



ASMA

NEWS AND JOURNAL

Spring 2015

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF MARINE ARTISTS

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF AMERICAN MARINE ART AND THE FREE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS BETWEEN ARTISTS



Visit our Web Site at: www.americansocietyofmarineartists.com

ASMA JOURNAL

Notes From Brush Hill

by **Charles Raskob Robinson**
Brush Hill Studios, Washington, CT

In the last issue we got to know long-time member Jerry Smith, a Signature Member from the American heartland, Crawfordsville, Indiana, and followed his life of experimenting in mediums as well as subject matter. He has developed a distinctive style and is as much at home with it in his beautiful home state as his adopted summer environment of coastal Maine. We then “went North” to follow the colorful career of Robert James Tandecki, a Member from Sumner, WA whose love of the waters of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska and interest in history of the area is reflected in his art.

Our Editor, Bob Semler, also included at the end of the last article a letter I received from Frank Handlen, Retired Fellow, who lives, paints and sails in Kennebunkport, Maine. That letter led to some interesting developments in the intervening months since it was published, including another letter, which we have incorporated into the second part of this article since it builds on a biography of Handlen that appeared here in 2000.

But first let us turn to an accomplished portrait painter who is relatively new to the Society and marine art and very enthusiastic about both, Tom Nielsen. Newly appointed to the Society’s Board, he is already thoroughly engaged. A beaming photo of him and his wife, Jan, taken at the AGM in Baltimore appeared in the last issue of this magazine (see page 18).



"Tennessee Dry Dock" - 11" x 14" - Oil

THOMAS MASON NIELSEN
Signature Member,
Carrollton, GA
www.tomnielsenfineart.com

The Surprise Homecoming

It was, for him, a big event. Another American marine artist adrift in a world that for a century has moved further and further away from the shores of the discipline of the Academic Tradition and realism, finds himself suddenly in ASMA’s safe harbor where such values still thrive. Tom recalls how it happened: “I first learned about ASMA shortly before its 2011 Annual General Meeting in Savannah while browsing the Internet for marine artists. I nearly jumped through the monitor with excitement when I landed on ASMA’s website. I’d found a group of artists who painted in the



grand tradition of representational painters, painting subjects I loved! I shared the discovery with my wife, Jan, and immediately sent my application for membership. Since that year’s AGM was only a few hours drive from us in Savannah, we drove down to see what these folks were about. We had previously attended another major painting organization’s national show and came away feeling we didn’t belong. Therefore, we approached the AGM with our eyes open. The first evening Jan and I, knowing no one, sat on the veranda of the hotel alone - but only briefly. Before long people began introducing themselves and welcoming us. From that moment, we felt like we had found the art community we belonged in. I mentioned to Jan that evening that these folks are so like us, they’re like family already. Now,

Notes From Brush Hill



"Tennessee Sunset Marsh" - 24" x 36" - Oil

several years later, we feel that sentiment even more.

Membership in ASMA has had a significant positive impact on my career. First is the inspiration of meeting and conversing with such incredibly talented artists. Since I'm such a beginner as a marine artist, it is a huge inspiration for me to be associated with such talent. The AGM's provide a wonderful opportunity to see, learn and discuss all aspects of marine art. The **ASMA News and Journal** alone is such a great resource that I keep next to me in the studio. Becoming a Signature Member 2012 and the prestige of the ASMA moniker brings immediate

recognition from collectors. I try to spread the word to anyone I meet who is interested in marine art and not yet a member."

One can better appreciate this unabashed enthusiasm for finding and joining ASMA when one considers Tom has had both the interest in maritime subjects and a talent in art since a boy. The third of three children of Earl and Betty Nielsen, Tom was born March 16, 1948 and raised in Clinton, Iowa a town on the banks of the Mississippi River. He had a Huck Fin boyhood; it was in his blood. His father, son of Danish immigrants, grew up on the water

in Minnesota – rowing, sailing and ice boating and dreamed of someday seeing tall ships like those that had brought his parents from Europe. He wanted to be a naval architect but fate had other plans. He met and married Betty, from Wichita, Kansas and they settled in Clinton where he became a grain buyer for Pillsbury and Clinton Corn Processing, Inc. and she became a Registered Nurse. Tom's father spent time with him building model boats and infusing in him the lore of his Danish mariner ancestors. Tom seemed to have gotten the message for in time he took his savings from mowing lawns to buy a wreck of a sailboat, rebuilt it and extended the range of his adventures on the Mississippi. Clinton was once a hub of river activity a century ago when it was a logging center. In fact, in the boom years of the 1890s it claimed to have the highest per capita of millionaires in the nation. It also boasts of being the home of the well-known Western painter, the Prussian-born Wilhelm Heinrich Detlev Körner (1878 – 1938).¹

Art from the Beginning

Tom attended elementary and high school in Clinton. Art constituted an important part of his studies. "My childhood artistic self was developing alongside my other adventures. Tall ships, lakes, rivers, pirates and scenes from the movie, **20,000 Leagues Under the Sea**, were favorite subjects. I knew deep down I was going to be an artist from the start. My maternal grandmother, Clarinda Mason in Wichita, was a pastel painter and on our annual visit to see her she

(Footnotes)

¹ Like Tom, "Big Bill Körner," as he became known, demonstrated exceptional skills as a young artist in Clinton. He was hired by the **Chicago Tribune** as a staff artist and then grabbed up by a paper in New York where he attended the Arts Student League. There he studied under the Canadian-American painter George Bridgman (1865-1943), Norman Rockwell's (1894-1978) teacher, and fell under the spell of the famous illustrators of the day. To further those skills he moved to Wilmington, Delaware to study in the Howard Pyle (1853-1911) School of Illustration where his fellow students included N.C. Wyeth (1882-1945), Harvey Dunn (1884-1952), Frank Schoonover (1877-1972) and others of what became known as the Brandywine School. (A personal aside: My grandfather, Captain Charles Webster Robinson annually hosted a summer artist colony at the Naaman's Inn run by my grandmother Edna. Now a state landmark known as the Robinson's Inn, back then it was alive with these very artists and my father and aunts, then

young children, would often pose for them.)

"Big Bill's" reputation spread and the **Saturday Evening Post** commissioned him to illustrate an article on the Old West. The subject was new to him and he cottoned onto it, becoming best known for work in that field. More recently his work received attention when one of his paintings, **A Charge to Keep**, which depicts determined men riding up a mountain trail on a mission, was chosen for the cover of the book then Governor of Texas, George W. Bush, wrote as his first move into the Presidential race. The book bore the same title of the painting – indicating that the future President Bush was also on a mission. "Big Bill" certainly was for he created and estimated 2000 paintings and illustrations of the Old West over his lifetime.

² After duty in the European Theater and participating in the Normandy landings, it sailed to the Pacific where it took a direct hit from a twin-engine Kamikaze that killed the captain and sixteen of the crew.

³ Laid down in 1954, launched in 1956 from New Port News, VA and commissioned in 1957, the **U.S.S. Ranger (CV-61)** was the first aircraft carrier to be built from the beginning with an angled deck. The ship earned thirteen battle stars, principally for its service in Vietnam although it did see service in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. It has been mothballed at its homeport in Bremerton, WA since it was decommissioned over twenty years ago. As this issue goes to press, the ship is to be towed around Cape Horn to Brownsville, TX where it will be scrapped this summer.

Those interested in U.S. Naval history know that the lineage of this ship's name goes back to the nation's Colonial Navy during the Revolutionary War when John Paul Jones captained the 18-gun **Sloop-of-War Ranger** from Brest, France, raided English shores and captured the 20-gun H.M. Sloop-of-War Drake in 1778. Centuries later, the **U.S.S. Ranger (CV-4)**, commissioned in 1934, was the first ship built as a carrier for the Navy.

Notes From Brush Hill

would give me lessons. My parents saw my serious interest and enrolled me in an “adults only” course in Clinton taught by a Mrs. Bach who agreed to take me on after reviewing my portfolio. Thanks to her, I started oil painting at the age of ten and never looked back.” As evidence of his early attraction to the sea, he notes that one of his first oils was a copy of *Light House at Two Lights* done in 1929 by Edward Hopper (1882 – 1967).

Tom thrived on his art classes and very much was looking forward to continuing his studies in college. “In my senior year,” Tom recounts, “I actually had art for three periods a day and the level of teaching was quite advanced. I very much wanted to attend college after high school and go on to a teaching career, however, the modernist-nonobjective-abstract philosophy was entrenched in the art classes in the state schools I could afford. An art professor at one of these colleges warned me that my chances of doing well were slim if I held to my traditional realist persuasion. The Viet Nam war was raging and my older brother, Richard who had been attending college was already drafted and serving in the Army in the mountains of Viet Nam. The draft loomed over me. I needed some time to mature and collect myself. So with my parent’s blessing, I enlisted in the Navy.” (Years later, an art commentator who knew of Tom’s abhorrence of modern art, perceptively observed that ‘Nielsen went to Viet Nam to avoid going to art school!’)

The “Magnificent Life”

“The Navy allowed me to finish high school and graduate and even spend some of the summer of 1966 painting before I had to report to boot camp and on to Radio “A” School in San Diego.” His first blue water duty was as a radioman on the **U.S.S. *Henrico* (APA 45)**, originally a 500’ banana boat whose keel was laid in 1939 but was taken into the Navy to serve as a troop landing ship.² Decades later, when Tom served on it, they trained for amphibious landings but never saw action, for the Navy decided to decommission the ship. He sailed it to



“Morning Stillness” - 24” x 36” - Oil

the Navy base at Bremerton, Washington where it was mothballed. In February of 1968 he received orders to report to the Naval Inshore Operations Training Center (NIOTC) at Mare Island, San Francisco Bay, and later to report to River Assault Squadron 13, Mobile Riverine Force in Vietnam. With dreams of another blue water posting, this was not good news for Tom.

The Mobile Riverine Force was part of the Navy but worked closely with the Army in delivering troops throughout the Mekong Delta. The clearest description of this multi-faceted force is seen in a poster Tom did. (See the image and explanatory text: a picture is worth a thousand words.) Tom spent a year as one of the seven crew members who lived and worked on what he calls “one of the ugliest boats you could imagine. It was a 56’ twin screw LCM-6 refitted landing boat otherwise referred to as a ‘Mike’ boat that had been recommissioned as an Armored Troop Carrier or ATC. We spent a year carrying 9th Infantry Army troops throughout the rivers and canals of the Mekong Delta.” Since there was no need for a radioman, Tom became a .50 and .30 caliber gunner

and part-time coxswain on the boat.

Tom’s next tour of duty was aboard the **U.S.S. *Ranger***, one of four Forrestal-class super carriers.³ Jim Griffiths, ASMA Signature Member, who has painted a number of Forrestal-class carriers (but unfortunately not the ***Ranger*** which I had hoped to use in this article), said of the change in duty assignments, “It must have been like going from a one-room shack to a fifty-room mansion. These ships were the Alpha and Omega of their time.” Tom agrees, “Our WestPac cruise on the *Ranger* (1969-70) took me to places I had only dreamed of: Hawaii, Japan, Philippines, Hong Kong and of course, days and days on Yankee Station off the coast of Vietnam. Bob Hope entertained us on the hanger deck the Christmas of 1969. Neal Armstrong had just returned from his historic mission to the Moon and was part of the team. My time in the Navy was magnificent.”

The Colorful Life as an Artist in Rarified Circles

In the late summer of 1970, Tom returned to Clinton, Iowa where he continued his love affair with maritime

Notes From Brush Hill

life, bought a derelict houseboat, refurbished it and made it his home and studio. Although he only did occasional sketches while in the Navy, he began paint much more actively, especially portraits



"Mobile Riverine Force" - 40" x 60" - Acrylic on Gessoed Board

with some landscapes. That fall his father alerted him to an opportunity that caught his fancy: to go as a paid supercargo on a towboat that was pushing several barges of soybeans down the Mississippi to Baton Rouge. That ten-day adventure not only provided near endless hours to sketch from the pilot house but also paid well (\$200) and enabled him to get to New Orleans where he "sought out every artist, gallery and art space I could find. It was just the shot in the arm I needed. My art-heart was nearly bursting with excitement to get painting!" And that he did.

"My first solo show was held at the Clinton Art Association gallery in February 1971. At this time, I was also working part time as a youth director at our local YMCA. A call came one afternoon from a fellow Vietnam veteran inviting me to take part in a humanitarian project with other veterans. The purpose was an attempt to both help our Vietnamese friends and possibly bring notice to the public that Vietnam veterans were not all necessarily the negative stereotypes portrayed in the news. So in the summer of 1971, while the war still raged, ten of us returned unarmed and unpaid to build housing for the families of disabled Vietnamese veterans in a river town near Saigon called

Cat Lai. The experience was profound for me. Between construction jobs, I would sketch portraits of the village children and at a nearby orphanage. Cat Lai probably has more of my portraits than any place else! Using art, I was able to break the ice with families that otherwise were a bit suspect of the real intentions of ten unpaid civilian Americans voluntarily risking their lives in a combat zone. We lived in the shelters we were constructing and were blessed to have survived the summer with only a few scary nights."

A few weeks after returning to the States, the group was invited by President Nixon to visit the Oval Office and meet with Admiral Zumwalt, Chief of Naval Operations whose wife's Helping Hand Foundation had supplied food for Tom's group during the project. One of the paintings Tom had brought to Washington to sell in order to finance his travels when the group was forming to go to Viet Nam had caught the attention of Mrs. Zumwalt and she invited him to have a solo exhibition at Admiral's



"Admiral Elmo Zumwalt" - Oil

House (now the Vice Presidential Mansion) in Washington. The positive response to that show convinced him to move to Washington to become a portrait artist there – a decision welcomed by Tom's new bride who found house boat living somewhat cramped. He had recently married Yolanda Rivera who was an exchange student from Guadalajara attending the Junior College in Clinton. They moved to Washington in 1973 and began a family with the arrival of Maria in 1977 and Erica in 1979. Both are now married with children of their own.

Family responsibilities led to a search for a day-job and he found one for "a cub-level graphic design position" at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Thus began a career as a graphic designer/illustrator that would last for the next twenty-one years. "During my VA career, I had the honor of designing numerous nationally published posters as well as countless mind-numbing budget charts. As the years went by, I advanced to become Chief, Presentations Division (aka art director) at the VA's Central Office."

During this time at the VA, Tom painted at home in his studio after hours. Represented by a commercial gallery in Washington, he received assignments for paintings but only where there was no conflict of interest (as defined by the government) for private commissions. Almost all of these were portraits. Although he did fewer marine paintings, he never lost interest and did several paintings of inland streams, the C&O Canal and estuaries on the Potomac. Some of his portraits were of the leading powers in Washington, commissioned by veteran's organizations to honor those lawmakers on the Hill and other notable people who supported veterans. "I painted about a dozen portraits for the Vietnam Veterans Institute (VVI). My friend and fellow veteran, Jerry Yates, was instrumental in creating the award series that became an annual event attended by hundreds in the veteran community. My most recent VVI award portrait was of VA Secretary Anthony J. Principi in

2005. And I did other award portraits for other organizations as well, notably the National League of POW/MIA Families, which gave a portrait-illustration I did of President Reagan as a thank you gift for his efforts on their behalf.”

Of course it comes as no surprise, given Tom’s serendipitous connection with the Zumwalts, Tom was chosen to do a three-quarter-length portrait of Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, who was the youngest Chief of Naval Operations in the Navy’s history. He also did portraits of leading Senators such as Strom Thurmond (1902-2003) who represented South Carolina for forty-eight years; Alan K. Simpson (b. 1932) from Wyoming; Alan Cranston (1914-2000) from California; and the longest-serving Senator in American history, Robert C. Byrd (1917-2010) from West Virginia.

While working for the VA, Tom served as a volunteer in other veteran organizations. This active involvement led to some unusual opportunities. “In 1983 Jerry Yates of the Vietnam Veterans Institute asked me



if I would submit a design for a three-inch bronze medallion that Congress would present to the next-of-kin of those still missing in action in Southeast Asia. The challenge was to create an image that was inclusive of all American military personnel who were missing. Considering the fact that the

(Footnotes)

⁴ The verso of the coin has an engraving depicting the National Prisoner of War Museum in Andersonville, GA. This is the site of the Camp Sumter military prison that was one of the largest Confederate military prisons during the Civil War. During the fourteen months the prison existed, more than 45,000 Union soldiers were confined here. Of these, almost a third died there. After the War, the officer in charge was convicted of murder and executed. Its 150th anniversary is commemorated in 2014-2015 and the Andersonville National Historic Site now serves as a memorial to all American prisoners of war throughout the nation’s history.

design needed to represent all branches of service, all ranks, and both genders - it was a tall order for one medallion. My solution was to represent the missing Americans in South East Asia symbolically with the Bald Eagle amidst a bamboo forest. Though missing, it remained vigilant and proud.” Congress approved the design and the U.S. Mint struck 2,490 of them, the number of those still missing at that time. (See the photograph.)

Then in 1994 the American Ex-Prisoners of War Organization asked Tom to design a commemorative silver dollar that would become part of a three-coin Viet Nam Commemorative Set. “With the same criteria as the bronze medallion to be all inclusive of all branches of service etc., I employed the Bald Eagle again, but this time in flight breaking through the boundaries of barbed wire representing its freedom from captivity. The U.S. Mint sold the coin with an extra \$10 surcharge that netted nearly \$2.7 million dollars towards the construction of the National Prisoner of War Museum in Andersonville, GA (site of the notorious Civil War prison).”⁴ Tom notes that neither of these coins was associated with his employment at the VA, but rather, as a private citizen artist. He also designed another medallion for the Governor’s Veteran Award for the State of Ohio and was asked by friends in the Mobile Riverine Force Association to design the **Vietnam Combatant Craft Crewman Insignia**. “Most of the other special ops groups had an insignia, but not the brown water navy. I based the design on a traditional insignia format portraying the boats that made up the three task forces. These were: Swiftboats, PBR’s, and the third group made up of Monitors and ATC’s. The U.S. Navy approved it in 2005.”

The New Life and Possibilities

In the mid-1990s there was a downsizing at the Department of Veterans Affairs and Tom took advantage of an offer to retire after decades of service. “Along with the job, my marriage had ended and this prompted my move south since I had been placing many paintings

in Georgia and loved the people there. So I re-established my studio in Augusta in 2000. That summer and the next, I returned to my hometown on the banks of the Mississippi River and taught painting workshops at the Clinton Art Association’s River Arts Center. Then a mutual friend back in Augusta, introduced me to Jan Walters, then a Delta flight attendant, who was attending the same church I had joined.” Jan’s own marriage had also ended and she had begun a new career at Delta. She has two sons, Shane and Jason, from her previous marriage and both are artistically gifted. Shane is a graduate of the Savannah School of Design and has his own firm while his brother worked his way through dental school doing pen and ink drawings. Both are now parents themselves.

Tom and Jan began scouting for a home in the various towns around the Hartsfield Jackson Atlanta International Airport where Jan was based as a flight attendant. They spotted Carrollton, a college town of 24,000 west of Atlanta that was building a Cultural Arts Center and they figured that any town that size with a demonstrated commitment to the arts might be special. “We were right! We ended up buying a historic building in the heart of Carrollton and signed the contract on September 11, 2001. What a day! We renovated and established studios and a gallery for Tom on the street level.” These also included space for an interior design business that Jan established, The Design Group, which has since grown and expanded into quarters next door. They made their home in the loft above. Shortly after they got established, the Cultural Arts Center was completed. When Jan set out to find if there was an artist organization in the area, she found none. Well, she fixed that. Within two years she had rallied local artists and those interested in the arts to create the Carrollton Artists Guild and that led to the annual Carrollton Fine Arts Mecca Festival, which was recently voted one of Georgia’s best festivals. This spring, the Center is hosting a show and an awards ceremony for ASMA’s local

Notes From Brush Hill



"Quiet Evening" (Detail) - 24" x 48" - Oil

Young Marine Artists Search competition (YMAS), thanks to the energy and drive of Tom and Jan.

Although portraits continued to be Tom's main focus, he began painting more landscapes and his love of the sea lured him increasingly to the coast. In 2004 the Left Bank Art Gallery on St. Simons Island, Georgia began to represent him.⁵ That same year the International G-8 Summit was held on the adjoining Sea Island and the Left Bank Art Gallery was designated the official art venue for the Summit.⁶ Ever open to possibilities, Jan and Tom created a program where Sonny Perdue, the Governor of Georgia and official host of the G-8, memorialized the event by giving each of the international leaders an 11" x 14" painting by Tom of the Marshes of Glynn – the salt marshes found in the area of the Summit. The project turned out to be quite involved – and a great success. Buck Bennett, Habitat Manager for the Georgia Department of Natural Resources was enlisted to take Tom out in his boat to locate sites for the paintings. One criterion requested by officials was for the marshes to be portrayed in summer-green rather than the winter brown as they were in April since the

summit was to be held in June. It all turned out to be a nice feather in Tom's cap, for he could now rightly boast of being in the collections of world leaders. One of them is still in power, Vladimir Putin.

Tools and Techniques

For over thirty years Tom has worked almost exclusively in oils (Utrecht). His palette varies depending on what he is working on. For portraits he premixes a series of flesh tones while for landscapes or marines, he employs a basic palette that includes (from right to left): Payne's Gray, Titanium White, Cadmium Yellow, Cadmium Orange, Cadmium Red, Alizarin Crimson, Yellow Ochre, Raw Sienna, Burnt Sienna, Burnt Umber, Cerulean Blue and Ultra Marine Blue. For plein air he limits his palette to: Payne's Gray, Titanium White, Cadmium Yellow, Cadmium Red, Yellow Ochre and Ultra Marine Blue and maybe Cerulean Blue and Alizarin Crimson for specific passages as needed. He uses brushes that are best for the passage at hand; these include bristle, mongoose and sables in flats, brights and filberts.

Tom is forthright about beauty and how it relates to his view of the world. It

was this philosophy, after all, that drove him into the Navy rather than attend art schools that would corrode this belief in beauty. He wonders at the beauty of creation. "My philosophy is simple: try to create a work of beautiful art. I consider my paintings to be a praise of the amazing creation God has given us and my hope is that the subject of His work can be enjoyed by those who view my painting. I simply interpret on canvas what He has already created."

Once the subject is determined, Tom begins with a compositional idea and selects a canvas that fits, preferably larger than 16"x 20" inches and a wide format. In his studio he sometimes works from plein air sketches but mainly relies on memory and personal photo images. After marking out the horizon line, he then uses a thinned neutral to outline basic shapes. "Once this is accomplished,



"Waiting At St. Ives" - 24" x 12" - Oil

especially on large canvases, I'll mix basic colors, thin them down to a wash and apply them to the appropriate areas on the canvas with large brushes and sometimes paper towels. This gets rid of all the white canvas and allows me to see a vague idea of the painting. Once dried, my next step is to paint as freely and quickly as I can - much like I was painting plein air, but in the studio. Value and hue are all important at this stage with little thought to detail. I'll let this layer dry overnight. The next day I'll apply retouch varnish to reestablish the intensity and begin painting tighter aspects of the composition. As the painting progresses, I constantly march to and from the canvas, squinting and often viewing it in a mirror to help see places needing adjustment. Values are such an important aspect of a successful painting and I may adjust passages several times before I'm satisfied."

Of Inspiration and Example

By Tom's own admission there is not enough space in this article to list those whose works he finds inspiring and from which he can learn. He holds artists in the Society in high regard but also lists William Trost Richards (1833-1905) for his ability to execute marine compositions and paint coastal water and John Singer Sargent for "his ability to capture a likeness with swift and assured brush strokes and render marine subjects with equal skill." Tom studied under Scott Christensen (b. 1962) in a ten-day workshop in Idaho. "He is an excellent painter with solid compositional skills and his understanding of hue and values in a painting were so helpful. I learned that 'the work of art' itself was what mattered most. This shift in mindset freed me from my 'portrait-artist-self' to compose

(Footnotes)

⁵ The Left Bank Gallery served Tom for many years but now is closed. His current gallery on Saint Simon Island, GA is the Anderson Fine Art Gallery. He is also represented in the Midwest by the Hinsdale Gallery in Hinsdale, IL and on the Pacific coast by Petri's Fine Arts in Sausalito, CA.

⁶ The G8 is an unofficial annual forum for the leaders of the world's leading industrial nations: Canada, the European Commission, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

⁷ Among them is the next subject in this article, Frederick Judd Waugh (1861-1940).



"Into The Night" - 20" x 36" - Oil

canvases for the sake of a beautiful work of art rather than a boringly faithful copy of a scene."

Another master he studied under in New York City and Washington, D.C., was John Howard Sanden (b. 1935), nationally recognized portrait painter, author, lecturer and instructor at the Art Students League and at the Carnegie Hall Studios before they closed ten years ago. "In one of his talks, Sanden had mentioned a painting by Standhope Alexander Forbes, RA (1857-1947), **The Health of the Bride**. He said it was a brilliant example of composition, brushwork and values - one of his all time favorite paintings. I took the cue and researched Forbes and learned that he was 'the father of the Newlyn School,' a group of late Nineteenth Century painters well known in England who painted the local fishermen, their wives, children, boats and coastal scenes of Cornwall, England in a naturalist style. Prompted by years of interest in the Newlyn School, Jan and I visited Cornwall a few years ago and concluded it contains some of the most beautiful coastal scenes and harbors anywhere we've previously been. Maritime life and history were everywhere. My intent was to gather subject references to create a body of work. This resulted in a solo show at the

Left Bank Art Gallery in 2009."

Tom's list of artists and Twentieth Century illustrators who excelled in creating beautifully crafted paintings and illustrations where subjects are accurately portrayed in believable space, atmosphere and light is long and interesting⁷ but of greater note is his constant search. "I am discovering 'new' favorites all the time thanks to Internet searches and visits to galleries and museums. I cannot emphasize enough how important researching other artist's works, watching their painting demonstrations and methods have been to me. I remain in a constant attitude of learning and consider myself a beginner still."

A Word to the Wise

With nearly seven decades of experience behind him, Tom's advice to young artists is, "First and foremost, paint your passion. The most successful artists are those who paint the subjects that are dearest to them. If you need other employment during the years you are developing your art career, do not be discouraged. Just keep your goals ever present. Stay positive, always be a student and never give up your passion or dreams."

Notes From Brush Hill

**FRANK HANDLEN,
Retired Fellow,
Kennebunkport, ME**

(AN ADDENDUM
TO THE 2000 NFBH
PROFILE OF THE
ARTIST)



In the last issue of the *ASMA News and Journal* our Editor, Bob Semler, ran a letter that Frank Handlen had written to me last fall. It was so characteristic of Frank and provided further evidence why he has had such a devoted following within the Society from its beginning that we felt it should be published. So, with Frank's permission we did.

However, I had written a note below Frank's letter and in it I misstated the facts about the ferroconcrete topsail schooner, *Salt Wind* that he built in his yard. I said that "when completed it was too big to move out of the driveway so it was hoisted by crane over their roof" to get it onto a low-boy trailer that took it to its launching. As you will see in the following missive from Frank, anybody who can deal with "those tedious, tedious weight calculations to fix (the ship's) longitudinal and vertical centers of gravity so that she floated to her designed waterline" clearly had thought out every step of getting the vessel from its blocks to the water and this did not involve a crane – only a winch to pull it on to the trailer. So, Frank, please accept my apologies.

The letter prompted Signature Member John Charles Roach to write to Frank to solicit his views on which museum should receive the collection of pastels that Frank had faithfully created and sent every Christmas for years to John and his wife, Judith Prowse. Frank gave these 5" x 7" pastels of coastal Maine to a number of his friends. The ones he sent to Barbara and me are all framed and hang all around my studio – and serve as a lesson in humility for more often than not visitors only comment on "my" pastels and how fresh and strong they are. Frank wrote a reply to John and John shared that letter with me. Frank

gave us permission to publish it.

Back in the beginning of this century we did a profile on Frank in this column. This letter to John is a valuable addendum to that biographical article and is especially interesting because so many of the artists in the Society share Frank's enthusiasm for and awe of the artist he tells about in the letter. The opening paragraph of the letter with its reflection and modesty is particularly meaningful, coming as it does from someone who will soon be a centurion. At ninety-eight he very neatly typed the following:

Dear J C,

Excuse my tardy reply but I'm just recovering from the flu. I am of course astonished and honored with your interest in me. I truthfully feel I don't warrant this, for frankly I never had an exemplary career, never made a name for myself because the body of my work never had the quality I vainly strove for. Of course, there are maybe two dozen works or so I'm comfortable with, and that's about it. The bronze figures on the village green do give me comfort, and unrelated to my art, I've always had a paternal love for the topsail schooner I designed and built. I'm now even more astonished that I have successfully brought her to life. Oh, those tedious, tedious weight calculations to fix her longitudinal and vertical centers of gravity; that she floated to her designed waterline was a triumph and a relief. I confess to having mixed feelings about your intention to preserve my Christmas cards. You asked if I have a choice of institution and I'll settle for the Farnsworth Museum.

My preoccupation with the sea as a subject had its beginning when I was nineteen and was working in Vermont. An older man, an architect, knowing my interest in painting ships, suggested I go to see Frederick Judd Waugh's paintings of the sea at the Grand Central Gallery in New York City. On returning to New Jersey (where I lived) I promptly went over to New York to see this marine painter's work. I shall never, never forget that first

marine of his I experienced. For it was an experience. It smote me, yes, smote is the word, in the pit of my stomach. I had never experienced such a reaction. I retain the clearest image of that painting to this very day. It was then and there that I decided the sea would be my subject.

In 1937 *Life Magazine* featured a two-page spread of Waugh's marines and a picture of Waugh. It blew me away, those pictures, but the picture of Waugh himself astonished, for the vigor of his work suggested a younger man. As a consequence I felt I had to get in touch with him. I wrote to him and in two weeks he answered and very cordially invited me on a weekend of my choosing to his home and studio in Provincetown, Cape Cod. That visit remains the high point of my art career. He was a man of touching modesty and quite unexpectedly felt I had made real progress in my attempts at painting marines and so showed me a treasured cache of his early work. As well, he showed me how by using rocks and colored lights he made compositions for his pictures. We corresponded until he died in 1940.

Waugh did not paint on Saturdays but, sitting in the studio with his wife, they listened to opera. I of course sat in the studio with them. Now, of the few operas I have any familiarity with, *Tristan and Isolde* is my favorite, particularly the prelude to the third act. Talking about icing on the cake, that was the ultimate gift to this pilgrim. That trip firmly set me on painting the sea. Today I have to psych myself to paint a ship.

We left New Jersey and came to Maine for its subject of coast and sea and settled in Biddeford Pool. East Point was its focal point and where summer and winter I learned to paint. It was the optimal classroom with two quadrants of surrounding sea that offered opalescent seas of summer or the grey ferule seas of winter breaking their green backs on outer reefs.

After first painting on canvas, I switched to Masonite (Waugh's

influence). Now large panels, say 20" x 30" or larger, present a problem with any kind of wind; shaking so one can't paint. In later years I discovered pastels and now use them exclusively when painting alla prima. For years I painted large (60" x 40") studio marines with a few 48" x 72" works that proved difficult to transport by car or to ship. They met with great acceptance for five years or so at a gallery in Lincolnville, Maine. How I wish that robust market had prevailed.

For several years I did portraits in pastel but phased that out from having to paint too many children: who can't be expected to pose even for five minutes. I then had a brief stint in book illustration and painted seven murals – only two surviving.

In 1940, before coming to Maine, I worked for the Essex Bronze Guild in Essex Fells, New Jersey where we made bronze tablets with either engraved or vitreous (glass) lettering. The engraving was not your Jewelers type but was cut with hammer and chisel. I was the only employee and did everything except the engraving. I was given the interesting job of designing and making a 3' x 4' bronze tablet with the Oath of Hippocrates in cast letters. It was to go to the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City. I modeled my own letters in clay and cast them in white metal and, when finished, shellacked their backs. The pattern too was shellacked and the lines for the lettering being drawn the cast letters were spaced out and carefully checked for spelling and punctuation. All being ready, I took an eyedropper of alcohol and squeezed a drop on each letter, bonding the lettering to the pattern. It was now ready for sand casting at the foundry. It still hangs at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York City. I still paint (at 98) but mostly in the studio.

In 1969 I had a studio at Biddeford Pool, Maine and a gallery in Kennebunkport, Maine. My dear wife died and I was hard pressed shuttling between the two places. Eventually I

met Mary Curran and we married. After about three months, I said, "Mary, I now have the back yard and the money and I'm going to build the boat I've dreamed of for years. Why sweetheart," she said, "if that is what you want, you should do it." Oh! Timing is everything. Little did she know what lay ahead – four and a half years of toil.

In the late 'Seventies, I turned all efforts to sculpting: a division of the arts that always fascinated me. I started small and made three small bronzes in limited editions. I had knowledge of both the local and early fishing trades and the hard life particularly for those historically engaged in off-shore fishing, which too often left widows with children to cling to life. With that guiding subject I modeled in clay two three-foot high representative figures – a fisherman and his wife. That done I was enfevered, you might say, to enlarge the figures to the anticipated height of nine feet – a size called heroic. "Anything less in height outdoors looks diminutive," so I said to Mary, "I'm going ahead with the project and hope I find a patron." Mary agreed, if a bit fatalistically. The nine-foot figures were well advanced when a patron appeared. The figures were cast in bronze and appropriately sited on the Village Green (in Kennebunkport). They were dedicated in September 1995. I was 79.

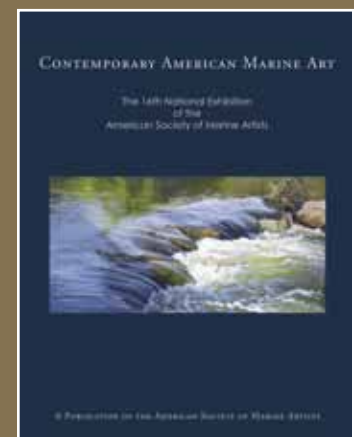
As ever,
(Signed Frank W. Handlen)



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.

16th National Exhibition

COLOR CATALOG



140+ full-color pages of every work in the Exhibition, with descriptive text from the artists, illuminating their inspirations and methods. 8 -1/2" x 11" perfect bound soft cover edition.

See ad on the back cover for details