



HOW THE SEARCH UNFOLDED

It started out as a simple request --- someone told me to get the story on the stained glass window. Having been a science teacher at Hoover since '71, I've had countless opportunities to investigate the window but I lacked the desire until I retired in 2002. Then, this summer, a teacher told me that her kids wanted to know who made the window and that request got me going. My first lead came from Bernie Gold, retired history teacher who vaguely remembered being told that the window was created by the W.P.A. . My first big break came when I located the school scrapbooks from the 1930's and '40's. While they were in bad shape, I did find a newspaper clipping from the 1939 book which named the artist --- Edgar Dorsey Taylor. Next step was a visit to the library to learn that Mr. Taylor graduated from U.C.Berkeley in 1928. Using the internet, I searched for WPA art and found the website run by Nancy Lorange. This was a treasure trove of information --- easily being the best site for posting of WPA art across the U.S. . Nancy directed me to another art historian, Mary Gill Smith who provided me with the biggest surprise of all --- the window had been constructed by 4 artists, and her father was one of them. Mary provided most of the biographical sketches on these artists.

Looking back at the 1939 newspaper clipping, I realized that two more searches were needed to complete the story. Were the students highlighted in the photo still alive, and why did Hoover school end up with such an amazing piece of art ? If you are attending this dedication, one answer is the presence of former Hoover student JoAnn Sweeney Lassen. The other question will probably never be fully answered, but I remind the reader that Mrs. Herbert Hoover made 3 visits to our school in '37 & '38, the years that the window was under construction.

Edward Hodges --- retired Hoover teacher

New Deal Art

During the Great Depression

On May 6, 1935, the Works Progress Administration (W.P.A.) was created to help provide economic relief to the citizens of the United States who were suffering through the Great Depression. The artistic community had already become inspired during the 1920s and '30s by the revitalization of the Italian Renaissance fresco style by the inspired creations of Mexican muralists Diego Rivera, Jose Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueriros. Certain visionary U.S. politicians decided to combine the creativity of the new art movements with the values of the American people. The Federal Art Project was one of the divisions of the W.P.A. created under Federal Project One. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had made several attempts prior to the F.A.P. to provide employment for artists on relief, namely the Public Works of Art Project (P.W.A.P.) which operated from 1933 to 1934 and the Treasury Department Section of Painting and Sculpture which was created in 1934 after the demise of the P.W.A.P. However, it was the F.A.P. which provided the widest reach, creating over 5,000 jobs for artists and producing over 225,000 works of art for the American people.

It is this legacy of the thousands of workers who labored at their craft for little money but great pride which we have to inspire us today. Although many of these works of art have been destroyed or stolen, those that remain must be preserved. They stand as a reminder of a time in our country's history when dreams were not allowed to be destroyed by economic disaster.

Nancy Lorance --- W.P.A. historian --- 2004

Memorial In Colored Light

MAY 7, 1939
San Jose Mercury Herald



...whites and greens, this leded
...the February graduating
...school is inspected
...and to Ann

CONSTRUCTION OF THE WINDOW

Mary Dill Henry, Robert E. Spray and Norval L. Gill were among the half-dozen artists and craftsman who produced this stained glass window in 1937 – 1938 at the Federal Arts Project in Oakland. In addition to this window, they did murals, mosaics, sculpture, tapestry weaving and easel painting. Edgar D. Taylor was the designer of the window. It depicts a medieval scene in which a manuscript is presented to a king and queen. The project was supervised by Clifford Pyle. Glen Wessels, professor at California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland was the advisor. Recent graduates of the College and the U.C. Berkeley Art Department were recruited by Wessels to join the project through an application process with the local unemployment office.

This stained glass window was fabricated in the traditional way with the various pieces of colored glass cut and shaped to match the full size “cartoon” of the design. The space used by the lead channeling joins the pieces into a whole window. The 1200 individual pieces of colored glass were coated with a black opaque vitreous enamel “paint” which, when dry, was scratched or rubbed away to reveal the underlying color. The glass pieces were then kiln fired to fuse the enamel to the glass and then assembled with the lead and framework of iron as may be structurally required by the design. This process can be dated back to the 14th century. Upon close inspection, you will notice that the artistic window is actually placed in front of the building’s original window. This is most apparent if you view the window from the outside. This is considered to be the only public school stained glass window in the United States created as a W.P.A. project.

Norval L. Gill -- Artist



EDGAR DORSEY TAYLOR

Born 1904 in Grass Valley , CA
Died 1978 in Los Angeles
Painter , Printmaker , Muralist
Taught art in California & Texas
Wrote & illustrated a 1969 book
"Baja California Woodcuts"



MARY DILL HENRY

Born 1913 in Sonoma , California
Still living at the time of dedication
Geometric Painter , Muralist
She is rated as one of the foremost
American modern painters who
lives in the Seattle, Washington area



NORVAL L. GILL

Born 1914 in Stockton, California
Still living at the time of dedication
Sculptor , Illustrator , Painter
Spent most of his professional life
in Tucson & Los Angeles as a
graphic designer in advertising.

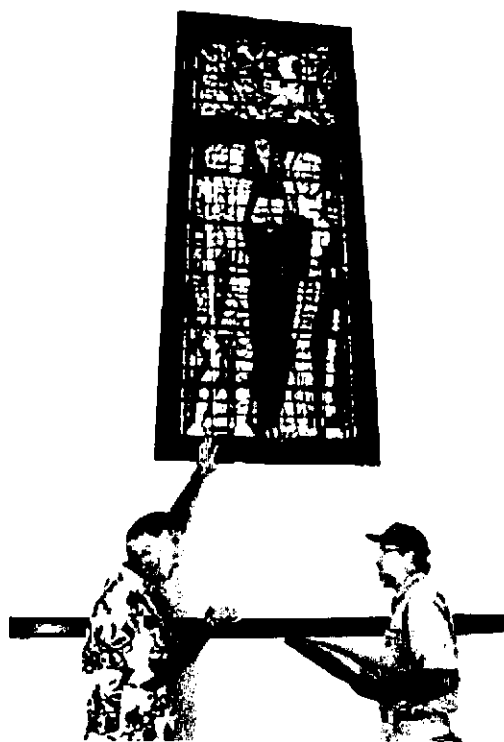


ROBERT E. SPRAY

Born 1910 in Spokane, Washington
Died 2000 in Tucson , Arizona
Sculptor , Illustrator , Painter
Spent most of his professional life
in Tucson. He was a pioneer in the
photographic silk-screen process.

Rose Garden **Resident**

September 16, 2004 San Jose, California *Since 2003*



Photograph by Erin Day

A Piece of History: Local stained-glass artist and former Hoover Middle School student Keith Bramer (left) discusses the condition of the school's stained-glass window with former Hoover science teacher Ed Hodges, who is investigating the history of the WPA-era piece by artist Edgar Taylor.

Stained glass offers a window on WPA art

By Mary Gottschalk

Sometimes a great treasure goes unrecognized, even when it's in plain sight.

Such is the case of the stained-glass window by Edgar Dorsey Taylor on the stairway landing between the first and second floors of Historic Hoover School.

The window is a lasting legacy of a California artist and the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration, the agency created to provide employment for artists during the Great Depression.

Yet, aside from a small news story in 1939 in the *San Jose Mercury Herald* when the window was installed, it has been all but forgotten. Thousands of students have passed by the window in its 65 years as a silent sentinel as the building evolved from Herbert Hoover Junior High School to Hoover Middle School and now to Historic Hoover School. The one original building is now part classrooms and part community center.

Yet, few seem to have given the window much more than a passing glance.

"For years I've known that window was there, but I didn't take it seriously," says Ed Hodges, a local historian and a retired science and math teacher from Hoover.

Earlier this year, Hodges decided it was time to take the window seriously. He recalled another instructor, Bernie Gold, mentioning that he had heard the window was a WPA piece when he first started teaching at Hoover in the early 1960s.

Taking that clue, Hodges started searching through the scrapbooks

kept for each school year, narrowing the search to the Great Depression years. In the 193839 scrapbook he found the photo and news clipping.

Although that article provided no title for the piece, it did report, "More than 1,200 pieces of glass were leaded into the window, which depicts a medieval scene, the presentation of a manuscript to a king and queen."

The story also identified the window as Taylor's design and described it as "built by the Oakland branch of the Federal Art Project and was under construction for a year."

Hodges' sleuthing led him to the www.wpamurals.com website, a labor of love originated and maintained by Nancy Lorange of Evanston, Ill.

A former social worker and now a videographer, Lorange first encountered WPA murals while doing a video on Oakton School in Evanston in 1998. The school has a wealth of WPA art, including a carved-stone sundial, three carved-pine bas-reliefs depicting animals, a diorama on railroads and a series of murals in the school's auditorium depicting the legend of Charlemagne.

Her interest piqued, Lorange started reading about the WPA and then searching out WPA art, particularly in post offices. As she and her husband, John Flannery, have traveled, she's taken time to document WPA art.

In 2000, Lorange registered the domain name www.wpamurals.com, built a website and started posting WPA art images and information as she's found it.

"It's just exploded," Lorange says of interest in her site. "There is such an interest in this, the government should do something. I'm not a professional, this is not my livelihood, I don't make money, it's a deficit."

Yet, Lorange is quick to admit, "I love it, I absolutely love it."

She's often able to guide people to specific art they thought had been destroyed, and corporations often contact her in search of art

with a specific theme. She's also communicated with a few WPA artists, as well as their spouses and children.

Lorance says, "The WPA art symbolizes a time when people were faced with huge, crushing economic problems and real threats to their survival. It's a time when people grew together as a group. A lot of the WPA art was done because people insisted on being artists.

"It symbolizes what's best in America: people working together in a time of need without pure monetary reward. Most artists didn't make that much: 50 cents to \$2 a day."

Lorance likes to share the story of when WPA funding was cut, Iowa artist Grant Wood was told to let some of his artists go.

"As a group they decided to take less money and keep everyone in the group," she says.

"They believed strongly in their art and they believed strongly in the artists. It's reflected in the heart of the work they produced. It's strong and an absolute symbol of a country pulling itself together and continuing forward."

After Hodges contacted Lorance, she contacted the daughter of one of the WPA artists who worked on the window.

In an email now posted on the site, Mary Gill Smith writes that her father, Norval L. Gill, "tells me that the stained glass was done using the older method of painting the glass black and scratching it off to reveal the color and design, rather than painting the design directly onto the glass. Each section as it was worked on was about the size of a book. He recognized the piece immediately from the photo on this website."

WPA stained-glass windows are relatively rare, Lorance says, because it was such "a specialized skill. It was much more common to do murals, paintings or woodcarvings."

The artist behind the Hoover window was born in 1904 in Grass Valley, earning his bachelor and master of arts at the University of California, Berkeley. After graduating in 1932, Taylor traveled in

Europe for a couple of years and then returned to Cal to teach. It was during this time he designed the window.

In the 1940s he moved to Austin to teach at the University of Texas, and in the early 1950s he moved back to California, teaching at the University of Southern California.

Today, Taylor, who died in 1978, is best remembered for his black-and-white woodcuts.

A 1940 limited-edition lithograph of Taylor's *The UVX, Jerome* depicting the United Verde Extension copper mine in Jerome, Ariz., now sells for \$800 to \$1,000 when it comes on the market, says Keith Sheridan, a New York-based dealer in fine art prints.

Sheridan isn't familiar with all of Taylor's work, but of *The UVX, Jerome*, he says, "This particular work is distinguished by its complex, precisionist composition and fine draftsmanship. Taylor's blend of cubist vernacular with his folk-art-like vision makes this work an important example of midcentury modernist American graphic art."

How Taylor's window went from the WPA's Oakland workshop to Hoover is unclear. Hodges believes that one or possibly two visits to the school by Lou Henry Hoover may have resulted in her encouraging her husband to use his influence for his namesake school. The Hoovers moved to a home they built on the Stanford University campus after he left the presidency in 1932.

Although the federal government paid for the window, the February 1939 graduating class sponsored it as their farewell gift to the school.

Harry Farrell, noted San Jose author who grew up near The Alameda, remembers the former first lady's visit when he was a student there.

"Mrs. Hoover came at the time of the June 1938 graduation," Farrell says. "She was an honored guest and I was an usher, so I saw her from a distance."

Farrell, who graduated from Hoover in 1939, has only a vague

memory of the window.

"It was no big deal at the time," Farrell says of the window.

This summer, Hodges asked Keith Bramer, stained-glass artist and owner of Parrot Studios on Emory Street, to evaluate the condition of the window.

"It's a beautiful window," Bramer says. "I went to the ninth grade at Hoover and I remembered seeing it, but I didn't remember what it was like."

Bramer finds the window in "great condition, especially for its age. If it were mine, I'd leave it. It's in no danger of falling apart, it's in its original historic condition and it doesn't appear to have ever been worked on. It's in great shape."

In terms of value, Bramer says, "To some it would be a priceless piece. To have work done like that nowadays would cost upwards of \$500 a square foot, and there's a big difference between a historical piece and a nonhistorical piece.

"It would be worth a good deal of money, at least \$10,000."

Hodges is working on a plaque explaining the history of Taylor's window, which he hopes to place this fall. Some Hoover graduates are planning to return for the ceremony, and Lorange says she will make an effort to attend as well.

The WPA stained-glass window designed by Edgar Dorsey Taylor can be viewed on weekdays between 3 and 4:30 p.m. in Historic Hoover School, Park and Naglee avenues. Visitors should check in at the Registrar's Office for a pass.