

Old Main Mural

What It Means To Penn State



Henry Varnum Poor and his daughter, Ann, work on the Old Main fresco.

(This is the first in a series of articles designed to acquaint the student with the significance of the incomplete Henry Varnum Poor mural in the lobby of Old Main.)

By Jane Wolbarst

The fresco in the lobby of Old Main has become, since its execution, an integral part of the College. Besides this, it has received high praise from art critics throughout the land as an outstanding example of mural painting. Yet, it stands incomplete.

Now, as contributions are being made toward its completion, questions are often raised as to the technique of the artist, the significance of the famous work of art, and the plans concerning its future.

The present painting was made possible by a gift from the class of 1932. The noted artist, Henry Varnum Poor, was commissioned to do the job.

Starting in September, 1939, Mr. Poor devoted almost his entire time toward making preliminary sketches and studies. He started the actual painting of the wall on April 26 and finished on June 18, 1940. Poor paints fresco at the rate of about one square yard a day.

The painting is pure fresco, which means that it is painted directly on wet plaster applied fresh every painting day. Miss

Ann Poor, daughter of the artist, did most of the plastering. As the two worked, the lobby of Old Main was always filled with observers who were fascinated by the work and interested in watching the fresco grow.

Before their eyes appeared the tall, lanky figure of Abe Lincoln, signer of the Morrill Land Grant Act which provided for the establishment of this school and others.

As they watched the work, students became extremely conscious of art and gained an understanding and appreciation that has probably not been equalled on campus since.

Taken as a whole, the mural dramatizes the period of the founding of the College, which became, under the Morrill Act signed after the Civil War, one of the first schools of agricultural and industrial arts in America.

Mr. Poor expressed his aims when he said, "First, I want to bring a sense of great spatial extension and ordered movement across the wall. Second, the main drama of the design will be in the light itself, with the farming and industrial regions of the state each lying in the light which most characterizes it. Using the general costume of about 1860, and having as its main theme the building of Old Main, I want to express the relation of

the College to the agricultural and industrial life of the state—but to do this by putting them in their simplest terms so they become in a sense symbols.

"I want Lincoln to be a symbol of faith and hope and more than just a part of the design because of his historic signing of the Morrill Act. I want his face and figure to express doubt and tragedy, and the full fruit of what he hoped to be expressed in the figure of the young student holding a tree to be planted."

Old Main itself provides a perfect background for the fresco. The figures of Lincoln and the young student are very large in scale because of their symbolic

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War Increases British Output

While Great Britain can blame the war for present food shortages, she also is indebted to World War II for the increased production she has today.

"Probably no country in history has realized the increase in food production that England achieved during World War II," according to R. U. Blasingame, professor of agricultural engineering at the College.

Blasingame recently returned to this country after spending seven months in England, teaching at Shrivvenham American University, and observing agricultural engineering developments in the British Isles. He pointed out that prior to the war, England was able to feed her people only two days per week. Now she is self-sustaining for five and one-half days per week.

"The British government directed the cultivation of thousands of acres that had been preserved as estates. Much of the land was covered with trees and was used only for hunting," Blasingame explained.

But he gave as the main reason for the rapid rise in production the increased use of mechanized farm equipment.

"Before the war, England had few combine harvesters, modern tractors, and gang plows," Blasingame said.

During the war she imported under lend-lease much modern farm machinery from this country, including bull-dozers that were invaluable in clearing thousands of acres of land.

"Another amazing thing about agriculture in England," Blasingame said, "is the high productivity of the land."

He explained that although the soil there had been tilled for centuries, the British people have taken good care of their farms and their land will out-produce much of the land in this country. He also credited the marine climate, as compared to our occasional heavy rains, for the limited soil erosion in England.

"In addition to the use of modern machinery, a land army of women who worked on the farms during the war played a large part in feeding the British people," Blasingame added.

X-G-I Club Conducts Season's First Smoker

The welcome mat is out for all ex-servicemen at the X-G-I Club's informal smoker at Schwab Auditorium a 10 p.m. Tuesday. The purpose of the club's first social affair of this semester, a traditional early-semester event, is to welcome the new veterans to the Penn State campus and to outline the club's aims and organization.

Following the regular program in Schwab, which will include talks by Arthur R. Warnock, dean of men; Professor Robert Galbraith, the College veterans' counselor; Charles Speidel, wrestling coach just out of the Navy; and Louis Bell, director of public information, the smoker will shift to Old Main where refreshments will be served and new memberships in the organization will be accepted.

77 NROTC's End College Duty

Seventy-seven Naval ROTC trainees have ended their tour of duty at the College, Capt. William T. McGarry, commanding officer, announced today.

Remaining on the campus are 197 trainees who, according to Captain McGarry, have promised to remain on duty until July 1, and accept commissions in the Naval Reserve, if tendered them, upon the completion of their training.

The change from a V-12 to an ROTC unit was effected here last fall, and the strength of the unit boosted to 300 by transfers from other V-12 units. No immediate replacements are planned for the outgoing trainees, Captain McGarry said.

Of the outgoing trainees, 16 were sent to separation centers for discharge; 14, who are eligible for release between March 3 and April 15, were transferred to the headquarters of the Naval District nearest their homes; and 38 were assigned to the Naval Training Station at Great Lakes, Ill., for boot training.

Six men were ordered to the Receiving Station at Philadelphia for further assignment.

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