

IMAGES

... then and now

From The Indian Hill Historical Society



Buckingham Lodge
1861

Remembering Harland Johnson

Artist Harland Johnson resided in Indian Hill from 1931 until his death in 1964. While here, he raised his family, pursued his career, and worked on his farm, endearing himself to his family and community.

Born in northern Ohio in 1892, he attended Oberlin College, where he became intrigued by art courses and applied to the Cincinnati Art Academy for a scholarship. Once accepted, he studied there for 4 years, and was a student of Frank Duveneck and Clement ^{Barnhorn} ~~Barnham~~. While living a bohemian life in Mt. Adams, Harland's diet consisted mostly of peanut butter and bananas. Upon graduation, he enlisted in the American Expeditionary Forces, saw active duty in France, and kept a sketchbook of local scenes and cartoons of doughboys and their problems with cooties.

After World War I, he returned to Cincinnati and married Jeanette Hyde in 1920, had two children, and resided in Walnut Hills. He worked as an illustrator for the Methodist Book Concern, illustrated the Sunday school paper, and freelanced. In 1931, the family moved to 6425 Park Road, a 10-acre parcel located at the western corner of Shawnee Run Road, to assist his father-in-law with the family farm. The Depression years were lean, but the family enjoyed the country life of Indian Hill, living in a farmhouse constructed from remnants of Camp Dennison Civil War barracks.

To supplement their income, Harland raised chickens in wire cages, fed them a special milk mash diet, and never let the poultry's feet touch the ground. He dressed and delivered these milk fed broasters to Indian Hill residents, who praised these extraordinarily juicy birds. An heirloom piano provided hours of entertainment for the musically talented family, and the family sang popular songs and hymns together.

Johnson continued painting portraits and landscapes, using an impressionistic style. He received commissions to do oil portraits of past presidents and faculty of Marietta College and of prominent Cincinnatians and their children. His pastels of the Twelve Disciples were a gift to the Milford First United Methodist Church in memory of his wife. The depiction of Thomas is said to resemble Harland himself. He painted a series of watercolor landscapes for the Clermont Historical Society. Johnson was proficient with oil, watercolor, pastels, and other mediums, and he painted on a variety of surfaces, e.g. a cloth window shade and a rubber tire liner. Fascinated by light and shadow, he incorporated chiaroscuro in his work.



Thomas

Harland was employed by the Cincinnati Milling Machine Company for 15 years in the blueprint department. He continued free lance painting and taught adults and children. On Saturday mornings, he instructed youths, setting up assignments for them in the chicken coop classroom or taking them outside to paint a landscape. Several of his students were successful artists and illustrators.

For 25 years, Johnson was a member of the Cincinnati Art Club, where he exhibited and sold his art, and was President from 1949–1951. He organized the annual sketch trip, attended sketch classes, directed and participated in the club's costumed plays, provided wassail for the Christmas Bazaar, and baked pies, cakes, and cobblers for members' enjoyment. He was chosen dinner chairman for the Art Club and was on its Board of Directors until his death.

Harland had a bass voice, and sang in the church choir and served on its Board. He was a member of the Terrace Park Music Club, and his Art Club colleagues were charmed by his falsetto portrayal of Madame Butterfly in one performance. A congenial man with a keen wit, Johnson was well liked by all. His paintings are a testament to his insight and impressive talent.

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