

Rediscovering the People's Art

NEW DEAL MURALS IN PENNSYLVANIA'S POST OFFICES

DAVID LEMBECK

WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY



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

PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY

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

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

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

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

Mexican artists Diego Rivera (1886–1957), José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949), and David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896–1974) fueled Biddle’s enthusiasm. Their bold, colorful murals, mixing images of indigenous cultures and the iconography of Marxism, transformed the walls of government buildings into a celebration of the Mexican Revolution and its ideals. Roosevelt, however, had no use for Marxist propaganda. His New Deal agenda sought to reform capitalism, not dismantle it. Like Biddle, he understood that public art could be used to communicate civic values and uplift and ennoble a popula-

tion discouraged by the Great Depression. In December 1933, a pilot program, the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP), was created as a New Deal initiative. Although lasting just six months, PWAP employed thousands of artists to produce works for public buildings. On the basis of this early success, project administrators created a unit within the Treasury Department, the Section of Fine Art, known simply as “the Section.” Beginning in 1934, the Section sponsored competitions for commissions in large buildings open to all artists in the United States. Runners-up were awarded commissions for smaller post offices.

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

In many parts of the country, post office murals gave residents their first encounter with an original work of art. Pennsylvanians, however, had enjoyed a rich history of art some two hundred years before the Treasury Department’s programs began. Some of the most enduring images of the Commonwealth’s history—William Penn’s treaty with the Indians, George Washington crossing the Delaware River, and the delegates signing of the United States Constitution in Philadelphia—were created by artists who had lived or worked in Pennsylvania. Edward Redfield (1869–1965), Fern Coppedge (1883–1951), and like-minded artists settled in the artist colony at New Hope and became known as the Pennsylvania Impressionists. They captured the daily life and landscapes of surrounding Bucks County. A group of Pittsburgh landscape painters founded by George Hetzel (1826–1899), known as the Scalp Level School, worked in the mountains near Johnstown in the late nineteenth century. Folk artists such as Edward Hicks (1780–1849) created charming farmstead portraits of barns, fields, and livestock of nineteenth-century Pennsylvania. Thomas Eakins (1844–1916), considered by many to be America’s greatest painter, was an instructor at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia where he exhorted his students to “study their own country and to portray its life and types.” At the turn of the twentieth century, John Sloan (1871–1951), George Luks (1867–1933), William Glackens (1870–1938), and Everett Shinn (1876–1953), who worked as illustrators for the *Philadelphia Press*, found fame for their stark scenes of urban life known as the Ashcan School. In the 1920s and 1930s, artists Charles Sheeler (1883–1965), Charles Demuth (1883–1935), and Elsie Driggs (1898–1992) painted iconic subjects, among them Bucks County barns, Lancaster’s commercial architecture, and Pittsburgh’s industrial buildings, in a hard-edged, geometrical style known as Precisionism. These artists inspired those who later created the post office murals.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY

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

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

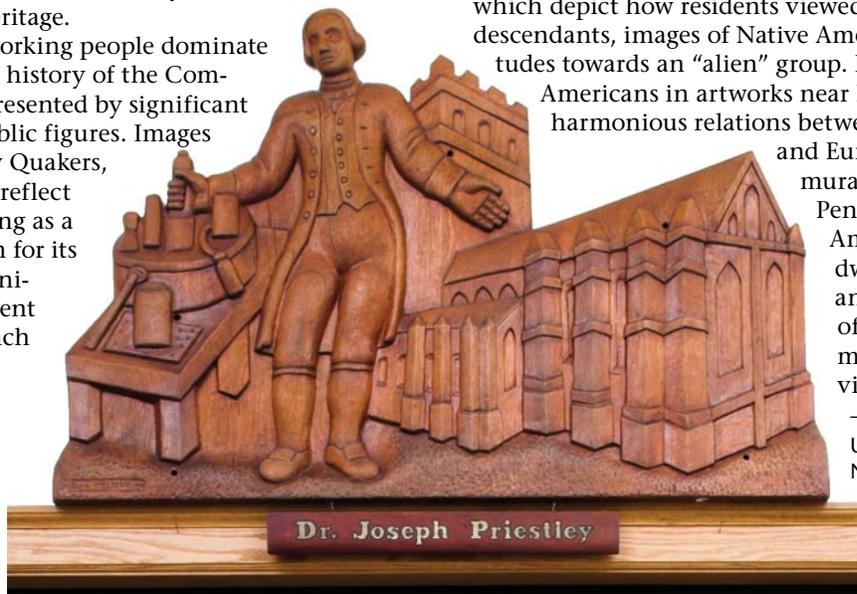
Portrayals of hardworking people dominate post office art, but the history of the Commonwealth is also represented by significant events and notable public figures. Images of William Penn, early Quakers, and Moravian settlers reflect Pennsylvania's founding as a religious haven known for its tolerance. Scenes chronicling the early settlement of the colony, the French and Indian War, the American Revolution, and the signing of the United States Constitution reflect the Keystone State's historical importance. Prominent

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

Pennsylvanians commemorated on post office walls include General "Mad Anthony" Wayne, military hero and statesman; Albert Gallatin, diplomat and the longest-serving treasury secretary; and Joseph Priestley, scientist and colleague of Benjamin Franklin, whose American home at Northumberland, Northumberland County, is administered by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) as a popular attraction on the Pennsylvania Trails of History™.

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

Pennsylvania portray Native Americans as exotic forest dwellers. Farther north and west, however, images of battles and displacement depict them as violent adversaries.



U.S. Post Office Building, Northumberland: Dina Melicov's red mahogany relief of theologian and scientist, *Dr. Joseph Priestley*, created in 1942.

PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY

THE PROCESS—*Susquehanna Trail*

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

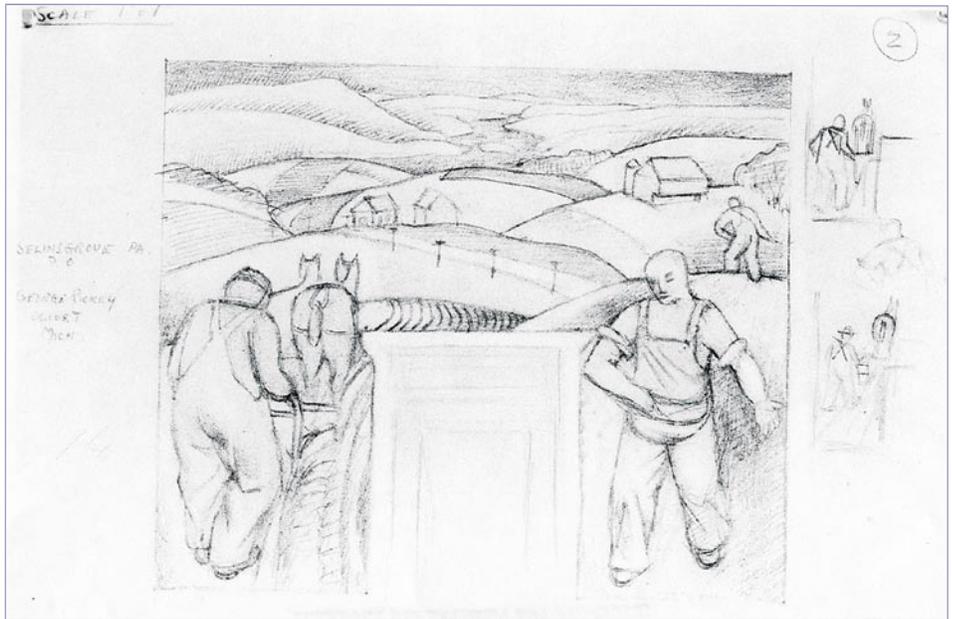
After receiving the commission, an artist was expected to visit the community to gather ideas. He or she would visit the postmaster and other townspeople, such as the mayor or librarian, who might suggest themes. The Selinsgrove postmaster favored a historical scene featuring Antoni Selin, the town's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

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

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

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

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



NATIONAL ARCHIVES



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

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



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION/ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART

U.S. Post Office Building, Drexel Hill: *Aborigines*, a wood relief created in 1942 by sculptor Concetta Maria Scaravaglione.

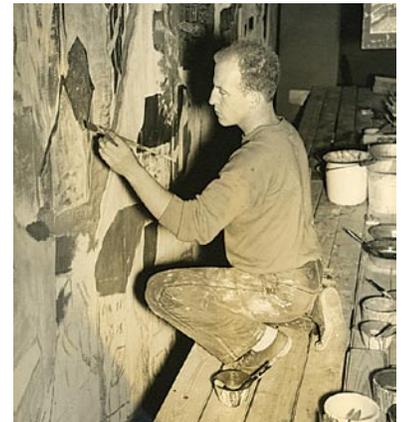
blackboards in the country. (PHMC installed several state historical markers commemorating Pennsylvania's slate industry, including one in Bangor in 1947.) Eighty-two artists won eighty-eight post office commissions for Pennsylvania. Some were established artists with national reputations, but many more were young unknowns whose commission afforded them their first public exposure. The majority resided in New York City, but many maintained Pennsylvania connections either by residency or through study at schools such as Philadelphia's venerable Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts or Pittsburgh's Carnegie Institute of Technology (since 1976, Carnegie Mellon University). Before America achieved international recognition as an artistic center, artists sought legitimacy in European education. Many of Pennsylvania's post office artists had some training in Europe, primarily in France. Sculptor Malvina Hoffman (1885–1966), whose beautifully carved *Coal Miners Returning from Work* for Mahanoy City, Schuylkill County, studied with Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) and later became his assistant. Eighteen of the eighty-two artists, about 22 percent, were female.



NATIONAL ARCHIVES

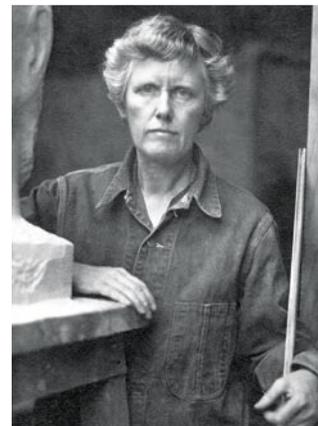
U.S. Post Office Building, Chester: Erwin Frederick Springweiler's 1938 aluminum bas relief portrays old and new, a popular theme, in *William Penn*.

The Section requested artists to work in the "American Scene" style. Section administrators vaguely defined the term, suggesting a straightforward realism portraying subjects easily recognizable by ordinary citizens. They forbade abstract and European-style modernism. The Section championed Midwestern Regionalists Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry as exemplars of the American Scene. The two murals for the Altoona Post Office, *Growth of the Road* and *Pioneers of Altoona*, with their dense groupings of figures are reminiscent of Benton's work. John Fulton Folinsbee (1892–1972), a Bucks County impressionist, painted beautiful landscapes for Freeland, Luzerne County, and Burgettstown, Washington County, employing loose brushwork and vivid color. His colleague, Harry Leith-Ross (1886–1973), chose instead to paint a formal, almost academic mural for his depiction of the Marquis de Lafayette and Albert Gallatin for the post office in Masontown, Fayette County. *Western Pennsylvania* by Niles Spencer (1893–1952) for Aliquippa, Beaver County, and *Beatty's Barn* by Peter Blume (1906–1992) for Canonsburg, Washington County, are best characterized as Precisionist murals with buildings and landscapes simplified to geometric shapes. In *Anthracite Coal* by George Harding (1882–1959) for Kingston, Luzerne County, the anxious determination on the miners' faces is registered in almost expressionist distortion and coloration. Harding, a painter of national reputation, enjoyed more leeway than most artists, but his mural was about as abstract as the Section would allow.



JAMES A. MICHENER ART MUSEUM

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



COURTESY PETER SHEFLER/CLEARSTORY STUDIOS

materials of wood, stone, and plaster. Carved walnut, mahogany, and maple provided a rustic look especially appropriate for the agricultural themes of the sculptural works in Blooms-

U.S. Post Office Building, Doylestown: Charles Child (above, right) painted *William Markham Purchases Bucks County Territory*. U.S. Post Office Building, Girard: Janet de Coux (left) sculpted wood relief *Vacation Time* in 1942.

burg, Columbia County, Hamburg, Berks County, and York, York County. Classically trained architectural sculptors Augustine Jaegers (1878–1952) and Leo Lentelli (1879–1961) created highly detailed and intricate bas relief panels. Some sculptures were executed in metal. *Iron Pouring* in Danville, originally designed in plaster, was cast in aluminum, more suggestive of the molten iron being poured. Josephine Mather's *Glass Making* in Ford City, Armstrong County, carved from a piece of Cararra glass, weds material and subject matter.

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

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

After a mural had been installed, it was too late to make alterations, but sometimes a cohesive and vocal community effort could influence the finished artwork. In 1936, the post office in Jeannette, Westmoreland County, a large neo-classical building, was to receive two murals, one of which depicted the community's major industry, glassmaking. The other depicted the 1763 Battle of Bushy Run, a violent skirmish in which British Highlanders and Royal American Redcoats fought Delaware, Shawnee, Mingo, and Huron warriors. Artist T. Frank Olson won the commission but died days after the Section approved his color sketches. His widow received payment for her husband's work, and the Section



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY

U.S. Post Office Building, Jeannette: Robert L. Lepper painted *The Battle of Bushy Run* for Frank T. Olson, who died. Lepper was pressured to add—but later remove—historical inaccuracies.

hired Robert Lepper (1906–1991), an art professor at the Carnegie Institute of Technology, to complete the murals. Lepper made a number of changes in the mural, taming the graphic violence of Olson's battle scene by removing the bayonets from Highlanders' muskets. In a newspaper article, Lepper explained the "post office murals are not intended to be viewed as pictures of events or activities but rather as decorations, symbolic of events and activities which stem from the past." In a letter to his supervisor, Jeannette's postmaster, Dillinger Shaffer, lodged his complaint that reflected local public opinion.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY

U.S. Post Office Building, Plymouth: *Mealtime with the Early Coal Miners* (1938) by Jared French, who painted the only nude in New Deal post office murals, despite warnings by government officials.

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

In a testy letter, the Section's Edward Rowan supported Lepper's alterations but ultimately acquiesced to community pressure and instructed the artist to paint the bayonets and impaled Native Americans back into the mural.

The Section vigilantly discouraged overtly political art. Several artists were politically active, however, and showed their sympathy with labor. Harold Lehman (1913–2006) expressed support for the Rail Car Workers' Union by including small blue union buttons on the caps of workers in his mural, *Railroad Repair*, for the post office in Renovo, Clinton County.

Nudity was also to be avoided, and Section Director Edward Bruce was emphatic about this point. "Anybody who wanted to paint a nude ought to have his head examined!" he declared. Bruce's officials were quick to advise artists to remove

or tone down anything that might be deemed risqué. Once again, however, depictions of Native Americans proved to be an exception to the rule. Artists who specialized in figurative art could portray muscular, nearly naked Native Americans in poses deemed inappropriate for whites. Jared French (1905–1987), an artist who devised an unusual pictorial language to explore human unconsciousness and its relation to sexuality, could not resist testing the boundaries. In 1937, he was working on two post office murals, one for Plymouth, Luzerne County, and the second for Richmond, Virginia. For the Richmond commission, he proposed depicting a group of Confederate soldiers in various states of undress preparing to cross a stream to flee advancing Union forces. The Section advised French that the figures must be clothed. "You have painted enough nudes in your life so that the painting of several more or less should not matter in your artistic career," wrote a Section administrator. French capitulated on the Richmond mural—he wanted to be paid after all—but as a final jab at Rowan and the Section, he did manage to paint one more nude. Before finishing the Plymouth mural, *Mealtime with the Early Coal Miners*, French inserted into the background a male figure piloting a barge, inexplicably unclothed.

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



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY

The nude pilot, like the union buttons of the railcar workers, went undetected by Treasury Department officials. The offending image appeared too small to be detected in the final eight-by-ten-inch photographs, and *Mealtime* became the only example of full-frontal nudity in a United States post office.

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

When rumors circulated that the farmer depicted in the



U.S. Post Office Building, Blawnox: Wood relief, *The Steel Worker and His Family*, carved in 1941 by Mildred Jerome, and now missing, honors the region's working-class families.

lower left of the post office mural was a portrait of Snyder, the public grew even more agitated and hostile. Conservatives reviled Snyder, an ardent New Dealer, and accused him of "emptying the Treasury." A front page article in a local newspaper helped stir a storm. "The Republican party chiefs have determined that if the face of J. Buell Snyder appears in the Post Office they will boycott the postal system . . . and start an independent system of their own." Alexander Kostellow (1897–1954), at work painting *Somerset—Farm Scene* in his New York studio, was dismayed by the controversy and wrote to Rowan for

assistance. "With reluctance, I would like to ask you for a favor, write me a letter, instructing me not to put any likeness of any living politician, in the mural . . . I am sure a note from you to me would settle the difficulties."

U.S. Post Office Building, Somerset: Alexander J. Kostellow's vibrant *Spring Planting* (1941) captures the spirit of southwestern Pennsylvania's agricultural traditions, but rumors of a local politician in the painting caused public outcry.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY

Ever sensitive to public reaction, Rowan obliged by writing a letter that appeared to scold Kostellow and flatter the mural's recipients. "I was distressed to learn," he wrote, "that there was any question on the subject of your mural and particularly at the rumor that it is your intention to include a portrait of a living statesman. It is not the policy of the Section to approve such action . . . I well recall the enthusiasm with which your design was received in this office. It was our feeling that you had a tender, spiritual message to give on the good citizenship of Somerset County and their natural setting of peace and plenty which fortunately is their rich heritage in this great country of ours. You are at liberty to present this letter in case any questions are asked."

The mission of the Treasury Department's post office art project was to provide employment to artists as part of the national recovery effort, to provide cultural enrichment to local communities, and to support the promotion of an

U.S. Post Office Building, Freeland: One of Pennsylvania's most prestigious impressionists of the New Hope School, John Fulton Folinsbee, painted *Freeland* in 1938 for the Luzerne County community.

American art. It also created a permanent record of the agricultural, industrial, social, and political history of the Commonwealth. Individuals can still enjoy George Rickey's *Susquehanna Trail* in the Selinsgrove Post Office. It captures a moment of Pennsylvania's history and preserves it for future generations. Throughout both state and nation, post office murals serve to enlighten and educate. Seventy-five years after the creation of the New Deal, Pennsylvanians can continue to appreciate this remarkable collection of public art, an experience free to anyone who wanders into a post office lobby.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY

U.S. Post Office Building, Norristown: PHMC selected *U.S. Mail* (1936), by Paul Mays, for a poster commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the New Deal in Pennsylvania, the agency's theme for 2008.

PHMC's limited edition New Deal commemorative poster is available free at www.pabookstore.com (handling and shipping charges apply).



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY

David Lembeck, a resident of State College, has studied Pennsylvania's post office art and architecture for more than a decade and is serving as a 2008–2009 Commonwealth Speaker for the Pennsylvania Humanities Council. Following graduation from the Pennsylvania State University with majors in graphic design and speech communications, he worked in publication design in Baltimore, Maryland, and Washington, D.C. Much of his work deals with architecture and historic preservation.

Michael Mutmansky, of State College, became interested in photography early in life and now works as a commercial architectural photographer. He earned a bachelor degree in architectural engineering, with an architectural history minor, from the Pennsylvania State University.

The author thanks Angela Breeden, executive director of the Centre County Historical Society, State College, for her critique of this article and for her continuing support of his project researching and recording New Deal era public art in the Keystone State.

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PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY

U.S. Post Office Building, Bloomsburg: *Pennsylvania Farming* (1937), a walnut wood relief (above) by Vincent Glinsky; U.S. Post Office Building, Union City: *The Lumberman* (1941), a wood relief (left) by Roy King; U.S. Post Office Building, Ford City: *Glass Making*, made from Carrara structural glass (below) by Josephine Mather in 1941.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL MUTMANSKY

NEW DEAL POST OFFICE MURAL TOUR: The Pennsylvania Heritage Society is hosting a tour to northeastern Pennsylvania to see New Deal post office murals on Tuesday, October 7, 2008, with author David Lembeck and State Museum curator Curtis Miner. A visit to PHMC's Pennsylvania Anthracite Heritage Museum in Scranton is included. See the PHS newsletter on page 41 or telephone membership coordinator Kelly VanSickle toll free at (866) 823-6539 for more details.