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The documentation and preservation of art-in-architecture of Michigan: The section of fine arts projects

Cheryl Ann Chidester

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THE DOCUMENTATION AND PRESERVATION OF
ART-IN-ARCHITECTURE OF MICHIGAN:
THE SECTION OF FINE ARTS PROJECTS

by

Cheryl Ann Chidester

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Geography and Geology

Eastern Michigan University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTERS OF SCIENCE

In

Historic Preservation

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ABSTRACT

The Section of Fine Arts' Art-in-Architecture program created public and permanent cultural artifacts that expressed and recorded American beliefs, values, and stories for future generations. Many of these artworks have been saved. Sadly, others have been neglected, mistreated, or forgotten. This project focuses on The Section's post office art installations in Michigan. The Section of Fine Arts, one of FDR's New Deal programs of the Depression era, operated under the auspices of the Treasury Department. The program utilized symbols of the common man to tie together a nation's scattered and often isolated communities, to promote a common heritage and purpose, and to relate the past to the present while giving hope for the future. The documentation of these art-in-architecture projects is essential as is the need to conserve them. Although challenging, the effort is vital to insure the survival of these records of an important and distinctive American chapter.

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Glossary

Art Deco - A decorative and architectural style of the period 1925-1940, characterized by geometric designs, bold colors, and the use of plastic and glass.

Cast Stone - A “highly refined form of concrete made from portland cement, fine and coarse aggregates and water.

Conservation - This involves “physical intervention in the actual fabric to ensure continued” integrity.¹

Cubism - A nonobjective school of painting and sculpture developed in Paris in the early 20th century, characterized by the reduction and fragmentation of natural forms into abstract, often geometric structures usually rendered as a set of discrete planes.

Dadaism - A European artistic and literary movement (1916-1923) that flouted conventional aesthetic and cultural values by producing works marked by nonsense, travesty, and incongruity.

Encaustic - An ancient method of painting with colored molten wax, which is fused with the surface by application of hot irons.

Expressionism - A movement in the arts during the early part of the 20th century that emphasized subjective expression of the artist's inner experiences.

Frescos - The artist paints directly on the plaster wall, which is either “dry” (dry fresco) or “wet” (wet or true fresco). In the latter method, the pigments are mixed with water and become chemically bound to the plaster.

Futurism - An artistic movement originating in Italy around 1910 whose aim was to express the energetic, dynamic, and violent quality of contemporary life, especially as embodied in the motion and force of modern machinery.

Impressionism - A theory or style of painting originating and developed in France during the 1870s, characterized by an emphasis on the immediate visual impression produced by a scene and by the use of unmixed primary colors and small strokes to simulate actual reflected light.

Italian Renaissance - The Italian Renaissance of the 15th century represented a reconnection of the west with classical antiquity, the absorption of knowledge (particularly mathematics), a focus on the importance of living well in the present (Renaissance humanism), and an explosion of the dissemination of knowledge brought on by the advent of printing. In addition, the creation of new techniques in art, poetry, and architecture led in turn to a radical change in the style and substance of the arts and letters. The Italian Renaissance was often labeled as the beginning of the Modern Age, or the Early Modern.

Mural - A painting on a wall.

Oil (paint or color) - The pigment is ground with oil.

pH - A measure of the acidity or alkalinity of a solution, numerically equal to 7 for neutral solutions, increasing with increasing alkalinity and decreasing with increasing acidity. The pH scale commonly in use ranges from 0 to 14.

Preservation - The “maintenance of the artifact in the same physical condition as when it was received.”²

Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) - In place from December 1933 to June

1934 and was a crash relief program administered without a strict relief test by the Treasury Department.

Regionalism (art) - Artists who shunned the city and rapidly developing technological advances to focus on scenes of rural life. Regionalist style was at its height from 1930 to 1935 and was widely appreciated for its reassuring images of the American heartland.

Relief Sculpture - A sculpture is in relief if it is attached to, or part of, a back-slab or backplate.

Section of Painting and Sculpture (later called the Section of Fine Arts) - A program administered by the Treasury Department. "The Section," as it was often referred to, though subsidized through commissions, was not a work relief program. Artists were selected through regional and national competitions. The program was in effect from October 1934 through June 1943.

Social Realism - Also known as Socio-Realism, is an artistic movement, expressed in the visual and other realist arts, which depicts working class activities.

Surrealism - A 20th-century literary and artistic movement that attempts to express the workings of the subconscious and is characterized by fantastic imagery and incongruous juxtaposition of subject matter. Also literature or art produced in this style.

Tempera - A technique of painting using a medium pigment mixed with egg yolk, glues or casein; also the medium itself.

Terra cotta - Also known as 'baked earth, is a fired clay product and usually glazed."³

Treasury Relief Art Program (TRAP) - In effect from July 1935 to June 1939 and

received funds from the WPA to the Treasury for the decoration of federal buildings.

Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates - A system that provides coordinates on a world wide flat grid, divided into sixty zones for easy computation of a location and mapping.

Work Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP) - A large work relief program devoted to the plastic arts and was part of a larger program called Federal Project No.1 which included drama, music, and writing.

Chapter One: Introduction and Background

General Introduction

The subject of this thesis is the post office artwork commissioned by the Section of Fine Arts. The Section of Fine Arts, a program funded through the Treasury Department and under the umbrella of the New Deal programs and which commissioned most of the post office murals, was one of four programs that subsidized artists through two different government agencies.

The Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) was in place from December 1933 to June 1934 and was a crash relief program administered without strict relief qualifications by the Treasury Department. It was the first federal art project carried out on a national scale.

The Treasury Relief Art Program (TRAP) was in effect from July 1935 to June 1939 and received funds from the Works Project Administration (WPA) for the decoration of federal buildings. The national directors were Olin Dows and Cecil Jones. The purpose of TRAP was to supplement the work of the Section by providing funds for art for previously constructed federal buildings or when building appropriation funds were exhausted. Since funds were provided by the WPA, relief-eligibility regulations applied to the use of those funds.⁴

The Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WPA/FAP) was a large work relief program devoted to the plastic arts and was part of a larger program called Federal Project No. 1, which included drama, music, and writing. Holger Cahill was the national director of this program, which was active from 1935 to 1943. Both of these were

work relief programs that required a large percentage of the artists involved to be relief-qualified.

The Section of Painting and Sculpture, later called the Section of Fine Arts, was also a program administered by the Treasury Department. “The Section,” as it was often referred to, was not a work relief program. Though the artwork was subsidized through commissions and so paid for by the government, the artists did not have to qualify for relief. Artists were selected through regional and national competitions or commissions. The program was in effect from October 1934 through June 1943.⁵

Even at that time, the distinctions between these various programs were not always clear to the public and have become even more blurred as time has passed. Even so, each of the New Deal art projects was a distinct entity with its own rules, regulations, and goals.⁶ For instance, the Section was responsible for placing art in Federal government buildings while the artwork of WPA/FAP was generally installed in city, county, and state-owned buildings.⁷

On October 16, 1934, the Section of Fine Arts was established by order of the Secretary of the Treasury. Under the terms of this order, five objectives were listed:

1. To secure the best quality of art to embellish public buildings.
2. To stimulate the development of art in the nation.
3. To employ local talent where possible.
4. To secure the cooperation of those in the art world to select artists for the work to be done.
5. To encourage competitions wherever practical although allowing for certain established artists to receive commissions without competing.⁸

Administered by the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department and headed by Edward Bruce, the main function of the Section of Fine Arts was to select art of high quality to decorate public buildings, most of these being post offices. Although the Section did sponsor a single competition for watercolors, a number of sculptural competitions and a few miscellaneous competitions, the vast majority of the competitions were for murals that were to be installed in public buildings.⁹ From 1934 to 1943, the Section awarded 1,123 mural contracts for a cost of \$1,472,199 and 289 sculpture contracts costing \$563,539. The Section held 193 competitions involving 1,205 artists.¹⁰

The Section specifically refused to undertake a relief program and concentrated instead on commissioning quality embellishments for Federal Buildings.¹¹ Bruce did not want the Section tied to control of the quality, money, or relief requirements of WPA.¹² The program was supported by money that had already been appropriated. Since the 18th century, the Secretary of Treasury has been responsible for federal buildings, with the supervising architect as executive officer. Existing rules set aside up to one percent of the cost of Federal buildings for decoration with the Treasury Department, responsible for the construction of all federal buildings, including local post offices throughout the country.¹³ The Section used this money to commission artists to adorn federal buildings with murals, sculptures, and other art objects. The change was that the art unit, not the architect, would take charge of the decorations.¹⁴ This arrangement caused Bruce to spend much of his time fighting with architects, planners, and Treasury officials for his funds.¹⁵ The one percent was more often a hope than a reality for most federal construction.¹⁶

The Section divided projects into two groups: national, involving commissions of more than \$5,000 and usually dealing with large federal buildings in Washington D.C. , and

local, involving an award of less than \$5,000 that were mostly commissions for artwork to be installed in small post offices.¹⁷

Although there were restrictions and regulations concerning the subject and style of the projects commissioned by the various New Deal art programs, including the Section of Fine Arts, the artwork of these programs became almost radical in contrast to what had preceded it. While these pieces are now often perceived as conventional, realistic works or period pieces, artists incorporated then-current trends and ideas.

While their work was often politicized because of the subsidized nature of these projects, the artists were free to dedicate themselves to the arts. Their compensation was similar to other skilled workers. They became part of the working class.¹⁸ The artist employed by the Section of Fine Arts, however, did not have to qualify for relief. Because of this, successful artists were eligible for commissions.¹⁹

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), the United States president at the time of the Great Depression and the New Deal Era, believed that these art projects would help create a national culture. FDR asserted that government support would infuse a new national spirit into the land. Roosevelt believed that America faced a psychological crisis and needed a sense of national unity to overcome it. Symbols could also be used to help create the national culture that FDR envisioned.

The Section's guidelines encouraged the use of symbolic themes in the artwork: the family, the pioneer, the common man, the farmer, and the worker. These themes tied people from scattered and often isolated communities together as a nation and promoted a common heritage and purpose. These symbols were by nature national ones, but they also functioned

to relate the past to the present. The virtues that had made the country great in the past would, hopefully, serve well in the crisis and even as models for the future.²⁰

The Section's programs extended the ideals of the FDR administration into areas that political and social legislation could not reach. The New Deal programs sought to change the relationship between artist and society by democratizing art and culture. The projects were a uniquely American blend combining an elitist belief in the value of high art and culture with the democratic ideal that everyone in the society could and should benefit from these projects.²¹ Many people of the 1930s had never seen an original painting. New Deal advocates believed that art was a necessary, desirable, and essential part of any culture and should be fostered by the government. It was a radical step for the government to take the position that art was a necessity rather than a luxury. FDR believed that a country needed citizens familiar and involved with the arts in order to be truly democratic and thus tried to bring original art to small towns everywhere.

The federal government had still another motive. It wanted to create visible and permanent cultural artifacts that would express and record American beliefs, values, and stories for future generations and civilizations. The most suitable visual form for recording these beliefs would be murals; they were the most public and permanent form of painting.²²

A large percentage of the commissions were murals; only 300 of the 1,400 projects were sculptures (Figure 1).



Figure 1: One of the Section's Michigan relief sculptures: *Chippewa Legend* by Hugo Robus, 1939, plaster relief, Munising, Michigan, post office. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester.

The sculptures commissioned were often low-relief. The most popular media were wood, plaster, terra cotta, and stone (both natural and synthetic). A few artists had their work cast in metal, glass, or ceramic, and rarely were works created with marble.²³ The cost of materials played a role in selecting the medium, for its cost was the responsibility of the artist.

Murals were executed in a variety of media. Frescos, because they became a permanent part of the plaster wall, were the most desired medium. Yet less than fifty percent of the commissions were actually frescoes. They were more expensive to produce; the process interfered with the functioning of the sites and demanded an artist with experience in a difficult medium.²⁴ Many were produced as oil canvas installation paintings. Most often artists completed the murals in their studios on canvas; then custodians or wallpaper hangers glued the work to the post office wall, thus avoiding erecting a scaffold and disrupting post office traffic.²⁵ Tempera was

used by about 10% of artists (Figure 2). Though tempera is technically more tedious than oil, some artists preferred the matte finish of tempera, which resembles the look of a true fresco unlike the glossiness of oil.²⁶



Figure 2: *Cattle Auctions* by Frank Cassara, 1942, egg tempera and oil on adhered to plaster wall, Sandusky, Michigan, post office. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester.

Post offices, because they are very public buildings, were thought to be the ideal vessel to convey these ideals and beliefs. The postal service performed a truly democratic

service. Michigan artist James Calder, when commenting on his work, stated that the Postal Service is “extending to the farmer the same opportunity to be as well-informed and intelligent a citizen as the city dweller.”²⁷ From 1934 to 1943 the Section commissioned art in 1,100 post offices nationwide.²⁸

The artwork was chosen by competitions and, to the more well-known artists, through consignment. The majority of commissions were awarded to runners-up in regional competitions outside the site-specific competitive process. However, no formal mechanism existed to establish citizen advisory committees, notify communities of the opportunity to contact the artist-designate, or poll local opinion.²⁹

For its local competitions, the Section suggested subject matter dealing with local history, local industry and recreation, or landscapes that would serve as a link between individual communities and the federal government.

The Section’s series of competitions was its hallmark and distinguished it in concept from the WPA/FAP. The competitions, which were announced in the Section’s irregularly issued *Bulletin*, were not usually open to the general public. Most of the competitions were restricted in some way. Many of the competitions were by invitation only; others were open only to artists who lived in a particular state or region. The winning artist received contracts as in any other government job.³⁰

The competitions gave the Section a great deal of publicity. Announcements of the contests and the winners were often



Figure 3: *Waiting for the Mail* by James Calder, 1941, oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall, Grand Ledge, Michigan post office. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester.

reprinted in the art press and even occasionally in the general press. One of the most publicized of the Section's competitions was the "Forty-Eight State Competition." The winners were awarded a commission for one of each state's post offices. The winning sketches (the forty-eight plus twenty-six more honorable mention awards that also received commissions), were exhibited at the Corcoran Art Gallery and reproduced in *Life* magazine.³¹ James Calder's entry of *Waiting for the Mail*, in the Grand Ledge Post Office, was the Michigan winner (Figure 3).³² *Copper Mining in Calumet* (Michigan), by Joseph Lasker, received both an honorable mention and a commission.³³

A majority of artists did not win competitions but were chosen from a file of "runners-up." The Section retained sketches they considered of high caliber. Often the artist could use the same sketch that was submitted for a competition. This practice saved both the Section and the artist's competition costs.³⁴

All artists who worked for the Section had to sign a contract committing them to several stages of preparatory work. There were four installments of payments, three for smaller commissions. In the first stage, the artist submitted black and white sketches and a color sketch on the scale of 1":1'. The second required submission was a black and white drawing or a clay model of the same size as the finished work. For larger commissions the third payment was given when half of the work was completed, and the final payment was received when the artwork was completed.³⁵ It was rare that each stage was initially approved. At times, there were several lengthy written discussions between the artist and the Section before approval.³⁶

The standard New Deal post office carried a decorative allotment of \$650 to \$750 to cover a space about twelve feet by five feet above the postmaster's door. The courthouses

and other larger and more costly installations had allotments up to \$3,000. From these allotments, the artist had to purchase all the necessary supplies and pay the costs of installation and photographs.³⁷ Working with the Section could be expensive. Besides the price of materials, installation, which often required a paperhanger to glue the artwork on the wall, the artwork was required to be photographed at different stages. Sometimes light fixtures had to be moved or lighting modified, and oftentimes there were shipping costs. Also the time spent from conception to the finished piece had to be taken into account.³⁸

Minority representation of artists employed by the Section is mixed. Only three African American artists received commissions, but more than one sixth or 150 of 850 artists working for the Section were women.³⁹ This was in contrast to the WPA restrictions of women; the WPA administration wanted to “Put a brake upon women’s eagerness to be the family breadwinner, wage recipient and controller of the family pocketbook.”⁴⁰ Efforts were also made to commission Native Americans and Western artists.⁴¹

The Section wanted to be perceived differently from the WPA by the public. Through the WPA, Cahill’s name was a household word. Bruce and his staff cultivated, and largely achieved, anonymity. Bruce did not want Treasury work confused with FAP works in the public mind. FAP officers complained that the Section awarded FAP workers commissions for federal murals with the result that many artists had quit, leaving the FAP work unfinished.⁴²

However, human relief was the motive behind all the New Deal’s art programs. If it had not been for the great Depression, it is unlikely that our government would have sponsored any more art than it had in the past.

The programs were experimental. In the end, neither the Treasury nor the Federal Art Project succeeded in convincing the representatives of the American people that federal art patronage was such an uplifting activity that it should be considered as a proper function of government and therefore be continued.⁴³

After Pearl Harbor came protests that the war threatened to bankrupt the country and that spending money on nonessential murals undermined the morale of citizens whom the government had asked to sacrifice and economize. It didn't seem to matter that the murals resulted from 1939 and 1941 appropriations. Although not all were in agreement, the majority of the public felt that the government should set examples in economy and divert money from nonessentials to defense projects.

Bruce tried to make his agency relevant to the war effort by conducting competitions for art to be placed in military hospitals to help raise funds for the Red Cross and by creating posters for the war effort. Bruce also tried to have the Section made an independent agency housed in a proposed new Smithsonian Gallery of Art. When this became lost in the gathering war clouds, the Section had no choice but to become part of the Federal Works Administration (FWA). With Bruce's new boss John M. Carmody's lack of interest in art and with FDR occupied by events in Europe, the Section was without political patrons. Edward Bruce suffered a heart attack in 1942 and on January 27, 1943, died. With him died the Section of Fine Arts.⁴⁴

The Section of Fine Art program did have an impact on the American art scene. Although censorship, approval of limited styles, the absence of some well-known artist of the era, and limited space and funds were issues that, at times, diluted the goals of the Section, many of its goals were met. The goal of employing artists, particularly local talent, was

successful. There were older painters living in distant communities whose work received national attention for the first time. There were younger ones who started their national reputations with the program. Goals of providing quality art for a wide public, to develop American art, to encourage national values were, at least partially, realized. The large amount of painting and sculpture that represented our nation's symbols and stories produced during the nine years of the government programs increased the general public's familiarity and appreciation of the arts.⁴⁵

Because the Section and other government programs became involved in such activities as art education, museum exhibits, traveling exhibitions, and publications, a precedent was set for government artistic involvement that extended beyond mere building decoration. The National Endowments for the Arts and the Humanities is one example of a government program that evolved from the New Deal programs. The organization support extends to museums, schools, and grants to individual artists. Artworks for federal buildings are under the jurisdiction of the *Art-in-Architecture* program administered by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). The program, created in 1963, has some similarities to the Section of Fine Arts program in that a small percentage of a building's construction costs are set aside to provide for art.⁴⁶

American art and its subsequent movements owe much to Depression era art programs and its art. The artwork recorded not just the outward symbols and stories of our nation from a Depression era perspective, but also the inner significance of the society in a unique time in our nation's history.

Biography of the Section of Fine Arts Key Personnel

George Biddle (1885-1973).

The artist George Biddle, who became known as the “father of federal art projects,” believed that the federal government could produce “a real spurt in the arts.” Biddle, who was among the American artists who had traveled in Mexico, had been impressed with that government’s immensely successful mural program, employing its best artists to decorate public buildings at workman’s wages. An old classmate of FDR from Groton and Harvard,⁴⁷ Biddle wrote to the President on May 9, 1933, urging the implementation of a Federal program to support the artists of America.⁴⁸ In his letter, Biddle proposed that he and a group of distinguished American painters—Thomas Benton, John Steuart Curry, Reginald March, Henry Varnum Poor, Boardman Robinson and Grand Wood—decorated the new Department of Justice Building in Washington for “plumber’s wages.”⁴⁹

Biddle, himself, completed a number of works for the Section.⁵⁰ According to Biddle, the projects were “democratic, social and anonymous rather than aristocratic, aesthetic and snobbish.” He also wrote, “I am not concerned with moral values but curious about the art trend in America.”⁵¹

He believed that the main objective of New Deal art was to create a permanent record of the aspirations and achievements of the American people. Because of this, an artist who accepted employment from the federal government should have been willing to make certain concessions to his employer concerning style and subject matter.⁵²

Edward Bruce (1880-1943).

Edward Bruce was the director of the Section of Fine Arts from its conception until its death. He was the son of a Baptist minister and a writer of children stories. He earned a Bachelor of Arts from Columbia College in 1901 and L.L.D. from Columbia Law School in 1904. After practicing law in the States for several years, he moved to Manila and then to China and became president of the Pacific Development Company. In 1922, Bruce traveled to Italy to study painting and within a few years was successfully exhibiting. Returning to New York in 1929, he painted a mural in the board room of the San Francisco Stock Exchange. He was then asked to serve as a silver expert on the United States delegation to the London Economic Conference, and soon afterwards to direct the first federal art project, the Public Works of Art Project in the winter of 1933-34.⁵³

Bruce organized a meeting in December 1933 of museum directors and others in the field of the arts and was instrumental in the establishment of the PWAP and its successor, the Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, later known as the Section of Fine Arts. As a lawyer, a business executive, and a respected artist who gave it all up for a career in public service, he was a constant advocate of integrity and the vision of the Section.⁵⁴ He believed in federal patronage of art of an enduring quality. Bruce wrote, "What we need is not official art, but the fostering and cultivation throughout the country of the creative spirit which is ready to spring up everywhere."⁵⁵

In 1937, he suffered a heart attack and partial paralysis of his left side. Doctors advised Bruce to resign. Though he submitted his resignation, Bruce immediately reconsidered. Self-sacrifice, philanthropy, and the sense of obligation were integral parts of

Bruce's character. He spent sizable amounts of his own money for Section activities not covered by government sources.⁵⁶

Bruce hoped to advance American Art and improve national taste by putting before the public what he judged to be America's best art acquired solely on the basis of its quality.⁵⁷ "Our objective should be to enrich the lives of all our people by making things in the spirit, the creation of beauty part of their daily lives, by giving them new hopes and sources of interest to fill their leisure, by eradicating the ugliness of their surroundings, by building with a sense of beauty as well as mere utility, and by fostering all the simple pleasures of life which are not important in terms of dollars spent but are immensely important in terms of a higher standard of living." The dividends of the government investment would be "in material wealth, in happiness, contentment and well-being."⁵⁸

Bruce unsuccessfully tried to convert the Section program into a permanent federal bureau.⁵⁹ Bruce suffered a heart attack in 1942 and on January 27, 1943, he died. With him died the Section of Fine Arts.⁶⁰

Olin Dows (1904-1981).

Olin Dows, an artist and art administrator, was the Director of the Treasury Relief Art Project from 1935 to 1938 and an important aide to Edward Bruce. Educated at Harvard and Yale, he assisted in establishing the Treasury Department's Art Program in 1933.⁶¹ Dows believed that it was both socially and artistically beneficial to have government art patronage. He felt that there was a need for a broad base for national art.⁶²

He also worked for the Office of Civilian Defense in Washington, D.C., overseeing a project involving artists depicting various phases of work in defense plants. Dow was a

WWII artist with the European Theatre of Operations and witnessed several significant battles.⁶³

Dow's published memoirs are a good source of information that encompasses both his knowledge and personal perspective on the TRAP and the Section.

Henry Morgenthau Jr. (1891-1967).

Henry Morgenthau Jr., the 52nd Secretary of the Treasury from 1934 to 1945, and his first wife Elinor (who died in 1949), were great supporters of the arts. As a good friend of FDR's, Morgenthau was a direct line between FDR and Bruce until 1939, when the Section was placed under the Federal Works Agency.⁶⁴

A New York state farmer specializing in dairy farming and apple crops, Morgenthau worked with Herbert Hoover's U.S. Farm Administration during World War II. Under FDR as governor of New York, he held such positions as chairman of the New York State Agricultural Advisory Commission and State Commissioner of Conservation. As president, FDR appointed Morgenthau Chairman of the Federal Farm Board and Governor of the Farm Credit Administration.

When health issues forced Secretary of the Treasury William H. Woodin to resign in 1933, Morgenthau filled his position. Through his efforts, the dollar was defended against devaluation by other competitive nations, and remarkable success was achieved in raising monies for government programs and the war effort.⁶⁵

Christian J. Peoples.

Christian J. Peoples was the director of the Treasury Department's Office of Procurement and, as such, was Bruce's direct supervisor.⁶⁶

Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) (1882-1945).

Franklin Delano Roosevelt, elected as president in November 1932 and inaugurated on March 20, 1933, was instrumental in all the New Deal projects. Through the New Deal programs the government of the United States altered its relationship to the people. For the first time the government built housing, regulated the stock market, established the rights of the labor unions, provided relief, and became a patron of the arts.⁶⁷ His key advisors included Edward Bruce, George Biddle, Henry and Elinor Morgenthau, and his wife, Eleanor Roosevelt.

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962).

Eleanor Roosevelt was a frequent speaker or guest at gatherings and exhibitions. She gave generously of her time and added prestige to the New Deal arts projects. According to Olin Dows, Mrs. Roosevelt was knitting at the initial meeting to establish the PWAP, predecessor to the Section, and every once in a while would interject a pertinent remark or question.⁶⁸

Edward Beatty Rowan (1879-1946).

Rowan, the assistant director of the Section of Fine arts, was in charge of day-to-day artistic and administrative decisions.⁶⁹ Rowan graduated from Miami University and received a master's degree in art history from Harvard. Associated with the Midwestern Regionalists, he became a well-known watercolorist and exhibited often. Before his involvement with the Section, Rowan was assistant director of the American Federation of Arts.⁷⁰

He was often in direct communication by mail with the artists and, at times, gave very specific criticisms of their sketches. Not only did Rowan hold a vital and influential position in the Section, but he also worked closely with Bruce on all aspects of the program.⁷²

Forbes Watson (circa 1880-1960).

An art critic and one of Bruce's closet advisors, Watson publicized the Section's work in countless newspaper and magazine articles⁷³ and reinforced the Section's image of the "quality" federal art program. Like Bruce, Watson believed that government patronage had sparked a major development in American art. FDR's desire to give people "a more abundant life" inspired artists to create their finest efforts. Artists could now "cut loose from foreign influence to find inspiration in the American scene."⁷⁴ Watson, along with Bruce, realized the importance of American art and the social fairness of opening its benefits to as many artists as possible and making their products available to as many communities as possible.⁷⁵

Watson's accomplishments included degrees from Harvard and Columbia Law School; positions as an art critic for the *Brooklyn Eagle*, the *New York Evening Post* and the

World; and owner, editor, and publisher of *The Arts*. Watson was also the author of *American Art Today*, a book on Winslow Homer, and, with Bruce, published *Art in Federal Buildings* a book about the Section of Fine Arts.⁷⁶

American Art before the Depression Era

To understand the significance of the Section of Fine Arts and its projects, an understanding of the development of American art is needed. Emergence of a distinctively “American” style in the plastic arts was slow. During the first century of the United States’ existence, with the exception of official portraiture and architectural embellishment, patronage of the arts was almost non-existent. Although President James Buchanan had established the first Commission of Fine Arts in 1859, the refusal of Congress to appropriate funds ended the program.⁷⁷ Through the end of the Civil War, the government’s patronage was restricted almost entirely to the decoration of the U.S. Capitol and, then, state capitol buildings. The government did not see itself in the role of promoting art for the national good; its support was restricted to the acquisition of individual works for specific sites.⁷⁸

The President’s Research Committee on Social Trends, appointed by Herbert Hoover in 1929, reported in 1933 that American art was still strongly influenced by foreign styles and trends.⁷⁹ American artistic expression was narrow and conservative at the time the market crashed in 1929.

Mural painting’s long history and tradition, which began with the Stone Age cultures, influenced the art of the New Deal projects, many of which were murals. In Europe, the embellishment of walls was the first and most elementary concern of the artist. Easel painting developed from the mural. In this country easel painting reached quality while the

art of mural painting was mostly ignored. Perhaps this was partly because of the lack of native architecture until the invention of the skyscraper, or, perhaps because our early arts were folk art, which was a natural, free, and often utilitarian, expression, such as a chair, weathervane, or crude portraits,⁸⁰ and not what often is considered fine art.

In the United States, mural painting was not generally practiced until the close of the 19th century when a small group of American artists, who had spent much time abroad—including John Singer Sargent—decided to promote mural painting in this country. In 1895 Charles Lamb, William Hunt, and others founded the still functioning National Society of Mural Painters, which maintained a close association with the Architectural League and membership in the Fine Arts Federation of New York.⁸¹ In 1910 Congress created a seven-member National Fine Arts Commission. However, this commission, small in numbers, functioned in an advisory capacity with activity generally limited to work in Washington, D. C. and U.S. embassies.⁸² There were few opportunities for mural painters. Architects dominated the American Academy at Rome and controlled the mural-painting field in this country. The painter was brought in to do a job under instruction, and few had the vision to let the artist experiment.⁸³

Influences of New Deal Art

Past, present, foreign, and domestic influences all played a role in influencing New Deal artwork in media, subject matter, technique, and style. With the help of the 1920s revival of art interests that paralleled the increase in income in the United States, the time was ripe for the government's experiment in public art. However, a catalyst such as the New Deal programs was needed.

The end of the Mexican Revolution gave painters walls to work with and the Revolution point of view, including that of Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Jose Clemente Orozco. From the late 1920s and mid-1930s, these muralists worked in the United States and received major commissions in California, Michigan, New Hampshire, and New York. They incorporated ideas of French Cubism and utilized the qualities of folk art to represent the unchanging character of the people. Although the political messages, at times, were radical, they were often positive with heavy industry's laborers a common theme. These artworks opened the American artists' eyes to the possibilities of painting strong, but simple messages.⁸⁴ American artists began to travel to Mexico to study under the Mexican muralists. They were impressed with that government's immensely successful mural program, employing its best artists in public buildings at workman's wages.⁸⁵ Technique, style, subject matter, and philosophy of the American mural painters were influenced by their Mexican counterparts.

The commercial and construction booms of the 1920s played roles in the development of mural painting in the U.S. The Art Deco style, popular in the era, influenced designs from architecture to teapots and can be seen in many Section works. Murals were an integral part of movie theaters' palace-like decor and the department stores' cathedrals of capitalism.⁸⁶ Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood is a well-known example that transported patrons to the exotic Orient.

Movies, themselves, played a role in influencing the type of subject matter portrayed in the New Deal murals. Movies were successful, profitable, and filled with stereotypes such as the cowboy, the Midwestern farmer, the laborer, the common man.⁸⁷

American artists, although influenced by a number of factors, were yearning to create distinctive American art. By the 1930s, many American artists thought of murals not just as architectural enhancement but important in their own right as forms of public art.

Murals, the Section's favored form of art, are, by nature, a public art. Creating murals for government buildings, especially a post office, which provides a truly democratic service, establishes the art itself as a democratic piece. The time was ripe for a public art program.

Depression Era Art

Something revolutionary and vital happened to American culture during the 1930s. When artists found an active voice through FDR's New Deal programs, American artists' voices began to be uniquely American. Democracy in the arts was realized. Democracy in the employment and competition procedures of the various New Deal projects, in the structures and politics of the artists' organizations and unions, and in the exhibition concepts at the World's Fair or the Municipal Art Galleries was an aspect of all of these programs.⁸⁸

The extensiveness of American government patronage of the Depression era was unique and has yet to be repeated. Many artists involved in New Deal projects felt that it was the golden age for the arts in the United States. Artists spoke of a sense of belonging to a middle-class society that heretofore often viewed artists with suspicion. Not only were they able to develop their skills but many realized that they were participating in a great period of public patronage for which they felt pride.⁸⁹ Bruce wrote, "There is no doubt that some of this work will be known as great. Almost all of it will be an addition to our faith and our civilization."⁹⁰

Although New Deal program concepts were innovative, by its government-supported nature, the art was not extremely radical in subject matter nor did it embrace total abstraction; however, elements of the current trends of the time were incorporated.

Common Subjects of Section of Fine Art Projects

Theoretically, the only guidelines given by the Section to the artist were that their works were to depict an American scene and present it realistically so that the public could understand it. They asked them to be careful about caricature representations of people in the community—not only exaggerations but also extreme simplifications.⁹¹

Common subjects included agricultural life, industry, the postal service, the union of man with nature, and historical themes, especially local history and the history of the pioneers. But above all, there was an “emphasis upon labor, upon the reward for a man’s work, upon the dignity and right of a man to work.”⁹² However, the Section’s and the community’s opinions and policies often narrowed the artist’s options.

The Section acknowledged the validity of a regional approach to art – to appeal to viewers in a geographic sector and often insisted on factual content derived from the local scene.⁹³ The suggested subject matter included local history, industry, pursuits, or landscapes. Though the postal service was also a popular theme, the Section understood that because the postal service was an active service it need not be symbolized by the obvious train or plane, and so the subject should take on human and dramatic significance as a link between every community of individuals and the federal government.

The artists and the Section often tried to avoid criticism in advance by avoiding unpleasant subjects, such as the social and economic realities of the time. Nudes were

negatively viewed by the general public as offending their value system and led to suspicion of the artists.⁹⁴

Both the Section and the artists frequently relied on the postmaster to provide history and other information of the area to assist in choosing an appropriate subject,⁹⁵ so often the subject was determined by the community and its location. The Section stressed accuracy and authenticity in the artwork's subject.⁹⁶

Most painters were able to express themselves within these limitations.⁹⁷ However, there were many compromises made by the artist and, to a lesser extent, the Section. At times conflicts developed among artists, local communities, and the Section administration, and on a few occasions, resulted in a commission withdrawal.⁹⁸

Styles Favored by the Section of Fine Art

Similar to subject choices, artistic styles were required to fall in accordingly with the Section's objective to convey a pictorial message to the American people. The Section felt that public art was a dialogue between the artist and the public and therefore insisted that the artists work in realistic styles. The Section's definition of Realism was not synonymous with Naturalism (sometimes unflattering), Idealism (vision of perfection), Expressionism (primacy of emotion), or the heightened sensibility of Romanticism. Instead, the 1930s Realism was often more abstract in both form and conception and involved simplification of form to convey an ideal or message. Earth tones with a simplified handling of paint aided in the attempt to elevate the ordinary and give it new meaning: small town scenes equal democratic traditions; small farms equate with integrity of American society; industrial workers equate with communal economic life.⁹⁹

The concepts of two movements that had begun to dominate the American art scene were often in agreement with the Section's objectives: the Regionalists whose subjects were



Figure 4: *Harvest* by Joe H. Cox, 1940, oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall, Alma, Michigan, post office. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester

often idyllic rural scenes, and included the artists John Steuart Curry, Jean Paul Slusser, Grant Wood, and Joe H. Cox (Figure 4), and the Social Realists whose ranks included William Gropper and

George Biddle (Figure 5).¹⁰⁰ The Regionalists and Social Realists are sometimes together referred to as the American Theme Style. Although these two artists groups were not often in concurrence, they were in agreement on their dislike of French modernism and their desire to create democratic public art.¹⁰¹ However, the Social Realists' tendencies to be more critical of American society and whose artwork often contained questionable political messages were tolerated very little by the Section.¹⁰²

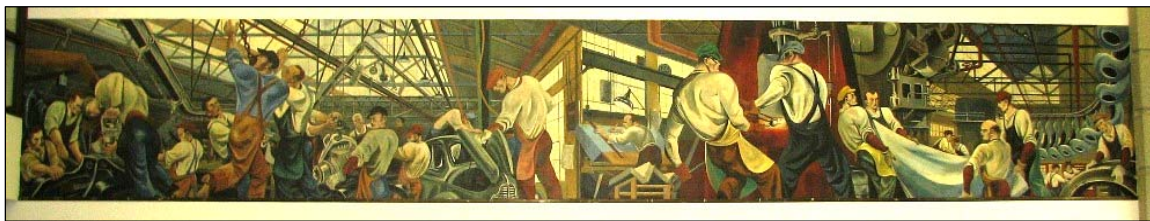


Figure 5: *Automobile Industry* by William Gropper, 1941, oil on canvas adhered to wall, originally located at the Detroit, Northwestern Branch Postal Station, relocated to Wayne State Student Union Building. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester.

Because the concepts of Abstract art were not generally understood by the public and even considered snobbish, there was only one abstract mural commissioned by Lloyd R. Nev for a New Deal post office located in New London, Ohio.¹⁰³ Still, conventions of the style were introduced in many murals, almost unnoticed.

Cubism, and its various degrees of planar flattening and faceting of imagery with an emphasis on two-dimensional pictorial surface, did not bother the Section (Figure 6). The pictorial image was kept intact and, in the Section's viewpoint, it did not inhibit the public's identification of the objects or stories told.¹⁰⁴



Figure 6: *Among the Furrows* by Pierre Bourdelle, 1941, Encaustic on canvas adhered to plaster wall, Rockford, Michigan post office. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester.

In order to paint a successful mural, many artists had to adjust their style in order to relate to the surrounding architecture and to allow for greater viewing distances. Many Section artists, though experienced in canvas painting, did not have experience in creating murals.

Technique and Technical Approval

Not only did subject and style need Section approval, the Section also required that materials, method of installation, and other technical matters be approved and corrected if necessary. The type of canvas, the colors and type of paint, the painting technique, and the type of adhesive that were to be used all had to meet with Section approval. Each artist

awarded a Section commission was required to complete the form, “Information Required of the Artist on All Jobs Using the Medium of Oil, or Tempera, or Combination etc.”¹⁰⁵

Articles in the Section *Bulletin* contained technical information that artists were encouraged to use as reference.

The Section also supplied technical instruction for cleaning and maintenance of installed artwork. Unfortunately, the information was sometimes ignored.

The Relationship of the Patron, the Public, and the Artist

With the creation of New Deal art programs, the government of the United States altered its relationship with the people and became a patron of the arts.¹⁰⁶ The Section’s projects were interplays of federal bureaucrats, creative artists, and small town citizens. The national ideals that the Section promoted included regional pride, local concerns, and grass roots participation. The patron enlisted the painter, the painter dealt with the public, and the public reported its judgment to the patron.

Bruce and the Section realized that that the program and the artwork it produced was expected meet with the approval of the Treasury, the President, Congress, and the public. The Section attempted to avoid controversy by approval of the subject, materials, and style and gave specific direction about these issues often through lengthy written correspondence.¹⁰⁷

Edward Rowan, the assistant director of the Section of Fine Arts and in charge of day-to-day artistic and administrative decisions, was often in direct communication by mail with the artists and, at times, gave very specific criticisms of their sketches. Constructive criticism often was directed at undifferentiated figures, problems with perspective, overcrowding, and compositions that lacked a feeling of space around the figures. Common

criticism directed to the sculptures often dealt with proportions, drapery, and unity of elements.¹⁰⁸ Usually the Section and the artist compromised, but occasionally an artist refused to make changes and the invitation to submit a design was withdrawn.¹⁰⁹

The Section attempted to take politics out of the selection process and make it as democratic as possible by initiating a system of competitions. The competitions were slow, complicated, and somewhat expensive. A great number of competitions were local, with appropriations awarded from \$2000-5000. The Section first found a chairperson, a museum director or head of an art association who was paid a nominal fee (between \$50- \$100). The chairperson selected the jury that always included an architect.

The chairman was sent a form announcement specifying the size and location of the panels to be decorated, the amount of money to be paid, the terms of the competition, the scale of the sketches, and so on. There were announcements in the local press and eligible artists would be notified. The jury was encouraged to seek out artists residing in or near the destination and solicit ideas. The competitors submitted their sketches anonymously with names in sealed envelopes, usually after a designing period of three months. At the jury meeting, the sketches were numbered and the local jury sent their recommendations to the Section office. This included not only the winning design, but recommendations for lesser commissions, all the sketches, and the unopened envelopes. The Section reviewed all sketches and, if jury selection was consistent with the Section's standards of quality, followed the recommendations. If not, and if no compromise could be reached, the Section would overrule the jury.¹¹⁰ Although reversal of a recommendation was seldom done, other contracts were awarded to artists that were not recommended by the local jury.¹¹¹ To ensure local artists would prevail, political figures sometimes lobbied for very limited competitions.

The Section encouraged artists to visit the town and consult with the postmaster and leading citizens about the choice of subject matter. Many artists wrote for advice and conducted library research.

Once the final decision was made, the envelopes were opened and the name of the winning artist disclosed. Often a three-foot-square full-size detail was requested in addition to the two-or-three-inch scale sketch. Local committees were urged to exhibit designs and models. This clarified the Section's activities and promoted interest in the art and the artists of the communities.¹¹² Once installed, the murals were beyond the control of the community and were property of the federal government; however, postmasters' criticisms were taken seriously by the Section. Postmasters reported on community reactions and often sent newspaper clippings to the Section.¹¹³ The Section also relied on the postmasters to report on the artwork's installation before the artist could receive the final payment.¹¹⁴

The program sponsored small traveling exhibitions of photographs, designs, and sculptural models that the artists submitted in Section competitions that visited such institutions as museums, libraries, and civic clubs to promote its goals. Larger exhibitions, including the 1936 show at the Whitney Museum in New York City, were at least partially funded by the Carnegie Corporation.¹¹⁵ The Section's *Bulletin* was used as a tool to promote the Section, its exhibitions, and its accomplishments.

Working with more than 1000 communities, the Section and the artist had to negotiate with individuals from congressmen to ordinary citizens and with groups from chambers of commerce to labor organizations involving commissions, subject appropriateness, the adequateness of sketches, and the accuracy of the artwork in depicting the community.¹¹⁶ The process was not democratic in the widest sense but did allow many

groups to become involved, and the involvement produced conflicts that were usually resolved by compromise. Oftentimes compromise tends to promote bland and favorable, less controversial art. However, artists, even those who were left-wing and somewhat radical in their political thinking, realized the importance of reaching the public directly and were aware of the potential permanence of the artworks.

The artist was put in a precarious position: sandwiched between the public and the patron who, from vastly divergent perspectives, arrived at a working consensus about what and how he or she should create.

The public of the 1930s included many who had never seen an original painting and who perceived the artist as a social alien.¹¹⁷ The artists' plight during the Great Depression was severe. A reassessment of the relationship between the painter and the public was overdue.¹¹⁸ The New Deal sought to change the relationship between artists and society by democratizing art and culture.¹¹⁹ Sometime artists were well received in the community; other times they were not. Some communities did not want the artwork, or there was not a community agreement on the appropriate subject matter. There were rivalries between towns about their history and distinctiveness. Some communities that initially wanted the artwork did not appreciate aspects of the finished piece.¹²⁰ If the communities did not like the work, the postmasters were quick to let the Section know.¹²¹ Usually however, upon completion of the artwork, there was a well-attended dedication ceremony with speeches and flag-waving.¹²² For the artist, there was a sense of accomplishment and of the artwork's importance to the community.¹²³

Life Magazine, with its three-page spread in December 1939 of 48 postage-stamp-size reproductions of the prizewinning sketches "This is Mural American for Rural Americans,"

inadvertently encouraged the public to voice their opinions concerning the Section's artwork. The article covered the *Forty-Eight State Competition* in which 972 artists sent in 1,477 designs. The artists were vying for one of forty-eight nearly identical structures with a low per-unit cost average of \$725.¹²⁴

Life erred by assuming that all of the artists had consulted with their public and arrived at subject choices by popular consensus. This conclusion came from misinterpreting a Section press packet and became a self-fulfilling prophecy. Readers came to believe this and wasted no time in making their wishes and opinions known.¹²⁵

Despite or perhaps because of all this, the artist often felt a social obligation to his fellow man to portray the significant aspects of an area, or of the country in general, in a positive light.

Other Issues Facing the Section of Fine Art and its Artists



Figure 7: *The Pioneering Society's Picnic* by Carlos Lopez, 1942, tempera on gesso base directly on plaster wall, Rockford, Michigan post office. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester

There were other issues that the Section and its artists faced. Working with the architects was a challenge. Bruce had commented, "We are having a hell of a time with the architects in providing mural spaces. They are dead set against this whole program."¹²⁶ There was no interaction between the artist and the architect. In

defense of the architects, often they did not know whether or not a piece of art was to be placed in their buildings.¹²⁷

The space itself presented some difficulty. The typical Section commission was not only for a post office, but for a very small and plain one. The mural or sculpture was generally at one end of a long, narrow lobby, in a space about six feet by twelve feet, above the postmaster's doorway and flanked by bulletin boards (Figure 7). It was lit by windows on one side and was often obscured by a jutting vestibule and by hanging light fixtures.¹²⁸ Mural painters also had to consider that the working space was often placed in an elaborate architectural setting that framed the artwork and may exhibit its own mood and rhythm.¹²⁹ The artwork needed to coexist with the wall and the surrounding architecture, and so the artists were instructed to work out their compositions accordingly. The Section sometimes suggested framing the murals to help set them apart from the architecture to lessen the conflicting forms. Many utilized a frieze composition or a threefold division. Geometric patterns were sometimes incorporated to tie the composition together.¹³⁰ Also, a surface pattern had to be retained in the murals to avoid the feeling that the wall had been punched full of big, uninteresting, empty holes. Ideally, to adequately address all of these issues, the artist should work directly on the wall.¹³¹ Unfortunately, this was often not feasible.

While many painters felt the urge to use fresco or work directly on the dry plaster,¹³² few actually did. Less than fifty percent of the Section's murals were frescos. Not only were they more expensive to produce, but the process also interfered with the functioning of the post office and demanded an artist with experience in a difficult medium.¹³³ Many could not afford to travel to create the work on site. Some artists never saw their walls and were forced to work from blueprints.¹³⁴ Most painted canvases in their studios and later affixed them to the wall.¹³⁵ Furthermore, lack of collaboration between architect and artist meant walls were not constructed for frescoes and so artists would have to pay for resurfacing. In most small

towns there were no plasterers available who were skilled in preparing a wall for fresco.¹³⁶ Not all mural artists were trained in the tedious fresco techniques.

There were other issues that are particular to mural painting that the artists had to overcome. Artists had often approached the murals as an enlarged easel painting and often painted a canvas in a studio and then later glued the canvas to the wall. However, larger scaled murals require a greater viewing distance and so should be created with that in mind. According to Jean Charlot, a Federal Art Project painter who was familiar the Mexican mural techniques, wrote that to be more easily read, simplified forms and color fields, limited color schemes, outlined forms, and subtle modeling should be utilized.¹³⁷

The Section was sometimes criticized because the colors in the murals did not always harmonize with the other colors in the building. To make the murals fit the architecture, the Section asked each to artist submit a sketch showing the relation of the colors of the mural to those of the building and to take a color tone from the mural that could be carried around the door and bulletin board to ensure a harmonious whole.¹³⁸

The Section did commission a few free-standing figures for facades or courthouses. The sculptors, like the muralists, had to submit their work in stages. The Section administrators kept the color sketch; the other preliminary work was retained by the artist. For the muralist, the cartoon represented the intermediate stage, and the final stage was the finished work. The sculptor's first stage, was a pen or pencil sketch, the second a clay model, and the third the finished work. For all artists, but for the sculptors in particular, preliminary steps were time-consuming and costly. These hardships were endured not only by the winners but also the losers who had nothing to show for their personal sacrifices and expenses.

Overcoming these obstacles, artists learned how to deal with the bureaucracy and the public; they learned how to “paint Section.”¹³⁹ Still, many felt that within these restrictions, they created worthwhile public art in which they could take pride.

Problem Statement

The research and documentation of the projects sponsored by the Section of Fine Arts projects in Michigan is limited. While successful efforts have been undertaken to save several of these artworks, others are missing or endangered. To encourage conservation and a fuller appreciation of these treasures, it is imperative to document the artwork in detail—descriptively and photographically.

Research Question

What are the locations, status, and conditions of the Section of Fine Arts projects created for Michigan post offices and what efforts, including conservation and restoration techniques and policy tools and programs, can be implemented to ensure their continued existence for future generations?

Purpose of Study

This encompassing project will bring together a large amount of information concerning the history, goals, key personnel, art, and artists of the Section of Fine Arts. Current detailed documentation of the artwork, a significant aspect of the project, is essential. Verifying current locations that include UTM coordinates is warranted. The identification of those pieces that are endangered in hopes of facilitating their restoration is a desired goal. Interviews with those involved in The Section of Fine Arts program is an important aspect of this project as their numbers are dwindling. Included in the hoped-for outcomes is to raise awareness of The Section of Fine Arts projects and the significant role they played in a unique chapter of our country's history and to renew a sense of appreciation and pride held by the guardians and the communities of the artwork. Hopefully, the information gathered will encourage and help local communities to save and preserve these records of their past. This is especially true as the Nation prepares to celebrate the 75th anniversary of all the New Deal programs. As time goes on, the trails that lead to findings will become less easy to follow. The varied projects under the New Deal are a part of our nation's story and should be recognized for the significance they hold for telling the compelling story of this chapter of American history.

Significance of Study

The artwork of the depression era, as a whole, has suffered from lack of available information, understanding, and appreciation. Early studies focusing on the Section of Fine Arts lack a perspective that can only be gained with the passage of time. More recent

publications on depression-era government-sponsored art, though limited, are available. However, few deal with the Section of Fine Arts program in particular. Other writings concentrate on artwork located in a specific state, yet little has been written with a Michigan focus.

Though limited, information is available that pertains to Michigan's Section artwork. Although the Archives of Michigan's holdings include information on depression-era agencies, most of these pertain to the Civilian Conservation Corps, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration, and the Works Projects Administration.¹⁴⁰ Also, although scattered information can be found on the World Wide Web, it is not inclusive, nor necessarily reliable. Few magazine or newspaper articles have been written, with most appearing in local newspapers and covering a particular mural. When researching recent dissertations on New Deal/WPA artwork, it was discovered that, though many aspects and regions have been researched, only one work, Christine Ruby's 1986 dissertation *Art for the People: Art in Michigan sponsored by the Treasury Section of Fine Arts, 1934 to 1943*, dealt specifically with Michigan Section art.¹⁴¹ While the dissertation does cover some aspects of the artwork, the focus of the work is history and not the art or the preservation of it. Updating artwork locations and documenting their condition is warranted.

The conservation and restoration of art-in-architecture involves a set of unique issues and circumstances. This research and documentation encompasses not only the history and the significance of the artists and the stories they tell but also investigates steps needed for preservation and conservation. The study is vital to ensure the continued existence of these works of art for future generations. This is an important and distinctive American chapter in our history that should not be lost.

Limitations of Study

When researching this type of subject and taking into account the era and climate in which the artwork was executed, it is often the case that little primary documentation is readily available.

Although many historians are able to distinguish between the various New Deal arts projects, the general public tends to view them as one and the same. A great deal of non-government art was also produced in the 1930s, which adds to the confusion. This blurring of the lines between the projects, both presently and in their own time, impedes the search for the source documents of the projects. Adding to the difficulty in tracking publications is the fact that at various times, all of the New Deal projects contributed to the creation of these records. Many of these documents were not considered “official” government documents. Because the total expenditures for the art component were less than one half percent of the total project budget, the art projects often were mentioned in a single line, or at most a paragraph or two.¹⁴²

Several installations are located in rural areas that are not privileged to the sources that are available to more urban settings. Though this may impede the research of individual artists and, perhaps, other primary documentation, this is only a small portion of the proposed research and will not affect the conclusions of this study.

Because of the length of time that has lapsed between the creation of the artwork and the present, interviews are anticipated to be limited in number. However, location of any living artists that created the Section of Fine Arts artwork will be diligently pursued.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

A wide range of literature sources were utilized in compiling information for this project. Available printed material most often focuses on administrative, thematic matters or the controversy and issues that surrounded the New Deal projects. Literature involving the history of the New Deal, often including biographies and interviews of key administrative personnel, though limited, is available.

Early studies that focused on the Section of Fine Arts include Grace Overmyer's *Government and the Arts* (1939), Erica Beckh Rubenstein's doctoral dissertation *Tax Payers' Murals* (1944), and the Federal Art Project's own *Art as a Function of Government* (1939). All contain vital information, yet, because of the time they were written, lack a perspective that can only be gained with the passage of time.

There have been a number of more recent publications on Depression-era government-sponsored art in general, such as Karal Ann Marling's *Wall-to-Wall America* (1982), which focuses on controversial issues of the Section, and Marlene Park and Gerald Markowitz's *Democratic Vistas, Post Offices and Public Art in the New Deal* (1984), which discusses several aspects of the Section, including relationships of the parties involved in the artwork, competitions and regional differences. *The New Deal Art Projects: an Anthology of Memoirs*, edited by Francis V. O'Conner and including a piece written by Olin Dows, gives the reader different perspectives of those involved in the New Deal programs.

Other writings concentrate on artwork located in a specific state, including New York, California, Ohio, and Oklahoma; however, little has been written with a Michigan focus.

Christine Ruby's 1986 dissertation *Art for the People: Art in Michigan sponsored by the Treasury Section of Fine Arts, 1934 to 1943* does cover many aspects of the artwork but focuses on history, not on the art or its preservation. The work does not deal with the condition of the artwork, suggest conservation methods, or discuss funding issues. The fact that it was written twenty years ago suggests the need for more current information of location. The inclusion of UTM (Universal Transverse Mercator) coordinates (a system that provides coordinates on a world wide flat grid, divided into sixty zones for easy computation of a location and mapping), until recently was not common but will be included in this project.

Archived newspaper articles were useful in researching the artists and community reactions to the artwork and, although low-grade, assessing photographic images of missing artwork. A few magazine or newspaper articles have been recently written about Section artwork with most appearing in local newspapers and covering a particular mural. Moreover, both written and on-line resources are becoming more prevalent in light of the 75th anniversary of the New Deal Programs.

Books consulted for the conservation aspect of the project include Thomas C. Jester's *Twentieth-Century Building Materials History and Conservation* and Alison Henry's *Stone Conservation Principles and Practice*. These sources, along with the Preservation Briefs found in *Preservation of Historic Architecture* and on-line, were instrumental in formulating suggested conservation techniques.

Additionally, miscellaneous printed material aided the research. These include correspondence between participating parties, information sheets that were issued by the Section to the post offices, flyers, bulletins, and conservation assessments.

Although these sources were vital to my research, primary sources and documentation were needed to obtain the desired goals of this thesis.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

Study Design and Type

The study design is quantitative. The research and documentation will be compiled using both primary and secondary sources.

Methodology

Information will be collected from a variety of sources, including but not limited to on-site observation and assessment; archival documents and photographs; interviews with conservation specialists, artists, and community members; well-respected books and sources; local newspaper articles; and magazine articles.

Several books will be used as secondary sources to gather background information on the Section of Fine Arts program, the key personnel involved, and New Deal programs in general. Artist biographical information, artistic influences, and historical context will also rely heavily on the use of these references. Interviews of Section artists are anticipated to be limited. Recommended conservation and preservation techniques will be researched using well-respected books, the National Park Service's *Preservation Briefs*, and experts in the field. Research involving government agencies and policies including the General Services Administration (GSA) and The Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1979 will be conducted using on-line resources, publications, and contacts through emails. Local, regional, and national sources will be utilized in this thesis and encompassed the listed primary and secondary sources. The artwork and its media, style, and subject will be explored using secondary and primary sources, with on-site visits playing a key role in the

analysis of this aspect of the research. The status and condition of the artwork will also be assessed through on-site visits and research. On selected artworks, the condition of the art will be analyzed for recommendation of appropriate conservation techniques. This encompassing information will contribute to observations and conclusions on the significance of the artwork researched in the thesis.

The status of the artwork (missing, safe, or endangered) also will be assessed through on-site visits and research. On selected artworks, the condition of the artwork will be analyzed for recommendation of appropriate conservation techniques.

The available funding and consulting resources for the conservation/restoration of the artwork will be identified, and appropriate options will be discussed.

This encompassing information will contribute to observations and conclusions on the significance of the artwork.

Chapter Four: Background of the Section of Fine Arts in Michigan and the Artists

Styles and Influences

In spite of the restrictions, guidelines, and strongly suggested themes, Michigan Section artwork does show diversity in sources, styles, subjects, and artists' viewpoints. Michigan artists and the artists of the Midwest in general were inspired by several styles of both the past and the new trends of the time. Although artists from all over the country created the Section's artwork in Michigan, many were executed by Midwestern artists, including Frank Cassara and Henry Bernstein of Detroit; Jaroslav Brozik, who is affiliated with Flint; and Ralph Henricksen and Rainey Bennett, both of whom resided in Chicago at the time.

The Midwest painter and sculptor were attracted to the art of the Greeks and to the artists of the Renaissance. Jaroslav Brozik, who created *Rural Delivery* for the Howell post office, wrote to the Section that, "In thinking of murals it is almost impossible to forget the beauty of the painters of the Early Renaissance."¹⁴³ *The Way of Life*, created by George Fisher for the Chelsea, Michigan, post office is among other Michigan works that displays a Renaissance influence (Figure 8).



Figure 8: *The Way of Life* by George Fisher, 1941, oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall, Chelsea, Michigan, post office. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester

English portraitists, along with the “isms” Impressionism, Expressionism, Futurism and Dadaism, impacted the art of the region.¹⁴⁴ However, there were also contemporary influences. Pierre Bourdelle of France displays a cubist influence in his commission for the Rockford post office in his piece *Among the Furrows*, as does Eaton Rapid’s *Industry and Agriculture*, created by Boris Mestchersky.

Flattened and stylized elements of Art Deco and Streamline design are found not only in architecture but also in such items as automobiles, appliances, and advertising and poster designs of the era.¹⁴⁵ An Art Deco influence can especially be seen. The elements of flattening of forms, stylized patterns, and repetitive lines and forms are apparent, particularly in sculpture artworks including River Rouge’s *The Horseless Carriage* by Marshall M. Fredericks (Figure 9) and Munising’s *Chippewa Legend* by Hugo Robus.



Figure 9: *The Horseless Carriage* by Marshall M. Fredericks, 1939, limestone relief, River Rouge, Michigan, post office. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester.



Figure 10: *The Mail Arrives in Clare – 1871* by Allan Thomas, 1938, oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall, Crystal Falls, Michigan, post office. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester.

Commercial art and design played a part in the styles of several murals including those created for the Clare and Crystal Falls post offices by Allan Thomas (Figure 10). The influence of

cinematography is visible in some Section murals and can be seen in Carl Lopez's composition of 1942 *The Pioneering Society's Picnic* located in the post office in Birmingham, Michigan.

The modern renaissance of Mexican mural painting was personally witnessed by many artists of the Midwest and had a profound impact on their art,¹⁴⁶ particularly in Michigan, where Diego Rivera's work in Detroit played a prominent role. George Fisher, creator of *The Way of Life*, located in Chelsea,¹⁴⁷ and Henry Bernstein, who created several government murals, talked with and watched Rivera as he worked at the Detroit Institute of Arts.¹⁴⁸ Other



Figure 11: *The Lumber Camp* by Robert L. Lepper, 1939, oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall, Grayling, Michigan, post office. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester.

murals that exhibit this influence include Monroe's *Romance of Monroe* by Ralph Henricksen, Grayling's *The Lumber Camp* by Robert L. Lepper (Figure 11) and *The Belding Brothers and their Silk Industry* by Marvin Beerbohm. These artists were often associated with the school of Social Realism.

The greatest influence that can be seen in Michigan's Section artwork is from the Regionalist movement. The Regionalists, while influential in the entire Depression era mural movement, held a significant role in Midwestern art during this time. Many of the established Regionalist artists were of the Midwest. Because they could meet the Section's stringent requirements for quality and their style was conducive to the Section's objectives, they were especially likely to receive commissions.¹⁴⁹ Thomas Hart Benton, particularly

influential in Michigan, advocated art that could be understood and appreciated by the general public. Regionalist themes were often drawn from American myths and folklore with a rural focus. These themes, and the idealistic portrayal of the themes, were popular not only with the Section but also with the communities.

Themes

The Midwest region was known as a combination of the breadbasket of America and the industrial heartland of the nation. The artworks' themes reflect this. The Midwest was also viewed as a place that embodied the ideals and values upon which the nation was built more fully than those in any other part of the country. These expressed values were intended to reinforce the belief that if America were going to recover from the Depression, it was going to do so with the strong back and strong convictions of these workers and farmers. The Midwest murals are the only murals of the Section to incorporate immigrants in factory scenes.¹⁵⁰

Themes that can be found in the Section's artwork located in Michigan include farming, the lumber industry, industrial labor, history, the postal service, and symbols such as the pioneer, the family, and the American eagle. Often the murals combine these themes. Historic vehicles are especially prevalent in Section art and can be seen in several Michigan post offices. Few Section murals incorporate modern mechanization or technology. Although several murals portray the town's local industry, only two murals, located in Detroit and Fenton, exhibit 1930s' factory workers laboring inside plants. Several artists chose a historical industry that was still associated with the area over present day industry. Murals located in Clare, Grayling, and Greenville are centered on the lumber industry of the past.

Belding's mural depicts the historical silk industry of the town, while the subject of Blissfield's mural is the laying of the railroad.

Local history was often depicted. Although these scenes give a good sense of development of a typical small town, they do not convey a complete or full social history. Because the emphasis was on what Americans have in common, distinctions based on race, sex, or class were played down, and conflicts were almost never depicted. Religious or ethnic groups were portrayed only if it represented the majority of the town's population or a significant role in its early history. In the Midwest, local color involved not merely a matter of landscape or history, but often also pride.¹⁵¹ Taste was often influenced by local prejudices and vanishing regional folkways.¹⁵² The Section murals located in Michigan that portray a specific historical event include *Plymouth Trail* (Plymouth) by Carlos Lopez, *Marquette Exploring the Shores of Lake Superior* (Marquette) by Dewey Albinson, *Laying the Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad* (Blissfield) by Jean Paul Slusser, *Ten Eyck's Tavern on the Chicago Road* (Dearborn) by Rainey Bennett, and *On Board the Carferry: Ann Arbor #4, February 14, 1923* created by Henry Bernstein.

The family, which symbolized traditional social cohesion and confidence in the future, appear in several Midwest artworks. The three figure configuration of father, mother, and child also lent themselves to the confined space allotted for the murals.¹⁵³ Women and children are usually depicted in connection with family life and are seen mostly in farming or pioneer themes.

Native American legends and their historical interactions with settlers and the lumbering industry were each portrayed in several Michigan pieces. Munising's *Chippewa Legend* by Hugo Robus, Marquette's *Marquette Exploring Shores of Lake Michigan* by

Dewey Albinson, and Grayling's *The Lumber Camp* by Robert L. Lepper are among those murals portraying Native Americans.

Additional Information

The majority of commissions granted to Michigan Section of Fine Arts' pieces were awards to the Section competitions' runners-up. Joseph Lasker (Calumet), David Fredenthal (Caro), Ruth Grotenrath (Hart), Alfred Sessler (Lowell), and Zoltan Sepeshy (Detroit, Lincoln Park Branch), were all chosen from the large St. Louis, Missouri, competition.

The Section also awarded commissions in Michigan to regional artists such as James Calder (Grand Ledge, St. Clair, Rogers City), George Fisher (Chelsea), Henry Bernstein (Midland, Frankfort), and Zoltan Sepeshy (Lincoln Park).

Of the 48 examples of Section artwork in Michigan, 47 were art-in-architecture pieces. (Saginaw's artwork, now missing, consisted of two watercolors and four prints. There is some speculation whether or not the artwork was actually installed.¹⁵⁴) Among the art-in-architecture pieces, only eight were sculptures.

Sculptures were more costly, and often the allotted space was inadequate for them. Two Michigan post offices, the Kalamazoo and Detroit Jefferson station, were assigned sculpture commissions, but because of cost issues, the decision was made not to pursue them.¹⁵⁵ Three sculptors of Michigan pieces selected inexpensive

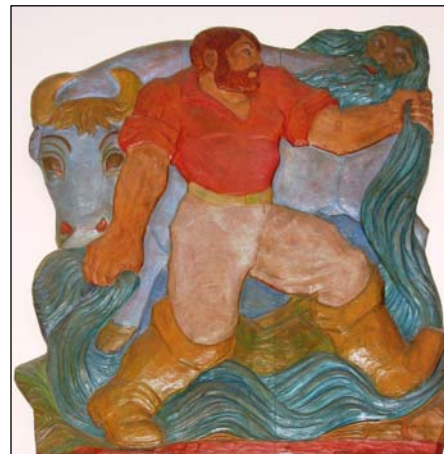


Figure 12: *Paul Bunyan Straightening Out the Round River* by Milton Horn, 1941, polychrome maple wood relief, Iron River, Michigan, post office. Photo Credit: Cheryl Chidester.

plaster medium (Munising, River Rouge, and Royal Oak); two were of wood (Traverse City and Iron River, Figure 12); two of stone (Highland Park and Rochester); and one of terracotta (Mason). All but the *American Eagle*, located outside the Highland Park post office, are sculpture reliefs located inside the post office buildings. All of the Michigan sculptures are representational in subject matter and all but the *Eagle* include human figures.

Like the painted artwork, sculptors encompassed both traditional and modern approaches. The Section was partial to the relief panel often found in Classical and Renaissance architecture, and many artists utilized this approach. Art Deco, the Streamline style, and European Modernism, along with such influences from Native American and Pre-Columbian art forms, can be seen. The tendency for some sculptors to favor direct carving to reveal the characteristics of the material over cast pieces is a direct influence of the so-called primitive cultures. Marion Overby's *The Cherry Picker*, a work carved from cherry wood, and Milton Horn's poly-chromed oak relief, *Paul Bunyan Straightening out the Round River*, are two such examples.

For many rural Michigan communities, this was the first original fine artwork in the community. Even the artworks in the more urban community post offices were more accessible and more visible than art in museums and other public facilities. Most pieces were well-received by the community; some even involved celebration.

Mural and Sculpture List: State of Michigan

Following is the list of the Section of Fine Art art-in-architecture work created for Michigan post offices and their relevant information. The locations listed are the original post offices in which the artwork was installed. The information has been verified by the United States Postal Services *Mural or Sculpture List: State of Michigan*.

1. Alma: Joe H. Cox, *Harvest*, 1940, oil on canvas.
2. Belding: Marvin Beerbohm, *Belding Brothers and Their Silk Industry*, 1943, oil on canvas.
3. Birmingham: Carlos Lopez, *The Pioneering Society's Picnic*, 1942, tempera on panel.
4. Blissfield: Jean Paul Slusser, *Laying the Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad*, 1939, mural.
5. Bronson: Arthur Getz, *Harvest*, 1941, oil on canvas.
6. Buchanan: Gertrude Goodrich, *Production*, 1941, oil on canvas.
7. Calumet: Joe Lasker, *Copper Mining in Calumet*, 1941, oil on canvas.
8. Caro: David Fredenthal, *Mail on the Farm*, 1941, tempera on panel.
9. Chelsea: George Fisher, *The Way of Life*, 1938, oil on canvas.
10. Clare: Allen Thomas, *The Mail Arrives in Clare – 1871*, 1937, oil on canvas.
11. Crystal Falls: Allen Thomas, *Extending the Frontier in Northwest Territory*, 1938, oil on canvas.
12. Dearborn: Rainey Bennett, *Ten Eyck's Tavern on Chicago Road*, 1938, oil on canvas.
13. Detroit, Hamtramck Branch: Schomer Lichtner, *City Workers, Farm Family and Products of Industry and Agriculture* (three pieces), 1940, tempera and oil on panel.
14. Detroit, Highland Park Branch: Erwin Springweiler, *American Eagle*, 1940, granite.
15. Detroit, Lincoln Park Branch: Zoltan Sepeshy, *Hauling the Net: Great Lakes Fishermen*, 1940, Tempera on fiberboard.
16. Detroit, Northwestern Branch Postal Station: William Gropper, *Automobile Industry*, 1941, mural.
17. East Detroit (East Pointe): Frank Cassara, *Early Settlers*, 1939, tempera and oil on panel.
18. East Lansing: (now in the Michigan State Library, first floor) Henry Bernstein, *America's First Agriculture College*, 1838, oil on canvas.
19. Eaton Rapids: Boris Mestchersky, *Industry and Agriculture*, 1939, oil on canvas.
20. Fenton: Jerome Snyder (Grace Goodrich, asst.), *Change of Shift*, 1942, tempera on canvas.
21. Frankfort: Henry Bernstein, *On Board the Carferry Ann Arbor #4, February 14, 1923*, 1941, tempera.
22. Fremont: Lumen Martin Winter, *Pony Express*, 1938, oil on canvas.
23. Grand Ledge: James Calder, *Waiting for the Mail*, 1938, mural.
24. Grayling: Robert L. Lepper, *The Lumber Camp*, 1939, oil on canvas.
25. Greenville: Charles W. Thwaites, *Lumbering*, 1940, tempera.
26. Hart: Ruth Grotenrath, *Boy Rounding Up the Stock*, 1941, oil on canvas.

27. Howell: Jaroslav Brozik, *Rural Delivery* (or *Saturday*), 1941, mural.
28. Iron Mountain: Vladimir Rousseff, *Fight with the Indians; Stage Coach; Ferry Boat; Moving West; Watching an Early Train; Washing & Carrying Gold* (Six Panels: Historical Treatment of Mail Transportation in the West), 1935-1936, oil (funded by Section and TRAP).
29. Iron River: Milton Horn, *Paul Bunyan Straightening Out the Round River*, 1941, oak wood relief.
30. Lowell: Alfred Sessler, *Lumbering in Early Lowell*, 1941, tempera.
31. Manistique: David Fredenthal, *Logging*, 1941, oil on canvas.
32. Marquette: Dewey Albinson, *Marquette Exploring Shores of Lake Superior*, 1938, oil on canvas.
33. Mason: Marion Overby, *Early Postman*, 1939, terra-cotta relief.
34. Midland: Henry Bernstein, *Chemistry*, 1942, tempera.
35. Monroe: Ralph Hendricksen, *Romance of Monroe*, 1938, oil on canvas.
36. Munising: Hugo Robus, *Chippewa Legend*, 1939, plaster relief.
37. Paw Paw: Carlos Lopez, *Bounty*, 1940, tempera.
38. Plymouth: Carlos Lopez, *Plymouth Trail*, 1938, oil on plaster.
39. River Rouge: Marshall M. Fredericks, *Transportation*, 1939, stone relief.
40. Rochester: Alexander Sambugnac, *Communication*, 1939, cast stone relief.
41. Rockford: Pierre Bourdelle, *Among the Furrows*, 1940, encaustic on canvas.
42. Rogers City: James Calder, *Harbor at Rogers City*, 1941, oil on canvas.
43. Royal Oak: Sidney Loeb, *The First Harvest, Pioneer Family*, 1939, plaster reliefs (2 pieces).
44. Saginaw: 1940, watercolors (2) and prints (4).
45. Saint Clair: James Calder, *St. Clair River*, 1939, oil on canvas.
46. Sandusky: Frank Cassara, *Cattle Auctions*, 1942, oil and tempera.
47. Traverse City: Marion Overby, *The Cherry Picker*, 1941, cherry wood relief (three pieces).
48. Wayne: Algot Stenbery, *Landscape near Wayne – 1876*. 1939, mural.¹⁵⁶

Ownership

At one time all of these pieces were the property of the United States Postal Service. A few are on permanent loan to universities, while others have exchanged hands without correct protocol. Some have been reinstalled in new postal facilities and others lost during facility renovations.

However, a vast majority of the Section of Fine Art artwork is owned by the United States General Services Administration, or the GSA. The GSA is the civil landlord for the

federal government, which comprises more than 1,600 government-owned buildings. Some of the functions of the GSA include leasing of space; repair, altering, and renovating existing facilities; and disposing of property. It is responsible also for the preservation and maintenance of more than 400 historic properties. The GSA oversees artist commissions to create artwork for new federal buildings and the conservation of a substantial inventory of artwork from the past as well. The Section of Fine Arts artwork is, of course, included in the inventory.¹⁵⁷

GSA's historic preservation program provides technical and strategic expertise to promote the viability and reuse of historic buildings owned, leased, or under acquisition by the agency.¹⁵⁸

However, only one person, currently Dallan Wordekemper, Real Estate Specialist, Federal Preservation Officer for the U.S.P.S Facilities, manages the inventory, so updating the lists is often accomplished by volunteers involved in the preservation field. Nonetheless, because the year 2008 marks the 75th anniversary of the founding of The Section of Fine Arts, the U.S.P.S. has set an objective to restore and recover as many pieces of the Section's artwork as possible.¹⁵⁹

In concurrence, Executive Order 13287, signed by President George W. Bush on March 3, 2003, *Preserve America*, calls for the federal government to “protect, enhance and use historic properties owned by the government; to build partnerships with state and local governments, Indian tribes and the private sector through the used of historic properties... to maintain accurate information on federal historic properties and their condition...”¹⁶⁰

The combination of these elements creates a setting that is conducive to the restoration and recovery of the Section's artwork. However, included in the mix are a lack of funding and a lack of manpower.

The Artists

Experience and background, place of birth, and artistic influences vary widely among the artists who created Detroit Area's Section Artwork. Yet all shared the desire to bring art to the common people and to tell the stories of our nation.

Dewey Albinson (1898-1971).

Dewey Albinson was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and studied at the Minneapolis School of Art, as well as in Paris and Italy. He worked for the WPA in the State Department of Education for Minnesota as both a state supervisor and as a teacher. Albinson was awarded the commission for the Marquette, Michigan, post office. He is most noted for his scenes of the Minnesota hills, the Iron Range, and the Shore of Lake Superior.¹⁶¹

Marvin Beerbohm (1909-1981).

Marvin Beerbohm was born in Toronto, Canada, and worked for the Detroit Public Schools where he taught high school art for years. Among his work is the mural he created for the Belding, Michigan, post office. In a letter to Edward Bruce, dated March 17, 1943, Beerbohm expressed that he felt creating a mural for the Section was a good learning experience that helped him grow as an artist.¹⁶²

Beerbohm, who was often viewed as outgoing and eccentric, also co-taught the free weekend classes offered at the Detroit Art Institute.¹⁶³ At the time of his death, Beerbohm was residing in North Olmstead, Ohio.

Rainey Bennett (1907-1998).

Rainey Bennett was born in Marion, Indiana, and studied at the University of Chicago, graduating with a degree in Art History in 1930. He then studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, the American Academy of Art, and, in New York, at the Art Students League and the George Grosz-Maurice Sterne School. Because Bennett was already a prominent artist, Olin Dows encouraged his involvement in the Treasury Programs. He served as a FAP supervisor from 1935-1938. Bennett produced 26 murals and ten stained glass designs.¹⁶⁴ Besides the Section's mural for Dearborn, Michigan, he was awarded post office murals for Rushville and Naperville, Illinois. Bennett's preferred medium was watercolor and mixed representation with fantasy in an expressionistic style. He was influenced by German Neue Sachlichkeit artist George Grosz, a teacher of his in the early 1930s. However, for the Michigan mural Bennett looked to Italian Renaissance artist Piero della Francesca for inspiration.

After the demise of the Section, Bennett used his Section and WPA experiences as a bridge to later professional work. He was awarded an art commission from TWA and Marshall Fields. His art became more abstract, with curvaceous linear elements dominating his work. He was also a free-lance writer, a jazz musician, and a free-lance commercial artist whose work included a book of caricatures.

Henry Bernstein (1912-1964).

Henry Bernstein was born in Detroit and graduated from Detroit's Northwestern High School in 1929. He then enrolled in the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts under the direction of William Valentiner. (Valentiner's principal instructor was John Carroll.) Bernstein won a number of awards and scholarships and became Carroll's assistant. He graduated in 1933 and participated in group shows in both NYC and Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. Bernstein, shy and reflective, rented a studio with his outgoing school friend Marvin Beerbohm.¹⁶⁵ Both were accepted by the WPA and received Section commissions with Bernstein painting four post office murals, including three in Michigan—East Lansing, Frankfort, and Midland—and the fourth in Mt. Sterling, Illinois. Bernstein enjoyed and appreciated working with The Section of Fine Arts. In a 1941 communication with Rowan he stated, "One of the most pleasant features of an association with the Section of Fine Arts...is the frank and able criticism which is given."¹⁶⁶ He also greatly protested the end of government support for artists.¹⁶⁷

Bernstein's style was sensitive and restrained, with subtle tonal gradations and lightness in touch. However, his later murals were influenced by the frescoes of Rivera in color, outlining, and general form after he had observed Rivera painting the Detroit of Institute of Art's Mural.¹⁶⁸

His exhibitions appeared at the Rockefeller Center in 1936, the Art Institute of Chicago in 1937, the Corcoran Gallery of Art in 1940, and the Detroit Institute of Arts from 1930 through 1944.

During WWII he became employed as a draftsman and engineering assistant at the Willow Run bomber factory in Ypsilanti, Michigan. He continued painting as a hobby and often worked in egg tempera.

Pierre Bourdelle (1903-1966.)

Pierre Bourdelle, born in Paris, was the son of the famous French sculptor Antoine Bourdelle, and was himself also a sculptor, painter, and muralist. Bourdelle studied under Rodin and graduated from Paris's Lycee Henri in 1918 and the Sorbonne in 1921. He became deaf as the result of an injury he suffered while fighting in World War II. Bourdelle moved to the United States and resided in New York in the 1930s and 1940s. He often produced large scale artwork for architectural projects including work for the rail industry.

He was awarded the Section's commission for the Rockford, Michigan, post office and created a work entitled *Among the Furrows*. Painted in 1940, it was executed in an unusual technique often called encaustic.

Jaroslav Brozik (1904-1986).

Jaroslav Brozik, born in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia, was well known for his printmaking and paintings of industrial scenes. He was educated at the Art Institute of Chicago and studied at the Tiffany Foundation in New York City and in Europe. Before his appointment as the supervisor of the school of the Flint Institute of Arts, Bozik taught at the Municipal Art Gallery in Davenport, Iowa. The use of The Flint Institute of Arts letterhead for his correspondence with Howell's postmaster confirms his relationship with that institution.

Brozik, who also taught etching and lithography, won an honorable mention in a fine arts competition, which entitled him to enter a design in the Section's contest for the Howell, Michigan, post office commission. As the winning entry, Brozik created *Rural Delivery* in 1941.¹⁶⁹

Although elements of the Regionalists, such as the idealized scene and the simplification of forms, and the Mexican muralists, which include the solidity of forms and the flattening of areas, can be seen in his artwork, Brozik was inspired by the Renaissance painters. In a correspondence with the Section he writes, "In thinking of murals it is almost impossible to forget the beauty of the painters of the Early Renaissance."¹⁷⁰

Brozik's work is in the collection of Cranbrook Institute of Arts in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and other institutions.

James Calder (1907-1977).

James Calder was the Michigan winner of the *48 State Competition* and was awarded the Grand Ledge, Michigan, commission.¹⁷¹

Calder, who was born in Czechoslovakia and lived for a time in Chicago, studied at the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts School with Samuel Halpert and John Carroll and graduated in 1930 with awards and scholarships. In 1938, Calder submitted an entry for the East Detroit post office, and because he was the runner-up, he received the St. Clair post office commission. His third Section mural is located in Rogers City.

Calder was influenced by the Cubists and was a well-known printmaker and painter.¹⁷² His award-winning style consisted of simplified modeling with flat areas of soft color with smooth, streamlined elements.

During WWII, Calder was involved with General Motors, but at the end of the war he turned down a commercial art position with the company. Instead, he produced architectural renderings for his brother, Ralph Calder, a Detroit architect known for university building designs. In 1957, Calder received an award for “outstanding work exemplifying excellence in traditional representation and technique” for his *Mariners Church* collection now with the DIA. Calder was a painter who was able to develop the Section style into an individualistic and contemporary artist point of view.

Frank Cassara (1913-).

Frank Cassara, born in Partinico, Sicily, is a painter, printmaker, and papermaker. He attended the Detroit School of Art (1933-36,) where he studied under Walter Speck and Reginald Bennett, and received a scholarship to the Colorado Springs School of Fine arts to work under Boardman Robinson, a well-known mural artist of the time. During a trip to Mexico, Cassara investigated the art of Diego Rivera’s and Jose Clemente Oroza’s Mexican fresco paintings and studied mural techniques under John Paul Slusser.¹⁷³ In 1938 he was appointed the Michigan supervisor of the WPA/FAP and was awarded the Section’s post office commission for East Detroit.¹⁷⁴ Cassara created several WPA pieces during that time, including two murals for the John F. Dye Water Conditioning Plant in Lansing, a mural for Detroit’s Fort Wayne, which was removed with its location now in question, and numerous easel paintings. His paintings included depictions of Detroit scenes and of birds that resided at the Detroit Zoo (including a missing painting depicting the Detroit-Windsor Tunnel, which Cassara has hopes of recovering). His second Section mural is located in the Sandusky post office.

Cassara served in the United States Army in World War II. He began teaching in 1947 and earned a Master's Degree in Design in 1954. He taught printmaking for many years at the University of Michigan. His works are in several Michigan museum collections, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, and several European museums, including the Stedelijk in Amsterdam. Cassara, who currently lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, has continued to create artwork and exhibits to the present day. His later work involves printmaking and pigments integrated in hand-made papers. According to Cassara, his artwork has been influenced indirectly by the Renaissance artists, the Mexican muralists, Picasso, and the Cubists.

Joe Cox (1915-1997).

Joe Cox was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, attended John Herron Art School, and received a MFA from the University of Iowa. After completing the Section mural for Garrett, Indiana (*Clearing the Right of Way*, 1938), Cox entered East Detroit's post office competition and, because his entry was well received, was awarded the Alma commission. Cox said he was literally a "starving young artist" and would have had no income at all if not for the Section murals.

After World War II, Cox taught at the University of Iowa, the University of Tennessee, and at North Carolina State University, where he retired in 1980. His later work combined representation with abstraction, using acrylic washes. His style eventually evolved into transparent planes intersecting in space with large flat areas, lines, and strong formal structure, recalling architectural drawings. Also included in his later pieces were "Light Murals," in which color was produced by changing lights hung from an overhead track that interacted with an anodized aluminum sculpture.¹⁷⁵

Cox exhibited in the Raleigh area until his death in 1997, with his medium of choice in his later years being watercolor often with ink.

George Fisher (1894-1986).

George Fisher was born in Detroit, Michigan, and was professionally active in Michigan and in Los Angeles, California. In his later years Fisher resided in Huntington Woods, Michigan. In 1938, Fisher created the Section's post office mural, *The Way of Life*, in Chelsea, Michigan. His style is reminiscent of the Renaissance painters, and his scenes are filled with symbolism.

David Fredenthal (1914-1958).

David Fredenthal was born in Detroit of immigrant parents. Leaving home at sixteen, Fredenthal began a series of jobs that included working at a print shop, in an auto factory, and as a deck hand on Great Lake freighters. Throughout this time Fredenthal was sketching what was around him. Sketches exhibited at the DIA in 1934 were highly praised. Included among Fredenthal's many awards was a scholarship allowing him to travel to Europe where he became inspired by the Italian Renaissance murals and fresco techniques.¹⁷⁶ He also received two Guggenheim Fellowships and three fellowships to the Cranbrook Academy of Art, where he studied under Zoltan Sepeshy. His Section artwork located in Michigan was created for post offices in Caro and Manistique. These commissions were awarded to Fredenthal as a runner-up in two Federal mural competitions.¹⁷⁷

During WWII, Fredenthal was a war correspondent in the South Pacific and then covered the defeat of Germany and the Nuremberg trials for *Life Magazine*. His work is

included in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, Yale University, the University of Michigan, IBM Corporation, and many other private and public collections. Watercolor was Fredentahal's preferred media with a style that was representational in form but often powerfully expressive and reminiscent of the German Expressionists.

Marshall Fredericks (1908-1998).

Marshall Fredericks was born in Rock Island, Illinois, of Danish and Norwegian parents. Fredericks studied art at the John Huntington Polytechnic Institute of Chicago and later graduated from the Cleveland School of Art, where he was awarded three scholarships to study in Europe. In 1932 he became a student of Carl Milles at Cranbrook, where he later became assistant resident instructor in Sculpture and Ceramics. He was a member of the faculty from 1933-1942.

Fredericks believed that sculpture should be integrated with architecture and had an interest in public art. Emphasis on the monumentality of sculpture using large spatial areas is characteristic of his artwork.¹⁷⁸

Fredericks exhibited widely in the U.S. and in Europe, and received numerous awards including the national commission for the Levi L. Barbour Fountain for Belle Isle in Detroit. His work can be seen in the City of Detroit, the Cranbrook Museum, and a number of private collections. Fredericks' two Section commissions are located at the River Rouge post office and the Sandwich, Illinois, post office.

After serving in the U.S. Army and Air Corps during World War II, Fredericks returned to the Detroit area and received several commissions for war memorials, including

the eagle on the Detroit Veteran's Building, the metal relief decorating Detroit's Ford Auditorium, and sculptures for the Administrative Building and the Stadium of the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.

Fredericks resided in Birmingham, Michigan, and kept studios in Royal Oak and Bloomfield Hills until his death in 1998.

Throughout his career, Fredericks preferred carving to construction and natural materials to synthetics.

Arthur Getz (1913-1996).

Arthur Getz created the oil on canvas mural for the Bronson, Michigan, post office titled *Farm Family with Produce* in 1941. Other New Deal commissions included post offices in New York City; Lancaster, Virginia; and Laverne, Alabama. Getz was born in New Jersey and studied at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and became known as an illustrator and a cartoonist.

Getz illustrated for numerous publications including *Audubon*, *Esquire*, and *Reader's Digest*. He is best known, however, as the most prolific cover artist of the *New Yorker* magazine, for which he created 213 covers, the first of which was published in 1936.

According to the former *New Yorker* art editor Lee Lorenz, "He drew inspiration equally from the nightclubs of Manhattan and the apple orchards of New England: all his covers, taken as a group, seem really to be about the joy of painting itself. He preferred a high-keyed palette, and laid on his colors with an energy and directness that often led him to the edge of Abstract Expressionism. In addition to his success as an illustrator, Getz was also a prolific fine artist, working in a variety of mediums and styles over his lifetime."¹⁷⁹

Gertrude Goodrich (1914-?).

Gertrude Goodrich, a New York native, was awarded the Section's commission for the Buchanan, Michigan, art installation for which she painted *Production*, a 1941 tempera artwork. Gertrude Goodrich often assisted her husband, Jerome Snyder, in creating government murals, including four murals in the Social Security building created in 1943.¹⁸⁰ She is one of only three women who were awarded Section commissions in Michigan.

William Gropper (1897-1977).

William Gropper, one of the most renowned artists of the 1930s, was born and raised in New York's Lower East Side. He attended the NY School of Fine and Applied Art and Ferrer School in New York. Gropper was radical and experimental in the Ashcan School tradition with other anti-academic artists. Labeled as a social realist,¹⁸¹ he held great sympathy for the lower classes and believed art should be related to the life of ordinary people. Gropper is best known for his paintings lambasting the rich and the powerful in the Millionaire's Club of the United State Senate and for his satirical cartoons in the radical press. He is listed as a prominent artist of the thirties by Olin Dows¹⁸² and was on the national executive committee of The American Artists' Congress formed in 1936.¹⁸³

Gropper painted two murals for the Section and one for TRAP. The 1936 TRAP mural is actually two pieces painted for the Freeport, New York, post office, *Winter Scene* and *Loading Mail onto Airplane*. Gropper also created *The Construction of a Dam* in 1937-1938 for the then-new Department of Interior Building in Washington, D.C. He received the largest Section commission awarded by the Section for Michigan for creating the two murals of the Detroit Northwestern station post office: \$2,800. Gropper sought simplicity in his

work, and his influences included the Ashcan School, American political cartooning, Japanese prints, Modernism, and the German New Realism of the time. The influence of Cubism with flat patterns and bold light and dark designs can also be seen in his work with his style of rapid execution yet with descriptive lines. In 1943 the War Department Art Advisory Committee selected Gropper to visit Africa to create a pictorial record of the North African war front. However, the State Department denied Gropper a passport. In 1953, he was called to appear before the McCarthy Committee, which resulted in a loss of commissions and lack of New York shows. Nevertheless, from the early 1960s until his death, Gropper continued to show his work.¹⁸⁴

Ruth Grotenrath (1912-1988).

In 1941 Ruth Grotenrath created for the Hart, Michigan, post office, *Boys Rounding Up the Stock*, an oil on canvas. She is one of only three women who received Michigan commissions from the Section. Among her work is the post office mural located in Hudson, Wisconsin. Created in 1943, this tempera piece is titled *Unloading a River Barge*. According to Hart Post Office employees, Grotenrath lived in Wisconsin, and in recent years, her husband, Schomer Litchner, also a Section artist, visited the post office and examined the mural's condition.

Ralf Hendricksen (1907-1975).

Ralf Hendricksen was Chicago-born and studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, and later, in Europe. His artwork incorporated the American Scene style with the common person

playing an important role in the artwork's story. Hendrickson was also influenced by the Mexican Muralists' use of flat colors and the geometric compositions of the Cubists.

Hendricksen was awarded several New Deal mural commissions, including the United States Naval Station at Great Lakes, Illinois (created in 1936 and no longer existing), and held several exhibitions at the Institute of Chicago.

After World War II, Hendricksen held a teaching position in the Art Department of Michigan State College (now Michigan State University). Later in life his style became more Cubist in nature, leaning towards abstraction.

Milton Horn (1906-1995).

Milton Horn was born in the Ukraine and came to the United States in 1913. He studied with Henry Kitson and Gaston Lachaise at the Beaux Arts Institute of Design in New York City. From 1927-39, Horn carried out commissions for New York City and the WPA Federal Art Project. In 1939, Olivet College in Olivet, Michigan, appointed Horn as Artist-in-Residence, a post he held for ten years. He received three Section commissions including Iron River, Michigan, which was awarded based on a model he submitted for the Evanston, Illinois, post office competition.

Horn held several one-man shows including exhibitions at the Whitney Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art, both located in New York City, and the Art Institute of Chicago.

Horn was known for his architectural sculpture and collaborated with Frank Lloyd Wright for the C. D. Wall residence in Plymouth, Michigan. In 1957 he was awarded the citation of honor from the American Institute of Architects. Horn felt that "The function of

sculptures is not to decorate but to integrate, not to entertain but to orientate man within the context of his universe.”¹⁸⁵

Joseph Lasker (1919 - .)

Joseph Lasker was born in Brooklyn, New York, and was a graduate of Cooper Union Night Art School where he studied under Byron Thomas, Wallace Harrison, and Ernest Fiene. Lasker attempted to work for the WPA but was denied eligibility because of his young age.

The Calumet commission was Lasker’s first professional recognition.¹⁸⁶ The honor was a result of an Honorable Mention in the St. Louis post office competition. At the time, Lasker was a nineteen-year-old art student who had yet to paint a mural. Among his other commissions for the Section of Fine Arts is the mural for the Millbury, Massachusetts, post office. Lasker’s artwork was exhibited at the St. Louis Art Museum and in the Section of Fine Arts Forty-Eight States Competition at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington D. C.

In 1941, Lasker was drafted in the military and was discharged in 1945. He was awarded the Prix de Rome fellowship and spent two years in Italy. Upon returning, Lasker accepted a position as an associate professor of art at the University of Illinois. He continued to paint and was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship. In order to support a family of five, in 1961 Lasker began to work as a free lance illustrator, specializing in historical and children’s books, and later wrote and illustrated children’s books.¹⁸⁷ Throughout his career, Lasker has considered himself a Realist and, to date, continues to create oil paintings in the Realist style. His artwork can be viewed at joelasker.com.¹⁸⁸

Robert L. Lepper (1906-1991).

Robert L. Lepper was born in Pennsylvania, studied at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, studied art in Europe, and held a position teaching painting and design at Carnegie-Mellon University from 1930 to 1975. Lepper was instrumental in establishing the first degree-granting Industrial Design program.¹⁸⁹ By the time he painted the Section work, Lepper had exhibited in galleries in Pittsburgh and Chicago, among others. Among his Section work is the Grayling post office mural, *The Lumber Camp*, created in 1939. He also produced the Caldwell, Ohio, post office mural. Executed in 1939, it is entitled, *Noble County – Ohio*.

By the Mid 1940s, Lepper's style had departed from representational art and he began to incorporate various media, including plastic, in his sculptures. Lepper not only received numerous awards and commissions but also published many articles in several art magazines.

Schomer Lichtner (1905-2006).

Schomer Lichtner was born in Peoria, Illinois. He executed the Section's post office artwork for the Detroit, Hamtramck Branch. The three panels of pressed wood painted with tempera are titled *City Workers*, *Farm Family*, and *Industry and Agriculture*. Included among his commissions is a Section artwork located in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. The mural created in 1939 and funded by TRAP is titled *The Lake, The Pioneer, Present City, Indian Life and Agriculture*. He was married to Ruth Grotenrath, who was also a Section muralist.

Until the time of his death at the age of 101, Lichtner continued to create his whimsical paintings of ballerinas and cows.

Sidney Loeb (1904-1972).

Sidney Loeb was a Chicago native. He pored over historical accounts of Royal Oak at the local public library¹⁹⁰ before he created two plaster reliefs in 1939 titled *The First Harvest* and *Pioneer Family*.

Carlos Lopez (1908-1953).

Carlos Lopez was born in Havana, Cuba, of Spanish parents, spent his early years in Spain, and immigrated to the United States in 1919 at the age of eleven. He studied at the Chicago Institute of Art and then at the Detroit Art Academy

Lopez was one of the most recognized painters in the United States during the New Deal era.¹⁹¹ Having received prestigious awards and commissions prior to his Section work, Lopez received the highest paid commission for his Birmingham mural of any Michigan painter.¹⁹² Lopez's first of five Section works was the 1937 mural for the Dwight, Illinois, post office titled *The Stage at Dawn*. He also created the Paw Paw and Plymouth post office murals located in Michigan. His fifth Section piece, *Shaw at Fort Wayne, 1863*, is located in the Recorder of Deeded Building in Washington, D. C. Lopez received several other government commissions including those from the War Department, the U.S. Army, and the U.S. Navy.

A sketchy, expressionistic technique typified his style throughout his career. Lopez's style was influence by the Mexican muralists, and Diego Rivera in particular, who worked in Detroit at the time. There are also similarities of his work and the art of Thomas Hart Benton. They both painted in the "American Scene" tradition with figurative pieces. Lopez was one

of the few artists commissioned by the Section who was experienced in fresco technique, which was utilized in his Michigan Section work.

During World War II, Lopez was given several art assignments including a commission by the War Department to produce a series of paintings of the U.S. industry at war and a commission by the Navy to paint amphibious training activities. He also worked for *Life Magazine*, creating pictorial war documentation.

A popular instructor, Lopez taught painting and drawing at the Detroit Art Academy, the Meinzinger Foundation, and at the summer School of Painting (the Oxbow Summer School of Art) in Saugatuck.¹⁹³ In 1945 he joined the Art Department at the University of Michigan. In his later years, Lopez grew increasingly expressionistic and his art leaned toward fantasy and symbolism.

Lopez, a member of the Ann Arbor Art Association, received many awards. His numerous exhibitions included those held at the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Carnegie Institute, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Art Institute of Chicago, the World's Fair held in New York in 1939, and the 1939 Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco. Lopez also taught at the University of Michigan and at the Meinzinger Foundation Art School in Detroit.

Boris Mestchersky (1889-1957).

Boris Mestchersky was born a Russian prince but left Russia in 1912. He was primarily known for his set and costume designs for the ballet. At the time of his 1939 Section commission work, *Industry and Agriculture*, for the Eaton Rapids, Michigan, post office, Mestchersky was living in New York.

Marion Overby (1914-?).

Marion Overby, one of only three women who received a Section commission for Michigan, created pieces for two Michigan post offices. Overby was a young sculpture student at the Cranbrook Academy of Art when she was awarded her commissions. According to a newspaper article written for the Traverse City's *Record-Eagle*, she was a "prominent Michigan sculptress and wood carver."

In 1939, Overby completed *Early Postman*, a terra cotta relief for the Mason post office. For the Traverse City post office, she executed three wood reliefs titled *The Cherry Picker* in 1941. Included in other government commissions that she was awarded is *Fish Story*, three wood reliefs created in 1943 and located in Spearfish, South Dakota.

Hugo Robus (1885-1964).

Hugo Robus was listed as a prominent artist of the 1930s by Olin Dows¹⁹⁴ and produced what is considered one of the most outstanding sculptures created under the auspices of the Section: *Chippewa Legend* for the Munising, Michigan, post office. Born in Cleveland, Robus studied painting at the Cleveland School of art from 1904-1908, later at the Art School of the National Academy of Design in New York, and then in Paris. He began exhibiting sculpture in the early 1930s and was part of an art movement that adopted drastic simplification and mild distortion in order to project a more symbolic content. Robus's paintings are often figurative, exhibit flowing movement, and sometimes contain a humorous reference.

Robus was concerned with revealing the important essentials of natural form. He stated, “Since I have been interested not in what the eye records but in what our sensitivities feel, it is necessary to eliminate and exaggerate...”¹⁹⁵

Robus worked for the WPA Federal Art Project in New York from 1937 to 1939 where he created animal figures in cast stone for playgrounds. In 1938, Robus was awarded the Munising commission based on a design submitted in the Bronx, New York, post office competition. His dedication to recognizable imagery and his skill in adapting to the relief format allowed him to conform to the section esthetic and, at the same time, maintain his highly individualistic style. In the 1940s and 1950s, Robus taught sculpture at several major universities, including Columbia. Besides being a skilled sculptor and painter, Robus also was experienced in hand-wrought jewelry and textile design.¹⁹⁶

Vladimir Rousseff (1890-1979).

Vladimir Rousseff was born in Silistra, Bulgaria. He studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, where he exhibited and received several awards. He lived in Chicago but had a small studio near Iron Mountain during his execution of the Section’s commission for the Iron Mountain, Michigan, post office. Besides his Section murals located in Iron Mountain, Michigan; Salem, Illinois; and Kaukauna and Edertown, Wisconsin, Rousseff was awarded several mural commissions with the WPA.

At the time of his death, Rousseff was residing in Boston, Massachusetts.

Alexander Sambugnac (1888-1965).

Alexander Sambugnac was born in Zemun, Yugoslavia, studied at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Budapest, Hungary; Munich, Germany; and in Paris, France, where he studied under Antoine Bourdelle.¹⁹⁷

Sambugnac created the Section's artwork *Communication*, for the Rochester, Michigan post office. The 1939 piece was executed in cast stone. He executed numerous sculptures for the Section including a plaster relief for the Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania, post office (*Air Mail*, 1939), and three cast stone reliefs for the Miami, Florida, post office and courthouse (*Love and Hope*, *Wisdom*, and *Courage*, 1938).

Sambugnac became a naturalized citizen in 1938 and taught sculpture in Florida. His work is represented in the Museum of Fine Arts in Budapest, a cathedral in Vienna, and in the capitol building in Havana.¹⁹⁸

Zoltan Sepeshy (1898-1974).

Zoltan Sepeshy was born in Kassa, Hungary. He studied at the Academy of Fine Arts and Art Instruction in Budapest, Hungary, in Paris and Prague, and at the Royal Academy in Vienna. From 1922-1925, Sepeshy worked with Detroit architect Albert Kahn as an architectural draftsman. He was a member of several professional organizations including the National Society of Mural Painters and the Scarab College in Detroit. In 1926, Sepeshy was appointed painting instructor at the newly founded Art School of the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts. In 1930, Sepeshy joined the staff at the Cranbrook Academy of Art, and from 1959-1966, he held the position of president.¹⁹⁹ Sepeshy exhibited often and earned numerous prestigious awards. His award-winning exhibitions included those held at the

Detroit Institute of Arts, the Corcoran, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Carnegie Institute. His work is in the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts, Art Institute of Chicago, Toledo Museum of Art, Albright Art Gallery, Wichita Art Museum, San Diego Fine Arts Society, St. Louis Art Museum, Milwaukee Art Institute, Grand Rapids Art Gallery, Flint Institute of Arts, the University of Arizona, Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum, and more.

Sepeshy created murals for the General Motors Building in Detroit and Fordson High School in Dearborn, Michigan. His Section post office mural commissions included a piece for Lincoln Park, Michigan, a 1940 mural entitled *Hauling the Net* (relocated to Beaver Island), and one in Nashville, Illinois.

Elements of the Regionalist style such as powerful, expressive, and active figures and the zigzag form of composition can be seen in his artwork of the 1930s and 1940s.²⁰⁰ However, he is best known for his Michigan scenes. He was quoted in a book commemorating the *Michigan on Canvas* series, for which he created several paintings that were sponsored by The J. L. Hudson Company in 1946-1947:

“For many years Michigan has meant for me the blue lakes, the sand, the driftwood, the fishing nets, the boats of all sorts and sizes-the water that surrounds the State.”²⁰¹

At the time of his death, Sepeshy resided in Royal Oak, Michigan.

Alfred Sessler (1909-1963).

Alfred Sessler was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and studied at the Layton School of Art and the University of Wisconsin. He exhibited throughout the 1930s and 1940s and his work was seen at the Milwaukee Art Institute, Art Institute of Chicago, World's Fair New

York, and the Kansas City Art Institute. His involvement in New Deal artwork included *Lumbering in Early Lowell*, painted in 1941, for the Lowell, Michigan, post office. Sessler taught at the Milwaukee Teachers College, University of Wisconsin, and the Milwaukee Art Institute. He is often associated with a group of Wisconsin Surrealists, which included Aaron Bohrod and Santos Zingal. Sessler's later work incorporated some of the emotional content of the movement and produced works with bizarre figures and disquieting moods.²⁰²

Jean Paul Slusser (1886-1981).

Born in Wauseon, Ohio, Jean Paul Slusser's formal training included the Art Students League of New York and the Boston Museum School. He was a painter, educator, art critic, and museum director. His accomplishments include working as an art critic for the *Boston Herald* and *New York Sun* and becoming first director of the University of Michigan Museum of Art, from 1947-1957. The University's Jean Paul Slusser Gallery was dedicated in his honor on his 90th birthday.²⁰³

His work, generally executed in watercolor or oils, was influenced by impressionism and, later, abstraction. His subjects included still lifes and landscapes; he often created Plein-Air work. Slusser, however, is best known for his figurative artwork. His artwork is in the collections of the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Corcoran Gallery Biennial, the Brooklyn Museum, and others. Several pieces can be viewed at the University of Michigan Museum of Art. New Deal artwork created by Slusser includes the 1939 Blissfield post office mural, *Laying the Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad*.

Jerome Snyder (1916-1976).

Jerome Snyder was a Michigan Section artist who went on to become a highly regarded and successful commercial artist. He had no formal training when he began his art career with government-sponsored murals. The sketch that Snyder had entered in a Section competition for the Social Security Building (Department of Health and Human Service Building), in Washington, D. C., was so admired that he received a commission for the Fenton post office.

Snyder was interested in the integration of murals and the surrounding architectural space and incorporated elements of the Social Realists, such as the flat pattern area, the low earth-tone colors, and slightly exaggerated features.

His commissions include Fenton's post office mural. Snyder also painted New Deal murals with his wife, Gertrude Goodrich, including four murals in the Social Security building, created in 1943.

He served as infantry captain in WWII, and later his career included teaching, writing, art directorship, and work as a freelance artist. As an artist, Snyder was very successful in poster designs, record and magazine covers, and children's book illustrations. In 1954, he became the first art director of *Sports Illustrated* and assumed art directorship for *Scientific America* in 1961.²⁰⁴

Erin Springweiler (1896-1966).

Erin Springweiler was born in Pforzheim, Germany. In 1940 he created the Section's Highland Park, Michigan, post office art, *American Eagle*, a granite sculpture. Springweiler was also professionally active in Wyandanch, New York.

Algot Stenbery (1902-1983).

Algot Stenbery began his art training at the Hartford Art School under Albertus E. Jones and continued at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Art Students League in New York City. Stenbery exhibited extensively throughout the United States, earning commissions for murals at the Chrysler Building, the American Sugar Refining Company, and the grand staircase of the ocean liner Bremen. He also received WPA commissions including the social room of the Harlem Housing Project. His Section mural, which is now missing, was located in the Wayne, Michigan, post office. Stenbery taught art at Cooper Union and the American Artists School. He also illustrated numerous books including *The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck. Today, his work is included in the collections of the New York Historical Society and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Allen Thomas (1902-1974).

Allen Thomas was born in Jackson, Michigan, and studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts with George Harding. He also trained in England and France.

Thomas won many awards in the 1920s, and in the 1930s had a successful career as an illustrator with *Harper's Bazaar*, *Cosmopolitan*, and others. Thomas exhibited at the DIA in the Michigan Artists Exhibition and executed several WPA murals including those for Jackson State Prison, the Hotel Hayes in Jackson, and Hackley Hospital in Muskegon.

In his Section murals, the first for Clare and then Crystal Falls, Michigan, post offices, a commercial art influence can be seen. Because of his training, Thomas was able to paint two Section works in half the time it took most other artist to complete one.

Thomas painted murals with a palette knife that allowed him to apply paint in broad areas and that gave sharpness and clarity to forms seen at a distance. The Section did not like the technique but liked the end results enough to award him another commission, Crystal Falls.²⁰⁵ He was also given the Wabasha, Minnesota, post office commission. He was more interested in color and composition than realism. Simplified compositions, well-placed powerful forms, and strong diagonal compositional lines are trademarks of Thomas's style.

Despite his mural success and praise of the Section, no records could be found involving a post-Section career.

Charles W. Thwaites (1904-2002).

Charles W. Thwaites was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He was awarded the Greenville, Michigan, post office commission for which he created the tempera painting *Lumbering* in 1940. *Threshing Barley* located in the Chilton, Wisconsin, post office (1940) and *Making Cheese*, located in the Plymouth, Wisconsin, post office (1942) were also Section commissions. Thwaites was also professionally active in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and died in Carmel, California.

Lumen Martin Winter (1908-1982).

Lumen Martin Winter, an internationally known muralist, sculptor, painter, and mosaic artist, was born in Ellery, Illinois, and studied at the Cleveland School of Art and the National Academy of Design in New York City. Winter was a native of Kansas when he was given the Freemont, Michigan, commission for which he created the mural *Pony Express* in 1938. Included among his other government works are the Alma post office mural and a

series for the Kansas State Capitol Building. His style in these murals exhibits aspects of Regionalists' works.

Winter's monumental works include those that are displayed at the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York City, the John F. Kennedy Memorial Gateway in Los Alamos, New Mexico, and the National Wildlife Federation and national headquarters of A.F.L.-C.I.O., both in Washington, D. C. He also designed the official medallion for the ill-fated Apollo 13 space flight.²⁰⁶ In Michigan, *The Legend of Grand Rapids*, created by Winter in 1976 for Grand Rapids Community College, illustrates the history of Grand Rapids from its beginnings through 1976.

Summary

Although not all of the Section artworks located in Michigan are masterpieces, their significance should not be underestimated. The artists were participants in a federal government experiment. Several of these artists were considered prominent in their field before their Section commissions, including David Fredenthal, William Gropper, and Frank Cassara,²⁰⁷ while others became prominent with the help of the Section's commissions. All of the artwork is unique and original, with the majority of these pieces being of high quality and treasured by their community. Last, it is evident that the subjects depicted not only reflected national themes but also regional and local culture and stories from the Depression era perspective. They are an important part of our historical fabric and state heritage.

Chapter Five: Documentation and Case Studies

Most of the information in this chapter was obtained by documentation conducted by the author. Dates of installation were obtained from the United States Postal Service. If the exact date of installation is not known, it is listed as 1 January of that year. Parma Conservation provided a list of murals that the company has recently restored. Information from missing artwork that was previously documented is included. Photograph credit is that of the author, unless otherwise noted.

Alma, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 233 North State Street, Alma, Michigan, post office, north wall of lobby over the postmaster's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0689298 4805383

Artist: Joe H. Cox,

Title: *Harvest*

Year Created: 1940

Date of Installation: 01 January 1940

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 13' 6" x 5" 9"

Condition: Poor, dirt and grime

Date Surveyed: 24 August 2006



Figure 13: Alma, Michigan. post office.

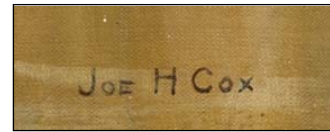


Figure 14: Artist's Signature.



Figure 15: *Harvest* by Joe Cox, 1940.



Figure 17: Detail of figure.

Figure 16: Detail of figure.



Figure 18: Detail of figure.



Figure 19: Visible paint splatters.



Figure 20: Frame separation and infestation.

Alma, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

After receiving the commission for the Alma post office (Figure 13) Joe H. Cox began corresponding with Alma's local authorities regarding information about the town and the surrounding area. He later visited the area, spoke with the postmaster and local residents, and took study photographs of the countryside. Cox's proposed subject was initially the oil refining industry in Alma and peach orchards that were common in southern Michigan. However, the Section was not satisfied with the subject combination. When locations where both agricultural and industrial, the Section generally preferred the depiction of, or at least the emphasis on, the agriculture of the area.²⁰⁸ There was much communication between the Section and Cox several times prior to final approval.²⁰⁹

In the final mural, the oil refinery plays a minor role; the act of harvesting wheat is the main subject. The productive labor of harvesting the wheat is concurrent with the idealized agriculture theme that the Section sought (Figures 14-19).

Three men and a small boy cut, tie, and carry bundles of wheat under a cloudy, gray sky. The features of the figures are intentionally not in full view and are either turned away or shaded by large-rimmed hats. Cox's desire was to direct attention to the act of work and the subject of an abundant food supply, both, in reality, scarce at that time. The earth tone pallet and idealized imagery demonstrate a Regionalist influence.

Condition and Developments.

At the time of inspection, the frame of the mural had partially separated from the wall. Infestation was evident and may have been harming the artwork (Figure 20). Paint splatters from wall repainting were visible. Restoration cleaning and inspection of the artwork was highly recommended, and Parma Conservation and Dallan Wordekemper were made aware of the mural's poor condition. There were tentative plans to have the mural restored in 2007.²¹⁰ In August of 2007, when last-minute funding came through, Parma Conservation restored the mural. Elizabeth Kendall of Parma Conservation stated, "Alma turned out to be one of the more beautiful murals we've worked on – after we took off all of the ugly over-paint put on years ago."²¹¹

Belding, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 201 East Main Street,
Belding, Michigan, post office; west wall of the
post office lobby over the post master's door
UTM Coordinates: 16T 0635349 4754903

Artist: Marvin Beerbohm,
Title: *Belding Brothers and Their Silk Industry*
Year Created: 1943
Date of Installation: 27 March 1943
Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall
Size: 11' 11" x 6' 5 1/2"
Condition: Very good
Date Surveyed: 25 May 2006



Figure 21: Belding, Michigan,
post office.



Figure 22: Artist's signature.

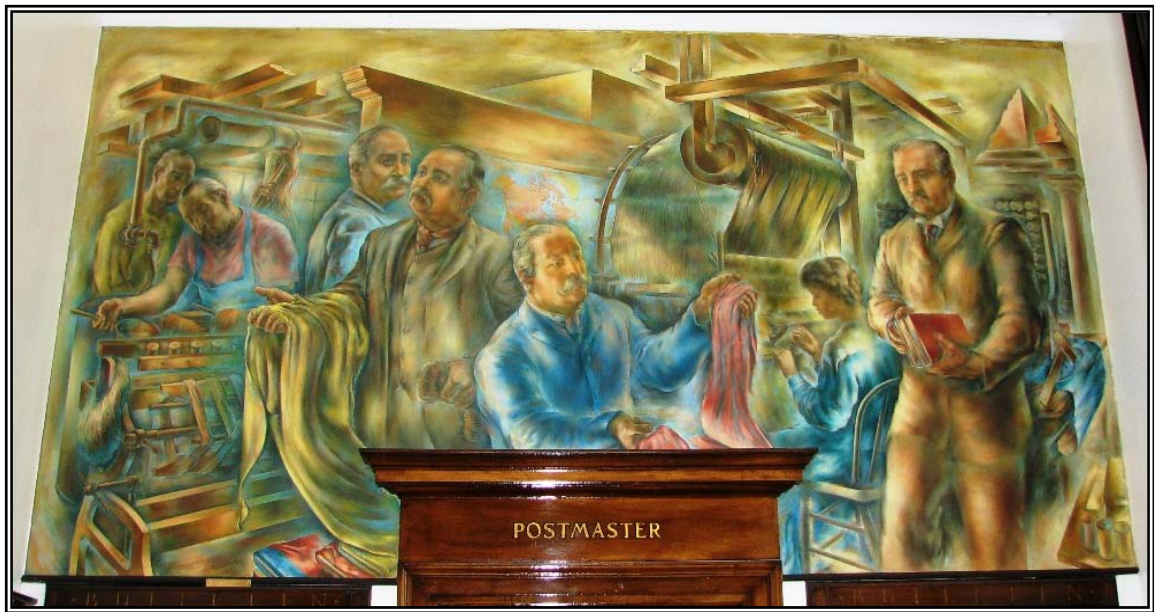


Figure 23: *Belding Brothers and Their Silk Industry*, by Marvin Beerbohm, 1940.

Figure 24: Detail of figures.



Figure 26: Detail of brushwork and use of color.



Figure 25: Detail of figure, brushwork technique, and use of color.

Belding, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

The Section commission for the Belding post office (Figure 21) was awarded to Marvin Beerbolm. Local industries appearing in such murals as Belding's *The Belding Brothers and their Silk Industry* is relatively common. The four Belding brothers played a prominent role in the development and growth of Belding, Michigan, from 1880 until 1935.²¹² They not only owned the major industry in town, but they were also investors in the opera house, Hotel Belding, the Belding Basket Company, the Belding Land Improvement Company, and a refrigeration company.²¹³ Because of this, the subject matter for Belding's mural was a natural choice. The four brothers are depicted working among their employees (Figures 22-26).

Although the mural theme is industrial in nature, it is also historical. While elements of Cubism and Abstract are evident in the play of picture planes and shapes and although Beerbohm idealized his subject matter, the artwork remains representational.

Condition and Developments.

The mural has recently been restored by Parma Conservation.

Birmingham, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 302 Martin Street, Birmingham, Michigan, post office (facility now functions as a regional office), east wall of post office lobby over the post master's door.

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0325402 4727824

Artist: Carlos Lopez

Title: *The Pioneering Society's Picnic*

Year Created: 1942

Date of Installation: 12 August 1942

Medium: Tempera on plaster with a gesso base

Size: 7' 3" x 16'

Condition: Excellent; restored 3/2006

Date Surveyed: 22 June 2006



Figure 27: Birmingham, Michigan, post office.



Figure 28: *The Pioneering Society's Picnic* by Carlos Lopez, 1942.



Figure 29 (left): Detail of figure of lower panel.



Figure 30 (right): Detail of mother and child of main mural.



Figure 32 (right): Detail of church and figures.



Figure 31 (above): Detail of lower panel.

Birmingham, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

The local judging panel for the 1941 competition for the Birmingham post office (Figure 27) was disappointed in the quality of submitted sketches. Carlos Lopez was chosen to receive the commission because of his past mural experience. In response to the local panel's and Section's criticism of his original sketches, Lopez strove for greater monumentality in his final work.

Because Lopez was one of the elite artists of the time, he received a sizable commission of \$14,000 for the mural.²¹⁴

At the time of the installation of *The Pioneering Society's Picnic* in Birmingham's Post Office on August 12, 1942, Birmingham was also celebrating the 119th Anniversary of the post office and the dedication of the new Post Office building.²¹⁵ The community of Birmingham held a public ceremony that included a band, master of ceremonies, a luncheon, and a parade for the dedication of the mural.²¹⁶

The mural portrays a family social gathering of the 19th century Michigan Pioneer Society as seen as a 1930s perception of an idealized American past. The theme refers to the activities of the early Historical Society of Michigan that was formerly called the Michigan Pioneer Society.²¹⁷ Included in the murals are jugs and a pig roast. The artwork depicts faces of people who lived in Birmingham at the time the mural was painted. The baby in the scene is a portrait of Lopez's neighbor's child (Figures 28-32).

Juxtaposition of different images and episodes was influenced by cinematic and newspaper formats. The sketchy, expressionistic style that Lopez was known for can be seen

in the artwork. The lower panels, unusual for Section post office artwork, were possibly inspired by a similar format used by Diego Rivera in the Detroit Institute of Art murals.

Condition and Developments.

The mural was previously restored by Joseph Sparks in 1960.²¹⁸

In March of 2006, Elizabeth Kendall, owner and head conservator of Parma Conservation, along with Peter Schoenmann, Parma Conservation of Chicago, Illinois, conducted a four-day restoration project.

Blissfield, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 302 South Lane Street, Blissfield, Michigan, post office, south wall of the lobby over the post masters door.

UTM Coordinates: 17 T 0262168 4634847

Artist: Jean Paul Slusser

Title: *Laying the Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad*

Year Created: 1939

Date of Installation: 01 January 1939

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 13' 2" x 4' 4"

Condition: Fair, deterioration of paint surface, grime

Date Surveyed: 15 July 2007



Figure 33: Blissfield Michigan, post office.



Figure 34: Artist's signature.

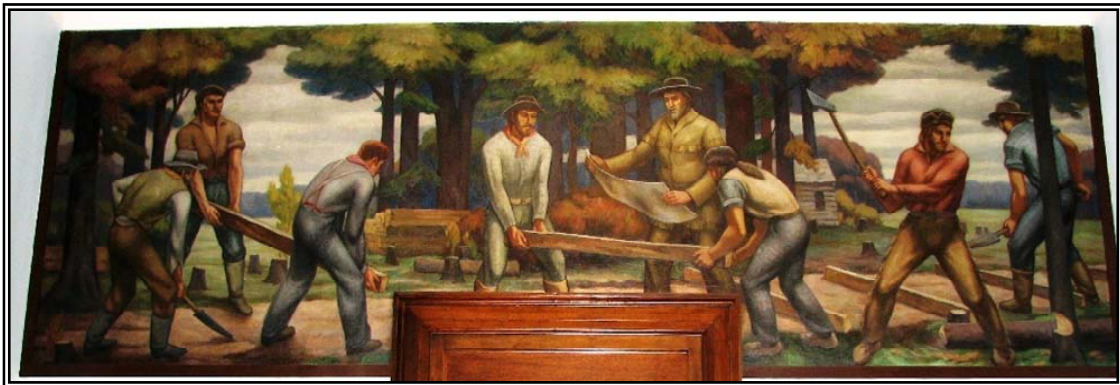


Figure 35: *Laying the Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad* by Jean Paul Slusser, 1939.



Figure 36: Detail of mural.



Figure 37: Detail of mural.

Figure 38: Deterioration of paint with noticeable crackling.



Figure 40: Visible deterioration.



Figure 39: Visible deterioration.



Blissfield, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Jean Paul Slusser was awarded the Section art commission for the Blissfield post office (Figure 33). Both the pioneer spirit and the benefits of industrialization are represented in the Blissfield mural. The Erie and Kalamazoo Railroad, chartered on April 22, 1933, was the first to operate west of the Alleghenies, and connected Port Lawrence (later named Toledo), with the Kalamazoo River via Adrian. It became part of the only unbroken line that connected the East Coast to Chicago under Michigan Southern Railroad. The track, in operation during the creation of the artwork and known as “The Old Road,” was an important feature of the community²¹⁹ (Figures 34-37).

The mural’s subject of the laying of the railroad is a theme of a local historical industry. Local historical themes were a part of the nationalism of 1930s art as artists and writers delved into American history in search of the stability and continuity of the past. This topic agreed with the Section’s preferred subjects. The railroads also evoked stories of America’s pioneer spirit, another popular Section subject.

Slusser’s use of earth tones and idealized imagery is reminiscent of Regionalists’ work, popular at that time.

Condition and Developments.

There is visible cracking of the paint, causing separation from the canvas support system (Figures 38-40). According to post office employees, an understudy of Slusser’s inspected the mural “a few” years ago, which included the use of a magnifying glass. The

understudy concluded that although it was stable, in order to be saved, restoration work in the near future was imperative. The window blinds are kept closed to hinder further deterioration. During the time of the visit, the postmaster was unsure of a funding source for restoration.

Bronson, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 220 East Chicago Street, Bronson, Michigan, post office, north wall over lobby door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0649953 4647145

Artist: Arthur Getz

Title: farm family with produce (subject)

Year Created: 1941

Date of Installation: 01 January 1941

Medium: Casein tempera on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 12' x 3' 3"

Condition: Fairly good.

Date Surveyed: 13 July 2006



Figure 41: Bronson, Michigan, post office.

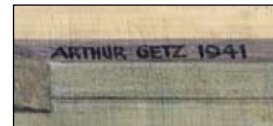


Figure 42: Artist's signature.



Figure 43: Farm family with produce (subject), by Arthur Getz, 1941.



Figure 44: Detail of mural.

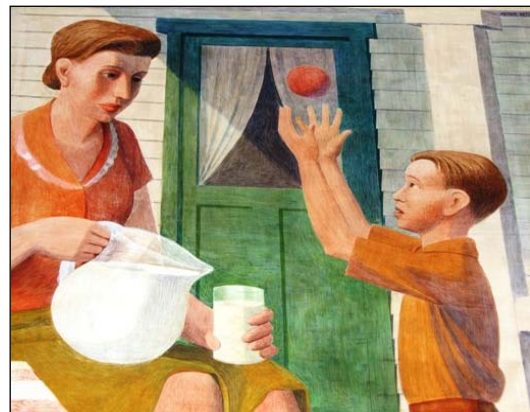


Figure 45: Detail of mural.

Figure 46: Detail of figure.



Figure 48: Further detail showing technique.

Figures 47 (above center): Detail of mural showing an intense palette and visible brushwork.

Bronson, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

At the time that Arthur Getz received the Bronson post office (Figure 41) commission, which was the result of an honorable mention in a Section of Fine Arts national competition of the Public Buildings Administration,²²⁰ he was living in New York City.

According to Getz, the mural depicts the satisfaction of a family after months of toil and anxiety.²²¹ Idealized abundance of farm life, a dominant Section subject, is represented in the mural. The farming family, enjoying the fruits of their harvest, is depicted with the high-keyed palette that Getz was known for. His quick brushstrokes are clearly visible (Figures 42-48).

The artwork was well-received by the community. The postmistress of Bronson wrote to the Section that Getz's mural was "...a beautiful piece of work, very adaptable to this locality..."²²²

Condition and Developments.

Long-time employees of the post office had no knowledge of any cleaning or restoration work being conducted on the mural. The artwork appears to be in fairly good condition. However, further inspection and cleaning is recommended.

Buchanan, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 112 West Front Street, Buchanan, Michigan, post office, east wall of the lobby over the post master's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T o552967 4630811

Artist: Gertrude Goodrich

Title: *Production*

Year Created: 1941

Date of Installation: 24 February 1942

Medium: Tempera on plaster with gesso base

Size: 4' 1" x 11' 10"

Condition: Poor, threatened; covered with several layers of paint, patches have been exposed with hopes of restoration but with unknown funding sources.

Date Surveyed: 13 July 2006



Figure 49: Buchanan, Michigan, post office.

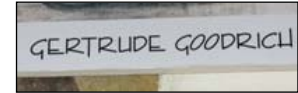


Figure 50: Artist's signature as seen on copy of sketch.

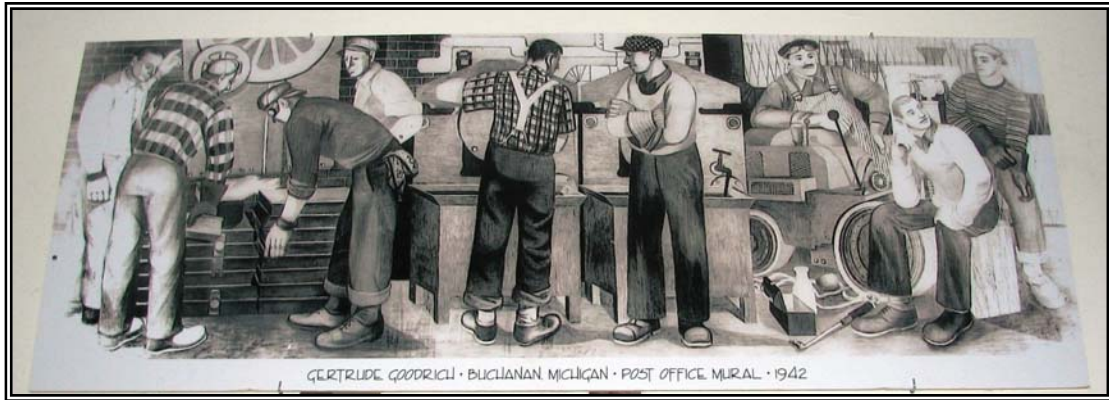


Figure 51: Copy of sketch for *Production* by Gertrude Goodrich, 1942.

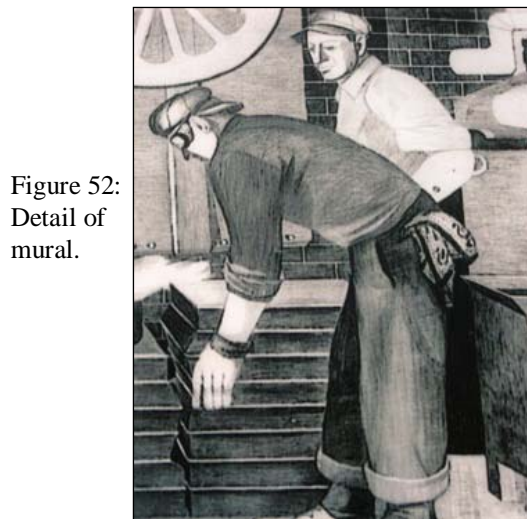


Figure 52: Detail of mural.



Figure 53: Detail of mural.

Figure 54: Exposure of original mural.



Figure 55: Exposure of original mural.



Buchanan, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Gertrude Goodrich created the mural for the Buchanan post office (Figure 49). *Production* was one of three Michigan artworks removed or painted over early in their existence. The Buchanan mural did not satisfy the public, the Section or the artist. Because of her modernistic approach, Goodrich struggled with the Section and had to alter her design from a semi-abstract composition of integrating aspects of machinery and workers of the town's major industry, the Clark Equipment Company, to a piece that was more representational in nature (Figures 50-53). The Section conveyed that her original design was "inappropriate for the citizens of Buchanan, many who have not had an opportunity of acquainting themselves with all the theories of contemporary art."²²³

The Section not only insisted on alterations, they also insisted that Goodrich obtain design approval from the postmaster and editor of Buchanan's newspaper.

Still, even after approval, the finished mural was criticized, not in itself, but because war had recently been declared and so the public felt that the money could have gone to the war cause. The postmaster tried to explain that not only was the mural begun before the United States' involvement in the war but the money for the mural was part of the original post office appropriation of funds. By the 1960s, the mural had deteriorated and was painted over.²²⁴

The final work depicts three different aspects of production work at the Clark Equipment Company. Although aspects of abstraction are visible in the mural sketch, the work is representational.

Condition and Developments.

Parma studios performed test patch exposures of the mural (Figures 45-55.) According to the current postmaster, although the United States Post Office's Facility Department has approved funding, it has withdrawn it (more than once). Though other murals have procured funding through the Grand Rapids regional office, the office advised Buchanan's postmaster to seek funding through local organizations and fundraising. There is hope that funding will become available from the federal government in May of 2007. Currently, in its place, is an enlargement of Goodrich's original mural sketch (Figures 51-53).

Calumet, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 201 6th Street, Calumet, Michigan, post office, southwest wall of the lobby over the postmaster's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0390902 5176715

Artist: Joseph Lasker

Title: *Copper Mining in Calumet*

Year Created: 1940

Date of Installation: 10 January 1941

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 14' x 5' 6"

Condition: Good, slight bubbling of canvas

Date Surveyed: 4 October 2006



Figure 56: Calumet, Michigan, post office.



Figure 57: Artist's signature.

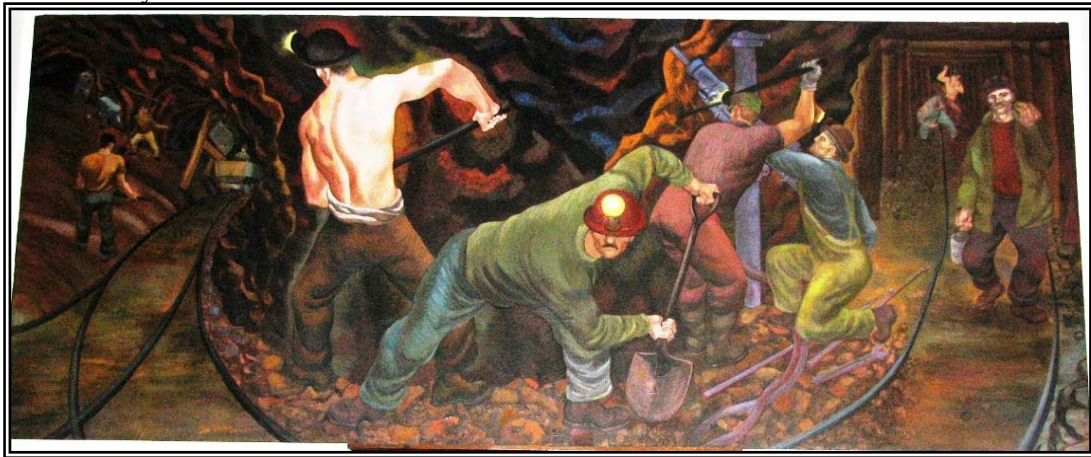


Figure 58: *Copper Mining in Calumet* by Joseph Lasker, 1940.

Figure 60: Detail of center figures.

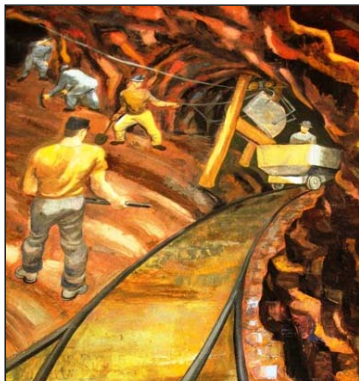


Figure 59: Detail of mural.



Figure 61: Detail of mural.



Figure 62: Detail of Brushwork.



Figure 63: "Grime square."

Calumet, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Joe Lasker was an art student who had never painted a mural when he received the Calumet post office (Figure 56) commission of \$700.²²⁵ Grateful for the commission, Lasker stated, “It was really the first professional recognition I’d gotten, and ... convinced me that maybe I could be a real artist.”²²⁶

Because he could not afford to travel to Calumet, Lasker executed the mural in New York. His rendition of copper mining is strictly based on the research he conducted in New York libraries. Consulted resources included *Mining Congress Journals*, local newspapers, literature from mine companies, and government reports.²²⁷

The original mural sketch illustrated an 1890 Calumet mine fire accident but the Section response was: “While we appreciate the thought given by your design and the consistency with which you have executed it, it is the opinion of this office that the subject matter selected by you is inappropriate....”²²⁸ Lasker then decided to create a composite view of several mines under varied conditions. As with other Section murals, Lasker does not show the turbulence and uncertainty of the time, such as the higher than normal unemployment rate and poverty level of the area or the hazards of mining, but of the miners hard at work in a conspicuously clean environment (Figures 57-62).

Lasker hired a local artist to install the Calumet mural. The artwork was well-received by the community. The postmaster of the time wrote Lasker “a nice letter” complimenting him on the mural.²²⁹

It is evident that Lasker researched the mining industry; an array of activities and equipment are depicted in the artwork. There is an emphasis on the dynamic action of the hard-working miners lit by the mine and their helmets.

Lasker began painting the mural in a flattened decorative style that was influenced by Cubism. However, both the Section and Lasker were dissatisfied with the look, and a more three-dimensional style emerged that, while it contained aspects of Cubism, the influence of the Realists, the Mexican muralists and Regionalists are evident. The circular composition of the mural was often used by mural artists in the 1930s and helps to combine depth with surface flatness.²³⁰

Condition and Developments.

In 1991, Anton Rejer, an art conservator with the Fine Arts Conservation Services of Madison, Wisconsin, conducted conservation work on the mural. According to the Conservation Report, dated Sept. 4, 1991, the following steps were taken:

1. Examination and photographs of the mural.
2. Removal of dirt and grime with a solution of 1% NH₃, H₂O and neutral soap with cotton swabs. Removal of paint splatter was executed using a scalpel.
3. Stabilization to prevent further flaking was conducted with the use of BEVA 371.
4. A thin Layer of SOLUVAR varnish was applied to establish matte/gloss relationship intended by the artist.
5. Photographs were taken after the process.

There is a “grime square” that is visible and was left to be an indicator of the level of dirt of the surrounding area of the mural (figure 63).²³¹ The mural appears to be in good

shape; however, some bubbling of the canvas is visible, suggesting that a slight detachment of the canvas from the plaster wall has occurred. Further inspection is warranted.

Caro, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 210 West Lincoln, Caro, Michigan, post office, north wall of the lobby over the postmaster's door

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0306198 4818114

Artist: David Fredenthal

Title: *Mail on the Farm*

Year Created: 1941

Date of Installation: 01 January 1941

Medium: Tempera on panel

Size: 12' x 6'

Condition: Fair, some dirt and grime, questionable hardware visible

Date Surveyed: 24 October 2006



Figure 64: Caro, Michigan, post office.



Figure 65: Artist's signature.



Figure 66: *Mail on the Farm* by David Fredenthal, 1941.



Figure 67: Detail of figure and brushwork.



Figure 68: Detail of figure.

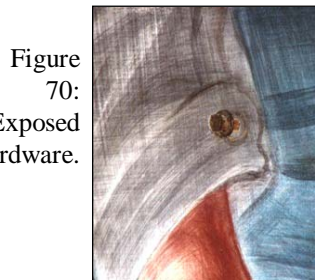
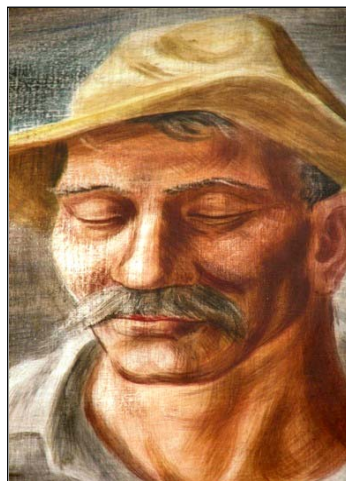


Figure 70:
Exposed hardware.



Caro, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

David Fredenthal was originally assigned to the Lincoln Park mural while Zoltan Sepeshy was assigned to create a mural for the Caro post office, (Figure 64) but they exchanged commissions because Sepeshy's teaching position at Cranbrook made it difficult for him to travel to Caro.²³² After visiting Caro, Fredenthal wrote to the section, "As Caro is in an agricultural district, I have chosen a simple agricultural subject, and have incorporated the idea of mail in it; a letter brought out to the plowman by his wife"²³³ (Figures 65-68).

Initially, Fredenthal planned to paint the mural directly on the wall but changed to a fire- and waterproof fiberboard for safety reasons. The work is painted with transparent washes of tempera.²³⁴ The artwork displays striking contrasts of values, which the artist's work was known for. Because he adhered to the Section's desires to give attention to modeling of both human and animal forms, and because he was considered an established, prominent artist,²³⁵ Fredenthal received little criticism from the Section.

Condition and Developments.

Although the mural is in need of cleaning, the artwork appears to be in fairly good condition. Bolt-like hardware is visible on the mural's surface (Figures 169, 170).

Chelsea, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 200 South Main Street, Chelsea, Michigan, post office, on south wall of the lobby over the post masters door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0745516 4689246

Artist: George Fisher

Title: *The Way of Life*

Year Created: 1938

Date of Installation: 01 January 1941

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 13' 2" x 4' 9"

Condition: Good; restored circa 1986.

Date Surveyed: 12 April 2006



Figure 71: Chelsea, Michigan, post office.



Figure 72: Artist's signature.



Figure 73: *The Way of Life* by George Fisher, 1938.

Figure 74: Detail of figure.



Figure 75: Detail of brushwork.



Figure 76: Detail of mural.



Chelsea, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

George Fisher was awarded the Section commission for the Chelsea post office (Figure 71). The Section discouraged, or outright banned, certain subjects in Michigan. Although discouraged as a whole, nude or semi-nude figures were permitted in other places, but not in Michigan. Because of this, the Section asked Fisher to eliminate the nude figures contained in his preliminary design. Rowan suggested that Fisher write to the postmaster and public library of Chelsea in order to find more suitable images. However, Fisher instead chose to appropriately clothe the figures in 1930s farm apparel.²³⁶ Fisher had a timeless, emblematic glory in mind when creating his contemporary family, perched atop a heap of wheat sheaves. The sense of plenty and well-being of the mural's scene suggests the traditional association between abundance and images of produce and women, and implies that the abundance is a contemporary commodity²³⁷ (Figures 72-76).

According to Fisher, "The title, *Way of Life*, indicated the fundamentals of a system of living and thought which are correlated and which carry the possibilities of a great civilization and a strong and happy people. These fundamentals are symbolized by the harvest, the logs, the grindstone, the spinning wheel and the people themselves. Aside from the symbolism, the mural is simply a picture of a family at rest, with work well done, enjoying the freedom, peace and love which [are] justly theirs."²³⁸

The influence of the Renaissance painters in the portrayal of the figures and the use of symbolism are evident in the artwork. The configuration of the three figures of father, mother, and child is a composition that suits the space over the postmaster's door.

Condition and Developments.

Restoration work was conducted on the mural in, or around, 1986 by Ann Wagner of Cooperstown New York.²³⁹

According to Elizabeth Kendall of Parma Conservation, the city is awaiting the construction of a new post office and has plans to pursue removal and reinstallation of the mural. To date, plans for a new facility have not been finalized, so no decisions have been made regarding the mural.²⁴⁰

Clare, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original, 111 West 5th Street, Clare, Michigan, post office, west wall of lobby over the postmaster's door.

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0745516 4689246

Artist: Allen Thomas

Title: *The Mail Arrives in Clare – 1871*

Year Created: 1937

Date of Installation: 27 October 1937

Medium: Oil on canvas on stretched canvas, framed

Size: 12' x 4' 6"

Condition: Fairly good; was restored circa 1986

Date Surveyed: 24 August 2006



Figure 77: Clare, Michigan, post office.



Figure 78: Artist's signature.



Figure 79: *The Mail Arrives in Clare – 1871* by Allen Thomas, 1937.



Figure 80: Detail of figure.



Figure 81: Detail of figure.

Figure 82: Details of thick application of paint.



Figure 83: Frame maintenance is needed.

Clare, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

After visiting Clare, Allen Thomas realized that Clare identifies itself with the slogan “The Gateway of the North” and wrote to the Section, “The town is the real beginning of the Northern Michigan area and marks the step from the industrial and agricultural southern part of the state to the wilderness and beauty of the north.” Because Thomas did not find an industrial or historical event that was prominent for Clare, the mail service was selected as a theme. He researched the local postal service and chose to depict the postmaster arriving with the mail that he picked up from the nearest railroad stop, approximately ten to fifteen miles from town.²⁴¹ Also prominently incorporated in the mural is the subject of the early lumbering days of Clare (Figures 72-82).

At first, only one sketch for the Clare post office (Figure 77) artwork was sent to the Section. They requested more and Thomas sent them but they chose the first one. The Section was very concerned about the use of the palette knife technique that Thomas had used to paint other murals during his association with George Harding and warned him against its use.

After the completion and installation of Clare’s mural, the Section praised Thomas for his work and decided to award him another commission. They invited him to submit sketches for the Crystal Falls mural. However, they apparently forgot to pay Thomas for his Clare piece, but the oversight was ultimately rectified.²⁴²

The community was interested in the mural process, and the artwork was well-received.²⁴³

In Thomas's Section murals for Clare and Crystal Falls, Michigan, a commercial art influence can be seen. Because of Thomas's professional experience, he was able to paint two Section works in half the time it took most other artist to complete one. Thomas's use of a simple composition using diagonal lines, powerful forms and strong color is evident in the artwork, as is his thick application of paint.

The postal service and the historic lumbering industry were subjects encouraged by the Section and generally well-received.

Condition and Developments.

The artwork was restored by Ann Wagner of Cooperstown, New York, about 1986.²⁴⁴ However, appropriate maintenance is recommended. The frame surrounding the artwork appears to also require maintenance (Figure 83).

Crystal Falls, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 501 Superior Avenue, Crystal Falls, Michigan, post office, northeast wall of lobby over the postmaster's door
UTM Coordinates: 16T 0396820 5105657

Artist: Allen Thomas

Title: *Extending the Frontier in Northwest Territory*

Year Created: 1938

Date of Installation: 23 May 1938

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 12' x 5'

Condition: Excellent, recently restored

Date Surveyed: 4 October 2006



Figure 84: Crystal Falls, Michigan, post office.

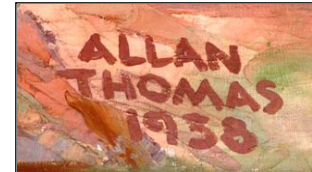


Figure 85: Artist's signature.



Figure 86: *Extending the Frontier in Northwest Territory* by Allen Thomas, 1938.

Figures 88 (below center): Detail of thick paint application.

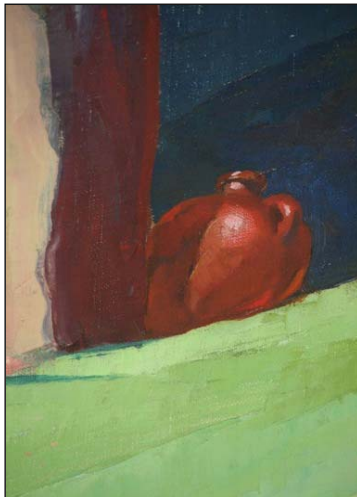


Figure 87: Detail of mural.

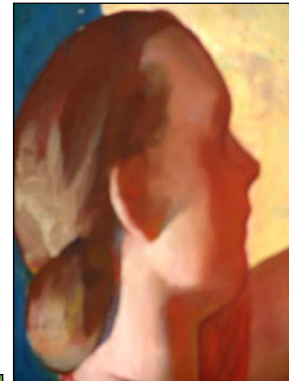


Figure 89: Detail of figure.



Figure 90: Frame surrounding the mural is in need of maintenance.

Crystal Falls, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

After receiving high praise for his Clare mural, Allen Thomas was invited to submit sketches for the Crystal Falls post office (Figure 84). The section had very little criticism of the chosen sketch and thought it was “handsomely composed.”²⁴⁵ Thomas noted that along with its lumber and mining industries, Crystal Falls “is a haven for the vacationist in summer and the hunter in winter.”²⁴⁶ However, both the artist and the Section chose to show northern Michigan as a wilderness to be tamed rather than a place for recreation (Figures 85-89).

As in the Clare piece, simplified composition, well-placed powerful forms, and strong diagonal compositional lines are incorporated in this artwork that depicts a husband and wife farming in the midst of a wilderness. His style contains characteristics of the type of commercial art of the time: bold, outlined forms and flat surfaces with an emphasis on compositional design elements.

Condition and Developments.

The mural has recently undergone restoration by Parma Conservation. However, the frame around the artwork is in need of maintenance (Figure 90).

Dearborn, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Removed; original location; Maple Street, Dearborn, Michigan, in storage at the Henry Ford Community College Learning Resource Center

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0315729 4688282

Artist: Rainey Bennett

Title: *Ten Eyck's Tavern on Chicago Road*, 1938, oil on canvas

Year Created: 1938

Date of Installation: 01 January 1938

Medium: Oil on canvas

Size: 14' x 7' 7" (per Ruby)

Condition: Poor, endangered

Date Surveyed: 23 April 2006, October 2006



Figure 91: Henry Ford Community College Learning Resource Center, Dearborn, Michigan.



Figure 92: Image of the mural when it was first installed at the Resource Center. Photo Credit: Courtesy of the Dearborn Historical Museum.



Figure 93: *Ten Eyck's Tavern on Chicago Road* by Rainey Bennett, 1938. Photo Credit: <http://www.wpamurals.com/dearborn.htm>.

Dearborn, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Understanding the preferred themes and styles of the Section, Rainey Bennett chose not to portray the Ford River Rouge automobile plant in Dearborn (at the time, the largest manufacturing plant in the world), and instead depicted Conrad Ten Eyck's Tavern on the Chicago Road (Figures 92, 93). The inn, which burned down in the late nineteenth century, had served pioneers heading westward from Detroit in Michigan's territorial days. Rich texture and intense color were used to convey the vitality and hospitality of the town's 1820 tavern.²⁴⁷

Bennett looked to Italian Renaissance artist Piero della Francesca for inspiration, and the influence can be seen in the decorative aspects of the mural. Bennett later remarked that the sweet expressions on the figures and their slightly stiff quality were the result of this influence.²⁴⁸ The oil medium on canvas was given a matte finish, the look of a fresco painting. While a Renaissance influence is apparent, flattened forms and overall quality is that of a modernist.

At the end of the Dearborn project, he wrote to Edward Rowan, "I want you to know how much I have enjoyed working on this commission with you and the Section of Painting and Sculpture. You have a genius for making an artist feel good about the work and all that is involved in it."²⁴⁹ Forty-three years after the completion of his Dearborn post office mural, Bennett stated that, "...for my generation it [the Section work] was terribly vital. We wouldn't have made it otherwise."²⁵⁰

Condition and Developments.

The mural was relocated to Eshlemann Library in 1977 (Figure 91) before the demolition of the original post office. With the intervention of local cultural organizations, the mural was saved and reinstalled by Hiram Holzen and Michael Regone of New York City in 1977.²⁵¹ However, with the renovation of the library, the mural was removed and is now rolled up, crated, and stored in the electrical room of the library, currently referred to as the Learning Resource Center. Many of the college staff is unaware of the mural's existence, and none that I spoke with knew of the artwork's history or of its significance. In 2005, Kirt Gross, Director of the Detroit Historical Society, and Julie Moreno, of Padzieski Gallery and a former painting conservator of the Detroit Institute of Arts, inspected approximately five inches of the width of the mural. According to Gross, although the mural was professionally rolled and crated, flaking and paint loss was visible.²⁵²

Dallan Wordekemper, the Real Estate and Faculty Director for the United States Post Offices, was able to determine that the mural is owned by the United States Government and was placed on loan by GSA to the City of Dearborn. It was also determined by the GSA that this particular mural had been missed in their recent inventory. In an email, Wordekemper wrote:

“Your concern regarding the Dearborn mural raised interest, that of Elizabeth Kendall, and with my help, we alerted someone to do some additional research...I thought it would be wise to make some response regarding the detective work that you are doing for the benefit of the murals and history.”²⁵³

The future status of the mural is in question, as is the mural's safety.

**Detroit, Hamtramck Branch, Michigan, Post Office
Paintings on Panels**

Location: Original; 2933 Caniff, Hamtramck, Michigan, post office,
north east and west wall of lobby between grills.

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0336509 4696297

Artist: Schomer Lichtner

Title: *City Workers, Products of Industry and Agriculture and Farm
Family* (three pieces)

Year Created: 1940

Date of Installation: 07 August 1940

Medium: Tempera on pressed wood (three pieces)

Size: three panes 3' 8" x 8' each

Condition: Fair

Date Surveyed: 23 April 2006



Figure 94: Detroit, Hamtramck, Michigan, post office.



Figure 95: Setting and placement of panels.



Figure 96: *City Workers* by Schomer Lichtner, 1940.



Figure 97: *Products of Industry and Agriculture* by Schomer Lichtner, 1940.



Figure 98: *Farm Family* by Schomer Lichtner, 1940.



Figure 99: Detail of *City Workers*.



Figure 100: Detail of *Products of Industry and Agriculture*.



Figure 101: Detail of *Farm Family*.

Detroit, Hamtramck Branch, Michigan, Post Office Installed Paintings on Panels

History and Description.

Schomer Lichtner wrote of the murals of Hamtramck, “Instead of depicting the sordid surrounding in which they live, I have shown probably the most beautiful thing they see—a snow laden tree.”²⁵⁴

The Hamtramck post office (Figure 94) mural, like Eaton Rapids’, combines farming and technology. To show the interdependence of the city worker and the farmer, farm products are integrated into the mural of city worker, as are factory products into the farming mural.²⁵⁵ Most of the Polish auto workers had come from farms. The ethnic Polish facial physiognomy and their rugged dignity serve to enhance the idea of an immigrant family, which through hard work and perseverance will succeed in creating a better life in America. Lichtner is recognizing that the immigrant, originally from farms, settled in the manufacturing area of Hamtramck. The artwork’s subject shows a Social Realism influence (Figures 95-101).

The panels are installed on three separate walls and are flanked by octagon art deco style windows (Figure 95).

Condition and Developments.

The artwork is in desperate need of cleaning. The panel substrates appear to be in good condition; however, further inspection is warranted. (Close inspection was not allowed by postal employees at the time of the documentation.)

**Detroit, Highland Park Branch, Michigan, Post Office
Sculpture**

Location: Original; 13215 Woodward Avenue, Highland Park,
Michigan, post office, northeast corner of building entrance

UTM coordinates: 17T 0327596 4696503

Artist: Erwin Springweiler

Title: *American Eagle*

Year Created: 1940

Date of Installation: 15 July 1940

Medium: Granite

Size: 5' 6" x 4' x 4' 8"

Condition: Fair

Date Surveyed: 23 April 2006



Figure 102: Detroit, Highland Park, Michigan post office.



Figure 103: Three-quarter view of *American Eagle* by Erwin Springweiler, 1940.



Figure 104: Front view of sculpture.

Figure 105: Detail of sculpture.



Figure 106 (above center): Detail; note the dirt and discoloration of the artwork.

Figure 107: Further dirt and discoloration.



Detroit, Highland Park Branch, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture

History and Description.

The commission for the Detroit Highland Park post office (Figure 102) was originally assigned to sculptor Ahron Ben-Shumel, but he was not in agreement with the Section's desire to pursue the subject of an eagle and so the commission was awarded to Erwin Springweiler.

Springweiler's design met the Section's approval with its massive yet simple style. They felt that the artwork conveyed the strength and fierceness appropriate for a United States national symbol.²⁵⁶ The strong, simplified eagle form carved in the granite succeeds in conveying the qualities that the Section sought with the facial features, in particular expressing strength, confidence, and fierceness (Figures 103-107).

Condition and Developments.

The sculpture is in desperate need of cleaning. There appears to be some surface deterioration; however, there are no visible structural problems (Figures 105-107).

Detroit, Lincoln Park Branch, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Relocated; Beaver Island Marine Museum, 26275 Main Street, Beaver Island, Michigan, lower level
 UTM coordinates: 16T 0615993 5067120
 (original post office location: 17T 0320224 46779842)

Artist: Zoltan Sepeshy

Title: *Hauling the Net: Great Lakes Fishermen*

Media: Tempera on board

Year Created: 1940

Date of Installation: 01 January 1940

Size: 13' 6" x 5'

Condition: Poor, endangered

Date Surveyed: 24 September 2006



Figure 108: Beaver Island Marine Museum.



Figure 109: Artist's signature.



Figure 110: Lincoln Park Historical Museum (former post office).



Figure 111: *Hauling the Net: Great Lakes Fishermen* by Zoltan Sepeshy, 1940.



Figure 112: Detail of mural; significant paint loss is apparent.

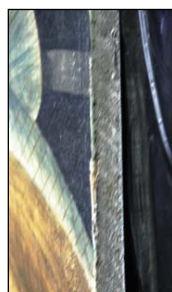


Figure 113: There is plastic between the wall and the mural; the frame is deteriorated.



Figure 114: Although loss of paint is evident, Sepeshy's brushwork style is still visible.



Figure 115: The mural was cut in half; bolts through the artwork attach it to the wall.

Detroit, Lincoln Park Branch, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Originally, the Lincoln Park post office (Figure 110) mural was assigned to David Fredenthal and the Caro mural to Zoltan Sepeshy. However, because of Sepeshy's teaching position at the Cranbrook Academy of the Arts and the inconvenience the Caro commission would cause him, the two artists exchanged commissions, and Sepeshy became the artist for the Lincoln Park mural.²⁵⁷ The postmaster had suggested to Sepeshy that, because of the presence of the Ford Motor Company in the community, Henry Ford would be an appropriate theme. Sepeshy submitted three sketches to the Section, one of Ford and his early automobiles, one of the mail services, and a third depicting a historic "Discovery of Michigan" theme. The Section was not satisfied with any of the submittals and asked Sepeshy to present sketches that represent the community utilizing the third theme of historic Michigan. Instead he submitted two additional sketches, including one of three fishermen. The Section complimented not only the theme but also the composition and its relationship to the architecture of the building²⁵⁸ (Figures 109, 111, 112, 114). However, many of the citizens of the community felt that the mural was not appropriate for Lincoln Park and criticized elements of the mural, including the fact that the mural depicted fishermen on a Great Lake; Lincoln Park is on the Detroit River. Local fishermen pointed out that over-sized carp were never so plentiful in the Great Lakes that they would fight to get into the boat. They also observed that although oar locks are present in the painting, oars are not, raising the question of how the boat is propelled. A local publication wrote, "The main feature of the

mural is the muscles of the men, which stand out like those aching muscles in liniment ads rather than those belonging to the men of the sea.”

The Postmaster of the time, Jimmy Southers, who commented that he never saw a boat “anchored to three hitching posts,” had petitioned the federal government for another mural but was unsuccessful.²⁵⁹ Sepesky later defended his choice, citing a lack of cooperation and input from the local residents and the fact that no significant historical event took place in the area.²⁶⁰

Three Great Lake fishermen are portrayed; two are hauling in a full net while the third fisherman is bringing in a smaller, overflowing net. The emphasis, however, is not on the fish, but the strong, hardworking figures and their actions. The significance of the activity and the movement and energy involved can be seen in the art of the Social Realists’ work of the time.

The mural contains Regionalist characteristics such as the powerful figures, earth tones, and the zigzag composition which was often utilized by Benton. There is also a circular aspect to the composition, which was a device used by muralists to help tie together varied elements of a large painting.

Condition and Developments.

The mural was removed from the Lincoln Park post office (Figure 110) during renovations in 1960. According to the Lincoln Park Historical Society, the mural was sitting rolled up on the back porch of the post office. Edward A. O’Donnell, whose business was located across Southfield Road, became interested in ownership of the mural after discovering that the post office had no plans to reinstall it.²⁶¹ The sale was approved by then-

mayor Melvin Gish and by U. S. Representatives William D. Ford and Raymond Clavenger. O'Donnell, who had lived the early part of his life on Beaver Island, later donated the mural to the island.²⁶² It is now located at the Beaver Island Marine Museum (Figure 110).

According to the Director of the Beaver Island museums, William Cashman, because the artwork was donated to Beaver Island, which is a geographical place but not a governing body or organization, it is unclear who has control of the artwork.²⁶³

The Mural was damaged by abrasive cleaning and unsafe display (Figures 113- 115). Sepeshy, who died in 1974, had expressed in a 1967 letter his desire to restore the mural.²⁶⁴ Cashman confirmed that the mural underwent destructive restoration again in 2000 and has expressed interest in intervention. Cashman recently thwarted an effort by a local organization to have various artists in-paint the mural.²⁶⁵

According to a 2004 conservation report by Kenneth B Katz, M.A., Fellow of I.I.C., “The painting is relatively secure, damaged and disfigured...the original paint has been removed and or skinned in many areas...Other areas have been abraded and there appears to be numerous drip marks where cleaning solvent dripped. There is a repaired crack, (approx. 25”) on the left panel that is out of line and disfiguring. Some sort of repair that corresponds to the damage is noted on the reverse.” He estimated the cost of treatment to be approximately \$40,000.²⁶⁶

Upon seeing a number of photographs of the mural in its present condition, Elizabeth Kendall's (of Parma Conservation), opinion is as follows “It can certainly be recuperated. However, the paint layer would first need to be consolidated to avoid further paint loss, and then the missing areas would be carefully reconstructed through exact color matching.²⁶⁷

The mural was, at some point, cut in half. There are bolts running through the mural

to attach it to wooden struts of the wall. Black plastic sheeting is used to protect the mural from moisture and extreme outside temperatures. The wooden frame that surrounds the mural is in a deteriorated state (Figures 113, 115).

Dallan Wordekemper, the Real Estate and Facilities Specialist for the United States Postal Service, was contacted and is aware of the mural's location and condition.

The Beaver Island Museum board has tentatively approved a bid for restoration work to be conducted by Parma Conservation.²⁶⁸

Detroit, Northwestern Branch, Michigan, Post Office Murals

Location: Relocated; Wayne State Student Union Building, upper level, Detroit, Michigan

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0327597 4696507

Artist: William Gropper

Title: *Automobile Industry*

Year Created: 1941

Date of Installation: 01 January 1940

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to wall

Size: 20' x 6'

Condition: Fairly good

Date Surveyed: 23 April 2006



Figure 116: Wayne State Student Union, Detroit, Michigan.



Figure 117: Interior space of installation.

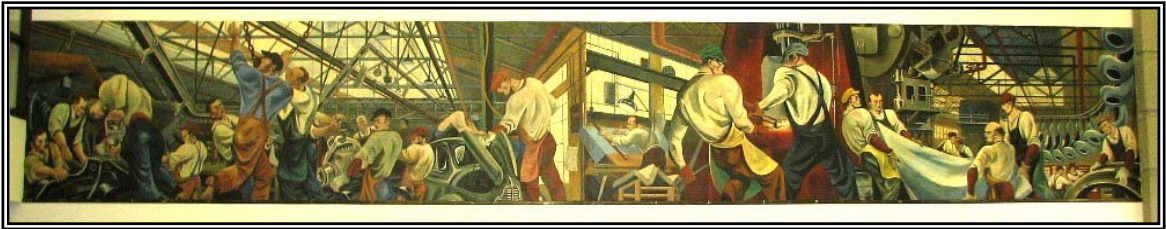


Figure 118: *Automobile Industry* by William Gropper, 1941.

Figure 120 (below center): Detail of center right section.



Figure 119: Detail of far right section.



Figure 121: Detail of center section.



Figure 122: Detail of center left section.



Figure 123: Detail of far left section.



Figure 124: Detail.



Figure 125: Detail.



Figure 126 (left): Paint from wall-repainting visible on edges of artwork.



Figure 127(right): Deterioration of paint surface.

Detroit, Northwestern Branch, Michigan, Post Office Murals

History and Description.

William Gropper was an accomplished artist before his involvement with the Section of Fine Arts. Known as a Social Realist, he illustrated for periodicals, but by 1930, publications could no longer pay, so Gropper became interested in government work.²⁶⁹

Gropper created *Automobile Industry* without seeing the Ford Motor assembly plant portrayed in the mural (Figures 117-125). He was not allowed to visit the plant because of what were considered his leftist political inclinations,²⁷⁰ so he had to rely on photographs for reference.²⁷¹ This was partially a result of Diego Rivera's controversial images in the Detroit Institute of Arts on the same subject created seven years earlier. While the Section realized that Gropper was often critical of the Government, the Section also realized that Gropper viewed industry in a positive way and the laborer in the industrial process as heroic.²⁷²

Comparatively speaking, the Section offered very little criticism during the development of Gropper's mural. Rowan stated, "The opinion of the members of the Section was that you know exactly what you are doing and we are confident of the very successful results."²⁷³ Gropper also thought the collaboration was positive and replied, "It has been a great pleasure and stimulant to work with... the Section of Fine Arts, and trust we will continue to do our part in building a great American Art and Culture."²⁷⁴

The six-by-forty-foot mural was originally installed in two sections at opposite ends of the main room of the Northwestern Branch Post Office at Joy Road and Grand River Avenue.

The artwork illustrates various stages of automobile production and captures the precise action of the workers and the mechanical interior. The right panel depicts the production of the various parts of an automobile and the left, the final assembly. Although Rivera's influence is evident, their interpretation is dissimilar. Rivera confronted the meaning of the technological age as it pertains to human life, while Gropper celebrates the power of labor. He idealized both the figures and their tasks. His experiences as a newspaper illustrator and political cartoonist are evident in his style. Gropper's use of a limited palette places the emphasis on the linear elements of energetic lines and angular shapes, influences of Cubism. Deliberate figural distortion adds to the monumental sense and rhythm of the mural.

Condition and Developments.

Gropper had learned of the scheduled demolition of Detroit's Northwestern Branch Post Office, and so his artwork, for expressway construction. He notified the GSA of his desire to save the mural. With the help of the Postmaster's stall tactics and an emergency National Endowments of the Arts grant to Wayne State University, the mural was removed before the 1971 demolition, restored, and relocated to Wayne State University's Student Union Building²⁷⁵ (Figure 116). The artwork was a gift to the University from the National Collection of Fine Arts, Washington, D. C. Gropper was relieved and overjoyed that his mural was saved and restored.²⁷⁶ It is unknown whether conservation cleaning has been conducted since 1971. Discoloration is evident, as is stray wall paint (Figures 126-127). Cleaning and inspection of the mural are recommended.

**East Detroit Branch (Eastpointe), Michigan,
Post Office Mural**

Location: Original; 22430 Gratiot, Eastpointe,
Michigan, post office, south wall of the lobby over the
post master's door (community renamed Eastpointe)
UTM Coordinates: 17 T 0339036 4703021

Artist: Frank Cassara

Title: *Early Settlers*

Year Created: 1939

Date of Installation: 09 December 1939

Medium: Egg tempera on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 12' x 4'

Condition: Fair.

Date Surveyed: 23 April 2006



Figure 128: East Detroit (Eastpointe), Michigan, post office.



Figure 129: Artist's signature.



Figure 130: *Early Settlers* by Frank Cassara, 1939.

Figure 131: Detail of figure.

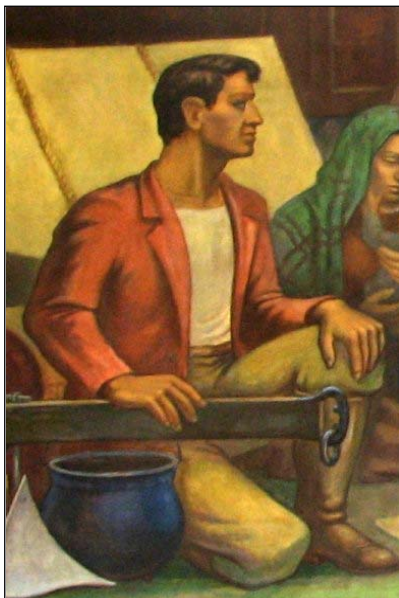


Figure 132: Detail of figures.



Figure 133: Detail of figures.

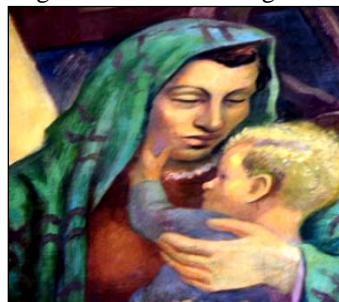


Figure 134: Paint from wall-repainting on the artwork.



Figure 135: Paint from wall-repainting on the artwork, lower section.



East Detroit Branch (Eastpointe), Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

The art commission for the East Detroit Branch post office (Figure 128) was awarded to Frank Cassara by the way of a competition.²⁷⁷ The artwork met with community approval and, as one patron stated, “It gives people waiting...something to look at.”²⁷⁸

The pioneer spirit of early settlers, a popular Section subject, was chosen for this mural. An obviously idealized scene of pioneers is depicted, including a young mother and her infant, relaxing in the outdoors with no visible permanent housing available (Figures 128-133).

The mix of influences is evident in the artwork. According to Cassara, his artwork was influenced by the Renaissance painters. The figures’ positions and solidity demonstrates this influence. Cassara’s use of color exhibits the influence of the Mexican muralists.

Condition and Developments.

According to Cassara, sometime in the 1980s the mural was restored. Cassara was consulted in the restoration process.²⁷⁹ However, during a more recent painting of the post office walls, paint has been inadvertently applied to small areas of the mural (Figures 134, 135). Conservation cleaning and inspection of the mural are advised.

East Lansing, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Relocated; Michigan State Library, first floor, east wing.

UTM Coordinates: 16T 07082 473028

Artist: Henry Bernstein

Title: *America's First Agriculture College*

Date Created: 1838

Date of Installation: 14 June 1938

Medium: Oil on stretched canvas (present condition)

Size: 11' 6" x 4'

Condition: Fair, some warping

Date Surveyed: 11 April 2006



Figure 136: Michigan State Library, East Lansing, Michigan.



Figure 137: Artist's signature.



Figure 138: *America's First Agriculture College* by Henry Bernstein, 1941.

Figure 139: Detail of center area.

Figure 140: Detail of figures.

Figure 141: Detail of figure and horse.

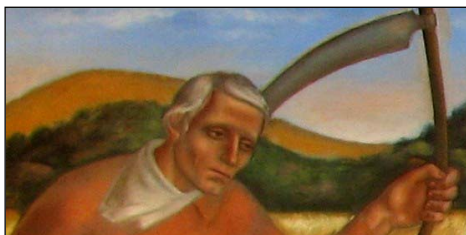


Figure 142: Detail of figure.



Figure 143: Commemorative plate created at the time of re-installation.

East Lansing, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Dow praised Henry Bernstein's work with the earlier established program, the TRAP. In 1937 he began to create Michigan Federal Art Project murals and produced three for the Michigan School of the Blind in Lansing. Upon entering Section competitions, Bernstein was awarded the Lansing post office commission and received \$800.00 for the mural.²⁸⁰

Bernstein had hoped to paint a college-related subject and felt that the communities of East Lansing and Michigan State University were intertwined,²⁸¹ but the Section conveyed that "The subject matter dealing with Michigan State College would meet with our approval if following your conference with the postmaster you find no other material more appropriate to the building..."²⁸²

Three themes were submitted: students studying, students at leisure, and, the Section's choice, scientific farming. Farming was a prevalent aspect of small town communities in the Midwest and important to Michigan State University, the first agricultural college.

America's First Agricultural College scene is set in the nineteenth century and depicts five agricultural students in a variety of work among an abundant harvest and healthy livestock (Figures 137-142). Bernstein received guidance from the college's professors of agriculture to correctly illustrate the approximately 26 varieties of fruits and vegetables seen in the mural.²⁸³ Modern machinery is conspicuously absent.

In the 1930s, Bernstein was known for sensitive and restrained portrait heads and nudes with the use of subtle tonal gradations. The influence of studying under John Carroll at

the School of Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts can be seen in his handling of the faces and figures and lightness of touch.

Although the Section preferred more rugged-looking workers, they were generally satisfied with the mural, and Bernstein received three other post office commissions: Mount Sterling, Illinois, and Frankfort and Midland, Michigan.

Condition and Developments.

The mural, relocated in 1978 because of the decommissioning of the post office building on Abbot Road (the Evergreen Grill is presently occupying the building), is on permanent loan to Michigan State University from the GSA (Figures 136, 143). The cleaning, restoration, and installation were supervised by artist Louis Pomerantz and was funded by the GSA.²⁸⁴ The mural is now located on the first floor of the Michigan State Library.²⁸⁵

Although the mural itself appears to be in fairly good condition, there is some visible warping of the canvas. The aluminum framing system is not compatible with the artwork and lessens the mural's visual impact. Also, uncomplimentary wood paneling acts as filler for the area of the mural that accommodated the postmaster's door. The area's lighting reflects on the mural's surface and interferes with viewing the artwork. There is no evidence that the mural has been cleaned or inspected since its relocation in 1978. Both are recommended.

Eaton Rapids, Michigan, Post Office Canvas Painting

Location: Original (although relocated within the lobby);
245 South Main Street, Eaton Rapids, Michigan, post
office, south wall of lobby over the reception window
UTM Coordinates: 16T 0692606 4709140

Artist: Boris Mestchersky

Title: *Industry and Agriculture*

Year Created: 1939

Date of Installation: 07 August 1939

Medium: oil on stretched canvas

Size: 12' x 4'

Condition: fairly good, cleaning is needed

Date Surveyed: 11 April 2006



Figure 144: Eaton Rapids, Michigan, post office.



Figure 145: Artist's signature.

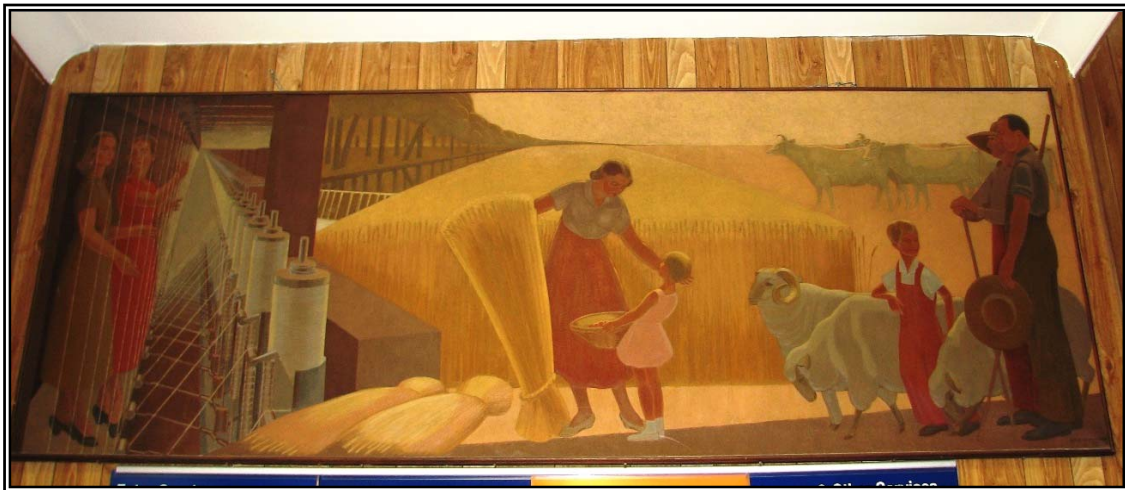
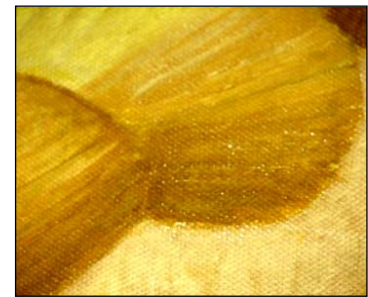


Figure 146: *Industry and Agriculture* by Boris Mestchersky, 1939.

Figure 147: Detail of figures.



Figure 148: Detail of figures.



Figures 149: Detail of brushwork

Eaton Rapids, Michigan, Post Office Canvas Painting

History and Description.

The mural was painted in New York where Boris Mestchersky lived, shipped to the Eaton Rapids post office (Figure 144), and installed by post office staff.²⁸⁶ The artwork, however, had undergone several revisions before completion. Rowan, the Section's assistant director, complained that an allegorical figure that was originally to be in the center of the mural surrounded by dairy and farming activity was not acceptable. When Mestchersky submitted a revised sketch with a post office building, it met with further criticism. The Section felt that the placement was arbitrary and felt the symbol of a dove carrying a message was "trite."²⁸⁷

The finished mural met with approval (Figures 145-149), including that of a member of the local Kiwanis Club, who stated, "I think it's a beautiful piece of work, emblematic of our community, and certainly a decorative addition."²⁸⁸ However, some questioned if the cows seen in the mural, because of under-developed mammary glands, were indeed the dairy cows common to the area.²⁸⁹ Mestchersky was further criticized by the Section for painting wheat that "under no stretch of the imagination" could grow "as high as you have indicated it..."²⁹⁰

The mural exhibits elements of the Regionalists, idealized scenes represented with simplified forms with the use of earth tones. The final composition of the mural is divided into two sections, agriculture and industry; however, as was preferred by the Section, agriculture dominates the canvas. Depicted in the mural are two women working in a woolen factory, a woman with a bale of hay conversing with a young girl holding a basket of berries,

and two men and a young boy watching over a herd of sheep. A letter written by a Horther Woolen Mill manager (with the initials “TGT”), sent to the assistant postmaster expressed appreciation for the inclusion of the woolen industry in the mural. The letter stated, “I am glad to say (the mural) is nicely done, incorporating as it does a combination of the rural atmosphere of our community together with the manufacturing of woolen goods.”²⁹¹

Condition and Developments.

According to an employee of the post office, although the mural was moved from its original location over the postmaster’s door to the space above the reception window in approximately 1992 during renovation, the frame is original.

The mural was restored in or around 1986 by Ann Wagner of Cooperstown, New York.²⁹² Maintenance conservation cleaning and inspection are recommended.

Fenton, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Relocated; removed from original post office (now a library) and installed in the present post office, 210 South Leroy, Fenton, Michigan, east wall over mail boxes
UTM Coordinates: 17T 0259577 4721114

Artist: Jerome Snyder (Grace Goodrich, assistant)

Title: *Change of Shift*

Year Created: 1942

Date of Installation: 01 January 1942

Medium: Tempera on canvas adhered to wall

Size: 11' 10 1/4" x 5' 9 1/2"

Condition: Good

Date Surveyed: 17 April 2006



Figure 150: Fenton, Michigan, post office.

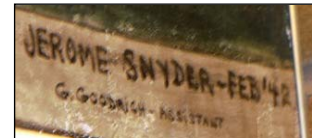


Figure 151: Artist's signature.

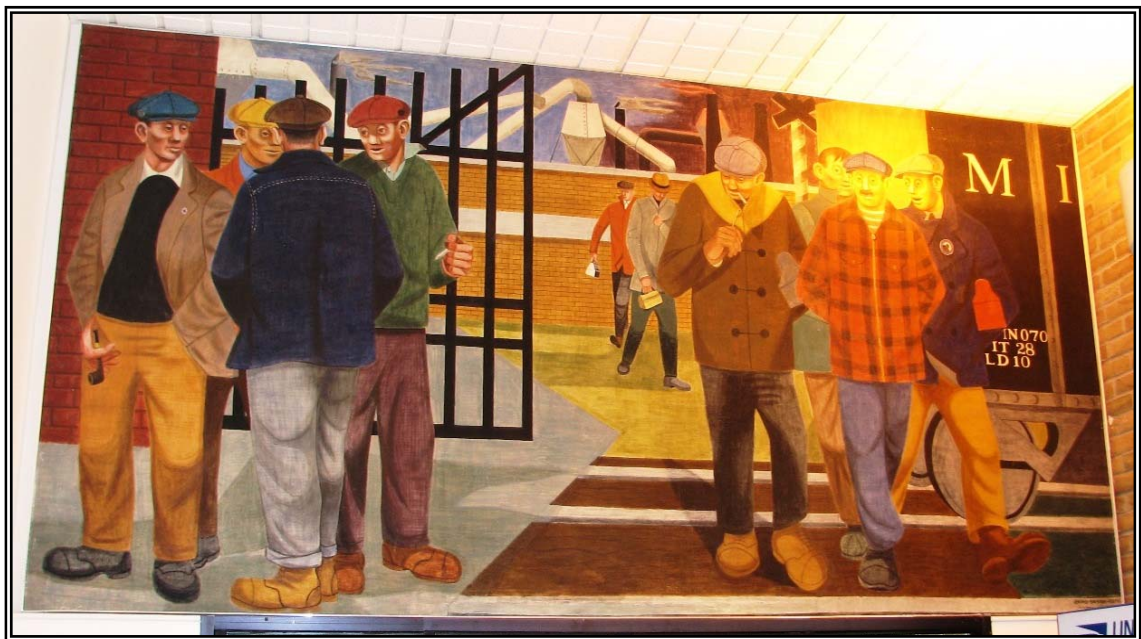


Figure 152: *Change of Shift* by Jerome Snyder, 1942.

Figure 153: Detail of mural.



Figure 154: Detail of figures.



Figure 155: The interior space of the artwork's installation.

Fenton, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

When Jerome Snyder visited the area, he learned that Fenton's history began in 1834, and the establishment of the railroad in 1856 brought a rush of settlers. The first of Snyder's sketches for the Fenton post office (Figure 150) were of a farm family receiving a new tractor at a location near the Fenton Depot. However, he ultimately chose to depict a scene of nearby Flint, which had several large GM auto plants where more than half of Genesee County's employed citizens were working²⁹³ (Figures 151-155). The subject caused considerable controversy. Many in the community felt that it did not represent the village in spite of the fact that many Fentonites worked at the General Motors plant in Flint. Fenton, at the time, was considered a bedroom community.²⁹⁴

Although the scene refers to the great sit-down of 1937,²⁹⁵ there is no direct representation of it. Still, there is no effort toward idealization that is often seen in Section artwork. The figures have a roughness about them as they are leaving the factory looking tired. Unlike the usual Industrial scene of active figures and an emphasis on the work, the people are the focus. Their casual dignity conveys their significance to the industrial scene.

Snyder's work has an affinity to Ben Shahn and his use of flat patterned areas of low earth-toned colors and slightly exaggerated feature of Social Realists. Snyder's integration of the mural with the original surrounding architectural space was carried out with the mural's color scheme that harmonized with the yellow, gray, and purple tones of the woodwork, wainscot, and floor. The patterns of geometric forms in his mural and brown shapes of the railroad tied directly over the postmaster's door.²⁹⁶ The asymmetrical design served to relieve

the symmetry of the architectural elements. He helped to unify his mural composition with the architectural elements by placing the two major figure groups over each of the bulletin boards. The form of the postmaster's door was echoed in the rectangular gate bars in the left area of the painting and the railroad cars in the right area.

Condition and Developments.

The mural was transferred to the new post office circa 1985-1986 (Figure 150). At that time, the mural was restored.²⁹⁷ The present location does not compliment the mural, now framed in a silver-tone metal frame. The light fixture obstructs the view of the artwork that lost its prestigious location above the postmaster's door (Figure 155). Maintenance conservation cleaning and inspection are advised.

Frankfort, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 615 Main Street, Frankfort, Michigan, post office, west wall of lobby over postmaster's door.

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0608898 4597490

Artist: Henry Bernstein

Title: *On Board the Carferry (Ann Arbor #4, February 14, 1923)*

Year Created: 1941

Date of Installation: 10 October 1941

Medium: Tempera on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 9' ¼" x 4' ½"

Condition: Very good (application of drywall surrounds the mural)

Date Surveyed: 25 September 2006



Figure 156: Frankfort, Michigan, post office.



Figure 157: Artist's signature.

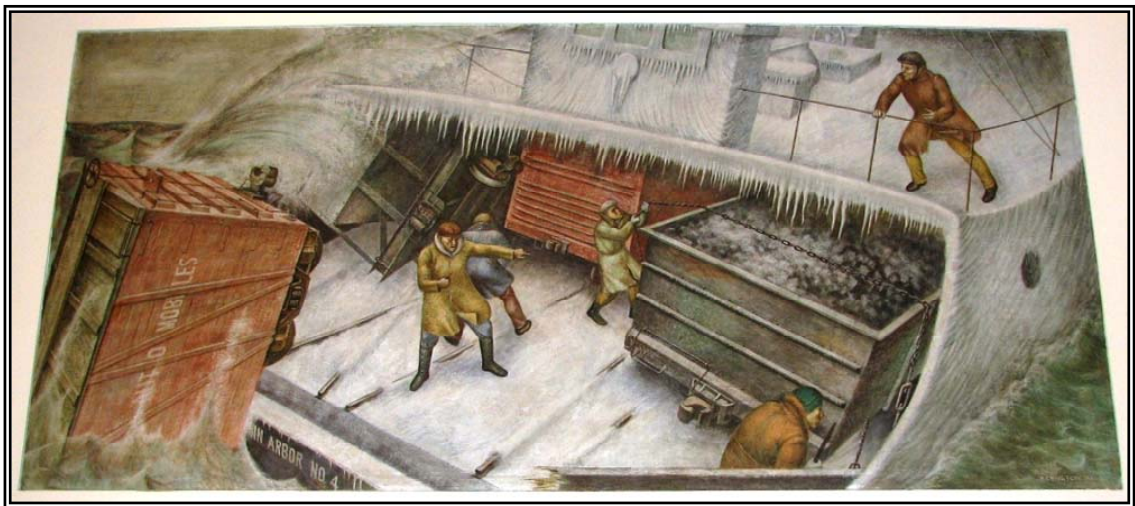


Figure 158: *On Board the Carferry (Ann Arbor #4, February 14, 1923)* by Henry Bernstein, 1941.



Figure 159 (left): Detail of figures.



Figure 160 (right): Detail of figure.

Figure 162 (below): Detail of ship's name



Figure 161 (left): Detail of figure.



Figure 163: The mural is recessed into the wall.

Frankfort, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Henry Bernstein was awarded the Section commission for the Frankfort post office (Figure 156). Frankfort's mural represents a rare scene in Section artwork: an accident. This event occurred within view of the post office.²⁹⁸ Although an accident is represented, man in control over the situation is the true subject of the mural (Figures 157-162). The Section rejected two other sketches that showed sailors struggling over an icy pier with waves breaking over them. Also submitted were sketches of summer resort activities,²⁹⁹ but the Section preferred the local and historical ferry subject.

Portrayed is one of the railroad's greatest ferry disasters. One night in 1923, Ann Arbor No. 4, which had a history of accidents, encountered a winter blizzard while en route to Manitowoc, Wisconsin. The freight cars were torn loose from their moorings and several cars were lost, and the crew feared the ship was doomed. After being tossed about all night, the ferry was blown back to the home port of Frankfort, hit a pier, and sank in sixteen feet of water. No lives were lost and injuries were few.

The mural was met with enthusiasm by the community. According to a local newspaper article of the time, "The painting has been declared as one of the most realistic ever made of the car ferries in action and sailors who were on the boat at the time have been particularly impressed by the accuracy of detail that the artist achieved."³⁰⁰

Bernstein's style of subtle tone gradations with a lightness of touch can be seen in the artwork. However, the use of outlining and the general form shows an influence of the Mexican muralist.

While most of the Section's murals located in Michigan exhibit a surrounding frame, this artwork is recessed into the wall (Figure 163).

Condition and Developments.

Restoration work was conducted in or around 1986 by Amy Wagner of Cooperstown, New York.³⁰¹ Maintenance conservation cleaning and inspection are recommended.

Fremont, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 19 South Division Avenue, Fremont, Michigan, post office, south wall of lobby over post master's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 060916 4766565

Artist: Lumen Martin Winter

Title; *Pony Express*

Year Created: 1938

Date of Installation: 16 August 1938

Medium: Tempera and oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 11' x 5'

Condition: Excellent, restored in 2005

Date Surveyed: 26 May 2006



Figure 164: Fremont, Michigan, post office.



Figure 165: Artist's signature.



Figure 166: *Pony Express* by Lumen Winter, 1938.

Figures 168 (below center): Details of brushwork and use of intense colors.



Figure 167: Detail of figures.



Figure 170: Possible frame and infestation issues.



Figure 169: Detail.

Fremont, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

When Lumen Martin Winter visited Fremont to research a historical subject but found nothing that he thought was appropriate, he decided that the United State mail service would be his best choice for the Fremont post office (Figure 164) artwork.³⁰² He nonetheless placed the mail theme in a historical context and included figures of Michigan lumbermen, Indians, and a pioneer family. The Pony Express is also represented; even though the service never operated in Michigan (Figures 165-169).

In addition to the Pony Express, the mural touches on several of the Section's favored subjects. The pioneer family stressed not only pioneer spirit but also traditional social cohesion. The lumbermen and their labor relates the past to the present. Although not as frequently, Native Americans are represented in several of the Section's murals.

The mural is executed in the Regionalist manner and depicts a composite-like idealistic theme with a heightened color scheme.

The brass molding surrounding the artwork is original and is installed directly on the wall.

The payment was initially overlooked by the Section. Winter had to inquire "Now that the painting has been installed, I believe the final payment is in order is it not?"³⁰³

Condition and Developments.

Restoration work has recently been conducted on the artwork by Parma Conservation. However, the frame is in need of maintenance, and inspection for possible infestation is recommended (Figure 170).

Grand Ledge, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 124 East Jefferson, Grand Ledge, Michigan, post office, northwest wall of lobby over post master's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0684435 4735820

Artist: James Calder

Title: *Waiting for the Mail*

Year Created: 1938 mural

Date of Installation: 1 January 1939

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 14' x 6'

Condition: Fair

Date Surveyed: 12 April 2006



Figure 171: Grand Ledge, Michigan, post office.



Figure 172: Artist's signature.



Figure 173: *Waiting for the Mail* by James Calder, 1938.

Figure 175 (below center): Detail of mural; notice the delicate style of rendering.



Figure 174: Detail.



Figure 176: Detail.

Grand Ledge, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

James Calder was the Michigan winner of the prestigious *48 State Competition* and was awarded the Grand Ledge, Michigan, post office commission³⁰⁴ (Figure 171). Although the Section did not approve Calder's original sketch that depicted exaggerated forms of wheat, the final artwork met with both the Section and the community's approval. The artwork depicts mail delivery via a Model A Ford with a farm family waiting for its delivery (Figures 172-176).

Several newspaper articles were written praising the mural, including the *Lansing State Journal*, which stated, "Distinctly appropriate in setting and subject is the new mural for the Grand Ledge post office, depicting the rural free postal delivery to a typical farm of the region." The *Lansing State Journal* also commented on the artwork that "one is impressed with the distinctly American aspects of the Painting."³⁰⁵ Also praised were the baskets of farm bounty and the "distinctly American aspects of the painting." The Grand Ledge newspaper, the *Independent*, stated when viewing *Waiting for the Mail*, "One is impressed with the distinctly American aspects of the painting. The 'RFD' mailman recalls the part played by this distinguished democratic service extending to the farmer the same opportunity to be as well-informed and intelligent a citizen as the city dweller. Free daily delivery of mail to rural areas [is] now accepted as one of the inalienable privileges of citizenship."

The combination of the subjects of agriculture, the rural family, and rural postal delivery, as seen in the Grand Ledge post office mural, was often seen in Section artwork.

Both idealized Regionalist elements, and the flat areas of Cubism can be identified in this work. Calder's style of simplification of modeling the figures, smooth streamlined elements, and flat areas of soft color lent itself to Section mural work. Structural forms of the surrounding architecture influenced the painting's use of geometrical shapes and shadows.

Condition and Developments.

In 1962, during building remodeling, the painting contract included painting over the mural. The postmaster at the time, Gordon Briggs, intervened and saved the mural.³⁰⁶ However, the dull surface and colors of the mural were evidence for the need of conservation cleaning and inspection of the artwork. The artwork was restored after the author's documentation in August 2007 by Parma Conservation.³⁰⁷

Grayling, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 300 Michigan Avenue, Grayling, Michigan, post office, south wall of the lobby over the postmaster's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0681266 4947952

Artist: Robert L. Lepper

Title: *The Lumber Camp*

Year Created: 1939

Date of Installation: 5 September 1939

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 11' 11" x 5'

Condition: Fair

Date Surveyed: 2 October 2006



Figure 177: Grayling, Michigan, post office.



Figure 178: *The Lumber Camp* by Robert L. Lepper, 1939.



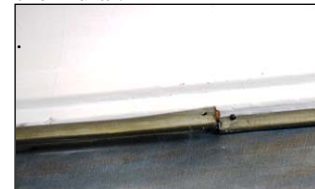
Figure 179: Detail of mural.



Figure 180: Detail of mural.



Figure 181: Deterioration of the frame surrounding the mural.



Figures 182: Deterioration of the frame surrounding the mural.

Grayling, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Robert Lepper, at eighteen, was proud to have outdone his teachers at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh by receiving a government art commission for the Grayling post office (Figure 177) mural.³⁰⁸

After receiving the commission in August 1938 Lepper visited the community in order to gather material for his mural subject and met with the postmaster. Because farming was poor in the area and trees were plentiful, lumbering became the lifeblood of the town. However, by the late 1920s, the area lumber industry had come to an end. Still, the historical lumbering industry was chosen as the mural's subject (Figures 178-180).

Although the subject was agreed upon, the Section had several concerns including unrelated scales, a low-keyed palette, and lumbermen being depicted as left-handed. Lepper responded to the latter criticism stating that "I am aware that the lumbermen are left-handed. The lumbermen whom I talked to in Grayling in September, however, took a certain pride in their ambidexterity as conditions in the forest involving the saw and the ax and in the using of the cant hook on the stack require either left-handed actions or the employment of a naturally left-handed man."³⁰⁹ There was also criticism of his design, which included a moccasin that appeared to come out of his picture.³¹⁰

The community approved of the mural. *The Bay City Daily Times* and *The Crawford County Avalanche* ran articles and photographs focusing on the historical aspect of the local lumber industry with headlines such as "Scenes Famed in Grayling's History" and "When King Pine Ruled." This publicity made the mural a tourist destination.³¹¹

Lepper included many details representative of the Grayling area and the lumber industry: the grayling fish, which once thrived in the Au Sable River; the area-famous Native American chief, David Shoppenagons; and historical lumbering equipment, including a narrow-gauge lumber train.³¹²

Lepper's style was influenced by Japanese prints with emphasis on compositional design with disregard for pictorial depth. A zigzag pattern composition and the proportions of his figures reveal a Benton influence, but Lepper felt that his artwork was more akin to Hans Hofmann and his spatial dynamics.³¹³

Egg tempera paint with an oil glaze varnish was used in the mural. This method was used by Italian and Flemish artists before oil and is less subject to darkening than oil alone.³¹⁴

Condition and Developments.

Restoration work was conducted on the artwork in or around 1986 by Amy Wagner of Cooperstown, New York.³¹⁵ Conservation cleaning and inspection of the mural is warranted as the restoration work was executed more than twenty years ago. Molding around the artwork is in need of repair (Figures 181, 182). Also, the present light fixture obscures the viewing of the mural (Figure 178).

Greenville, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 119 West Cass Street, Greenville, Michigan, post office west wall of lobby over the post master's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0641851 4782117

Artist: Charles W. Thwaites

Title: *Lumbering*

Year Created: 1940

Date of Installation: 21 October 1940

Medium: Tempera on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 14' x 9'

Condition: Excellent, recently restored.

Date Surveyed: 25 May 2006



Figure 183: Greenville, Michigan, post office.

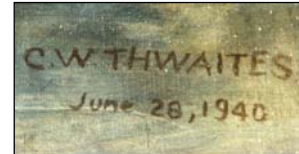


Figure 184: Artist's signature.



Figure 185: *Lumbering* by Charles W. Thwaites, 1940.



Figure 186: Detail of mural.



Figure 187: Detail of mural.



Figure 188: Questionable and deteriorating patch on mural.

Greenville, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Charles Thwaites was awarded the Section commission for the Greenville post office (Figure 183). The lumbering industry, a frequent subject in Michigan Section murals, is portrayed in the Greenville post office mural. Thwaites utilized loose, expressive artwork and a diagonal composition to convey the energy of the working men (Figures 184-187).

The Section was critical of elements of preliminary sketches. The requested corrections included clarification of the function and action of the men at their work, in particular in regards to the two men sawing. Rowan suggested that "... more conviction be brought to bear in the function of sawing." Thwaites re-worked the figures to the approval of the Section.³¹⁶

Condition and Development.

The artwork is in excellent condition. The mural received restoration work in the 1980s by Amy Wagner of Cooperstown, New York³¹⁷ and recently by Parma Conservation. However, the mural exhibits a questionable patch (Figure 188).

Hart, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 135 North State Street, Hart, Michigan, post office, south wall of lobby over the post master's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0551253 4838877

Artist: Ruth Grotenrath

Title: *Boy Rounding Up the Stock*

Year Created: 1941

Date of Installation: 18 December 1941, created in 1940

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to the plaster wall

Size: 12' x 4' 9"

Condition: Excellent: restored

Date Surveyed: 30 June 2006



Figure 189: Hart, Michigan, post office.



Figure 190: Artist's signature.



Figure 191: *Boy Rounding Up the Stock*, Ruth Grotenrath, 1941.

Figure 192: Detail of mural.



Figures 193: Detail of mural including close-up of the Grotenrath's brushwork.



Figure 194: Separation of the canvas from the wall and wayward paint are visible.

Hart, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Ruth Grotenrath's Michigan Section commission was created for the Hart post office (Figure 189). The postmaster of Hart arranged for a staff member to escort Grotenrath on a tour of the area in order to help her choose an appropriate subject for the mural.³¹⁸ An agricultural theme was agreed upon.

Boy Rounding Up the Stock portrays a red-capped boy riding a large work horse as he is rounding up two other horses and cattle, including a calf, with the help of his dog. A farm house can be seen in the distance (Figures 190-192).

The idyllic setting, the earth tones, and the massiveness of the animal forms are reminiscent of the Regionalists. Grotenrath also exhibits quick, energetic brush work and playfulness to her work: the dog is nipping at one of the horse's ankles and the horse carrying the boy is looking directly at the viewer as if the boy is unaware of the events. The mural was praised by the Assistant Section Chief, Rowan, for its "appealing closeness to the soil."³¹⁹

Condition and Developments.

According to Hart postal workers, Grotenrath's husband had visited the post office to inspect the mural several years ago, prior to its restoration. The restoration of this mural was conducted in 2001 by Parma Conservation of Chicago, Illinois.

The condition report and the restoration proposal were completed by Parma Conservation. It was assessed that the mural and the plaster wall that supports the mural were in good condition. However, the heavy layer of dirt and grime was considerable and could

have led to more permanent damage. A few paint drips and abrasions were present. The mural was not varnished when executed, so there was little protection of the artwork against oxidizing airborne pollutants.

The restoration process included a water-based cleaning system consisting of both a non-ionic surfactant and a chelator both used at a 1% solution. The solution was buffered at a constant pH that was between pH6 and pH8. An emulsified solution with a low polarity was also used in necessary areas.

After cleaning, the areas that suffered paint loss were in-painted with Miameri varnish colors, which are compatible and completely reversible. This process was very controlled and limited to only the areas in which there was actual paint loss.³²⁰

Currently the mural appears to be in good condition. However, the lower right corner of the canvas has separated from the plaster wall. Also, white paint, possibly from a recent painting project, is visible in the same area (Figure 193).

Howell, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Relocated; removed from original location, 202 South Michigan Avenue, to the present post office; 325 South Michigan Avenue, Howell, Michigan, south wall of lobby over mail boxes

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0259579 472112

Artist: Jaroslav Brozik

Title: *Rural Delivery*

Year Created: 1941

Date of Installation: 01 January 1941*

Medium: Oil on stretched canvas (originally canvas adhered to a plaster wall)

Size: 14' x 6'

Condition: Good

Date Surveyed: 16 April 2006



Figure 195: The original post office building; now owned by Ann Arbor Rail Road.



Figure 196: The current Howell, Michigan, post office and location of the mural.



Figure 197: *Rural Delivery*, Jaroslav Brozik, 1941.



Figure 198: Detail of figure.



Figures 199: Detail of mural including the artist's brushwork and use of vivid color.



Figure 200 (right): The frame corners are separating. Perhaps the frame is covering the signature.

Howell, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Jaroslav Brozik felt that the designated space over the postmaster's door was extremely poor in light and visibility. The postmaster agreed and proposed that the mural be located near the stamp window. The Postmaster, Alfred H. Pfau, wrote to the Fourth Assistant Postmaster General requesting approval.³²¹ Although the request was initially denied,³²² it was eventually honored.³²³ According to a letter Brozik sent to Howell's postmaster, the mural was installed On January 19, 1941. The artist requested the use of two ladders, a plank eight or ten feet long, and the assistance of a janitor.³²⁴ A zinc compound was used to adhere the canvas to the plaster wall.³²⁵

The mural was well-received by not only the Postmaster and the press but the community as well and "created a great deal of comment from the patrons..."³²⁶ In correspondence to the Section, Brozik voiced that he was "thrilled" with his commission and considered it a "real break."³²⁷

Rural Delivery is only one of three murals located in Michigan that portrays leisure activity (the other two are located in Paw Paw and Birmingham), and the scene represents nearby Thompson Lake in Howell.³²⁸ Still, the leisure activity is secondary to the rural farm setting in which news is being received in several ways: through friends, reading the newspaper, and, in the center of the composition, a post card that was delivered by the postal service. A farmer plowing his land and large produce are also rendered (Figures 197-199).

Though Brozik was inspired by the Renaissance muralists, he decided that his original three-dimensional approach and extreme perspective did not read well on the wall

and decided that flattening of the design was necessary, a technique that was utilized by the Mexican muralists of the era.³²⁹ The idyllic setting and the simplification of form is reminiscent of the Regionalists.

Condition and Developments.

The mural was removed from its original location at 202 South Michigan (Figure 195) and relocated to Howell's current post office in 1985 (Figure 196). Tony Rajer, of the Texas Conservation Center, conducted the removal, restoration, and re-installation of the artwork. Rajer used palette knives and scalpels to remove the mural from the wall. The painting was then cleaned, lined, attached to a new canvas, stretched into shape on stretchers, cleaned again, varnished, and framed. The mural is displayed in a lobby alcove especially designed for the artwork. The postmaster during the time of construction of the new post office, Delores Maidlow, is credited with organizing the effort to save the mural.³³⁰

Currently, the mural appears to be in good condition. However, Brozik's signature could not be found. It is possible that the process of stretching and framing the canvas has eliminated the signature from view (Figure 200). Maintenance conservation cleaning and inspection are recommended.

Iron Mountain, Michigan, Post Office Murals

Location: Original; 101 West Ludington Street, Ludington, Michigan, post office on the east, south and west wall of the lobby, including over the postmaster's door (five panels in all)

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0417082 5074634

Artist: Vladimir Rousseff

Title: *Fight with the Indians; Stage Coach; Ferry Boat; Moving West; Watching an Early Train; Washing & Carrying Gold* (Six Panels:

Historical Treatment of Mail Transportation in the West)

Years Created: 1935-1936 (funded by Section and TRAP)

Date of Installation: 01 January 1936

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to the plaster walls

Size: 13' x 5' 9" each, total size 23' x 5' 9"

Condition: Excellent, recently restored

Date Surveyed: 4 October 2006



Figure 201: Iron Mountain, Michigan, post office.



Figure 203 (above): *Ferry Boat*. Photo Credit: Paul T. Schroeder, Oshkosh, WI (available from "Postmarks of the Past": <http://www.grandmaraismichigan.com/History/postmarks.htm>).



Figure 202 (below): *Moving West*. Photo Credit: Paul T. Schroeder, Oshkosh, WI (available from "Postmarks of the Past": <http://www.grandmaraismichigan.com/History/postmarks.htm>).



Figure 204 (left): *Fight with the Indians*. Photo Credit: Paul T. Schroeder, Oshkosh, WI (available from "Postmarks of the Past": <http://www.grandmaraismichigan.com/History/postmarks.htm>).

No photo is available for *Stagecoach*.



Figure 205 (above): *Watching an Early Train*. Paul T. Schroeder, Oshkosh, WI (available from "Postmarks of the Past": <http://www.grandmaraismichigan.com/History/postmarks.htm>).



Figure 206 (above): *Washing and Carrying Gold*. Photo Credit: Paul T. Schroeder, Oshkosh, WI (available from "Postmarks of the Past": <http://www.grandmaraismichigan.com/History/postmarks.htm>).

Iron Mountain, Michigan, Post Office Murals

History and Description.

Because of the years they were executed, the Iron Mountain post office (Figure 201) murals was funded by both TRAP and then, upon its establishment, the Section of Fine Arts. Rousseff was awarded the commission based on sketches he submitted for the Washington, D. C. Post Office Department Building mural competition.³³¹

Unlike most of the Section artwork that involves local themes, Vladimir Rousseff covered all four of the post office walls with six murals of a variety of historical scenes that are more general in nature. Western expansion, pioneering, and settlement were explored in these murals and show a time of strength and determination to give hope during the Depression era (Figures 203-206).

The separate murals unite a common overall theme and color scheme by harmonizing the color and tones with that of the building.

Condition and Developments.

The post office was remodeled in 1965, but the mural was not touched. The artwork has recently undergone restoration work by Parma Conservation.

This is the only location that denied my request to conduct photo documentation of the artwork. Close-up inspection was also discouraged. However, the artwork appears to be in excellent condition.

Iron River, Michigan Post Office Sculpture Relief

Location: Original; 425 West Genesee Street, Iron River, Michigan, post office, west wall of lobby over the postmaster's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0372963 5105516

Artist: Milton Horn

Title: *Paul Bunyan Straightening Out the Round River*

Year Created: 1941

Date of Installation: 16 July 1941

Medium: Poly-chromed oak wood relief

Size: 47' 5" x 47' 5" x 2 1/2"

Condition: Fairly good, some splitting of wood and slight over-painting from wall maintenance are visible

Date Surveyed: 4 October 2006



Figure 207: Iron River, Michigan, post office.



Figure 208: Artist's signature.

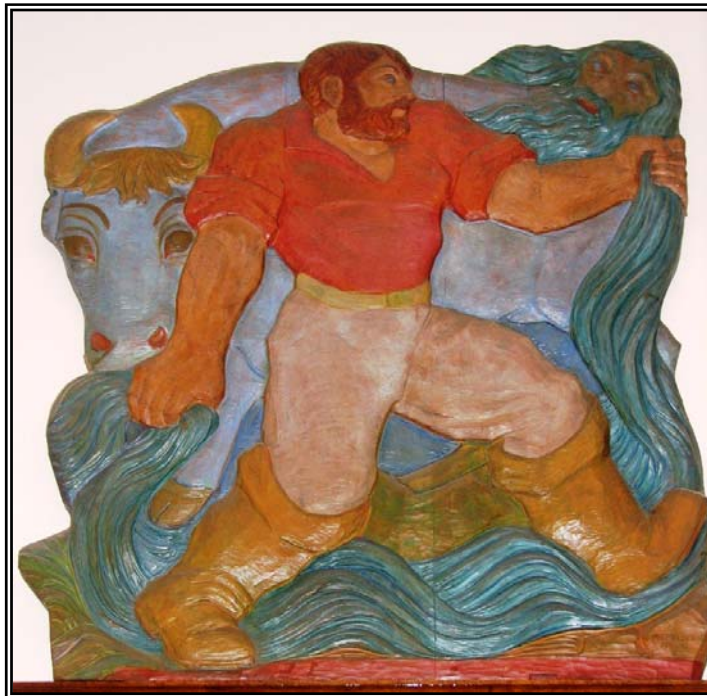


Figure 209: *Paul Bunyan Straightening out the Round River* by Milton Horn, 1941.

Figure 210: Detail of wood relief.

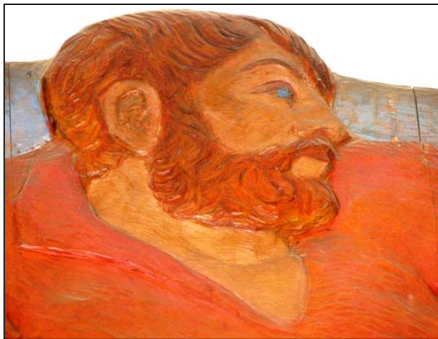


Figure 212: Detail of wood relief.



Figures 211 (above center): Detail of the carving texture.

Iron River, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture Relief

History and Description.

Milton Horn received the Iron River post office (Figure 207) commission in 1940 on the basis of a model he submitted to the Evanston, Illinois, post office competition. He visited the Michigan community and reported to the Section that Iron River had “no history to speak of but it was ‘Paul Bunyan country’.”³³² Horn submitted five sketches showing Bunyan performing various activities. The Section selected one that depicted the legend of Bunyan straightening out the Round River.³³³

The legend of Paul Bunyan straightening the Round Rivers begins with Bunyan’s frustration with a river that floated his logs back to where they had originated. The giant challenged the river and succeeded in straightening it; however, the river never recovered. The Round River went dry and disappeared during Prohibition.³³⁴ Feelings of strength and powerful labor activity and its legendary link with the past is conveyed in the artwork (Figures 208-212).

The carved polychrome wood relief began with the creation of a clay model, followed by a charcoal drawing directly on the maple wood. Because of its hardness, maple is difficult to carve and is time-consuming to work with. The polychroming, a popular treatment in the 30s, was suggested by the Section. The color was built up through a series of thin oil glazes. The relief consists of several parts glued together and reinforced by cleats.³³⁵

Representational imagery can be seen in the work. Human figures combine with natural elements, especially fire and water, in swirling intertwining linear patterns.

Direct-carving tendencies of the 1930s can be seen in this and Traverse City's pieces. Though European modernist tendencies do not dominate the Michigan installations, the apparent flattening of forms, stylized patterns, and repetitive lines and forms demonstrate an Art Deco influence.

Many were unhappy with the choice of Paul Bunyan as the subject and would have rather had artwork representing the mining industry. However, Iron River did hold a Paul Bunyan Logging Festival the previous year, and the theme was chosen after consulting with the postmaster and the manager of the county tourist association. Although there was talk of removing the relief and giving it to Gladstone, where Bunyan was considered a community hero, there was enough local support of the artwork to keep it in Iron River.³³⁶

Condition and Developments.

The artwork appears to be in fairly good condition. There are visible splits in the wood and over-painting that occurred from wall painting maintenance. Further inspection of the carving and cleaning are warranted.

Lowell, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 120 North Broadway Street, Lowell, Michigan, post office, north wall of the lobby over the post master's door

ATM Coordinates: 17T 0315639 4717243

Artist: Alfred Sessler

Title: *Lumbering in Early Lowell*

Year Created: 1941

Date of Installation: 11 April 1940

Medium: Tempera on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 12' x 6' 11"

Condition: Fair

Date Surveyed: 25 May 2006



Figure 213: Lowell, Michigan, post office.



Figure 214: Artist's signature.



Figure 215: *Lumbering in Early Lowell* by Alfred Sessler, 1941.



Figure 216: Detail of figures.



Figure 217: Detail of figures.



Figure 219: Mural exhibits scratches and wall paint.



Figure 218: Detail of the artist's quick brushwork.

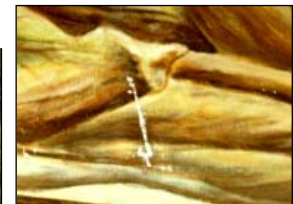


Figure 220: Detail of scratch .

Lowell, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

A favorite theme for Section murals in Michigan, lumbering, is illustrated in Lowell's post office (Figure 213) mural which was created by Alfred Sessler. *Lumbering in Early Lowell* with quick, expressionistic brushwork conveys the energy of the lumbermen working, while the colors and idealistic setting is reminiscent of the Regionalists (Figures 215-218).

Sessler expressed to the Section that the postmaster and the community were both cooperative and interested in his work. The postmaster, J. Hasley, reported to the Section that he had given Sessler "...considerable data and furnished a volume of historical facts...and I shall be anxious to see the mural completed..."³³⁷

Condition and Developments.

The mural is in fair condition with an apparent need of restoration and conservation work. Deep scratches are visible on the mural's surface as is wall paint (Figures 119, 120). The dull surface color is evidence of dirt and grime accumulation.

Manistique, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 301 Cedar Street, Manistique, Michigan, post office, on north wall of lobby over the postmaster's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0558373 5089321

Artist; David Fredenthal

Title: *Logging*

Year Created: 1941

Date of Installation: 18 August 1941

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 12' x 6'

Condition: Excellent, recently restored

Date Surveyed: 4 October 2006



Figure 221: Manistique, Michigan, post office.

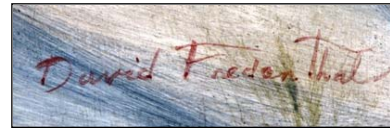


Figure 222: Artist's signature.



Figure 223: *Logging* by David Fredenthal, 1941.

Figure 224: Detail of figure.



Figure 225: Detail of figures.



Figure 226: Detail of artist's brushwork technique.



Figure 227: Wall paint on mural.



Figures 228: Frame's condition in question.

Manistique, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

David Frauenthal was awarded the art commission for the Manistique post office (Figure 221). In his report to the Public Buildings Administration, the postmaster, Frank Gierke, praised the mural, saying “....many local people and hundreds of tourists...have extended many fine compliments on this work. We believe that we have one of the best paintings in Northern Michigan.”

The selected theme of labor in the lumbering industry was probably chosen in part because of its popularity with the Section, but the fact that Fredenthal had spent some time logging himself³³⁸ influenced his subject choice. The facial features of the very active figures are obscured so as to focus the attention of the viewer to the energy of the action. The artwork reveals a more linear expressive style of his later work, an influence of the German Expressionists (Figures 222-226).

Condition and Developments.

The artwork underwent recent restoration work by Parma Conservation and is in excellent condition. Inspection of the frame is suggested. Recent re-painting of the wall is evident on the edges of the artwork (Figures 226, 227).

Marquette, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 202 West Washington Street, Marquette, Michigan, post office, west wall of lobby over the postmaster's door

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0469660 515528

Artist: Dewey Albinson

Title: *Marquette Exploring Shores of Lake Superior,*

Year Created: 1938

Date of Installation: 7 June 1938

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to wall

Size: 15' x 4' 1/8"

Condition: Excellent, recently restored

Date Surveyed: 3 October 2006



Figure 229: Marquette, Michigan, Post Office.



Figure 230: The post office's elaborate entrance.



Figure 231: *Marquette Exploring Shores of Lake Superior* by Dewey Albinson, 1938.

Figure 232: Detail of figures.



Figure 234 (left): Detail of unusual inset of the artwork.

Figure 233: Detail of figures.



Figure 235 (right): Detail of thick application of paint.



Marquette, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

The postmaster, inquiring if a mural could be placed in the planned post office and courthouse, helped facilitate Marquette being awarded a commissioned piece.³³⁹

The artwork, *Marquette Exploring Shores of Lake Superior*, was created for the Marquette post office (Figures 229, 230) by Dewey Albinson. The mural received mixed reviews from the community. Several aspects of the mural were questioned, including Father Marquette's standing position in the canoe. Albinson did explain in a letter to Edward Rowan, dated June 21, 1938, that Marquette was standing during a "pause" in paddling (Figures 231, 232).

Simplified forms and flat areas suggest a Cubist influence in this mural that portrays Father Pere Marquette directing the bark canoe passengers who consist of two voyageurs and two Native Americans (Figures 231-233). Albinson's thick application of paint creates a heavily textured piece of art (Figure 235).

The artwork, framed in a wood molding, is recessed in a granite wall surface, an unusual presentation of Section post office artwork (Figure 234).

Condition and Developments.

Restoration work on the mural has recently been conducted by Parma Conservation.

Mason, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture Relief

Location: Original; 114 West Ash Street, Mason, Michigan, post office, west wall of the lobby over the post master's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 070984 471587

Artist: Marion Overby

Title: *Early Postman*

Year Created: 1939

Date of Installation: 31 March 1939

Medium: Terra cotta relief

Size: 4' x 4' x 4 1/2"

Condition: fairly good, some visible cracks

Date Surveyed: 11 April 2006



Figure 236: Mason, Michigan post office.



Figure 237: Artist's signature with "Overby" barely visible.



Figure 238: *Early Postman* by Marion Overby, 1941.



Figure 239: Detail of visible crack.



Figure 240: Detail.



Figure 241: Detail.

Mason, Michigan Post Office Sculpture Relief

History and Description.

Marion Overby, who also created wood reliefs for the Traverse City post office, (Figure 236) was one of three women who received Section Commissions for Michigan.

The terra cotta artwork depicts the postman from the nearby town of Leslie delivering the mail to Mason, who until later had no post office, and the animals that he might encounter along the way. Overby's primitive style, which was popular in the 1930s, was influenced by pre-Columbian art (Figures 237-241).

Condition and Developments.

Restoration work was executed in or before 1986 by Amy Wagner of Cooperstown, New York.³⁴⁰ Hairline cracks are visible in the sculpture (Figure 239). Maintenance conservation cleaning and inspection of the artwork are highly recommended.

Midland, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Relocated; 200 West Ellsworth Street, County Service Building, Midland, Michigan, south wall of first floor lobby; original post office was demolished.

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0650975 4929888

Artist: Henry Bernstein

Title: *Chemistry*

Year Created: 1942

Date of Installation: 1 January 1943

Medium: Tempera on canvas adhered to a board

Size: 13' 3" x 5' 8"

Condition: Fairly good, bubbling of the canvas

Date Surveyed: 2 October 2006



Figure 242: County Service Building, Midland, Michigan.



Figure 243: Artist's signature.

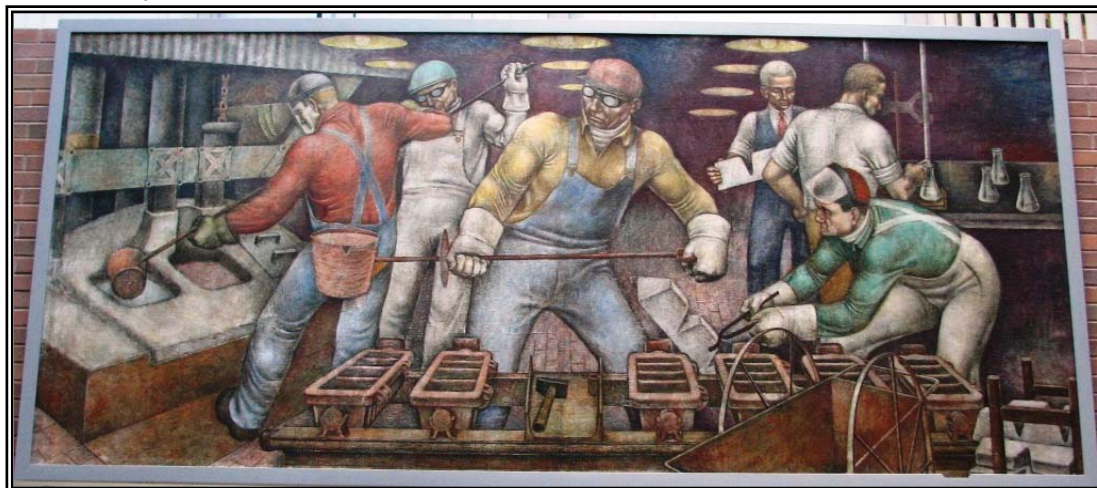


Figure 244: *Chemistry* by Henry Bernstein, 1942.

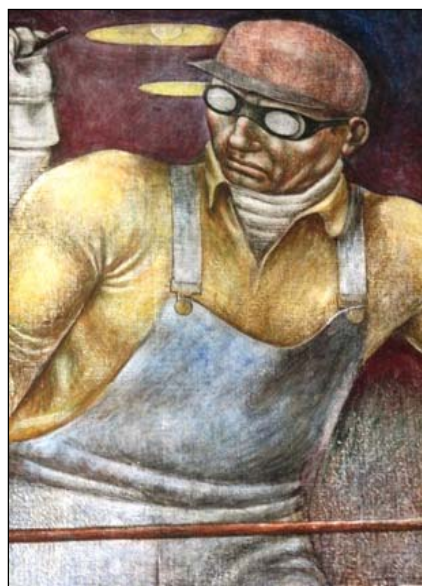


Figure 245: Detail of center figure.



Figure 246: Detail of figures.

Figure 247 (right):
Bubbling of the artwork's surface suggest adhesive failure.



Midland, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Henry Bernstein was persistent in winning approval of his chosen subject, the Dow Chemical Company, for the Midland mural. He submitted four sketches to the Section and although they chose one of the sketches, they had some criticism. Even the revised fourth sketch was subject to criticism by the Section. One sketch featured three phases of Dow—research, manufacturing, and shipping—with no interrelationship among figures or actions. Another sketch involved a historical theme of the lumber industry. The fourth depicted a farmer, doctor, industrial worker, and family connected by chemistry. Bernstein then abandoned the sketch altogether and submitted three new sketches. Rowan, however, was still concerned with whether the public would comprehend what was represented. Although Bernstein received approval to develop this last sketch into the next stage, a two-inch color sketch met with disapproval. At this point, Bernstein realized that the only thing that would save his mural project would be to solicit the input from the chemical company itself. Though Dow officials had previously denied the artist admission to the plant, after studying the sketches he sent them and finding technical errors, they invited Bernstein to come to Midland and observe actual chemical industry operations. The resulting studies met with Section approval and offered a more authentic rendering of the industrial environment³⁴¹ (Figures 244-246).

The artwork portrays people, both laborers and scientists, working together for a common goal, a theme encouraged by the Section. Industrial themes were welcomed by a

public that craved reassurance that mechanization could provide a livelihood in troubled times and could render a secure future for people.

A change in style from Bernstein's earlier murals is evident. Bernstein had witnessed Diego Rivera working on the Detroit Institute of Art mural,³⁴² and this influence can be seen in the mural. The Midland mural's style is different from his previous Section work and exhibits the use of earth tones and solidity of forms.

Because Bernstein sought a fresco look, he used a technique of removing paint with sandpaper in order to lighten certain areas to imitate the texture of a fresco.³⁴³

Condition and Developments.

The post office in which the mural was originally located was demolished. The artwork was installed in 1989 at its present location upon completion of the Midland County Service Building (Figure 242). It is under the jurisdiction of the Smithsonian and must comply with guidelines, according to Christopher Gilley, who is employed at the County Service Building and active in the Midland County Historical Society, and Herbert D. Doan, director of several historical facilities in Midland.

Bubbling of the canvas surface is visible throughout the artwork (Figure 247). This suggests adhesive failure. Inspection of the mural is highly recommended as is conservation cleaning and maintenance.

Monroe, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Relocated; third location, 126 Monroe Street, Monroe, Michigan, first floor, main room, east wall, Monroe Historical Museum

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0325402 47278241

Artist: Ralph Hendricksen

Title: *Romance of Monroe*

Year Created: 1938

Date of Installation: 1 January 1938

Medium: Oil on Stretched Canvas

Size: 7' x 9' 5"

Condition: fair

Date Surveyed: 27 June 2006



Figure 248: Monroe Historical Museum, Monroe, Michigan (former post office).



Figure 249: Artist's signature.



Figure 250: Space of original location.



Figure 251: *Romance of Monroe* by Ralph Hendricksen, 1938.



Figure 252 (above): Detail of mural.



Figure 253 (left): Questionable installation and condition of supporting structure.



Figure 254: Questionable installation and condition of supporting structure.

Monroe, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

In 1937, Ralph Henricksen was awarded the commission for the Monroe post office (Figure 248) based on designs that were entered in a Chicago competition. Henricksen visited the community and talked with the postmaster and townspeople in order to choose an appropriate subject for the mural.³⁴⁴

The selected theme represents three phases of Monroe: historic, romantic, and the industrial present. Agriculture and industry are included, as well as a number of figures (Figures 251, 252). Henricksen explained, “The figure at the left represents the tragic River Raisin Massacre of 1813. The figures in the center symbolize the romance of General [George Armstrong] Custer and Miss Elizabeth Bacon. In the background is the home in which they lived after their marriage, now the site of the present Post Office. Monroe’s industries of today, paper making and flower raising, are represented at the right.”³⁴⁵

The Section’s criticism of the artwork included the fierce expression of the Native Americans that certain members of the Section found “gruesome.”

Nonetheless, the community of Monroe approved and held a public ceremony to unveil the mural that included the town’s American Legion Drum and Bugle Corps, the high school glee club, and speeches given by prominent ministers and ancestors of Custer.³⁴⁶

The artwork exhibits elements of the American Scene style in which the common person plays a prominent role in the theme. Repetitive lines and shapes, stylized leaves and plant forms, and an overall decorative look reveal an Art Deco influence. The flat areas of color and severe geometric composition are aspects of the Cubists.

Condition and Developments.

The mural was relocated to Monroe County Community College in 1971 when the United States Government relinquished the post office that the mural was installed in (Figure 247). The intervention involved the city of Monroe, the County of Fine Arts Council with funding from the council, and GSA. It was then relocated in 1984 to the former post office, which now serves as the Monroe County Historical Museum.³⁴⁷

It is, however, not in its original location (Figure 249). The framing and hanging system is suspect and the mural itself appears to be in need of work (Figures 253, 354). Conservation cleaning and inspection are highly recommended, as is exploring options of the murals structural support and location.

Munising, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture Relief

Location: Original; 220 Elm Avenue, Munising, Michigan, post office, north wall of lobby over the postmaster's door

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0279649 5033493

Artist: Hugo Robus

Title: *Chippewa Legend*

Year Created: 1939

Date of Installation: 1 January 1939

Medium: Plaster relief

Size: 7' x 3' x 4 1/2"

Condition: Fair, spalling and severe dirt

Date Surveyed: 3 October 2006



Figure 255: Munising, Michigan, post office.



Figure 256: Artist's signature.



Figure 257: *Chippewa Legend* by Hugo Robus, 1939.



Figure 258: Detail.



Figure 259: Detail.



Figure 260: Detail.



Figure 261: Visible spalling.



Figure 262: Visible spalling.

Munising, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture Relief

History and Description.

Hugo Robus's *Chippewa Legend* is considered by some to be one of the most outstanding sculptures created under the auspices of the Section of Fine Arts.

The Munising post office's (Figure 255) artwork exhibits a more realistic style than the other figures Robus created during the 1930s, which may be due to the fact that the Munising artwork was, unlike the round sculptures he usually created, executed in relief. Still, the work retains an element of whimsy which his sculptures were known for.³⁴⁸ Simple dramatic lines and curved shapes create movement in the artwork, which unifies the human figure with the animals and signifies the Indian's communication with all. The piece displays a lyrical flow and textural variety that show Robus's experience in jewelry and textile design³⁴⁹ (Figures 256-260). Robus was interested in the expression of life through its forms and believed that "all creative art has the same purpose--to express the essence of life."

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Robus submitted two designs to the Section: one that he liked better, representing the postal service; and the other, which they chose, a Chippewa Indian Legend. In the legend the Chippewa demi-god, Nanabozho, and his animal companions were exploring the Munising shore for a place to make a home. A storm developed. Because there was no land to take refuge, Nanabozho proposed that the beaver dive down to the bottom of the lake for mud from which the Indian would form land. When the mud was brought to the surface, Nanabozho accidentally sneezed on it; the mud scattered and created islands, including one that is located in Munising's harbor. The beaver, lying on his back, is obviously exhausted.

The Section offered little criticism of Robus's artwork.³⁵¹ He was known as an artist of superior ability and they realized the quality of this piece. The artwork was also well-received by the community. They compared the subject to Greek mythology and the work was thought of as "first of its kind anywhere."³⁵²

Condition and Developments.

The relief exhibits spalling and excessive amounts of dirt and grime (Figures 261, 262). Further inspection is needed to determine the stability of the artwork; restoration and cleaning are recommended.

Paw Paw, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 125 North Kalamazoo Street, Paw Paw, Michigan, post office, north wall of the lobby over the post master's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0591506 4674599

Artist: Carlos Lopez

Title: *Bounty*

Year Created: 1940

Date of Installation: 14 October 1940

Medium: Tempera on plaster with gesso base

Size: 13' 6" x 4' 6"

Condition: Fair

Date Surveyed: 13 July 2006



Figure 263: Paw Paw, Michigan, post office.



Figure 264: Artist's signature.



Figure 265: *Bounty* by Carlos Lopez, 1940.



Figure 266: Detail of center section.

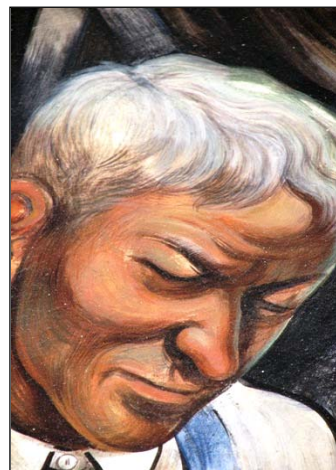


Figure 268: Detail of figure.



Figure 267: Detail of figures.



Figure 269: Artist's self-portrait in mural.



Figure 270 (right): The artwork exhibits signs of deterioration.

Paw Paw, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

After completing the Plymouth mural, Carlos Lopez expressed to the Section his desire to create another mural.³⁵³ The following year, he received an invitation to submit sketches for the Paw Paw post office (Figure 263). Upon visiting Paw Paw, Lopez discovered that the soil and conditions were conducive for growing fruit, especially grapes. Lopez submitted five sketches: two with an agricultural theme and three with a historical one. The Section selected the design featuring oversized fruits and vegetables surrounded by rural people at work and play, expressing the idea of nature's bounty and the resulting joy, a valued Section idealized theme (Figures 225-269). A sense of plenty and well-being that can be seen in the Chelsea mural is present in this one as well and is only one of three murals located in Michigan that shows a leisure activity. (The other two are Birmingham's mural, created by Lopez, and Brozik's artwork, located in Howell.)

After Lopez sent the photograph of his cartoon to Washington, Rowan replied with the criticism that the male figures needed greater variety. "It looks now as if the same gentlemen had posed for several of the heads."³⁵⁴ Lopez agreed and decided to paint the likenesses of Paw Paw residents, including the white-haired postmaster. Lopez appears as the figure who is observing the dancers from the upper right-hand corner³⁵⁵ (Figure 269). Though the figures appear to be Hispanic, this can be attributed to Lopez's own ethnic background rather than the make-up of the Paw Paw population.

The mural depicts several activities including planting, pruning, carrying full baskets of harvest crops, a hoedown, and ice-skating. Lopez illustrated a bounty of crops and people

enjoying a celebration. But he also wanted to convey the dignity of rural residents and the wholesomeness of “American” entertainments.

Under the main mural area, Lopez painted tree roots and the earth strata, a layer of coal and under that, diamonds. He wanted to signify that the people were “people of the soil.”³⁵⁶

Although there is no direct evidence of a Thomas Hart Benton influence, there are similarities: the sectioned composition with a center collage as a focal point, and the use of strong outlines of modeling that Benson was known to utilize is similar to the white jagged outline around forms of Lopez’s work.

Condition and Developments.

The mural exhibits dirt, with crazing and cracking of the surface paint, and is in need of cleaning and restoration (Figure 270).

Plymouth, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 860 Penniman Avenue, Plymouth, Michigan, post office, west wall of the lobby over the post master's door

Artist: Carlos Lopez

Title: *Plymouth Trail*

Year Created: 1938

Date of Installation: 1 January 1938

Medium: Tempera on plaster with gesso base

Size: 12' x 6'

Condition: Fairly good

Date Surveyed: 17 April 2006



Figure 271: Plymouth, Michigan, post office.



Figure 272: Artist's signature.



Figure 273: *Plymouth Trail* by Carlos Lopez, 1938.

Figure 274: Detail of Mural.



Figure 275: Detail of Figure.



Figure 276: Detail of figures.

Plymouth, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Because the Section was aware of Carlos Lopez's work and felt that his style fit well with their goals, he was invited in 1937 to submit sketches for the Plymouth post office (Figure 271). Since he lived just fifteen miles from the community, Lopez visited the area and painted on location. Several sketches were submitted, including one representing a fire in the 1880s and another that was a symbolic rendition of several large hands of different races. Although Lopez believed that the symbolic theme was a good concept, he admitted that, "I do not know how the people of Plymouth would interpret those hands. I suppose you are familiar with the terrible criticism Diego Rivera's hand received here in Detroit." On the margin of Lopez's letter, a section official emphatically scrawled in longhand a large "NO."³⁵⁷

Lopez and the Section decided the historical progression of mail service in Plymouth was an appropriate choice. Included in the mural is the rendition of the buildings of early Plymouth and of a four-horse stagecoach passing through the village bringing mail³⁵⁸ (Figures 272-276).

The mural, directly painted on the plaster wall, is a true fresco, which is rare for Section murals. Lopez's executed the mural with quick, descriptive brushstrokes, a style that can be found in illustrations of books and magazine of the time.

Besides the large section of artwork, Lopez created three small panels along the bottom of this mural of scenes representing Plymouth from the time of the early settlers to the twentieth century. Small panels were also utilized by Diego Rivera in his Detroit Institute

of Arts murals. A similar format can be seen in the other two murals that Lopez created for Michigan post offices.

Postmaster General S. W. Purdum (Plymouth) wrote to the Postmaster General in Washington, D.C., to voice his disapproval of a figure in the completed mural that was holding an issue of *The Detroit Free Press* newspaper and inquired if this might be considered advertising, which was not permitted in Section artwork. The Section informed Lopez of the need to alter his mural. Though he had laboriously reproduced an authentic copy of an 1864 edition and although the Section had approved his sketches, he agreed to repaint the paper folded to hide the newspaper's name.³⁵⁹

After the mural's completion, Lopez expressed desire to do another mural. He was invited to submit sketches for the Paw Paw post office. Still, like many Section artists, because of a lengthy final approval process, payment was not prompt. Lopez wrote politely to the Section asking if his payments had "been mailed and have gone astray."³⁶⁰

Condition and Developments.

It appears that cleaning and restoration work has not been performed on the mural. A layer of dirt and grime is compromising the artwork's impact while possibly endangering the mural. Conservation cleaning and further inspection are recommended.

River Rouge, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture Relief

Location: Original; 235 Burke Street, River Rouge, Michigan, post office, west wall of the lobby over the post master's door

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0324023 468251

Artist: Marshall M. Fredericks

Title: *Transportation*

Year Created 1939

Date of Installation: 26 January 1939

Medium: Limestone relief.

Size: 4' x 4'

Condition: Fair

Date Surveyed: 26 June 2006



Figure 277: River Rouge, Michigan, post office.



Figure 278: *Transportation* by Marshall M. Fredericks, 1939.



Figure 279: Detail of artwork including the encasement's grime and dirt.



Figure 280: Detail of artwork; note the distortion caused by the Plexiglas encasement.



Figure 281: Detail showing grime and dirt possibly inside the encasement.

River Rouge, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture Relief

History and Description.

Although the Ford Rouge auto plant was where a majority of the community worked and the plant was prominent in the local landscape, Marshall Fredericks chose a 1908 Ford car to represent the industry in the artwork for the Rouge River post office (Figure 277). He presented the issue of agriculture versus industry in a humorous way by picturing the effect of the car upon farm animals. The Model S, billowing smoke and dust, is speeding along scattering pigs and chickens while disapproving cows look on. Fredericks, who preferred carving to construction, created the piece in limestone (Figures 278-280).

Humorous depictions such as Fredericks *Transportation* were rarely seen in Section art, but because this work did not involve satire of subjects that the Section wished to avoid, the sketch was “reviewed and approved with enthusiasm.”³⁶¹

With the suggestion of the Section, Fredericks opened up the restrictive composition by extending the clouds, pigs, and birds to create an irregular shape.³⁶²

The completed artwork also met with approval, so the Section offered Fredericks the Sandwich, Illinois, commission.

Condition and Developments.

The layers of “thick shiny...bisque paint” that Ruby noted in her dissertation, which covered the artwork, have since been removed. However, the artwork is encased in yellowing Plexiglas with layers of dirt and grime that distorts the view of the piece (Figures

279, 281). Also, there is the possibility that encasing limestone could have detrimental effects on the artwork. Inspection and alternative display options should be pursued.

Rochester, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture Relief

Location: Relocated; removed from original location and installed in present post office; 511 Old Towne Road, Rochester, Michigan, west wall over mail boxes
UTM Coordinates: 17T 0325422 4727767

Artist: Alexander Sambugnac

Title: *Communication*

Year Created: 1939

Date of Installation: 4 February 1939

Medium: Cast sandstone

Size: 5' 9" x 3' 9" x 3 1/2"

Condition: good

Date Surveyed: 22 June 2006



Figure 282: The current Rochester, Michigan post office and location of the artwork.



Figure 283: The former Rochester, Michigan post office where the artwork was originally installed.



Figure 284: *Communication* by Alexander Sambugnac, 1939.



Figure 285: Detail of mural.



Figure 286: Detail of mural.



Figure 287: Space in which the sculpture is housed.

Rochester, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture Relief

History and Description.

Although Sambugnac created a semi-nude Section piece for Miami, Florida, when he submitted a similar design for the Rochester post office, it was met with immediate disapproval.³⁶³ Although the approved figure retained an exposed chest and bared thighs, it is of a male figure and so less controversial.

The artwork exhibits an academic style and subject. The crouching muscular figure, who has just released a pigeon in flight, refers to classical and Renaissance-inspired sculptural relief and indicates the study of these styles. The action of the figure symbolizes an early mail runner who has released a pigeon that will deliver a message. Allegorical and symbolic themes such as these are somewhat rare in Section art (Figures 284-287).

Condition and Developments.

The former post office that originally housed the reliefs, located at Fourth and Walnut, is presently a restaurant. The artwork has been relocated to the current post office (Figure 282). A display area was designed in the new post office for the artwork (Figure 283).

The artwork, although not easily viewed at a close distance, appears to be in excellent condition.

Rockford, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 57 Courtland Street, Rockford, Michigan, post office, west wall of lobby over the post master's door

UTM Coordinates: 16T 0617119 47752771

Artist: Pierre Bourdelle

Title: *Among the Furrows*

Year Created: 1940

Date of Installation: 12 April 1940

Medium: Encaustic, wax emulsion on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 12' x 5' 6"

Condition: Fair

Date Surveyed: 26 May 2006



Figure 288: Rockford, Michigan, post office.



Figure 289: *Among the Furrows* by Pierre Bourdelle, 1940.

Figure 290: Detail of figure.



Figure 291: Detail of center section.



Figure 293 (right): Areas of the paint surface have deteriorated.



Figure 292: Detail of painting technique.

Rockford, Michigan, Post Office Encaustic Painting

History and Description.

Pierre Bourdelle created the mural for the Rockford post office (Figure 288). After discovering that the artist did not have his materials approved, Rowan wrote to Bourdelle, “I was rather surprised to learn that you have nearly completed the mural without having submitted this material previously. You must realize that the purpose of the (technical) outline is to procure approval of method, pigments and canvas before the artist is authorized to proceed with the actual work. It is our only way of checking on these important matters.”

³⁶⁴ The mural, depicting a woman holding a small lamb and farmers and an ox working in the fields, was, however, completed without a change in materials (Figures 228-292).

While the farming subject illustrated is common, the style and technique of the piece is not. The encaustic technique uses pigments that are fused with the surface by application of hot irons. Although the artwork is representational, flat planes and geometric shapes show an obvious Cubist influence. The solidity of forms is evidence of Bourdelle’s experience as a sculptor.

Condition and Developments.

There appear to be layers of dirt and grime on the artwork and, possibly, paint surface deterioration (Figure 293). Conservation cleaning and closer inspection of the artwork is recommended. Because of the type of medium used, the process may prove especially difficult.

Rogers City, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 188 North 3rd Street, Rogers City, Michigan, post office, north wall of lobby over the postmaster's door

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0279647 5033492

Artist: James Calder

Title: *Harbor at Rogers City*

Year Created 1941

Date of Installation: 26 September 1941

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 5' x 11' 7 1/2"

Condition: Fairly good

Date Surveyed: 2 October 2006



Figure 294: Rogers City, Michigan, post office.

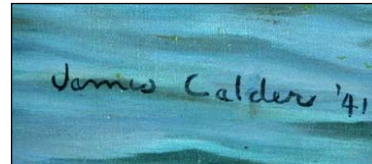


Figure 295: Artist's signature.

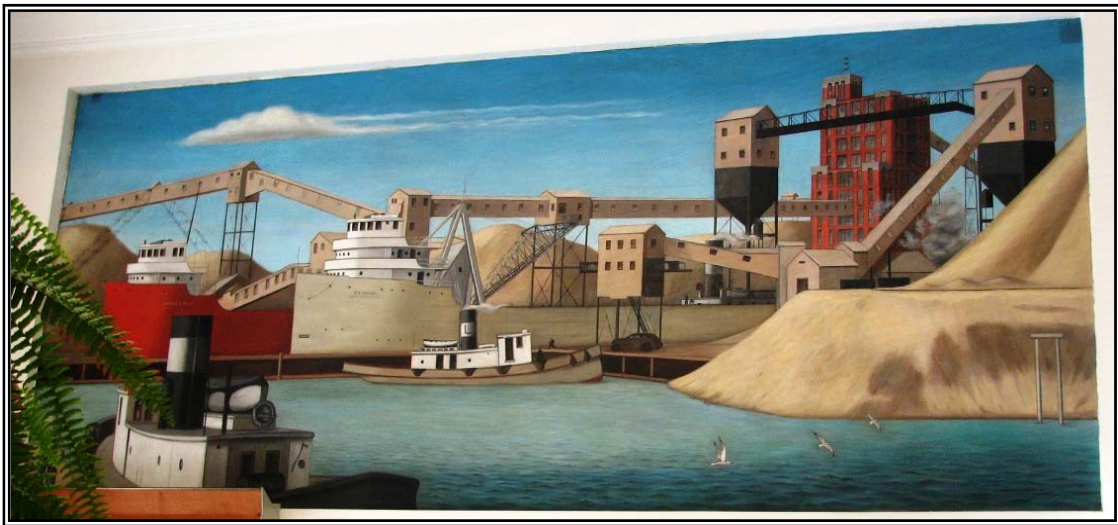


Figure 296: *Harbor at Rogers City* by James Calder, 1941.

Figure 297: Detail of mural.

Figure 298: Detail of mural.



Figure 299 (right): The mural, which is recessed into the wall; the surrounding area shows signs of mold and dirt.



Rogers City, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

James Calder was awarded the Section art commission for the Rogers City post office (Figure 294). Like the St. Clair mural, this artwork displays a waterfront scene, a favorite subject of Calder's. Calder did submit several preliminary sketches and used photographs that he took for reference. The sketch of the Limestone and Chemical Company, which was the major local industry of Rogers City, was chosen for the mural (Figures 295-298).³⁶⁵

The finished mural is an authentic local industrial scene, consisting of two freighters having cargo loaded at the factory, a tug in the foreground, and the conveyer and factory buildings in the background. Calder, describing the artwork to Rowan, wrote: "This is an authentic scene drawn and photographed while I was in Rogers City. The boats and buildings are just as you would actually see them, with the exception of minor changes made here and there for the sake of design."³⁶⁶

The design, subject matter, and details, such as a sailor on the deck of a boat watching another freighter from his fleet pass by, pleased the community.³⁶⁷

Elements of the artwork such as the decorative design, the outline of mechanical forms, flat areas of color, and smooth streamlined ships display an affinity with Precisionism, the cubist-inspired American art style of the previous decade.

Condition and Developments.

Unusual for Section murals, the artwork is recessed in the wall, and it appears that this recess is original and was designed to contain the mural. Although no evidence of recent

restoration work was discovered, the mural appears to be in fairly good condition. There are signs of mold and grime, particularly around the murals edges (Figure 299). Maintenance conservation cleaning and closer inspection of the artwork is highly recommended.

**Royal Oak, Michigan, Post Office
Sculpture Reliefs**

Location: Unknown; original location: 200 West 2nd Street, Royal Oak, Michigan, post office, on the east wall.

UTM Coordinates: unknown; original location: 17T 0323611 4706305

Artist: Sidney Loeb

Title: *The First Harvest, Pioneer Family*

Year Created: 1939

Date of Installation: Unknown

Medium: Plaster reliefs (2 pieces)

Size: 6' 8" x 5" / 6' 8" x 6'

Condition: Unknown, lost

Date Surveyed: October 24 2006



Figure 300: Royal Oak, Michigan, post office.



Figure 301: Area where the artwork once hung.

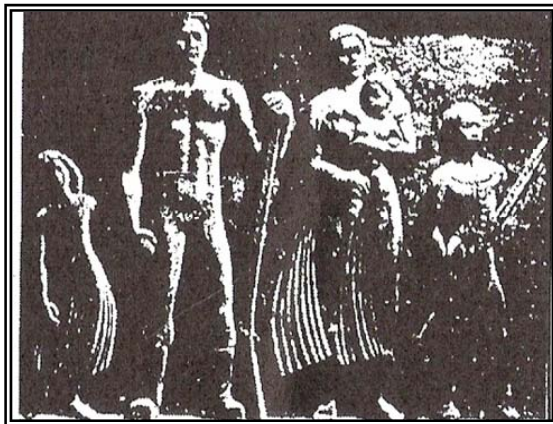


Figure 302: *Pioneer Family* by Sidney Loeb, 1939. Photo Credit: Craig Gaffield, staff photos, *Royal Oak Daily Tribune*.



Figure 303: *The First Harvest* by Sidney Loeb, 1939. Photo Credit: Craig Gaffield, staff photos, *Royal Oak Daily Tribune*.

Royal Oak, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture Reliefs

History and Description.

Sidney Loeb created the artwork for the Royal Oak post office (Figures 300, 301). Originally the artist submitted a symbolic interpretation of the postal service signifying communication. However, Rowan stated that it held “little meaning” and proposed that the sculptor, instead, should depict a pioneer family and if he chose not to do so, the job would be offered to another artist.³⁶⁸

Together, the postmaster, Gilbert Davis, and Loeb researched historical information at the local library and offered to send Loeb additional information that might be needed once Loeb left the area.³⁶⁹

Pioneer Family, a plaster relief, depicts a young couple with three young children seeing “for the first time the rich plain where they would make their home,” (Figure 302). *The First Harvest* portrays a couple working side by side in a wheat field; the woman is gathering stalks and the man is cutting the wheat with a scythe³⁷⁰ (Figure 303).

Condition and Developments.

According to the city historian, Muriel Versagi, the 200 West 2nd Street post office was the location of the mural.³⁷¹

When two wings were added to the post office in the mid-1960s (according to Nick Karaguleff, finance director of the Royal Oak Post Office), “The construction company had to cut into walls where the statues were to construct doors...The very nature of them suggests

they could have come down in one unit...We tried to find the contractors, but couldn't. We ran into a dead end at that point and that was it.”³⁷² Recent contact with several members of the Royal Oak Historical Society and Museum has produced no additional information.

Saginaw, Michigan, Post Office Watercolors and Prints

Location: Unknown

UTM Coordinates:

Artist:

Title:

Year Created: 1940

Date of Installation: unknown

Medium: Watercolors (2) and prints (4)

Size:

Condition: Unknown

Date Surveyed:

History and Description.

Although the artwork was created under the jurisdiction of the Section of Fine Arts, they are not categorized as art-in-architecture pieces. There was not enough in the building appropriation fund to cover the cost of a mural or a sculpture, but because of the postmaster's initiative, the post office received easel paintings and prints from Washington, D. C.³⁷³ No description of the artwork has been found.

Condition and Developments.

An unsuccessful search was conducted by the city historian in 1984 to locate the artwork.³⁷⁴ It has been questioned if the pieces were ever actually hung in the post office.³⁷⁵

Saint Clair, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Original; 202 Trumbull Street, St. Clair, Michigan, post office, east wall of lobby over the postmaster's door.

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0378416 4742246

Artist: James Calder

Title: *St. Clair River*

Year Created: 1939

Date of Installation: 9 October 1939

Medium: Oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 13' x 4'

Condition: Fair condition, separation from substrate and water issues are visible.

Date Surveyed: 25 October 2006



Figure 304: Saint Clair, Michigan, post office.



Figure 305: Artist's signature.



Figure 306: *St. Clair River* by James Calder, 1939.

Figure 307: Detail of mural.



Figure 310 (right): Artwork is separation from the wall.



Figure 311 (right): Possible water and infestation issues.



Figure 309 Detail of background.



Figure 308: Detail of ship's name.



Saint Clair, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

In 1938, James Calder submitted an entry for the East Detroit post office competition and was a runner-up. Because of this, he received the commission for the post office in St. Clair (Figure 304). The postmaster did not have any suggestions on subject matter for the mural and deferred the decision to the local government and the artist. Calder prepared preliminary sketches of the St. Clair landscape and local families. Two of his six sketches portrayed workers in the local factory of the Diamond Crystal Salt Company,³⁷⁶ which became the subject of the mural.

Although the Section generally preferred workmen to be represented in the mural, the final scene instead depicts a view of the salt plant seen from the St. Clair River and various ships, including a Roy D. Bixby Transportation Company steamer; two tugs, one named *St. Clair* and the other headed for the wharf; and the barge *Iron Cliff* of the Pringle shipping line. The Section felt that this river view was more scenic and pleasant with more public appeal than grimmer industrial representation.³⁷⁷ Still factory buildings with smokestacks and billowing smoke and piles of coal are present but without laborers (Figures 305-309).

Calder's style of simplified modeling with large flat areas and smooth streamlined elements are evident in the artwork.

The mural was well received by both the community and the local press who described it as "fine" and "beautiful." However, there was one criticism from the community:

the color of the river. “He has painted it in green shades, whereas St. Clair River is noted for being the bluest water in the world.”³⁷⁸

Condition and Developments.

The artwork is in fair condition; however, water issues may be endangering it (Figure 311). There is evidence of possible infestation (Figure 310). Inspection of both the art and the substrate is highly recommended, as are necessary steps taken to insure the mural’s safety.

Sandusky, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: 55 South Morse Street, Sandusky, Michigan, post office, north wall of lobby over the postmaster's door.

UTM Coordinates: 17T 0351992 4809067

Artist: Frank Cassara

Title: *Cattle Auctions*

Year Created: 1942

Date of Installation: 1 January 1942

Medium: Egg tempera and oil on canvas adhered to plaster wall

Size: 11' 11" x 6' 10"

Condition: Fairly good condition, needs cleaning

Date Surveyed: 25 October 2006



Figure 312: Sandusky, Michigan, post office.

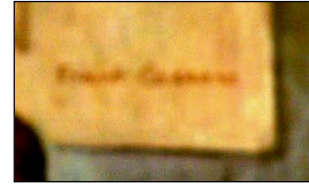


Figure 313: Artist's signature.



Figure 314: *Cattle Auctions* by Frank Cassara, 1942.



Figure 315: Detail of mural.



Figure 316: Detail of mural.



Figure 317: Wall paint mars the artwork.

Sandusky, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

The commission for the Sandusky post office (Figure 312) was awarded to Frank Cassara based on sketches submitted to the St. Louis and San Francisco post office competitions.³⁷⁹ Before painting the mural, Cassara spent some time in Sandusky, talking to people and looking for a theme that would best depict the area. His first contact was somewhat uncooperative due to the opinion that FDR's politics were too liberal. The theme was chosen after witnessing the excitement of a cattle auction³⁸⁰ (Figures 313-316). Cassara's commission for the mural was \$700.00. "We were paid by the foot," stated Cassara in a 1986 interview.³⁸¹ The egg tempera painting, with friends serving as models, was created in Cassara's Detroit studio.³⁸² During the execution of the artwork, Cassara kept notes on the preparation of the ground and the formulas of the gazing medium.³⁸³

The artwork subject is represented in a more realistic manner than many Section murals. The portrayal of the scene conveys the excitement and confusion of a current event of that time, Sandusky's cattle auction, an unusual subject for Section murals. The solidity and color used suggests a Mexican muralist influence.

The mural was well-received by the community and the media. A journalist of a local newspaper pointed out to the rural farming community that eggs were used to paint their post office mural. He then not only explained the government's program but then stated, "This record... will go down to our children and their children as a cultural distinction of this period, a landmark to the integrity of rural people, and an incentive for the development of talent of our children..."³⁸⁴

Condition and Developments.

The mural was restored in 1987 by Ann Wagner of Cooperstown, New York,³⁸⁵ and appears to be in good condition except for the stray wall paint visible on the artwork (Figure 317). Maintenance cleaning and inspection of the artwork are recommended.

Traverse City, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture Reliefs

Location: Relocated; 6861 Deepwater Point Road, Williamsburg, Michigan, in

the foyer of the residence of William and Ruth Ackerman

UTM Coordinates: 16T 06177973 4960330 (original post office:

16T 0615978 5067134)

Artist: Marion Overby

Title: *The Cherry Picker*

Year Created: 1941

Date of Installation: 1 January 1941

Medium: Cherry wood relief (three pieces)

Size: three pieces, total size 4' x 5' 3" x 7"; large relief: 71" x 21" x 9",

small figure relief: 23" x 9" x 7"; size of third piece is unknown.

Condition: Good, some paint drippings are visible on the large piece.

Date Surveyed: 24 September 2006



Figure 318: Traverse City post office, site of mural's original location.



Figure 320: Detail of central figure.



Figure 319 (left): Center figure of *The Cherry Picker* by Marion Overby, 1941.



Figure 321: Located small figure of *The Cherry Picker* by Marion Overby, 1941.



Figure 322: Backside of the small figure.



Figure 323: Detail of central figure with visible paint splatter.



Figure 324: Backside of the center figure.



Figure 325: Detail of central figure.



Figure 326: Detail of the smaller figure.

Traverse City, Michigan, Post Office Sculpture Reliefs

History and Description.

Marion Overby created three sculpture reliefs for the Traverse City post office (Figure 318). This piece is the only Michigan's Section sculpture that depicts contemporary figures of the 1930s. When Overby visited Traverse City, she determined that the cherry industry or lumbering would be an appropriate subject. She initially proposed a woodman figure but the Section favored a subject that represented the cherry industry.

The Section and the building architect had originally planned for bronze pieces. Overby, however, objected because of the cost to the artist to produce such pieces would have been excessive, and it was questionable if the walls would be able to support the artwork in bronze. Reluctantly, the Section allowed the use of cherry wood.³⁸⁶ Unlike many installations of Section artwork, Overby personally supervised the hanging.³⁸⁷

The relief was created in three sections: the larger, central panel featuring a figure picking cherries and flanked by a smaller figure and a portion of a cherry tree. Overby's primitive style of the hand carved piece,³⁸⁸ as many other sculptors of the 1930s, exhibits influence of Pre-Columbian art³⁸⁹ (Figures 319-326).

Condition and Developments.

Although Overby was initially optimistic after the artwork's installation, the public turned against the piece. Objections were divided among dislike of the interpretation of the theme, negative feelings about the suitability of the theme, and the perceived incompatibility of the large artwork and the small space that it occupied. Some patrons complained that the

figures did not resemble the migrant Mexican workers, while others thought the figures resembled too closely the migrant worker and so were not appropriate.³⁹⁰ The subsequent postmaster removed the artwork from the wall. It was then stored for nearly thirty years in the building's basement before being sold without government permission.³⁹¹

According to Dr. William Ackerman, a Rex Hentscher (now deceased) was given the two pieces in payment for two years of snow removal and, in turn, gave the artwork as payment for over \$600.00 of dental bills to Ackerman. At that time, Ackerman inquired about the third piece but was told that it was not available. This location of the third piece is not known.³⁹²

The two pieces in Ackerman's possession are in good condition. The central figure exhibits some paint drippings on the lower section and exposed raw wood on the shoulder area (Figure 323).

Dallan Wordekemper, Real Estate Facilities Specialist, for the United States postal services, maintains that the art belongs to the United States Postal Service. He further states that he intends to have them returned to the government but would also like to acknowledge Ackerman's care and stewardship of the artwork. Wordekemper and Ackerman have had some correspondence.³⁹³

Wayne, Michigan, Post Office Mural

Location: Unknown; original location:
3716 Newberry Street, Wayne, Michigan
post office.

UTM Coordinates: 17T 03032000

4683740 (coordinates of possible location)

Artist: Algot Stenbery

Title: *Landscape near Wayne – 1876*. 1939

Year Created: 1939

Date of Installation: 1 January 1939

Medium: Oil on canvas (Ruby)

Size: 12' 6" x 6'

Condition: Missing

Date Surveyed: 27 October 2006



Figure 327: Wayne, Michigan, post office.

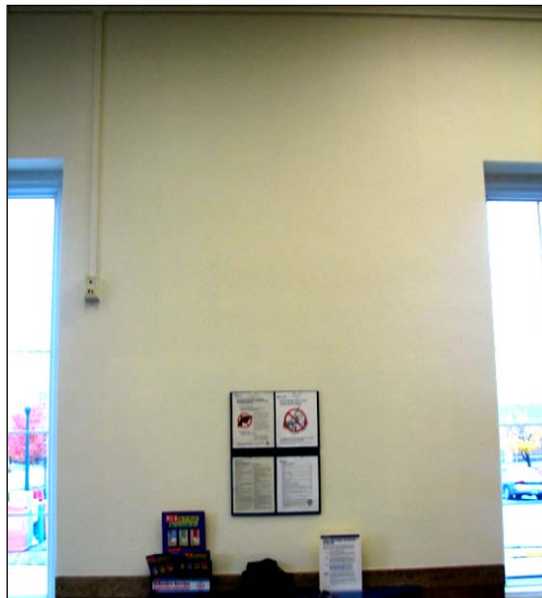


Figure 328: Interior north wall of the post office.



Figure 329: North wall of the post office and the adjacent corner; note that the moldings are original, suggesting that the original wall exists.

Wayne, Michigan, Post Office Mural

History and Description.

Algot Stenbery was awarded the Section art commission for the Wayne post office (Figures 327-329). When Stenbery, living in New York at the time of the commission, could not afford to travel to Wayne, he wrote to the local chamber of commerce asking for applicable subjects for a mural but received no reply. He then began to research the area at the New York Public Library; he discovered that it was the junction of two major railroads.³⁹⁴ The result was the depiction of Wayne in 1875 that includes two trains. The artist's sketch was a compilation of a small engraving of the area that he found in an old atlas and a map of Wayne, which had indicated the existence of a shallow river and low-lying land in the town.³⁹⁵

Except for the description, which has been confirmed by long-time residents of the area, no other verbal or visual description has been found. The City of Wayne Historical Museum is continuing to search for photo documentation. Stenbery's nephew has expressed interest in helping with the research. Wordekemper, of the United States Postal Service, is looking into the matter, but this type of research is often slow in results.

Condition and Developments.

According to the GSA, the mural was removed in 1959 for remodeling and disappeared. All effort by the United States Postal Service has failed to relocate the artwork.³⁹⁶ According to Valerie Latzman, an archivist at the City of Wayne Historical Museum, one theory that is being pursued is that the mural was painted over during the renovation. She

believes that, unlike the majority of the murals that were located over the postmaster's door, this one was painted on the north wall. As of yet, original floor plans and renovation plans have not been found. Although the post office has been renovated and an addition installed, the original Sections' plaster walls still exist. Furthermore, Dawn Humphrey of the USPS Business Development Team, Detroit District, and a long-time employee, recalls that when the interior walls were being painted several years ago, cabinets were moved. Behind these cabinets sections of a painting were visible. This reaffirms the suspicion that the mural still exists under layers of paint.

Presently, Lutzman is working with the post office to pursue the necessary steps for a possible exposure.

Chapter Six: Recommended Restoration and Conservation Techniques

General Information

The General Services Administration (GSA), established in 1949, assumed the responsibilities of the Federal Works Agency, including tracking and maintenance of art in federal buildings.³⁹⁷ Presently the Real Estate Facilities Specialist for the United States post offices has made finding missing Section artwork and the conservation of all a priority.

Today a number of companies specialize in mural restoration. Located in Chicago, Parma Conservation has conducted extensive mural conservation of government artwork.

The conservation and preservation of art-in-architecture projects often combine traditional and innovative techniques and materials under a unique set of circumstances. Although the artwork is incorporated into the architecture, most often the materials, such as stone and wood reliefs, frescos, and tempera or oil painted canvas installations are dissimilar to that of the surrounding building fabric. These are often removable only with great difficulty and at the risk of the artwork. Conservation of these projects must deal not only with the materials of the artwork but with elements of the building fabric as well, each location offering a different set of problems, decisions, and solutions.

Prior to treatment, documentation and research should be conducted and should include recorded and unrecorded prior treatments and written and photographic documentation of current condition and ongoing treatments. Awareness of the variety of deterioration that art was subjected to including environmental (particularly changes in temperature and humidity), air pollution, and the aging of materials is necessary.

Both qualitative and quantitative measures should be conducted to determine the proper method of conservation for the unique characteristics of each individual artifact. Non-invasive examination may include pH measurement, solvent parameter mapping, microscopy, and ultraviolet light inspection. Cleaning treatments for painted artifacts should be designed specifically for each piece of artwork and take into account the media, condition and painting surface. The pH is a crucial factor in all water-based cleaning agents and should be closely monitored so as to fall within the safe range of the particular artwork. Techniques for inspection have become increasingly sophisticated; they currently involve photographic, X-ray, infrared, and other radiation examination, as well as complex chemical analysis.³⁹⁸

All effective art conservation and restoration depends upon the restorer's understanding of materials and technical craftsmanship and aesthetic and historical awareness. The support (such as wood panel, canvas, paper), the ground (gesso, chalk), and the surface treatment (wax, varnish) of a painting all undergo some form of decay over the years.

A mobile laboratory can be set up at almost any location where restoration is needed. In situ restoration is most often the least traumatic and least costly for the artwork.

Murals

With age, a painting can darken, varnish can yellow, and dirt can accumulate.³⁹⁹ When this happens, the artwork's aesthetic integrity is compromised. The dirt can act like a compress, accelerating the deterioration and decay of the substrate canvas. The yellowing of the varnish coat on the paintings as it deteriorates is one common issue that needs to be addressed.

Smoke, another hazard to artwork, leaves layers of soot on a painting, which flattens the perception of the image and diminishes the quality.

Varnish may be removed painstakingly by mechanical means or the use of a solvent.⁴⁰⁰ A solvent-based gel consisting of mineral spirits and acetone emulsified with pluronic (a type of detergent), that has a pH of 7.5, is recommended to remove discolored varnish and imbedded dirt and grime of oil paintings in one phase of cleaning.⁴⁰¹ (The pH level measures the acidity or basicity of a solution, with pH 7 defined as neutral.)

Cleaning systems that use forms of gel, though relatively new, have been adopted internationally by conservators. The use of gel reduces the penetration of the cleaning agent into the layers of the painting. Gels can be confined and applied with precision and so are easier to control. The debris must be meticulously removed by mechanical means.

After cleaning, structural inspection and problems can be addressed. Stabilization is a priority. All holes, tears, or punctures, however small, should be patched using Beva solution and polyester monofilament and then filled with a gelatin based gesso, which is compatible with the structure of the painting. If it is necessary to consolidate the entire painting, flattening the art utilizing a heated suction table at less than ten inches of gravitational force and diluted Beva 301 fed into areas via a syringe is recommended by Parma Conservation.⁴⁰²

There are only a small number of Section artworks that were originally stretched canvas pieces located in Michigan. However, to treat these paintings, at times it is necessary to remove the painting from its stretchers because of either canvas or stretcher deterioration. Canvas supports in the stretched canvas installations, such as Mestchersky's artwork in Eaton Rapids, can absorb and lose moisture, swelling and shrinking, and thereby causing loss of

paint. In addition, weakened canvases may be torn with comparative ease. Although relining (re-stretching on a second under-canvas), should be conducted only when necessary for the stabilization of the artwork, at times it is. One of the techniques used involves attaching old canvas to the new canvas by either a thermoplastic wax-resin combination or, as Parma Conservation recommends, compatible and completely reversible adhesives such as Beva or Plexisol.⁴⁰³ The painted surface becomes impregnated with the adhesive and is consequently stabilized. In those cases, the canvas is first removed and then cleaned with a solvent based gel emulsified with a surfactant (mineral spirits/acetone gel emulsified with pluronic).

Water exposure, while destructive in artwork in any media, can be especially damaging to murals. Whether it is high humidity over a period of time, or a sudden flood, water exposure can loosen the bond between paint and canvas, causing the paint to lift and separate.

Frescos, such as *Plymouth Trail* by Carl Lopez, are particularly prone to moisture damage. The moisture carries to the wall soluble surface salts that effloresce and can injure the fresco's pigments. One technique that has been utilized to stabilize the pigment and prevent flaking of the painting material is to apply water-permeable fixatives. Because of the high alkaline composition of mortar, pH monitoring is another important aspect in fresco restoration.⁴⁰⁴ If small areas of restoration are needed, pre-existing paint chip losses or scratches to the surface can be filled to plane with gesso. This material incorporates traditional rabbit-skin glue sizing and chalk and is reversible.⁴⁰⁵ Removal of a fresco is a labor-intensive project that requires a highly skilled technician. At times, custom engineering and the building of heavy-duty crates (often steel-support), as well as special coatings, are needed.⁴⁰⁶

Although some of the Section's artwork substructures were wood stretchers and others were directly painted on a plaster wall, the more common technique was to adhere the finished canvas piece directly to the plaster wall. Canvas directly adhered to the plaster that requires removal often presents a challenge. The canvas pieces were adhered with various glues. Some artists hired wallpaper hangers, others employed the janitor of the post office, and still other artists did it themselves. Though the artist was often there to oversee the installation, others never visited the site before, during, or after the installation. Testing for the existence of lead and a variety of safe solvents is often necessary.⁴⁰⁷

Like several Section murals that have been relocated, Brozik's artwork, which was originally glued to the wall, was converted into a stretched canvas piece. The relocation process of this piece involved cleaning, relining, and attaching the artwork to a new canvas and then stretching the piece onto canvas stretcher boards. It was then cleaned again, varnished, and framed.⁴⁰⁸

Parma's technique is as follows: the canvas is faced with a type of Japanese paper using a reversible adhesive. This process stabilizes the mural so that it can be removed from the wall. Though at times a wall-paper type starched-based adhesive was used to hang the murals, the most common type of adhesive that was originally used to adhere on the plaster was a very strong lead-based type. Often during removal, the wall will fail before the adhesive will.⁴⁰⁹ After cleaning, consolidation, and restoration, the work is adhered to the wall or, if necessary, stretched.

The recommendation is that these murals should be turned into easel paintings only as a last resort. Detaching them from their original installation compromises their integrity, alters their historic context, and diminishes their significance. This process, however, has

been conducted on several Section murals located in Michigan, including those located at Wayne State, Michigan State, Monroe, and Midland. This practice appears to have been common in the 1980s and has fallen out of grace. Presently the most common practice is to relocate the mural to a new post office facility with installation that is similar to the original format and space.

If it is necessary to re-adhere the mural, or sections of it, to the wall, or to install the artwork in a new location, wax adhesive is recommended by some. Other conservators utilize newer types of adhesives such as Beva and Plexisol, which are also completely compatible and reversible. (Traditional wax adhesives chemically change an artwork forever.) While both are reversible, Parma recommends the newer types of adhesives.

Retouching areas where paint loss and gesso filler has occurred should be carried out after the mural has been varnished and should be very controlled and limited, using paint products that have a high light-fast rating.⁴¹⁰ Varnish colors should be utilized in oil paintings and water colors for frescos and temperas. Matching color, tone, and intensity is crucial.⁴¹¹ A reversible (removed with mineral spirits) synthetic polymer varnish that incorporates ultraviolet light filters and stabilizers is recommended for protection.

All of these techniques should be conducted on the artwork only by experienced professional conservationists.

Artwork of Wood

Wood panels were sometimes employed as a painting surface as seen in the Hamtramck pieces. Wood reliefs, such as those created for the post offices in Traverse City and Iron River, share common issues with the paneled paintings. These pieces are often

subjected to excessive swelling and shrinking due to changes in humidity. Wood-boring insects and fungus can also attack the artwork. Strengthening with a consolidate and placing auxiliary support or a new support system may be necessary. Treating the wood with carefully selected insecticides and fungicides are options for treatment of these types of artifacts. Broken wood sculpture can also be doweled.⁴¹² However, before any restoration work is executed, proper documentation of prior restoration work and the artwork's current condition is necessary. Again, restoration/conservation work should be executed only by experienced professionals.

Masonry Artwork

Masonry materials used in Section artwork were created in both stone and kiln-dried masonry. Stones are cut from three main categories of natural rock: dense igneous rock, such as granite; sandy sedimentary rock, such as limestone and sandstone; and crystalline, metamorphic rock, such as marble.

This is in contrast to kiln-dried masonry materials such as brick and architectural terra cotta. Terra cotta (Latin word "cooked earth"), refers to a high grade clay, which, mixed with sand or with pulverized fired clay, can be molded and fired at high temperatures to a hardness and compactness not obtainable with brick. Terra-cotta clays vary widely in color according to geography and types, ranging from red and brown to white.⁴¹³

Cast stone is basically a mixture of water, sand, coarse aggregate, and cementing agents. High quality cast stone was frequently "cut" or tooled. It was most often cast in molds of wood, plaster, or sand. Terra cotta and cast stone, however, are often handled in the same manner as natural stone.⁴¹⁴

Deterioration found in the Section's masonry artwork ranged from spalling, pitting, and hairline cracks to large cracks caused by movement of the substrate plaster wall. Detailed condition assessment would be necessary before any conservation work is executed. Preliminary cleaning using water, detergent, and a natural or nylon bristle brush before a detailed inspection is advised. Infrared scanning is an option that can determine if a less firm attachment is present by recording different thermal properties. Metal detection, another non-destructive procedure, will indicate where, if any, metal anchoring is present.⁴¹⁵

Before conservation cleaning of stone, brick, architectural terra cotta, or cast stone, you must identify what is to be removed. Soot and smoke, for example, require a different cleaning agent than oil stains or metallic stains. Other common cleaning problems included biological growth such as mold or mildew, and organic matter such as the tendrils left on masonry after removal of ivy.

There are also similar aspects to consider before cleaning, which include historic appearance, practicalities of cleaning, and a need to identify prior treatments and to choose the appropriate cleaner and, generally, use the gentlest means possible. Cleaning methods differ widely in their ability to remove soil and to avoid damage. In general, the more aggressive the cleaning method, the more tenacious the soiling it can remove, but at the price of a greater degree of damage.⁴¹⁶

The categories of cleaning commonly used on historic masonry are:

1. Water-based methods (principally for limestone and marble): fine sprays (mists), water sprays with and without pressure, hot or cold water, steam.
2. Chemical methods (principally for sandstones, brick, terra cotta, and granite; but also for limestone): acidic and alkaline solutions.
3. Poultices and packs (most substrates): acid, alkaline, and neutral pastes.

4. Air abrasive and mechanical methods: wet and dry abrasive, micro-abrasive, surface redressing.

Within each category of cleaning there is a very wide variation in the applied processes. It is therefore possible to select methods within each category that may be safe, while others will be damaging. However, to disregard the use of any one category of cleaning without a full understanding of its versified applications is unnecessary. The success of a cleaning project relies heavily on consistent application and a high level of skill.⁴¹⁷

One possible technique to consider is soaking. Prolonged spraying or misting with water is especially effective with limestone and marble. Soaking is often used in combination with water washing and followed by a final water rinse. Soaking is slow and may take several days or a week.

Water washing with low-pressure or medium-pressure water is another recommended technique. The force is usually measured by pounds per square inch (psi). Experts suggest to start with low pressure (100 psi or less) and, if necessary, to increase the pressure (up to 300-400 psi). Scrubbing with natural or synthetic bristle brushes (never metal) is an accepted practice.

Water washing with detergents is another accepted technique. However it should be pointed out that non-ionic detergents are not the same as soaps and should be followed by a water rinse. The use of brushes to facilitate cleaning is permissible.

Steam or hot-pressurized water cleaning is often effective for acid-sensitive stones and on ridding the material of dried plant materials. The technique is sometimes also appropriate for cleaning interior masonry and carved stone details.

Removing paint, stains, or graffiti from most types of stone may be accomplished by a chemical treatment carefully selected to best handle the removal of the particular type of paint or stain without damaging the stone.⁴¹⁸ Chemical cleaners used to remove dirt and soiling include acids, alkalis, and organic compounds. Acidic cleaners should not be used on masonry that is acid sensitive. Paint removers are alkaline solvents. Both Alkaline and acidic cleaning treatments include the use of water and are likely to contain surfactants (wetting agents). Generally, the masonry is wetted prior to the use of both types of cleaners. The chemical cleaner is then sprayed on at very low pressure or brushed onto the surface. The cleaner is left to dwell on the masonry for an amount of time recommended by the product manufacturer or, preferably, determined by testing, and rinsed off with a low- or moderate-pressure cold or sometimes hot water wash. The masonry surface may be scrubbed lightly with natural or synthetic bristle brushes prior to rinsing. After rinsing, pH strips should be applied to the surface to ensure that the masonry has been neutralized completely. More than one application of cleaner may be necessary. Terra cotta usually reacts well to this type of procedure. Acidic cleaners can generally be used on granite, most sandstones, slate, unglazed brick, and unglazed architectural terra cotta, cast stone, and concrete. Most commercial acidic cleaners are composed primarily of hydrofluoric acid and often include some phosphoric acid to prevent rust-like stains from developing on the masonry after the cleaning. Acid cleaners that are applied to pre-wet masonry should be kept wet while the acid is allowed to work, and then removed with a water wash. However, an acidic cleaner might harm a possible polished finish. Alkaline cleaners should be used on limestone, polished and unpolished marble, calcareous sandstone, glazed brick, and glazed architectural terra cotta, and polished granite.

If the stains have penetrated the granite, they are best removed by using a poultice (an absorbent material mixed with a liquid solvent or remover). Poulticing to remove stains and graffiti often is best for the removal of graffiti and stains. A poultice consists of an absorbent material or clay powder (such as kaolin or fuller's earth, or even shredded paper or paper towels), mixed with a liquid (a solvent or other remover), to form a paste, which is applied to the stain. The poultice is kept moist and left on the stain as long as necessary. As it dries, the paste absorbs the staining material so that it is not re-deposited on the masonry surface.

Generally, abrasive cleaning methods are not appropriate for use on historic masonry buildings. Abrasive cleaning can be safely used to clean some materials (though not historic). Finely-powdered walnut shells are commonly used for cleaning monumental bronze sculpture. Finely detailed stone features of museum objects are sometimes cleaned with small, micro-abrasive units using aluminum oxide. Although some communities use baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) to remove graffiti, it can permanently etch the graffiti into the stone and can leave potentially damaging salts in the stone which cannot be removed. Occasionally, it may be possible to clean a small area of rough-cut granite, limestone, or sandstone having a heavy dirt encrustation by using the "wet grit" method, whereby a small amount of abrasive material is injected into a controlled, pressurized water stream. However, this technique requires very careful supervision in order to prevent damage to the stone. Polished or honed marble or granite should never be treated abrasively; the abrasion would remove the finish. It is generally preferable to underclean than to expose a new and increased surface area to collect atmospheric moisture and dirt.

Any method that involves water should not be carried out in cold weather because of the possibility of freezing. Ideally the temperature should not be below fifty degrees

Fahrenheit. Certain acid-based cleaners can leave a hazy residue if left on too long.

Hydrochloric acid can also leave calcium fluoride salts or a colloidal silica, which may be impossible to remove. Some alkaline cleaners, such as sodium hydroxide and ammonium bifluoride, can also damage or leave disfiguring brownish-yellow stains.

Theoretically, for repair work, cementitious grouts are most appropriate for reattaching separated facings of terra cotta pieces, but hairline fissures may require the use of resin adhesives. Low-viscosity epoxies have been used for this purpose and may be applied through small injection ports. Holes made for adhesive injection will require patching after re-attachment is complete.⁴¹⁹

The maintenance of stone sculptures requires periodic washing: steam, spray, or trickled water, depending on the porosity of the stone. Broken sculptures may be mended with clear, cold-setting adhesives, sometimes mixed with a suitable colored filler, or by means of dowelling. Large pieces are held together by metal dowels, usually of copper, stainless steel, or brass.⁴²⁰

Each piece of artwork presents unique preservation challenges. Materials, problems, and solutions vary, yet all merit the effort to meet these challenges.

Chapter Seven: Funding

Financial resources are almost always an issue when restoration or conservation is needed, whether only cleaning is warranted or major restoration work necessary.

There are a number of avenues that can be pursued to acquire funding for the restoration of the Section of Fine Arts' artwork.

Because a majority of the murals are the property of the GSA, postmasters can request funds from the district headquarters in Grand Rapids (contact Chuck De Pomarius, Project Manager, P.O. Box 9991, Grand Rapids, MI 49599-9991, James M. Anton, Contracting Officer), or the National headquarters in Washington D.C. (Dallan Wordekemper, Federal Preservation Officer, 4301 Wilson Blvd. Ste. 300, Arlington VA 22203-1861 [703-526-2779]). In 2008, the USPS is celebrating the 75th anniversary of the establishment of the Section of Fine Arts and so is actively pursuing the restoration and recovery of the artwork. However, postmasters are encouraged to seek additional funds elsewhere, including local fundraising and grants.

Grants and fundraising are essential for those pieces that are owned by museums and other non-profit institutions. Possible organizations to look toward for funding include *The National Endowment for the Arts* (www.arts.endow.gov) *The Getty Foundation* (www.getty.edu/grants/), *The AT&T Foundation* (www.att.com/foundation), *Save America's Treasures* (www.2.cr.nps.gov/treasures), and *Rescue Public Murals* (rescuepublicmurals.com). *Save Outdoor Sculpture* (sos@heritagepreservation.org) offers not only funding but also assessment forms, survey questionnaires, maintenance guides, and help in selecting a conservator.

There are also a number of grants with a field of interest of Michigan art and/or history. The *Americana Foundation* (fluhart5@msu.edu), whose purpose and activities include the preservation of the American Heritage, and the *Taubman Endowments for the Arts* (248-358-7207), with a field of interest that includes arts and historic preservation, are two of several foundations that would possibly support the restoration of Section murals. The *Joanne Nicolay Foundation* (313-844-3700) supports historical activities in both Michigan and Tennessee.

There are numerous foundations that are geographically limited to a county or community. Those that pertain to the areas in which Michigan Section artwork exists include the *Community Foundation of Monroe County* (<http://www.cfmnroe.org/>), the *Grand Rapids Community Foundation* (www.grfoundation.org), the *Kantzler Foundation* (989- 892-0591), and the *Frank N. Andersen Foundation* (contact Gerald Barber: 989-777-2361); the latter two support the Bay City and Saginaw area projects.

Several of the postmasters I spoke with were unaware of the restoration efforts of the USPS. Others were unaware of optional funding sources. Funding and finding reputable art conservationists are key components that the stewards of the Section artwork have faced. Along with education of the significance of the history and significance of the artwork, these appear to be key factors in the preservation of these pieces.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

The Section of Fine Arts' art-in-architecture created public and permanent cultural artifacts that expressed and recorded American beliefs, values, and stories for future generations. Though many of these artworks have been saved, others have been neglected, mistreated, or forgotten. This project focuses on The Section's post office art installations in Michigan.

Although The Section of Fine Arts was one of FDR's New Deal programs of the Depression era, it was not a WPA project but instead operated under the auspices of the Treasury Department. The program utilized symbols of the common man to tie together a nation's scattered and often isolated communities, to promote a common heritage and purpose, and to relate the past to the present while giving hope for the future.

The documentation of these art-in-architecture projects is essential as is the need to conserve them. Although challenging, the effort is vital to ensure the survival of these records of an important and distinctive American chapter. This is especially true in light of the fact that in 2008 we will be celebrating the 75th anniversary of the New Deal programs.

The study design was quantitative. The research and documentation was compiled using both primary and secondary sources. Information concerning the art and the artists was collected from a variety of primary sources, including but not limited to on-site observation and assessment, archival documents and photographs, interviews, and local newspaper and magazine articles. Several books were used as secondary sources to gather background information on the Section of Fine Arts program, the key personnel involved, and New Deal programs in general. Artist biographical information, artistic influences, and historical context also relied heavily on the use of these references. Recommended conservation and

preservation techniques were researched using well-respected books, the National Park Service's *Preservation Briefs*, and experts in the field. Research involving government agencies and policies including the General Services Administration (GSA) and The Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1979 was conducted using on-line resources, publications, and contacts through emails and by phone. Local, regional, and national sources were utilized in this thesis and encompass the listed primary and secondary sources. The artwork and its media, style, and subject were explored using secondary and primary sources, with on-site visits playing a key role in the analysis of this aspect of the research. The status and condition of the artwork were also assessed through on-site visits and research. On selected artworks, the condition of the artwork was analyzed for recommendation of appropriate conservation techniques. This encompassing information contributed to observations and conclusions on the significance of the artwork in the thesis.

Although the Section of Fine Arts, a non-relief program, was relatively small compared to other New Deal programs, its impact was formidable not only in employing artists and advancing many careers but also in establishing American art as a visual record of art inspired by a unique time in our Nation's history.

Key figures who played vital roles in the creation and support of the Section of Fine Arts included Edward Rowan, Olin Dows, George Biddle, and FDR. However, without the determination and dedication of Edward Bruce, the Section would not have been as successful as it was. Olin Dows writes in *The New Deal's Treasury Art Program: A Memoir* that he found it difficult "to convey the sense of hope, excitement, and enthusiasm that the early New Deal Days inspired. Edward Bruce personified it at its best."⁴²¹

The Section employed artists through competitions and commissions. While the Section did have restrictions on the art created, most artists were able to work with those limitations, were grateful for the opportunity, and felt that participating in the program helped them grow as an artist. Although the artists involved were from varied backgrounds and influences with different levels of experience and expertise, all played a role in creating a piece of visual history. Interviews conducted with two Section artists, Frank Cassara and Joseph Lasker, not only supported these findings but also were inspiring and enjoyable.

Although there were issues of compromise and expectations among the Section, the artist, and the community, most pieces were well-received by all parties. Post offices often requested information about the artwork and the artist to display. Many of these information sheets are still on display (see Appendix B).

Forty-seven sites were documented throughout the state, including seven in the Upper Peninsula and one endangered mural that once hung in Lincoln Park's post office and is currently housed on Beaver Island. Several previous or last-known sites were also documented.

Artwork that the United States Postal Service had listed as "missing" has been located. The mural that at one time was installed in the now-demolished Dearborn post office and then in the Henry Ford Community College Library was crated and forgotten in an electrical storage room at the college. Two of the three cherry wood high-relief sculptures that were created for the Traverse City post office have been traced to a retired dentist living in that area. The United States Postal Service Facilities Specialist and the preservation artists involved in Section artwork were alerted to the status of those that were missing or in an endangered condition. The USPS plans to reclaim the found pieces.

Although not all the missing artwork has been located, the search is continuing with those communities becoming interested and involved in the search. Contacts and communication has begun the process of saving those pieces that are endangered. For instance, interviews conducted concerning the missing mural of the City of Wayne's post office disclosed that a mural was painted over during a renovation. Although inconclusive, an exposure would reveal the nature of the artwork.

My findings and observations are quite diverse. Although the styles, subject matter, and media vary, certain themes were prevalent as was the influence of the Regionalist artists of the time. Many of the artists employed for Michigan Section work had Midwest ties. While some of the artists were established and well-known, others were young and inexperienced. Most of the Section artworks created are murals; sculptures are in the minority, with most of those produced in relief form.

Not only are there a wide range of conditions of the art, but also of the communities' original reaction to the art and their current awareness of the artwork. Some communities are well aware of the significance and the history of the artwork, while others are barely cognizant of the artwork's existence. Several murals have recently been restored; other communities have applied for funding for restoration, while others were not aware of possible funding sources.

The Section of Fine Arts did influence the art scene in the United States. The program encouraged young, developing artists and helped to sustain those that were established. Goals of providing quality art for a wide public, developing American art, and encouraging national values were, at least partially, realized. However, the hopes and dreams for the continuation and expansion of the program resulting in a sustainable government agency that would act as

a patron of the arts was not achieved. In *W.P.A. art in America; regional study of Michigan*, a 1939 thesis written by Sidney W. Seeley, the author states that the government sponsored art programs had facilitated "...one of the greatest art movements in history...government art seems destined to fill a future place in our cultural development" and had "cemented a bond between the American people and public art." Seeley predicted that someday a "Department of Art will be a member of the President's Cabinet." Such enthusiasm and optimism in spite of the economic circumstances of the time was widespread within the art culture and those involved in the government art programs. Our nation's involvement in World War II was at least partially responsible for their demise.

The artwork of the Depression era, as a whole, has suffered from lack of available information, understanding, and appreciation. With the passage of time, a new perspective can be gained in the appreciation of The Section Fine Art projects and all New Deal programs. Continued research and communication with the guardians of the artwork is warranted. With the New Deal anniversary drawing near, the time is ripe for expanding research and documentation to include other New Deal projects. Conducting interviews with those who participated in these projects should be a priority as their numbers are quickly dwindling. As time goes on, the trails that lead to findings will become more difficult to follow. The varied projects under the New Deal are a part of our nation's story and should be recognized for the significance they hold for telling the compelling story of this chapter of American history.

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APPENDIX

**APPENDIX A-1: Sample Correspondence
(Involving Howell Post Office Mural)**

HOWELL, MICH., P. O.
X SECTION OF FINE ARTS



PUBLIC BUILDINGS BRANCH
IN REPLYING, QUOTE THE ABOVE SUB-
JECT, BUILDING, AND THESE LETTERS PB- SA-FA

TREASURY DEPARTMENT
PROCUREMENT DIVISION
WASHINGTON

January 30, 1939

Postmaster,
Howell, Michigan.

Dear Sir:

Pursuant to the policy of the Treasury Department of installing mural and sculptural decorations in certain Federal buildings, you are informed that Mr. J. Brozik has been commissioned to execute a mural decoration for the Howell, Michigan, Post Office.

The artist expects to visit the building in the near future and will call on you at that time. Any courtesy you can extend him will be greatly appreciated by this office.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "J. R. Barton".

Acting Supervising Architect.

Image Credit: Howell Library Archives.

**APPENDIX A-2: Sample Correspondence
(Involving Howell Post Office Mural)**

DIVISION OF
ENGINEERING AND
RESEARCH

Post Office Department
FOURTH ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL

IN REPLYING
MENTION INITIALS AND DATE
ER:WC:MP

Washington September 18, 1939.

Postmaster,

Howell, Michigan.

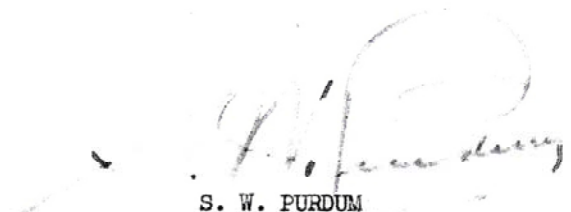
My dear Postmaster:

The Federal Works Agency has advised that J. Brozik is completing a mural decoration to be installed by him over the Postmaster's door in the public lobby of the Post Office building.

Kindly advise whether the proposed mural will interfere in any way with the ventilation, clocks, or take up wall space that may be needed for public lobby bulletin boards. You are informed that permission for installation of this mural should not be granted by you until definite advice to that effect has been received from this Bureau.

Further instructions will be issued upon receipt of your reply.

Respectfully yours,



S. W. PURDUM
Fourth Assistant

Image Credit: Howell Library Archives.

APPENDIX A-3: Sample Correspondence
(Involving Howell Post Office Mural)

2nd

Howell, Michigan
September 20, 1939

Fourth Assistant Postmaster General
Division of Engineering and Research
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

In reply to your letter of September 18th(ER:WC:MP) regarding the installing of a mural decoration in the lobby of the Howell Post Office Building I wish to state, that there are some reasons why it should not go above the Postmaster's door.

In the beginning the door is in a darkened corner of the lobby and is shadowed by the vestibule and by a large light globe that hangs directly in front of the space above the door. These two factors make it almost impossible for anyone entering the lobby to see clearly the space where it is proposed to place the mural. Again, the space above the door is only four and one half feet in height, and so while it is long enough(about 16 feet) there would be practically no margin above and below the picture. 0

On the other hand there is an excellent clear space of wall directly in front of the main door on that part of the lobby above the service windows, which is well lighted and right in view of all people entering and leaving the building, it would seem should be the proper place for the hanging of this decoration. This space is large and would give it the setting and work should have.

We await further instructions from your office.

Respectfully yours

Alfred H. Pfsu, Postmaster

Image Credit: Howell Library Archives.

**APPENDIX A-4: Sample Correspondence
(Involving Howell Post Office Mural)**

DIVISION OF
ENGINEERING AND
RESEARCH

Post Office Department

FOURTH ASSISTANT POSTMASTER GENERAL

IN REPLYING
MENTION INITIALS AND DATE

ER:WC:MP

Washington September 25, 1939.

Postmaster,

Howell, Michigan.

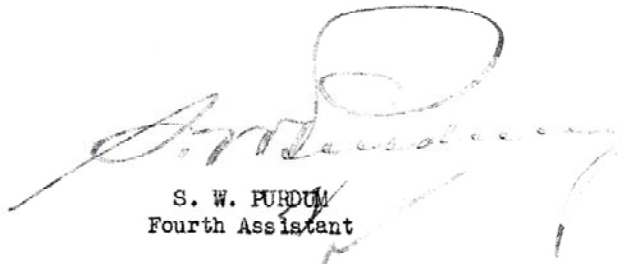
My dear Postmaster:

Reference is made to your letter dated September 20, 1939, relative to the proposed installation of a mural decoration over the Postmaster's office door in the public lobby of the Post Office building.

Owing to the fact that mural decorations above the service windows eliminate the ventilators, approval is not given to installations of this kind, and your suggestion in this respect is therefore not approved.

However, authority is hereby granted to permit installation of the mural decoration above the Postmaster's office door in the public lobby.

Respectfully yours,



S. W. PURDUM
Fourth Assistant

Image Credit: Howell Library Archives.

APPENDIX A-5: Sample Correspondence
(Involving Howell Post Office Mural)

United States Post Office

2 nd CLASS

IN REPLYING
MENTION INITIALS AND DATE

Howell, Michigan
October 11, 1940

Mr. J. Brozik
Flint, Michigan

Dear Sir;

This is to advise you that this office concurs with the opinion of the Department as to the mural decorations to be placed in this office.

At such time when you are to do the work at this office we will be pleased to cooperate in any manner that we are able.

Very truly yours,

Alfred H. Pfau, Postmaster.

Image Credit: Howell Library Archives.

THE FLINT INSTITUTE OF ARTS
FLINT MICHIGAN

**APPENDIX A-6: Sample Correspondence
(Involving Howell Post Office Mural)**

*Flint, Michigan
January 14th 1941*

*Mr. Alfred H. Pfau
Howell, Michigan*

Dear Postmaster;

We are finally able to proceed with the placing of my mural. In order to avoid confusion we have made arrangements to have the mural installed this coming Sunday morning January 19th at 9 o'clock. It will be necessary for us to have 2 ladders and a plank 8 or 10 feet long. Are these available at the Post Office and is it possible to have your janitor there at that time? It will take us 5 or 6 hours at least. Trusting that this is agreeable to you otherwise would you kindly write or wire collect telling me of your preference in this matter.

*Sincerely
Jaroslav Brozik*

*3110 Pencombe
Apt. 22C. Flint, Michigan.*

Image Credit: Howell Library Archives.

**APPENDIX A-7: Sample Correspondence
(Involving Howell Post Office Mural)**

United States Post Office

2nd _____ CLASS

IN REPLYING
MENTION INITIALS AND DATE

Howell, Michigan
January 20, 1941

Treasury Department
Procurement Division
Washington, D.C.

Dear Sir:

This is to notify you that Mr. J. Brozik has placed the mural referred to in your letter of January 30, 1939 (PB-SA-FA) on the wall in the lobby of the Howell Post Office Building. This was completed and is approved by this office on January 19th.

Respectfully yours

Alfred H. Pfau, Postmaster

Image Credit: Howell Library Archives.

APPENDIX A-8: Sample Correspondence
(Involving Howell Post Office Mural)

HOWELL, MICH., P. O.

FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY
PUBLIC BUILDINGS ADMINISTRATION

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

IN REPLYING, QUOTE THE ABOVE SUB-
JECT, BUILDING, AND THESE LETTERS FA

WASHINGTON

January 24, 1941

Postmaster
United States Post Office
Howell, Michigan

Dear Sir:

Mr. Jaroslav Brozik has informed this office that his mural has been installed in the Howell, Michigan Post Office.

From photographs the mural appears to be a real addition to the decoration of the building.

We would appreciate a report from you relative to the satisfactory installation, and if any comments appear in your newspapers we would be very much interested in seeing them.

Cordially yours,

Edward B. Rowan
Assistant Chief
Section of Fine Arts

Image Credit: Howell Library Archives.

APPENDIX A-9: Sample Correspondence
(Involving Howell Post Office Mural)

2 nd

Howell, Michigan
January 27, 1941

Mr. Edward B. Rowan
Assistant Chief
Section of Fine Arts
Federal Works Agency
Washington D. C.

Dear Sir:

Your letter of January 24, initials FA, received to which I am inclosing the local paper picture and article relative to the mural painting recently hung in this office.

This mural was installed on January 13, 1941, in a most satisfactory manner and created a great deal of comment from the patrons of our office. The accompanying picture and article from the Livingston County Republican Press, printed here in Howell, reflects the interest of the community.

Trusting that this answers your inquiry, I remain,

Very truly yours,

Alfred H. Pfau, Postmaster.

Image Credit: Howell Library Archives.

**APPENDIX A-10: Sample Correspondence
(Involving Howell Post Office Mural)**

Howell, Michigan P.O.

FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY
PUBLIC BUILDINGS ADMINISTRATION

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

IN REPLYING, QUOTE THE ABOVE SUB-
JECT, BUILDING, AND THESE LETTERS

FA

WASHINGTON

29 January, 1941.

Mr. Alfred H. Pfau,
Postmaster,
Howell, Michigan.

Dear Mr. Pfau:

Thank you very much for your report relative to the satisfactory installation of the mural by Mr. J. Brozik for the Howell, Michigan Post Office.

If any cleaning is necessary a dry soft cloth may be used for dusting the mural. Should this not be adequate, further instructions will be furnished by this office upon request. It is very important to use the proper technique in cleaning, which varies according to the medium with which the mural has been painted. If the walls surrounding the mural require repainting or cleaning, care should be taken to see that the mural is covered before such work is undertaken.

I also wish to take this opportunity to thank you for your kind cooperation in connection with this work.

Cordially yours,



Edward B. Rowan
Assistant Chief
Section of Fine Arts.

Image Credit: Howell Library Archives.

**APPENDIX A-11: Sample Correspondence
(Involving Howell Post Office Mural)**

Howell, Michigan P.O.

FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY
PUBLIC BUILDINGS ADMINISTRATION

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

IN REPLYING, QUOTE THE ABOVE SUB-
JECT, BUILDING, AND THESE LETTERS

FA

WASHINGTON

February 4, 1941.

Mr. Alfred H. Pfau
Postmaster
Howell, Michigan.

Dear Mr. Pfau:

Thank you very much for your report relative to the satisfactory installation of the mural by Mr. J. Brozik for the Howell, Michigan Post Office.

It is gratifying to know that the mural is an addition to the decoration of the building.

If any cleaning is necessary a dry soft cloth may be used for dusting the mural. Should this not be adequate, further instructions will be furnished by this office upon request. It is very important to use the proper technique in cleaning, which varies according to the medium with which the mural has been painted. If the walls surrounding the mural require repainting or cleaning, care should be taken to see that the mural is covered before such work is undertaken.

I also wish to take this opportunity to thank you for your kind cooperation in connection with this work, and for the newspaper clipping enclosed with your letter.

Cordially yours,



Edward B. Rowan
Assistant Chief
Section of Fine Arts.

APPENDIX B-1: Sample Mural Descriptions

Issued by the Section of Fine Arts

MURAL PAINTING BY RAINEY BENNETT

"CONRAD TEN EYCK'S TAVERN ON CHICAGO ROAD"

Dearborn Michigan Post Office	This mural (oil on canvas) was executed by Rainey Bennett of Chicago, Illinois. Mr. Bennett received this commission as the result of competent designs submitted in a Section of Fine Arts open anonymous competition.
Description of Mural	Pioneers in their trek westward are shown approaching the warmth of the famous Ten Eyck Tavern. Conrad Ten Eyck was well known for his broad hospitality. Plump geese, baskets of fruit, rolling fields, a healthy group of people, a high key in color throughout comprise the material elements of the spirit that the artist feels still exists in Michigan.
Note on the Artist	Rainey Bennett was born July 26, 1907 in Marion, Indiana. He attended the Art Institute of Chicago where he studied with Edmund Giesberg and Francis Chapin; the University of Chicago where he received a Bachelor of Philosophy degree and majored in Art History; the Art Students' League of New York, where he studied with Eugene Fitch; and the George Grosz-Maurice Sterne School. He exhibited his work at the International Water Color Exhibitions at the Chicago Art Institute in 1931, 1934, 1935 and 1936. He won the William Tuthill Prize in 1937; and was on the jury in 1938. His murals include one for the People's Gas Company, Illinois, for the 1933 Century of Progress; eight panels for the Illinois Research and Educational Hospitals under the Federal Art Project; one panel in the Cook County Nurses Home; eighteen panels for the Chicago Home for Jewish Orphans and ten stained glass window sections for the Steimetz High School. Under the program of the Section of Fine Arts Mr. Bennett has executed a mural in the Rushville, Illinois, Post Office.
Section of Fine Arts	The aim of the Section of Fine Arts is to secure murals and sculpture of distinguished quality appropriate to the embellishment of Federal buildings. Approximately 1% of the total of limit of cost of the buildings is reserved for this decoration. The Section holds open anonymous competitions, national, regional, state or local to which all citizen artists of the United States are eligible. A different jury of painters or sculptors, unattached to the Section, judges each competition. The jury members are selected on the basis of experience and knowledge. They are called upon to judge the intrinsic quality of the painting or the sculpture and its relationship to its setting.

SECTION OF FINE ARTS
PUBLIC BUILDINGS ADMINISTRATION
FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY

(Mural painted in 1938) Image Credit: Henry Ford Community College.

APPENDIX B-2: Sample Mural Descriptions
Issued by the Section of Fine Arts

MURAL PAINTING BY JOSEPH LASKER

"COPPER MINING IN CALUMET"

Calumet, Michigan Post Office

The mural painting in the public lobby was executed by Joseph Lasker of Brooklyn, New York. Mr. Lasker received his commission as a result of an Honorable Mention in a Section of Fine Arts competition.

Description of Mural

This painting is a composite design depicting the various activities in a copper mine. The figures of the miners are typical of those who work in the Michigan mines.

Note on the Artist

Joseph A. Lasker was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1919. He is a graduate of the Cooper Union Night Art School where he studied under Byron Thomas, Wallace Harrison and Ernest Fiene. Mr. Lasker has exhibited at the St. Louis Art Museum and in the Section of Fine Arts Forty-Eight States Competition at the Corcoran Gallery in Washington, D.C. His other work for the Section of Fine Arts includes a mural for the United States Post Office in Millbury, Massachusetts.

Section of Fine Arts

The aim of the Section of Fine Arts is to secure murals and sculpture of distinguished quality appropriate to the embellishment of Federal Buildings. Approximately 1% of the total of limit of cost of the buildings is reserved for this decoration. The Section holds open anonymous competitions, national, regional, state or local, to which all citizen artists of the United States are eligible. A different jury of painters or sculptors, unattached to the Section, judges each competition. The jury members are selected on the basis of experience and knowledge. They are called upon to judge the intrinsic quality of the painting or the sculpture and its relationship to its setting.

SECTION OF FINE ARTS
PUBLIC BUILDINGS ADMINISTRATION
FEDERAL WORKS AGENCY
1941

Image Credit: Postmaster, Calumet, Michigan.

APPENDIX C-1: Articles and Photographs
Cherries in Post Office



Placing a final decorative touch to the Federal building at the corner of Union and State streets, Marion Overby, prominent Michigan sculptress and wood carver, gave personal supervision to the hanging of a set of her own wood carvings in the post office lobby. The carving, composed of three separate sections, is made from solid cherry and painstakingly carved by hand. The motif is appropriately a cherry picker with an overflowing basket of ripe fruit as the main unit. A limb of a cherry tree forms a smaller section and a small figure of a child balances the entire scene. The actual carving of the scene took six months of full time work and represents the second design Miss Overby has been commissioned by the government to make. She is connected with the Cranbrook Academy of Art at Bloomfield Hills.

(Record-Eagle photo)

Forty-five years ago the Grand Army of The Republic was an active and influential organization and it was in September, 1896, that these veterans of the Civil War held their reunion in this city, the camp being just east of the Pennsylvania tracks on East Front street. This was the fife and drum corps which furnished the martial music for the event. The young fellow in the front row with the fife is Clayton Cole, county supervisor and airport manager, who was drafted by the veterans to help out the band. In the center, with the big bass drum, is the late F. D. Marvin. Perhaps early residents may recognize some of the other veterans.

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APPENDIX C-2: Articles and Photographs



The mural above the entrance of the Bronson Post Office was painted by Arthur Getz, who died of a stroke Jan. 26.

Staff Photo by Michelle Conklin

Artist Who Painted Post Office Mural Dies at 82

Arthur Getz, the artist who depicted a slice of life in a farming community in his "Harvest" mural at the Bronson Post Office, died of a stroke Jan. 26 at the age of 82.

Even though Getz may be known locally for his mural, he was more widely known for his 210 covers on *The New Yorker* magazine. According to wire reports, Getz sold his first cover to the magazine in 1936. His last cover was on the Aug. 29, 1988 issue. The majority of his covers for the magazine were scenes of city life.

Getz also did covers for other magazines, including *Esquire* and *The New Republic*.

Getz also painted murals in other post offices, including New York, Lancaster, Pa. and Luverne, Ala.

Getz was born in Passaic, New Jersey on May 17, 1913. He studied at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn and spent six months in Africa drawing and painting.

Getz was an artist who explored a variety of artistic forms of expression, including painting in oil and watercolor, industrial designing for architectural metal work, illustrating and cartooning.

At the time the mural was commissioned in Bronson, Getz claimed New York City as his home. He received the commission as a result of an honorable mention in a Section of Fine Arts national competition of the Public Buildings Administration. The mural was painted with casein tempers on a gesso panel.

Image Credit: Postmaster, Bronson, Michigan.

APPENDIX C-3: Articles and Photographs



The mural located in the lobby of the Fenton Post Office was painted in 1942. When the present post office was opened in 1985, the mural was moved.

Photo by Brian Dawley

Famous artist designed Fenton mural

by Jan Rymearson

No doubt you have noticed the large mural on the wall in the lobby of the Fenton Post Office.

It was painted in February of 1942 on the lobby wall of the post office located on E. Caroline in the building now occupied by A. J. Phillips Library.

When the new office on S. Leroy Street was opened in November of 1985, special arrangements were made to transfer the mural to the new building, very carefully.

Jerome Snyder, the artist, was assisted by Gertrude Goodrich, who later became his wife.

Just why Fenton was given the honor of a mural, no one seems to know, other than the fact that the post office was new and the WPA was commissioning murals at the time.

Dennis P. Kelleher was postmaster at the time the painting was done.

The first sketch was quite different from the final mural. It showed a farm family receiving a new tractor at a location near the Fenton Depot.

When the present factory scene was unveiled there was a great deal of controversy. Many Fentonites felt the subject matter did not depict Fenton, in spite of the fact that a great many people that lived in the village worked in General Motors plants in Flint. Fenton was considered a "bedroom community" at that time.

But through the years the mural has become an accepted part of Fenton and

newcomers or visitors now show great interest in the painting.

Fenton's former Assistant Postmaster George Paine became well acquainted with Snyder. During World War II, when Paine was transferred to New York City, he and his wife visited Mrs. Snyder in her Greenwich Village apartment. Snyder was then in the Army in Europe, a captain in the infantry.

Snyder, 60, died on Sunday, May 2, 1976 in New York's Central Park from a heart attack following a touch football game. At that time he called himself "the world's oldest touch football player". The weekly game in the park was started 40 years before.

Snyder's obituary, which appeared in the New York Times, noted that he painted the mural in the Fenton, Mich. post office.

At the time of his death he was co-author, along with fellow designer Milton Glazer, of "Underground Gourmet", a guide to inexpensive New York City restaurants, which appeared as a series in New York Magazine.

Snyder was a self-taught artist, a native of New York. He dropped out of art school after two days of frustration, but went on to become an award-winning illustrator and graphic designer. He was an innovator in bold style illustrating.

In 1941, Snyder and his wife-to-be won a competition to produce a four wall mural at the Social Security

Administration Building in Washington, D.C. It was after this mural was completed that the couple were commissioned to paint in Fenton.

Snyder spent two years teaching art to GI's at the Army University in Biarritz on the Bay of Biscayne, in southern France. There he assembled a portfolio that later was successful in highly competitive art. He also taught at Yale, Cooper Union, Pratt Institute and Parsons School of Design.

Snyder was the first art director of Sports Illustrated magazine, designed its well-known graphic format.

He spent a decade as art director of Scientific American and illustrated a number of children's and other books.

Snyder won numerous awards for the posters, brochures and advertisements he created as a commercial artist.

His work included one of the first paintings in the Container Corporation's Great Savings series of magazine ads.

A series of covers for Mark Cross Christmas catalogs brought him considerable standing with his profession.

His studio was on East 31st Street in NYC. He and his wife, who became a successful illustrator, made their home in Brooklyn Heights, N.Y.

Snyder's hobbies included dabbling in languages. He spoke Italian, French, Spanish and Chinese fluently and taught himself to read in Greek.

Image Credit: Fenton Post Office, Lobby.

APPENDIX C-4: Articles and Photographs



Ten Eyck's Tavern on Chicago by Rainey Bennett, Mural installed At Henry Ford Community College Library, 1977. Image Credit: Dearborn Historical Museum.

APPENDIX C-5: Articles and Photographs



'Rural Delivery' will go with post office

Mural to be taken to new post office

2/1/83
It's as much a part of the Howell post office as stamps and envelopes.

The item in question is the mural that covers the wall inside the post office. It's been a part of the Howell post office since it opened in 1932.

That's why Postmaster Delores Maidlow will be taking it with her when the post office moves to its new location in the next couple of years.

It has not yet been decided where the post office will move to.

"Everyone I've talked to, I've told them I was taking the painting with me," Maidlow said. "At first, we didn't think that was possible, because we thought it was painted right on the wall. Then we found out that it was painted onto a canvas. We discovered that because one corner of it started to peel off."

The mural, titled "Rural Delivery," was painted in the early 30s by Czechoslovakian-born artist Jaroslav

Brozik. As part of the depression-era program to keep artists busy, post offices throughout the country became galleries for out-of-work painters and other artists.

"I've seen many other post offices throughout the state which have art work done during the depression," Maidlow said. "The post office in Mason, for instance, has a metal casting in it."

Brozik's painting depicts a scene at Thompson Lake in Howell. In it, a man reads a postcard while he sits on his horse. Several ladies talk while a farmer plows his field in the background.

"It was intended to be a composite scene of several rural activities," Maidlow said.

Brozik, who was born in 1904, has several of his etchings and other works on display in the Cranbrook Institute in Bloomfield Hills, Maidlow said.

Image Credit: Howell Library Archives.

APPENDIX C-6: Articles and Photographs



Treadwell Newspaper Staff Photo by Sager (From our files, circa 1940)

Mural That Created Controversy

Here's the mural, recently hung in the Lincoln Park post office, which is creating considerable comment among patrons, many of the opinion that the artist overlooked many important items in his painting, including the propelling motive of the boat, because there are no oars, oarlocks, sails or motor visible. Local fishermen also point out that carp never was so plentiful in the Great Lakes that the fish would fight to get into the boat, as depicted by the artist, Voltan Sepeshy, teacher of art at Cranbrook. As for James Southers, superintendent of the local branch, he thinks that a more appropriate scene would be better for the Lincoln Park building, and also commented that he never saw a fishing boat "anchored to three hitching posts" as in the mural. He has appealed to Washington in the hope that another mural would be forthcoming.

Fish Is Theme of Post Office Mural Artist

Patrons of the Lincoln Park post office can breathe freely again – the long-awaited mural for the building lobby has been completed.

Framed over the door leading to James Southers' office, superintendent, the mural measures 5 by 14 feet, and depicts, according to the artist, a Great Lakes fishing scene.

But those who have inspected the mural more closely seem to disagree somewhat with the artist Voltan Sepeshy, teacher of art at Cranbrook.

The painting includes three fishermen, pulling in a mess of carp which would put the proverbial fishermen of Biblical days to shame. Hundreds of fish seem to vie for honors to be the first to get into the boat, which, strange to say, must have drifted into the lake, because there is no evidence of oar, oarlock, sail or motor.

The boat is fastened to what appears to be hitching posts, but there is no dock in view, and local art students wonder whether the posts are grounded to the bottom of the lake, or whether the fishermen have conceived some form of floating anchorage.

But the main feature of the mural is the muscles of the men, which stand out on the arms like those aching muscles in the liniment ads rather than belonging to men of the sea. Unquestionably, the men in the mural have larger muscles than were ever seen on three men at any one time.

Just why the Lincoln Park post office should depict a scene from the Great Lakes fisheries is what mainly puzzles Southers.

Image Credit: Lincoln Park Historical Museum.

APPENDIX C-7: Articles and Photographs



Zoltan Sepeshy working on the Lincoln Park mural in his studio. Photo Credit: Beaver Island Historical Museum.