



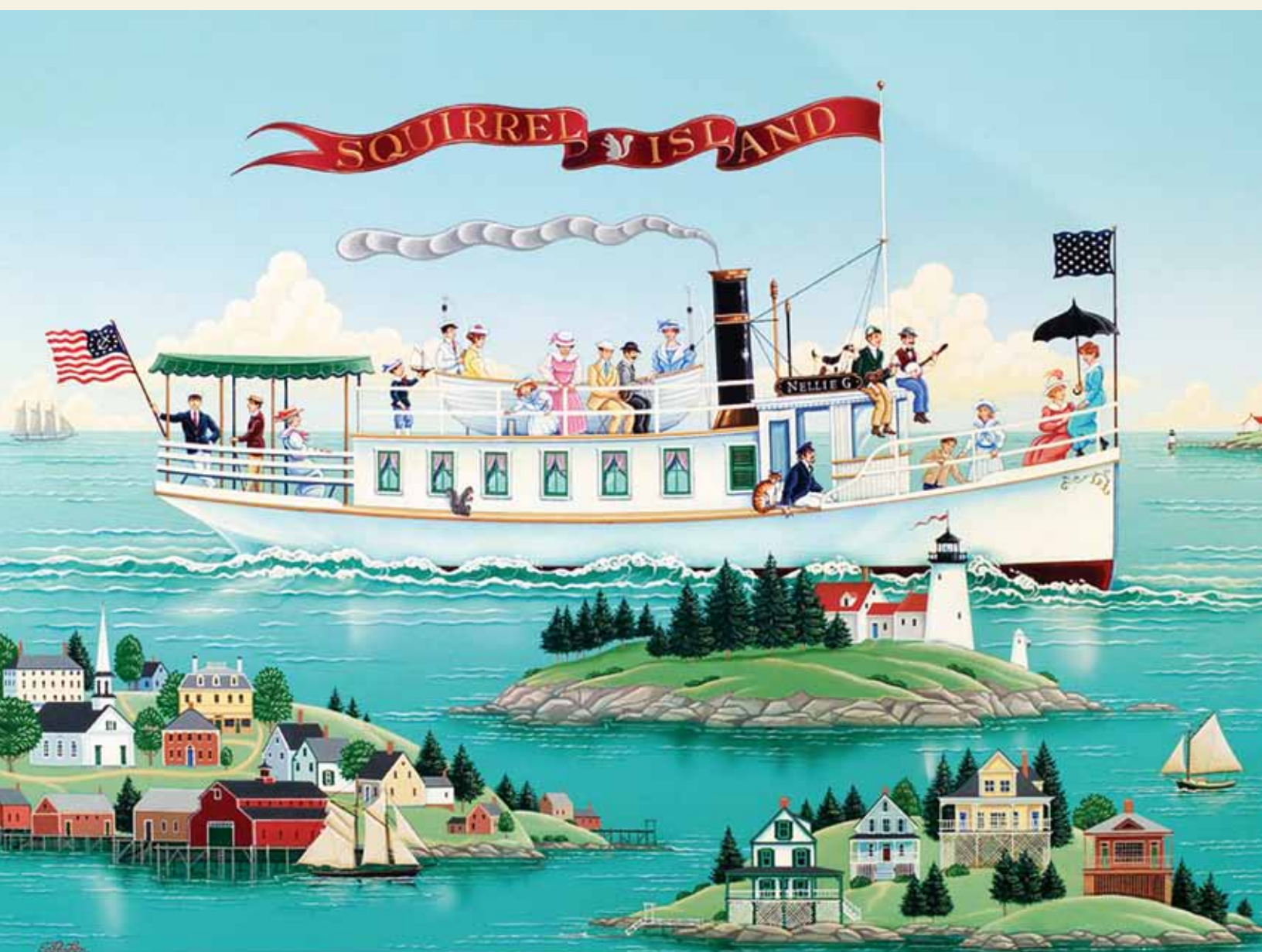
# ASMA

## NEWS AND JOURNAL

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**ASMA 2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM)**

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# ASMA JOURNAL

## Notes From Brush Hill

by Charles Raskob Robinson  
Brush Hill Studios, Washington, CT

In the last issue we met Signature Member and new Board member Tom Nielsen from Carrollton, GA and followed what he described as his “magnificent life” from the U.S. Navy to rarified circles of portrait painting in the Capitol before he turned to coastal marine painting in the Southeast. With decades of painting behind him, his advice to young artists is, “First and foremost, paint your passion.” Curiously, that is the same advice Ed Parker gives – and his passion is quite out of the ordinary. This is why J. Russell Jinishian, a recognized international authority on marine art says, “Over the past thirty years Parker’s paintings and illustrations have graced books, magazines, private and corporate collections from coast to coast. Working in the great American folk art tradition, he has carved out a name for himself using a sophisticated sense of design, proportion and color to create charming and often humorous vignettes of American life. Ed’s illustrations have a romantic simplicity, a refined naiveté, capturing the best parts of every moment. The paintings borrow from American folklore and history creating inspired moments in time and imagination. They become visual stories that you can interpret and complete, each in their own way. Recently, *The Atlanta Journal* referred to Ed’s work as ‘Grant Wood with a Yankee sense of humor.’”

Parker’s art is another example of how the American Society of Marine Artists continues to set the standards for breath of vision as to what constitutes marine



“Sailor’s Rights” - 9” x 12” - Acrylic/Mixed Media

art while at the same time demanding excellence in those fields.

### EDWARD WILLIAM PARKER

Signature Member  
Andover, MA

[www.edparkerstudio.com](http://www.edparkerstudio.com)

Six years ago when a number of ASMA members began the *Naval War of 1812* video and book projects, I first came to understand Ed Parker’s work in the larger context of his vision of this art form. The Parker painting that Russell Jinishian, who represents Ed<sup>1</sup>, provided for the video was the *Sailors’ Rights*, pictured above. Russell knew this

summed up the message of that War for it visually encapsulated the main cause of the war and did so in a way that conveyed the story of the war. A young nation, newly freed and independent with a thriving maritime commerce that was fueled by wartime strife in Europe, naively thought that the world should recognize and honor its rights to trade freely with whomever it wished and that the rights of American seaman should not be violated. Our sailors should not be “impressed”– taken off American ships and forced to serve in foreign navies. The painting tells it all – a young Yank sailor from America with its thriving communities and a promising future stands boldly ready to defend

his nation’s rights and claims to free trade. It shows the power a well researched and brilliantly executed painting can have. It only takes a minute for the viewer to understand the message whereas it takes over four hours for the video to tell the story and many pages for the book to do the same.

Most fundamental to appreciating and understanding Ed’s work is his statement, “I choose to do what I do because of what inspires and interests me. When looking for concepts and ideas for a painting, I am fascinated by old photographs of nautical events and curiosities, not so much the famous well known stuff, but rather the legend,

# Notes From Brush Hill

folk tales, ill-conceived adventures and stunts.” Line graphics from 19th Century books and newspapers, Down East Maine<sup>2</sup> humor, obscure historic events can all spark an idea. As a guitarist and singer, he also finds sea chanteys and folk songs a rich source. “Sometimes it’s an object in a maritime museum or a verse from a poem. Other times I stumble on something like a story or picture; I get curious and it develops with research. One thing leads to another and things change, most often expanding beyond the original inspiration.”

A couple of examples will demonstrate what Ed means but, before turning to them, one should understand how he views his work and his place in this art form. Some easily – and wrongly – “paint it with a broad brush” and dismiss his work as Primitive Art whereas Ed believes his work is Fine Art influenced by the history, culture and dry humor of Down East. It is professionally executed by an experienced artist and is based on solid research even though the very underlying concept might reflect the whimsical humor of Down East culture.

“As to how some people view my work and the style I work in, I want to be clear that I do not consider myself a ‘Primitive’ or an ‘Outsider’ artist even though, perhaps because of my New England and Down East roots, I am influenced by the direct and graphic sensibilities of American Folk Art. Much of my attraction to that style comes from my education as a graphic designer as well as my interest in history and the culture of Down East. Do not confuse this with the



“Waiting For The Tide” - 18” x 18” - Acrylic/Mixed Media

more recent development of ‘Americana,’ which tends to be very mannered and basically is by artists pretending they are channeling Grandma Moses.<sup>3</sup> I am not to be put into that category since both the creative process that goes into what I do and what inspires me are much less formulaic and more complex.

While most marine artists tend to capture a moment in time, I seek to

capture a moment of a story or event. It may be real; it may be just plausible enough to be real. It is visual storytelling and the viewer gets to decide how the story began or ends. My intent is often a humorous or whimsical attempt to view our culture or our not so different past history from another perspective that perhaps, within the story, reveals something new about that culture, our history and our place in it.

## (Footnotes)

<sup>1</sup> The J. Russell Jinishian Gallery is in Fairfield, CT. The Cavalier Gallery with galleries in Greenwich, CT, Nantucket, MA and New York City also represents Ed.

<sup>2</sup> “Down East” plays an important part in Ed’s life. Narrowly, it refers to the most northern (eastern) part of the coast of Maine – from Penobscot Bay to the Canadian border – but generally is applied to the eastern coast of the state. The Canadians also use the name to refer to their maritime provinces. The etymology of the phrase in New England is generally attributed to the fact that when sailing from Boston or basically any part of New England to this part of Maine, one had prevailing winds from behind and thus they were going down-wind and, since that part of Maine was considerably to the east of the rest of the New England coast, they were sailing east. Thus, they were going “down east.” Going the other way, they would have to sail against the prevailing

winds, or “up wind,” and thus they would sail “up” to Boston even though it was far to the south of even southern Maine.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Mary Robertson Moses (September 7, 1860 – December 13, 1961) left her mark on American art by capturing an international following fascinated with this humble, hard working farmer-wife/mother who turned artist at nearly eighty years of age and then, for the next twenty years, until she died at 101, produced over 1500 paintings, developed a media presence, won awards and received honorary doctorates. As a New York resident, Governor Nelson Rockefeller even declared her 100th birthday as “Grandma Moses Day.” Her work appears in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Hirshhorn Museum and Phillips Collection in Washington, D. C., among others.

<sup>4</sup> Not to be confused with Thomas Crapper (1836-1910), the

British plumber and manufacturer who did much to introduce the flush toilet and indoor plumbing and thus had his name associated with toilets. However, that public association did not occur until later in the 19th Century, after our Captain Thomas Crapo made his voyage, so this near coincidence of name did not burden the publicity potential of Captain Crapo’s successful entrepreneurial voyage.

<sup>5</sup> Russell has had a number of exhibitions for ASMA artists in this prestigious setting over the years. The Club dates back to 1863 when New Yorkers who supported the Union cause in the Civil War founded it. After the War, members of this gentleman’s social club supported important civic undertakings in the City, including the establishment of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Union Leagues were also found in other parts of the North but only a couple remain today.

My approach is based on extensive research and mastery of detail to respect the integrity of the subject and to have a thorough understanding of it to do it justice. This is particularly important in what I do because sometimes I'm painting an actual event and sometimes I'm making it up, but it still needs to be plausible and the sources need to be accurate. I do not include detail for the sake of detail; rather I carefully research the subject and add detail to support the concept and render the subject as accurately as I can. This is particularly important when I get involved in the tall-tale aspects of a maritime yarn because accurate, well-researched details play an important role in supporting the story."

Let us look at a couple of paintings to understand what Ed means, return to him to see how he developed an interest in this field and evolved from an illustrator to an artist and then visit a couple more of his art stories. **Waiting for the Tide** began when Ed found a 19th Century line engraving of man and a woman sitting in a very formal pose in a small, strange vessel. On the mast was a flag that read New Bedford; no other details were evident. "The image peaked my curiosity and, looking further, I found the story of the voyage of Capt. Thomas Crapo<sup>4</sup> and his wife which was a real, if very risky, event typical of small-time Victorian adventurers." (I should note that the following and subsequent story explanations are taken from didactics for paintings in the **Curious and Charming World of Ed Parker** Exhibition that Russell Jinishian mounted at the historic Union League Club in New York City last year.<sup>5</sup>)

On the afternoon of June 2, 1877 a former whaler and sea captain Thomas Crapo set sail with his wife Joanna, described by the press as a "plucky woman" from New Bedford, Massachusetts on a voyage to England. The nineteen-foot boat, which Captain Crapo designed and had built, was named **New Bedford**. When Captain Crapo first proposed the voyage to his wife as an entrepreneurial opportunity, she was much against it. Unable to talk him out of the venture she



"Red, White and Blue" - 9" x 12" - Acrylic/Mixed Media

relented but declared she was going with him. On board with them were kegs of water, ninety pounds of biscuits, seventy-five pounds of canned meat, coffee, tea, sugar and a small kerosene lamp stove. After fifty-six storm-tossed days at sea and three thousand miles of dead reckoning, Captain Crapo and Joanna arrived in Penzance, Cornwall in the United Kingdom to the cheers and kudos of the populace. In the painting, the couple is on board the New Bedford, waiting for the incoming tide to launch them on their historic voyage.

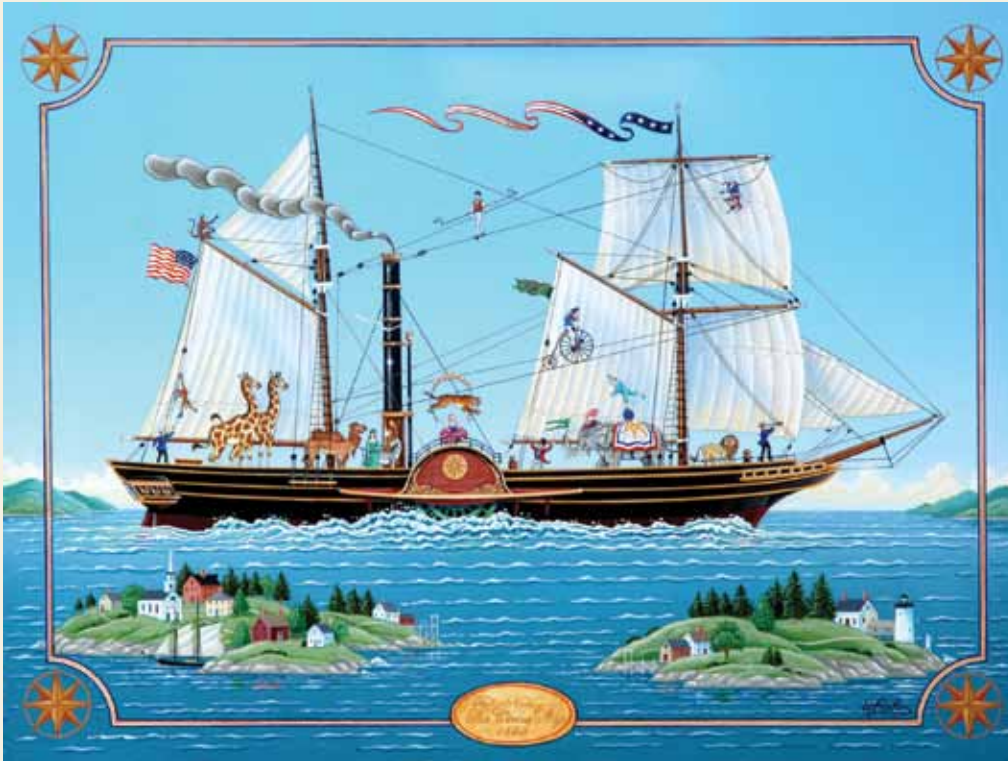
Twenty-two years later, in 1899, Captain Crapo attempted to regain the fame and fortune of his successful trans-Atlantic voyage by sailing an even smaller boat – only nine feet long - to Cuba. His wife declined his invitation to join him - perhaps for want of space but certainly not sense. This was fortunate for her because he was lost at sea off the coast of South Carolina.

In another trans-Atlantic entrepreneurial endeavor, Captains Hudson and Fitch with their dog, Fanny, set sail for England from New York City on July 9, 1866 in

their twenty-six foot, three-masted boat, the **Red, White and Blue**. The square-rigged ship was conventionally rigged – however diminutively – but the hull was actually a galvanized metal lifeboat. The Captains intended to publicize the new metal lifeboat designed by the New York boat builder, O.K. Ingersoll. The words "Ingersoll's Improved Metallic Life Boat" were painted on both sides of the hull. Remarkably, they arrived at Margate, East Kent in the United Kingdom five weeks later on August 16th. Their success was their undoing for the sight of the craft and the reported speed of their trans-Atlantic passage combined to convince the public that it had to be a sham. However, Ed notes, "years later scholars reviewed the 'ship's' log, the weather and sightings during the passage and concluded that the two captains and Fanny did, indeed, complete their voyage as claimed."

**Fuller's Menagerie: The Circus Ship** is another example where Parker uses imagination, exacting research and detail to combine history with whimsy and folklore. In October 1836 the **Steamer Royal Tar** left Eastport, Maine for Portland. It was one of the first steamers to travel the

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"Fuller's Menagerie: The Circus Ship" - 18" x 24" - Acrylic/Mixed Media

coastal routes of Maine and Nova Scotia. On board were the usual collection of passengers but also the highly unusual addition of a traveling circus called **Fuller's Menagerie**. It consisted of a group of performers and a collection of exotic animals including camels, monkeys, two lions, a Bengal tiger and an elephant. Tragedy struck when the boiler caught fire and set the ship ablaze off Fox Island in the Penobscot Bay. To this day, Ed's research confirms, people on the islands there tell of seeing and hearing strange animals in the forests.

This painting is part of that story telling tradition. It depicts the ship whimsically sailing peacefully through

(Footnotes)

<sup>6</sup> Ed explains, "We have been going to Southport since the early 70's, renting and then buying a summer cottage. We found ourselves spending more and more of our summer there. When I figured out I could work there during the summer via fax and FedEx, we began to spend the summers from end of June to end of August. We rebuilt our house three years ago to make it year round and I have a studio there as well as in Andover."

<sup>7</sup> In grade school Ed's teachers suggested he would do a lot better if he did not doodle and draw pictures in the margins during tests - written advice that Ed's mother saved to spring on Ed's kids years later when they were in school. Ed credits an art teacher at Andover High School, Francis Dalton, with understanding his needs and preparing strong portfolios when

the islands of the Penobscot Bay. "Since no previous images of the ship could be found, only a verbal description of the length, beam, sail configuration and steam engine type, I found pictures of early steamships and combined their features into what the **Royal Tar** could have looked like. I also researched early 19th Century circus performers in order to accurately render them. All of this is necessary if you are going to interpret or exaggerate an actual event by adding whimsy and humor and still engage the imagination of the viewer by making the painting sufficiently believable."

From the above examples, it helps in appreciating Ed's art to know something

he applied to colleges of art.

<sup>8</sup> When asked if Karen Lundgren might be related to Charles Lundgren, the Connecticut resident and Charter Member/first President of the American Society of Marine Artists, Ed says, "I guess anything is possible. Her grandfather had about eight siblings and some ended up in Connecticut but we haven't done the genealogy to find them."

<sup>9</sup> These include: The Massachusetts College of Art in Boston, the Art Institute of Boston and adjunct faculty positions at the Montserrat College of Art in Beverly, MA, Salem State College in Salem MA, Merrimack College in North Andover MA and at Andover High School in Andover, MA.

about his ancestry, upbringing and interests. He was born on May 2, 1946 to Ruth McGraw and Edward F. Parker in Framingham, MA where he spent the first two years of life with his family and his maternal grandparents from Scotland while his father, back from WWII, finished college. "As a result I was fluent in Scot's dialect before I spoke proper English. We moved to upstate New York where my father had a job at General Electric in Schenectady and 'were in exile,' to use my mother's phrase, for ten years before returning to our roots in New England when we moved to Andover, MA."<sup>6</sup>

His family heritage and decades of family summer vacations on Southport Island tie him to Down East Maine ("Which is why I am also fluent in Down East dialect.") and Nova Scotia. Family lore offers ancestors dating back to the **Mayflower** and Captain John Parker, the leader of the Minutemen on Lexington Green and others who, as "British North Americans" before Canada existed fought as privateers for the other side in the War of 1812. "History, particularly America and British, has always been of great interest to me and this, over time, laid the foundation for my historically oriented art. In that regard, just before the start of the Bicentennial in 1976, I was a Founding Member of a Revolutionary War re-enactment group, The Andover Company of Militia. Our attention to detail was meticulous down to the proper drills, weapons and even the number of threads per inch on our clothing, patterns of which came from several museums in the area. I also joined and led another equally meticulous and historically accurate group, The Fifth Massachusetts Regiment Continental Line. I mention this since I've always felt it very important to represent history as truthfully and accurately as possible both in those circumstances and in what I choose to paint."

During his elementary and high school education Ed demonstrated artistic talent and was encouraged by both his parents and teachers to pursue it.<sup>7</sup> "After graduating from Andover High School,

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I was accepted at the Massachusetts College of Art & Design and majored in Graphic Design and Advertising. I had expected to major in Illustration but at the time that was in the Painting Department and if you did declare an interest in Illustration there you were generally treated like a mentally challenged leper. So I did Graphic Design, which in retrospect has been a major influence on the way I work and think about what I create - particularly in regards to concept, composition and process. I graduated in 1968 with a BFA.

I then attended Rochester Institute of Technology on a full scholarship as a teaching fellow and graduated in 1969 with a MFA in Illustration. I had met my bride-to-be, Karen Lundgren<sup>8</sup>, in high school and we married in our junior year in college. We went on to raise a family of three – now all grown: Christian, Holly, Susannah and have a grand twelve-year old granddaughter, Carolyn – who has modeled for me as a mermaid.”

After receiving his MFA, Ed served as Art Director of *Boston Magazine* and in 1974 began the Ed Parker Studio where over the decades he has done illustration work for national and international clients and collaborated on a wide variety of creative projects. He has also continued the teaching career that began at Rochester Institute of Technology with positions at various secondary schools and colleges. Long before becoming a Signature Member of ASMA, Ed was elected to the Society of Illustrators in New York and has received numerous awards from the Advertising Clubs of New York and Boston. However, as technology and thus the illustration business changed, Ed began to drift away from commercial illustration and focus on his own art. For him, illustration is now a rare exception and art the rule. Here are some more examples of that art.

Built in 1895 in Woolwich, Maine, the *Nellie G.* served as a passenger ferry on the coast of Maine until 1951. Its primary route was taking “Rusticators” to and from the summer colony on Squirrel



"The Nellie G." - 18" x 24" - Acrylic/Mixed Media

Island at the entrance of Boothbay Harbor. Ed notes, “The origin of the name Squirrel Island is not related to its squirrel population since, according to island historians, squirrels do not inhabit the island and, if they do now, they did not in the early times. Rather the name refers to the shape of the island which, when seen from above, resembles a squirrel holding an acorn. I have incorporated this image into the Squirrel Island flag flown by the Nellie G.”

Farmers and sheepherders have resided on Squirrel Island since the American Revolutionary War. The summer colony was created with the formation of the Squirrel Island Association in 1871 as a village corporation within the town of Southport (where Ed and his family summer). There are approximately one hundred parcels, each with a one-family cottage, most of which were built between the 1870's and 1920's. The painting depicts the Nellie G. at the turn of the 20th Century with her load of eager summer vacationers and, if you look closely, one squirrel.

Ed grew up as an avid reader. In addition to history, he was also fascinated by the worlds created by Jules Verne and H. G. Wells. “The fantastic inventions, submarines, flying machines and vehicles with their Victorian Era design, cast iron struts, brass steam valves and flywheels captured my young imagination. In many ways I still am inspired by that imaginative 19th Century vision of technological wonders.” The concept of a flying machine transporting members of 19th Century Newport society to Nantucket and back seems to fit into Ed's genre of the fantastical. We are not sure how the machine sailing blissfully along, in the best “Steampunk tradition” with all its bells and whistles, stays up in the sky but Ed invites us to just accept that it can.

In *Love A First Sight* Ed comments, “There has always been a sense of wonder about the sea, an element of the unknown, reflected in folklore and legend. What is unknown is replaced by what is imagined, taking the form of mermaids, leviathans, sirens, selkies and, of course, sea serpents. New England has

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"Nantucket to Newport" - 9" x 12" - Acrylic/Mixed Media

a long history of sea serpent sightings from early Native American legends to sightings off Cape Cod in 1962. The most famous and well-recorded incident happened in Gloucester Harbor in 1817. The Gloucester Serpent interacted with schooners, fishing boats and lighthouses, both terrifying and intriguing the local inhabitants.

"The interaction in my painting is more a whimsical interpretation. Does the Sea Serpent mistake the lighthouse for one of its own? Or perhaps it is the beauty that interests the beast or is it just the fish at the end of her pole?" Whatever the case, the lighthouse keeper is doing his best, however vainly, to drive off the creature.

Not surprisingly, Ed admires storytelling artists such as the early illustrators Howard Pyle (1852-1911) and N. C. Wyeth (1882-1945). He is also drawn to René Magritte (1889-1967) the popular surrealist artist who was born in Belgium, schooled at the Académie Royale des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, worked and painted in Brussels and Paris. "He put things in a different context,"

## (Footnotes)

<sup>10</sup> Frasnay, Daniel *The Artist's World*, "Magritte." New York: The Viking Press, 1969. pp. 99-107

Ed observes. Even when a thing was in apparently in its own context, he took pleasure in challenging the viewer's sense of reality. For instance the late 'Twenties he did a realistic, straightforward painting of a smoking pipe and named it the *Treachery of Images*. He then challenged the viewer's sense of reality by painting below the pipe in French: "This is not a pipe." It seemed to work because he had to defend his claim by pointing out that you could not put tobacco in it and smoke it. Perhaps closer to the mark, Magritte liked to use ordinary objects out of context to create what he called "poetic imagery." He viewed this as "the art of putting colors side by side in such a way that their real aspect is effaced, so that familiar objects—the sky, people, trees, mountains, furniture, the stars, solid structures, graffiti—become united



"Love at First Sight" - 16" x 16" - Acrylic/Mixed Media

in a single poetically disciplined image. The poetry of this image dispenses with any symbolic significance, old or new."<sup>10</sup> Have a look again at Parker's *Nantucket to Newport* in this context.

The work of the British book illustrator Arthur Rackham (1867-1939) from the Golden Age of Illustration in England at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Centuries influenced Parker. "Since I did not study Illustration in college, I found the bold pen and India ink drawings of Rackham a great source for learning how to illustrate the figure." Rackham was propelled into the limelight when he illustrated Washington Irving's *Rip Van*

*Winkle* by Heinemann in 1905 and in the following year J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*. Rackham won a gold medal at the Milan International Exhibition in 1906 and another one at the Barcelona International Exposition in 1912. His works were in numerous exhibitions including one at the Louvre in Paris in 1914.

"I became aware of the American Society of Marine Artists by way of my involvement in a number of group shows held at the New York Yacht Club's Harbor Court in Newport that were organized by Russell Jinishian and included ASMA members such as Don Demers, Chris Blossom, John Stobart, Len Mizerek, Russ Kramer and others. I felt privileged to be included. Artists tend to be solitary and the opportunity to engage in discussions around our craft and talk about the various ways in which the work is conceived and created was an inspiration. Russ in particular encouraged me to consider joining ASMA because he felt the way I approached maritime art was quite different and would contribute to the organization. Membership has given me a sense of being a part of an evolving and relevant genre of art with a great history and tradition." In 2010 Parker was elected to Signature Membership in the Society.

We began this article noting advice the artist would give to young artists based on his life experiences. Recall that for years Ed has been teaching young artists so he has thought about this question a lot. "Find your own inspiration. What is intuitive to you? Why are you drawn to art you want to pursue? Think it out and then do it." Ed's romance is that he continues to practice what he preaches.



Charles Raskob Robinson is a Fellow of the Society. He paints at Brush Hill, a studio built in 1752, located in Washington, CT and formerly owned by Connecticut and New Mexico artist Eric Sloane. Some of Charlie's work may be seen on his website at: [www.brushhillstudios.com](http://www.brushhillstudios.com).