

**Collection #
M 1385**

**JESSIE HULL MAYER
COLLECTION, 1935–1998**

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Processed by

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William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 half size manuscript document case; 1 photograph folder; 1 cold storage color photograph folder; 1 oil painting; 1 pastel portrait

COLLECTION DATES: 1935–1998

PROVENANCE: Gregory E. Mescha, Baltimore, MD, 1998,
A. Thompson Ellwanger III, Baltimore, MD, 1999

RESTRICTIONS: Items listed as being in cold storage need at least four hours to acclimate, so patrons are advised to call ahead of their visit if they wish to view those items in order to allow for thawing time.

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Indiana Post Office Murals Research Collection, M1139;
A Simple and Vital Design: The Story of the Indiana Post Office Murals, ND2635.I6 C37 1995;
Art for Main Street: the Indiana Post Office Murals, ND2635.I6 A77

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1998.0737, 1999.0123

NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SKETCHES

American artist, **Jessie Hull Mayer** (1910–2009) was born in New Haven, Connecticut and grew up on Long Island Sound in Branford, Connecticut. She enrolled in the Yale School of Fine Arts and graduated with a bachelor's degree in fine arts. While at Yale, she met and married fellow art student Henrik Martin Mayer in 1932. The couple lived in New York City for a year before moving to Indianapolis, Indiana, where Henrik was newly hired as assistant director at the John Herron Art Institute in 1934.

In 1935, both Jessie and Henrik submitted designs for the competition of the Lafayette, Indiana post office mural. Henrik won that first mural commission with Jessie being the runner up. Over the next four years Jessie submitted and won four more post office mural designs; three in Indiana and one in Missouri. When WWII began, the public art program ended.

While in Indianapolis, Jessie worked at the John Herron Art Museum as an artist and teacher. In 1946, the couple moved to Essex, Connecticut, where Henrik had accepted the position as director of the Hartford Art School of the Wadsworth Atheneum. For the remainder of her career, Jessie worked as a commercial artist in retail advertising and continued to paint watercolors of flowers and marine subjects.

Lucy Martha Taggart (1880–1960) was the daughter of noted Indiana Democratic politician and businessman Thomas Taggart. Lucy studied art with many notable artists in the East and Europe and exhibited her paintings widely. She was especially noted for her work in portraits. In 1931, she began teaching at the John Herron Art Institute and remained on the faculty as a painting and portrait instructor until 1943. It was during this time period that both Taggart and Jessie Hull Mayer were at Herron and the portrait of Mayer was completed.

Gregory E. Mescha was an art collector from Baltimore, Maryland, who acquired Jessie Hull Mayer's design painting for the Jasper, Indiana, post office mural.

Indiana Post Office Murals: In 1934 during the Depression, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. established a new arts program known as the Section of Painting and Sculpture. The Section's purpose was to provide artistic decoration for public buildings across the United States and provide financial relief for artists.

Because of their public access, post offices were chosen as the ideal location for the placement of murals. Open competitions were held for artists requiring that they either live in or were born in the state for which they were submitting a mural design. Thirty-seven of these mural commissions were created for Indiana post offices, with thirty-six remaining today.

Sources:

Materials in the collection

Carlisle, John C. *A Simple and Vital Design: The Story of the Indiana Post Office Murals*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1995.

I.H.S. General Collection ND2635.I6 C37 1995

Newton, Judith Vale; Carol Ann Weiss. *Skirting the Issue: Stories of Indiana's Historical Women Artists*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society Press, 2004.

I.H.S. General Collection: N6530.I6 N5 2004

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection is arranged in two series.

The first series is comprised of research materials and photographs collected by art dealer, Gregory E. Mescha. They document his research on tracking down the artist Jessie Hull Mayer, and the history of her winning mural design for the Jasper, Indiana post office. The painting was once owned by the Treasury Department until it was given to an employee who later sold it to Mescha.

The second series contains Jessie Hull Mayer's original design painting for the Jasper, Indiana Post Office mural titled, *Indiana Farm*. Created in 1938, her winning design depicts an autumn day on an Indiana farm. Farmers are seen loading pumpkins onto a horse drawn wagon while the farmer's wife opens a letter at the mail box. Children, cows, a house, barns, and trees are all part of the scenery.

The second series also contains a profile portrait of Jessie Hull Mayer drawn in pastels by Indiana artist Lucy Martha Taggart. The portrait was done while both women were working at the John Herron Art Institute in Indianapolis. It was donated as a gift of A. Thompson Ellwanger III in honor of Gregory E. Mescha.

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Research, Correspondence, and Photographs, 1935–1998

CONTENTS	CONTAINER
Research material associated with the <i>Indiana Farm</i> mural, includes receipts from the National Archives Trust Fund, copy of correspondence to Jessie Hull Mayer, and mechanical reproductions of her four winning murals, ca. 1935–1983	Box 1, Folder 1
Handwritten correspondence with Jessie Hull Mayer to Gregory Mescha, 1984, 1986 includes Mayer's biographical information and copies of letters she received from Edward B. Rowan about her painting, 1935, 1943	Box 1, Folder 2
Correspondence with the Treasury Department and the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, concerning Mayer's mural, 1997, 1998	Box 1, Folder 3
Correspondence and print outs on mural studies by Henrick Mayer, 1996	Box 1, Folder 4
Corcoran Museum of Art correspondence, 1997, includes copy of Federal Works Agency exhibition catalogue from 1939 with Jessie Hull Mayer listed	Box 1, Folder 5
Printed publicity on murals, 1939, 1997 Mescha's provenance and history of the mural, 1997	Box 1, Folder 6
Mural Study Finished Mural Cartoon drawing for mural Mural in progress [4 photographs from original negatives from the National Archives]	Photographs: Folder 1
Jasper, Indiana Post Office: 5 views of post office facade, mural, and details, July 1984	Color Photographs: Folder 1

Series 2: Art work, 1938, ca. 1942

CONTENTS

Jessie Hull Mayer
American, 1910–2009

Indiana Farm
(*Indiana Farming Scene in Late Autumn*)
1938

Oil on canvas backed by ¼" plywood
12 x 36 inches
in frame 13 ½ x 37 ¾ inches

Signed on verso: Jessie Hull Mayer
Inscribed on verso: Indiana /Post Office
(WPA (era) post office mural - Jasper, Indiana)
Signed by the artist at her home in Essex, Connecticut
- June 24, 1986

Lucy Martha Taggart
American, 1880–1960

Jessie Hull Mayer
ca. 1942
pastel portrait
18 ½ x 16 inches
in frame 28 x 25 ½ inches

"Gift of A. Thompson Ellwanger III
in honor of Gregory E. Mescha"

CONTAINER

3rd Floor
Flat File 28c

3rd Floor
Flat File 28d