RICHARD G. SIGAFOOS, APRIL 20, 1908- MARCH 5, 1985

EDUCATION: ROCHESTER MECHANICS INSTITUTE, ROCHESTER, NY. ALBRIGHT ART SCHOOL, BUFFALO, NY.

ILLUSTRATOR: BELL AIRCRAFT CORPORATION, NEW YORK STATE EDUCATION DEPT. TELLING TREES.

MURALS: ALLING-CORY PAPER CO, KENSINGTON METHODIST CHURCH, CHICAGO TRIBUNE TOWER. MURAL PAINTING PARTNER – GEORGE A. ALBACH.


TEACHING POSITIONS: ALBRIGHT-KNOX GALLERY; WARREN, PA, BRADFORD, PA; CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTION; JAMESTOWN, NY. PRIVATE LESSONS.

RUSSELL F. WELCH, AUGUST 7, 1908 – FEBRUARY 5, 1994

EDUCATION: JAMESTOWN HIGH SCHOOL, CORRESPONDENCE COURSE, WASHINGTON D.C. SCHOOL OF COMMERCIAL ART; NEW YORK STATE TEACHER LICENSE. STUDIED WITH CARL NORDELL, INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONALLY REKNOWNED ARTIST AND ADON TRIMM, ACCLAIMED REGIONAL ARTIST. WELCH IS LISTED IN AMERICAN ARTISTS OF RENOWN.

PROFESSION: PAINTER. HEAD PAINTER AT UNION NATIONAL, TEACHER (PRIVATE AND SOUTHWESTERN SCHOOL DISTRICT ADULT EDUCATION).


EXHIBITS: ALBRIGHT-KNOX ART GALLERY; STATE EXHIBIT, SYRACUSE, NY; ERIE, PA MUSEUM; PRENDERGAST LIBRARY; THE HENDERSON GARDEN HOUSE, MEADVILLE, PA; TERRY ART INSTITUTE, MIAMI, FLORIDA; GRAND CENTRAL GALLERIES, NY; CHAUTAUQUA INSTITUTION SHOWS – 1942-1980. WETMORE ROOM MURAL, JEFFERSON DE FREES CENTER, WARREN, PA 1973-4; COVER OF CHAUTAUQUA AND ERIE TELEPHONE CO.

MEMBERSHIPS: CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY SOCIETY OF ARTIST, PRESIDENT, 1973; CHAUTAUQUA ART ASSOCIATION. WARREN ART LEAGUE.
# 1 Richard Sigafoos: The Burchfield Penney Museum describes him as an impressionist painter, illustrator, muralist and teacher. In this newspaper photo, he has matinee-idol good looks, though most other photos would show him with glasses looking rather professorial.

THIS PHOTO WAS ACCOMPANIED BY A 1955 WARREN COUNTY OBSERVER COLUMN “Play Time” AND REFERS TO A SIGAFOOS EXHIBITION. ““IT IS THE WORK OF A MAN, AND A RATHER RUGGED AND MASCULINE MAN, WHO WILL CONTRADICT THE SISSY LABEL OFTEN TAGGED ON SUCH LEISURE TIME ACTIVITY.”

#2 Picture of home and barn. In 1948 Bought 106 acres land from Leon F. Gale (Dunkirk Evening Observer). A year later in July, Jamestown Post Journal would do a story on the artist and his home. The property had a barn and the remaining foundation of a house which had burned down. Described as “secluded” the residence is about a mile west of Stedman corneers on the Stedman – Sherman Road. The Post Journal article describes the house which Sigafoos and his wife, Elizabeth, designed and built.

“... it features in the living room a massive stone fireplace whose chimney reaches to a slanting ceiling.
The mantel is a wide plank taken from the barn, sanded down and enameled. Built in bookcases extend to the ceiling and contribute to the rough hewn atmosphere.

# 3. CATHEDRAL CEILING IN HOUSE, FIRE PLACE. North Harmony resident Vicky Rohm (a Westfield School councilor) now owns the former Sigafoos home and barn. The cathedral ceiling and fireplace remain.

# 4 SIGAFOOS ARTIST STUDIO SIGN. North Harmony resident Robert Rohm inherited the property from his mother Marion Rohm. He found the sign in the barn and hung it just for the day I was there. The Barn was Sigafoos’ studio which he redecorated to be both studio and gallery. He would paint scenes around the farm as small studies and then paint them on larger canvasses. Sigafoos would win a third place prize from the Buffalo Society of Artists for his painting “The Rail Fence” which was a scene from his home.

Bob Rohm’s mother Marion Rohm bought the property from Sigafoos in 1956. She is a wonderful artist herself and for many years ran the Horse Barn Antiques from the barn which had been the Sigafoos studio. In her May 13, 1956 diary entry, she describes Sigafoos as she saw him the first time. He was “tall, reserved and weary
eyed.” It is important to note that Elizabeth Sigafoos committed suicide in her car in September, 1955.

Bob also remembers that his mother wanted to buy the painting of galleons, large sailing ships which Sigafoos had hanging over the fireplace. He would not sell it. Rohm’s mother told him that Sigafoos burned many of his paintings before he moved out of the house he had built with his wife. His mother saw the fire and asked Sigafoos not to burn his paintings, that she would buy some. Sigafoos would not extinguish the fire, saying, “They are not my best.”

# 5 PAINTING – Kathy Rohm found this Sigafoos painting and they gave it to their daughter. It now hangs over the fireplace.

Why did Sigafoos come to Chautauqua County when it seems that he had a very successful career in Buffalo where he was born and studied. He said in a Post Journal Article he came because of the “scenic beauty”. Floyd Darrow writes in his North Harmony History that he came after the death of a friend – “to get away from the reminders of his former associations.” The friend most likely was George A. Albach a fellow artist with whom he painted murals in the Chicago Tribune Tower, Kensington
Methodist Church, Buffalo, NY and the Alling-Cory Paper Co., Buffalo, NY.

This is purely speculation, but many from Buffalo visit Chautauqua. Sigafoos must have recognized that the county was not only a painter’s lode, it also featured a vibrant art scene. The Jamestown Area had many venues for art exhibition and the Chautauqua Institution visitors offered a viable art market for paintings and students.

#6. Norton picture. Sigafoos earned his living selling paintings and teaching students. He certainly had no trouble finding students. This is Lake Erie painting is owned by Cynthia Norton. She said her mother Florence took lessons from him. A March 8, 1950 Post Journal article reports that 31 students took his painting classes at the Hotel Jamestown. He would teach classes for the Warren Art League, Warren, PA and Bradford, PA.

Again the July 1949 Post Journal article offers an insight into his disciplined approach to teaching— “Findley Lake residents, every Thursday while other students meet at the studio from 1 pm -3 pm on Monday and Wednesday. Meibohn Fine Arts Sigafoos bio, states, “he had a keen understanding of student needs and a strict adherence to fundamentals.”
# 7. Show them the book. Sigafoos was also an illustrator. In 1953 *Telling Trees* was published. Julius King was the author, Sigafoos, the illustrator. Julius King is a mighty interesting person, himself, an author of many books on nature, he may be the forgotten Chautauqua County naturalist. In relation to Sigafoos and Welch, also, it was his position as Chautauqua Institution Publicity Director that is of import here. Sigafoos had a show there in the summers of 1950 – 51 and may have been working on the “*Telling Trees*’ illustrations. One can speculate that King had some influence on which artists showed at the Institution. Did King know Sigafoos’ reputation and turned to him to illustrate his book? Did Sigafoos approach King when he moved here to get a show at the Institution? Did they know each other previously?

#8 Illustration of leaves. Notice the grid. King’s introduction states, “The artist has drawn a background scale of square inches. Count the squares and you have the size of leaf, needle, cone, flower or fruit.” Notice how effectively Sigafoos uses just two colors, green and black. National Audubon Society president John H. Baker said, “This is the book everyone is looking for.”
#9. Sigafoos was a prominent figure in the community. In his wife’s 1955 death notice, he is described as a “widely known Chautauqua County artist.” Sigafoos painted the portraits of four Jamestown Soap Box Derby winners. Robert Greenwood won the 1951 race and the portrait would be displayed in Akron, Ohio and other cities. The portrait would be framed. Sigafoos received $250.00 for his work.

According to Darrow, he worked for other Jamestown businesses; Blackstone, Corp., the Crescent Tool Co., and Fiber Foam Co. Salamanca, NY. He also painted scenery for the Little Theater in Jamestown.


#10. Newspaper accounts list multiple Sigafoos paintings of Chautauqua County. They hang on unknown walls. Where is the Buffalo Society of Artists gold medal winner, “The 5:15” or the third place winner, “The Rail Fence”? or any of the other many Chautauqua scenes?
We have the beginning of an answer. The Fenton has two Christmas cards and a large painting of Art Medal. The Lawson Center has a painting of the steamboat “City of Jamestown”. Andy Freay, Freay Funeral Home Manager said that his grandfather, Harold Freay, bought a painting from the Sigafoos Gallery in Mayville. The Gallery was across the street from the Howard Hanna Real Estate office, formerly the Howard Holt Real Estate office. That painting hangs there today. The August 22, 1959 Chautauquan Daily had an add for Sigafoos’ Mayville Gallery, where he moved after selling the farm. The add highlights portraits by appointment, exhibition of local scenes and custom frames.

#11. Sigafoos would leave the county at some point shortly before 1960. He and his second wife Ruth ZEH would move to Rockport, Maine. He would die in Georgia in March, 1985.

#12. The Burchfield Penney Art Center’s September 2011-2012 exhibit “Buffalo in the 1940’s” featured two of his paintings.

# 13. The Burchfield Penney Art Center has one painting in their collection. “Hazy Day” donated by John and Carol Kociela.
# 14. Currently the Meibohn Gallery, Buffalo has a Maine painting, “Granite Giants, Acadia National Park” for sale.
#1. HIS PICTURE, RUSSELL WELCH WAS CELEBRATED IN CHAUTAUQUA COUNTY. WHAT IS AMAZING ABOUT ORGANIZING THIS PROGRAM IS THE RESPONSE FROM SO MANY PEOPLE WHO HAVE CONTACTED ME TO SHARE THEIR PAINTINGS AND ALSO, MORE IMPORTANTLY, THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THIS MAN. WHAT EMERGES FROM THESE CONVERSATIONS IS A PORTRAIT OF A MAN WHO HAD A GIFT FOR FRIENDSHIP AND A PASSION FOR PAINTING. ANN E. WEIDMAN’S 1976 ARTICLE INCLUDES RUSSELL’S RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION, “WHAT MAKES AN ARTIST AN ARTIST.” “IT COMES RIGHT FROM THE HEART - SOMETHING WITHIN - ALONG WITH ABILITY AND TALENT. IT TAKES A LOT OF HARD WORK AND STUDY AND A LOT OF DETERMINATION ALONG WITH THAT ABILITY. AT LEAST THAT’S WHAT I’VE FOUND. IT COMES RIGHT FROM THE SOUL.” WHAT IMPRESSED ME IS HIS PURPOSEFULNESS AND PERSISTENCE PURSUING ART WHEN UPBRINGING AND FINANCES COULD HAVE PREVENTED HIM FROM BECOMING AN ARTIST. AGAIN THE WEIDMAN ARTICLE, “I DIDN’T GET MUCH ENCOURAGEMENT FROM MY PARENTS OR ANYONE ELSE,” THERE WERE ALSO FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES.

#2. TRAIN PICTURE. WHEN I ASKED MY NEIGHBOR AND FRIEND KAREN HALLE IF SHE KNEW ABOUT RUSSELL WELCH, SHE ANSWERED, “DIDN’T HE PAINT TRAINS? INDEED HE DID, THOUGH HE WOULD SAY THEY WERE A SIDE LINE FROM HIS LANDSCAPES. PAT SAULSGIVER, NORTH HARMONY SENIOR CITIZEN MEMBER SAID, “I KNEW HIM WHEN I WAS A YOUNG GIRL. HE WAS A QUIET MAN. HE USED TO PAINT TRAINS AS THEY PASSED THE BOOMERTOWN BRIDGE NEAR CUMMINS MANUFACTURING.”
#3 PICTURE OF ADD AND HOUSE. ACCORDING TO CITY DIRECTORIES, HE MOVED TO ASHVILLE IN 1940. THE HOUSE LOCATED AT THE CORNER OF HOAG AND COLLEGE ST. FLOYD DARRROW WROTE THIS IN HIS JOURNAL. “SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 1951. I WENT TO LOOK AT RUSSELL WELCH’S PAINTINGS – OF WHICH HE HAS SCORES – AND THEY ARE SPLENDID.”

WEIDMAN’S ARTICLE DESCRIBES WELCH’S HOME. “PAINTINGS ARE HUNG ON THE WALLS, RESTING ON THE PIANO AND STACKED AGAINST THE FURNITURE. THE DINING ROOM TABLE IS HEAPED WITH MATERIALS OF ALL KINDS FROM ART BOOKS TO SKETCH PADS. BOXES OF SUPPLIES ARE PILED UNDER THE TABLE.”

#4 NORDELL AND TRIMM PHOTOS. LETS TAKE A DETOUR AND BRIEFLY INTRODUCE CARL J. NORDELL AND HERMAN ADON TRIMM. WELCH STUDIED WITH BOTH MEN AND HE USED THAT AS A CREDENTIAL. LIKE ARTISTS BEFORE HIM WELCH SOUGHT THE BEST ARTISTS HE COULD TO TEACH HIM. COINCIDENCE PROVIDED HIM WITH TWO OF THE BEST TO EVER PAINT IN THE COUNTY. NORDELL WAS INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED WHEN HE MARRIED WESTFIELD, NY RESIDENT HELEN EDDY AND CAME TO WESTFIELD, NY. NORDELL SAID, “AN ARTIST COULD PAINT HERE FOR 100 YEARS AND STILL HAVE MORE MATERIAL THAN HE COULD USE. ARTISTS MUST LIVE IN THE SURROUNDINGS WHICH THEY PAINT.”

ADON TRIMM WAS A PROMINENT REGIONAL PAINTER AND TEACHER WHO LIVED IN JAMESTOWN. HE WAS KNOWN FOR HIS SNOW SCENES, PASTELS AND PORTRAITS. HIS PORTRAIT OF JOSEPH MCGINNES, STATE LEGISLATOR HANGS IN THE COUNTY COURT HOUSE. WELCH WOULD BECOME A PERSONAL FRIEND AND WAS PALL BEARER AT TRIMM’S FUNERAL.
ACCORDING TO THE WEIDMAN ARTICLE, “WHEN HE WAS ABOUT 27 YEARS OLD, WELCH RESUMED HIS PURSUIT OF ART AND BEGAN HIS FIRST FORMAL INSTRUCTION UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE LATE CARL NORDELL, CONCENTRATING ON OILS. HE THEN SPENT TWO YEARS WITH THE LATE ADON TRIMM WHO INTRODUCED HIM TO PASTELS. FROM THEN ON HE WAS A SELF TAUGHT PAINTER WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE WASHINGTON SCHOOL OF ART CORRESPONDENCE COURSE.” WELCH SAID, “I PREFERRED FINE ARTS TO COMMERCIAL ART SO I DID NOT PURSUE THE COMMERCIAL SIDE.”


#6 PORTRAIT AT FALCONER LIBRARY. PAM BROWN DISCOVERED THIS PORTRAIT OF GERALD S. GAETA AT THE FALCONER LIBRARY. WELCH’S COMMENT ON HIS PORTRAITS IS “I HAVE TRIED PORTRAIT, BUT, LET’S SAY WE DIDN’T DO ANYTHING FOR EACH OTHER.”

PERHAPS NOT, BUT THIS PORTRAIT WAS VALUED BY GAETA’S FAMILY. GERALD GAETA WAS THE SON OF FANNY AND JOSEPH GAETA, FALCONER. HE WAS LISTED AS MISSING IN ACTION ON NOV. 13, 1942. FALCONER LIBRARY HISTORIAN AND ARCHIVIST BRENDA CAVALLARO SAID THAT FANNY GAETA CHERISHED THE PORTRAIT OF HER SON AND
IN HER LATER YEARS WOULD SIT IN A ROCKING CHAIR NEAR THE PAINTING. GAETA MARRIED FLORENCE RODRIGUES IN HAWAII AND THEY HAD A DAUGHTER, GERALDINE GAETA MAUTHE. CAVALLARO SAID THAT THERE WAS A GERALD GAETA CLUB FOR SERVICE MEN AFTER WWII IN JAMESTOWN. GERALD S. GAETA FUND IS STILL PART OF THE CHAUTAUQUA COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FUNDS

#7. MANY ARTICLES ABOUT WELCH REFERENCE HIS PAINTING TECHNIQUE. HE WOULD DRAW IN PENCIL THEN USE A RULER TO APPLY THE PAINT OR WOULD DRAW THE PICTURE THEN PAINT IT WITH RULER OR PALETTE KNIFE BEGINNING IN THE TOP CORNER OF THE CANVASS. THIS CREATES A VERY THICK PAINT SURFACE. HE WOULD PAINT A MURAL ON THE WALLS OF THE WETMORE ROOM OF THE WARREN, YWCA, USING THAT TECHNIQUE. IT IS STILL IN THE WETMORE ROOM, BUT IT IS NOW THE JEFFERSON DE FREES CENTER. THE SEPTEMBER 25, 1972 WARREN, PA TIMES MIRROR AND OBSERVATOR DESCRIBED HIS METHOD. “HE USES A RULER TO APPLY THE OILS INSTEAD OF THE TRADITIONAL BRUSH. JUDICIOUS USE OF THE RULER’S EDGE GAVE THE CORRECT COMBINATION OF BROAD AND THIN COLOR STROKES TO COMPLETE THE OUTDOOR SCENE.” THERE ARE MANY NEWSPAPER PICTURES OF RUSSELL PAINTING WITH HIS RULER.

#8 JOHN AND ANNE SAYLOR COLLECTION PICTURES – BOTH JOHN AND RUSSELL WERE MEMBERS OF THE WARREN ART LEAGUE AND BECAME FRIENDS. JOHN WAS EXECUTOR OF WELCH’S ESTATE.

JOHN TALKED OF PUSHING RUSSELL IN A WHEEL CHAIR AROUND THE GREAT EUROPEAN CITIES. “RUSSELL WAS A SUPER GUY. HE HAD THREE LOVES, LOVED THE LORD, ART AND WOMEN. AND HE LOVED BASEBALL AND LOVED TO SING. HE REALLY KNEW HIS HYMNS.
ANNE SAID THAT WELCH SANG WITH A COUNTRY TWANG. RUSSELL LOVED TO PAINT CLOUDS. WHEN WE GO RIDING IN A CAR AND SEE CLOUDS, WE SAY THAT’S A RUSSELL CLOUD.”

#9. PICTURES OF SHARON SMEAD, WESTFIELD RESIDENT. SHARON KNEW HIM. RUSSELL AND HER MOTHER BETTY E. MORGENSTERN, A LOCAL ARTIST, WERE GOOD FRIENDS.

CAROLINE BISSELL THROUGH CHRISTIE HERBST, CONTACTED ME. HER MOTHER BOUGHT A RUSSELL PAINTING AND CAROLINE LIKED IT. SHE WENT TO RUSSELL’S HOME IN ASHVILLE AND BOUGHT FOUR. SHE SAID THAT THEY SAT ON THE STOOP AND TALKED.

#10. DENA CARLSON, ASHVILLE RESIDENT, RECEIVED THIS PAINTING AS A WEDDING PRESENT. SHE SAID THAT IT HAS ACCOMPANIED ALL OF HER LIFE AND NOW HANGS IN HER ASHVILLE HOME. “IT’S A SUNNY DAY AND REMINDS ME OF THE LAKE.” SHE SAID THAT RUSSELL HIT IT OFF WITH HER DAD. SHE REMEMBERS GOING TO ART SHOWS AT WELCH’S HOME. HER PARENTS ARE HOWARD AND HELEN CARLSON WHO OWNED AND RAN H.C. CARLSON, JEWELERS FOR 60 YEARS.

#11. PICTURE OF HIS CHAIR. ONE CAN IMAGINE RUSSELL SITTING IN THIS CHAIR ALL THOSE YEARS AGO.

#13. PICTURE OF GRAVE STONE. RUSSELL’S LIFE WAS ALL ABOUT ART AND PAINTING AND THAT PASSION IS COMMEMORATED IN HIS GRAVE STONE. NOTICE THE ARTIST’S PALLETTE CARVED IN THE STONE.

“I BELIEVE THAT ANYONE CAN GO A LONG WAY IF DETERMINED AND ANYONE WHO WANTS TO SHOULD BE GIVEN THE CHANCE WHETHER YOUNG, MIDDLE AGED OR OLDER.”