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View from The Overlook

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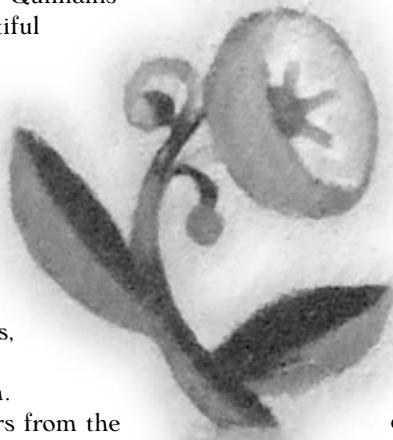
National Art Treasures in Cleveland Heights

By Mazie Adams

Did you know that Oxford Elementary school is home to one of the Cleveland area's finest collection of Federal Art? Thousands of students and hundreds of teachers who walked through the halls and library of Oxford, located at 939 Quilliams Road, have passed by these beautiful pieces of art every day.

During the Great Depression, President Franklin Roosevelt developed a variety of programs to provide work relief for millions of needy Americans. The Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (FAP) put local artists to work creating murals, sculpture and ceramics using the "American Scene" for inspiration.

Under the direction of leaders from the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Cleveland Public Library, the Cleveland branch of the FAP sought more grants than many larger cities. As a result, the Cleveland program not only employed needy artists to adorn numerous schools and public buildings, it also created a deep appreciation among the general public for Cleveland's growing community of artists.



The Cleveland FAP extended its reach to outlying suburbs. The Cleveland Heights school district requested works pertaining to children's themes and the American Scene during the late 1930s and 1940s. Oxford Elementary was allocated funding for two murals, two hydrocals (a type of extra-hard plaster) and thirty-five ceramics (although not all the ceramics were completed).

Early in 1937, two murals applied directly to the walls of the first floor corridor were executed at Oxford School by Gladys Carambella. These showed the stories of the Pied Piper of Hamelin and Cinderella in colorful detail.

In 1941, artists LeRoy Flint and Henry Olmer, inspired by the history of Cleveland, created a pair of relief panels for Oxford, depicting "Agriculture" and "Industry." They were sculpted in clay, but cast in hydrocal.

Cleveland Heights artist Edris Eckhardt guided the work of the Sculpture and Ceramics Division of Cleveland FAP. She developed a new process, which was used for most of the 20 Oxford ceramics. Artists Eckhardt, Emilie Scrivens, Frank Gentot and Theresa DeVries created ceramics

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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society



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The Cleveland Heights Historical Society,
founded in 1983, is a state-chartered,
501 (c)(3), not-for-profit organization.

Our Mission

The Cleveland Heights Historical Society
is dedicated to preserving and promoting
the diverse character and traditions of
Cleveland Heights.

As a community-based historic organization,
the Society encourages and facilitates greater
knowledge, understanding and awareness
of the heritage of Cleveland Heights.

Special Thanks

The Cleveland Heights Historical Society is extremely grateful to every one of its 120+ members. However, we would like to extend a special thank-you to our Deming- and Severance-level members:

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based on children's stories, taking inspiration from Kipling's "Just So Stories," "Alice in Wonderland," "Winnie the Pooh" and others. Elizabeth Seaver, Grace Luse, John Tenkacs and Nils Hanson—inspired by the people, families and cultures found in America—created works such as "Eskimo Family," "Hiawatha" and "Johnny Appleseed."

Fast Forward

Almost four decades later, in 1972, the CH-UH School Board approved a 19.5 million dollar bond issue, which called for the "demolition of Roosevelt Junior High School, the demolition and new construction of Boulevard, Coventry, Fairfax, and Taylor Elementary Schools, and the complete renovation of all other schools to provide a modern atmosphere for learning in each."

The remodeling of Oxford Elementary included the addition of a storage space and an instruction room off the ground floor corridor.

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Construction of these spaces involved opening a doorway in the middle of the Cinderella mural. In the 1970s, the beauty and artistic value of Federal Art was just being recognized and scholars were searching for surviving pieces. The general public often had little or no knowledge of these works. Luckily, Oxford PTA president Donalene

Poduska, with the support of principal James Evans, worked tirelessly to save the Cinderella mural.

Poduska contacted then CWRU Assistant Professor of Art Dr. Karal Ann Marling, a noted Federal Art expert. Dr. Marling documented the FAP art at Oxford. Oxford staff were surprised to discover that one sculpture, positioned close to the edge of the office counter, was also FAP art. It was quickly moved to a safer space.

Dr. Marling also provided much-needed guidance on saving the Cinderella mural. One important fact pointed out by Marling was that all works of art





produced under the auspices of the FAP are federal property transferred to the custody of semi-public, non-federal institutions as either permanent or 99 year loans, subject to the good conduct of the receiving agency. Destruction of these works of art could lead to serious and extended legal complications.

Mrs. Poduska brought Cinderella's plight to public attention with an impassioned plea at a school board meeting. She reminded the School Board that they had designated 1974 as the "Year of Fine Arts." The destruction of irreplaceable works of art would be "inconsistent" at best. "Too often, in remodeling and new construction, Americans have destroyed many irreplaceable historic landmarks and works of art." Her words led to an article in the Feb. 28, 1974 edition of *The Sun Press* entitled "37 year-old Cinderella Awaits Prince as Midnight Approaches." Public pressure led to a reconsideration by the coordinating architects for the remodeling program, saving Cinderella from destruction.

In 1974, Dr. Marling organized "Federal Art in Cleveland: 1933-1943," an exhibition sponsored by the Cleveland Public Library. Outstanding examples of Cleveland FAP, including many Oxford ceramics, were featured in the exhibition and accompanying catalog. Upon their return to Oxford, the ceramics were placed in a display case purchased by the school PTA.

In 2000, Oxford Elementary underwent yet another round of maintenance and renovation. Donalene Poduska once again spearheaded work to protect and preserve the murals. The Intermuseum Conservation Associates at Oberlin provided professional assessment and restoration. Glue used to adhere a protective covering over the murals in 1974 remained, discoloring Cinderella and figures in *The Pied Piper*. A grant from the Cleveland Foundation funded the protection of the murals during the renovation process and their restoration to their former glory in time for the November 6th Board of Education meeting, held at Oxford.

It is interesting to note that the Oxford FAP murals and ceramics inspired later generations of artists.



Edris Eckhardt volunteered at the school, helping students and parents create new art for many years. During the 50th anniversary of the school, in 1978, students painted a "modern" mural

depicting the school building, the owl (located over the original entrance), and the gardening program.

Unfortunately, much of the art created under the WPA was lost or destroyed. Cleveland Heights is lucky to be home to such a wonderful collection of Federal Art. And we should be thankful to the experts and volunteers who worked diligently through the years to protect and preserve the pieces at Oxford Elementary School.

Much of the information for this article came from three sources: "Federal Art in Cleveland, 1933-1943" (exhibition catalog); "Edris Eckhardt: Cleveland Sculptor" by Ruth Dancyger; and the private papers of Donalene Poduska.

A Brief History of the Shaker Lakes

By Chris Roy

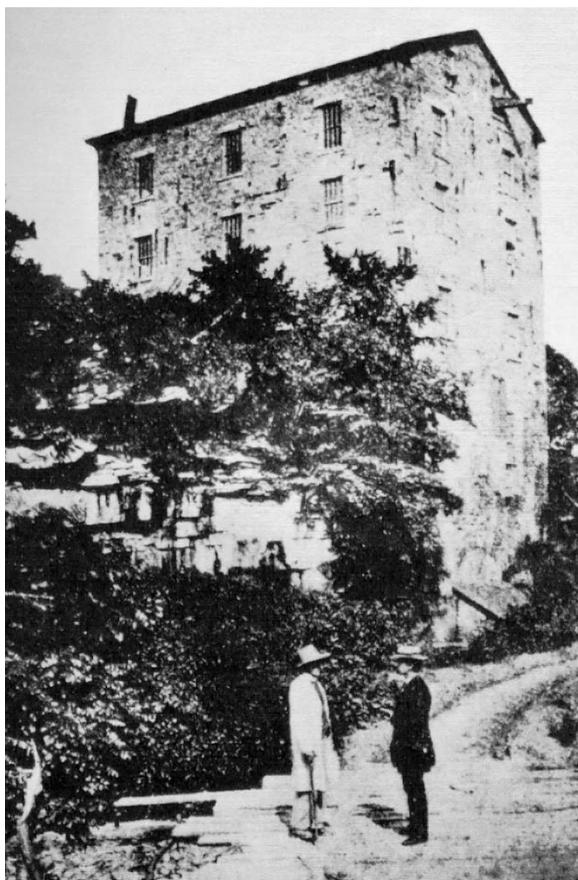
One of the great things about Cleveland Heights is that well over half its residents can walk to a park in 15 minutes or less. Three of those parks (Cain, Cumberland and Forest Hill) are all part of the same watershed: Dugway Brook. A fourth—the Shaker Lakes system that straddles Cleveland Heights and Shaker Heights—is part of the Doan Creek watershed. Following is a brief historical overview of this local treasure which, as many of us recall, almost became the infamous Clark Freeway in the mid-1960s.

In 1799, three years after the first permanent white settlers arrived in Cleveland, Nathaniel Doan and his family built a home and tavern beside Doan Brook at what is now in Euclid Avenue and East 105th Street. Then known as the Buffalo Road, Euclid Avenue was a primary artery connecting Cleveland and Buffalo NY.

Thirteen years later, in 1812, Jacob Russell relocated his extended, 20-member family several miles upstream to a 1000-acre site near what is currently the intersection of South Park Boulevard and Lee Road. In 1822, at Russell's urging, this group became the "Center Family"—the first members of the North Union Shaker Community.

In addition to numerous buildings, orchards, cemeteries, a tannery, a blacksmith shop and an oil mill for making baked goods, the Shakers successfully dammed Doan Brook in 1826. These efforts made it possible to construct a gristmill and a sawmill near the intersection of what is now Coventry Road and North Park Boulevard. These facilities (the remnants of which are still visible) were operated by the Shakers' second community: the "Mill Family." Soon after, another family unit, the Gathering Family, was organized. Whole families often lived in one house, the men sleeping on one side and the women on the opposite side, with separate stairways for each.

As the Shaker community grew, additional water power was needed; so, in 1854, a second dam was created further east. By that time, however, the community's celibate lifestyle and an inability to



Old stone grist mill, near what is now Fairhill Boulevard, west of Coventry Road.



Mill Family main house along what is now Coventry Road.¹



attract new recruits were beginning to take their toll. In 1889, with membership down to only 27 members, the community disbanded and 1366 acres were sold to O. P. and M. J. Van Sweringen for \$316,000. In 1892, 280 of those acres were donated to the City of Cleveland, which owns them to this day.

Around the same time, Jephtha Wade, William Gordon, Mr. and Mrs. John D. Rockefeller, Nathan Ambler and others donated downstream Doan Brook land to make a continuous line of parks along the stream from Lake Erie all the way to Horseshoe Lake in Shaker Heights. The Cleveland Parks Commission then built roadways to connect the parks and commissioned architect Charles Schweinfurth to design beautiful bridges

to carry streetcar lines across the lower park areas. By 1930, nearly all of the Doan Brook watershed in Shaker Heights, Cleveland Heights, and Cleveland was fully developed.²

Today, public access to the archeological site of the North Union Shaker community is restricted to ensure its preservation and to allow further archeological investigation. However, most of the parklands and Shaker Lakes are accessible via walking trails both in Cleveland Heights on the north shore of Doan Brook and Shaker Heights on the south. Located on land that was once the North Union apple orchard, the Shaker Historical Museum interprets the history of the Shakers who once lived here, and referred to the area spiritually as “The Valley of God’s Pleasure.”³



Early boaters on the Lower Shaker Lake.

1 Source: “Shaker Heights Then and Now”
© 1938, Shaker Heights Board of Education.

2 The Nature Center at Shaker Lakes,
“History of the Doan Brook,”
<http://www.shakerlakes.org/doan%20brookhistory.htm>
<accessed 1/1/06>

3 “North Union Shaker Site – Shaker Historic Trail –
National Register of Historic Places,”
<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/shaker/nor.htm>,
<accessed 1/1/06>

References:

**North Union Shaker Site – Shaker Historic Trail –
National Register of Historic Places**

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/travel/shaker/nor.htm>

History of the Doan Brook

<http://www.shakerlakes.org/doan%20brookhistory.htm>

Shaker Heights Then and Now

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