

Collection #
M 1139
OM 0570

**INDIANA POST OFFICE MURALS
RESEARCH COLLECTION, CA. 1930S–1995**

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Processed by

Kate Scott
October 2014

Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org

COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 3 manuscript boxes, 2 oversize manuscript folders, 1 graphics folder, 1 photograph half box, 1 color photograph half box, 1 4 x 5 polyester negative box, 1 4 x 5 polyester color negative box, 1 120 mm acetate negative bin, 1 120 mm acetate color negative bin, 1 35 mm acetate negative bin, 1 35 mm slide bin

COLLECTION DATES: ca. 1930s–1995

PROVENANCE: Estate of Martha R. Van Sickle, Indianapolis

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS: Carlisle, John C. *A Simple and Vital Design: The Story of the Indiana Post Office Murals*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1995. General Collection: ND2635.I6 C37 1995; *Art for Main Street: The Indiana Post Office Murals*. Directed by John C. Carlisle. Merrillville, Indiana: Interphase II Productions, 1976 and 1991. General Collection: ND2635.I6 A77

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2005.0004

NOTES:

HISTORICAL SKETCH

In 1934, Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, Jr. established the Section of Painting and Sculpture. The Section had multiple goals: First, it would provide decoration for public buildings across the United States, which would create enriching cultural experiences for citizens who had little exposure to art. Second, it would provide financial relief for Depression-era artists. Section head Edward Bruce considered post offices to be ideal locations for art, since they were common and nearly everyone in the 1930s visited his or her local post office on occasion.

The Section selected artists and designs through massive open competitions, and required a percentage of artists to be residents of the state for which they were selected. A total of thirty-seven post office murals were commissioned and executed in Indiana as a result of Section efforts. Thirty-six of these still existed in 1995. Most of the artists chosen were relatively unknown, though several were on the faculty of the John Herron Art Institute (now the Herron School of Art and Design at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis). Nationally known painter Milton Avery painted a mural for the Rockville post office, though some residents complained about his abstract style and the fact that his hilly landscape did not look like the Rockville area.

Several other federally funded projects commissioned post office art as well. One of these was the Treasury Relief Art Project, affiliated with the Works Progress Administration. Under TRAP, Grant Christian painted a series of nine murals for the U.S. Courthouse and Post Office in Indianapolis (now the Birch Bayh Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse).

The Section of Painting and Sculpture, and other similar programs, ended in the early 1940s due to nondefense budget cuts.

Retired Indiana University art professor Robert Van Sickle began researching Indiana post office murals in 1975, with the intention of writing a book. Following his 1982 death, his wife Martha R. Van Sickle finished researching and writing the volume, and gave public talks on the material. However, it does not appear that she found a publisher.

Sources:

Carlisle, John C. *A Simple and Vital Design: The Story of the Indiana Post Office Murals*. Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1995. General Collection: ND2635.I6 C37 1995
Collection Materials

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This is first and foremost a research collection. It includes the research files and images compiled by Robert and Martha Van Sickle in the course of research for their unpublished book *Please Send My Payment*, which examined artworks in Indiana post offices. The collection could be of use to scholars researching post office murals, public art, Regionalist/American Scene art in Indiana, the Section of Painting and Sculpture, or any of the individual artists or towns.

Typed and handwritten segments of the book, in addition to a full typed manuscript, comprise the first series.

The second series includes miscellaneous papers, such as correspondence, news clippings, source notes, and two 1938 bulletins for federal mural competitions. Most of the correspondence relates to requests for information about the artworks or to the Van Sickles' search for a publisher.

The third series consists of the Van Sickles' research files for individual artwork locations. There are forty-one of these, each labeled by city and artist. Nearly all are for murals, with just a few sculptural works examined. Only one folder (downtown Indianapolis) holds information on multiple works. Typically, the folders hold chapter drafts, correspondence particular to the locations, notes, and news clippings. Several contain biographical materials sent by the artists or their families. Much of the correspondence is between the Van Sickles and the artists. Also included are photocopies of original 1930s and 1940s correspondence between the artists and Section administrators. These give a great deal of insight into the process of proposing and executing the murals, and into the involvement of local officials in the projects.

The fourth and fifth series are devoted to images of the artworks. In the fourth series are photographic prints; in the fifth is photographic film. Most of the murals are represented by printed photos. All of the works are represented by either prints or film except for those in the downtown Indianapolis post office (though the research file for this location does include photocopied images). The bulk of these images were taken by the Van Sickles on research trips in the early 1980s. However, some of the prints are on different paper stock and were likely provided by archives or the artists themselves.

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Van Sickle and Van Sickle, Manuscript Segments, not dated	Box 1, Folder 3
Van Sickle and Van Sickle, <i>Please Send My Payment</i> Manuscript, not dated	Box 1, Folder 4
Van Sickle and Van Sickle, <i>Please Send My Payment</i> Partial Manuscript, not dated	Box 1, Folder 5

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Indiana State Highway System Map with Post Office Mural Locations Marked, 1974–75	OM 0570 Folder 1 of 2
Correspondence, 1975–89 and not dated	Box 1, Folder 10
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David K. Rubins, <i>Poetry</i> , 1977	OM 0570 Folder 1 of 2
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Boonville Photographs, ca. 1981

Crawfordsville Photographs, ca. 1981

Culver Photographs, 1981

Dunkirk Photographs, ca. 1981

Fowler Photographs, ca. 1981

CONTAINER

Color Photographs
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Color Photographs
Box 1, Folder 2

Color Photographs
Box 1, Folder 3

Color Photographs
Box 1, Folder 4

Color Photographs
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Photographs
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Photographs
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Color Photographs
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Box 1, Folder 8

Photographs
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Franklin Photographs, ca. 1981	Photographs Box 1, Folder 5
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Cambridge City Positive, ca. 1981	4 x 5 Polyester Color Negatives Box 1, Folder 4
Crawfordsville Negatives, ca. 1981	120 mm Acetate Negatives Bin 1, Folder 2
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