

MURAL PRESENTED TO CITY OF LANCASTER

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

On Friday evening, December 28th, 1934, a mural painted on one of the walls of the council chamber of the municipal building, (depicting "The Arrival of James Hamilton," in 1729, who came for the purpose of establishing Hickory town as the county seat and the site upon which Lancaster city later was to be built) was formally unveiled and presented to the people of Lancaster by Milton Thomas Garvin, prominent merchant, philanthropist and civic leader, in recognition of the sixtieth anniversary of his entrance into business. At a brief but colorful ceremony, attended by a group of men and women prominent in business and civic affairs, the painting was dedicated and its historic setting outlined in addresses delivered by the Rev. Dr. H. M. J. Klein, head of the department of history in Franklin and Marshall College, and Professor Herbert H. Beck, president of The Lancaster County Historical Society.

Following the invocation by the Rev. Robert S. Miller, pastor of the Unitarian Church of Our Father, Mayor James H. Ross introduced Mr. Garvin, the donor, who, in turn, presented Vernon K. Newswanger, of Lancaster and Philadelphia, the artist who painted the mural.

MR. GARVIN PRESENTS MURAL

Modestly transferring the limelight to the artist, Mr. Garvin said: "To have the ability to conceive and preserve in permanent form historic scenes of long ago is a gift of the companion by my side, Vernon K. Newswanger, a native of our historic Lancaster county, who has painted a scene from a very early incident in the development of the capital town of our county. It represents the arrival of James Hamilton, who laid out this city of ours, in which nearly 70,000 people now reside.

“To create is one of the great satisfactions of life, and our artist has here executed a mural painting which we hope will be a lasting memorial of an interesting episode in our early history, and, at the same time, a praiseworthy monument to his own artistic skill.

“My own contribution has been only that of financial encouragement; which, when compared in value to this mural, is small indeed. It is our great privilege at this time to present to you, Mr. Mayor, and through you to the city of Lancaster and the community in general, this mural painting which is before you. I hope it may long be an incentive to this and coming generations to delve deeper into our honorable past and to encourage the portrayal of many other historical scenes.”

MAYOR ROSS'S RESPONSE

In his reply to Mr. Garvin, the mayor said: “To receive the painting so generously donated to the city by you, Mr. Garvin, is a pleasure. I accept it for the people of Lancaster, and I hope our citizens will take advantage of viewing it at any time and many times, because I think it important that our history should be written in pictures whenever possible.

“The mural painted here tells the story which our citizens should remember and with which the coming generations should be familiar. The artist, Mr. Newswanger, has done his part well in placing before the people this bit of history in painting.

“It is very fitting, Mr. Garvin, that you should present this to the city on this day. Those who can look back a number of years are reminded that you, a little country boy, were taking your place in the business world of Lancaster, just sixty years ago—a place which you have filled with credit to yourself and in which you have been a valued asset to the city. Your business vision, your kindly sympathy, your interest in art and the finer things of life, have made their helpful impression on the development of Lancaster. You have been not only successful in business, but, at the same time, you have possibly done more than your share for the community at large; and it is with genuine appreciation that I accept this token of your generous regard for Lancaster and its people.”

Commenting upon the anniversary of Mr. Garvin's entrance into business, Dr. Klein told the audience that "On December 28th, 1874, Mr. Garvin began his business career by starting to work as an errand boy in the old Fahnestock dry goods store, next door to the court house. He has been there ever since. But in these sixty years, he had advanced from errand boy to the First Citizen of Lancaster. He stands second to none in his interest to the city in which his life has been spent; and his fine spirit of civic devotion is an inspiration to those of his own times and will be to coming generations.

"The time will come, let us hope, when men and women will be as willing to give to their government as they now are to receive from it;" Dr. Klein added, "When that time comes, we shall have more beautiful cities and more contented citizens."

Laying emphasis upon the mural as a product of "the creative skill of a young artist who is a native son of Lancaster county," the speaker termed it a "satisfaction to all of us that a county that has produced Jacob Eichholtz, Peter Lehn Grosh, Arthur Armstrong and Ludwig Reingruber, should continue to develop young artists."

GIVES HISTORY OF PAINTING

Dr. Klein concluded his talk with an interesting survey of the conditions surrounding the visit of James Hamilton, "Founder of Lancaster," as depicted in the mural. Only nineteen years of age when he consummated the deal which changed what was then little Hickory town into Lancaster, seat of the county, Hamilton subsequently became one of the leading figures in Pennsylvania, first as mayor of Philadelphia and later as lieutenant-governor, or executive of the province.

Concluding, he extended congratulations to "Mr. Garvin, upon his sixtieth business anniversary; to Mr. Newswanger, upon his mural; and to the City of Lancaster, upon its father and founder, James Hamilton. These three personalities are somehow associated on this occasion in a beautiful way—like a three-fold cord which is not easily broken. They stand for Law, for Business, for Art—three essential elements in the successful building of any city."

PROFESSOR BECK SPEAKS

A vivid word-picture, based upon the figures and landscapes of the mural, was drawn by Professor Herbert H. Beck.

"Perhaps it sounds surprising to state that the site of this city, now a part of the 'Garden Spot' of our country, was in 1729, a very questionable place for a village," the speaker said; "for the region at that time was covered with heavy swamps. Extending as far as Franklin and Marshall College, the land was a mire overgrown with timber."

Pointing out the three Indian figures in the mural, Professor Beck declared that, "from the friendly tribes then inhabiting Lancaster county, we have gleaned the richest heritage of stream-names in Pennsylvania — the Conoy, Susquehanna, Conestoga, Tucquan, Cocalico, Conowingo and many others."

He spoke of the distribution of pioneer settlers, referring to the scores of names "found in the 1934 telephone directories, which were a part of Lancaster county as far back as 1729." Game was abundant: "You could buy a gobbler for less than twelve cents, and a fat buck for less than twenty cents;" and the fish, including "fifty-pound sturgeons, were plentiful in the river in those days." These formed interesting sidelights to the picture. The speaker also pointed out the figure of the trader, with a gun taller than himself, explaining that "the Indians traded beaver pelts for guns, and since the skins were piled to meet the length of the guns, traders found it profitable to barter long weapons."

REGARDING THE ARTIST

In commenting on the mural, the donor, Mr. Garvin, writes as follows:

"The artist Newswanger while painting the Lancaster mural, showed much imagination and clear vision. He requested my presence several times, and was eager for suggestions, all of which he weighed intelligently but, of course, did not always accept them. As the celebrated artists of the Renaissance frequently bestowed upon their heroes portraits of themselves, so in this painting it may be observed that the trader (man with gun) bears the likeness of the artist, Vernon K. Newswanger; the blond Mennonite

maid (first figure at lower right side of the picture) is his wife; and the little boy with the hoop (near front of horse) is their son. This was done at my suggestion. It certainly gives an added interest to their friends."

RESTORES CITY HALL

In December, 1924, after he had been in business for fifty years, Mr. Garvin, at his own expense,—the sum being in excess of five thousand dollars—restored the old city hall in Penn Square, a building erected in 1795-7, to its original Colonial architectural form, as a gift to the city of Lancaster. He also placed two bronze tablets on the exterior of the venerable building—one with appropriate descriptions designating its place in the history of Lancaster city, and the other giving a history of Lancaster itself.

LOVE OF BEAUTY

Through his love of art, too, the Unitarian Church of Our Father, in Lancaster, of which Mr. Garvin is a zealous and an active member, has been made by his liberality a sanctuary of rare beauty, adorned with reproductions of Sargent's "Prophets" in mural form, and Leonardo da Vinci's "Last Supper" in wood carving, produced by some of the characters figuring in the Oberammergau Passion Play; and with stained glass windows with appropriate symbols characterizing the virtues of great and good men and women in human history.

Such a picture as described in this article is invaluable in its fine portrayal of scenes and characteristics of a by-gone age altogether unfamiliar to our present generation. The hardy pioneers, the friendly Indians and the crude log cabins, will have their appeal to all who appreciate the successful efforts of the artist to pass on to the future this well-known bit of old-time history of our beloved town. May our Garvins be multiplied to inspire, and our Newswangers be increased to paint, the fine stories of our past that deserve to be transmitted in this permanent form to those who may come after us!