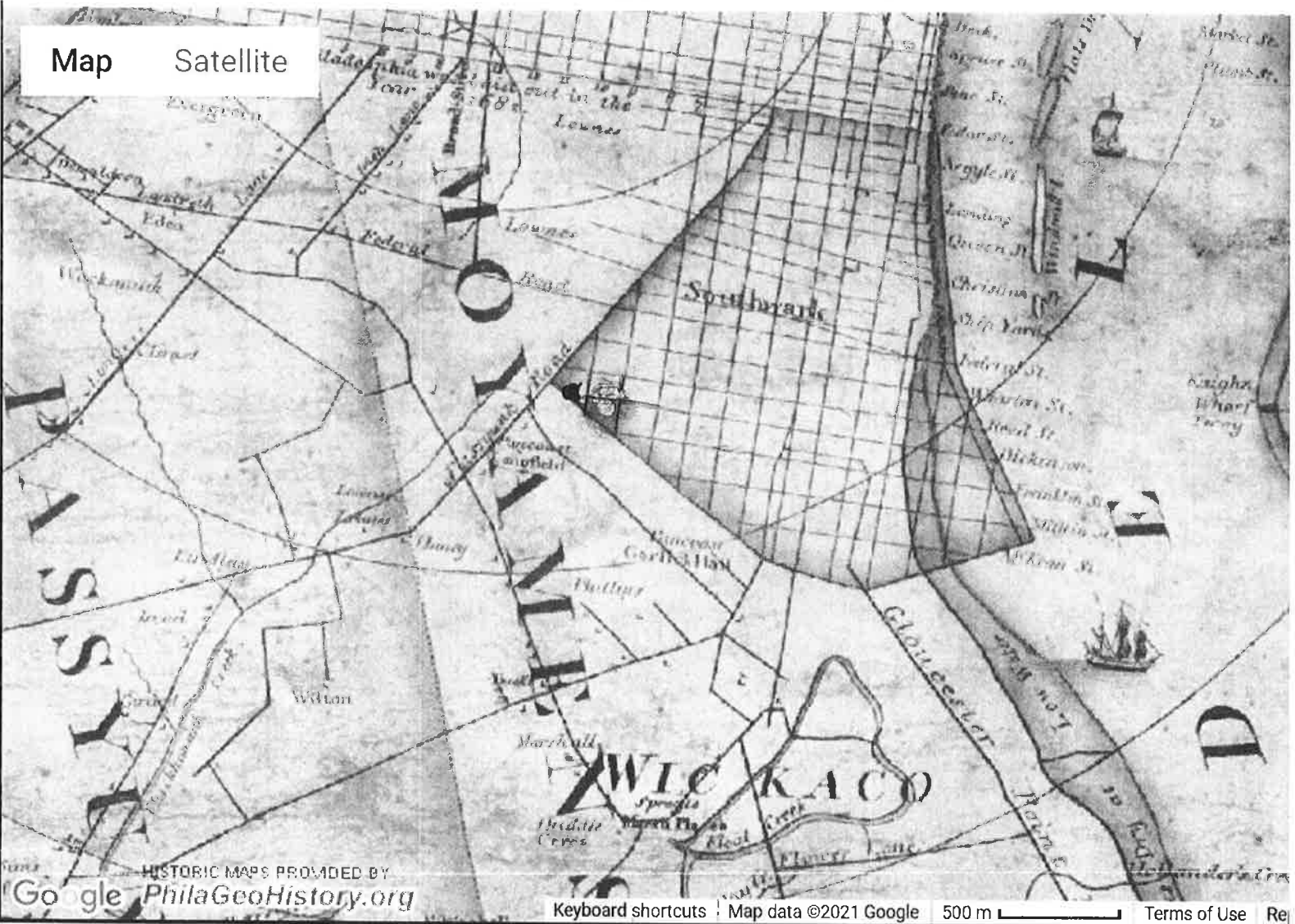
Inquirer AUG 24 1930

Plant at Fifth and Federal Streets Stilled After Century of Activity

Company One of Pioneer Companies of Phila.; Has Played Part in U.S. History

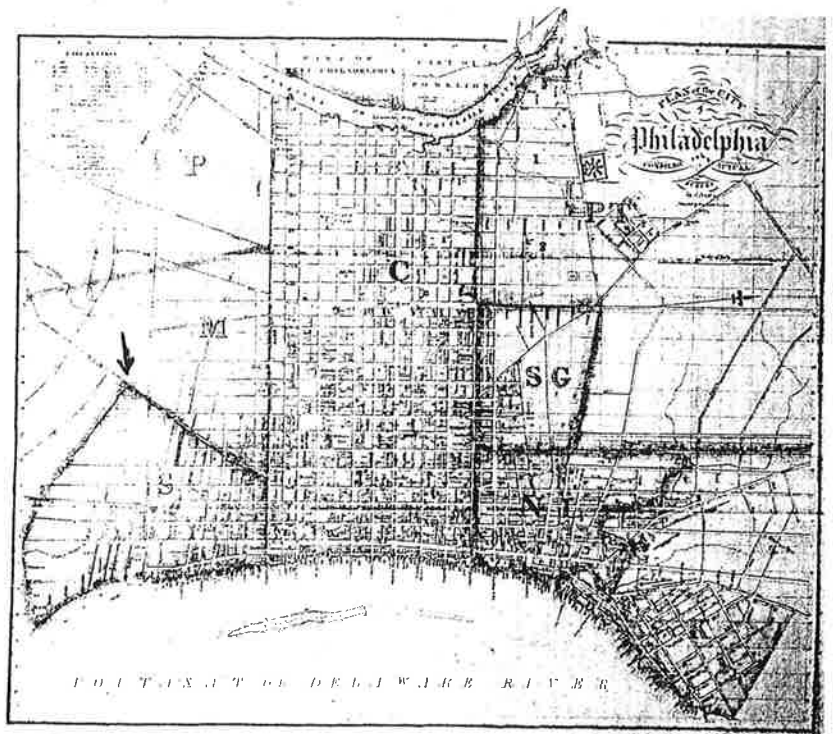
Baldwin Locomotive Works had purchased Southwark Foundry.

Map Satellite



Above is the John Hills 1808 map with a black dot at the far west of Southwark to show where the Southwark Post Office is.

The Carey & Lea map of 1824 on right is consistent to the 1808 map (see arrow) except it is turned clockwise, down for the Delaware River on the bottom.



As of 1882, there were over "500 establishments" processing iron throughout Philadelphia, making the city "the largest manufactory of iron in the U.S."³⁰ but no distinction was recorded for any of the businesses in Southwark.

The Pascal-Morris, Tasker, Morris & Co. dissolved sometime before the Southwark Foundry closed in 1930.³¹ Perhaps nostalgia for these businesses--still fresh in the minds of many in 1938--accounted for the subject matter of this mural by Larter.

Lastly, the name "Southwark" for this post office is not in error. Pre-Consolidation maps (to 1854) show that the Passyunk Road (Avenue) was the western boundary, running in a diagonal, in a northeastward direction, with Moyamensing Township to the west. The instant post office then, is still within the boundary of Southwark District, although it is one-half block from the Moyamensing Township line and would have had more affinity to the environment in that general area.

The Southwark Post Office mural is valuable in the American heritage: it is public art, approved by the federal government. If one was not from Philadelphia, or knew of Southwark's past, the 18th century genre evokes "Americana" and nothing European or of anything foreign. The writings on New Deal art in post offices³³ agree that the purpose of the federally-funded art was ideological, closely in tandem and identifying the era and New Deal program by Franklin Roosevelt--there is nothing ambiguous about this art.

The Southwark Post Office mural gave Larter a paying job during

³⁰Scharf & Westcott, op.cit., p. 2248iii.

³¹"The Philadelphia Inquirer," August 24, 1930.

³²Maps from The Free Library, Map Collection.

³³McKinzie, pp. 72;179 on public reaction or indifference. Marling, Karal Ann, Wall-to-Wall America: A Cultural History of Post Office Murals...1982. Park, M. and Markowitz, Democratic Vistas: Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal. Temple U., 1984.

the Depression. He also was able to combine traditional art styles with the Treasury Department's Fine Art Section's dictum on portraying a sense of hope and reflection of a wondrous past. Larter also accomplished what Park and Markowitz found in the subjects of post offices in New York and in Philadelphia: "murals about contemporary life and...as centers of industry and commerce."³⁴ One can compare Larter's work with the post office murals of animated figures, bright colors and styling like Thomas Hart Benton, one of the foremost American artists of the time. They isolate Larter's Iron Plantation, but these other murals also prove the variation in what the U.S. Government would allow for certain areas, such as Southwark, the "southern suburb" of Philadelphia since the Swedes arrived in the 1600s.

The Southwark Post Office mural, "Iron Plantation near Southwark--1800"...

(j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, social or historical heritage of the community.

The Philadelphia Art Commission's Penny Balkin Bach had reviewed artist Robert E. Larter's file from the National Archives for the nominated mural's origins and the response(s) from locals. Her book, Public Art in Philadelphia (1992)³⁵ affirmed the importance of spectators' acceptance of what was placed in the public domain. Lembeck provided examples of how many Pennsylvania communities had harshly criticized the historical accuracy of some murals (like confusing a Puritan with a Quaker). Many artists had to alter their original drawings to accommodate local residents. As Bach wrote, however, the patrons of the Southwark Post Office in 1938 gave

³⁴ Park and Markowitz, op.cit., p.78.

³⁵ Bach, op.cit., pp. 104,227, 270 citation on National Archives file on Robert E. Larter.

no such treatment to Larter as he was painting. Bach noted Larter saying (as recorded) that "one of the pleasures of the job...the interest shown by the spectators."³⁶ Doubtfully, none had ancestors from the "1800" year mistakenly marked for the subject matter--the neighborhood was a large majority of Roman Catholics descended from the Irish Famine, or the eastern and southern Europeans, not anyone from Protestant northern Europe. Southwark had been settled first by the Swedes, leaving Glòria Dei (Lutheran) Church, and street names with Swedish origins: Christian; Swanson; Queen. When ceded to Great Britain, it became "Southwark" (after a London neighborhood) and continued to expand as a residential area near the old Navy Yard, private piers and wharves; and industries providing the base for the longshoremen and related occupations.

McKinzie concluded that "much of the public remained oblivious" to these post office murals and their intended effect. He would say with his supporting findings: "In short, the Section of Fine Arts and the WPA art program were not exemplary and uplifting for enough people." And, "they failed."³⁷ Perhaps this is why Raynor wrote for the Smithsonian's National Postal Museum that "Many post office murals have vanished over the years."³⁸ Certainly, one mural, the "Shipyards at Southwark--1800" (more historically accurate in dating) has already been removed from the Southwark Post Office, thereby giving "Iron Plantation" more significance--as well as more public attention. The subject matter does not seem to attach to anything around 10th and Dickinson Streets, just off "The Avenue" (Passyunk). The word "Southwark" better relates to Queen Village now, and may have been more foreign to residents in 1938 who had a cursive knowledge of Philadelphia history, and may have only known the word "Southwark" in relation to the "Southwark Foundry" which closed by the end of 1930.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ McKinzie, op.cit., pp. 72;179.

³⁸ Raynor, Patricia, "Off the Wall: New Deal Post Office Murals" in Enroute, Vol. 6, Issue #4, October-December, 1997.

Abel designed a post office building which was anomalous to this extreme edge of the former Southwark District in 1935 and had then set the basis for Larter's mural's theme. In 1935, Abel knew the local demographics and had ample information to see and to know that his design related more to the rowhouses of brick and flush facades than to the 18th century history that the architecture was to proprot. Did any of this matter to those who patronized the post office then? Bach related Larter's sentiment, which was positive. One fact found during the research for this nomination was that across the street from the Southwark Post Office is Annunciation, Blessed Virgin Mary Roman Catholic Church where renovations had been on-going from 1933 through 1938. The church's tall steeple had been "condemned" and had to be taken down--a feat to watch! Then the pastor, Father John Tolino began an interior renovation of the church (yes, even during the Depression) through 1937, with other beautification efforts to continue (at parishioners' expense).³⁹ Not to diminish the importance of the Southwark Post Office's construction in 1935, then the mural painting in 1938, but it seemed that the proximate buildings bordering the post office and those residing here had already been inured with the hustle and bustle of contractors for awhile. The Larter murals from 1938 would have been interpreted as more activity, but in a positive way. Moreover, there was nothing in Larter's art which would have raised any objections from locals. Bach recorded Larter's impressions from his experience at Southwark--it should be viewed as another artistic improvement in the area--which was acceptable to the community at that time, and can now be revisited as part of the "heritage" of the community.

The Southwark Post Office mural painted as a New Deal art work merits historical designation for these and perhaps more reasons.

Celeste A. Morello, MS, MA
October, 2021
(Still during COVID's limits)

³⁹ "The Souvenir Book of Annunciation, BVM Church, 1957", parish file. Catholic Historical Research Center, Philadelphia.
The Assunta House, abutting the post office's west also was the scene of youth groups' activities and as a convent for about ten nuns.

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A P P E N D I X of R E F E R E N C E S

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Southwark Branch Post Office

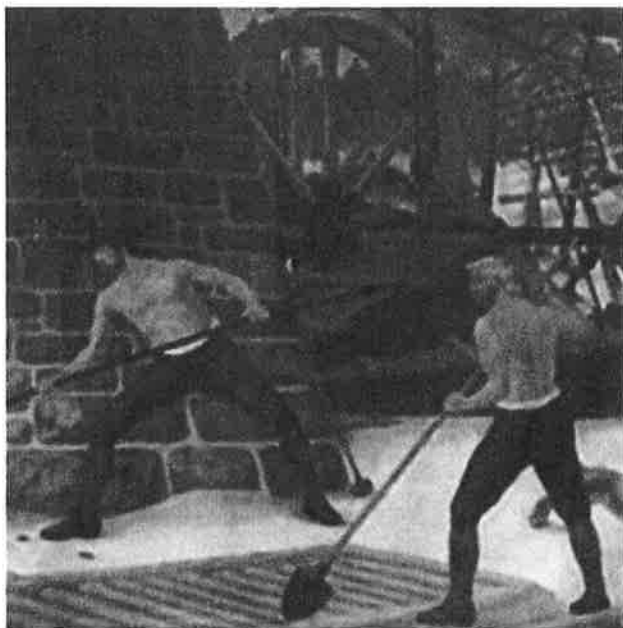
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"Iron Plantation Near Southwark--1800"

1938

Mural, oil on canvas

Robert E. Larter , painter

Program: Treasury
Section of Fine Arts

Location: lobby

Click here to see the full artwork

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Photo (detail): Linh Dinh

Southwark Station Post Office Murals – Philadelphia PA

 livingnewdeal.org/projects/southwark-station-post-office-murals-philadelphia-pa



Southwark PO Larter Mural (Left View)

Southwark PO Larter Mural (Left View)

Photo: Linh Dinh Creative Commons BY-NC-ND 2009

Southwark PO Larter Mural (Left View)

Southwark PO Larter Mural (Left View)

Project type: Art, Murals

New Deal Agencies: Treasury Section of Fine Arts

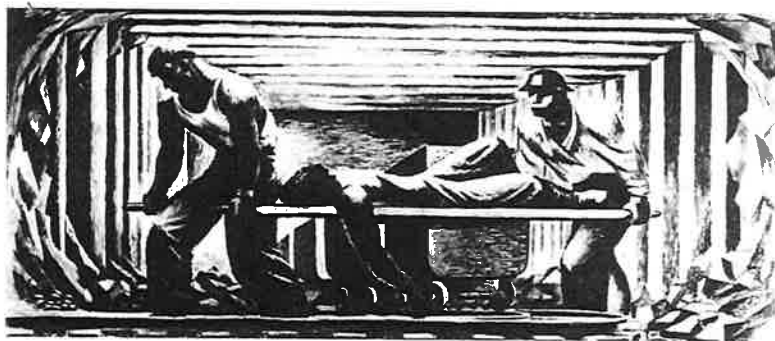
Completed: 1938

Artists: Robert E. Larter

Description

Philadelphia's historic Southwark Station post office contains two Section of Fine Arts murals by Robert E. Larter. The oil on canvas murals were painted in 1938 and entitled "Iron Plantation Near Southwark – 1800" and "Shipyards at Southwark – 1800."

McKinzie
1973



33 Fletcher Martin (Section of Fine Arts), *Mine Rescue*, rejected study for mural in the Kellogg, Idaho, Post Office

34 Fletcher Martin's executed mural in the Kellogg Post Office, showing the arrival of a prospector named Kellogg

archt.

The same critics who demanded that art conform to architecture branded Section art "lightweight stuff," based on casual and trifling conceptions unworthy of wall space. They saw in the "banal sentimentality" of post office "illustrations" failure to conceive mural painting as a noble, scholarly art. The symbolism of antiquity, not the fads of the 1930s, made for timelessness. And they believed that important buildings demanded important art. When Treasury art went to the White House these critics protested that nothing less than acknowledged masterpieces should hang in the White House, "no painting less important, for in-

P.O.'s
architecture

stance, than Whistler's 'Mother.' " Presumably art in buildings in Washington and small towns across America need be relative to the importance of the agency occupying the structure. Despite these adverse judgments, most critics praised the Section for bringing art out of the studio, the museum, and the pink tea salon and bringing it into the post office. They approved competitions as a democratic device for breaking what one called "the stranglehold of the romantic-escape school . . . on officialdom." By discouraging artists' attempts to capture eternal verities in noble allegories, they believed, the government stimulated murals more alive, easier to live with, more understandable. Still other critics supported the Section's contention that its easels for hospitals, ship art, and monumental decorations represented a faithful cross section of contemporary standards, resulting—depending on one's view—in something for everyone or aesthetic Babel.⁴⁶

General public reaction, so far as it existed, varied widely. Many vociferous laymen considered art frivolous during the economic emergency, absorbing energy which should be channeled into productive tasks—on the plow handles or in the ditches. Professional New Deal haters, decrying the boondoggle in the arts, lumped Section artists with the WPA cultural employees and dismissed them as "sorry daubers, spavined dancers, ham actors, and radical scribblers" luxuriating on the dole. Bruce admitted that nine out of ten people, if they had heard of the Section, thought it was simply a branch of the relief organization. That so few people understood the distinction between the Section's emphasis on art and the WPA's emphasis on relief in large part resulted from the Section's aversion to publicity, especially if it involved controversy. Practices such as asking commissioned artists not to grant interviews unless authorized, Olin Dows reflected 30 years later, were quite wrong. Better that the Section be talked about, even unfavorably, than be ignored, as it was by most people.⁴⁷

Infrequently the people who lived with the art rallied to protest. The sensitivity of the Section to criticism usually brought change. Residents of Port Washington, New York objected to the artist Paul Cadmus's designs for the local post office showing the resort town's summer people engaged in youthful sports, and especially to a girl clad in shorts in a yachting panel. Cadmus, on

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McKINZIE
(1973)

tion's argument that art enobled, raised morale, and helped men to maintain some perspective during war. From Mobile, Alabama; Yakima, Washington; Orofino, Idaho; and Riverton, New Jersey, came protests that the war threatened to bankrupt the country and that spending money on nonessential murals undermined the morale of the citizens whom the government had asked to sacrifice and economize. It mattered not to postmasters, Granges, and Chambers of Commerce that the decorations resulted from 1939 or 1940 appropriations. The government should set examples in economy and divert money from nonessentials to defense projects. Without effect Bruce circulated a resolution passed by the now friendly Commission of Fine Arts endorsing the Section's work as a means of keeping culture alive during the war. "No resolution passed by any set of persons on earth," wrote Judge John McDuffie in typical response, "could ever convince me that the continuance of the work of your Bureau is an essential activity of the government during a very serious war." Pressures on the Post Office Department led to its recommendation, in November 1942, that the Section abandon post office decoration for the duration. And that ended post office art.⁵⁰

While much of the public remained oblivious to the Section of Fine Arts and a small minority resisted it after Pearl Harbor, another part accepted its work in gratitude and pride. In an era when the local post office was a place of some leisure and conversation among townsmen, pleasant, easy-to-understand murals and sculpture did affect the art consciousness of many patrons. Residents of small towns like Big Spring, Texas, brought their out-of-town guests into the post office to view the art, and in rural America, ladies' clubs traveled from post office to post office on art tours. The post office mural or sculpture was the first work of original art in many communities. Bruce always kept copies at hand of a letter from the appreciative postmaster of Pleasant Hill, Missouri. Postmaster Basil V. Jones had written: "In behalf of many smaller cities, wholly without objects of art, as ours was, may I beseech you and the Treasury to give them some art, more of it, whenever you find it possible to do so. How can a finished citizen be made in an artless town?"⁵¹

How indeed? For those Americans who accepted on faith the idea that exposure to the fine arts of painting and sculpture

brought spiritual and emotional betterment, whatever aesthetic and bureaucratic controversies consumed Section energies, and however short of its goal fell the Section's achievements, putting some art in a thousand towns warranted all its efforts.

¹ "Final Report of Section of Fine Arts," typescript, RG121/ special file.

² The Section ignored the jury recommendation in the mural competition for the Wenatchee, Washington, Post Office, to cite one example, and commissioned no art as a result of the competition for murals for the Springfield, Ohio, Post Office. The best summary of the mechanics and technicalities of competitions is Bruce and Watson, *Art in Federal Buildings*.

³ Bruce to William Zorach, Feb. 21, 1936, Bruce to Hildreth Meiere, Jan. 12, 1937, RG121/124; Section *Bulletin*, No. 1 (March 1, 1935), 4, No. 11 (Sept. 1936-Feb. 1937), 7.

⁴ See, for example, Rowan to Joseph Pistey, Jr., Feb. 19, 1941, and Inslee Hopper to Salvatore Reina, May 24, 1940, RG121/126; Section *Bulletin*, No. 2 (April 1, 1935), 7; Bruce to Rowan, April 8, 1936, RG121/124; Bruce to Biddle, April 9, 1940, Bruce Papers. Officials of the Section reported slightly varying statistics. Forbes Watson, in *The Edward Bruce Memorial Collection*, catalogue (Corcoran Gallery, Washington, 1943), mentions 1,371 works in 1,205 communities.

⁵ Erica Beckh Rubenstein, "The Tax Payers' Murals" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Harvard University, 1944); memorandum, Cecil Jones to [Section staff], March 31, 1937, RG121/129.

⁶ See "Reports" folder, RG121/129.

⁷ Anita Weschler to Hopper, April 5, 1938, RG121/138; Bianca Todd to Bruce, April 7, 1939, RG121/122.

⁸ Heinz Warneke to Bruce, Nov. 23, 1938, RG121/124.

⁹ Biddle, *American Artist's Story*, 278-82; notes for speech, nd, William Zorach Papers (Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.), AAA Reel NY 59-1.

¹⁰ Typed speech by Robert Cronbach, RG121/122.

¹¹ *New York Times*, July 28, 1940; Bruce to Lucile Blanche, March 21, 1937, Bruce to Maurice Sterne, March 10, 1938, RG121/124.

¹² Bruce to Merle Armitage, Dec. 12, 1934, RG121/123; speech by Bruce to artists, nd, speech by Bruce at luncheon for Carmody, Sept. 9, 1939, speech before cabinet, Jan. 20, 1939, Bruce Papers; clipping from *Baltimore Evening Sun*, Nov. 3, 1939, Bruce to Rowan, June 20, 1938, RG121/124; "Minutes of Meeting" of Commission of Fine Arts, May 17, 1940, RG121/122; Rubenstein, "The Tax Payers' Murals," 152-54, 211-12. Public acceptance was clearly a part of the definition of the "middle course" art Bruce desired. George Biddle, piqued at Bruce's compromises and "face-saving policy" in selecting artists for the Justice Department building, protested: "After all, we want an arrangement which will produce the nine finest mural units." "No," Bruce returned, "we want the nine mural units which will make possible the best and largest number of art projects in America in the next five years." George Biddle Diary, Oct. 10, 1934.

¹³ Section *Bulletin*, No. 1 (March 1, 1935), 5, No. 7 (Dec. 1935), 6, No. 10 (June-Aug. 1936), 10-11 No. 11 (Sept. 1936-Feb. 1937), 3, 4, No. 21 (March 1940), 4.

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¹⁴ Bruce to Roosevelt, April 20, 1936, AAA Reel NDA/HP1; Bruce to Peoples, Dec. 15, 1934, RG121/124. Bruce was not wealthy. He was able to work without compensation and spend his own money on the Treasury art program because of the \$50,000 fee he had received as a lobbyist for the West Coast Chambers of Commerce. See Bruce to Harlan F. Stone, Nov. 10, 1942, Bruce Papers.

¹⁵ Memorandum, Rowan to Members of the Section, Dec. 12, 1940, RG121/126; memorandum, Rowan to Bruce, Watson, and Ealand, Dec. 21, 1939, RG121/129; Carmody to Richard Lewis, June 7, 1940, Bruce to Rowan, April 8, 1936, RG121/124.

¹⁶ Section *Bulletin*, No. 2 (April 1935), 3-4; memorandum, Dows to Peoples [Dec. 1935], RG121/118; Belisario R. Contreras, "The New Deal Treasury Department Art Programs and the American Artist, 1933-1943" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, American University, 1967). The eleven artists selected first were: Thomas Hart Benton, John S. Curry, Rockwell Kent, Leon Kroll, Reginald Marsh, Henry V. Poor, Boardman Robinson, Eugene Savage, Maurice Sterne, and Grant Wood; the two sculptors, Paul Manship and William Zorach.

¹⁷ Moore to Peoples, Jan. 3, 1936, RG121/118.

¹⁸ Biddle, *American Artist's Story*, 287; Moore to Rowan, Nov. 26, 1935, RG121/118.

¹⁹ Biddle, *American Artist's Story*, 290; Boardman Robinson to Biddle, Dec. 8, 1935, Bruce to Biddle, Nov. 10, 1935, Biddle Papers; Bruce to Dows, Jan. 21, 1936, RG121/122.

²⁰ *New York Times Magazine*, Aug. 2, 1936; Peoples to Biddle, Dec. 9, 1935, Biddle Papers; Elinor Morgenthau to Bruce, Dec. 10, 1935, Bruce to Dows, Jan. 21, 1935, RG121/122.

²¹ Memorandum of Mr. Dow's trip to New York, May 1, 1936, RG121/129. For fuller exposition of Treasury relations with individual artists see Contreras, "The New Deal Treasury Department Art Programs and the American Artist: 1933-1943," and Francis V. O'Connor, "New Deal Murals in New York," *Artforum*, vii (Nov. 1968), 41-49.

²² Bruce to William V. Griffin, June 10, 1940, RG121/124.

²³ Michael J. Ready to Carmody, April 19, 1940, Jan. 21, 1941, Edward G. Kemp to W. E. Reynolds, Feb. 29, 1940, Sterne to Bruce, March 21, 1940, RG121/124.

²⁴ Bruce to Rev. John La Farge, July 15, 1940, RG121/124.

²⁵ Vera Sterne to Bruce, nd, La Farge to Bruce, July 18, 1940, RG121/124.

²⁶ Bruce to John Dewey, Oct. 8, 1940, Bruce to Dows, May 31, 1940, Bruce to Sterne, Jan. 15, 1941, RG121/124.

²⁷ Francis Biddle to George Biddle, Jan. 30, 1941, Biddle Papers; Francis Biddle, *In Brief Authority* (Garden City, 1962), 137-39.

²⁸ Bruce to Sterne, Dec. 19, 1940, RG121/124.

²⁹ Clippings from *Washington Daily News*, Jan. 30, July 21, 1936, *New York Sun*, Feb. 21, 1936, *New York Daily Mirror*, Dec. 30, 1936, *Washington Post*, May 14, 1936, Biddle Papers; *Time*, xxviii (Nov. 30, 1936), 19; Biddle, *American Artist's Story*, 304-05.

³⁰ See Rockwell Kent's two accounts of the incident: *This Is My Own* (New York, 1940), 303-12; *It's Me O Lord* (New York, 1955), 501-05.

³¹ Kent, *It's Me O Lord*, 501, 502.

³² Clippings from *Washington Star*, Sept. 12, 1937, *Baltimore Sun*, Nov. 3, 1937, *Washington Daily News*, Sept. 21, 1937, RG121/124, *Time*, xxx (Sept. 20, 1937), 21; Kent, *It's Me O Lord*, 504; *New York Times*, Nov. 6, 1937.

³³ Clipping from *Baltimore Sun*, Nov. 6, 1937, RG121/124.

³⁴ *New York Times*, Nov. 4, 1937; memorandum, Watson to Peoples, Nov. 1, 1937, clipping from *Washington Daily News*, Jan. 25, 1938, RG121/124.

³⁵ Kent, *It's Me O Lord*, 311; George Biddle, "Art Under Five Years of *Four* Federal Patronage," *American Scholar*, ix (July 1940), 327-38.

³⁶ Bruce to Watson, Jan. 26, Feb. 14, 1940, Lloyd R. Ney to Bruce, nd, RG121/124; "Final Report of Section of Fine Arts."

³⁷ "Report of Section of Fine Arts, 1939-1940," typescript, RG121/128; Bruce to Dows, Nov. 14, 1935, RG121/118.

³⁸ Bruce to Morgenthau, Nov. 30, 1937, Bruce to Zorach, April 5, 1938, Bruce to Fiske Kimball, Jan. 15, 1940, Section Press Release, Jan. 26, 1938, RG121/124; clippings from *Washington Star*, Feb. 4, 1938, *Washington Herald*, Jan. 29, 1938, RG121/124.

³⁹ Clipping from *Washington Daily News*, Sept. 15, 1941, RG121/124.

⁴⁰ See "Final Report of the Treasury Relief Art Project."

⁴¹ The Carnegie donation was \$10,000 in 1940. See Bruce to Roosevelt, Nov. 6, 1939, AAA Reel NDA/HP1; Bruce to Frederick Keppel, Jan. 5, 1942, RG121/118.

⁴² Section *Bulletin*, No. 13 (March-June 1937), 9, No. 14 (July 1937-Jan. 1938), 3, 10, No. 17 (Sept. 1938), 16.

⁴³ Clipping from *New Masses*, Nov. 22, 1938, Biddle Papers; Report of Jury Meeting for Judgment of the Mural Competition for the Federal Building at the New York World's Fair, Arthur Emptage to Bruce, Nov. 10, 1938, Hopper to Bruce, Sept. 26, 1938, Bruce to Sterne, March 6, 1939, RG121/124; Bruce to Roosevelt, Dec. 19, 1937, RG121/138.

⁴⁴ Report on the Destruction of Statue by Louis Slobodkin, na, nd, RG121/124; *New York Times*, May 4, 1939; clippings from *Washington Times-Herald*, May 21, 1939, *Washington Daily News*, May 12, 1939, *Washington Post*, Nov. 2, 1939, RG121/124.

⁴⁵ Address by Cass Gilbert, Jan. 4, 1934, in RG121/124; *New York Times*, July 15, 1934.

⁴⁶ *New York Times*, June 12, 1934; *New York Times Magazine*, Aug. 2, 1936; clippings from *San Francisco Argonaut*, July 18, 1941, *New York Post*, March 2, 1940, RG121/137; *Forum*, xcvi (Dec. 1936), 293.

⁴⁷ Clipping from *Baltimore Evening Sun*, March 24, 1938, RG121/124; Dows, "The New Deal's Treasury Art Programs," 74; Bruce to Joseph Alsop, Oct. 27, 1939, RG121/124.

⁴⁸ Frank T. Cornell to LeRoy Barton, Jan. 31, 1936, Dows to Bruce, Feb. 6, 1936, Bruce to Dows, Feb. 15, 1936, RG121/122; Bruce to William F. King, Nov. 22, 1937, RG121/124; clippings from *Louisville Courier Journal*, June 15, 1936, *Washington Post*, Nov. 23, 1937, Sept. 15, 1940, *Little Rock Gazette*, Oct. 29, 1935, *Boise Statesman*, Nov. 4, 1935, RG121/137.

⁴⁹ Report of July 14 and July 16 meetings between Secretary of Interior and Rowan, Aug. 4, 1937, Bruce to Millard Sheets, nd, RG121/118.

⁵⁰ Orofino, Idaho Chamber of Commerce, to Compton I. White, Feb. 12, 1942, Mrs. Mervil E. Hass to Walter Myers, March 4, 1942, F. J. Buckley to W. E. Reynolds, Nov. 19, 1941, John McDuffie to Bruce, Jan. 23, 1942, RG121/118; Resolution . . . of Broadway Grange No. 647, Yakima, Washington, nd, RG121/122.

⁵¹ Basil V. Jones to Treasury Department, June 6, 1939, RG121/124. (The Texas artist Tom Lea had painted the mural in the Pleasant Hill Post Office.)

and more job security. Still, letters in the files of art organizations and journals, government agencies, and congressional committees indicate that with few exceptions artists could endorse sculptor Ibram Lassaw's feeling that the depression program was "a providential thing."

Had a commission investigated the state of American art at the end of the 1930s it could not have concluded, as President Hoover's did earlier, that for the overwhelming majority of Americans the fine arts of painting and sculpture did not exist. The nation had purchased thousands upon thousands of art objects at a fraction of their cost in the artificial private market. There were too many murals and easels and graphics in too many post offices and federal buildings, schools, and community halls; too many graduates of Community Art Centers and WPA classes in settlement houses and civic clubs; too many producing artists at work to contend that American art was stagnant. With the depression consuming the energies and attention of the people, with the government increasingly criticized and financially distressed, and with wrenching uncertainty and change characterizing American art, perhaps limited success was enough to expect.

Conclusion The federal art projects faded because they were born of the need to sustain professionals through the depression and they failed to transcend their depression purpose. When the Second World War displaced the depression as the nation's foremost concern, the American people, the Congress, and the executive bureaucracy were unconvinced that continued patronage of artists served the national interest. It was not that the depression-born art agencies had not tried. Both had aspired to integrate art with daily life in America and thereby improve its quality. Both realized that the kind of reordering of values they sought—if ultimately obtainable—could not occur in a decade. Both, therefore, tried to embed themselves, or a linear descendant, into the structure of government as concern for the depression waned. The Section and WPA art program had convinced thousands of Americans and confirmed countless others of the principle of federal art patronage. Even so, desires for government frugality and more spectacular diversions still ranked far above thirst for the

traditional arts with the average taxpayer. And among the "important public," the individuals with influence enough to make things happen, the art agencies failed to spark a movement large, loud, and zealous enough to survive World War II.

To endure, federal art programs needed more than well-wishers; they required legions of crusaders among artists, the public, and the government hierarchy. To enlist legions it was not enough to be competent and culturally justifiable; the art units needed to prove that they were in every way exemplary and uplifting. In that, they failed. They could not escape the stigma of make-work relief or the taint of Rooseveltian politics. Perhaps most important, the bureaucracy of the art agencies, by the end of the 1930s slow and hyper-cautious, displayed little in the way of innovative administration. Moreover, the bureaucracy failed to perceive that its cautious exercise of prerogatives, which were too limited to engender real enthusiasm in the first place, cost it support. In short, the Section of Fine Arts and the WPA art program were not exemplary and uplifting for enough people.

Edward Bruce's Section of Fine Arts touched well under 1,000 of the 57,000 artists and art teachers in the country, and many of those who took commissions lacked enthusiasm and inspiration after enduring the cautious Section's "suggestions" and delays. Artists who "painted Section"—however few and however they may have justified it to themselves—were not ambassadors of the system. Other artists objected to the Section's selectivity, its arbitrary "standards," its mysterious and eternally invoked jury system. To those artists with activist commitments, such intervention and self-proclaimed ability to judge recalled the elitism of an earlier age, and they saw Bruce, Forbes Watson, and Olin Dows as self-gratifying proprietors of an enterprise usurped from the public trust.

The 10,000 or so artists who were on the FAP rolls at various times and thousands of others who wanted to be on them were piqued on occasion by the impersonality and rigidity of the relief agency. They could not understand why they had to submit to the humiliation of the pauper's oath. The rural California artist who sent President Roosevelt a photograph of her nine children,

Conclusion *

Marlene Park and Gerald E. Markowitz



Democratic Vistas

Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal



Temple University Press Philadelphia

1984



Figure 58. Anatol Shulkin, "Invention of a Paper Bag in Canajoharie," Canajoharie, New York.

tion of the paper bag, a product crucial to the shipping of the state's wheat crop (Figure 58).

→ Both New York and Philadelphia are distinguished by ambitious series of murals about contemporary life and cities as centers of industry and commerce. There are two series in New York, one dealing with the various neighborhoods in the city and the other with labor in America. The first, by Kindred McLeary, decorates three walls in the Madison Square post office with eight panels. Working in tempera on plaster, McLeary stresses the cosmopolitan nature of the city by crowding the scenes with all sorts of people (Figure 59). The *Section* wrote: "Localities of the widest divergence in character have been chosen to show the multiformity of inhabitants and ways of life in New York."¹²

Ben Shahn with his wife, Bernarda Bryson, painted "Resources of America" in the Bronx Central Postal Station, based on his winning sketches. Because he

conceived of both agricultural and industrial workers as great national resources, he and his wife boldly painted large figures in tempera on plaster in the upright panels. On the longer wall they painted Walt Whitman teaching a symbolic lesson to workers and students. Productive work, rather than local industry, is the subject of these murals (Figure 60).¹³

George Harding painted a cycle treating aspects of commerce in the United States Custom House and Appraisers Stores in Philadelphia and another large cycle in the North Philadelphia post office (Figures 61, 62). His murals, in tempera on canvas, are not the grand designs one might expect from an experienced mural painter of the older generation but are freely painted and richly conceived genre pieces.

The same conception of human diversity distinguishes scenes showing the masses from the cities disporting themselves at the beach. Jon Corbino chose to paint a crowded beach in Long Beach, Long Island

Off The Wall: New Deal Post Office Murals

*Article from Enroute**

By Patricia Raynor

Volume 6, Issue 4

October–December 1997

Throughout the United States—on post office walls large and small—are scenes reflecting America's history and way of life. Post offices built in the 1930s during Roosevelt's New Deal were decorated with enduring images of the "American scene."

In the 1930s, as America continued to struggle with the effects of the depression, the federal government searched for solutions to provide work for all Americans, including artists. During this time government-created agencies supported the arts in unprecedented ways. As Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt's relief administrator said in response to criticism of federal support for the arts, "[artists] have got to eat just like other people."

Often mistaken for WPA art, post office murals were actually executed by artists working for the Section of Fine Arts. Commonly known as "the Section," it was established in 1934 and administered by the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department. Headed by Edward Bruce, a former lawyer, businessman, and artist, the Section's main function was to select art of high quality to decorate public buildings—if the funding was available. By providing decoration in public buildings, the art was made accessible to all people. Post offices were located in virtually every community and available for viewing by all postal patrons—which made post office murals a truly democratic art form. Artists working for the Section were not chosen on the basis of need, but through anonymous competitions where the national jurors were often other artists. Although considered open competitions, restrictions were often attached to entries. For smaller competitions, the jury might consist of the postmaster, a member of the architectural firm, and a prominent citizen. Artists were also awarded commissions based on designs submitted for previous Section competitions. They were often paid for completing a work in a specific post office or federal building. One percent of the building construction funds was to be set aside for "embellishment" of the federal building, and artists were supposed to be paid from these funds.

Mural artists were provided with guidelines and themes for executing their mural studies. Scenes of local interest and events were deemed to be the most suitable. Artists invited to submit design sketches for a particular post office were strongly urged to visit the site. However, this was not possible for every artist. Distance, expense, or family commitment prevented many artists from actually traveling to the community. Once awarded a commission, the mural artist engaged in an often lengthy negotiation between the Post Office Department, the town, and the Section before finally getting the finished mural on the wall. Many local communities deemed the approved designs unacceptable due to theme, content, method of expression or design elements. Artists were constantly reminded that the communities were their patron and they went to great lengths to satisfy the desires of everyone involved in the project in order to save their commissions.

Genre themes were the most popular subject matter for post office murals. Americans shown at work or at leisure, grace the walls of the new deal post offices. Although the mural program was inspired by a Mexican mural tradition strongly affected by social change, the hard realities of American life are not illustrated on post office walls. Scenes of industrial America, for instance, avoid tragic portrayals of industrial accidents. Social realism painting, though popular at the time, was discouraged. Therefore, the very real scenes of jobless Americans standing in bread lines are not to be found on post office walls.

But, if the tragic was to be avoided, the heroic was to be celebrated and embraced. Historical events and daring and courageous acts were popular themes. One unusual depiction of a local hero is featured on the wall of the West Palm Beach post office. The Legend of James Edward Hamilton, Florida's barefoot mail carrier, is told on six narrative panels. The artist, Stevan Dohanos, rendered the story of the brave and enduring postman who delivers the mail against all odds. In fact, on October 1, 1887, Hamilton lost his life while on his postal route.

In Band Concert, by Marion Gilmore, the mural artist portrayed an idealized view of small town America. Gilmore, one of only a few female mural artists who worked for the Section, shows the residents of Corning, Iowa gathered about to listen to an evening band concert in their town square. The original design, which won the commission, drew inspiration from typical Iowa town squares. It was not, however, an accurate depiction of the square in Corning where the mural was to be installed. Her study added an obelisk and a cannon where none existed in Corning. The Section encouraged Gilmore to change her design to more accurately reflect the Corning town square. Her finished mural eliminated the offending additions. The Study for Band Concert indicates the mural's eventual placement. Most small town post office murals were constructed around the postmaster's door. And, this is where Gilmore's finished mural was eventually hung.

Many post office murals have vanished over the years. Others are in need of repair. Fortunately, there has been a renewed local interest in the depression era murals. These murals provide local communities with a colorful record of their heritage and give us all a glimpse of the American public's taste during a fascinating time in our nation's history.

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Rediscovering the People's Art: New Deal Murals in Pennsylvania's Post Offices

This article appeared in the Summer 2008 issue of Pennsylvania Heritage Magazine
By David Lembeck



U.S. Post Office Building, Selinsgrove: adorned by George Warren Rickey's tempera on canvas, Susquehanna Trail, since 1937.

On a February morning in 1937, artist George Warren Rickey (1907–2002) and a group of four men met at the post office in Selinsgrove, Snyder County. Armed with cloth-covered rolling pins, the men attached Rickey's mural entitled Susquehanna Trail to one of the lobby's end walls. After six hours, they transformed the entire blank white wall, from marble wainscoting to ceiling, into a glorious depiction of a spring day in a nearby valley. Two farmers, one planting and one plowing, dominate the foreground. Behind them are the farmer's family, another farmer on a disking machine, and several buildings, including Shriners' Church, a local landmark. Rickey's colors are pure central Pennsylvania: verdant green and chocolate brown fields, rich red soil, and the majestic blue Susquehanna River in the distance. The mural is practically an illustration for "America the Beautiful," with its spacious skies and purple mountains, and farmers preparing for future amber waves of grain.

A mural in a post office was certainly an unusual occurrence—especially one featuring hardworking, ordinary citizens—but it was becoming more common during the Great Depression. Artworks celebrating local industry and history were suddenly appearing in post office lobbies throughout the country; between 1934 and 1943, more than twelve hundred original works of art were installed in post offices nationwide. Pennsylvania received eighty-eight of these, second in number only to New York. As part of the effort to stimulate the economy and provide work for millions of unemployed Americans, the administration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt embarked on massive public works programs during the Great Depression. Thousands of projects—courthouses, customs houses, bridges, dams, and post offices—were constructed during Roosevelt's New Deal. When funds were available, the U.S. Department of the Treasury, which was responsible for the design and construction of government buildings, also commissioned appropriate works of art with which to decorate their public spaces, usually lobbies.

It was Philadelphia artist George Biddle (1885–1973) who suggested the idea of commissioning artists to decorate federal buildings. On May 9, 1933, Biddle wrote to FDR, friend and former Groton School classmate, who had been inaugurated the nation's thirty-second president on March 4.

There is a matter which I have long considered and which some day might interest your administration. . . . The younger artists of America are conscious as they have never been of the social revolution that our country and civilization are going through; and they would be eager to express these ideals in a permanent art form if they were given the government's co-operation. They would be contributing to and expressing in living monuments the social ideals that you are struggling to achieve. And I am convinced that our mural art with a little impetus can soon result, for the first time in our history, in a vital national expression.

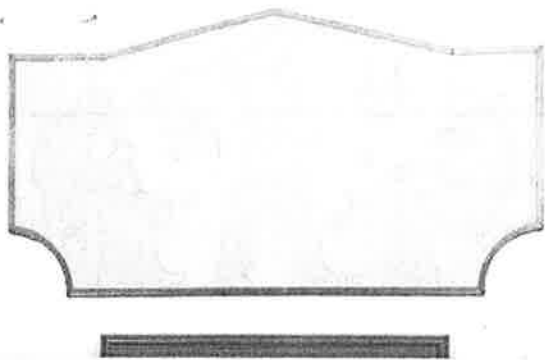
Mexican artists Diego Rivera (1886–1957), José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949), and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974) fueled Biddle's enthusiasm. Their bold, colorful murals, mixing images of indigenous cultures and the iconography of Marxism, transformed the walls of government buildings into a celebration of the Mexican Revolution and its ideals. Roosevelt, however, had no use for Marxist propaganda. His New Deal agenda sought to reform capitalism, not dismantle it. Like Biddle, he understood that public art could be used to communicate civic values and uplift and ennoble a population discouraged by the Great Depression. In December 1933, a pilot program, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), was created as a New Deal initiative. Although lasting just six months, PWAP employed thousands of artists to produce works for public buildings. On the basis of this early success, project administrators created a unit within the Treasury Department, the Section of Fine Art, known simply as "the Section." Beginning in 1934, the Section sponsored competitions for commissions in large buildings open to all artists in the United States. Runners-up were awarded commissions for smaller post offices.

Section administrators enthusiastically supported American artists and fostered unique American art. Tapped for the position of Section director, Edward Bruce (1879–1943), a successful businessman and lawyer, had become an accomplished landscape painter in mid-life. Publicist Forbes Watson had been one of the most influential art critics in the country. Assistant director Edward Rowan (1898–1946), a friend to Grant Wood (1891–1942), creator of the cultural icon American Gothic, greatly admired the work of the Midwestern Regionalist artists. As a local historian and amateur architect, President Roosevelt was concerned that the vernacular architecture of New York's Hudson River Valley was disappearing. He saw to it that the valley's colorful heritage was preserved in the post office at Hyde Park and five others, each based on a specific Dutch Colonial building chosen by him and built with reclaimed fieldstone. Roosevelt also helped select the artists and themes for the six Hudson River Valley murals.



*U.S. Post Office Building, Renovo: Even though officials discouraged political sentiments in New Deal murals, Harold Lehman empathized with laborers by including union buttons on workers' caps in Railroad Repair (1943). **(Click image to view an enlarged version)***

In many parts of the country, post office murals gave residents their first encounter with an original work of art. Pennsylvanians, however, had enjoyed a rich history of art some two hundred years before the Treasury Department's programs began. Some of the most enduring images of the Commonwealth's history—William Penn's treaty with the Indians, George Washington crossing the Delaware River, and the delegates signing of the United States Constitution in Philadelphia—were created by artists who had lived or worked in Pennsylvania. Edward Redfield (1869–1965), Fern Coppedge (1883–1951), and like-minded artists settled in the artist colony at New Hope and became known as the Pennsylvania Impressionists.



U.S. Post Office Building, Ford City: Glass Making, made from Carrara structural glass by Josephine Mather in 1941.

They captured the daily life and landscapes of surrounding Bucks County. A group of Pittsburgh landscape painters founded by George Hetzel (1826–1899), known as the Scalp Level School, worked in the mountains near Johnstown in the late nineteenth century. Folk artists such as Edward Hicks (1780–1849) created charming farmstead portraits of barns, fields, and livestock of nineteenth-century Pennsylvania. Thomas Eakins (1844–1916), considered by many to be America's greatest painter, was an instructor at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia where he exhorted his students to "study their own country and to portray its life and types." At the turn of the twentieth century, John Sloan (1871–1951), George Luks (1867–1933), William Glackens (1870–1938), and Everett Shinn (1876–1953), who worked as illustrators for the Philadelphia Press, found fame for their stark scenes of urban life known as the Ashcan School. In the 1920s and 1930s, artists Charles Sheeler (1883–1965), Charles Demuth (1883–1935), and Elsie Driggs (1898–1992) painted iconic subjects, among them Bucks County barns, Lancaster's commercial architecture, and Pittsburgh's industrial buildings, in a hard-edged, geometrical style known as Precisionism. These artists inspired those who later created the post office murals.

Farm scenes were quite common in Pennsylvania art in the 1930s and 1940s. Farming was a family enterprise, and works of art of the period often show multi-generational families raising a variety of crops and livestock. A typical farm family could provide for nearly all of its food needs and these images of abundance were popular with non-farmers as well.

In addition to its rich, expansive farmland, the most important of Pennsylvania's abundant resources were iron ore and the anthracite and bituminous coal that fueled the steel-making and railroad industries, providing artists with a wealth of subject matter. Some commissions depict these workers as heroic figures, overcoming the hardships of working underground or handling molten metals. Others depict the massive structures which housed those industries, the monumental mills of the steel industry, and the coal breakers towering above the mine shafts. Other important activities celebrated in post office art include glassmaking in western Pennsylvania, lumbering in the northern tier, and the cement, textile, and transportation industries throughout the Commonwealth. Most of these major industries declined after World War II and have virtually disappeared and, in several cases, post office art is the only visual reminder of a vanished industrial heritage.



U.S. Post Office Building, Doylestown: Charles Child painted William Markham Purchases Bucks County Territory.

Portrayals of hardworking people dominate post office art, but the history of the Commonwealth is also represented by significant events and notable public figures. Images of William Penn, early Quakers, and Moravian settlers reflect Pennsylvania's founding as a religious haven known for its tolerance. Scenes chronicling the early settlement of the colony, the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and the signing of the United States Constitution reflect the Keystone State's historical importance. Prominent Pennsylvanians commemorated on post office walls include General "Mad Anthony" Wayne, military hero and statesman; Albert Gallatin, diplomat and the longest-serving treasury secretary; and Joseph Priestley, scientist and colleague of Benjamin Franklin, whose American home at Northumberland, Northumberland County, is administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) as a popular attraction on the Pennsylvania Trails of HistoryTM.

Nearly all the personalities celebrated in these public artworks were Caucasian males. Women appear in the majority of murals, but rarely as heroic figures. An interesting exception is the mural in the post office in Muncy, Lycoming County. Rachel Silverthorne's Ride by John W. Beauchamp (1906–1957) celebrates a local heroine who warned settlers of an imminent attack of British-allied Native Americans in 1778. Unlike most of the works, which depict how residents viewed themselves or their descendants, images of Native Americans reflect local attitudes towards an "alien" group. Depictions of Native Americans in artworks near Philadelphia emphasize harmonious relations between the native peoples and European settlers. Several murals in southeastern Pennsylvania portray Native Americans as exotic forest dwellers. Farther north and west, however, images of battles and displacement depict them as violent adversaries.

While Native Americans are relegated to narrow roles in the murals, portrayals of African Americans are almost completely absent. Despite being a significant presence in heavy industries, only a few African Americans are portrayed in murals, usually in the margins of the canvas.

Typically, a commission was one work of art usually placed above the postmaster's door on one of the lobby's end walls. Sometimes, however, a commission would include multiple works. Larger post offices, including those in Altoona, Blair County, Jeannette, Westmoreland County, and Norristown, Montgomery County, each received two large murals. The Allentown, Lehigh County, post office was decorated with ten smaller panels. Artists painted mostly in oil on canvas, but a few, including the Selinsgrove mural, were executed in tempera. Only two, Smelting by Walter Carnelli (1905–1959) for Bridgeville, Allegheny County, and Canal Era by Yngve Soderberg (1896–1971) for Morrisville, Bucks County, were painted directly on the lobby walls. Barbara Crawford (born 1914) chose a most unusual, although appropriate, medium for her painting of Bangor's citizens in Northampton County. She painted Slate Belt People on four pieces of slate to celebrate the workers who quarried the finely grained rock used in nearly all the blackboards in the country. (PHMC installed several state historical markers commemorating Pennsylvania's slate industry, including one in Bangor in 1947.)

Eighty-two artists won eighty-eight post office commissions for Pennsylvania. Some were established artists with national reputations, but many more were young unknowns whose commission afforded them their first public exposure. The majority resided in New York City, but many maintained Pennsylvania connections either by residency or through study at schools such as Philadelphia's venerable Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts or Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute of Technology (since 1976, Carnegie Mellon University). Before America achieved international recognition as an artistic center, artists sought legitimacy in European education. Many of Pennsylvania's post office artists had some training in France. Sculptor Malvina Hoffman (1885–1966), whose beautifully carved Coal Miners Returning from Work for Mahanoy City, Schuylkill County, studied with Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) and later became his assistant. Eighteen of the eighty-two artists, about 22 percent, were female.

The Section requested artists to work in the "American Scene" style. Section administrators vaguely defined the term, suggesting a straightforward realism portraying subjects easily recognizable by ordinary citizens. They forbade abstract and European-style modernism. The Section championed Midwestern Regionalists Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Stuart Curry as exemplars of the American Scene. The two murals for the Altoona



U.S. Post Office Building, Drexel Hill: Aborigines, a wood relief created in 1942 by sculptor Concetta Maria Scaravaglione (left). U.S. Post Office Building, Girard: Janet de Coux sculpted wood relief Vacation Time in 1942 (right).

SOUTH
WARK



U.S. Post Office Building, Muncy: John W. Beauchamp's *Rachel Silverthorne's Ride* (1938) depicts a local heroine warning of an imminent British-allied Indian attack in 1778. (Click image to view an enlarged version)

Post Office, Growth of the Road and Pioneers of Altoona, with their dense groupings of figures are reminiscent of Benton's work. John Fulton Folinsbee (1892–1972), a Bucks County impressionist, painted beautiful landscapes for Freeland, Luzerne County, and Burgettstown, Washington County, employing loose brushwork and vivid color. His colleague, Harry Leith-Ross (1886–1973), chose instead to paint a formal, almost academic mural for his depiction of the Marquis de Lafayette and Albert Gallatin for the post office in Masontown, Fayette County. Western Pennsylvania by Niles Spencer (1893–1952) for Aliquippa, Beaver County, and Beatty's Barn by Peter Blume (1906–1992) for Canonsburg, Washington County, are best characterized as Precisionist murals with buildings and landscapes simplified to geometric shapes. In Anthracite Coal by George Harding (1882–1959) for Kingston, Luzerne County, the anxious determination on the miners' faces is registered in almost expressionist distortion and coloration. Harding, a painter of national reputation, enjoyed more leeway than most artists, but his mural was about as abstract as the Section would allow.

Thirty-seven of the 88 Pennsylvania commissions—42 percent—were for sculpture, more than twice the national average of 20 percent. Most were

created with traditional materials of wood, stone, and plaster. Carved walnut, mahogany, and maple provided a rustic look especially appropriate for the agricultural themes of the sculptural works in Bloomsburg, Columbia County, Hamburg, Berks County, and York, York County. Classically trained architectural sculptors Augustine Jaegers (1878–1952) and Leo Lentelli (1879–1961) created highly detailed and intricate bas relief panels. Some sculptures were executed in metal. Iron Pouring in Danville, originally designed in plaster, was cast in aluminum, more suggestive of the molten iron being poured. Josephine Mather's Glass Making in Ford City, Armstrong County, carved from a piece of Cararra glass, weds material and subject matter,

The Section encouraged artists to produce works acceptable to the communities for which they were being created, and to avoid objectionable subject matter. Taboo topics included any depictions of civil unrest such as strikes, uprisings, and warfare—unless the opponents were Native Americans. Overall, this system worked as the Section had hoped; most communities were happy with their artworks, but there were several notable exceptions.

The most common complaints concerned details relating to the historical accuracy and authenticity of the individuals, incidents, elements, and environments depicted in the murals. Frank Morla's portrayal of Quakertown's early settlers offended residents, who vented their displeasure in several letters to the Quakertown Free Press. "It's a colorful creation as to pigments, but the historic and authentic detail of that mural is debatable," one critic wrote. The offending details included "impractical" harnesses on the horses, uneven brickwork in the buildings, and lop-sided trees. But the gravest offense of all was Morla's placement of Puritan hats on Quaker heads. "Early Quakers pictured wearing the garb of Puritans whose persecution of the Quakers in New England is a well known historical fact, might well be considered an 'effrontery' to their present-day descendants," opined ten members of the Religious Society of Friends. "This mural is more appropriate for a Post Office in some New England town."

After a mural had been installed, it was too late to make alterations, but sometimes a cohesive and vocal community effort could influence the finished artwork. In 1936, the post office in Jeannette, Westmoreland County, a large neo-classical building, was to receive two murals, one of which depicted the community's major industry, glassmaking. The other depicted the 1763 Battle of Bushy Run, a violent skirmish in which British Highlanders and Royal American Redcoats fought Delaware, Shawnee, Mingo, and Huron warriors. Artist T. Frank Olson won the commission but died days after the Section approved his color sketches. His widow received payment for her husband's work, and the Section hired Robert Lepper (1906–1991), an art professor at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, to complete the murals. Lepper made a number of changes in the mural, taming the graphic violence of Olson's battle scene by removing the bayonets from Highlanders' muskets. In a newspaper article, Lepper explained the "post office murals are not intended to be viewed as pictures of events or activities but rather as decorations, symbolic of events and activities which stem from the past." In a letter to his supervisor, Jeannette's postmaster, Dillinger Shaffer, lodged his complaint that reflected local public opinion.



U.S. Post Office Building, Muncy: John W. Beauchamp's *Rachel Silverthorne's Ride* (1938) depicts a local heroine warning of an imminent British-allied Indian attack in 1778..

The murals did not carry out [Olson's] original design . . . [the firearms] looked more like repeating rifles in the hands of the fighters instead of muskets. While it is granted that artists have an artistic license . . . it was a disappointment that such an error had been made as of course at the time this battle was fought, repeating rifles were unknown. Perhaps more outstanding than that is the [absence] of the bayonets as the battle was really won by the bayonets in the hands of the Highlanders as they did not have time to stop and reload their muskets.

In a testy letter, the Section's Edward Rowan supported Lepper's alterations but ultimately acquiesced to community pressure and instructed the artist to paint the bayonets and impaled Native Americans back into the mural. The Section vigilantly discouraged overtly political art. Several artists were politically active, however, and showed their sympathy with labor. Harold Lehman (1913–2006) expressed support for the Rail Car Workers' Union by including small blue union buttons on the caps of workers in his mural, Railroad Repair, for the post office in Renovo, Clinton County.

Nudity was also to be avoided, and Section Director Edward Bruce was emphatic about this point. "Anybody who wanted to paint a nude ought to have his head examined!" he declared. Bruce's officials were quick to advise artists to remove or tone down anything that might be deemed risqué. Once again, however, depictions of Native Americans proved to be an exception to the rule. Artists who specialized in figurative art could portray muscular, nearly naked Native Americans in poses deemed inappropriate for whites. Jared French (1905–1987), an artist who devised an unusual pictorial language to explore human unconsciousness and its relation to sexuality, could not resist testing the boundaries. In 1937, he was working on two post office murals, one for Plymouth, Luzerne County, and the second for Richmond, Virginia. For the Richmond commission, he proposed depicting a group of Confederate soldiers in various states of undress preparing to cross a stream to flee advancing Union forces. The Section advised French that the figures must be clothed. "You have painted enough nudes in your life so that the painting of several more or less should not matter in your artistic career," wrote a Section administrator. French capitulated on the



U.S. Post Office Building, Plymouth: *Lunchtime with Early Miners* (1938) by Jared French, who painted the only nude in New Deal post office murals, despite warnings by government officials. (Click image to view an enlarged version)

Richmond mural—he wanted to be paid after all—but as a final jab at Rowan and the Section, he did manage to paint one more nude. Before finishing the Plymouth mural, Mealtine with the Early Coal Miners, French inserted into the background a male figure piloting a barge, inexplicably unclothed. The nude pilot, like the union buttons of the railcar workers, went undetected by Treasury Department officials. The offending image appeared too small to be detected in the final eight-by-ten-inch photographs, and Mealtine became the only example of full-frontal nudity in a United States post office.

The greatest controversy between the Section and a community erupted over the mural for Somerset, Somerset County. At first glance, it's hard to imagine that Spring Planting, a charming autumnal agricultural scene, could offend anyone. Many residents of Somerset were already angry with the Treasury Department about their new post office. Instead of a building that would blend harmoniously with the surrounding architecture, the Treasury Department's private architect designed a severe moderne-style building. The blocky post office set in the center of the community clashed with the ornate neoclassical style county courthouse across the street and necessitated the removal of a much-beloved copper beech tree. One newspaper editorial bluntly blamed Somerset's U.S. Representative J. Buell Snyder (1877–1946). "The building stands out as a witness to Congressman Snyder's dislike of Somerset," the newspaper editorialized. "One cannot conceive of a more suitable means by which Mr. Snyder could have spat in the faces of the citizens of Somerset than by the erection of that building. It is an abomination."

When rumors circulated that the farmer depicted in the lower left of the post office mural was a portrait of Snyder, the public grew even more agitated and hostile. Conservatives reviled Snyder, an ardent New Dealer, and accused him of "emptying the Treasury." A front page article in a local newspaper helped stir a storm. "The Republican party chiefs have determined that if the face of J.



U.S. Post Office Building, Chester: Erwin Frederick Springweiller's 1938 aluminum bas relief portrays old and new, a popular theme, in William Penn.

Buell Snyder appears in the Post Office they will boycott the postal system . . . and start an independent system of their own." Alexander Kostellow (1897–1954), at work painting Somerset—Farm Scene in his New York studio, was dismayed by the controversy and wrote to Rowan for assistance. "With reluctance, I would like to ask you for a favor, write me a letter, instructing me not to put any likeness of any living politician, in the mural . . . I am sure a note from you to me would settle the difficulties." Ever sensitive to public reaction, Rowan obliged by writing a letter that appeared to scold Kostellow and flatter the mural's recipients. "I was distressed to learn," he wrote, "that there was any question on the subject of your mural and particularly at the rumor that it is your intention to include a portrait of a living statesman. It is not the policy of the Section to approve such action . . . I well recall the enthusiasm with which your design was received in this office. It was our feeling that you had a tender, spiritual message to give on the good citizenship of Somerset County and their natural setting of peace and plenty which fortunately is their rich heritage in this great country of ours. You are at liberty to present this letter in case any questions are asked."

The mission of the Treasury Department's post office art project was to provide employment to artists as part of the national recovery effort, to provide cultural enrichment to local communities, and to support the promotion of an American art. It also created a permanent record of the agricultural, industrial, social, and political history of the Commonwealth. Individuals can still enjoy George Rickey's Susquehanna Trail in the Selinsgrove Post Office. It captures a moment of Pennsylvania's history and preserves it for future generations. Throughout both state and nation, post office murals serve to enlighten and educate. Seventy-five years after the creation of the New Deal, Pennsylvanians can continue to appreciate this remarkable collection of public art, an experience free to anyone who wanders into a post office lobby.

The Process

The search for an artist for the Selinsgrove post office began in 1936. The commission had been offered to artists Harry Gottlieb, Sidney Kaufman, and Charles Gilbert, each of whom declined. In a January 11, 1938, letter, Edward Rowan, superintendent of the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture offered the commission to George Rickey, suggesting "subject matter which embodies some idea appropriate to the building or to the particular locale of Selinsgrove. What we most want is a simple and vital design." The blueprints of the lobby indicated a space of about ten feet wide by four feet high over the postmaster's door. For this mural, Rickey was to receive \$570 paid in three installments at various stages in the creation of the work. Perhaps because of the delayed start, the Section proposed a very short period of time with May 31, 1938, as the date of completion.

After receiving the commission, an artist was expected to visit the community to gather ideas. He or she would visit the postmaster and other townspeople, such as the mayor or librarian, who might suggest themes. The Selinsgrove postmaster favored a historical scene featuring Antoni Selin, the town's namesake and Revolutionary War officer, but Rickey decided on a "pastoral motif." He also suggested enlarging the mural. The customary format, a rectangular canvas above the postmaster's office door, was augmented to wrap down and around the top half of the postmaster's door. In April, Rickey submitted three rough sketches. The Section concurred in the choice of theme and offered Rickey an increased commission of \$970 to paint the larger canvas.

With the rough sketch approved, Rickey proceeded to paint a small color sketch at a scale of two inches to the foot. The major elements of the finished mural are evident: a sower, a ploughman, a farmer, and a mother with children. Rowan, who reviewed Rickey's sketch, was so displeased with Rickey's draftsmanship, that he rejected it. "It will be necessary to convince this office of your ability to draw," wrote Rowan, who summoned Rickey to Washington. Rickey revised his color sketch and presented it to the Section in August 1938, and it was approved with minor changes.

With the revised sketch approved, Rickey prepared a full size drawing on heavy brown paper. This would allow details to be worked out and then used to transfer the design to the canvas. It was at this stage that Rickey transposed the two main farmers, explaining, "Contrary to almost all of rural America, the ploughs here turn the furrow to the left instead of to the right. Details like that, though trivial from the point of view of composition, can rankle in the minds of those who have to look at the painting every day, and I thought I might as well get my facts straight."

In order to render detail accurately and keep his color scheme—red in the center and green along the edges—Rickey placed the farmer sowing on the left and the ploughman on the right. He also painted the mother holding a letter and standing next to a mailbox, a reference to the Rural Free Delivery service that connected all Americans by mail.

Most murals were painted in oil on canvas, but Rickey chose the more labor intensive process of tempera because he preferred the matte finish which he felt more closely resembled true fresco. Despite the beautiful result, Rickey received no further commissions from the Section. After serving in World War II, he became an art educator and later achieved international acclaim as an abstract kinetic sculptor.

<http://www.greenbeams.us/sustainable-travelogue-history-at-southwark-station-post-office/>

Sustainable Travelogue – History At Southwark Station Post Office

by Amy on ~~October 14, 2016~~

Tweet

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You always wait in line at the [Southwalk Station Post Office](#) – sometimes for a very long time. I love it. I always meet someone new and I like to look at the painting at the far end. Commissioned in 1938 by the Treasury Department’s section of Fine Arts and Sculpture, “Iron Plantation near Southwark – 1800”, was



painted in oil on canvas by Robert E. Larter. At first I thought the piece was done as part of the WPA but found that The Treasury Department was charged with commissioning artwork to make it more accessible to the people and lift their Depression laden spirits. I noticed the painting the first time I walked into the post office – it continues to amaze me that my fellow line-waiters often confess to never having noticed it.

In doing some research I found that there are actually two Larter paintings in the post office. One day I asked my postal clerk if the other one had been taken down. “Oh no!” she said, “It is in the back and it is very beautiful.” She said that no one can go back there except postal workers but, “let me have your camera and I will take some photos for you,” and off she went. She came back with more than 30 shots of various angles apologizing that the whole thing wouldn’t fit in one shot because, “you really need to step back more to appreciate the whole thing and there isn’t enough room back there.”



I took those angled shots and tried to lay them out to get an approximation of the piece. It, like its counterpart, is fitted to the wall around different window and door obstructions. It depicts the shipbuilding industry that was at the core of the Southwark District in the early 1800’s. Now Queen Village, parts of Old City and Bella Vista, Southwark was a highly diverse, bustling, industrial area that was home to immigrant and established families. The painting, “Shipyards at Southwark – 1800” shows the hard, hard work that was and is shipbuilding, launching and sailing.

My postal clerk said it was a shame that more people couldn’t see and enjoy the second painting but that it had been necessary to build the wall of post office boxes to meet the needs of the neighborhood. It is a shame since the intent was art for all. And it is a shame to see that some postal workers are starting to deface it with mindless graffiti. My hope is that the painting can be moved to a more public place, preserved and enjoyed by many. I also hope that once it is moved, it can be photographed in its entirety and that the photo can be mounted in Southwark Station Post Office for all the line-waiters to enjoy.

In the meantime, take a stroll through history in an unexpected place, the Southwark Station Post Office, and enjoy Larter's interpretation of the iron industry in south Philly because, to be truly sustainable, you should understand the history, the roots of a place and build upon that history. If you want to learn more about The Treasury Department's efforts check the following links:

<https://livingnewdeal.org/projects/southwark-station-post-office-murals-philadelphia-pa/>

<http://statemuseumpa.org/common-canvas/>

<http://www.wpamurals.com/pennsyly.htm>