

Text for "Legacy: The Artistic Families of the North Shore Arts Association" for [American Art Review](#)

By Kathleen Valentine

In Gloucester, Massachusetts lifelong residents speak of life across-the-bridge. "I haven't been across the bridge in years" is often said with pride. The A. Piatt Andrews Bridge, arching over the Annisquam River separates Gloucester Island from the rest of Cape Ann by less than 300 yards. But in that small distance the light seems to shimmer differently. The sky becomes more luminous and the island is surrounded by the ever-shifting colors and moods of the sea.

For over 200 years artists have found their way to Gloucester. Before the birth of native son, Fitz Hugh Lane in 1804, artists of all disciplines found the natural beauty, the quality of light and the vital energy of America's oldest fishing port a source of inspiration. Though only 20 miles in circumference Gloucester has served as a mecca for artists such as John Singer Sergeant, Winslow Homer, Paul Manship, George Demetrios, John Henry Twachtman, Mark Rothko, Frederick Mulhaupt and Walker Hancock.

Many of the artists who came to Gloucester brought their children. In 1880 Stephen Parrish brought his son Maxfield from Philadelphia. They became one of the first intergenerational families to find artistic inspiration on Cape Ann.

In 1923 the city of Gloucester celebrated its 300th anniversary by commissioning sculptor Leonard Craske to create the Man at the Wheel. This ten foot bronze statue overlooking Gloucester Harbor became instantly recognizable and serves as a tribute both to the fishing community - the subject of thousands of paintings - as well as to Gloucester's distinguished artistic heritage.

The preceding year, in 1922, the North Shore Arts Association was founded. In its eighty year history some of America's most noteworthy artists have been members, including multiple generations of families. It is this heritage that is celebrated in "Legacy: The Artistic Families of the North Shore Arts Association" opening May 19th in its galleries on Pirate's Lane in Gloucester.

From the front porch of its turn-of-the-century livery stable painters have captured the tall sails and ruggedly industrious lobster boats and fishing vessels as they return to port at day's end. Outlined against blazing sunsets are the graceful towers of Gloucester's City Hall on whose walls the names of hundreds of fishermen lost at sea are inscribed. A little to the right are the blue carillon towers of Our Lady of Good Voyage Church between which a ten foot statue of the Blessed Mother stands guard over the harbor cradling a fishing ship in her arms. The entire panorama has been painted time and again by NSAA artists.

The first art exhibit was held in the upstairs gallery in 1923 and included work by six of the artists honored in the Legacy show: Henry Hammond Ahl, his wife Eleanor Curtis Ahl, Gifford Beal, N.A., Eric Hudson, N.A., Susan Barse Miller, and her son T. Barse Miller, A.N.A.

The Ahl family, Henry Hammond (1869-1953), Eleanor Curtis (1875-1953) and their only son Henry Curtis (1905-1996) were a versatile and mutually supportive family of NSAA artists. Like the Beals and the Wyeths they each maintained a distinctive individuality apparent in the paintings chosen for this exhibit. Henry Hammond's "An Ancient Oak" displays the powerful imagery and strength that were characteristic of his landscapes and murals. Eleanor's watercolor, "A New England Winter" shows her fine attention to detail and subtle coloration. Henry Curtis' "Wetland Scene" is typical of his light, luminous touch. As interest in American art grows it is hoped that this family will gain the recognition they deserve.

Henry Hammond was born in East Hartford, CT. In 1869 he married poet and painter Eleanor Isabella Curtis. Ahl achieved recognition for his political portraits however his career was quite varied including powerful religious paintings in the manner of Rubens. Eleanor was known more for her watercolors of New England landscapes. Henry Curtis lived most of his life in the seaside town of Newburyport where he was highly regarded for his sunlit seascapes.

Warren Hastings Miller (1875-1960), though known primarily as a writer, joined the association in 1923 with his wife and son. Susan Barse Miller (1875-1935) studied in Paris at L'acadmie de la grande chaumière and with Hugh Breckinridge and William M. Chase. Their son, T. Barse Miller, A.N.A. (1904-1973) was acknowledged in his lifetime as one of America's most accomplished watercolorists. In the late 20s he helped to found the Southern California School of Watercolor Painters.

Prior to World War II Miller was largely a landscape painter but after serving under General MacArthur as a major in the Pacific Theater - where he painted many combat operations - his work became profoundly spiritual. In 1946 he was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship. His painting "The Shrine" shows the light handling of color and the powerful technique which lends his work its poignancy.

A true son of the sea, Eric Hudson, N.A. (1864-1932) was born "Elmer" Hudson in Boston. He went to sea at a young age and began painting ships. Eventually he attended the Boston Museum of Fine Arts School and L'academie Julian in Paris. There his fellow students began calling him "Eric" and, rather than risk embarrassing them, he adopted the name and used it from then on. He was among the first of the Monhegan Island painters establishing his studio there in 1898. In the two Hudson paintings presented in the show the earliest "Fishing Schooners" is signed with his birth name, Elmer, and the second, "Dories" is representative of the mature artist.

His daughter Jacqueline Hudson (1910-2001) lived most of her life on Monhegan Island, ME. She attended the Art Students League and Columbia University as well as studying in Europe. She was recognized by the National Association of Women Artists but preferred to spend her time on Monhegan where she painted throughout her life.

Gifford Beal, N.A. (1879-1956) is a profoundly American artist. Encouraged by his father William Reynolds Beal he began painting with his older brother Reynolds and went on the study at William Merrit Chase's Shinnecock School of Art. For years he served as the president of the Art Student's League. Beal painted diverse subject matter and his style was much influenced by his long time friend Childe Hassam. He is remembered as an exuberant, energetic man whose bright joyful nature is evident in his scenes of circuses, carnivals and garden parties. His son William Beal (1914-1995) achieved prominence in the New York theater world as an actor, director and producer. Later he served as artist-in-residence at Ithaca College. Like his father he often painted gardens, ornamentation and other whimsical subjects.

The facades of some of America's most remarkable buildings feature the work of sculptor Ulysses Ricci, N.A. (1888-1960). Both he and his daughter Jerri Ricci, N.A. (1916-1996) were New Yorkers who were drawn to Cape Ann by their love of art and of sailing. Ulysses won numerous awards for his sculpture as well as for numismatic design. His sensitive sculpture of children and classical themes is evident in "Head of a Young Girl".

Jerri studied at the Art Student's League and her watercolors of New York City and of Rockport have been widely exhibited and collected. She and her husband, artist Arnold Knauth, spent most of their lives in Rockport, MA. Jerri's painting of Rockport's famous painted Motif #1 demonstrates her intense handling of watercolor.

Rocky Neck Artist Colony, located on a sixty-five acre spit of land between Smith's Cove and the Outer Harbor is less than a mile from the North Shore Arts Association. Here some of the greatest American marine painters lived, worked, and maintained galleries. NSAA member Tom Nicholas, N.A. was drawn to Rocky Neck in the early 1950s by his admiration for Frederick Mulhaupt. Nicholas tells the story of the time a group of tourists entered Mulhaupt's Rocky Neck studio while they were browsing galleries and collecting brochures. They asked Mulhaupt if he had any brochures. "No," he tartly replied, "and no salted peanuts either."

Later when Nicholas became friendly with Emile Gruppe, he asked what the other artists thought of Mulhaupt when he was active. "When he was alive," Gruppe said, "he had us all over a barrel.... He was in a class of his own." It was seeing a painting of Mulhaupt's in a New York show that prompted Gruppe to come to Gloucester.

Today the artists have changed but the galleries remain. Emile's studio, located in a 135-year old school house, is now occupied by his son Robert. Brilliant sunflowers and fiery chili peppers still grow in his garden and black-backed gulls soar overhead.

No family in the history of the North Shore Arts Association has nurtured more artists than the Groupes. Charles Paul Gruppe (1860-1940) was born in Picton, Canada but his love of painting drew him to Europe where he eventually settled in the fishing village of Katwyk Ann Zee in Holland. His skill with paint and his superb draftsmanship was appreciated by the Dutch Royal Family and he was elected to the Hague's Pulchre School. Many of his early paintings were done in the traditional European style but later after moving to the Rochester area and then coming to New England to paint his work transformed into a charming American style which influenced his son. "New England Countryside" is an exciting example of the style that characterized his last two decades.

Of Gruppe Sr.'s four children, three achieved recognition as artists (his son Paulo was a gifted cellist). Emile (1896-1978), inspired by Mulhaupt's Gloucester Harbor paintings, moved to Rocky Neck. He was later joined by his father, his brother Karl (1893-1982) and their sister Virginia (1907-1980). Karl achieved prominence as the chief Sculptor of Monument Restoration in New York City. He studied at the Royal

Academy in Belgium and was President of the National Sculpture Society. His bust of his brother "Emile" is a fine example of his talent for portraiture. Virginia studied with her father as well as at Cornell and the University of Rochester. She worked both in sculpture, creating small, perfectly detailed figures, and in watercolor as seen here in "Seaside Cottage".

All of the Gruppés at one time or another worked in Emile's Rocky Neck studio. Emile Gruppe had the distinction of being not only an accomplished artist but a dedicated teacher. He ran the Gloucester School of Painting from 1940 until 1970 and many of the artists on Cape Ann recall his ability to teach and his flamboyant personality with great appreciation. He was famous for his observation that "*if there is a heaven, it must be here on earth because the earth is so beautiful. Everyone subconsciously appreciates this beauty. But the painter's appreciation is more conscious for he spends his life trying to communicate his feelings to others.*"

Perhaps the finest testimony to Emile comes in the words of his son Robert whose marine paintings of Gloucester rival his father's for their power and craftsmanship. Of his father, Robert says: *I was extremely fortunate to have studied painting with my father for 20 years, and I would not trade it for the world.*

At my first interest in learning to paint Dad saw the need for studying drawing to train my eye and I was sent to George Demetrios. While continuing my classes in drawing I began apprenticing with my father. All the while learning his philosophy of painting and learning his evolutionary process. When I first started painting he told me, "I can teach you everything I know about painting in five minutes if I talk slow, but you will remember what I said when you discover it for yourself."

Emile was more academic in his early years. Later in life he used terms like, "Get the big effect! You can put paint on with your foot if you get the color and value right." This spirit of expressive painting was the culmination of 6,000 students and 60 years painting on location.

Expressive brush strokes, lost and found edges (the Dutch called hide and seek edge)] truthfully relate the big masses. One's own mannerisms and aptitudes come forth and set us apart as individuals.

Distinguished as the history of the North Shore Arts Association may be, it is in the works of the new generations of artists that the Cape Ann Legacy is most evident. Proving that "the paint doesn't drip far from the brush" many of the next generation of artists have demonstrated accomplishment and achieved success early in their careers.

Emile's son Robert and Karl's son Charles C., both members of the NSAA, studied with their fathers and their work offers fresh perspectives on the enduring marine themes. Robert's powerful brushwork and strong design skills are obvious in his painting "In for Repairs". Charles C., who graduated from Yale University, lives in Connecticut and teaches painting workshops throughout the country. His use of soft light and brilliant color shimmers in his painting "Boats in Morning Light".

Gloucester's maritime lure also drew George Armit Bradshaw (1880-1968) who brought his 11 year old son Robert to Rocky Neck in 1927 and joined the NSAA. Bradshaw Sr. was a graphic arts instructor at the Trenton School of Industrial Arts and was well recognized for his fine work as an etcher. "Ludlow Street, Philadelphia" shows the intricate detail that characterize his art.

Robert Bradshaw recalls his life as a young man on Rocky Neck where he spent summers sailing with Leonard Craske and, inspired by the work of Robert M. Pearson, tried his hand at sculpture. This included making sculptures from beach glass gathered from the surf below the yacht clubs where partiers would toss cocktail glasses onto the rocks below to be tumbled smooth by the surf. His friendships with Gordon Grant, William Meyerowitz, and Theresa Berenstein and other New York art rebels influenced his unique style and infuse his bold modern marine watercolors that reflect his love of the waterfront as seen in his paintings "The Last of the Sadie Noonan" and "Sibley's Wharf".

Roger W. Curtis (1910-2000) was born and educated in Gloucester and Boston. A versatile and innovative artist, Curtis founded the Burlington Art Association, taught at the New England Artist's Workshop and was the director of Aldro Hibbard's Legendsea Gallery. He was the definitive painter of seascapes writing two books on that subject with Charles Movalli. Curtis also fathered three NSAA artists: Alan, William, and David. Though all four of the Curtises are accomplished landscape artists each has pursued his own unique style and tastes. After years spent travelling Alan settled in Northern California and frequently paints the rugged Western landscape as seen here in "Cloud Studies". William's landscapes of the Connecticut countryside and of northern New England subtly capture the delicacy of the natural world. David Curtis is a Copley Master – the highest of honors bestowed by the Copley Society of Boston. After

several years spent in England painting the Yorkshire Dales, David returned to Gloucester where he is a plein-air teacher.

Many current members of the NSAA recall watercolorist Charlotte Movalli (1914-1992) with great affection and respect for her skills as a teacher and her contagious enthusiasm which motivated her students. This love of painting was openly communicated to her son Charles J. Movalli who recalls his mother making and selling braided rugs to earn money for painting lessons and supplies. In addition to studying with his mother, Charles had the opportunity to study with Emile Gruppe, Roger Curtis, Betty Lou Schlemm, and Zygmund Jankowski. He holds a PhD in English and his painting is characterized by his use of shimmering light and movement. One of the most distinguished painters of the Gruppe tradition he lives and paints in Gloucester.

Part of the pleasure of organizing a show such as "Legacy" has been the rare opportunity to meet and speak with artists who have had the privilege of growing up in families where art was a way of life and also to live in a community surrounded by great artists who served not only as artistic inspiration but as a tempering factor as they learned their craft. Don Stone, N.A. recalls the time Aldro Hibbard's wife Jackie attended one of his watercolor workshops and was impressed by his demonstration. She asked Stone if he would be willing to swap his demonstration for one of her husband's works. Stone says he was flattered and agreed to the swap so Mrs. Hibbard left with the painting tucked under her arm. She returned a week later with Stone's demonstration. She explained that she had told her husband about her offer of a trade to which Hibbard replied, "You've GOT to be kidding!"

Years later when Caleb Stone was becoming established as a painter he and his father set out for a day painting together. Reaching their site they met two amateur painters who eagerly greeted Caleb with the news that they had just purchased one of his paintings. He stopped to talk with them while Stone, Sr. went on to find a spot and begin painting. Caleb eventually joined him and, in awhile, the two amateurs completed their work and stopped by to bid farewell. One of them noticed Don and asked Caleb if that was his father. "Yes," Caleb proudly replied, "that's where it all started." The guy looked at him and asked incredulous, "He paints?"

Don Stone, N.A. has been variously described as a traditional realist and a contemporary impressionist. His long and distinguished career has earned him membership in the National Academy of Design and a Dolphin Fellowship in the American Watercolor Society. He is probably most recognized for his paintings of his beloved Monhegan Island, some of which were reproduced in "Monhegan, The Artist's Island". His son Caleb took his first workshop with his father on Monhegan at the age of twelve. Caleb talks appreciatively of the many artists he had the opportunity to know both on Monhegan and while growing up in Rockport. His painting displays a sensitive appreciation of familiar North Shore and Maine themes as seen in "Choate St. Bridge."

Perhaps the most romantic of contemporary North Shore Artists is Tom Nicholas, N.A. His lyrically rendered landscapes and finely detailed still lifes are both realistic and poetic. Tom belongs to the American Watercolor Society and was one of the youngest members ever elected to the National Academy of Design. More than 40 one-man shows and hundreds of awards pay tribute to his talents. His painting "Cape Ann Inlet" shows his gift for capturing the beauty of the North Shore. His son, T.M. Nicholas, studied with his father and recalls being encouraged to develop his own vision as he developed as an artist - "My father would say, 'You have to combine some of yourself with nature. The subject is just the vehicle.'" T.M. also studied at The Montserrat School of Art and, in recent years, has gained significant recognition as a painter and a teacher. His painting "Gloucester Harbor" is typical of the North Shore marine tradition but is transformed with a fresh eye and extraordinary craftsmanship.

Among the most recent multigenerational families of the North Shore Arts Association are Andrew Menna and his daughter Andrea Menna Taylor, Ronald T. Brake and his daughter Sharon Brake, and Ellen O'Maley and her son Terry O'Maley.

Andrew Menna discovered painting in his thirties and rapidly gained skill as an artist. He and his daughter Andrea Menna Taylor often paint together and share The Barn Gallery in Rockport. Ronald and Sharon Brake not only paint together but they teach together, lecture and make videos of their workshops. Ellen O'Maley admits that it was her son Terry who inspired her to paint. He began painting at the age of five and his photorealism style has resulted in many awards.

As the North Shore Arts Association enters its 81st year it is hoped that the long-standing tradition of mutually supportive artists will continue to inspire, mentor and empower future generations of artists.

The beauty of Cape Ann, Massachusetts has attracted some of the finest artists from all over the world who come to capture the luminosity and natural beauty. Regardless of the many varied works of art created by its members the fondest hope of the NSAA is that the best is yet to come.

- adapted from text for the accompanying exhibition catalog

Legacy: The Artistic Families of The North Shore Arts Association

May 19, 2002 – June 29, 2002

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