The New Rochelle Art Association

100 Years
1912-2012

Graphic design by Jesse M. Sanchez
Edited and written by Theresa Beyer
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In 1912 New Rochelle was a fast growing suburb. Already in 1899 New Rochelle had incorporated as a city. While New Rochelle was one of the earliest communities in the area, having been founded by the Huguenots in 1688, New York City residents first discovered New Rochelle in large numbers with the advent of the steam boat, especially the one that took them to the pleasure gardens at Glen Island and the Neptune House resort. Soon, planned residential areas like Rochelle Park (1885) and Rochelle Heights (1905) sprang up. New Rochelle's population doubled between 1900 and 1910 and would double again between 1910 and 1930. The village the Huguenots had founded with large tracts of farm land was rapidly being sub-divided into residential communities. A system of trolleys, commuter railroads, and later the parkways made New Rochelle easily accessible.

The New York area had always been friendly to artists. In the 19th century painters of the Hudson River School settled here. Many artists traveled to Europe and began to paint in the style of the impressionists while others were more influenced by traditional Beaux Arts training. Meanwhile, with the turn of the century, the highly influential realism of the Ash Can School promoted the idea that art didn't have to portray just beautiful objects. In 1913, a large show of contemporary art at the Armory in New York City showed a wide variety of paintings. These included paintings by the cubists and surrealists which would cause quite a stir, and would also divide the art world for the most part into realists and those who wanted to something else. New York City was also the hub of the magazine and advertising world and many commercial artists found work there while living in the suburbs. New Rochelle had a particularly large and vibrant art community starting in the late 19th century.
with artists as early residents of some of the planned residential parks. New York was a center of magazine publishing and many illustrators of the day also came to New York and settled in New Rochelle. Artist Ernest Albert moved to a house in Rochelle Park that is now the Elks Club. Illustrator Orson Lowell resided across the street from him. Frederick Remington moved to New Rochelle in 1891 and lived here until 1908 on an estate designed by renowned architect Alexander Jackson Davis. Edward Kemble and Rufus Zogbaum were other early artist settlers. Joseph C. Leyendecker, who sold his first cover to The Saturday Evening Post in 1899, moved here and built a large house in 1918 that is now the Mount Tom School. Cartoonist F. Burr Opper moved to the area now known as Residential Park. Clare Briggs, a very popular cartoonist with cartoons appearing in 180 daily papers, lived in a large Tudor house near the Wykagyl Country Club, which he joined in 1914. A series of golfing cartoons soon followed. By 1914 there were so many artists in New Rochelle that the local paper referred to the “artist colony”. It has been said that that 90% of the illustrations in The Saturday Evening Post were produced by artists from the city in the early years of the 20th century. Indeed, its most famous illustrator, Norman Rockwell, moved with his family to a boarding house in New Rochelle in 1913. Rockwell, although only 17, already had illustrated a children’s book. He first rented a studio on North Avenue then quickly plugged into the New Rochelle art community, sharing Remington’s former studio with the cartoonist Victor Clyde Forsythe, who worked for The Saturday Evening Post and created the Joe Jinx comic strip. By 1916 Rockwell’s work was on the first of what were to be many covers of The Saturday Evening Post.

Rockwell spoke of his early years in New Rochelle, recalling that “he often saw Cole Phillips the celebrated pretty girl artist, or Clare Briggs, the well-known cartoonist” or Leyendecker on his way to his commute to New York City. New Rochelle was also home to the Thanhauser silent movie studio and Terrytoons the animation firm that created early cartoons such as Mighty Mouse.

**FOUNDING OF THE NEW ROCHELLE ART ASSOCIATION**

For years there had been informal meetings in the studios of various artists, often with guests invited out from New York City. In 1912, however, Alta Salisbury West, an esteemed artist who had studied at the Corcoran School of Art and in Europe, proposed that a more formal group be formed – the New Rochelle Art Association. The original group of artists included Charles F. Ayer, Frederick Dana Marsh, Remington Schuyler, Herman Lambden, George T. Tobin, Armand Booth, Leon Schafer, Lucius Hitchcock and Orson Lowell. Mrs. West became the first president. Part of the impetus was apparently a concern about the quality of several civil monuments and structures being planned by the city.

The Art Association produced its first public exhibition in 1914 as part of the celebrations surrounding the opening of the new Carnegie Public Library on the corner of Pintard Avenue and Main Street which included both a large and small public exhibition room.

This first exhibit included both paintings by New Rochelle Art Association members and a few pieces by other area artists, some of who were no longer living. The exhibit was front page news in The Standard Star, which described many of the pieces in great detail saying, “It is a show that would
look well in the best art galleries of New York, and many of the pictures are suitable to be hung in the National Academy and other shows of equal importance.” The place of honor in the show was given to the recently deceased Frederic Remington, with a large oil painting entitled “The Snow Trail.”

Also singled out was a pastel by Hudson River School artist F. Edwin Church (also deceased). Among the members who were especially noted were Ernest Albert, “one of the greatest scenic artists in all the world” for a painting called “Purple”, M. H. Lowell, representing “the old school”, Ernest Albert Jr. for a painting entitled “Ten above Zero” (which also showed that year at the Art Institute in Chicago), Herman Lambden, Alta West Salisbury, Remington Schuyler, George T. Tobin and George Glenn Newell.

That exhibition was just the first of many at the library. While the library was at the Main Street location, the Art Association provided an almost continuous series of exhibitions. There were both group shows, generally featuring a particular media, and ones featuring various individual artists, most of whom were Association members. Shows in the first few years included one devoted to the work of Frederick Dana Marsh and one to Milton Mayer, and a group show of the Association of Women Painters and Sculptors of New York City.

**WORLD WAR I**

A few years after the founding of the Association, in the spring of 1917, World War I was declared. Artists were expected to volunteer their services to the war and there was active recruitment of artists from the field of magazines and advertising. Well-known illustrator Charles Dana Gibson headed up an army of unpaid artists at the Division of Pictorial Publicity. Many members of the New Rochelle Art Association including Orson Lowell, Victor Clyde Forsythe, J. C. Leyendecker, and Maginel Wright Enright, (sister of Frank Lloyd Wright), contributed to the war effort by creating posters for recruitment, liberty bonds, improving public relations, etc. Victor Clyde Forsythe (who had mentored Norman Rockwell and would later become well known for his western art) worked for the United States Shipping Board, Emergency Fleet Corporation, producing cartoons which appeared in publications that were distributed to the workers in the shipyards. He said that at first he produced “high brow” stuff, but then discovered that “to draw popular cartoons, representing the workmen, not as heroes, but as humans, had the better effect”.

The volunteering war artists met together at regular dinners at the Salmagundi Club, often inviting soldiers and sailors to tell the artists of the things they seen so that they could better visualize the war. At one of these dinners, Charles Dana Gibson spoke saying, “the artist is no longer regarded as an effeminate being with long hair and flowing tie, but a fighting man, and he is now being treated as a ‘regular fellow’ and his war work is appreciated.”
THE FIRST CIVIC ACTION

Soldiers’ Gratitude Plaque

The first project resulting from the First World War was a bronze plaque that was originally located at the head of the Main Street New Rochelle Public Library’s stairs and is now located in the City Hall Rotunda. This celebrates an interesting but rather obscure bit of World War I history. Fort Slocum, located on David’s Island in New Rochelle, was the main recruiting examining and reception point for all of New England. When the army announced that because of the passage of the draft, no volunteer enlistments would be accepted for the army after December 15th, 1917, over ten thousand prospective inductees descended on New Rochelle. They had no place to stay and due to miserably cold weather and rough seas, no way to get to David’s Island. They were put up in various local institutions and local merchants saw that they got clothed and fed. (The New Rochelle population at the time was about 30,000.) At one point it looked like the army would make them go home, though most did not have money for return tickets, but happily the powers that be prevailed on those in charge of recruitment to process those men already in New Rochelle. This plaque was conceived as a thank you gift to New Rochelle by the recruit Richard R. Pavlick of Boston who immediately began soliciting contributions from the men. He would not accept more than ten cents from any individual so that all could participate equally. By December 17th he had collected almost $500.00. The New Rochelle Art Association was consulted and a committee was formed which received a number of design proposals. The design chosen was by former New Rochelle resident Frank Tolles Chamberlain, a Prix de Rome winner and nephew of Miss Wyant, a New Rochelle painter. The bronze panel was dedicated on March 15, 1919.

The Inscription on the tablet reads:

“This tablet is erected by the volunteers of the National Army in grateful appreciation of the kindly welcome and hospitality extended by the people of New Rochelle from December 10th to 20th, 1917. Coming in such numbers that the Recruiting station at Fort Slocum could not provide accommodation for them, these thousands of men found food and shelter in the homes and public buildings of the city while awaiting reception into the service of the nation.”

THE 1920s

Colophon

Sometime during these early years the distinctive logo or colophon of the New Rochelle Art Association was designed by Fred G. Cooper. It first appears on the program for the Sketch Show of 1921. Its exact form has evolved over the years, but it remains largely as originally designed.

Shows

During the 1920s the New Rochelle Art Association continued to exhibit regularly. There were so many members that each show tended to be devoted to subsets of the membership. There were shows for illustrations, for painting and sculpture, for drawings and graphic arts, architecture (which often featured mural painting designs and other architectural ornamentation), and one devoted to arts and crafts. In between the group shows, smaller shows
were held featuring a particular artist (often recently deceased), or a particular medium. Many shows included work by well-known artists outside the organization. Many shows also featured a lecture related to the theme of the show. Each exhibit was lovingly described in both the morning and evening papers, with many works critiqued and described in detail. Some of the language reminds one that there were fewer entertainments available then.

Here is how one early show, a “Sketch Exhibition” was described in the local paper:

*If so minded, any reader of The Star may step out of bleak, lowering December weather and into the midst of an autumnal scene of a few weeks ago; or, as simply, transfer to the land of serape and sombrero – New Mexico – with its vivid tints and sharp contrasts of light and shade; or vault to the heaving bosom of the sea, with alert yachtsmen; or fast in the necromancy of a spell cast by some witching female figure with bland eyes and provocative lips, or do any of many other things, equally remote and alluring.*

Still, there were times the artists did not feel properly appreciated, especially when it concerned their pocketbooks. *The Standard Star* loved a 1924 show, writing, “In the gleam of the lights that flooded the spacious library Hall there met a gathering of people representative of the most exclusive elements of Westchester County society and of the most significant figures in the artists’ colony of this city.” However judge George Bellows had a rather different view, bemoaning the fact that while New Rochelle paid the highest per capita income tax of any city in the country, its wealthy residents weren’t supporting the arts by buying the paintings in the show in any quantity.

The organization often operated as a museum for the city. A show in November 1921, for example, featured paintings and sculptures loaned by local patrons. It was considered significant enough that *The New York Times* covered the show saying, “About $50,000 has emerged from the private collections of the locality”. The show included four examples of work by Winslow Homer.

The Association had good relations with other institutions in the city, in particular the Garden Club and the Woman’s Club, who often contributed to their receptions or offered space in their buildings. In fact the first sketches for the Woman’s Club House, by William F. Dominick, appeared in a 1922 Association show.

In 1925 the Association organized a poster exhibition which included posters that had been part of a lawsuit in England. These were a series of posters featuring scenes from the British colonies done by Captain Spenser Pryse for the British Empire Exhibition, but had been rejected because some of the subjects were too scantily clad.

In 1925, the Association lost one of their notable illustrators - Edward Penfield. A Memorial Exhibition was held in his honor. He was considered the “originator of the poster in America” and for six years designed all the posters for *Harper’s Magazine*. After leaving *Harper’s* he did freelance work, working on murals and publishing books of travel sketches, and illustrating books and stories. Many examples of his work were displayed.

While, for the most part, the work that appeared in the shows seems to have been somewhat conservative in style, the members of the association were aware of current movements. They went out of their way to look for examples of work from overseas, and
shows might include work by artists from London or Munich or Scandinavia. A 1926 show included work by Reginald Marsh. In 1927 they even hosted a show billed as a “Modern Show”. This show had work by Arthur Covey, Lois Lenski, and Elsie and Elizabeth Driggs. Particular praise was given to a large scale canvas by Joseph Stella of a white heron. However, although the Association was modern, it was not too modern, as The Standard Star reporter said: “The exhibition is not of the extreme type which caused such a furore some years ago when “The Nude Descending the Staircase” was the target for a thousand jokes and the entire movement proved quite unintelligible to many. Thus modern art has been through the fire and it is found that today it has retained the originality and daring, which have formed the basis of the whole modern movement, but has discarded extreme symbolism and cubism, although there are paintings in the exhibition which show how the modernist
Throughout the 1920s the Association continued to grapple with how modern they should be, with the illustrator shows displaying mostly fairly traditional work while the artist and sculpture shows occasionally got a little more daring as evidenced in this comment from The Standard Star in 1928:

_We do not envy the task the judges have before them for, with the exception of one of two compositions which point sharp nailed fingers into the still somewhat mystic future, and two or three which are just pulling their toes out of the already fading past, the majority of canvases claim a strikingly even status with each other._

1928 saw the passing of another luminary, artist Cole Phillips, and a Memorial Show was put together. Cole Phillips did many cover illustrations for the magazines of the day and was known for his fade away style. He was instrumental in working with the Chamber of Commerce on the book _New Rochelle The City of the Huguenots_ featuring paintings by local artists. The show included approximately sixty works including both finished paintings and sketches and included the painting of a mermaid which he did for the Chamber of Commerce’s book.

1929 saw the production of a very popular show on Scandinavian advertising posters. As part of the activities Adolph Treidler gave a lecture on “Posters and how they are designed, painted and printed”. Treidler was a well-known poster artist himself, having produced the first poster used for the Liberty Loan.

Another 1929 show included thirteen drawings by N. C. Wyeth and C B Falls’ Animal Alphabet.
MORE CIVIC PROJECTS

Approach Signs

Around 1921 the New Rochelle Art Association conceived the idea of creating more interesting signs for the major approach roads to New Rochelle. In April of that year a model of one of the signs was displayed at the New Rochelle Trust company and in 1922 the City Council approved their construction. The Chamber of Commerce and the Association worked together on the project and the city also appropriated $3500 to help defray the cost of materials.

By 1923 there were ten signs created by various well-known artists. These signs received national attention and were widely imitated in towns throughout the United States.

New Rochelle the City of the Huguenots

In 1926, largely at the behest of Cole Phillips, a book was put together by the Chamber of Commerce advertising the advantages of the city with beautiful full page plates produced by eleven different artists. The booklet was one of the first of its kind and was copied widely.

World War I Memorial

One of the missions of the Art Association from the start was to contribute to the community, not just by hosting shows, but also through permanent
monuments. One of the first projects the Association undertook was raising money and leading the committee for the creation of a World War I Memorial. To raise the money they sponsored three years of costume dances, created and auctioned off posters, and had puppeteer Tony Sarg stage a show. Norman Rockwell remembered being part of the effort: “Not long after this I received what I thought was a real indication that I was sitting in the world’s eye. The New Rochelle Art Association invited me to a banquet to raise funds for a statue commemorating the soldiers who had fought in World War I. The invitation read: “A seat has been reserved for you at the ‘speakers’ table.” He continued, “Charles Dana Gibson was to be the toast master at the banquet. The Wykagyl Country Club, a posh place, had been rented for the night. All the famous artist and illustrators who lived in New Rochelle were to be present.”

Ultimately the Art Association raised $35,500 for the monument which consisted of a sculpture entitled Victory by Edmond Thomas Quinn in an architectural setting designed by Louis R. Metcalfe. It is located in Faneuil Park, New Rochelle at the eastern intersection of Main and Huguenot Streets, and was first dedicated on December 11, 1921. It honors “the men of New Rochelle who served in the Great War for the rights of humanity.”

**Spanish-American War Monument**

Commemorating an older war, but not completed until 1925 is the small memorial to the Spanish-American War. A committee headed by Orson Lowell of the New Rochelle Art Association, and A. E. Thorne of the citizens’ committee selected Frances Adams Kent (Lamont), a Westchester artist and member of the National Sculpture Society to design the plaque which is mounted on a large boulder near City Hall just off North Avenue.

**Russell Young Memorial Tablet**

Russell Addison Young was a philanthropist and supporter of New Rochelle Hospital. A committee headed by Orson Lowell selected sculptor Edmond P. Quinn to create a tablet recognizing Young’s contributions. It was displayed first at the library and then installed at the hospital. The tablet featured a profile portrait of Young.

**OTHER 1920s activity**

In 1928, the Manual Training Department of the High School was asked if they could produce a number of pedestals for sculptures for a show which unexpectedly required more than the Association had available since no local carpenters could get them done quickly enough. They received the wood on a Friday and by Tuesday they had completed the job. An article in the paper gave it as an example of one of many ways that the Art Association worked hand in hand with other groups in the city and the good relations they had with each other.

After almost fifteen years of non-stop activity, in 1929 The New Rochelle Art Association finally became officially incorporated as a membership organization and issued its constitution and by-laws. This is the first official document the Association has that records its purposes, which are stated as:

*to further the interest in Art in the Community, to establish through public exhibitions an educational standard in the Fine Arts, to safeguard the public interest in matters pertaining to the Fine Arts, to improve the administration of the public departments relating to the Fine Arts and to interest itself in all matters pertaining to the practice of Fine Arts in Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Decorating, Illustrating and Craftsmanship.*

The active, or professional, membership was divided into four classes: Painters and Sculptors, Illustrators and Cartoonists, Architects and Interior Decorators, and Arts and Crafts. In addition, provisions were made for associate or non-professional members. The organization also was allowed to have up to five honorary members. Professional
members were expected to be current practitioners, or past practitioners now engaged in teaching. Associate members could be anyone of good character in the community with an interest in the arts.

THE 1930s

Despite hard times, work continued in 1930s. Well-known artists who joined during these years included Ugo Mochi, Charles Kinghan, Paul Jennnewein, William Oberhardt, Frederick Frost, and L. M. Phoenix (who founded the Phoenix Art Institute in New York City). During this time a program of youth membership, exhibits and scholarships was promoted largely due to the efforts of Phoenix.

Shows

In 1930, a Memorial Exhibit was held for New Rochelle’s Clare Biggs, a cartoonist whom The Standard Star said was “the most widely-read cartoonist the world has ever known.” His strip Mr. and Mrs. was carried by two hundred syndicates and he was estimated to have ten million readers. In addition to his strips, he had book collections on some of his favorite subjects including golf cartoons, which featured friendly caricatures of his buddies from the Wykagyl and Siwanoy Clubs.

In the early years of the 1930s the effects of the crash seemed to be minimal. Each show was pronounced to be “the finest yet” and some pictures were priced in the thousands of dollars. One show had “Dryads” by renowned impressionist Childe Hassam, while another featured watercolors by Eliot O’Hara who wrote the first of what would be six how-to books about watercolors that year. There continued to be shows which regularly featured clever and amusing paintings by Norman Rockwell in the Illustrators section.

The painting section meanwhile was still dominated primarily by realist works like F. C. Friesenke’s “Practice Hour”.
Lectures often looked beyond the usual and included, for example, one by Louis Paul Jonas, sculptor and taxidermist. He was a pioneer in showing animals in their settings - often as groups of animals and his work appears in many museums of Natural History. He designed groups by using smaller models which were then used by museums that could not afford the real animals. A model for “Grizzly’s Last Stand” appeared in one of the New Rochelle shows.

In 1931 the Illustrator’s Section featured a painting by J. C. Leyendecker showing Santa on a ladder trying to soothe a fierce bulldog which appears to have taken a bite out of his suit.

At the same show Norman Rockwell showed a picture of an old fashioned portraitist and another painting of a Hollywood hopeful, while Orson Lowell showed some of his Life covers.

In 1932, a hugely popular show of comic art was held. The Association president said the show “was put on deliberately to combat what some pessimists have alluded to as the present period of depression.”

The comic art show included work by three New Rochellians: Ad Carter of Just Kids, F. Burr “Fred” Opper of Happy Hooligan and Russ Westover of Tillie the Toiler. There were also some political cartoons in the show. It was such a success it went on to the Cleveland Museum of Art.

In 1933 the Association put on an Old Masters Exhibition, with thirty-four pictures totaling $500,000 in value. It included the earliest known portrait of George Washington, some Dutch and French artists and several English artists including portraits by Lawrence, Reynolds and Gainsborough and a Turner landscape.

The 1933 Illustrators Show included two works by Leyendecker and three by Rockwell including one about which the paper said, “Don’t say anything about it but we also discovered a dead man in the exhibition. He’s lying over in one corner in an awkward position and there’s a revolver nearby. There was nothing we could do about it so we left him there. You can find him without a bit of trouble if you want to look but you’ll sleep better if you don’t.”

The shows continued to be very popular and the library estimated that they received 10,000 visitors a year. In 1933, members of the Association had a very positive outlook and spoke of getting their own quarters while also maintaining their relationship with the library.

At this time the Association had the first of its fundraisers to raise scholarship money. Each artist painted a small picture or donated an existing one, all framed and more or less the same size (though there was some sculpture too). Patrons paid a small fee ($5) to entitle them to one of the pictures, but which one, was determined by lot at a party where the names of the patrons were placed in one hat, and the names of the painting in another, and then one card was drawn from each hat. They raised enough money to cover a year’s tuition at the
Phoenix Art Institute for a high school senior. Eighty-nine members participated.

However by 1934 the depression had definitely reached New Rochelle. The library budget was cut by 27%, meaning that there was no longer money for the expense of an attendant. The Association considered cutting the popular hobby show, but ultimately the American Legion offered to come up with the $25 to cover the cost of the attendant at thirty cents per hour for six hours a day.

One presumes shows continued on through the thirties, but perhaps as a result of the library cuts, few clippings are filed by the library, though there is a newspaper photograph and article about a medal that was designed for the awards at the 1939 show.

THE 1940s

During the 1940s the regular exhibitions continued. There was always a show for the illustrators and another one for the painters and sculptors. There was usually a themed show or two, a scholarship fundraising show, a solo art show or two and an occasional show for students.

In 1942 one of the rooms at the library was refurbished and named the Huntington Memorial Room. New Rochelle Art Association artists painted panels to decorate the space above the shelves. The participating artists were Orson Lowell, Courtney Allen, Harold Anderson, Ernest Thompson, Ugo Mochi, Herbert Kates, Robert Owen, Walter Beach Humphrey, Revere Wistehuff, Charles Kinghan and George Tobin. While most of the pictures depict peacetime themes, artist Courtney Allen chose to depict B-17 bombers.

WORLD WAR II

During World War Two, New Rochelle artists contributed to the war effort artistically. They decorated the Masonic service center where new recruits were welcomed with paintings of sports designed by Courtney Allen. They also produced posters as they had in World War One. Adolph Treidler, for example, did a number featuring women.

World War II Portrait Project

In 1943 the United Services Organizations (USO) contacted the Society of Illustrators for volunteers to sketch servicemen at USO centers. Since many of the Society's members were also Association members the idea caught on at the Association. The soldiers were stationed at Fort Slocum on David’s Island and were entertained at the Masonic Services Center which is where most of the portraits were made. Sketches of the servicemen were done on site which were then sent to the loved ones of their choice. Photostats were made of all the portraits and are stored in scrapbooks at the New Rochelle Public Library.

Each portrait was sent with a cover letter which gave a brief explanation of the project. Amusingly the letter not only asks for an acknowledgment of receipt of the artwork, it also gives suggestions for proper framing, writing: “This drawing is fragile and it cannot be cleaned if soiled: it should be protected under glass. We would suggest that in selecting a proper frame, a natural, wood molding with waxed finish, about one inch in width, be selected.” Thirty two artists were listed on the letterhead as being part of the project. Not content to just sketch the soldiers they could access easily in New Rochelle, the artists made several weekend excursions to military hospitals to sketch injured soldiers. The first of these morale missions involved flying to
New River, North Carolina. Fifteen artists sketched 161 marines in the course of a few days. On a second trip, a group traveled to the Naval Hospital in Portsmouth, Virginia to draw veterans of Iwo Jima and other battles. Fifteen artists, nine of whom were from New Rochelle, did 137 portraits in one weekend. On another trip, a group went to the Norfolk Navy Base in Virginia and did 146 portraits. On this trip they worked entirely in the wards for the first time. Finally, there was a trip where fourteen artists traveled to Magnolia Gardens outside Charleston, South Carolina where there was a naval hospital. On that trip they produced 140 portraits. Eventually the portrait project was reproduced in other parts of the country and even some overseas locations. Ultimately by the spring of 1945 over 100 American artists had donated their talents in creating over 10,000 portraits. The New Rochelle Art Association completed over 4,000 of these. The Art Association received a citation from the US Army Second Service Command in recognition of this project.

POST WAR AND THE 1950s

Shows and Lectures

Besides the regular shows there were some interesting lectures in the post-war period. In 1946, Harold Von Schmidt, a Saturday Evening Post artist, and the founder of the art correspondence school the Famous Artists School (which for many years employed Norman Rockwell) came and talked about how to do color lay-in work. Later that year there was a lecture on commercial art by Dean Cornwell who showed preliminary work for the Eastern Airlines murals at Rockefeller Center. Questioned about modern art he said there were three types, “mechanical skill, effected incompetence and incompetence ‘when they just don’t know what they are doing’.” He also didn’t like art critics much, saying he thought they should just describe the work, and not pass judgment.

In 1946 for the first time separate prizes were given to professional versus amateur artists. This separation was never mentioned again, suggesting that the experiment was abandoned.

In 1947 Eugene Savage gave a lecture titled “The Expanding Metaphysics in Art”. It is unclear if the reporter understood what the talk was about, but it appear that he was explaining or defending surrealism and the symbolic meaning of basic geometric shapes which he said were an outgrowth of emphasizing the spiritual in art, and a rejection of the “perfect specimen of beauty”.

In 1948 and 1949 the Association along with the Music Teachers Council sponsored two big Arts and Crafts fairs. The fairs included many demonstrations and were hugely popular. The second fair, which was held at the Woman’s Club, featured sixty paintings, the presentation of the Adolph Grant award for best painting, and the Julliard String Quartet, (which had been founded just a few years earlier), among its highlights. The event also included a game of musical easels where seven artists painted what was suggested by a piece of music. Results ranged from traditional to very abstract.

In 1950, well-known water colorist Dong Kingman gave a talk and also showed his film “Art in Action”. Later that year Harry Sternberg discussed silk screen painting, a new medium which the WPA had brought into prominence. An announcement was made that arrangements with Artists Equity Association would allow even more nationally known artists to lecture and demonstrate at the Association meetings for next season.

In 1951 the Art Association made a big splash when they staged the 39th Winter Exhibit at First National Bank on the corner of Main St and Lawton Street. The show included artists who had
previous association with New Rochelle, not just current NRAA members. The New York Times headline read “Philistines Open Arms to Artists as Bank Becomes Gallery for Day”. The New Rochelle Garden Club provided flowers. Apparently the bank president had heard they felt they weren’t getting enough visibility at the library located “on the edge of town” and offered his space as well as $500 in prize money and the opportunity to touch a $5000 bill. Fell Sharp, president of the Association was quoted as saying “It came as a great surprise, artists are more accustomed to being thrown out of banks on their ears than being invited inside this way.” Mr. Roth, an Association member, said “We are trying to kill the glass-eye and marble-wall atmosphere in banking. This Bohemian Art show will help.” The show included paintings by Reginald Marsh and the late J. C. Leyendecker. Over a thousand people attended the reception. The affair seems to have been somewhat complicated since it only spent the weekend at the bank and then had to be moved to its regular quarters in the library.

At about this time the Association added a new activity to its evening roster of demonstrations and lectures. This was the panel discussion where they invited a panel of artists or critics to discuss a topic. The first of these panels discussed “What makes a picture a masterpiece?”

Modern art as we know it finally seemed to be getting accepted in 1954 as president Lumen Martin Winters gave a talk about the relationship of Italian renaissance art and Picasso, Matisse and other modernists. Some interesting art events were organized, such as one where silhouette artist Ugo Mochi was presented with a medallion to celebrate his new book and article in the magazine Natural History, and dances inspired by Mochi’s gazelles were performed by Broadway dancer Virginia (Tiny) Shimp.

In 1956 Miss Molly Guion did a portrait demonstration. She was a well-known artist who had spent several years in England painting portraits of high society including many in the Royal Family. She was also a direct descendant of one of the original Huguenot families that settled New Rochelle.

In the meantime the big Painting and Sculpture show, which had become a juried show, became so big that they had to go back to the bank and have them host the sculptures portion of the show. The show may have been particularly popular that year as they were able to arrange to refund the fees for anyone who was rejected from the show. Another attraction may have been the award money offered - $2000 total. Six hundred visitors were at the opening reception and ultimately at least seven thousand saw the show. Membership rose to 325 that year including the fifty new sculptors who joined the association.

THE 1960s

Starting in the 1960s and throughout most of the 1970s there was a regular series of shows with October for oils, November for Watercolors, Pastels and Crafts, December as a Priced to Sell Show, January either for new members or an open show,
February for Drawing, Prints and Sculptures, March for Figures and Portraits, April for a Juried Show, and May for an “Anything Goes” show that encouraged experimentation. One interesting event, held in conjunction with most of the shows, was a dinner with the judge or judges which anyone in the Association could attend.

The panel discussions which were begun in the previous decade continued on such topics as “Pros and Cons of Modern Art” (The Association newsletter said of that particular event, “This should prove to be an evening requiring referees.”)

Sketch nights became a regular occurrence, usually led by artist and later president A. Shore Packer. During the 1960s there were some new activities including a studio home tour for the benefit for the Association. The tour visited Helen Beling, sculptor, Herman Roth, silversmith, Esther Perry, potter, Lee Perry (architect), Molly Guion Smythe (painter), C. Paul Jennewein (sculptor), Lily, Irene and Alice Gross (two painters and one sculptor), and Herman Roth (silversmither and jeweler).

Another new activity was a program to rotate art through the mayor’s office on a monthly basis.

Two very successful fundraisers were held at Temple Emanu-El in Mount Vernon. At the 1965 event one hundred and twenty-five pieces of art were sold netting $5600 for Association members and a $4000 commission for the temple.

In 1963 all the first place winners from a year’s worth of shows displayed their work together at the Ruth White gallery on 57th Street in New York City to generally favorable reviews.

In 1964 there was a small group show by four invited artists “all of whom paint in the modern manner.” The artists were Frances Harkavy, Pearl Mandell, Margo Krouwer, and Edward Stoloff.

In 1964 the Association celebrated its 50th anniversary with a big juried exhibition open to all Westchester artists. The current president Robert Sabato was quoted in The Standard Star: “This show represents a new phase in the activities of the New Rochelle Art Association, which has been part of the New Rochelle cultural scene for the past forty years” The show was held at the Huguenot YMCA on Division Street which had more space than the library. There was a $3 entry fee for members and $4 for non-members. There were $100 prizes in four categories – Oil Painting, Watercolor, Graphics and Sculpture, with several judges for each category.

Sculpture continued to be a very popular medium and a 1964 sculpture show at the Huguenot YMCA had forty-nine pieces. There was an even
bigger open juried show in 1966 just for sculpture and large ceramics held at 1st Westchester National Bank and again in 1967 with a top prize of $400. Truly modern art appeared to have finally been accepted when the association held a 1965 show for abstract or non-objective work. However there was still room for tradition, with Helen Van Wyk demonstrating portrait painting in a traditional style, albeit using polymer colors instead of oils. The following year watercolor painter and teacher Edgar Whitney gave a demonstration.

That said, tension between modernists and traditionalists came to the fore when in 1965 there was a bit of a kerfuffle regarding an outdoor show (6th Annual Westchester Outdoor Art Festival) organized by local gallery owner Woodi Ishmael of the Greene Gallery. “Famed illustrator and artist” C. C. Beall, a New Rochelle Art Association member, complained in The Standard Star that the work shown belonged to “the tin cup school of art”. Letters flew back and forth in the paper as artists who were in the show disagreed and praised the New Rochelle citizens who attended and seemed to enjoy the show. Robert Ceston, an Association artist who was in the show, was “appalled” by Mr. Beall’s attack, saying “Mr. Beall is obviously a member of a bitter clique of commercial rather than fine artists who have never adjusted to the tidal wave of great progressive American art, the demand for which was created by their own stale techniques.” He continued, “As a five-year member of the New Rochelle Art Association of which Mr. Beall thinks so highly, I can assure you that the shows run by the New Rochelle Art Association are hardly stimulating, the atmosphere being more suited to Aunt Martha’s coffee Klatsch rather than an art exhibit – and ditto for their paintings – save for a few good artists like Buchman, Mandell, or the Sabatos.” He also said that Mr. Beall’s comment that “abstraction is the work of children was ‘the joke of the century.’” The official word from the New Rochelle Art Association? There was “no feud” between the organization and the outdoor art exhibition promoted by Theodore H. Greene according to President Martha Gangel who added, “We are a dignified, 51-year-old non-profit group and I’d like to let it go at that.”

Meanwhile the New Rochelle Art Association, perhaps showing their conservative leanings, announced that romantic realist artist, Samuel Edmund Oppenheim, would demonstrate a portrait at the YMCA on the closing date of the festival. Oppenheim was a respected artist who had exhibited at the White House, the Chrysler Museum of Art and many galleries and was definitely no modernist.

The eclectic nature of the Association is hinted at in the winners of the 1965 juried show where “Young Mermaid” by Monique Winston, a sculpture, won Best in Show, but intriguingly a painting entitled “Shame of Selma” by Lilli Gross won best painting.

October 1966 John Groth gave a talk. He is known best as an artist-correspondent who recorded “the drama and beauty of the world as well as the miseries and gore of its battlefields”. He covered the fall of Berlin, the Korean conflict, and the Jack Ruby trial. He illustrated War and Peace, Heming-
way’s *Men Without Women*, and *Exodus* among other books. He also did *Esquire* cartoons. His pictures of doctors and nurses at work during the Korean War were a far cry from the relatively cheery portrait that would later be provided by the TV show *MASH*.

**THE 1970s**

During the 1970s the local paper seemed to lose interest in art with a few exceptions. As in the previous decades, the Association remained determined to accept all kinds of arts and lectures and activities reflect an interest in both modern and traditional art.

The juried show continued to be a popular event too large to be held at the library. It was held at a variety of locations including the Greek Orthodox Church on North Avenue, the Sports building at the College of New Rochelle and the brand new mall. At a 1977 juried show at the mall, the most popular piece was a collection of match stick constructions by Ben Zabinsky, including a replica of Thomas Paine Cottage.

Demonstrations continued to be popular. Among the artists who gave demonstrations were: Cliff Young (a muralist for NASA and painter of many government portraits), Everett Raymond Kinstler (portrait painter), David Stone (past president of Society of Illustrators), Maury Medwic (who showed how to use latex molds and fill with hardened plastics), David Immerman (oil portrait painter), Tipi Halsey (who demonstrated batik), Marilyn Bottjer (who discussed rug hooking), Margaret Garri (cloisonné artist), and Albert Handell (pastel artist).

New activities included a regular film series with both films about artists and experimental films. In 1973 an art show featuring New Rochelle past and present went on to be exhibited at City Hall.

In 1976 a sketching expedition was organized to various newly declared Landmark Sites in the New Rochelle area. The paintings that resulted were to be hung first in the library, then at the museum at Wildcliff. There were plans for them to travel to three branches of the Westchester Savings Bank, New Rochelle Hospital and perhaps even to Albany, but no descriptions of those trips were found.

In 1977 there was a panel discussion where the question “What makes a prize winner?” was discussed. Panelists were Helen Trotzky, Josphe Krasansky, Barbara Bisguyer and Pat de Haan (the latter representing avant-garde oils). Bisguyer said, “First you want emotional impact. Then you analyze the art.” Trotzky said she looked for something with a universal feeling reflecting its time. De Haan said a good judge gets past their own style. Everyone on the panel (all artists themselves) thought artists made better judges than trendy gallery owners and curators.

The 1970s saw some big architectural changes for New Rochelle. The Mall had been opened in 1968 and at least at first provided community spaces that were well used. In 1977 there was the groundbreaking ceremony of the Main Street Walkway. The activities included A. Shore Packer doing instant portraits and Paul de Tagyos doing caricatures. Plans were also in the works for a new library which was opened at the end of the decade.

**The New Library**

The new library caused a great deal of angst with the Art Association. The library and the Art Association had been intimately entwined from their beginnings, but it was clear that the library had a different vision for the future. Unlike the old library, the new one was planned with very little secure display space. Instead they proposed that the lobby be used. They planned an “Omnipole system” which would allow for about 1000 square feet of display space. There would also a small gallery on the third floor with
about 400 square feet available (30 linear feet). Both these spaces could be made available to the Association, but it was emphasized that "other uses by the Library or other community organizations would also have to be taken into consideration." In addition, the library suggested that if the association didn’t like the lobby they could donate a display system to the library that would be suitable for the third floor room. The Association was assured that "the needs and interests of the New Rochelle Art Association will be given a high priority in these deliberations."

In August 1979 a letter to the editor of The Standard Star under the big headline “Library Misses the Boat” appreciated that New Rochelle’s planning officials were “trying hard to make our city, once more, the Queen City of the Sound,” but lamented that “when priorities were set, who decided that the New Rochelle Art Association must go; to make space for what?” The writer went on to say, “I can’t believe that the residents of New Rochelle, whose tax dollars built and will maintain this library, will be willing to have their 65-year-old New Rochelle Art Association be told that there is no room for it – now, nor in the future.” The library responded that the New Rochelle Art Association “will be able to exhibit and meet at the new library, but that the board cannot reserve a particular space at the library for the exclusive use of the art association.” In a sign of things to come, in October 1979 at the brand new building at last, the New Rochelle Art Association managed to get reservations for a monthly meeting, but not for their normal season opening show in the library. A new era had begun. Monthly shows and meetings with a steady series of lectures and demonstrations would no longer be possible.

Peace was made however, and when former president Lumen Winter passed away in 1982 the lobby space was named the Lumen Winter Gallery in his honor. Lumen Winter’s sculpture “Flame of Knowledge” now stands in Library Green adjacent to the library. And eventually the artists realized there were some real advantages to a location that means that every single library patron sees that a show has been hung.

THE 1980s

The Association adjusted to its more limited schedule. Shows were reduced to four a year, plus the juried show, and other venues were found for the occasional additional show.

In the mid-1980s, a reporter with an interest in art appeared in The Standard Star and a few shows got reviews that did more than list the winners and judges’ names. In 1985 this reporter said that the 71st Juried New Rochelle Art Association show “looks different this year. For one thing it has a higher energy level than usual’ for another, there are twice as many watercolors as any other media and most of them are twice as large as usual.” Mary Moussot’s oil painting of Yankee Dave Winfield got special praise for its sense of movement and action. There were 123 works including painting, crafts, sculptures, and even some jewelry.

In 1989 the Association celebrated the 75th anniversary of its first library show by producing the first extended history of the association. Ann Maloney Lyons produced a fine booklet with many illustrations.

THE 1990s

In 1991 the juried show once again got enthusiastic press coverage: “It’s worth the hustle and bustle to get to the library today or tomorrow. One of this area’s premier showcases of regional artists, the exhibit always yields its pleasures – as well as a few duds.” The presence of humor was deemed a pleasant surprise and as examples of this the reporter described a ship model as though imagined by a fireman as well as a work by Tom LaPadula which portrayed baseball players whose heads had been replaced by their trading cards.

Lectures, which were open to the public, continued to be offered on an occasional basis. The talks included a lecture on Early American pottery, a talk by Wendon Blake followed by a private critique for members only, and Frank Callendo, owner of a local
framing gallery, demonstrating the basics of framing and also critiquing framing in the juried show.

In 1999 as part of the festivities for the anniversary of New Rochelle’s incorporation, a reprise of the landmark show was held. A contest for the best work in the show was to be used by New Rochelle in its publicity. Association artist Aida-Maria Vandemoortele’s drawing of the notable buildings in New Rochelle was chosen by the city for use in their publicity and the drawing is now hung at City Hall.

THE 21st CENTURY

With the new century the art association made some major changes. In 2000 a vote was taken to eliminate the category of Associate member which was no longer for non-artists who were interested in supporting art and instead had become a class of membership for artists who were not considered good enough to be full members and it only allowed them to participate in one show a year. At the same time the Association voted to add two new classes of membership: Photography and Digital Art. It was hoped that the changes would both help the Association to expand its membership and also to allow for some more interesting and contemporary work that had been an uncomfortable fit in the “Mixed Media” category. At the same time, under the leadership of president Charlotte Klein, the Association took a long overdue look at its by-laws which had remained unchanged since 1929 and brought them into the new century to reflect the way the Association currently operated.
Activities included a demonstration by pastel painter Diana DeSantis, a critique conducted by artist David Beynon Pena, and a talk entitled “The art market: strategies for artists” by Beth Gersh-Nesic.

In 2000 the Art Association entered the digital age when artists Lenni Hirsh and Theresa Beyer gave a seminar on how to use the internet, from places to talk about art online to places to sell it, as well as the basics of how to make a website. Members were invited to bring in a piece of work which was then photographed and put on the first New Rochelle Art Association website that Lenni Hirsh created later that year. The website included a brief history of the Association, art samples of current artists with links to personal sites if they had them, and a calendar of events. It was later completely revamped by John Channel and Jesse Sanchez. It now includes video, a changing exhibit of member spotlights and links to the newsletters as well.

In 2001 and 2002 the newly formed downtown Business Improvement District (BID) invited artists of the Association to participate in an outdoor art show on Library Green.

In 2007 the Art Association produced a calendar with images of New Rochelle as a way to promote the city and raise money. The original works of art were displayed at City Hall and a reception was held there. As a community building activity and promotion of the city was successful, but fundraising was limited.

In 2008 the Association collaborated with the Garden Club and Chamber of Commerce who had organized a daffodil festival, planting thousands of daffodils all over town. The Association did its bit to “Paint the town yellow”, organizing a yellow themed show that ran in conjunction with the festival.

In addition to its regular shows, the Association organized several shows at locations outside the library. In 2009, 2010, and 2011 small group shows were held at New Century Artists, Inc. in the Chelsea district of New York City. In 2012 a group put together a show at the Jewish Community Center in New Rochelle.

In 2011 the New Rochelle Juried Show coincided with a City Wide Art Fest and its reception, with a local jazz band playing becoming part of the festivities.

The New Rochelle Art Association has enjoyed one hundred years of promoting art in New Rochelle and will continue to look for ways as we head into the next century to add to the community and further the appreciation of art.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Most of the quotations in the text come from either one of New Rochelle’s newspapers or the Association’s Newsletter and are credited in the text.

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