



THE
MURALS
OF PORTSMOUTH

a history

HOW IT ALL BEGAN

By Robert L. Morton, AAA

It all began with a AAA motorcoach tour to the Wheeling, West Virginia, and Steubenville, Ohio area in February, 1992. AAA escort Ava Chaboudy had her husband, Dr. Louis Chaboudy, on the tour with her. When the group toured the murals in Steubenville Dr. Chaboudy recalls remarking to Ava, "The floodwall in Portsmouth would be a good place for murals and they would fix something that has been an eyesore for over 50 years."



In May, 1992, our AAA club's annual meeting was held in the Steubenville area and the trustees were given a tour of the murals. Dr. Chaboudy remembers talking to a fellow trustee, George Clayton, and myself about the floodwall murals idea. Upon returning to Portsmouth the discussions turned more serious and the three of us met with the Portsmouth Mayor, The Honorable Franklin T.

Gerlach. He liked the idea. AAA then organized a group to visit Steubenville in June, 1993. Included were Mayor Gerlach, City Council president Ann Sydnor, Dr. and Ava Chaboudy, George Clayton, Leo Blackburn, Carl Ackerman, Doug Peterseim (the AAA employee who drove the AAA van), and myself. Several of Mr. Ackerman's photos from his fantastic historical collection would later be used for murals. The AAA office in Steubenville hosted the luncheon and invited Mrs. Louise Snider, Executive Director of the then Downtown Business Association, to make a presentation. Mrs. Snider not only did this but got into the AAA van with us and gave our group a personal tour of their murals providing the background on each and the muralists who did them.



On the return trip to Portsmouth there was considerable discussion and a decision was made to hire Mrs. Snider as a consultant. AAA advanced the money to do this and later funds were pledged by several of the group to get the project started. In July, 1992, letters were sent to some muralists whose names and addresses were furnished by Mrs. Snider. Her highest recommendation was for Robert Dafford of Lafayette, Louisiana. In October, 1992, Ava Chaboudy escorted a motorcoach tour to New Orleans. Arrangements were made for Dr. Chaboudy to fly there, courtesy of the USAir, and a meeting was set to meet Robert Dafford.

It should be noted the Mrs. Snider got the mural idea originally from Mr. Karl Schutz who did a similar project in Chemainus, a town located on Vancouver Island in British /Columbia, Canada. An extensive article on the Chemainus murals appeared in the May, 1994, edition of Smithsonian Magazine. Robert Dafford painted one of the murals in Chemainus.

An informal committee was organized and a date of December 6, 1992, was set for the first fund raiser. Another AAA trustee was called upon for assistance. Attorney William Howland was asked to do the legal work on incorporating the organization as a 501-(c)(3) non-profit corporation so we could solicit funds for

the project. Mr. Howland did this at no cost to our organization.

This first function was held at Harold's restaurant and arrangements were made for both Louise Snider and Robert Dafford to attend. USAir provided a ticket for Mr. Dafford and he proceeded to miss his flight. He later wrote, "I sincerely apologize for missing your program. I am still interested. I will make every effort to be at your next event. I am anxious to view your collection of photographs and to tour the area. I am reserving a slot for you for Spring." The event wasn't exactly a failure but it wasn't a great success either. Mrs. Snider made a good presentation but we raised very little money.

In early 1993 Dr. Chaboudy and Mr. Clayton decided to go on their own personal fund raising campaign. It proved to be very successful. While Mr. Howland was working on the incorporation, the Committee used the PACE (Portsmouth Area Community Exhibits) organization, courtesy of its president, Don Gordley, for the fund raising organization because of their 501-(c)(3) tax exempt status. Many meetings were held in early 1993. In late February Robert Dafford and his business associate, George Baumgartener, visited for a weekend. A wine and cheese reception was held at the Ramada Inn to introduce them and the idea for the first mural was presented. It was a scene of Portsmouth as it looked in 1903 taken from four photographs in the Carl Ackerman collection and would consist of four panels, each 40 feet by 20 feet. The event was not a resounding success with 34 people in attendance but the local media gave it good publicity. Many of the negative comments by local citizens were starting to subside.

Finally, in early April, 1993, Portsmouth Murals, Inc. was formally organized. The officers were Dr. Louis R. Chaboudy, President, George H. Clayton, First Vice President, Robert L. Morton, Second Vice President, Ava Chaboudy, Secretary, and James D. Kricker, Treasurer. Trustees elected were Mayor Franklin Gerlach,

Ann Sydnor, Leo Blackburn, Don Gordley, Mary Hall, Imogene Howland, Carl Ackerman, Chris Lute, Phil Jackson, Tom Stead, Jan Morton, E.L. Glockner, Kay Reynolds, Jeanne Sheets, Margaret Clayton, and Jeff Albrecht.

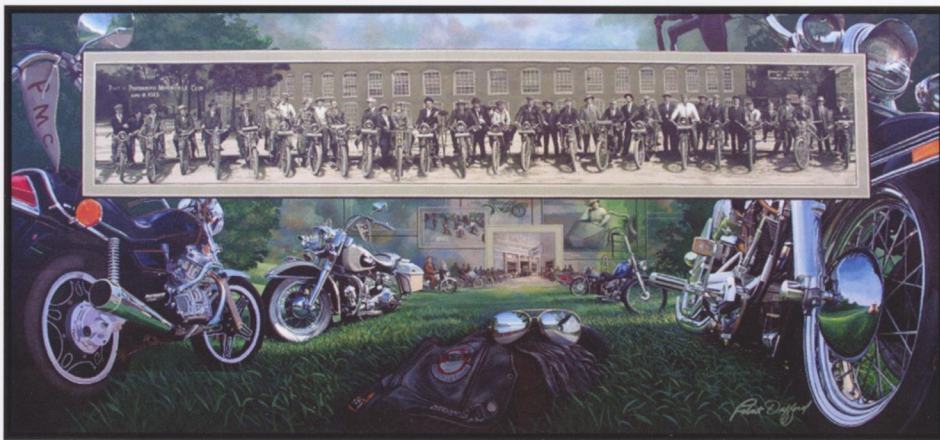
Mr. Dafford was commissioned at this time to do the first mural and agreed to begin work on May 3. The Stevens Construction Company was contracted to prepare the section of the floodwall. Imogene Howland was officially appointed the head of the Art Committee to work with Mr. Dafford and Stevens Construction along with other Committee members. It was announced that more than \$20,000 had been donated from private sources to pay for the first mural. Mrs. Howland reported that her Committee had looked at hundreds of photographs of the area before deciding on the 1903 panoramic view. She also said, "We are especially grateful to Carl Ackerman for his valuable assistance in allowing the Committee to browse his photographic collection."



One of the most important meetings took place in late April of 1993. Dr. Chaboudy, George Clayton, Imogene Howland and I met with the Honorable Vern Riffe, then our State of Ohio representative and the Speaker of the House.

We explained the background for the project, what money had been raised and what our future plans were. Speaker Riffe was acquainted with the Steubenville success, knew Mrs. Snider and had helped their project with some State funding. He was impressed with our start on the project and agreed to help the mural committee. And help he did in a big way! More details will follow.

The first mural was completed before the end of May, 1993, and a dedication ceremony was held Thursday, May 27, with a large gathering of over 150 people. Announcements were prepared on new stationery. Announcements were do-



nated by the Daily Times thanks to Wendell Skinner and showed the 1803 mural at the top. I served as Master of Ceremonies and dignitaries who spoke were Dr. Louis Chaboudy, Mayor Franklin Gerlach and the three County Commissioners; John Knauff, Skip Riffe and William Ogg. It was announced that the entire project would be 50 murals and would be completed in 4 to 6 years. I announced that AAA would pay for the lighting for one year to illuminate the murals so it could be seen at night. I should add AAA is still paying this expense.

Robert Dafford also spoke and praised the community's interest and cooperation. He commented on the project being made possible through donations from citizens. Dafford said that he expected to complete two other murals during his stay and that one presently in progress would depict Henry Massie drawing the original platte of Portsmouth in 1803. The third was going to be 40 feet in length and show the French General Celeron de Blainville meeting with Indians at the junction of the Scioto and Ohio rivers to claim this area for France. This mural would be a replica of a mural which is in the law library of the Scioto County Courthouse.



In a June 29 meeting where a discussion was held on sealing the finished murals with a special sealant, Thoro Seal, the Committee treasurer announced that our current balance was down to \$1,319.26 and all bills were not yet paid. At the same meeting President Chaboudy announced the Speaker Riffe's office informed him that \$115,000 in monies was being set aside for the mural project. There would be \$50,000 the first year and \$65,000 the second year based on the submission and approval of grant applications to the Ohio Department of Development.

The significance of the new money was that it allowed the Committee to plan

for the future. Ideas began being discussed on how to fill in the area between the 1803 and 1903 murals as well as the time periods before and beyond. The meeting was being held exactly one year after the visit to Steubenville. This was recalled because the group had sung "Happy Birthday" to Carl Ackerman at the luncheon there, so we proceeded to do so again.



Progress had been amazing in just one year going from Dr. Chaboudy's idea to a lot of work despite negative comments and nasty letters to the editors of local newspapers and then to the completion of three murals.

And thanks to Speaker Riffe's help we had some grant money coming in to allow us to plan the next murals. A master plan for all 50 murals began to be developed.

However, cash was low so Dr. Chaboudy and George Clayton began soliciting funds again and the committee began planning a new fund-raising event. This was a dinner held at the home of Whitney Miller on September 18. Robert Dafford came back for the occasion, courtesy of USAir and their representative, Charlie Malone. At the dinner 10 x 20 color prints of the Celeron mural provided by the Community Common and autographed by Robert Dafford were sold with all proceeds given to the Mural Committee. The Scioto Ribber restaurant owner, Steve Mault, catered the dinner and gave the Committee a bargain rate for the dinner.

It was later reported that we netted almost \$8,700 for the dinner along with special donations from people who could not attend, and over \$500 for the photos. A video was produced and sales began from which the Committee started earning a profit. The money situation was improving but to finish all 50 murals the

Committee agreed that many more fund raisers would be needed.

In a July meeting held to discuss future murals it was decided to do several panels on Education going from a one-room school house to Shawnee State University. Robert Dafford was scheduled to return in September to begin this work. In August Chaboudys made a trip to Texas to interview other muralists and reported that they still felt Robert Dafford's work was the best and the Committee agreed. The Chaboudys, the Claytons and my wife Jan and I all went to Chemainus to view their murals. They were done by several different people. Another muralist was interviewed but the sentiment grew still stronger that the best murals were those done by Dafford.

In September the Education mural consisted of three panels was approved and Robert Dafford returned to work on it. At a meeting in mid-September Dafford announced that someone sent him a postcard showing a night scene of Portsmouth in the 1940's. He stated that he would like to extend his stay to do this scene as it would make an excellent mural. The Committee with a high degree of skepticism granted this approval. This scene is shown below and it has proved to be the most popular of all the murals. At a meeting the end of September the Executive Committee was authorized to negotiate a contract with Robert Dafford to complete all murals on the floodwall. Plans were made for his return in January for the purpose of planning murals for the entire floodwall.



In October Mary Hall, head of Portsmouth Convention and Visitors Bureau, arranged a tour for Ohio Governor George Voinovich and travel writers for various areas to visit Portsmouth to see the murals. Dr. Chaboudy led the tour and the Governor was the most impressed with the 1940's Chillicothe street scene.

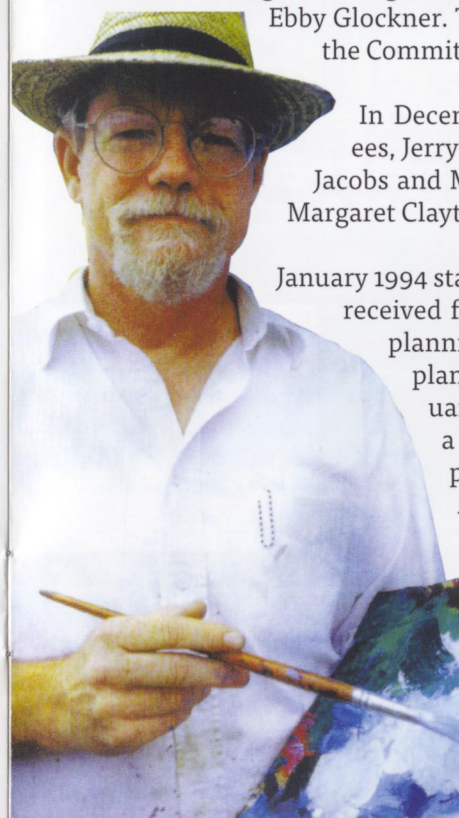


The need for funds continued to be a pressing matter. While the state grants had been approved, the money was yet to be received. Several contributions began coming in, most notably a pledge of \$10,000 from Andy and Ebby Glockner. The first \$5,000 was given in September when the Committee was really short in operating funds.

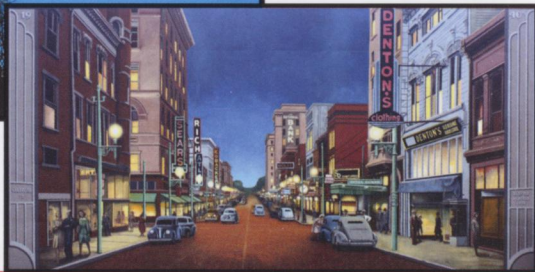
In December the Committee elected three new trustees, Jerry Holt of Shawnee State University, Dr. Norman Jacobs and Mrs. Jo Russell of Russell Glass. They replaced Margaret Clayton, Jan Morton, and Kay Reynolds.

January 1994 started with the good news that \$5,000 had been received from the Scioto County Area Foundation. The planning meeting with Robert Dafford to outline a plan for the entire floodwall was scheduled for January 26. Kendricks and AAA agreed to sponsor a wine and cheese party and invite the general public and media to see plans for the floodwall. Among topics selected at a January 10 meeting were Branch Rickey, Roy Rogers, the Portsmouth Spartans professional football team and the Mound builders. Many others were listed for future plans but the first painted in 1994 was the Branch Rickey mural.

However, this part would not be complete without mentioning those businesses who contributed substantially. The Ramada Inn,



courtesy of Jeff Albrecht, provided many, many nights of lodging for Robert Dafford and his assistants, several restaurants provided meals, the Pizza Pub, Fergie's, Bob Evans, Arby's, Ye Olde Lantern, Suzie's, Mexi-Tali Inn, and the Nellie Peck at the Ramada Inn. Naturally there was a tremendous number of hours devoted to the project by Committee members, particularly Imogene Howland and Dr. Chaboudy.



The information in this brochure was taken mostly from the 1998 Winter Edition of the AAA South Central Ohio's quarterly publication of *AAA Today*. Additional information was taken from the following Summer 1996 edition. No further articles were done due to the club's merger with the AAA club located in Pittsburgh, PA. The articles were written by the Ohio club's President Robert L. Morton. Morton is presently President of Portsmouth Murals, Inc.

Portsmouth Murals, Inc. is an Ohio Corporation with the 501-(c)(3) tax exempt status. Donations to support the maintenance and future painting of murals may be sent to:

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P.O. Box 509
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