

**Collection #
SC3687**

**Andrew Wyeth
Letter, 11 January 1953**

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF
COLLECTION: 1 manuscript folder

COLLECTION
DATES: 11 January 1953

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RESTRICTIONS: None

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NOTES:

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Andrew Wyeth (July 12, 1917-January 16, 2009) was born in Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, and was the youngest of the five children. His father, N.C. Wyeth, was a prominent illustrator who was most remembered for his work on Scribner's Illustrated Classics, particularly *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Robin Hood's Adventures*. The Wyeth family split their time between their home in Chadds Ford and a summer home in Cushing, Maine, both locations that showed up consistently in Wyeth's work. Wyeth was frequently ill as a child so he was educated at home, and he showed a natural talent for drawing and painting. In his early teens Wyeth began studying drawing and painting under the tutelage of his father. In 1937, Wyeth had his first one-man show at Macbeth Gallery in New York. His work, mostly watercolors of Maine, sold out in two days. By 1938, Wyeth had switched his medium and began working in tempura, a technique that he learned from his brother-in-law, Peter Hurd. In 1939, Wyeth met Betsy James, whose family also summered in Maine, and the couple were married in May 1940. They had two children, Nicholas and Jamie. Wyeth's best-known work is *Christina's World*, and two of his paintings, *Groundhog Day* and *That Gentleman*, set records for the largest sum a museum had ever paid for a work by a living American painter.

Leon Kroll (December 6, 1884-October 25, 1974) was born in New York City. He studied art at the National Academy of Design and the Art Students League. In 1906 and 1908, he received scholarships to study in Europe at the Byrdcliffe art colony and later at the Academie Julian with Jean-Paul Laurens. In 1910, Kroll received his first one-man exhibition at the National Academy where he showed 85 paintings. In 1913 at the Armory Show, he sold all his paintings. Kroll painted with other well-known artists of the day, including George Bellows and Robert Henri. Kroll painted landscapes and figurative works and in 1924 he was given a one-man exhibition at the Art Institute of Chicago. Kroll also produced murals for the Worcester Memorial Auditorium, the Department of Justice in Washington D.C., Shriver Hall at Johns Hopkins University, and a mosaic for the Normandy American Cemetery in France in addition to the mural in the Indiana State Capitol. Some of his works were also commissioned for war bond propaganda posters in World War II.

Sources:

"Wyeth's World," *Smithsonian Magazine*, June 2006.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/wyeths-world-117907877/>

"Andrew Wyeth." Smithsonian American Art Museum.

<https://americanart.si.edu/artist/andrew-wyeth-5502>

"Leon Kroll." D. Wigmore Fine Art, Inc. <https://www.dwigmore.com/leon-kroll#:~:text=Leon%20Kroll%20was%20born%20in,study%20in%20Europe%20in%201908.>

"Leon Kroll." Delaware Art Museum. <https://emuseum.delart.org/people/1134/leon-kroll/objects>

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

In this letter dated 11 January 1953, Wyeth writes to Leon Kroll, complimenting him on the mural he painted in the Indiana Statehouse, which was installed in the Senate chamber in 1952. The mural had three panels, one which depicted the founding of the state and its four capitol buildings, and the other two devoted to industry and agriculture. The murals were a gift to the state of Indiana through the National Academy of Design through the Abbey Mural Fund and were not funded by taxpayer dollars nor did the state have any say in the selection of the artist.

The artist selected, Leon Kroll, ultimately caused controversy in the Indiana Statehouse. In May 1953, Indianapolis mayor Alex Clark sent a letter to Lt. Governor Harold W. Handley concerned about Kroll's association with what Clark believed to be Communist-front organizations. In addition, some members of the legislature felt that certain features of the mural- a hammer, and a red bird (a cardinal, Indiana's state bird)- were dangerous Communist symbols and called for the removal of the murals. The Indiana Legislative Advisory Commission unanimously decided to take no action and the murals remained until the Statehouse was renovated in the 1970s. Similarly, murals that were painted by Thomas Benton for the Indiana building at the World's Fair in 1933-34 also caught criticism for being "unrepresentative of Indiana."

Sources:

"Check Loyalty of Leon Kroll, Mural Artist." *Vincennes Sun-Commercial*, 10 May 1953, Page 5.

"Fuss About Murals at Statehouse Ends." *Linton Daily Citizen*, 15 May 1953, Page 2.

"Approve Mural for Indiana Senate Room." *The Star Press*, 1 May 1952, Page 18.

"The First One Hundred Years." The Statehouse Story, Indiana Department of Administration. <https://www.in.gov/idoa/statehouse/the-statehouse-story/the-first-one-hundred-years/>

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