

Woodlawn H. S. Mural. F. J. Tombrello, 2010.

DEPRESSION-ERA MURALS LIVE ON

The Birmingham Historical Society's new exhibit and book capture seldom-seen murals that tell the story of an era, the history of our region, and the mood of a nation in hardship.

Depression-era murals survive and thrive in both exhibit and book form thanks to the Society's newest endeavor: identifying, assembling, presenting, and chronicling artworks that were created and displayed in the Birmingham area. "We just kept looking," explains Marjorie White, BHS Director. "We found the murals still intact in some structures, never having been moved in all these years. We found collections tucked in attics, archives, and online. It has been a fascinating scavenger hunt to discover this incredible art, created by artists between 1929 and 1939."

Examples: a series of detailed and colorful murals depicting Alabama agriculture from its origins to the arrival of federal programs in the 30s; historical murals about the founding of America and the governments that ruled over Jefferson County; New Deal murals proclaiming aspirations for better lives.

The Book: *Digging Out of the Great Depression: Federal Programs at Work In and Around Birmingham.* It's the ultimate picture book, 144 pages with 250 seldom-seen images of our region's programs in art, agriculture, beautification, archaeology, school and infrastructure improvement, health, reforestation, theater, and more. See our ancestors at work improving our community and keeping morale and productivity alive at one of our nation's most challenging times.

The Exhibit, November 7-December 31: *Murals, Murals on the Wall.* See magnificent Depression-era artwork covering the walls of the Birmingham Public Library's Gallery. You'll see the actual 10 large panels created for the 1939 Alabama State Fair to chart the history of Alabama agriculture. "They were lost and forgotten in an attic of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES) headquarters at Auburn, but are now rediscovered and being shown for the first time in many years," says White. In fact, the murals have been restored for the exhibition and will be moved by their new owner, Auburn's Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art, to the library for the exhibit. Bruce Dupree's illustration, based on historic documents at the Auburn archives, will suggest the aura of the original installation of the murals at the 1939 state fair. Digital reproductions of other murals still located in libraries, post offices, and courthouses across the city will also be on display thanks to the photographic efforts of Frank Jefferson Tombrello and exhibition designer Scott Fuller. White, Julius Linn Jr., and Katherine Tipton curated the exhibition.

The Opening Event: Sunday, November 7. A 2 p.m. lecture on *Birmingham's New Deal Murals* with Gaines Smith, Director, ACES and Marjorie White, Director, BHS, who will take us back to the optimistic era when science, technology and massive federal funds helped build a new future for Alabama. At the reception to follow, 3-5 p.m., ACES agents costumed in 1930s attire will demonstrate historic farming and food preservation. *Digging Out of the Great Depression* books and note cards featuring the *Historical Panorama of Alabama Agriculture* murals will be available for purchase at the reception and afterwards at the Library.

EVENTS AT THE LIBRARY

Exhibition

Murals, Murals on the Wall

Our Story Through Art in Public Places, 1929-1939

Sponsored by the Birmingham Historical Society, the Birmingham Public Library, and the Alabama Cooperative Extension System with the financial support of the Daniel Foundation of Alabama and the Alabama Humanities Foundation—A State Program of the National Endowment of the Humanities.
Birmingham Public Library Gallery, 2100 Park Place,
November 7-December 31, 2010.

Opening Day Lecture

Birmingham's New Deal Murals, with exhibition sponsors Gaines Smith, Director, Alabama Cooperative Extension System (ACES), and Marjorie White.
Sunday, November 7, 2 p.m., Arrington Auditorium.

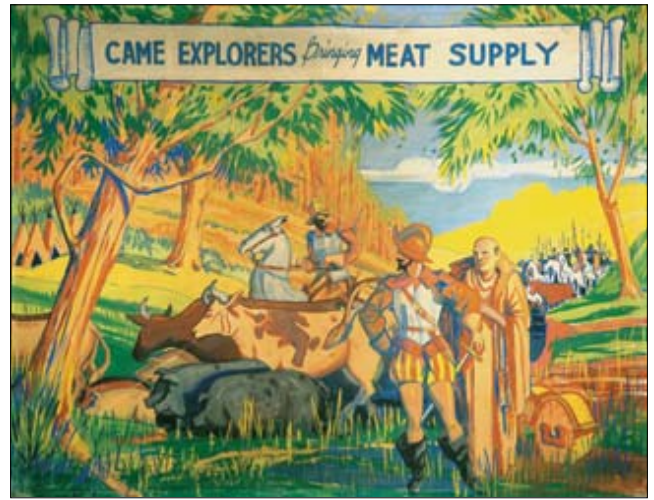
Murals, Murals Exhibition Opening & Reception with the exhibition curators and editors of *Digging Out of the Great Depression—Federal Programs at Work*: Julius Linn Jr., Katherine Tipton, and Marjorie White and with Extension System agents advising on farming and food preservation 1930s style: Charlie Mitchell, Angela Treadway, and Joann Wissinger.
Sunday, November 7, 3-5 p.m., Library Gallery.

Brown Bag Lunch Talk

Artists on Relief—The Men and Women Behind Birmingham's Murals. Speaker: Graham Boettcher, Curator of American Art, Birmingham Museum of Art.
Wednesday, Nov. 3, Noon, Arrington Auditorium.

Brown Bag Lunch Talk

The Discovery and Saving of Birmingham Murals. Speakers: Bruce Dupree, historian, ACES, Auburn, AL; John Bertalan, Conservator, Birmingham.
Wednesday, Nov. 10, Noon, Arrington Auditorium.



Historical Panorama of Alabama Agriculture.
 Eight of the ten panels, tempera on canvas, 1939, designed by John Augustus Walker, Mobile, Alabama; painted by Walker and Richebourg Gaillard Jr., Mobile, Alabama, for the Alabama Cooperative Extension Service Exhibition, Alabama State Fair, Birmingham, October 1939. Ownership transferred in 2010 to the Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art, Auburn, Alabama, lenders for the *Murals, Murals* exhibition. Photographs by Alabama Cooperative Extension System, 2006.

Funded by the WPA, Mobile muralist John Augustus Walker created these panels for installation at the 1939 Alabama State Fair in Birmingham. Commissioned by the Extension Service of the Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University), they tell the story of Alabama agriculture from its origins in the cultivation of corn by indigenous people to the arrival in the 1930s of federal programs advocating scientific and improved practices. Measuring roughly 5 x 7 feet each, the murals were displayed in the agricultural pavilion at the fair.

Murals, Murals Artists

Frank Hartley Anderson (1891–1947) A native Bostonian, Anderson studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Cleveland School of Art, and Harvard University. He lived in Birmingham from 1917 to 1938, practicing architecture and landscape design and making art, especially prints. In 1935, he founded the Southern Printmakers Society and organized annual exhibitions at the Birmingham Public Library. He designed several murals for area schools, of which the Lakeview murals remain, as do those at the Fairfield Post Office. He served as head of the University of Alabama Extension Division of Fine Arts.

Martha Fort Anderson (1885–1968) This Georgia native studied at the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts, the Académie Colarossi in Paris, and the Art Students League of New York. She founded the Art Department of the University of Alabama and later its Extension Division in Birmingham, of which she was the first director. Best known for her portraits, she painted, working with her husband Frank, the *Discovery of America* murals at Lakeview School and the *Spirit of Steel* mural at the Fairfield Post Office.

Richard Blauvelt Coe (1904–1978) A Selma native, Coe first studied architecture at the University of Cincinnati prior to his studies at the Grand Central School of Art in New York and the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. He then won a traveling scholarship for two years of European study. After bicycling about Europe, he came to Birmingham during the period 1934–1938. At this time, he served as the Alabama director for the WPA art program and painted the Woodlawn High School mural. Primarily a painter, he later studied and taught in Colorado, Maryland, and upstate New York.

Leo Friedlander (1890–1966) The native New Yorker exhibited portraits and life sketches at the Art Students League at age 12. As an apprentice modeler, he did ornamental modeling for the interiors of the St. Regis Hotel and the B. Altman's store in New York. He studied sculpture at the Art Students League of New York, and the École des Beaux Arts in Paris and won a Rome prize for study at the American Academy in Rome. Human figures remained his specialty. His sculptures are found across America, free-standing and integrated into architectural programs, such as the Jefferson County Courthouse and the RCA Building at Rockefeller Center in New York. Friedlander is best known for large scale public sculpture with heroic and American themes. He also became an art educator, teacher and lecturer.

Richebourg Gaillard, Jr. (1906–unknown) This longtime resident of Mobile studied art during the late 1920s at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia and traveled extensively in Europe to observe first hand works of the great masters. Gaillard painted in oil, pastel, tempera, and charcoal. A ninth generation descendent of French Huguenots who immigrated into South Carolina and in 1832 moved to Claiborne, Alabama and then to Mobile, he was proud to continue his family heritage as craftsmen and artisans.

Carrie L. Hill (1875–1957) Born in Vance, Alabama, Hill moved to Birmingham in 1891. She studied with Elliott Dangerfield in North Carolina, Arthur Friedlander on Martha's Vineyard, and George Elmer Browne in Provincetown and Europe. Her works were exhibited in the Brooklyn Museum of Art, the Art Institute of Chicago, The New York Art Students League, the 1928 Paris Salon, and through the southeast in shows of the Southern States Art League. She joined the Birmingham Art Club in 1908 and remained active throughout her life as a strong advocate for an art museum in Birmingham. A member of the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, Hill

was the only Alabama woman to receive WPA painting assignments, including the storybook mural for the children's reading room in the East Lake Library.

William Sherrod McCall (1900–unknown) This Florida native was a resident of Los Angeles from 1929 to 1934 and active in the art world there at this time, exhibiting at the Los Angeles County Fair of 1929. Following a move to Jacksonville, Florida, he taught art for two years in Jacksonville and served as assistant supervisor for a WPA recreation program, helping to build men's service centers in Fort Myers, Sebring, Avon Park, and Clearwater. In 1938, he was awarded the Montevallo Post Office commission based upon earlier federally supported work. In St. Petersburg, Florida from 1940 to 1941, he taught art and directed the city's federally funded WPA Art Center. McCall had served in the U.S. Navy during World War I and returned to the service for duty in the Army during World War II.

John W. Norton (1876–1934) The Illinois native studied law at Harvard University and joined Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders during the Spanish American War before undertaking art study at the Art Institute of Chicago. He later became one of the Institute's more progressive teachers, adapting modernist styles to mural painting. His major mural commissions adorn the Chicago Daily News Building, the Board of Trade, the Tavern Club, Hamilton Park Field House, all in Chicago, and the St. Paul City Hall in Minnesota as well as Beloit College in Wisconsin, where he executed 12 murals entitled *The History of Mankind*. The Architectural League of New York awarded him a Gold Medal for Mural Painting in 1931, the year he designed the Jefferson County Courthouse murals.

Sidney W.J. Van Sheck (c.1896–1991) The Czech-born artist was appointed instructor in commercial art and interior decoration in the Department of Applied Art at Alabama Polytechnic Institute in 1932. A graduate of the École des Beaux Arts in Paris, he taught at the Sorbonne in Paris and the Massachusetts School of Art in Boston. His professional artistic practice covered commercial design, portraiture, and interior decoration. He designed the Woodlawn High School mural. A combat pilot during World War I, he was shot down by a German ace over the French Alps in 1918. Later trained as an aeronautical engineer, he worked for Bechtel-McCone in Birmingham and later for the Hughes Aircraft Corporation in California.

John Augustus Walker (1901–1967) This Mobile native clerked for the Mobile and Ohio Railroad at night and eagerly studied drawing and painting in Mobile during the day and at the St. Louis School of Fine Arts. When the M & O closed its Mobile office in 1932, Walker pursued art full-time thanks to federal and local patronage. Major commissions include designing murals for Mobile's new Federal Building and the Southern Market/Old City Hall (today's Museum of Mobile) and the 10-panel series *Historical Panorama of Alabama Agriculture* for the 1939 Alabama State Fair in Birmingham. Walker also created floats and costumes for the Mobile Mardi Gras. In 1940, he resumed his job with the railroad, painting again as an avocation.

Ezra Augustus Winter (1886–1949) The Michigan native studied at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and won a scholarship for three years of study at the American Academy in Rome and then traveled extensively in Europe. Upon his return, he opened a studio in New York City. He specialized in murals, designing them for theatres, banks, office buildings, universities, libraries, and entrance halls in elegant homes. Radio City Music Hall, the Library of Congress, and the U.S. Supreme Court library all exhibit Winter murals, as does the Birmingham Public Library.



Where to See the Real Murals

World Literary & Storybook Figures at the Birmingham Public-Linn-Henley Research Library, Park Place (*left*).

The Old & New South Murals in the Jefferson County Courthouse Lobby, East Side, Linn Park (*below*).



Early Settlers Weighing Cotton, Montevallo Post Office, 720 Vine Street, Montevallo.



Spirit of Steel, Fairfield Post Office, 420 45th Street, Fairfield.

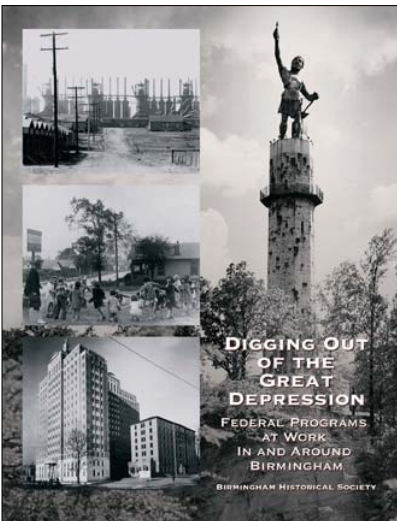


Discovery of America Murals in the Martin Advertising, Inc., Building, 2801 University Blvd. (*above*).



Youth's Strife in the Approach to Life's Problems, Woodlawn High School Auditorium, 5620 First Avenue North, Birmingham.

All photographs by Frank Jefferson Tombrello, Birmingham Historical Society, 2010. Not pictured is the East Lake Public Library, which houses Carrie Hill's *Storybook Mural*.



When hard times came to Birmingham in the 1930s and its industrial engine shut down, so too came more than \$1 billion in today's dollars. Federal programs designed to cut the relief rolls and ameliorate the lives of area residents built housing, hospitals, waterworks, local and state parks, public buildings, and roads.

Digging Out of the Great Depression provides a visual record of the diverse projects that put skilled and unskilled workers, paupers and professionals, to work in the Birmingham area. More than 250 historic photographs and other materials document work in public health, recreation, beautification, school improvement, reforestation, storm drainage, agricultural advances, the arts, theatre, and archaeology. These images provide a fascinating look at the industrial region as it once was—its mines and mills, urban places, and undeveloped areas.

Copies of this book will be available at the Library and by mail for \$35 postpaid (send checks to BHS, One Sloss Quarters, Birmingham, AL 35222). For more information, see www.bhistorical.org. This is the 2010 Members book. It has been mailed to members paid for 2010.