

# Henry Varnum Poor: Commemorating 125 Years

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Angular detail of *Self Portrait*, circa 1917, lithograph, size unknown.

## Seeking Beauty

Henry Varnum Poor is an important name not only for those interested in the history of Kansas or American art, but for those who celebrate bountiful lives. Determined to follow his own path, he was committed to a life based on unadorned pursuits and a constant search for beauty. He once wrote to friend and fellow artist

Birger Sandzén, “I want to make beautiful things so as to make our living as beautiful as possible.”<sup>1</sup> Developing and using his multi-faceted talents, he also lived a life of great variety. At various times in his life he combined one or more professions as an artist, craftsman, builder, writer, teacher, organizer, administrator, evaluator and more. He was the perennial “jack-of-all-trades,” or perhaps more appropriately, a “renaissance man.” Just within the arts he explored a vast array of differing media – oils, watercolors, ceramics, pastels, drawings, frescos, etchings, lithography, woodworking, textiles, and illustration. He seemed to turn everything he touched into art. Perhaps nowhere is this better evident than the house he designed and constructed near New City, New York. Dubbed Crow House it was conceived as a place of comfort for his family – away from, but still accessible to, the bustling metropolis of New York and other Eastern cities. As he continued to write in his letter to Birger Sandzén, “The joy and satisfaction in making the house has been tremendous, and the future work of carving and painting our huge beams and stones will be great. . . . where humans live in swarms like ants I don’t think wholesome, beautiful living is possible. This city, with its miles of skyscraping apartments degrades human beings.”<sup>2</sup>

Poor’s character was vital to his creativity and he lived as if it were all intertwined. Because he sought a simple, elemental existence filled with beauty, his art reflected those qualities. A defining statement illustrating this facet is in a passage from a book he wrote of his experiences with the War Artists’ Unit during the Second World War. As he sketched and painted activities related to the military and local peoples of Alaska, he had the opportunity to show some of his sketches to a pilot temporarily grounded in Kotzebue. The pilot “looked through my little sketchbook, studying every drawing and shaking his head in wonder. ‘So few lines and there it is,’ he said. ‘It’s wonderful to see things I know set down in such simple direct language.’ I have never had a more beautifully expressed compliment.”<sup>3</sup>



Crow House construction showing the archway from the kitchen into the living room

## Characteristics

Physically and personally, Henry Varnum Poor was an impressive individual. He had the rough-edged qualities of a plainsman mixed with the sophisticated aspects of a cultured academic, and a lot in between. One writer described him in 1929 as “a snub-nosed husky from the sun.”<sup>4</sup> Author and New York neighbor Ben Hecht continued in that vein: “a well muscled Kansan with a blond squarish face. He had the snub nose and twinkling glance of a Tolstoy *moujik* [peasant]. . . He walked gracefully and

worked like a cart horse”<sup>5</sup> Evidence of his strength is recalled by his son Peter, remembering that his father, much like Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables*, had come to the assistance of a neighbor’s worker whose tractor had upset atop him. With the worker trapped, Poor put his shoulder against the machine and leveraged it enough for the worker to be removed, burning himself in the process.<sup>6</sup> Another account was related by artist Alex Katz, who studied under Poor at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. Katz claimed the 62-year old Poor threw a fellow student, and former football lineman, like he was paper during a match of leg wrestling. He worked his way through the male student body – finishing off with mammoth weightlifter Joe Adams.<sup>7</sup> Poor developed his physical strength early as a youth traipsing along the Smoky Hill River in Kansas, climbing trees, and pursuing the normal activities of a country boy. After the family moved to Kansas City, he also participated in organized sports, later becoming a collegiate high jumper at Stanford University. His fondness for tennis increased with age and he often played matches with neighbors along South Mountain Road in New York.<sup>8</sup>

Legendary actor and producer John Houseman (with whom he often played tennis) called him “a strong, gentle man, an athlete who retained his physical grace and power in his work and in his life.”<sup>9</sup> Early in life, on his draft registration card prior to WWI, he answered the standard questions that he was a “teacher and artist” at the San Francisco Art Institute; and was tall, of medium build, with blue eyes, light colored hair and not bald.<sup>10</sup> After reaching age 79, a doctor’s report described him physically as “a healthy appearing well-nourished elderly male. There is diffuse erythema [redness of the skin] and diffuse scars on the nose, cheeks. There is no pallor. He is comfortable in the chair during interview. He gets up from the chair with ease using his right leg as a principal lever for lifting his weight. He walks with an essentially normal gait and without pain at the knee. Height 69 inches, Weight 184 pounds.”<sup>11</sup>



*Self Portrait with Amaryllis*, 1934, oil on linen, 32 x 28 inches. Wichita Art Museum, Gift of Peter Poor, in memory of his father, the artist Henry Varnum Poor.



Henry Varnum Poor beside the door to his studio at Crow House in 1920

Apart from Poor’s physical attributes, Hecht noted that Poor “had the secret of living without effort. No echoes of any outside world were around him.”<sup>12</sup> Another writer called him “a pioneering kind of man who will shape his own environment as he wants it without too much counting of the cost.”<sup>13</sup> Richard Porter, who has written the definitive dissertation on Poor to date, concurs with many of those reflections and describes him as “a man of uncommon intellectual capacity” who read widely and voraciously. He was sophisticated and intelligent – “a big, brusque American sportsman with the soul and sensitivity of a creative genius.”<sup>14</sup>

Beyond these qualities, Poor had additional traits that stand out and give his character more interest and complexity. Although one of the leading American artists in the 1930s, he remained modest throughout his life. There were times when he believed he hadn’t received his due, but these were tempered by his desire to avoid the spotlight. In an unpublished biography of Poor, author Monroe

Stearns wrote that “as he [Poor] grew older he stubbornly refused to push himself into any kind of recognition. ‘Keep the prices low,’ he would tell gallery owner Frank Rehn, who advised him that higher prices on his work would make him seem a more important figure.”<sup>15</sup>

In addition to Poor’s physical feats, Alex Katz was drawn to his appearance as a man in pale clothes who dressed contrary to the art instructors he was accustomed to – with their tweeds, blue shirts and plaids. “He was the best dressed artist I had seen,” Katz recalled<sup>16</sup> In contrast to this, his relatives in Chapman, Kansas, were often befuddled by his complete disregard for his appearance when visiting his hometown and family members. Cousin Mary Klein recalled when he wandered around town “re-visiting childhood scenes, he was always his rumpled, paint-streaked, unpretentious self.” She also remembered her sister asking her mother “if he is such a famous artist, why does he dress like that?”

Her mother replied “Because he is a famous artist, he can dress any way he pleases.”

Klein also relates the story of another cousin in Iowa who happened to be visiting a new mall and was riding down the escalator, “at the bottom, gazing up at the busy shoppers, stood a shabby fellow she took at first for a street person.

“That poor old man!” she thought. But when she got closer, she recognized Cousin Henry who was in Iowa to give some kind of seminar at the university.”<sup>17</sup>

Although savvy with money (his father was a banker), Poor had a disregard for financial excess and extravagance. As noted earlier, he maintained reasonable prices on his art. He also charged moderate prices for the houses he constructed. His wife Bessie lamented this fact for a home he was building for well-known cartoonist Milton Caniff. She felt he was not charging enough for his services, nor acting in he and Bessie’s best interest. Finally, exasperated by her reproaches, he wrote her a letter stating, “We live well enough considering that we really try to live for something else than making money. If the Caniffs are making and spending a lot of money, what do I care? That’s what they work for, and I don’t envy them.”<sup>18</sup>

Poor also was fond of everyday chores and culinary activities. He enjoyed working in the yard and growing flowers, especially peonies. His battles with the ever-expanding brush around Crow House often made it into his later journals, but there is always a sense of satisfaction in cutting things back and shaping the landscape. In dining, he enjoyed taking wine with his meals and Jack Daniels before supper.<sup>19</sup> Bessie did the bulk of the cooking at home, but he would often prepare meals when away or left alone. One account is particularly insightful into his approach to dining on his own. An unannounced visit by Sidney and Joan Simon to Poor’s farmhouse in Maine led to suspicions that he was preparing a meal for someone special, other than his wife. They noticed from the window that the table was covered with a tablecloth his mother had made, his own hand-made tableware, and lighted candles. When they knocked, he answered and proceeded to produce a freshly prepared lobster. Upon questioning he responded to their inquiry of why such an elaborate affair: “You’ve got to keep your standards up, especially when living alone.”<sup>20</sup>



*Self Portrait, 1962, oil on board, 26 x 18 inches. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, gift of the artist.*

## Overview of the Artist’s Life

Characteristics demonstrate interesting aspects of a personality, but it’s helpful to have basic facts to help bring depth to an individual. Henry Varnum Poor was born in Chapman, Kansas on September 30, 1887. Many sources, and even the artist himself, chronicled the date as 1888; however, census records and the Chapman newspaper confirm 1887.<sup>21</sup> As a child growing up on the Kansas prairie, Poor developed a passionate love for nature and the outdoors, thanks in large part to the

influence of his maternal grandfather, Simeon Graham. Of Irish descent, Graham came to Kansas after prospecting for gold in California and serving as a scout during the Civil War.<sup>22</sup> He established his family in Chapman and eventually taught his grandson the ways of the prairie – including how to make grasshopper and cornmeal pones and baked Prairie Hen.<sup>23</sup> In 1896 the Poor family – consisting of his industrious father Alfred James (who came from Andover, Maine, and was a nephew to the founder of Standard and Poor’s), artistic mother Josephine Melinda (Graham), brother Herbert and sister Eva – moved from Chapman to Kansas City, Missouri. A. J. Poor, a grain dealer and banker, made the move on account of his increasing business interests and membership in the Kansas City Board of Trade. While in Kansas City, the younger Poor attended one of the earliest Manual Training Schools established in the United States, learning drafting, carpentry, and other industrial arts. He frequently returned to Chapman until moving in the summer of 1905 with his mother and siblings to Palo Alto, California, so that his older brother could enroll in Stanford University. A. J. Poor remained in Kansas City.

Henry Poor graduated from Palo Alto High School and entered Stanford University in the fall of 1906, initially majoring in economics before switching to art his junior year. In addition to his involvement in academics, he learned to fence and was a member of the track team and Gymnasium Club. In 1910 he graduated Phi Beta Kappa and began a bicycling trip through Europe with his former art professor, Arthur B. Clark. Prolonging his stay there, he studied at the Slade School with English Impressionist Walter Sickert and others in London. He also viewed the Grafton Gallery exhibition featuring the work of Cézanne, Manet, Gauguin, and a host of other Post-Impressionist artists. Their work, together with Sickert’s influence, altered his perspective on painting. It led him to appropriate the Post-Impressionists’ philosophies and techniques in his ensuing work. He also spent time in Paris, studying both at the Académie Julian and independently with several artists.

After completing studies in France, Poor accepted a one-year temporary position at Stanford in 1911. At its conclusion, he married fellow student Lena Wiltz and moved to Kansas so he could manage his parents’ farm some four miles north of Bonner Springs and also advance his work as an artist. While there, daughter Josephine was born. In the fall of 1913, he accepted a permanent position back at Stanford and remained there until the spring of 1916 when his position was eliminated by the College president.



***Mother with Sleeping Baby* (Lena Wiltz and Josephine), 1913, oil on canvas, 30 1/4 x 22 inches. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Gift of Oscar Thorsen.**

Out of work, but still a productive artist, Poor and his young family moved north to San Francisco where he eventually resumed teaching at what would become the San Francisco Institute of Art. While his art career began to flourish, his marriage was dissolving. Once reconciliation became improbable, he began seeing Marion Dorn, a former student from Stanford. Much to his chagrin, he was drafted in 1918. While serving in France as a regimental artist with the 115<sup>th</sup> Engineers, he completed paintings, drawings and lithographs of his fellow soldiers, superiors and wartime activities. He remained in France following



***Simeon Graham* by Henry Varnum Poor, circa 1912, oil on canvas, 24 x 18 inches. Private Collection**



**Josephine Melinda Graham, circa 1882**



**Alfred James Poor, circa 1878**

the Armistice, finally returning to San Francisco in June 1919. With his divorce from Lena Wiltz final, he married Marion Dorn and the couple headed east to New York in hopes of more success with their individual careers.

Life in the city proved a daunting prospect and the couple purchased land along South Mountain Road near New City, New York. Soon afterward, Poor began constructing a home. For over a year he worked primarily on his own to build the living room, kitchen, bedroom, and studio based on the architecture he had seen in France. The house was largely made of local stone and hand-hewn timbers, and included a large fireplace, flying buttress and a steeply pitched roof. It became known as “Crow House” after the crows that congregated to watch Poor work.

Once settled, he exhibited his recent paintings, drawings and etchings at the Kevorkian Galleries in New York City. After only a few paintings sold, he decided to try working in ceramics. Many of his early techniques mirrored those used in Cretan/Persian pottery, of which he had recently seen examples at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He originally intended to produce inexpensive, unsigned work; but realizing the impracticality of this approach, instead focused on personalizing the pieces and spent more time developing each work. Throughout his career he did not take on assistants, preferring to work alone, and his ceramics generally sold as quickly as he could make them. They were characterized by sgraffito designs drawn through cream-colored slip applied to local clay bodies. Oxides and glazes enhanced and added color to the clay surfaces. Over the years, he made functional pottery, sculpture, architectural elements, fountains and tile murals.

While busy developing his ceramic work, he also began constructing houses for friends and associates living along South Mountain Road and in the New City region. Not long after he finished Crow House, Ruth Reeves, a well-known American textile designer, asked him to build a home for her. Additional future clients included playwright Maxwell Anderson; actors Burgess Meredith and John Houseman; cartoonist Milton Caniff; and friends Jules Billig and MacDonald Deming.

Also in the 1920s, Poor remarried for the final time. He was divorced from Marion Dorn in 1923 and two years later married Bessie Freedman Breuer, an established writer and editor. Bessie had a daughter, Anne, whom Poor adopted, and in 1926 they had a son, Peter.

After working extensively in ceramics throughout the decade and exhibiting at the Montross



**Bowl, 1947, ceramic earthenware, 6 x 14 x 14 inches. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Gift of Timothy A. Johnson in honor of the 50th Wedding Anniversary of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Vivian Johnson.**



**A Painter and His Wife (Self Portrait with Marion Dorn), 1920, oil on canvas, 24 x 26 inches. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Greenough Trust Collection.**

Galleries and the American Designers' Gallery as one of its founding members, Poor traveled with his family to France for an extended stay in 1929. While there, he resumed painting. By the mid-1930s his paintings drew as much attention as his ceramics. New York critics such as Murdock Pemberton and Edward Alden Jewell championed Poor's paintings, placing his work at the forefront of American artists. Reviewing an exhibition in 1937, Jewell wrote in the *New York Times*: "For my part, I will pit Henry Varnum Poor against any living artist anywhere, yes, and against a lot of artists who have laid aside their brushes, quite confident that he can hold his own."<sup>24</sup>

Also in the early 1930s, he began experimenting with traditional fresco painting. This eventually led to mural commissions for the Justice Department,



*The Hudson River at Bear Mountain, 1932, oil on board, 15 x 20 inches. Spencer Museum of Art, University of Kansas, Museum Purchase: Carnegie Fund Grant, 1935.*

Interior Department, the Main building on the Pennsylvania State University campus, and the Courier-Journal Building in Louisville, Kentucky.

In 1938 his increasing reputation facilitated a commission for him to illustrate Edith Wharton's *Ethan Frome*, published by the Limited Editions Club. He later also illustrated *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne and *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London.

During the Great Depression Poor became deeply involved in the organization and operation of the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts. He participated as an artist and juror. After America entered World War II in 1941, he helped artists become involved in the war effort. He authored and illustrated a book, *An Artist Sees Alaska*, recounting his

travels along the Alaska coast as a visual art war correspondent. He later wrote and illustrated a book on ceramics titled *A Book of Pottery: From Mud Into Immortality*.

Poor was generally reluctant to serve as a teacher following his time at Stanford and in San Francisco, but he did accept several positions in later years. He was appointed Instructor in painting and drawing at Columbia University and was a guest teacher at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center during the summers of 1937 and 1938. In 1949, he was named painter-in-residence at the American Academy in Rome and in 1962 taught at the Des Moines Art Center in Iowa. His most dedicated efforts as an instructor, however, came in 1946 when, along with Willard Cummings, Sidney Simon and Charles Cutler, he founded the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Skowhegan, Maine.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s Poor remained busy as an artist, instructor, and arts advocate. His artwork no longer achieved the recognition it had in the 1920s and 30s, but he continued to be a major influence in American art, exhibiting extensively and being honored with numerous retrospectives. He generally split his time between his home in New City, New York, and a summer residence near Skowhegan. Additionally, he spent extended periods in Truro, along Cape Cod in Massachusetts, at Marco Island in Florida, and along the Cuban coast before the American embargo in the 1960s.

As an artist, Poor emphasized directness in his work. He continually fought to find a balance, as he described it, between "Material and Spirit (or artistic intention)."<sup>25</sup> Birger Sandzén described his approach to art in a 1939 letter to his daughter: "Mr. Poor's art shows great variety of subject matter, still life, landscape, figure and portrait. He paints simply and directly and does most of his work in one continuous effort without retouching. He tells his pupils. . .to 'paint what they see and simply put one color next to the other, finishing as they proceed.'" Henry Varnum Poor is an honest, unsophisticated realist, very modern in his vision, but without any complications of surrealism, expressionism, or any other -isms. He has a great gift and the simple directness of his art has considerable charm."<sup>26</sup>

The last years of his life were spent primarily working in ceramics and pastels. He died from a heart attack on December 8,



*Early Spring (Trees Against the Sky), circa 1940, oil on board, 36 x 24 inches. Ulrich Art Museum, Gift of Anne and Bessie Poor.*

1970. News of his death was relayed in papers, magazines and journals throughout the country and he was buried in Mt. Repose Cemetery near Haverstraw, New York.

## Henry Varnum Poor's Philosophies Related to Art and Working Methods

Over his lifetime Henry Varnum Poor developed and maintained sound, fundamental principles that he adhered to in creating art. His ideas evolved, but continually exemplified reasoned thinking. Early in his career he aligned himself with the Post-Impressionists, later he fell in line with ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement, and eventually came to identify with the Realists. He also was not shy in publically discussing his stance on art and often published articles and books reflecting his philosophies. As is often the case with long living artists, many of his initial ideas seemed radical, but over time became out of step with the ever-changing art world. In hindsight it appears he was most aligned with the nation's art scene in the 1930s.

First and foremost, Poor felt an artist should look to nature for inspiration and subject matter.

Quality artwork should not be purely decoration, but rather reflect what could be observed in the natural world. He particularly clung to this idea in his paintings and two-dimensional works. His pottery reflected a decorative tendency, but realistic imagery remained in the forefront.



**Untitled Male Figure, circa 1917, etching on paper, 4 3/8 x 5 inches. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Greenough Trust Collection.**

As he grew older, he became concerned about the lack of tradition in contemporary American art. He felt that it was being replaced by influences that did not carry the weight of an entire culture.<sup>29</sup> Like many artists active in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he hoped to be involved in the development of an American tradition in art but also realized that new movements were continually on the rise. He wrote "The great cultures of the world, and also the most universally eloquent artists, have been the product of and part of a tradition. Without this common language you have Babel, and loudness of their voices and the assertiveness of their styles."<sup>30</sup>

Delving deeper into how Poor's thoughts on art



**Still Life (Apples with Blue Compote), circa 1917, oil on canvas, 20 x 24 inches. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Gift of Oscar Thorsen.**

As noted earlier, he felt quality artwork required a balance between "material" and "spirit." Once either the material or spirit became overly dominant in a work, the resulting object lost its visual integrity. In 1958 he wrote "The ratio of the parts in the duality is very shifting. The material can be all important; or the spirit, the intention of the creator can completely swamp the material. I think the most eloquent works of art are those in which you are always conscious of both."<sup>27</sup> Along the same line, he found perfection in artworks particularly "irritating" and never hesitated to exhibit pieces with condition issues if he felt their design was strong enough.<sup>28</sup>

As he grew older,



**Basket of Yellow Apples, 1963, oil on canvas mounted to plywood, 17 1/4 x 20 inches. KSU, Beach Museum of Art, Gift of the artist.**

changed over his lifetime, it's imperative to examine his writings. In conjunction with a San Francisco exhibition in 1917, he laid out key elements he sought as an artist:

*Every true artist must have as the backbone of his work the idea of service. He must feel that if he succeeds the world will have been enriched by his work. . .*

*Great work is only built upon the refusal on the part of its creator to accept limitations. . .*

*The young artist of today who scorns the meaning of new art movements and declares the old is good enough for him, is a fool. . .*

*Our artists may know more about anatomy and more of painting techniques [than the Egyptians], but techniques may cover up the real thing and blind a whole generation to what is essential. And the more we add to the technical baggage of art, the more difficult it is to keep from obscuring the fundamentals. . .*

*The real artist of today is a man born with the love of form and color, who longs to express himself with these.<sup>31</sup>*

These early writings reflect Poor as an artist committed to breaking the mold of what he saw as sensational technique-driven works that focused more on the application of paint than the importance of subject matter and careful observation. Similar to artists that inspired him, such as Giotto and Cézanne, he wanted to paint directly and honestly. These same sentiments, but with renewed optimism, are contained in his statement for his first New York exhibition in 1920:

*The America that I knew several years ago seemed a barren place for an artist. The finest values seemed swallowed in materialism. The free live forms of art were non-existent for people surrounded by machine made comfort only wanted some form of sweetened literalism for their sentimental pleasure. I thought I hated America.*

*A year ago I was part of the stupid horror that brought the youth of my generation together on the soil of France. With more mature eyes I saw again the people and country that I had lived nine years before and while I loved it still, I found there too what I hated in America. And I found that I was stamped with a race, that I was American, and that there is something large and moving that is America. So I knew that as I lived life I loved America – for its potentialities.*

*So I have come from the West to live and work in the East, for I want to know America. What American art is and what it can become, deeply concerns me.<sup>32</sup>*

By 1940, Poor had become a potter, then again a painter, and finally a jack-of-all-trades. His views continued to grow and fostered a deep appreciation of what it meant to be an American artist:

*The first difficulty is that we want everything fine for ourselves, and see no reason in the modern world why everything before our eyes cannot be our proper heritage. I think it can be and is. Our art is young and particularly in youth we much accept no limitations – the years will impose them soon enough and then we should not accept them with too much grace.*

*In this struggle of a greedy and healthy youth to absorb anything, our national traits and traditions will gradually, and only after the event, be clear.*

*Mistrust any self conscious American scene.*

*Mistrust the talk about artists having to come out of their ivory tower and keep contact with life. It seems to me that now, in America, the more rare and infinitely more difficult thing is to keep enough detachment, and so to be able to make some reason and order out of the infinitely varied life with which even the most retiring is brought into constant and confusing contact.<sup>33</sup>*



***The Blue Pitcher, 1912, oil on canvas, 30 x 23 inches. Private Collection.***



***Mother and Child, circa 1913, oil on canvas, 36 x 24 inches. KSU, Beach Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Stone.***



By the 1950s, Poor became united with a group of artists intent on fostering representational artwork. The group was disenchanted with the emphasis by major American art museums on abstract and non-representational art. Members of this group eventually developed a publication to air their grievances. Known as *Reality*, the journal contained articles reflecting their opinions. Poor was a leading contributor. In the inaugural issue he wrote about the group's origins and position:

*I was for simply saying that we believed in, and loved the "Object," the "Image." That we were all objective painters and so, conversely, we thought non-objective painting was a blind alley. But we found that what we were most "against" was not any way of painting, but the forces in our art world that threw things out of balance. Museums and critics were so quick to surrender all the values that we felt were permanent, and thus were making of our profession a thing of cults and fads, and obscurity and snobbery.*

*So, like liberals in a free society, it is easier to state what we are against than what we are for. We are for the maintenance of values and liberties that we already have. To restate them means reviewing the whole history of art, or making generalizations that seem like clichés. We are against all forces that set up false values, that substitute obscurity for clarity, and that imperil our true democracy.<sup>34</sup>*

Finally, the most concise expression of Poor's philosophies are related in *A Book of Pottery: From Mud Into Immortality*, published in 1958. In it, he covers most of the material included above with characteristic clarity and directness.

In technical terms as an artist, he was not fickle or obsessed with slick processes. He determined the best method to achieve a desired outcome and tailored his methods to realize it. By no means lazy, he was demanding of himself and spent untold hours in the studio or wherever opportunities presented themselves. He was a supreme innovator and could manufacture tools and materials from scratch. One of the best examples comes from *A Book of Pottery*:

*I will describe the potter's wheel I made when I started to do pottery. Now it may seem primitive to the point of affectation, but remember this was 1920; there were no "artist" potters' wheels and kilns on the market that I knew of and I had no money to buy them anyway. Maybe I have exceptionally strong atavistic instincts, too. I had never seen a potter throwing on a wheel, but I had seen those early unglazed Cretan cups and bowls at the Metropolitan Museum and knew that if those primitive people could do such things so could I. And I had to find some way of earning a living through work that I loved to do.*



**Henry Varnum Poor at his wheel. Photograph by David Corcos Levy, circa 1968**



***The Chess Game*, 1939-40, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 inches. Wichita Art Museum, purchased with funds donated by Marvin Bastian in memory of his wife, Bobbie Bastian.**

*In a junk yard I found an old washing machine flywheel, weighing twenty pounds and measuring about thirty inches in diameter, with a 1 1/2-inch core for a shaft. In the woods, after much looking, I found a white oak stick about forty inches long and two inches in diameter with a sharp crook in it. I cut and*

*trimmed the end near the crook. So trimmed, it fit into the 1 1/2-inch core of the flywheel.*

*Then I set a long, round-headed screw into this tapered end of my shaft. I cut a deep, flat groove at the most offset point in the crook, about five inches over the flywheel, and another groove about five inches below the top of the stick. Then I made a solid frame of 2x4's, calculated to fit my shaft, with a dented steel plate for the sharpened screw to revolve on, flat leather straps for fittings around the oak shaft, and a top with two notched boards supporting the shaft at the groove five inches below the top.*



**Wall Planter, circa 1930,  
earthenware, 13 x 10 x 5 inches.  
Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery,  
gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Stone.**

*When I had the shaft mounted, firmly held, and running smoothly, I cast a plaster head ten inches in diameter over the squared end of the shaft, and while the plaster was still soft, revolved it and timed to run truly and accurately. On this wheel I learned to throw, and on it for ten years I earned my living.<sup>35</sup>*

Though pottery showed many of his innovative tendencies, painting was not alien to them. Instead of relying on pre-stretched canvas, Poor used nearly any surface as a support. Early in his career he often employed a heavy, inexpensive jute material akin to burlap. Later he moved to better canvas and occasionally linen, but plywood, hardboard, canvas mounted on wood, etc. became standard. Additionally, he often made his own frames, which were painted and decorated with sgraffito incising.

When drawing, he incorporated a variety of materials and is quoted as saying his favorite instrument was a matchstick dipped in India ink.<sup>36</sup> He often created mixed media works using ink, pastels and any other material he deemed appropriate.



**Self Portrait with Gun, 1934,  
oil on canvas mounted to board,  
38 x 30 inches.**

**Wichita Art Museum, purchased using  
the Burneta Adair Endowment Fund.**

As previously noted, when searching for subject matter, Poor looked to nature, especially things closest to him that he knew best. Landscapes were derived from local motifs he traversed often, or that he experienced through travels. He often sought areas lacking grandeur, with a simple abundance of foliage or characteristics that stimulated his interest. When creating portraits, he chose subjects close at hand, most often family members or himself. While living in California and Kansas, his wife, child, parents, sister and extended family became principle subjects. One of the first works submitted to a major national juried exhibition was a snapshot-like painting of his mother holding a simple blue pitcher.<sup>37</sup> On several occasions he painted his sister Eva and her son Charles. He also extended sittings to include his immediate circle of friends.

Once divorced from Lena Wiltz, Marion Dorn made her way into his portraits, including a strong work of the artist and his wife.<sup>38</sup> Following their breakup, Poor found long-lasting subjects in his third wife and their children. He placed Bessie, Anne and Peter in everyday settings, participating in daily activities, with their changes over the years reflected in many of his pieces. He also painted friends along South Mountain Road and other well-known celebrities who entered his life.<sup>39</sup>

Self-portraits became a staple of his art. At one point he reflected on the number he had painted versus those done by Rembrandt – Poor felt he hadn't done as many.<sup>40</sup> The earliest known self-portrait is in the collection of Stanford University and was completed in 1911, not long after his graduation.<sup>41</sup> He continued painting himself in various settings and situations. Perhaps the most perplexing and charming

is *Self Portrait with Gun* now in the collection of the Wichita Art Museum.<sup>42</sup> One of his later self-portraits was exhibited and donated to the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery in 1963.<sup>43</sup>

Watching Poor at work in his studio must have been fascinating. Friend and neighbor John Houseman compared him to an athlete, in constant motion and balanced on the balls of his feet.<sup>44</sup> Peter Poor, who posed for many of his father's portraits, described the sittings as quiet affairs, with his father scarcely uttering a word during the sessions. They were often long sittings, and he recalls the deep, penetrating look his father used in analyzing him throughout the process. This look is also evident in his self-portraits. Rarely did Poor work from photographs, preferring instead live models. On a humorous note, he was often dissuaded by his wife Bessie from doing portraits of women as she often felt they did not flatter the sitter – he was too honest with his brush.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout his life, he rarely looked back at what he had accomplished. He preferred to forge ahead with new ideas and the feeling that he was doing his best work at any given time. On numerous occasions he wrote that, after so many years, he was finally learning to paint.<sup>46</sup> He also encouraged others artists to push forward. In *An Artist Sees Alaska* he describes a young waitress in Nome who was reluctant to sell a fine wood carving:

*“Did you see my wood carving of an Eskimo head in Poletti’s window?” she asked.*

*“My God! Another artist,” exclaimed Joe [Jones]. I [Poor] had noticed the wood panel, and it was very well done.*

*“Yesterday an officer wanted to buy it for two hundred dollars and I wouldn’t sell it. I like it. It’s the best thing I’ve ever done. Do you think I should sell it?” she asked in a rush.*

*“Two hundred dollars? That’s a lot of money. Sure, sell it. Don’t hang on to what you do. Keeps you from doing any better.” I spoke as a professional to an amateur.”<sup>47</sup>*

## **Henry Varnum Poor’s Legacy**

At his equinox, Henry Varnum Poor was one of the most recognized and respected figures in American art. Biographer Monroe Stearns wrote in 1975 that Poor was “famous for his work, loved for his personality, universally respected for his artistic integrity, and incalculably influential through his teaching and writing about art.” He continued:

*Henry Varnum Poor currently enjoys an equally great posthumous reputation, especially among young persons, for the unpretentious self-reliance he preached and practiced. The steadfastness of his attitude that working with bold originality but in a tradition is essential to all great art has survived the chaotic confusion in the art scene of the mid-twentieth century to become again a valid and viable point of view for present-day creative spirits.<sup>48</sup>*

Since Stearns’ bold pronouncement, Poor’s recognition has waned and his fame has been eclipsed by some of his contemporaries, but he continues to be a recognizable name in the art lexicons. Over the years there has been limited, but noteworthy and rich scholarship. Special recognition is reserved for Stearns unpublished biography; the dissertations of Richard Porter and Linda Steigleder; and the major exhibition in which they were involved at the Museum of Art (now the Palmer Museum of Art) at Pennsylvania State University in 1983. The published catalog broke new ground and continues to serve as the major resource regarding Poor. Caroline M. Hannah has taken over as a leading proponent of the artist’s efforts and continues to bring scholarly attention to his work. Additionally, smaller articles have helped maintain the flame. Hopefully, this trend will continue to be expanded upon in future years.

In the end, most artists understand that their work will have more lasting power than they themselves. It is fortunate that many of the nation’s leading museums still retain and exhibit examples of Poor’s creative output. Just within his native Kansas and neighboring states well over 100 works of art are found in public and private collections.<sup>49</sup> The majority are not permanently on view, but most are included in periodic exhibitions or available for viewing with advance notice.

After Poor’s death on December 8, 1970, artist Red Grooms wrote to his daughter Anne:

*I called Bill on business last night and he broke the news to me – it seemed so unlikely I almost asked “are you kidding?” Henry dead? He couldn’t do anything like that, he wouldn’t know how. But he did know how and I am sure he did it well. Bill said he just day down, smiled and died. I can see the smile (that marvelous sly indulgent smile), the dying part was Henry’s little joke on all of us. We were silly to imagine he would live forever.<sup>50</sup>*

Indeed, Henry Varnum Poor has been dead for over 40 years, but because of his extensive, vital and unique output, a part of him is still living. In a sense, it will live forever.

#### Notes:

- <sup>1</sup> Letter from Henry Varnum Poor [hereinafter HVP] to Birger Sandzén, February 14, 1921, in which Poor also enclosed 5 snapshots of the construction of his home on South Mountain Road near New City, NY. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery Archives [hereinafter BSMGA], Lindsborg, KS.
- <sup>2</sup> Letter from HVP to Birger Sandzén, February 14, 1921.
- <sup>3</sup> HVP, *An Artist Sees Alaska* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1945), p. 229.
- <sup>4</sup> “Potter Poor,” *Time*, April 1, 1929, p. 38.
- <sup>5</sup> Ben Hecht, *A Child of the Century* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954), p. 404.
- <sup>6</sup> Author’s phone interview with Peter Poor, February 2, 2012. HVP sustained a severe burn mark on his shoulder as a result of the incident.
- <sup>7</sup> Alex Katz, “Henry Varnum Poor,” *Henry Varnum Poor Paintings*, James Graham and Sons exhibition catalog, New York, November 4-27, 1999, p. 6.
- <sup>8</sup> Peter Poor interview, February 2, 2012.
- <sup>9</sup> John Houseman, *Run-Through* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), p. 89.
- <sup>10</sup> Poor’s 1917 Draft registration card, [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com)
- <sup>11</sup> Report of Dr. Richard H. Freyberg, M.D., December 29, 1966 in *Henry Varnum Poor papers 1873-2001*[hereinafter *HVP Papers*], Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution [hereinafter AAA-SI], Washington, DC (reels 633-634).
- <sup>12</sup> Hecht, p. 404.
- <sup>13</sup> Ernest Watson, “Henry Varnum Poor,” *American Artist*, 17, March 1953, p. 26
- <sup>14</sup> Richard J. Porter, *Henry Varnum Poor, 1887-1970: A Biography and Study of His Paintings*, Ph.D. Dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA, 1983, p. 14.
- <sup>15</sup> Monroe Stearns, *Henry Varnum Poor*, manuscript for a biography, 1976, pg. 301. *Monroe Stearns research papers on Henry Varnum Poor, 1938 – 1975*, AAA-SI.
- <sup>16</sup> Katz, p. 6
- <sup>17</sup> Mary Klein, letter to Museum People, May 7, 2000, BSMGA.
- <sup>18</sup> Stearns, p. 243.
- <sup>19</sup> Stearns, p. 410.
- <sup>20</sup> Stearns, p. 385.
- <sup>21</sup> “Local News,” *The Chapman Courier* (Chapman, Kansas), October 7, 1887.
- <sup>22</sup> Dorcus Knight, “Pioneer History of the Graham Family, as Told By One of Its Members,” *Chapman Advertiser*, May 12, 1932.
- <sup>23</sup> *HVP Papers*, AAA-SI, (reels 633-634).
- <sup>24</sup> Edward Allen Jewell, “Paintings by Poor in One-Man Show,” *New York Times*, December 10, 1937, digital edition.
- <sup>25</sup> Henry Varnum Poor, *A Book of Pottery: From Mud to Immortality* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1958), pp. 28-30.
- <sup>26</sup> Birger Sandzén letter to Margaret Sandzén, July 13, 1939, BSMGA.
- <sup>27</sup> HVP, *A Book of Pottery*, p. 28.
- <sup>28</sup> HVP, *An Artist Sees Alaska*, p. 22.
- <sup>29</sup> HVP, *A Book of Pottery*, pg. 34 and *Henry Varnum Poor 1954*, Skowhegan Lecture Archive – Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, ME.
- <sup>30</sup> HVP, *A Book of Pottery*, p. 34.
- <sup>31</sup> *Oakland Tribune*, March 18, 1917, p. 24.
- <sup>32</sup> Kevorkian Galleries exhibition catalog March 17 – 28, 1920. *John and Mary Mowbray-Clarke Papers 1901 – 1925*, AAA-SI, (reels D169 & D169A).
- <sup>33</sup> HVP, “Roots that Grow,” *Magazine of Art*, December 1940, p. 666-667.
- <sup>34</sup> HVP, “How This Group Began,” *Reality*, Spring 1953, p. 6. *Raphael Soyer Papers 1933 – 1989*, AAA-SI (digitized collection).
- <sup>35</sup> HVP, *A Book of Pottery*, pp. 54-55.
- <sup>36</sup> Watson, p. 29.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Hastings Falk, *The Annual Exhibition Record of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts 1876-1913*, (Madison, CT: Sound View Press, 1989), p. 385.

<sup>38</sup> Collection of the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Lindsborg, KS. Listing included in Kevorkian Galleries exhibition catalog March 17 – 28, 1920, *John and Mary Mowbray-Clarke Papers 1901 – 1925*, AAA-SI, (reels D169 & D169A).

<sup>39</sup> Among others, Poor painted portraits of Theodore Dreiser, Wharton Eschrick, John Houseman, Margaret Perry, Waldo Peirce, Ruth Reeves, and John Steinbeck,

<sup>40</sup> *HVP Papers*, AAA-SI, (reels 633-634).

<sup>41</sup> *Portrait of a Young Man as an Artist (Self-Portrait)*, 1911, oil on canvas, 23 1/4 x 19 3/8 inches, Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University.

<sup>42</sup> *Self Portrait with Gun*, 1934, oil on canvas mounted to board, 38 x 30 inches. Wichita Art Museum, Museum Purchase, Burneta Adair Endowment Fund.

<sup>43</sup> *Self Portrait*, 1962, oil on board, 26 x 18 inches, Gift of the Artist, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Lindsborg, KS.

<sup>44</sup> John Houseman, *Henry Varnum Poor: An Artist Remembered*, (Pennsylvania State University Audio Visual Services, 1983), videocassette.

<sup>45</sup> Peter Poor interview, September 2, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> HVP letter to Charles Pelham Greenough, September 15, 1962, BSMGA.

<sup>47</sup> Poor, *An Artist Sees Alaska*, p. 112.

<sup>48</sup> Stearns, introductory note p. b.

<sup>49</sup> The largest holdings are found at the Wichita Art Museum; Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art in Manhattan, KS; and Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery in Lindsborg, KS. Smaller but still extensive collections are those of the Emprise Bank Collection in Wichita, KS; Hillstrom Museum of Art in St. Peter, MN; Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, MO; Spencer Museum of Art in Lawrence, KS; Ulrich Museum of Art in Wichita, KS and the Walker Art Center in Garnett, KS. Institutions having up to three works include Bethany College in Lindsborg, KS; Chapman Area Preservation Society and Chapman Library in Chapman, KS; Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center in Colorado Springs, CO; Des Moines Art Center in Des Moines, IA; Hutchinson Art Association in Hutchinson, KS; Kirkland Museum of Fine and Decorative Art in Denver, CO; Alice C. Sabatini Gallery in Topeka, KS; Sheldon Museum of Art in Lincoln, NE; Wichita Center for the Arts in Wichita, KS; and the World War I Museum at Liberty Memorial in Kansas City, MO.

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# *Henry Varnum Poor: Commemorating 125 Years*

July 8 through September 30, 2012

## **Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery**

401 N. First Street, PO Box 348, Lindsborg, KS 67456-0348

(785) 227-2220 fineart@sandzen.org or sandzengallery@sbcglobal.net www.sandzen.org

## **Exhibition Listing**

from the **Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art** in Manhattan, Kansas  
(beach.k-state.edu):



*Mrs. Josephine Poor (Mrs. A. J. Poor)*,  
1912,  
Oil on canvas,  
31 3/4 x 27 5/8 in. (framed),  
KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of Mr. & Mrs. Charles A. Stone,  
1985.29.

Portrait of the artist's mother likely completed after he and his first wife, Lena, had returned to manage his parent's farm near Bonner Springs, Kansas, in 1912.



*The White Barn*  
circa 1912  
oil on canvas  
23 1/4 x 29 in. (canvas)  
KSU, Beach Museum of Art, 1984.13

Likely a scene from the farm north of Bonner Springs that Poor managed for his parents in 1912 and 13. This painting was exhibited (along with *Mountain Landscape*) in *An Exhibition of Paintings by American Artists* at the International Wheat Show in Wichita, Kansas (September 26 to October 8, 1921), under the direction of the Wichita Art Association – catalog in Sandzén Gallery Archives.



*Frozen Lake*  
ca. 1917,  
oil on canvas,  
19 1/2 x 23 1/2 in. (sight).  
KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of Astra Bank and the Richard Campbell Family, 2009.19.

*Frozen Lake* was displayed for many years in the Chapman State Bank owned by Poor's family. When the bank

was eventually purchased by the Campbell family, it remained for several years before being donated along with another painting in 2009 to the Beach Museum of Art in Manhattan, Kansas.



*Winding Road*

circa 1920,  
Oil on canvas,  
23 5/8 x 28 1/8 in. (framed).

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of Mr. & Mrs. Charles A. Stone, 1984.19.

*Winding Road* was likely completed soon after Poor and his second wife, Marion Dorn, moved to New City, New York from San Francisco. Paintings from this time period are able to be readily identified from the "Varnum Poor" signature which Poor used to distinguish himself from the other Henry Poor's (Henry Warren Poor and Henry Rankin Poore) working on the East Coast.



*Still Life with Wild Hellebore,*

circa 1933,  
Oil on plywood,  
17 x 23 3/8 in. (overall).

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, acquired with funds provided by the Friends of Art in 1936.

*Still Life with Wild Hellebore* is one of the earliest acquisitions of Poor's work by a Kansas institution, second only to *the Hudson River at Bear Mountain* that was purchased in 1935 by the Thayer Museum at the University of Kansas. It was purchased from Poor's dealer, Rehn Galleries, in 1936.



*Dark Clustered Trees,*

1956,  
Oil on canvas mounted to plywood,  
26 x 30 1/8 in. (image).

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, acquired for the Friends of Art with K-State Works of Art Purchase Fund, 1967.3.

*Dark Clustered Trees* was included in the Ninth Biennial Exhibition of Regional Art at Kansas State in 1967 and received a Purchase Award. Poor then donated *Basket of Yellow Apples* to the school to accompany the purchase.



*Basket of Yellow Apples,*

1963,  
Oil on canvas mounted to plywood,  
17 1/4 x 20 in. (canvas).

KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of the artist, 1967.2

*Basket of Yellow Apples* was included in the Ninth Biennial Exhibition of Regional Art held at Kansas State in 1967. Poor

gave the painting to the school after they purchased *Dark Clustered Trees*.

from **Bethany College** in Lindsborg, Kansas ([www.bethanylb.edu](http://www.bethanylb.edu)):



Untitled (Garden of the Gods),  
1917,  
lithograph,  
15 x 21 inches.  
Bethany College Collection.

This scene illustrates the North and South Gateway rock formations, looking towards the west, in the Garden of the Gods park near Colorado Springs, Colorado. Poor spent extended time in the area during the summer of 1917.



Untitled (Garden of the Gods),  
1917,  
lithograph,  
15 x 21 inches.  
Bethany College Collection.

This scene, looking from the northwest, includes a large area of the Garden of the Gods park near Colorado Springs, Colorado. Poor spent extended time in the area during the summer of 1917.

from the **Chapman Area Preservation Society** in Chapman, Kansas  
([www.cityofchapman.org/Historical\\_Society](http://www.cityofchapman.org/Historical_Society)):



Coffee Cup,  
1924,  
earthenware,  
3.75 x 4 x 5 inches.  
Chapman Public Library Collection.

Although belonging to the Chapman Public Library, this cup has been on display in the Chapman Area Preservation Society for many years.



Small Green Bowl  
circa 1923  
earthenware  
1.875 x 4.25 x 4.25 inches.  
Chapman Public Library Collection.

Although belonging to the Chapman Public Library, this cup has been on display in the Chapman Area Preservation Society for many years.



from the **Chapman Library** in Chapman, Kansas

([skyways.lib.ks.us/library/chapman/](http://skyways.lib.ks.us/library/chapman/)):



*Orchard in Fall*,  
circa 1915  
oil on canvas,  
size approx. 28 x 34,  
Chapman Public Library Collection.

Between 1913 and 1916, Poor frequently painted orchards in the Santa Clara Valley region surrounding his in-laws home near San Jose, California. His father-in-law, Rudolph Wiltz, was a well-known walnut grower in the area.

From the **Chapman School District** in Chapman, Kansas ([usd473.net](http://usd473.net)):



*Cows*,  
1913,  
oil painting on canvas,  
19 x 22 1/2 inches.  
U.S.D. 473, Chapman, Kansas.

This painting was completed when Henry, his wife and daughter lived on his parent's farm near Bonner Springs. On the back he wrote:

"Merry Xmax!  
Papa from Henry"

Henry served as manager of the property and appears to have been quite successful. However, as he recalled in his 1943 book *An Artist Sees Alaska*, "you wondered whether this dream so many artists have, of being an artist and a rancher at the same time, could stick. I had tried it, and it didn't work. To be an artist, you must be a workman – as steadily and unremittingly working away at your craft as any workman. . . when you surround yourself with cattle and pigs and chickens and fields of grain and fruit trees, you find their care becomes a full-time job."

K-7 Highway now goes through the farm ground between State Avenue to the south and Parallel Parkway to the north, approximately four miles north of Bonner Springs.



*Garden of the Gods, Winter*,  
1917,  
oil painting on canvas,  
28 x 36 inches.  
U.S.D. 473, Chapman, Kansas.

In the late spring and summer of 1917, Poor traveled to the Colorado Springs area suffering from a nervous condition and stayed with his friend Russell Cheney. Cheney, also an artist and sick with tuberculosis, had been drawn to the region for its rehabilitating climate. Both actively sketched and painted in the

area, with one of Poor's favorite areas for landscape work being Garden of the Gods near Manitou.



*Rocks and Hills*,  
1917,  
oil painting on canvas,  
36 x 42 inches.  
U.S.D. 473, Chapman, Kansas.

A scene likely showing the red rock formations near Manitou Springs, Colorado.



*Horseshoe Park, Colorado*,  
1917,  
oil painting on canvas,  
28 x 36 inches,  
signed in the lower left.  
U.S.D. 473, Chapman, Kansas.

In early August of 1917, Henry Poor, along with his parents, spent several days with Birger Sandzén at Fall River Lodge outside of Estes Park, Colorado. Poor and Sandzén, friends from as early as 1912, spent several days out sketching in region. This painting, along with a drawing and two etchings in the exhibit, is a result of those outings. Horseshoe Park is located about two miles west of Estes Park.



*Floral Plate*,  
1935,  
earthenware,  
2 x 7.25 x 7.25 inches.  
U.S.D. 473, Chapman, Kansas.

from the **Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center** in Colorado Springs, Colorado ([www.csfineartscenter.org](http://www.csfineartscenter.org)):



*Portrait of a Red-Headed Woman*,  
1937,  
oil painting on board,  
18 x 14 inches.  
Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, gift of Margaret Perry.

Margaret Perry was a friend and neighbor of Poor's at the time this painting was completed. She was a highly regarded Broadway actress and appeared in several Hollywood films, including *Go West*, *Young Man* starring Mae West and Randolph Scott.

She was born Margaret Hall Frueauff in Denver, Colorado, but took the stage name Margaret Perry after her mother, Antonette Perry, the Broadway producer for whom the Toni Awards were named. At the time the painting was completed, Perry was married to actor Burgess Meredith, well-known for his roles on the stage, television and film.

After divorcing Meredith, Perry married director/producer Paul Fanning. They had several children, and when Perry and Fanning divorced she retired to her family's Salt Works Ranch near South Park, Colorado.

The painting is one of two known portraits of the actress – the other shows a seated Margaret Perry. Additionally, this painting was reproduced in an early 1941 monograph on Poor by Peyton Boswell, Jr. titled simply *Varnum Poor*.

from **Emprise Bank** in Wichita, Kansas ([www.emprisebank.com](http://www.emprisebank.com)):



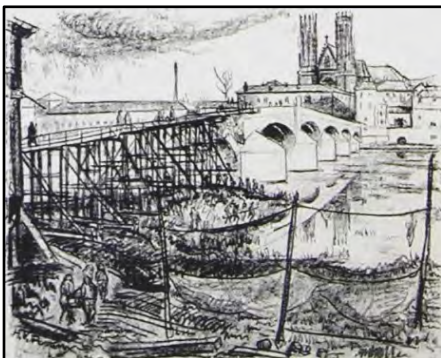
*California Mission (Santa Clara de Asis Mission)*,  
1912,  
oil on canvas,  
12 x 24 inches.  
Emprise Bank Collection.

The mission represented in this painting is in Santa Clara, California. As can be imagined, the area around it has changed dramatically since Poor painted it in 1912.



*Horseshoe Park, Colorado*,  
1917,  
lithograph on paper,  
12 x 13  
Emprise Bank Collection.

In early August of 1917, Henry Poor, along with his parents, spent several days with Birger Sandzén at Fall River Lodge outside of Estes Park. Poor and Sandzén, friends from as early as 1912, spent several days out sketching in region. This drawing, along with a larger painting and two etchings in the exhibit, is a result of those outings. Horseshoe Park is located about two miles west of Estes Park.



*The Bridge at Pont-à-Mousson, France*  
1918,  
lithograph on paper,  
17 x 20 inches.  
Emprise Bank Collection.

During the First World War, Poor served in France as a regimental artist with the 115<sup>th</sup> Engineers. This lithograph shows a bridge undergoing reconstruction in the town of Pont-à-Mousson,

France. In the distance is St. Martin's Church. Poor remained in France following the Armistice, finally returning to San Francisco in June 1919.



*Plate with Bird,*  
1926  
earthenware  
2 1/2 x 12 1/2 x 12 1/2 inches.  
Emprise Bank Collection.

A strong example of Poor's ceramic work in the mid-1920s. This plate has very little sgraffito, with the image created primarily with brushed oxides and glazes.



*Trencher,*  
1928  
earthenware  
3 1/2 x 10 3/4 x 17 1/2 inches  
Emprise Bank Collection.

In contrast to the *Plate with Bird*, this ceramic piece showcases Poor's use of sgraffito to "draw" the image on the white-slipped clay surface. The lines are then accented with coloring oxides. The majority of Poor's clay was an earthenware acquired from local sources. He rarely fired work above cone 02 unless it was designed for outdoor use.



*Rocks and Black Cloud,*  
circa 1941,  
oil on board  
16 x 20 inches.  
Emprise Bank Collection.

During the Fall of 1941, Poor left for California to distance himself from many of his Eastern responsibilities. As he wrote to dealer Frank Rehn on November 22nd, "to get away from it all" – so help me God to PAINT – think of nothing else for two months." Soon after his arrival, the United States was thrust into World War II when Pearl Harbor was bombed on December 7, 1941.

This painting is typical of the works completed at the time – seascapes which had a heavy quality. Many of them seem to impart the impending weight of the War years.



*Landscape,*  
circa 1950,  
ink wash and pastel,  
13 x 22 inches.  
Emprise Bank Collection.

Likely a farm scene from either Kansas or, possibly, Maine.

from the **Hillstrom Museum of Art** in St. Peter, Minnesota  
([gustavus.edu/finearts/hillstrom/](http://gustavus.edu/finearts/hillstrom/)):



*Autumn Still Life*  
circa 1937,  
oil on canvas panel,  
16 x 20 inches  
Hillstrom Museum of Art, Gift of Reverend Richard Hillstrom.

One of the fine still life paintings that Poor completed in the 1930s, this work illustrates his remarkable ability with composition and color. Although its date is confirmed as 1937, the painting was long thought to have been produced later since it was purchased by Rev. Hillstrom from Poor's New York dealer, Rehn Galleries, in 1963. It was not uncommon for Poor or Rehn to exhibit paintings that he had done years before, but this is one of the most extreme examples of that practice.

from **Private Collections** in Kansas:



*Chrysanthemums*  
1906,  
chalk and charcoal,  
16 x 12 inches.  
Private Collection.

This drawing is the earliest known surviving work by Henry Varnum Poor. For many years it remained in the collection of his nephew, Charles Stone, but was donated to an Arizona institution in the 1980s and remained there until it was deaccessioned in February 2010.



*Goblet*  
circa 1924  
earthenware  
4 x 4.25 x 4.25 inches.  
Private Collection.

Demonstrating Poor's ability at decorative brushwork with oxides, this simple goblet form is enhanced with cross patterning and circular elements.



*Goblet*  
circa 1926  
earthenware  
4 x 4.5 x 4.75 inches.  
Collection of Mary Klein.

After throwing his forms, Poor often continued to use the wheel for decorating purposes. On this work the lines are created by saturating a brush with a dark oxide or slip and applying it to the turning vessel. Poor also incorporated a mirror so he could observe the opposite side of the object.

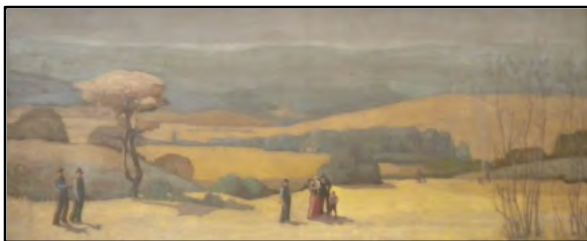
From the **Alice Sabatini Gallery** in Topeka, Kansas ([cpl.org/gallery/](http://cpl.org/gallery/)):



*Black Plate with Sun*  
1951,  
earthenware  
9 1/4 in. diameter.  
Alice C. Sabatini Gallery, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library.

Poor rarely allowed a dark slip to dominate a ceramic piece, but this plate is a good example of it. The overlaying white slip and sgraffito in the center is nearly engulfed by the blackness.

From the **Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery** in Lindsborg, Kansas ([www.sandzen.org](http://www.sandzen.org)):



*November in California,*  
1911,  
oil on canvas,  
46 1/2 x 106 3/4 inches.

Sandzén Gallery. Gift of Mr. And Mrs. James C. Haydon of Oak Ridge, TN and Mr. And Mrs. Richard M. Hurd of Sunrise Beach, MO.

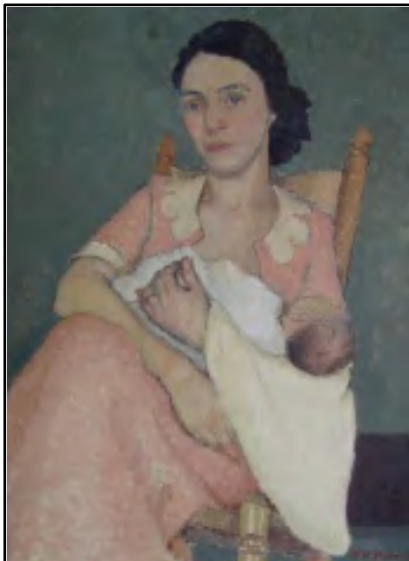
Painted for Poor's parents home near the Plaza in Kansas City, Missouri. *November in California* was designed to go over their fireplace and serve as a focal point for the living room.

When Poor graduated from Stanford in 1910, his aspiration was to become a muralist. After he was exposed to the changes happening in European painting later that year and in early 1911, these sentiments evolved to following the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. This work demonstrates that evolution and was likely the most ambitious painting he had done to that date.



*The Luncheon,*  
1913,  
oil on canvas,  
36 x 48 1/2 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Stone.

A well-received early work by Poor, this painting was exhibited in the 109<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in February and March of 1914. It is an arrangement showing Poor's nephew Charles, mother Josephine, and sister Eva, and likely was completed when Poor was living north of Bonner Springs, Kansas.



*Mother with Sleeping Baby,*  
circa 1913,  
oil on canvas,  
30 1/4 x 22 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Gift of Oscar Thorsen.

This painting portrays the intimacy of mother and child. Represented are Poor's first wife, Lena Wiltz, and their daughter Josephine, born March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1913.



*Pines at Pacific Grove, California,*  
1915,  
oil on canvas,  
36 x 36 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Stone.

In addition to painting motifs in the Santa Clara Valley of California, Poor enjoyed scenes along the coast. Pacific Grove is adjacent to Monterey, and is about 85 miles south of Palo Alto, where Poor was teaching at Stanford.



*California Orange Grove*,  
c. 1915,  
oil on canvas,  
32 1/2 x 37 1/2 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Stone.

The Santa Clara Valley was a favorite location for Poor to work, and while teaching at Stanford he made numerous paintings of orchards in the area.



*Farmhouse and Wheatfield (A Homestead)*,  
circa 1915,  
oil on canvas,  
23 x 29 1/2 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).



*Apricot Orchard*,  
circa 1916,  
oil on canvas,  
30 x 36 inches.  
Bethany College Collection.

Poor saw great beauty in the California orchards and he painted them frequently during his teaching tenure at Stanford. This painting was purchased by the Smoky Hill Art Club for the Bethany College art collection – probably in 1916.



Untitled (*Outskirts of Town*),  
circa 1916,  
oil on canvas,  
17 1/2 x 22 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).





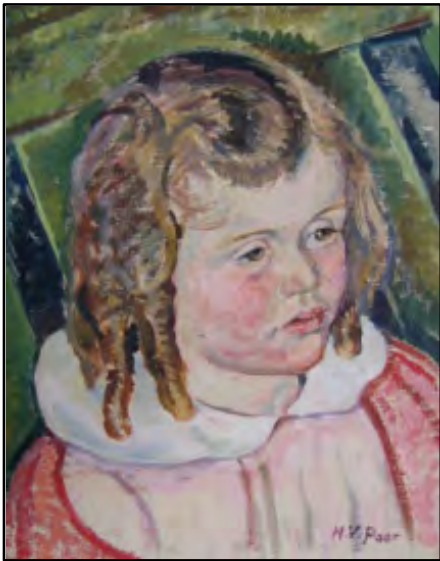
*Plum Orchard*,  
circa 1916,  
oil on canvas,  
23 3/4 x 29 1/2 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Gift of Oscar Thorsen.

Oscar Thorsen and Birger Sandzén were early patrons and supporters of Poor's work. In 1962, he wrote to Sandzén's son-in-law Pelham Greenough, after visiting the relatively new Sandzén Gallery, that he was "very interested to see again, after very many years, so much of my own early work. Most of it has been scattered and lost so you have the best record of it that exists anywhere. Thanks to the generous faith of Birger and Mr. Thorsane [sic].



*Still Life (Apples with Blue Compote)*,  
circa 1917,  
oil on canvas,  
20 x 24 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Gift of Oscar Thorsen.

Although better known for his landscapes and portraits at this period in his career, Poor occasionally painted still lifes. This work demonstrates Poor's indebtedness to Cézanne – one of his art heroes.



*Portrait of Peggy*,  
circa 1917,  
oil on canvas,  
14 3/4 x 12 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).

A portrait of Poor's niece, Peggy. Her father, Herbert, was the oldest of the three Poor children. Born January 1, 1884, Herbert followed his father's interest in grain and banking, attending Stanford University. He served on the Kansas City Board of Trade from 1907 until 1947 and worked for banks in Kansas City and Linwood, Kansas. Following his brother's lead he also worked with ceramics, but only as a hobby.

Peggy grew up to live in a variety of locations, including Juneau, Alaska; Sunrise Beach, Missouri; and Prescott, Arizona.



*Pigs*,  
circa 1917,  
etching,  
4 x 5 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).



*Horseshoe Park, Colorado,*

circa 1917,

etching,

3 x 3 1/8 inches.

Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).

In early August of 1917, Henry Poor, along with his parents, spent several days with Birger Sandzén at Fall River Lodge outside of Estes Park, Colorado. Poor and Sandzén, friends from as early as 1912, spent several days out sketching in region. This etching, along with a painting, drawing and another etching in the exhibit, is a result of those outings. Horseshoe Park is located about two miles west of Estes Park.



*Garden of the Gods,*

circa 1917,

etching,

3 x 4 inches.

Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).

This scene illustrates the North and South Gateway rock formations, looking towards the southwest, in the Garden of the Gods park near Colorado Springs, Colorado. Poor spent extended time in the area during the summer of 1917.



*Male Figure,*

circa 1917,

etching,

4 3/8 x 5 inches.

Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).



*Untitled (Colorado motif),*

circa 1917,

etching,

5 x 7 inches.

Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).



*Sunset, Horseshoe Park,*  
circa 1917,  
etching,  
5 x 7 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).

In early August of 1917, Henry Poor, along with his parents, spent several days with Birger Sandzén at Fall River Lodge outside of Estes Park. Poor and Sandzén, friends from as early as 1912, spent several days out sketching in region. This etching, along with a painting, drawing and another etching in the exhibit, is a result of those outings. Horseshoe Park is located about two miles west of Estes Park.



*Portrait of Birger Sandzén,*  
1917,  
etching,  
3 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery Collection (purchased in 2000).

This etching was completed while Poor and Sandzén were sketching near Estes Park, Colorado. In a letter to his wife Alfrida on August 6, 1917, Sandzén notes that Poor had completed an etching of him that is “very powerful.”



*Valley of the Mosselle at Metz,*  
1918,  
watercolor on paper,  
6 x 8 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).

Done during his time in Europe during the First World War, Poor documented this scene of the Mosselle River flowing near the town of Metz in northeastern France.



*115th Engineer Camp, Puvenelle Woods, France*  
1918,  
lithograph,  
16 x 19 inches.  
Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).

Poor served in France as a regimental artist with the 115<sup>th</sup> Engineers. While there, he completed paintings, drawings and

lithographs of his fellow soldiers, superiors and scenes he experienced. He remained in France following the Armistice, finally returning to San Francisco in June 1919.



*Portrait of a Lady (Camille S),*  
1919,

oil on canvas,  
29 x 24 inches.

Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).

Sister to Poor's second wife, Marion Dorn, this portrait of Camille Dorn Schiller demonstrates the often stark simplicity of Poor's work. He rarely glamorized his subjects and this eventually led to his third wife, Bessie Breuer, discouraging him from painting female portraits – she felt he was often too honest with his brush.



*Self Portrait with Wife,*  
1919,

oil on canvas,  
24 x 26 inches.

Sandzén Gallery. Greenough Trust Collection (orig. Birger Sandzén).

Poor with his second wife, Marion Dorn. Dorn grew up in a wealthy San Francisco family and had Poor as an instructor at Stanford. When his marriage with Lena Wiltz began to crumble, he began seeing Dorn on a regular basis. They were married in the spring of 1919 after his divorce from Wiltz was finalized during World War I. As a result, she was disowned by her parents. The couple decided to relocate to New York State, where they could be closer to the art hub of the nation in New York City. Dorn and Poor eventually divorced in October 1923. After moving to England, she became a well-known designer of carpets and textiles – later marrying Edward McKnight Kauffer. In 1940 they moved back to New York and she died in Tangiers, Morocco, in 1964.



Wall Planter,  
circa 1930s,  
ceramic earthenware,  
13 x 10 x 5 inches.

Sandzén Gallery. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Stone in 1972.

Poor often added ceramic elements such as this to the homes he built. They were most often used as decorative planters that were inset in the wall.



Untitled Bowl,  
1947,  
ceramic earthenware,  
6 x 14 x 14 inches.

Sandzén Gallery. Gift by Timothy A. Johnson in honor of the 50th Wedding Anniversary of his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Vivian Johnson.

A larger bowl that demonstrates Poor's statement from *A Book of Pottery: From Mud Into Immortality* that "I started doing pottery for the pleasure of decorating it, of having something entirely in my control from beginning to end, so that both the object and the images it held would be equally mine."



*Goblet,*  
1958,  
4 x 4 x 4 inches.

Sandzén Gallery. Gift of the artist.

This cup was designed as a part of a set for Connecticut Senator William Benton, who was a great collector of Poor's work. When it arrived at the Sandzén Gallery for a show in 1963, a nick in the lip was discovered. After being notified, Poor wrote back to Margaret Sandzén – "as for the cracked goblet. Can you collect insurance on it? Probably it happened in shipment from Iowa. If the crack does not ruin it for show purposes, you may keep it if you want. They are part of a set made for Senator Benton and meant for use."



*Self Portrait,*  
1962,  
oil on board (masonite),  
26 x 18 inches.

Sandzén Gallery. Gift of the artist.

Painting was given to the Gallery following Poor's exhibition in April 1963.

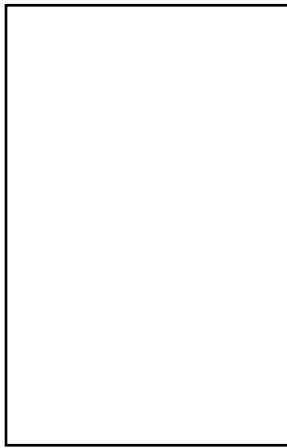
From the **Spencer Art Museum** at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas ([www.spencerart.ku.edu](http://www.spencerart.ku.edu)):



*The Hudson River at Bear Mountain*,  
1932,  
oil on Masonite  
15 x 20 inches.

Spencer Museum of Art, the University of Kansas  
Museum Purchase: Carnegie Fund Grant, 1935.

Before being purchased by the Spencer Museum of Art in 1935, then known as the Thayer Museum, the painting won the Norman Wait Harris silver medal (and \$500) at an Art Institute of Chicago exhibition in 1932. When the work was acquired by the Thayer Museum, it represented the first work to be purchased by an institution in Poor's native state.



*Henry Varnum Poor* by Duane Michals (born. 1932)  
1967  
gelatin silver print,  
16 1/4 x 11 3/8 inches. Framed 25 x 20 approx.  
Spencer Museum of Art, the University of Kansas,  
Gift of Esquire, Inc.

Taken by highly respected photographer Duane Michals, this photograph is a reflective portrait of Poor at his home in New City, New York. See the museum's website for an image of this photograph.

From the **Ulrich Art Museum** at Wichita State University in Wichita, Kansas ([www.ulrich.wichita.edu](http://www.ulrich.wichita.edu)):



*Early Spring (Trees Against the Sky)*,  
circa 1940,  
oil painting on board,  
36 x 24 inches, framed 44.5 x 32.65 inches.

Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, gift of Anne and Bessie Poor.

Although the location of the painting is unknown, it demonstrates Poor's love of nature and the woods. He frequently sketched and painted forested areas around his home in New City, New York and in other places he visited.



*Self Portrait,*  
circa 1960,  
marker on paper,  
10 x 7 inches.  
Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, gift of Anne and Bessie Poor.

A simple and honest self-portrait. Pool enjoyed creating images using limited materials and effects – a characteristic reflected in a passage from the book he wrote on his experiences with the War Artists' Unit during the Second World War. As he sketched and painted activities related to the military and local peoples of Alaska, he had the opportunity to show some of his sketches to a pilot temporarily grounded in Kotzebue. The pilot "looked through my little sketchbook, studying every drawing and shaking his head in wonder. 'So few lines and there it is,' he said. 'It's wonderful to see things I know set down in such simple direct language.' I have never had a more beautifully expressed compliment."



*Autumn Apples,*  
1967,  
ink wash and pastel on paper,  
14 x 12 inches.  
Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita State University, gift of Anne and Bessie Poor.

In the mid to late 1960s, Pool worked primarily in ceramics and pastels – largely foregoing painting. He continued to explore still life compositions and this work reflects his efforts in this medium.

From the **Wichita Art Museum** in Wichita, Kansas ([www.wichitaartmuseum.org](http://www.wichitaartmuseum.org)):



*Horse in Pasture,*  
1914,  
oil painting on canvas,  
22.125 x 17.625 inches.  
Wichita Art Museum, The Edmund L. and Faye Davison Collection.

Likely a scene from the Santa Clara Valley near his home at the time in Palo Alto, California.



*Self Portrait with Amaryllis,*

1934,  
oil on linen,  
32 x 28 inches.

Wichita Art Museum, Gift of Peter Poor, in memory of his father,  
the artist Henry Varnum Poor.

This painting, titled simply *Amaryllis*, was included in an  
exhibition of Poor's work at the Rehn Gallery in 1934.



*Self Portrait with Gun,*

1934,  
oil on canvas mounted to board,  
38 x 30 inches.

Wichita Art Museum, Museum Purchase, Burneta Adair  
Endowment Fund.

This quirky painting of the artist seems to demonstrate his  
growing reluctance as a hunter. Poor was always an avid  
outdoorsman, but his desire to hunt waned as he grew older. As a  
small boy in Chapman, Kansas, his grandfather taught him to  
make grasshopper and cornmeal pones and baked Prairie Hen.  
When older, he occasionally hunted to help supplement his  
family's diet; however, this ceased after his children had become  
full grown.

The painting was included in many exhibitions featuring  
Poor's work and was even shown in a sports related exhibition at  
the Milwaukee Art Institute – now the Milwaukee Art Museum.



*The Chess Game* by Henry Varnum Poor,

1939-40,  
oil on canvas,  
36 1/8 x 30 1/4 inches.

Wichita Art Museum, Purchased with funds donated by Marvin  
Bastian in memory of his wife, Bobbie Bastian.

*The Chess Game* is one of the most exhibited and well-  
known paintings by Poor. Before being acquired by the Wichita  
Art Museum, it was shown at the Rehn Galleries, Art Institute of  
Chicago, Cranbrook Art Museum in Michigan, Boston Art Festival,  
and the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco.  
It was also included in most of the artist's retrospective exhibitions.

The subjects are Poor's son, Peter, and his sister Anne.





Selections from the *Family Tea Set*,  
1940,  
earthenware,  
Wichita Art Museum, Museum Purchase, Burneta Adair  
Endowment Fund.

Made for use by his immediate family, the *Tea Set* documents important events in their lives. Pieces reflect his wife Bessie's writing successes and his children's endeavors. They also document the family's trips to Maine and LaCiotat, France.

The saucer showing his son Peter as a child has one of Poor's favorite sayings from an old English plate:

Earth I am, it is most true  
Disdain me not, for so are you.



2007.46.3  
*Portrait of Jose De Creeft*,  
circa 1948,  
oil on canvas,  
30.125 x 20.25 inches  
Wichita Art Museum, Gift of Peter Poor, in memory of his father,  
the artist Henry Varnum Poor.

Poor was well connected to his fellow artists in the New York area and this portrait represents one such friendship. Jose De Creeft was a figurative sculptor known primarily for his direct carving in stone and wood. Both he and Poor were members of the New York Artists Equity Association and De Creeft taught occasional summers at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, which Poor helped to found in 1946.

# Selected works in Kansas and Regional Collections, But Not Included in the Exhibition

Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art in Manhattan, Kansas (beach.k-state.edu):



*Mother and Child*,  
circa 1913,  
oil on canvas,  
35 3/4 x 23 3/4 in. (canvas).  
KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A.  
Stone, 1985.30.

Portrait of Poor's sister, Eva, and her son Charles.



Untitled (In the Sierras),  
circa 1914,  
oil on canvas,  
19 5/8 x 25 5/8 in. (canvas).  
KSU, Beach Museum of Art, N606.

This painting was completed during Poor's Christmas break from Stanford in 1913-1914. He traveled to the snowy Sierra Mountains in eastern California in search of new subject matter.



*Fall Orchard*,  
circa 1915,  
oil on canvas,  
28 3/8 x 35 1/2 in. (canvas).  
KSU, Beach Museum of Art, 1984.18.



Untitled (California Coast),  
circa 1915,  
oil on canvas,  
35 1/2 x 51 1/2 in. (canvas).  
KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of Astra Bank and the Richard  
Campbell Family, 2009.18.

Along with *Frozen Lake*, this painting was displayed for many years in the Chapman State Bank owned by Poor's family. When the bank was eventually purchased by the Campbell family, it remained for several years before being donated to the Beach Museum of Art in 2009.



*Landscape*,  
circa 1960,  
ink and pastel on paper,  
14 3/8 x 17 1/4 in. (overall).  
KSU, Beach Museum of Art, Ninth Biennial Exhibition of  
Regional Art (1967) Purchase Award, acquired for the Friends of  
Art with K-State Works of Art Purchase Fund, 1967.4.



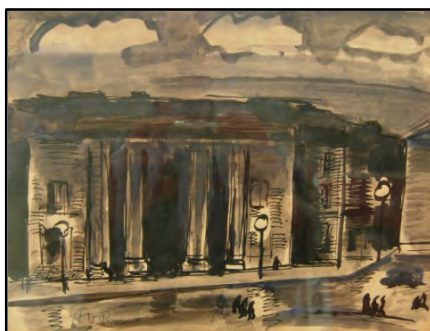
*M5 Plate*,  
circa 1963,  
earthenware,  
8 1/4 x 8 1/4 x 1 1/8 in. (overall).  
KSU, Beach Museum of Art, gift of Mary Brownell Helm, 1986.5.

### Hutchinson Art Association in Hutchinson, Kansas ([www.hutchinsonartcenter.org](http://www.hutchinsonartcenter.org)):



*Pont-à-Mousson*,  
November 1918,  
lithograph on paper,  
16 x 19 inches.  
Hutchinson Art Association collection.

This lithograph, similar to one in the collection of Emprise Bank in Wichita, shows a bridge undergoing reconstruction in the town of Pont-à-Mousson, France. In the distance is St. Martin's Church.



Untitled Street Scene,  
circa 1943,  
ink on paper,  
8 x 10 1/2 inches.  
Hutchinson Art Association collection.

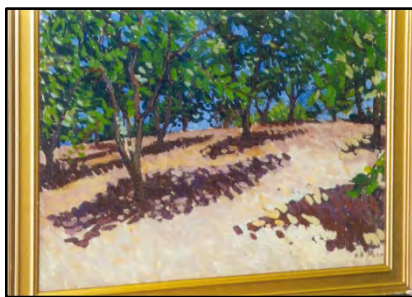
**Kirkland Museum of Fine & Decorative Art in Denver, Colorado**

([www.kirklandmuseum.org](http://www.kirklandmuseum.org)):



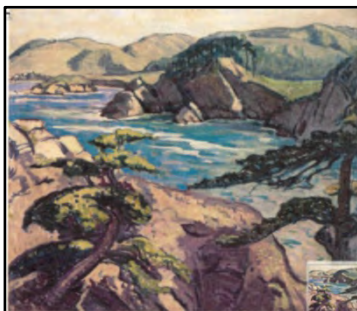
*Mountain Stream*,  
circa 1917,  
etching on paper,  
4 7/8 x 5 1/2 inches.  
Kirkland Museum collection.

**U.S.D. 418 in McPherson, Kansas** ([www.mcpherson.com](http://www.mcpherson.com)):

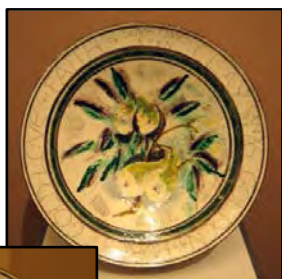


*In the Orchard*,  
1915,  
oil on canvas,  
17 x 24 inches.  
U.S.D. 418 collection.

**The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City, Missouri** ([www.nelson-atkins.org](http://www.nelson-atkins.org)):



Untitled (California Coastal Scene),  
circa 1915,  
oil on canvas,  
36 x 41 1/8 inches.  
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dixon.



*Footed Dish*,  
1932,  
earthenware,  
14 x 14 x 5 inches.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, gift of Mrs. H. S. Stone, H. E. Poor and Henry Varnum Poor in memory of Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Poor.



This commemorative piece was made by Poor in honor of his parents 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. They were married in Chapman, Kansas, on Christmas Day in 1882. The inscription on the rim reads: "Love & Faith & Sometimes Even Clay Can Be As Golden As Purest Gold."



*Dead Pheasant*,  
circa 1935,  
oil on board,  
15 7/8 x 19 7/8 inches.  
The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, gift of the Friends of Art.

**The Sheldon Museum of Art** in Lincoln, Nebraska ([www.sheldonartmuseum.org](http://www.sheldonartmuseum.org)):



*Self Portrait*,  
1936,  
oil on canvas,  
38 x 30 inches.  
Sheldon Museum of Art, F. M. Hall Collection



*Self Portrait Plate*,  
1940,  
earthenware,  
8 1/2 inch diameter.  
Sheldon Museum of Art, F. M. Hall Collection

*Mothball Fleet, Haverstraw*,  
1966,  
ink and pastel on paper,  
size not available.  
Sheldon Museum of Art, gift of Maynard Walker.

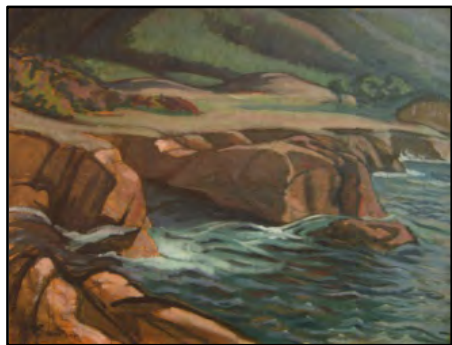
**Spencer Art Museum** at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas  
([www.spencerart.ku.edu](http://www.spencerart.ku.edu)):



*Plaque*,  
1968,  
earthenware,  
2 3/8 x 11 1/8 x 13 7/8 inches.  
Spencer Museum of Art, gift of Maynard Walker in memory of  
Lucy Drage.

## Ulrich Art Museum at Wichita State University in Wichita, Kansas

([www.ulrich.wichita.edu](http://www.ulrich.wichita.edu)):



*California Coast Near Pacific Grove*,  
circa 1915,  
oil painting on canvas,  
29 x 38 inches.

Ulrich Art Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Stone in 1972.



*Mountain Ranch*,  
1938,  
oil on canvas,  
30 x 44 1/4 inches.

Ulrich Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Henry Varnum Poor in 1974.

In the summers of 1937 and 38, Poor taught landscape drawing and painting at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado. For the most part, his classes were held outdoors and the students developed drawing skills and used watercolor and oil paints.

## Walker Art Gallery in Garnett, Kansas:



*American Army Camp in France*,  
1918,  
watercolor and charcoal,  
18 x 22 inches.  
Walker Art Gallery.

Poor served in France as a regimental artist with the 115<sup>th</sup> Engineers. While there, he completed paintings, drawings and lithographs of his fellow soldiers, superiors and scenes he experienced. This work is similar to a lithograph in the collection of the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery.



*Anne*,  
1947,  
earthenware,  
11 x 11 x 2 inches.  
Walker Art Gallery.

Portrait of Poor's daughter Anne, who became a highly accomplished artist in her own right.



*Spring Landscape*,  
circa 1950,  
oil on board,  
15 x 18 inches.  
Walker Art Gallery.



*Petunias*,  
1960,  
oil on canvas mounted to board,  
18 x 15 inches.  
Walker Art Gallery.

**Wichita Art Museum in Wichita, Kansas ([www.wichitaartmuseum.org](http://www.wichitaartmuseum.org)):**

Untitled (California Harbor),  
1912,  
oil on linen,  
18 x 24 inches.  
Wichita Art Museum, bequest of Max and Icee Moxley.

Untitled (Still Life),  
1912,  
oil on linen,  
19 x 23 3/4 inches.  
Wichita Art Museum, bequest of Max and Icee Moxley.



*Eva Stone*,  
circa 1917,  
etching on paper,  
3 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches.  
Wichita Art Museum, bequest of Max and Icee Moxley.



*In Western Garb,*  
1937,  
oil on board,  
24 x 20 inches.  
Wichita Art Museum, Rolland P. Murdock Collection.



*Portrait of Karl Knaths,*  
circa 1948,  
oil on linen,  
20 x 16 inches.  
Wichita Art Museum, Gift of Peter Poor, in memory of his father,  
the artist Henry Varnum Poor.



*Portrait of Karl Zerbe,*  
circa 1948,  
oil on board,  
20 x 16 inches.  
Wichita Art Museum, Gift of Peter Poor, in memory of his father,  
the artist Henry Varnum Poor.



*Portrait of William Zorach,*  
circa 1948,  
oil on linen mounted to board,  
18 x 15 inches.  
Wichita Art Museum, Gift of Peter Poor, in memory of his father,  
the artist Henry Varnum Poor.



*A Wedding Plate,*  
1951,  
earthenware,  
11 3/4 in. diameter.  
Wichita Art Museum, Gift of Peter Poor, in memory of his father,  
the artist Henry Varnum Poor.



*Bowl,*  
1952,  
earthenware,  
12 1/2 inches in height,  
Wichita Art Museum, Rolland P. Murdock Collection.



*Jar,*  
1953,  
earthenware,  
Wichita Art Museum, Rolland P. Murdock Collection.

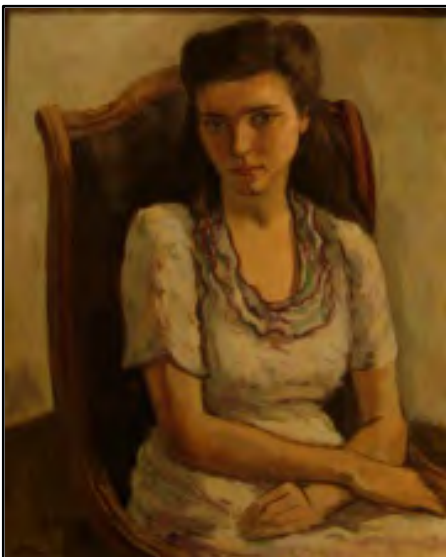


*Green and Sunny Glade*,  
circa 1955,  
oil on canvas mounted to plywood,  
23 3/8 x 30 7/8 inches.  
Wichita Art Museum, Gift of Peter Poor, in memory of his father,  
the artist Henry Varnum Poor.

**Wichita Center for the Arts in Wichita, Kansas ([www.wcfta.com](http://www.wcfta.com)):**



*Monterey Pier*,  
1912,  
oil painting on canvas,  
18 x 24 inches.



*Naomi*,  
1946,  
oil painting on board,  
29 x 24 inches.

Images used courtesy of owning institutions and individuals.  
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# Henry Varnum Poor:

## Commemorating 125 Years

by Ron Michael, Curator,  
Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

**Annotated Chronology** - August 2012

## **Pre-1887 through 1919**

### **Pre-1887: the Poor and Graham Families:**

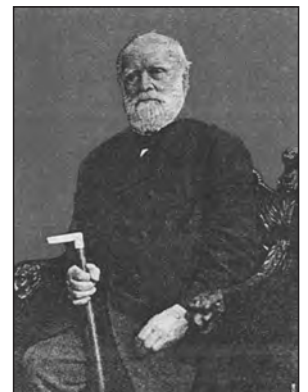
Summary: Henry Varnum Poor's family (he will often be referred to in this chronology as either "Poor" or "HVP"), like many who entered Kansas, came from the eastern United States and generally descended from Europeans. His father's side, the **Poors**, came from distant Andover, Maine. His mother's, the **Grahams**, made their way through various states in the east.

### **The POOR family:**

- anchored in Andover, Maine, HVP's father's relatives were early settlers in the region. They had come from Massachusetts following the Revolutionary War and endured many hardships in establishing a new community in Maine.<sup>1</sup>

The following is a partial list of Poor's paternal descendents:

- Great-great-grandparents: Ebenezer Poor (1732-1809) married Suzanna Varnum (1734-1811). Ebenezer Poor was one of the original founders of Andover, Maine, and served as a deacon of the newly established Congregational Church.<sup>2</sup>
- Great-great-grandparents: Ezekiel Merrill (1747- 1830) married Sarah Emery (1753-1848). Merrill and Emery were married on June 1, 1773. Merrill was a veteran of the Revolutionary War and considered the "leading spirit" in establishing remotely located Andover, Maine. The family was aided greatly by the Native Americans in the area and constructed the first house in Andover<sup>3</sup>
- Great-grandparents: Dr. Silvanus Poor (1768-1848) married Mary Merrill (1781-1841). Dr. Silvanus Poor and Mary Merrill were married in 1802. Poor was a highly regarded citizen in Andover and helped frame the Constitution of Maine and served as the town's first postmaster.<sup>4</sup>
- Grandparents: Elbridge Poor (1811-1900) married Susan Bragg Stevens (1813-1876). Elbridge Poor ran a sawmill in Andover. Additionally, he was a known to work as a millwright, blacksmith and carpenter in the surrounding region.<sup>5</sup> HVP met his grandfather when the family would occasionally return to Maine.
- Great-uncle: Henry Varnum Poor (1812-1905). Henry Varnum Poor was the founder of what would evolve into Standard and Poor's (S&P). He was born in Andover, Maine to Silvanus and Mary Poor. After graduating from Bowdoin College in 1831, he practiced law in Maine before establishing himself in New York and eventually publishing *Manual of the Railroads of the United States*. In 1868, along with his son, he formed H. V. and H. W. Poor company which continued to publish the *Manual*. The company's publications evolved to tracking financial information that could be used by investors. Through a series of mergers and buyouts the company became S&P.<sup>6</sup>
- Uncle: Scott Poor (1844-1904). Scott Poor was the first of the Poor sons to venture west to Kansas.



**Henry Varnum Poor (1812-1905).** Google images.

During the Civil War he was trained as a telegraph operator and later worked in that capacity in Wamego, Abilene and Chapman, Kansas. While in Abilene, during the cow town days in late 1870, he and his wife reportedly became friends with gun fighting legend Wild Bill Hickok. Hickok took over as Marshall in April 1871. In late December 1870, the Poor's established the first depot in Chapman and assisted in the town's growth. Through the years, Poor became one of the most prosperous citizens of Chapman.<sup>7</sup>



**Alfred J. Poor**

- Father: Alfred James Poor (1853-1936)



**Alfred J. Poor, at left, with early Chapman settlers. Courtesy of Chapman Area Preservation Society (CAPS)**

Alfred Poor (often referred to as A. J.) followed his brother Scott from Andover, Maine, to Kansas in 1872. He was also an early telegraph operator and worked at Ogden, Kansas, prior to establishing himself in Chapman. Soon after his arrival, he and Scott opened a grain elevator – which he eventually bought out along with H. A. Knight. In 1881, he constructed a house in Chapman that would be a home for he and his family for many years. Around it, he planted mulberry and pine trees, and the home became known as “the Mulberries.” On Christmas Day in 1882, he married Josephine Melinda Graham. Four years later he organized the Chapman State Bank and continued operating the two for the remainder of his life. He expanded the families financial interests substantially throughout his life and in 1896 took a position on the Kansas City Board of Trade. He was also actively involved in the community activities of Chapman, Kansas City and Victory Junction (located approximately four miles north of Bonner Springs, Kansas). In 1911, A. J. and his partner, H. A. Knight constructed one the earliest all-cement elevators at the Chapman location after the previous structure burned down.<sup>8</sup>

### **The GRAHAM family:**

- Poor's mother's family is also well documented. The Graham name has been traced back to the mid-1600s in Ireland and Scotland. They are regarded as versatile individualists who succeed in most of their endeavors. One writer described the family as having “constructive creativity, deftness with tools, love of using their hands and an obsession to train them to expert efficiency. They have been dreamers, but also doers, sensuous especially in respect to touch, spare-spoken and contemplative, motivated more by loving and giving than by taking. They have despised any attempt to impose upon them the conventional, the non-individualistic, conformity in general.”<sup>9</sup>

The following is a list of Poor's maternal descendents:

- Great-great-great grandparents: John Graham (1750-1798) married Rebecca Dixon (1752-1836).

John Graham was born in Preston, West Virginia, married Rebecca Dixon in 1774, and died in 1798. Rebecca Dixon was born in Ireland and died in 1836. John's father, David John Graham, reportedly came to the United States in 1713<sup>10</sup>

- Great-great grandparents: Jacob Polsley (1763-1823) married Margaret Haymond (1769-1830).

Jacob Polsley was born in Berks County, Pennsylvania, married Margaret Haymond in May 1791 and died in Fairmont, Virginia in May of 1823. Margaret Haymond was born in 1769 and also died in Fairmont, Virginia.

- Great grandparents: Rev. Robert Graham (1794-1851) married Rowena Polsley (1798-1845). Robert Graham was born in Virginia, married Rowena Polsley in July 1816 and died in Illinois in August of 1851. Rowena Polsley was born in Palatine, Virginia and died prior to her husband in Illinois.<sup>10</sup>

- Grandparents: Simeon Levi Graham (1833-1912) married LeAnn Asbury (1840-1900)<sup>11</sup>  
Simeon Levi Graham was born in Brown County, Ohio on April 18, 1833. His mother bore eight

children, but died when he was only twelve. His father died not long afterwards in 1851. Sim, as he was often called, headed for California in search of gold with two brothers. He eventually returned to Illinois and married LeAnn Asbury in 1857. Asbury's parents, who were descended from English immigrants, had moved



**LeAnn Asbury, seated at right, with her parents and siblings in 1883.**  
Courtesy CAPS.

from Kentucky to Indiana, where she was born and raised. After marriage, Sim and LeAnn lived on farms in Illinois and Indiana prior to coming to Kansas in 1871. Eventually the couple settled in Chapman following his service in the Civil War - beginning in a dugout, then constructing a stone house on the same site. With eleven children born between 1858 and 1880, they faced difficult times on the prairie. At one point Sim's life was threatened by a cattleman who felt his fences were a menace to his herd. Another time, the stone house was hit by lightning causing glass to shatter, the chimney to collapse and the lime mortar to explode from between the stones. Grasshopper invasions also devastated crops, the worst being in 1874, and forced many of the settlers to flee the area.<sup>12</sup> Happier times were had at church gatherings and in family sing-a-longs (Sim played violin and LeAnn piano).<sup>13</sup>



**Simeon Levi Graham, circa 1910.** Courtesy CAPS.

Mother: Josephine (1863-1940)



**Josephine Melinda Graham (Poor), circa 1880.**

Josephine, or Josie as she was known, had ten siblings, of which nine were sisters. She was the third child, born near Ashmore, Illinois, and was nine when the family came to Kansas. Schooling at that time was difficult around Chapman so most of her education was provided by her parents until she was able to attend the local high school after her children were born.<sup>14</sup> With a natural artistic inclination, Josie often copied book and magazine images and also dabbled with pastels and paints. At the urging of HVP, she stopped copying and became quite proficient at working directly from life.<sup>15</sup> Following her marriage to A. J. Poor in 1882, the couple had three children. Oldest son Herbert Emery was born on January 1, 1884, daughter Eva May on April 4, 1885, and youngest son Henry Varnum on September 30, 1887.



**The Graham Family's stone house located south-east of Chapman.**

**Early History of Chapman, Kansas:**

- Chapman, Kansas, which was to play such an important part in the life of Henry Varnum Poor, was primarily an agricultural center established in 1872 after settlers had begun collecting in the area nearly seventeen years earlier. The earliest noted settler was George Freeman, who homesteaded approximately four miles north of the town in 1855. In the early years, Chapman hosted settlers with wide ranging backgrounds and beliefs. By 1914, the population rose to 814 people. The town continued to grow through the decades and now supports nearly 1400. One of many notable events in the community was the establishment of the first county high school, known as the Dickinson County Community High School, in 1889.<sup>16</sup>



**Downtown Chapman, Kansas, in 1906.** Courtesy of Wichita State University Libraries - Special Collections and Archives.

## 1887 through 1911: the Birth of Henry Varnum Poor Through His Collegiate Years

**Summary:** On September 30, 1887 Henry Varnum Poor was born in Chapman, Kansas. The Poor family, consisting of his father Alfred, mother Josephine (Graham), older brother Herbert, and sister Eva moved from Chapman to Kansas City, Missouri, in 1896. Poor attended one of the earliest Manual Training Schools established in the United States - learning drafting, carpentry, and other industrial arts. In 1905, Poor, his mother and siblings relocated to Palo Alto, California, so that Henry's older brother, Herbert, could enroll in Stanford University as a California resident. Henry enrolled at Palo Alto High School. He graduated in the spring of 1906 and enrolled at Stanford University that fall as an economics major. His first semester, he took his first art class. He eventually changed his major to art and graduated from Stanford following the spring semester of 1910. Poor immediately left for Europe on a bicycling trip with art professor Arthur Clark - extending his stay to study painting and drawing in London and Paris.

**1887 September 30:** Henry Varnum Poor is born in Chapman, Kansas, to Alfred James and Josephine Melinda Poor. The locally issued *Chapman Courier*, printed on the day of his birth, of course has no record of the child but does contain an advertisement stating "Bank of Chapman, A. J. Poor & Co., General Banking Business, Loans at Reasonable Rates, Collections Promptly Attended to."

- many sources, and even the artist himself, chronicled Poor's birth year as 1888; however, the Chapman newspaper, census records, and his 1917 draft card confirm 1887.

In "Local News," the October 7, 1887 edition of *The Chapman Courier*, reported "A. J. Poor is the happy father of a bouncing boy" and the census records for March 1, 1895, record that "Henry V" was 7 at the time. Further, on his draft card completed in May of 1917 he records his birthday as "September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1887."<sup>17</sup>

- the earliest known reference to Poor being born in 1888 (that's known to this author) is his California State Library card. In his writing, the card states his date of birth as Sept. 30, 1888.<sup>17.1</sup>



**Poor's childhood home in Chapman, known as "the Mulberries." Courtesy of CAPS.**

**1887 through 1896:** Poor spends his childhood in Chapman, surrounded by relatives on both his mother's and father's side of the family. It is an important time in his development and made a lasting impact on his life.



**Members of the Graham Family, 1908. Courtesy of CAPS.**

- Poor described his time in Chapman as "Pretty wonderful. I used to herd cattle over the prairies and had a black Indian pony and - you know, I loved the country. I'm a country person more than a city person, always have been."<sup>18</sup> In one article he remembered, "my earliest ambition was to be a naturalist. I knew all the birds and made collections of them. I recall following the plow, turning up the black furrows and feeling the soil between my bare toes. It was a friendly world in which we grew up, surrounded by 'kinfolk' in the villages and neighboring farms, loving every bit of the familiar earth and its creatures."<sup>19</sup>

- an important element in HVP's childhood was his time spent with grandfather Simeon Graham.

Poor recalled his grandfather as "a wonderful old man. I grew up with him. He came back and lived with us in Chapman [likely from Colorado], and I'd go hunting and fishing with him all over the place – a wonderful person."<sup>20</sup>

In his later journals, he noted two forms of Native American cooking that his grandfather taught him: "1<sup>st</sup> grasshopper and corn meal pones. With a stick make a grasshopper trap in the prairie. About 1 ft. wide at the top. When the bottom chamber is full, dry the grasshoppers – the large wingless green ones are the best & grind them with corn between flat stones – 1 part grasshoppers to 4 parts corn. Salt, make into patties and bake on hot stones. Refreshing to carry along to munch as you hunt. 2<sup>nd</sup>, Baked Prairie Hen. Remove innards, leaving feathers on. Encase the whole bird in a ball of clay (or mud). Bake in hot ashes. The feathers come off with the baked clay leaving all meat juices. Salt and pepper – if you have any."<sup>21</sup>



Poor as a child, circa 1897. HVP Estate.

- Poor also had a love of heights as a kid and enjoyed climbing trees, windmills, roofs, etc.

"My father instructed me as to which trees were brittle and unsafe and which safe and tough to climb to the very top and sway in the wind."<sup>22</sup>

**1896 through mid-1905:** HVP's family moves to Kansas City so that A. J. Poor, whose grain business was ever increasing, can maintain an office at the Kansas City Board of Trade. He erected grain elevators throughout Kansas, expanded his banking interests, and served on the board of the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad. As of 1906, the family was living at 1000 Park Avenue in Kansas City, Missouri.<sup>23</sup>

- Poor attended school in Kansas City and enrolled in the newly constructed Manual Training High School where he learned carpentry, forge and machine work, and mechanical drawing. The school was located on the south side of Fifteenth Street, between Forest and Tracy Avenues.



Manual Training High School in Kansas City, Missouri.

- during the summers, he often visited Chapman and occasionally relatives in Maine. During one summer, while in high school, he helped with the construction of a grain elevator in Dorrance, Kansas.<sup>24</sup> Additional time was likely spent working on his parents' farm located approximately four miles north of Bonner Springs, Kansas.

- he also participated in basketball and track. At one point, while playing basketball, he stressed his heart from overexertion in a closely enclosed gymnasium.<sup>25</sup>

**1905 June:** HVP, his mother, brother and sister move to Palo Alto, California, after he completes his Junior year at Manual Training High School. He enrolls at Palo Alto High School for his senior year and the family rents a house at 515 Evert Street.<sup>25.1</sup> A. J. Poor remained in Kansas City to attend to business interests, but likely visited frequently.

- the move was made to allow older brother Herbert's enrollment at Stanford University as a California resident. He majored both in chemical engineering (1907) and civil engineering (1908).<sup>25.2</sup>

- Josephine's brother, Arthur Graham, was living near the San Francisco at the time, which likely

made the relocation less traumatic.<sup>26</sup>

- Palo Alto High School first opened in 1894 as a private school. In 1900 a new school (which HVP would have attended) was built at the corner of Channing and Webster Streets.<sup>27</sup>



**Palo Alto High School**

- the family experienced the 1906 San Francisco earthquake (April 18, 1906) – which would have occurred when HVP was in his final semester of high school. The earthquake and its effects on the Poor family are not recorded, but HVP makes reference to it in a later 1970 journal entry.<sup>28</sup>

**1906 August:** Poor enters Stanford University and finishes in four years, graduating in the spring of 1910.

- Stanford University was established in 1891 by former California governor and United States senator Leland Stanford and his wife Jane in memory of their son, who had died of typhoid fever when he was 15. The school offered free tuition to residents, was open to both men and women, and had no religious affiliation.



**Stanford University, 1905.**  
Photo by A. J. Waters & Co.

- Poor began as an economics major, with the intent to follow in his father's footsteps, but changed to art at the beginning of his junior year after prolonged discourse with his parents.<sup>29</sup> He had taken an early drawing class in 1906, and became more involved in the department as his studies progressed.

- while at Stanford, Poor was active in organizations and athletics. Of particular note are his involvements in the gymnasium club and track team. Additionally, he learned to fence.

Poor generally does not appear to be the top high jumper, but does place well in meets. In the spring semester of 1908, he served as the secretary-treasurer of the Gymnasium Club.<sup>30</sup>



**The 1908 Gymnasium Club. Poor is second from the left in the middle row.**

**1909 Fall:** first Painting class at Stanford. One of his earliest paintings is of a Dutch girl, which for many years was in the collection of Poor's nephew, Charles Stone.<sup>31</sup>

- Poor's primary art instructor (and a major influence) was Arthur Bridgman Clark (1866-1948).

Clark came to Stanford after attending Syracuse University in New York and later briefly studied with William Merritt Chase, John Henry Twachtman, and James McNeill Whistler. Additionally, he did architectural work.<sup>32</sup>

- Lena Gretchen Wiltz, a fellow art student at Stanford was attracting Poor's attention and by December, he wrote to his mother that he was



**Poor's sophomore class picture at Stanford.**



**Chrysanthemums, 1906,**  
conte crayon,  
16 x 12 inches.



**Dutch Girl, 1909, oil on**  
canvas.

in love.<sup>33</sup>

Lena was born in Kansas on July 12, 1885, but the family moved to the Santa Clara region of California where her father established a walnut orchard near San Jose. She had three sisters and was raised primarily by her aunts after the early death of her mother.<sup>34</sup>

**1909 Summer:** Poor and a classmate sail north along the Pacific coast to Washington and HVP works in a logging camp in the area.<sup>35</sup>

- Poor's son, Peter, indicated the boat was actually a lifeboat that HVP and his classmate rigged and sailed as far north as Alaska and back. He seemed to enjoy the water and occasionally rented boats – once taking the family on a motorboat excursion up the Hudson River from Nyack to Albany with the intent of visiting the Great Lakes. However, after encountering on the massive locks on the Erie Canal, the family turned around and headed home. His most well documented water adventure was aboard the *Ada*, cruising up the Alaskan coastline while serving in the War Artists' Unit during World War II.<sup>35.1</sup>

**1910 Spring:** graduates from Stanford at the conclusion of the spring semester.

- elected Phi Beta Kappa on April 11, 1910.

Phi Beta Kappa is a well known prestigious academic honor society established at the College of William and Mary in 1776, and celebrates high achievement in the liberal arts and sciences.<sup>36</sup>

- plans to accompany Arthur Clark to Europe.

**1910 May:** Poor leaves on an extended trip to Europe with Stanford professor Arthur B. Clark.

- they arrive in London on June 5, 1910.

- the two visit France, then on to Switzerland, Italy, Germany, and Holland – giving Poor an opportunity to see many of Europe's best known works of art.<sup>37</sup>

Of particular note was the opportunity to see Giotto's works in Italy. Giotto was one of the early influential artists of the Italian Renaissance and the directness of his work greatly affected Poor.

-after bicycling back to London in mid-August, Clark headed back to the United States, while Poor remained in London.<sup>38</sup>

**1910 mid-August:** Begins art studies at the Slade School in London with Walter Sickert (1860-1942) and others.

- he rented an attic room at 130 Cambridge St. near the heart of the city.<sup>39</sup>

- HVP enrolled in the Slade School of Fine Art and took classes during the day with faculty members such as Frederick Brown (1851-1941). Most of his efforts are spent in drawing classes.

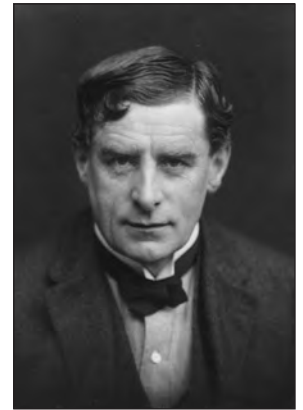
The Slade School of Fine Art opened in 1871 and has continued to expand and train many of Britain's most renowned artists. Frederick Brown joined the Slade faculty in 1892, after having studied at Académie Julian and teaching at the Westminster School of Art, and continued until 1918.<sup>40</sup>

-also enrolled in English Impressionist Walter Sickert's class at the Westminster School of



Art, which were held in the evenings. Sickert proved to be the most influential of Poor's teachers, even though his tutelage only lasted a short time, and provided him insights into drawing directly and honestly from nature using a natural scale.<sup>41</sup>

Walter Sickert was active in the London art scene and was one of James McNeill Whistler's better known protégés. He was also a friend of Edgar Degas, associated with many in his circle, and has works in many of the world's important art museums. He has been considered a suspect in the Jack the Ripper murders, but has largely been cleared of any involvement.<sup>42</sup>



Walter Sickert, 1911.  
Google images.

- Poor quits the Slade School in October 1910 and works with Clifford Issac Addams (1876-1942)

Addams was an acknowledged student of Whistler, who precisely followed his teachings and was a legal apprentice. He followed directly the palette orientation and blending, application of paint, etc. Poor met him while sketching in the National Gallery after Addams critiqued the work he was doing. Poor spent several weeks working with him, but finally found his approach too regimented.<sup>43</sup>

- nearly as important as his studies, Poor also had the opportunity to view the *Manet and the Post-Impressionists* exhibition at the Grafton Galleries while in London. The exhibit opened on November 8 and continued through January 15, 1911. Poor visited the show repeatedly and drew inspiration from the works of Cezanne, Gauguin, Van Gogh, and the other exhibitors. From that point forward, he felt Cezanne was a kindred spirit and one of his strongest influences.<sup>44</sup>

### 1910 December: Poor leaves London to begin studies in Paris.

- he arrived on December 28, 1910<sup>45</sup>
- Poor was determined to work hard to establish himself as an artist so he would be able to return to California and marry Lena Wiltz, who had taken a teaching job in Redding, California.<sup>46</sup>
- begins classes at Académie Julian (established in 1868), drawing the figure during the morning.

One of the main points Poor learned was the importance of negative space in a composition: "Julian's had a terrific tradition which, in a sense, was very disciplinarian in that it didn't draw the figure all by itself but drew it in relation to its background all the time."<sup>47</sup>

- HVP also studied painting with Jean-Paul Laurens (1838-1921) during the afternoon.

Well known for his realistic, academic depictions of historical and religious scenes, Laurens was also a teacher at Académie Julian.

- took night classes with Lucien Simon (1861-1945), Jacques Emile Blanche (1861-1942), and others.
- visited the Louvre often – studying and copying paintings.
- Poor felt more at home in Paris than London and enjoyed socializing with his fellow students.<sup>48</sup>
- he also was able to see Wassily Kandinsky's "complete abstract" work for the first time – possibly at the Salon des Indépendants since there is no record of a solo exhibition by the artist during the time Poor was in Paris.

In relation to seeing Kandinsky's painting, HVP would later say: "I was very aware of it as an intellectual thing and definitely knew that to me it didn't mean what I wanted painting to mean."<sup>49</sup>



Jean-Paul Laurens,  
1914. Collection ofBib-  
liothèque nationale de  
France

- While at Stanford, Poor had considered becoming a mural painter and was afforded the opportunity to study murals completed by Puvis de Chavannes (1824-1898) in the Panthéon.
- Poor placed very highly at the concours (competitions) held at Académie Julian.

**1911 January:** receives offer from Arthur B. Clarke to return to Stanford as a temporary Graphics instructor for Robert Harshe (1879-1938), who was taking a leave of absence.

**1911 April:** Poor's mother, Josephine, and a cousin arrive in Paris to tour Europe with HVP in May 1911.

**1911 June:** Poor leaves from London in June to return to the United States.

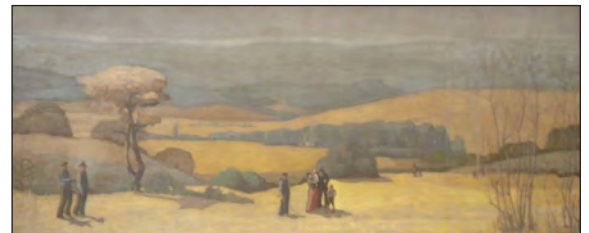
- proceeds to Kansas City, Missouri to visit family and also stays at the farm in Bonner Springs, Kansas, before returning to Palo Alto later in the summer.

- during this time, he possibly completed *November in California* for his parents new home in Kansas City, Missouri, or it may have been completed during the fall when he was back at Stanford.



Several members of Poor's family in front of his parents new home in Kansas City, Missouri

The design and plan for the house, located approximately 1 mile south of the Country Club Plaza area on West 53<sup>rd</sup> Street Terrace, had been underway since at least 1909. Poor sent an initial sketch of a painting to go over the living room fireplace to his mother in January of that year.<sup>50</sup> The completed work measured nearly 47 inches in height by 107 inches in width.



*November in California, 1911*, oil on canvas, 46 1/2 x 106 3/4 inches. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James Haydon and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Hurd.

### 1911 Through 1919: the California Years:

Summary: In 1911, Poor returned to the United States from Europe and began a temporary teaching position at Stanford. The next year he exhibited at Stanford's "Old Studio" and married Lena Wiltz in San Jose, California. The couple moved to his parent's property north of Bonner Springs, Kansas, so he could manage the farming operation. A daughter, Josephine Lydia, was born to the couple on March 6, 1913. The Poor family returned to California in August, after Henry accepted a new position at Stanford. In 1915, Poor exhibited in the important Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco. Poor's position at Stanford was discontinued following the spring 1916 semester and he moved the family to San Francisco - teaching at what would become the San Francisco Institute of Art. In 1918, Poor was inducted into the Army, eventually becoming regimental artist in France. During the War he was divorced from Lena Wiltz. After his discharge, he married former Stanford student Marion Dorn and the couple moved to New York.

**1911 August:** Poor begins a temporary teaching position at Stanford.

- he was reunited with Lena, who was still teaching at Redding. With the distances involved, they are not able to spend much time together.
- Poor maintains a teaching load of two classes in drawing and one in painting.<sup>51</sup>
- his teaching style was based primarily on methods learned under Walter Sickert and, by his own

account, the students made good progress.<sup>52</sup>

**1911 Christmas:** spent at Wiltz's farm outside of San Jose. HVP encourages Lena to re-enroll at Stanford in January in order to complete her degree in the spring.<sup>53</sup>

**1912 February:** has first one-person exhibition, which is held at Stanford's "Old Studio."

- Shows work from Paris, Bonner Springs and current Stanford work.
- Becomes better known in the area art circles (esp. San Francisco). Meets Ann Bremer (1868-1923), Maynard Dixon (1875-1946), Beniamino Bufano (1890-1970), Ralph Stackpole (1885-1975), and other prominent area artists.<sup>54</sup>

**1912 May 20:** marries Lena Wiltz and agrees to manage Bonner Springs farm after spending summer painting near Carmel, California.<sup>55</sup>

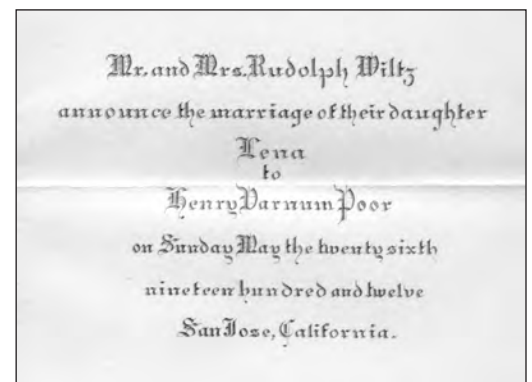
- actively paints most of the summer – producing over 36 paintings.<sup>56</sup>



*California Mission (Santa Clara de Asis Mission), 1912, oil on canvas, 12 x 24 inches. Emprise Bank Collection, Wichita.*

**1912 August or September:** moves with pregnant wife, Lena, to the family's farm north of Bonner Springs, Kansas, to manage the farming operation.

- the farm ground was 301.35 acres located approximately four miles north of Bonner Springs. In the early and mid-1900s, a small town/traveler's stop sprung up on the north portion of the property known as Victory Junction and the farm itself was referred to as Wyandotte Oak Farms by the mid-1930s. The farm's location can be found on current maps by following Kansas Highway 7 north of Bonner Springs and I-70 to where it crosses State Avenue (southern edge of the property) and Parallel Pkwy (northern edge of the property). K-7 nearly bisects the original acreage.<sup>57</sup>
- for Poor, this experience turned out to be an experiment about being a farmer and an artist simultaneously. He eventually found that farming, especially animal care, demanded too much effort, leaving little time or energy to create art.<sup>58</sup>
- however, he appears to have been successful as a manager and helped make the farm profitable.<sup>59</sup>



**Wedding announcement of Lena Wiltz to Henry Varnum Poor. Courtesy of CAPS**



*Cows, 1913, oil on canvas, 19 x 22 1/2 inches. U.S.D. 473 Collection*

- living close to his family (all were living in Kansas City at the time) gave him the opportunity to use them as models for his paintings. Many of this period are of his wife and child, mother, father, sister and her son.

**1912 November 11 through November 30:** exhibits at the Kansas City Art Institute in Kansas City, Missouri.

- shows over 60 canvases and several drawings.<sup>60</sup>

Included in the exhibit are Carmel-Monterey scenes, fourteen works from Europe, seven portraits and two decorative panels. The accompanying catalog included an explanation: "This exhibit, makes its claims to your study as work truly

seen and honestly painted – the product of a whole-hearted realist who finds truth to be the only great beauty. And in proportion as pertinent truths are selected and in proportion as they are seen and painted with true insight do they escape from sordidness and commonplaceness.”<sup>61</sup>

Poor’s biographer, Monroe Stearns, wrote about the local reactions to the show: “Accustomed to sweetness and sentimentality, Kansas City art lovers of 1912 were not used to Impressionism, much less Postimpressionism. They found Henry’s indistinct outlines, his raw colors, his flat effects, a strain on their eyes.” He continues, “At first the portraits in the show disturbed spectators accustomed to idealizations with rosy waxen flesh, arch poses, vapid smiles, or superimposed dignity. They were all of persons – including himself – whom Henry knew well and had studied as individual personalities rather than as casual sitters who had narcissistically solicited his work. He showed them with unruly hair, everyday clothes, revealing gestures, and with somber, brooding, intense faces, as if they were pursuing some unspoken goal or obeying an intellectual compulsion. His lively brushwork gave them vitality.”<sup>62</sup>

- although no firm evidence exists, the show may have drawn the attention of Swedish-American painter Birger Sandzén, who was living in Lindsborg, Kansas, and teaching at Bethany College. He and Poor’s friendship is documented as early as 1915, but they may have become acquainted with each other as early as 1912. Monroe Stearns suggests in his unpublished biography that Sandzén encouraged Poor to enter work in the *Annual Exhibition* at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts – which he did in 1913.<sup>63</sup>

**1913 February:** Poor’s *The Blue Pitcher*, a portrait of the artist’s mother, accepted for exhibition in the 108<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts – the first major, national, juried show he was represented in.<sup>64</sup>

**1913 March 6:** daughter Josephine Lydia (1913-1985) born at the Poor family home in Kansas City, Missouri. HVP commutes to the farm in Model T during this time period.<sup>65</sup>

**1913 May:** Poor receives offer to return to Stanford to take over Robert Harshe’s position in the Fall 1913. He and family return in August and settle on a small farm near Palo Alto.<sup>66</sup>



*The Blue Pitcher*, 1912, oil on canvas, 30 x 23 inches.

**1913 October 25 through November 9:** second exhibition at Stanford’s “Old Studio.” Poor is disappointed in sales and in the general reaction. Remains committed to continuing his work in a “Modernist” style.<sup>67</sup>

**1913 December through January 1914:** Christmas break spent painting in the snowy Sierra Nevada mountains in eastern California. He is pleased with work he completed there.<sup>68</sup>



*The Luncheon*, 1913, oil on canvas, 36 x 48 inches. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Stone.

**1914:** Poor, Lena and Josephine are living at 1236 Cowper in Palo Alto, California.<sup>69</sup>

**1914 February through March:** Poor’s *The Luncheon*, featuring his nephew Charles, mother Josephine, and sister Eva, accepted by the jury for the 109<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>70</sup>

**1914 May 1 through 12:** shows at Helgesen Gallery (345 Sutter St.) in San Francisco in an exhibition arranged by painter Anne Bremer (1868-1923) and arts patron Alfred

Bender (1866-1941). Receives good critical responses from the *San Francisco Chronicle*.<sup>71</sup>

**1914 May and June:** shows *Mother and Sleeping Baby* at the Carnegie Institute's *International Exhibition* in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

- this was an important exhibition in Poor's career and he continued to show here through the 1950s.<sup>72</sup>

**1914 Summer:** spent painting in the Santa Cruz mountains, Santa Clara Valley, and near Monterey. Many of his paintings are of scenes from orchards near Palo Alto.<sup>73</sup>

**1915 February:** HVP continues exhibiting throughout the region and is invited by J. Nilsen Laurvik (1877-1953) to exhibit in the major 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition, which opened on Feb. 20 and continued until Dec. 4.

- exhibits *Baby's Toilet*, a portrait of his daughter Josephine, and *The Orchardist and his Family*, a portrait of the Wiltz family in their walnut orchard.

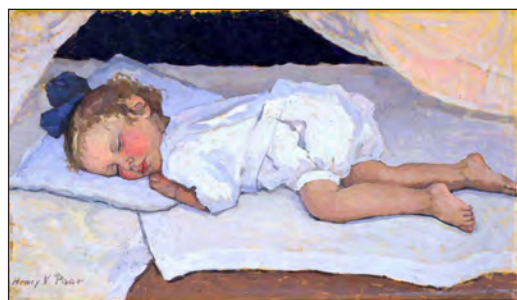
Poor recalled how he was selected for the exhibition: "As it happened at that time, the San Francisco 1915 Exposition was coming along, and a brilliant man named Nilsen Laurvik came out to San Francisco, and he had been commissioned to gather together for the exhibition avant-garde European work. . . For instance, they had a whole room of Kokoschka, Oscar Kokoschka, way back in 1915 in San Francisco, and they had Edward Munch, a whole room of his magnificent big figure paintings and landscapes; also his drawings and lithographs. Laurvik saw my work in an exhibition in San Francisco and came down to Stanford to visit me and became very close friends with him."<sup>74</sup>



*Mother with Sleeping Baby, 1913, oil on canvas, 30 x 22 inches. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery, Oscar Thorsen Collection.*



*The Orchardist and His Family, 1914, oil on canvas, 54 x 78 inches.*



*Baby's Toilet (portrait of Poor's daughter Josephine), 1914, oil on canvas, 20 x 36 inches. Both above paintings in the collection of the de Young Museum in San Francisco, California*

**1915 November:** begins participating in the McPherson Schools exhibitions (McPherson, Kansas) in his native state. He's invited by friend and fellow artist Birger Sandzén and organizer Carl Smalley to show in this and subsequent exhibitions. For this exhibit he submits *A Homestead* and *In the Orchard*.

- Sandzén writes to his former student and art professor at the University of Oklahoma, Oscar B. Jacobson, that "one of the exhibitors will be Mr. Henry Poor, art teacher at Stanford University, Palo Alto, Cal. with whom I have had an interesting correspondence. He has sent two very good and original studies, one of which I am supposed to keep in exchange for one of my latest studies. I believe it is a movement in the right direction if we artists of the great Southwest cooperate the way we have commenced to do."<sup>75</sup>

- Poor also became a member of Bethany College's Smoky Hill Art Club, whose purpose was to further the arts in the region and build a collection of art for the college.<sup>76</sup>

**1916 June:** Poor's teaching position at Stanford is discontinued after the Spring 1916 semester, via

recommendation of the University's president Ray Lyman Wilbur.<sup>77</sup>

**1916:** Poor has difficulties in his marriage to Lena and begins spending more time with former student Marion Victoria Dorn (1896-1964). He also renews his friendship with artist Russell Cheney (1881-1945), who he had shared a studio with in Paris while both were students. Cheney moved to California for health reasons, hoping to improve his tuberculosis.<sup>78</sup>

**1916 August:** Poor and family move to San Francisco (renting at 3417 24<sup>th</sup> Street) where he was offered the opportunity by Laurvik to begin teaching classes for the Mark Hopkins Art School, which was overseen by the San Francisco Art Association. The Art School had been housed in a mansion donated by Mark Hopkins, which burned during the 1906 earthquake, but classes continued to be held in the basement. The School was eventually renamed the San Francisco Institute of Art.

**1916 December:** Spends Christmas break painting at Pt. Lobos below Monterey and preparing for an exhibition in late-February at the Hill Tolerton Gallery in San Francisco.

A glimpse into his professional life can be read in a New Year's greeting letter to friend Birger Sandzén: "Thank you for the kind New Year wishes. I certainly wish the same to you and yours, with all my heart. I was so busy during all the Xmas season that my friends got good wishes only in my thoughts. Nothing got onto paper.

"I spent the two weeks that had free at Pt. Lobos, a very wonderful and heroic sort of place on the coast a few miles below Monterey. Thru a good many years of loving that country I am coming more and more to understand it and the grandeur of it enters deep into me. I did four large canvases and in them I got more than I have ever gotten into landscape before. In the past month, beginning with some still-life studies, I have found such important new things for me that I feel I am just learning to paint. As my show at Tolerton's gets near at hand I wish I could postpone it a year and paint an entire new lot for it. If this show could only turn out well financially

I would be very happy. Not to be dependent upon teaching positions from which conservatism is constantly trying to oust me, would be a relief.

"In a recent election of the Art Association the "Old Guard" mustered all their forces and thru well worked out politics virtually gained control of affairs. They stand for leaving the School in the old rut it was in and are particularly bitter over the unrest and dissensions that my being there this year has started. They will certainly try to put me out. Whether they will dare or have the power, I do not know. I get very sick of it all at times – at other times I enjoy the scrapping. I do not worry over anything as much as I should I think. Whenever I have some free time for painting, everything else is nonexistent.

"I was very pleased to learn that your lithographs have gotten into such a fine place as the National Museum of Sweden. That is fine. With modern Swedish and Norwegian art I feel that we Americans have a closer affinity than with any other art – just as we have in Literature.

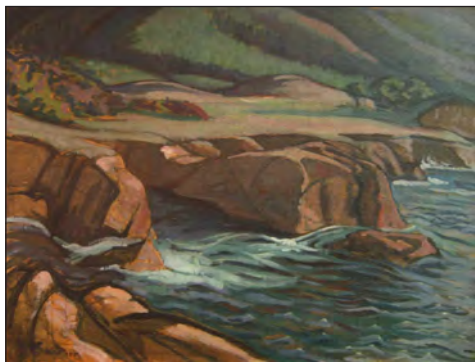
"From the really little that I know of him I feel that Munch is

one of the big painters of this time. I saw a few tiny reproductions of his things last week that confirmed my high regard for him.

"Thanks for the draft. I am glad you have that painting there. Best wishes to all of you.

Sincerely your friend

Henry V. Poor<sup>79</sup>



*California Coast Near Pacific Grove, circa 1916, oil on canvas, 29 x 38 inches. Ulrich Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Stone.*

**1917 February 23 through March:** exhibits at Hill Tolerton Gallery (107 Grant Ave in San Francisco, California).

- the exhibition received an upbeat, informative review in *The Wasp* magazine:

"This exhibition of Mr. Poor's work is of great importance, coming at this time when modern methods of painting are receiving so much attention from the critics and public. Opinions

are divided and as yet the true value of ultra modern work has not been appreciated except by the few.

“The exhibition consists of landscapes, still-life studies, and portraiture, and each and every canvas in the small collection is worthy of our keenest intellectual study. Mr. Poor is not a Futurist or a Cubist, and the sooner the public forgets these two fatal terms so much the sooner will we arrive at the clearer understanding of what sincere, intellectual artists of the day are aiming at.

“. . . Such men as Henry V. Poor are scientifically working out the problems of modern art. That their work is a finished product as yet need not be claimed for them, but when viewing an exhibition such as Mr. Poor’s, the public must remember that they are there to *learn* from the artist and not to pass judgment upon a subject, the first principles of which they are ignorant of. The time has passed when a pleasing combination of colors and forms is all that is required of a work of art. The public must follow the artist in his scientific investigations and realize the importance of the art of the day before attempting to pass judgment.”<sup>80</sup>

- on a similar note, the review in the *Oakland Tribune* emphasizes Poor’s cutting edge exhibition:

“That it is a most significant show there can be no question. That it affords the public the largest amount of pleasure is a question, since most of us hold to orthodox forms of what we are pleased to call beauty. And my young friend Poor has but small sympathy with these preconceived ideals, notably manifested in his portraits.

“And it is held against him that he is moved to his art by the stimulus of his brain, instead of his heart – that his work is cold.

“For my own part, the mixing of paint with brains is not the worst thing that can be said of a painter. No man can paint bigger than he thinks.

“However, whether we agree with Mr. Poor or not, it must be admitted that he is a figure in the art development of the west that must be reckoned with.”<sup>81</sup>

- on his own behalf, Poor also wrote an article titled “Modern Art” that was printed in the *Oakland Tribune* a week after the above critique and a supportive statement by Stanford professor Arthur B. Clark.<sup>82</sup>

**1917 April 8:** Lena, along with daughter Josephine, leave HVP and return to her parent’s home near San Jose.<sup>83</sup> The stress of the breakup and likely his elevated working habits led Poor to have a near nervous breakdown toward the end of the spring.

- biographer Monroe Stearns indicated there were multiple reasons for the couple’s split including personal and professional jealousy, HVP’s disillusioned outlook participating in World War I, and most notably Poor’s developing relationship with former student Marion Dorn.

Additional insight into the breakup can be gained from a letter Birger Sandzén wrote to his wife later in the summer after spending several days with Poor and his parents in Colorado: “Mrs. Poor [HVP’s mother Josephine] told me in confidence that Henry has been unhappy in his marriage and that his wife has not been living with him for the past year. Henry has taken it very hard and his health was poor when he came out to Colorado.” Additionally, Josephine indicated that Lena “likes everything that Henry detests” and there was a sense of artistic jealousy between the two – but this comes from a mother’s perspective.<sup>84</sup>

- Stearns also quoted a letter from Russell Cheney to Josephine Poor about Henry’s condition:

“Dr. Foster says Henry must be ‘looked after’ for a couple of years or there are conditions which will develop and trouble him and impair his efficiency. His heart is strained from over-exercise in college, and there are symptoms of beginning trouble in his kidneys – these together making a condition like that of a man forty or forty-five years old. Foster thinks all it needs is to live more carefully – have someone who will make him be regular and for a definite thing go to a good doctor every six months and have all those tests made to be sure nothing is developing on the sly. He’s got to give up the pleasures of going without meals or eating improper ones perched on a stool somewhere.”<sup>85</sup>

**1917 May or June:** after classes conclude, HVP leaves for Colorado Springs, Colorado, in order to regain his health – possibly traveling with Russell Cheney and his nephew, or meeting them there.

- Poor spent most of the summer in Colorado Springs painting and sketching. He completed multiple works from the Garden of the Gods area and also two known portraits of Russell Cheney (one includes two other unidentified individuals – possibly Cheney’s nephew and H. Phelps Putnam?).



*Portrait of Russell Cheney, 1917, oil on canvas, 24 x 27 inches. Private Collection.*

**1917 August 3 through 7:** Poor stays with his parents at Fall River Lodge, outside of Estes Park, Colorado. Friend and fellow artist Birger Sandzén from Lindsborg, Kansas, arrives at their invitation to stay at the Lodge and go out sketching with Poor.

In addition to describing Poor’s deteriorating relationship with Lena, Sandzén also describes how he and the Poores spent Sunday, August 5: “Yesterday morning I was out alone, making a number of sketches. In the afternoon and evening I went out with the Poores and some of their friends on a picnic

here in the area and had a very good time. This morning Henry and I are going out together. Henry is leaving tomorrow and I will go down to Estes Park, where I will stay at one of the smaller hotels. The nature here in Estes and the National Park [Rocky Mountain National Park] is extremely grand, but not as colorful as near Boulder or Colorado Springs. . . I have, however, a great number of splendid scenes from here that will be suited for painting – I can’t remember if mentioned in my last letter that Henry made a portrait etching of me that is very powerful.<sup>86</sup>



*Portrait of Birger Sandzén, 1917, etching, 3 1/2 x 3 1/2 inches. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery.*



*Garden of the Gods, 1917, lithograph, 15 x 21 inches. Bethany College Collection, Lindsborg, Kansas.*

**1917 Mid-August:** HVP returns to San Francisco after time in Estes and resumes his teaching duties at the San Francisco Institute of Art. He rents a small house at 2625 Polk Street on Russian Hill in San Francisco. Poor’s

mother Josephine and sister Eva stay with him for an extended period, but eventually Marion Dorn moves in.

**1917 Fall through Spring 1918:** continues teaching throughout the year at the Institute of Art and during the spring semester. Comes closer and closer to getting drafted in World War I and in March asks Birger Sandzén for a letter of recommendation.

- after the letters have been received by Poor he writes back to Sandzén:

Thanks for the letter of recommendation. It is good. It seems pretty certain that I’ll be put in class II or IV now. About the war artist business I’m uncertain. If I go in I must have liberty of action or I’ll just make trouble. This insane war weighs on me, so I have no heart for work. I only hate the war and the insane pride and arrogance in all circles that allows it to continue. My time for writing is up.

As ever  
Henry<sup>87</sup>



**1918 March 22 through May 22:** Poor participates in and wins top prize at the San Francisco Art Association's *Annual Exhibition by Contemporary Artists*.

- a write-up in the *Kansas City Star* stated: "the picture that won the highest award at the recent exhibition of the San Francisco Art Association was painted by a Middle Western boy, an artist who at the age of 30 has achieved an international reputation. California papers speak of him as a Californian, but Henry Varnum Poor, although born in Chapman, Kansas, has lived most of life in Kansas City, Mo."<sup>88</sup>

**1918 June 11:** Poor writes the following letter to Sandzén updating his status:

" . . . I will probably be called to the army June 24 – going to Camp Kearny in San Diego. I may get work on Shipping Board Camouflage – it is rather a race against time, there I think. I could probably have landed the job if I had had more time.

"When I am called to camp I will put application and supporting letters in to the Adjutant General's office to be appointed to Camouflage Corps. In such pinches it's good to have good friends, so I impose upon you again to ask you to write a good pointed letter such as your last, stating my artistic and physical and mental qualifications – suiting me to be of value as a camoufleur. Energy, resource, etc. should play a big part. Will you please address one copy to "Whom it May Concern" and one to "Adjutant General of the Army," Washington D.C. Then if you will send them to me, I'll be all ready to set things going.

"Any work, no matter how severe, will be in a way a vacation from the hardest most soul trying work of all – artistic production. Now that I am forced to face giving up my work, there is a certain mentally-lazy relief in giving my time and mind and even life, into the keeping of forces outside myself.

"This is a beautiful day – hazy sun over the green bay and warm tan hills. My little house commands a view that's always a delight. It is home more than I have ever found and it is not easy to give it up.

Sincerely your friend,  
Henry"<sup>89</sup>

**1918 July 1:** inducted into the Army and assigned to the 115<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Engineers – begins training at Camp Kearny in San Diego.

- Poor was recommended for Officer's Training, but declined; stating later "I had a chance to be sent to officers' training school because of people who were interested in my work and position. I was a professor then and this school tried to get me exempted. Then they got me sent to officers' training school, but I refused to go to officers' training school. I didn't want to be an officer in a war I hated anyhow."<sup>90</sup>

**1918 mid-July:** travels to New York and Camp Mills in Long Island. From there, Poor's company boards the *Balmoral Castle* (a passenger vessel converted to a troop ship) and endures a long, hot, boring trip; finally docking at Liverpool, England, on August 20, 1918.<sup>91</sup>

**1918 Fall:** Henry Varnum Poor's activities during the War are dangerous and he seeks no special treatment, but he also finds a way to utilize his art skills and eventually becomes a regimental artist and historian.<sup>92</sup>

- After arriving in Liverpool, HVP's regiment marches to Southampton and embarks for France.

- initially, Poor worked as a topographer and interpreter, but eventually was assigned to camouflage.

- the 115<sup>th</sup> Engineers was principally stationed near Pont-à-Mousson in the northwest portion of France. Throughout the War, Poor was



*Self Portrait, 1918, ink and charcoal, 14 x 11 inches.*  
Private Collection.



Image reproduced in  
the *Kansas City Star*,  
1918.

close to the front and had many dangerous encounters and duties.

- he began drawing “likenesses” of soldiers that they could send home: “I started drawing, making drawings of the men in the trenches at night, and they would take them to the Captain so they could send them home. Nobody was allowed to have cameras, so I did endless portrait drawings of the men and they would take them in. The Captain decided that he would like to have his portrait done too, so he detached me from infantry duty and made me a regimental artist.”<sup>93</sup>

Initially the sketches were done with whatever materials were available: “The portrait business was rushing in France. There was always a long waiting list. Some brought their own paper, often mere scraps. If it would hold pen and ink, well and good, if not, charcoal was used. Most of the sketches were sent home at once in letters. An opportunity came to go to Nancy. There I bought canvas and oils, and on my return painted the portraits of several of the officers of the regiment. Most of them were painted out in the shell torn forests where we were stationed.”<sup>94</sup>

Poor also employed a lithographing firm in Nancy, Berger-Levrault, to make lithographs of drawings he brought in.<sup>95</sup>

- by the end of the Armistice on November 11, 1918, Poor has accumulated a substantial amount of money from his commissioned artwork.

**1919 March 7:** Poor is discharged early in France with the agreement to pay his own way home; however, he decides to layover in Paris and, as he would write later, spend time “studying art in its after-the-war aspects.”<sup>96</sup>

**1919 June:** returns to KC and Josephine Poor arranges an exhibit of war images at the Women’s City Club in Kansas City.

**1919 Summer:** with his divorce from Lena finalized during the War, Poor returns to San Francisco by June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1919.

- Lena Wiltz would remain near San Jose, California. She later married Arthur Lowell Emery (1879-1938) and became an art teacher at San Jose High School. One of the most prominent students she had was San Francisco artist Jay DeFeo, who described her as “an absolute inspiration to me. She took me to plays. She took me to the San Francisco Museum for the first time in my life. She really just opened up the whole world to me.”<sup>97</sup>

- Poor’s daughter, Josephine, also remained in California where she married, had children and died in March 1985. She had limited contact with her father, but they did keep in touch throughout the remainder of his life.

**1919 July 17:** Poor marries Marion Victoria Dorn (1896-1964).<sup>98</sup>

- Dorn was born on December 25, 1896, to well-to-do parents Diodemus and Camille Dorn, and raised in San



*Lironville, November 1919,*  
lithograph.



*Beaumont, March 1919,*  
graphite.



*Cathedral, February 1919,*  
graphite.



*Gate of Verdun, February 1919,*  
lithograph.

Francisco. She attended Stanford from 1912 to 1916, where Poor had her as a student. Her parents disapproved of the couple's wedding and reportedly disinherited her. Following graduation, she primarily considered herself a painter, but had graduated focused on the graphic arts. Later in life she became a highly regarded textile designer in London and New York.<sup>99</sup>

**1919 Late Summer:** in order to gain more recognition for their work (and the fact that Poor did not want to continue teaching) HVP and Marion decide to move to New York. They started the journey east in a Model T, touring through Arizona and New Mexico on their way to Kansas City. Once there the car died and they took a train with Alfred and Josephine Poor to New York City, where they stayed together in a hotel for nearly two months.<sup>100</sup>

**1919 Fall:** through a variety of friends and contacts, Poor and Marion met John and Mary Mowbray-Clarke.

- Mary Helena Bothwell Horgan Mowbray-Clarke (1874-1962) is best known as one of the "proprietors" of the Sunwise Turn book and art shop in New York City. She was also an artist, writer and lecturer at Columbia University. She was married to John F. Mowbray-Clarke (1869-1953), a noted sculptor. The couple were very influential in the New York art scene, but were one of the first members to establish an "artist colony" near New City in Rockland County, New York.<sup>101</sup>



*A Painter and His Wife (Poor and Dorn), circa 1919-20, oil on canvas, 24 x 26. Greenough Trust Collection, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery.*

**1919 Fall:** at the urging of the Mowbray-Clarks, HVP and Marion decide to purchase land close to theirs on South Mountain Road near New City. Although the closest town is New City, their mailing address often indicates Pomona, New York.

- New City had been established as early as 1703, and in 1798 became the county seat for Rockland County. The town was primarily a farming community, save for the colony of artists that began establishing homes there in the early 1900s. With the opening of Tappan Zee Bridge in 1955, the town became more accessible to people working in Manhattan, thus adding to the population and development of the area.<sup>102</sup>
- when Poor and Marion moved and established their home along South Mountain Road (on 5 ½ acres known as "the old Nash farm"), the area was "mostly forest interspersed with small, rocky farms and an occasional apple orchard. Streams gurgled through the wooded hills and tumbled into clear pools at the bottom of the glens. From the crest of a hill could be seen to the east the broad blue Hudson [River], and to the north the peak of High Tor. The South Mountain Road, the one means of vehicular communication with the villages of New City and Haverstraw, the latter of which had a railway station, was little more than a dirt logging track from which half-hidden lanes led to the houses of the few farmers who were still trying to maintain themselves on the uncompromising soil."<sup>103</sup>
- among the neighbors, in addition to the Mowbray-Clarks, HVP would have in the forthcoming years along South Mountain Road and in its vicinity were:

Maxwell Anderson  
Jules Billig  
Milton Caniff  
Majorie Content

Hume Dixon  
 Julie Harris  
 Helen Hayes and Charles McArthur  
 Ben Hecht  
 John Houseman  
 Bill and Nancy Maudlin  
 Carson McCullers  
 Burgess Meredith and Margaret Perry  
 Amy Murry  
 Ruth Reeves  
 Martha Rhyther  
 Herman Rosse  
 Sidney and Joan Simon  
 John Steinbeck  
 Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya

- after purchasing the land, HVP and Marion decided to build their own house on the property. They rented a place from neighbor and textile designer Martha Rhyther and began to cut down blighted chestnut trees that were on the property. While doing this, Poor worked on detailed drawings and measurements for house.

“On his acres, a stand of dead chestnut trees – victims of the blight which had destroyed all chestnuts five years previously – offered plenty of sound and seasoned timber for building. On his property also he found an abandoned sandstone quarry and a huge pile of scrap stone. The quarry being on a rise above his house site, he built a railroad of planks and brought the stone right down to it on a hand car.

“Then began the building of his home. Largely with his own strength and skill he built the huge fireplace and chimney and laid up the stone walls. All the timbers for framing he himself hewed from the chestnut trees.

“He got the inspiration for his house from the provincial architecture of France which he had had a chance to soak up while stationed there in the first World War. Although he never had formal instruction in architecture or in building construction, his informed craftsmanship and his native sense of design needed only keen observation to give him competence as a builder.”<sup>104</sup>

**1919 late Fall:** As winter set in, he is offered an opportunity to exhibit at Kovorkian Galleries in New York City during March 1920, so begins painting to make the deadline. Many of these works are signed “Varnum Poor” rather than his previously used “H V Poor” or “Henry V. Poor,” to distinguish him from Henry Warren Poor (1863-1938) and Henry Rankin Poore (1859-1940), who were already recognized names on the East Coast.

#### Notes:

1. <http://www.andovermaine.com/ezekielmerrill.html>.
2. “History of Andover, Maine,” *Supplement to the Rumford Falls Times*, August 13, 1904, digitized by Google, p. 7.
3. “History of Andover, Maine,” pp. 5 & 6.
4. “History of Andover, Maine,” p. 8.
5. Harry Salpeter, “Henry Poor: Art’s Robinson Crusoe,” *Esquire*, September 1938, p. 51.
6. For additional information on the “other” Henry Varnum Poor refer to the timeline on the Standard and Poor’s website ([www.standardandpoors.com](http://www.standardandpoors.com)) and also the Wikipedia listing.
7. William Poor, “Early History of Pioneers, A Story of Mr. and Mrs. Scott E. Poor, as told by their son, William Poor,” *The Chapman Advertiser* (Chapman, Kansas), March 17, 1932. Also see “Memoirs of Mrs. Frances Poor” typescript in vertical files of the Dickinson County Historical Center, Abilene, Kansas.
8. “Sudden Death of Alfred Poor,” *The Chapman Advertiser*, September 3, 1936; an early Chapman Pamphlet featuring “Poor and Knight, Grain Dealers” from the Chapman Area Preservation Society, Chapman, Kansas [hereinafter CAPS]; and “Chapman Bank Anniversary,” *The Chapman Advertiser*, Thursday, May 22, 1952.
9. Interview with Graham family relatives on September 20, 2011 at CAPS; with quote from Monroe Stearns, *Henry Varnum Poor*, manuscript for a biography, 1976, 8-9. Monroe Stearns research papers on Henry Varnum Poor, 1938 – 1975, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution [hereinafter Stearns].
10. Dorcas Knight, “Early History of Pioneers: Pioneer History of the Graham Family as Told By One of Its Members, Mrs. Dorcas Knight,” *Chapman Advertiser*, May 12, 1932. Copy available at the Dickinson County Heritage Center in Abilene, Kansas.
11. The Graham family history is documented with dates at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).
12. Letter from Simeon Graham to his “Brother,” August 23, 1874 and letter to “Ella” from Lola Graham, illegible date 1874. Copies from CAPS.
13. Knight, “Early History of Pioneers.”

14. Stearns, p. 10. See also Harlan Phillips interview with Henry Varnum Poor transcript, November 1964, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution [hereinafter Phillips], p. 2.
15. Phillips, p. 2.
16. The history of Chapman can be viewed at [www.cityofchapman.org](http://www.cityofchapman.org). Additional details from Stearns, pp. 6-8.
17. "Local News," *The Chapman Courier*, October 7, 1887. *The Chapman Courier* is available on microfilm through the Kansas State Historical Society. Census records and World War I Draft Registration cards can be accessed at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).
18. California, Biographical Index Cards, 1781-1990, record for Henry Varnum Poor found at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).
18. Phillips, p. 1
19. Ernest W. Watson, "Henry Varnum Poor," *American Artist* (March 1953), p. 28.
20. Phillips, p. 2.
21. *Henry Varnum Poor papers 1873-2001*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, (reels 633-634) [hereinafter HVP Papers, AAA-SI].
22. Journal entry, October 22, 1967, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
23. M. L. Van Nada, *the Book of Missourians* (1906), pp. 384-385.
24. Richard J. Porter, *Henry Varnum Poor, 1887-1970: A Biography and Study of His Paintings*, Ph.D. Dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University, 1983 [hereinafter Porter]. p. 21.
25. Peter Poor, phone interview with author, February 2, 2012. This event may have well taken place at the Dickinson County Community High School which had a tight gym with little space outside of the court boundaries.
- 25.1 Stearns, p. 15.
- 25.2 Stanford University Quad Yearbooks for 1907 and 1908. Accessed through [www.e-yearbook.com](http://www.e-yearbook.com).
26. The 1910 census indicates Arthur Graham lived in Solano, California, and later census records show Berkeley, California. Accessed through [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).
27. Palo Alto Senior High School handbook 2011-2012 – available as a .pdf document at [www.paly.net](http://www.paly.net).
28. First journal entry for 1970, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
29. Stearns, p. 20.
30. Stanford University Quad Yearbooks for 1909. Accessed through [www.e-yearbook.com](http://www.e-yearbook.com).
31. Porter, p. 52. The Note 37 reads: Stearns 45, cites a painting of a *Dutch Girl* in the possession of Charles A. Stone which he believes to have been painted in Simon's [an instructor Poor later had in England] studio; however, that painting can be documented as one of the first compositions Poor executed in his painting class at Stanford in the fall of 1909.
32. "Arthur B. Clark Obituary," *New York Times*, May 15, 1948, digital edition.
33. Stearns, p. 25.
34. Stearns, p. 25. Also, census records via [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).
35. Stearns, p. 24.
- 35.1. Peter Poor email to author, September 26, 2012. Peter elaborated on the motorboat trip writing "He rented a motorboat one summer and we went from Nyack up the Hudson to Albany, started through the Erie Canal to go to the Great Lakes, but one experience in the giant locks turned us around to go back downriver. I think he was a fearless sailor, but doubt he sailed much." Also, HVP, *An Artist Sees Alaska* (New York, NY: The Viking Press, 1945).
36. Stearns, p. 27. Also, see [www.pbk.org](http://www.pbk.org) for the details about Phi Beta Kappa.
37. Porter, p. 36.
38. Stearns, p. 30.
39. Stearns, p. 30.
40. Slade School of Fine Art website, [www.ucl.ac.uk/slade](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/slade). Also, Wikipedia entry for artist Frederick Brown.
41. Phillips, p. 4.
42. see Matthew Sturgis, *Walter Sickert, A Life*, (London: Harper Perennial, 2005) for additional details.
43. Phillips, p. 5.
44. Phillips, p. 8.
45. Porter, p. 45.
46. Stearns, p. 42.
47. Phillips, p. 6.
48. Porter, p. 47.
49. Phillips, p. 8.
50. Harold Dickson and Richard Porter, with additional contributions by Raphael Soyer, Jeanne Chenault Porter, Stuart Frost, Linda Steigleder and Mark Simon, *Henry Varnum Poor 1887-1970: A Retrospective Exhibition* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1983) [hereinafter Dickson Porter], p. 11.
51. Stearns, p. 55.
52. Porter, p. 54.
53. Stearns, p. 53.
54. Stearns, pp. 56-57.
55. Marriage Announcement information and image courtesy of CAPS.
56. Stearns, p. 59.
57. Assistance in locating the farm was provided by Monte Gross at the Wyandotte County Museum in Bonner Springs, Kansas.
58. Later in his 1945 book *An Artist Sees Alaska* (p. 19), Poor revisited this concept in regard to his friend Ralph Stackpole who was attempting to operate a ranch while continuing as an artist. Poor recalled ". . .you wondered whether this dream so many artists have, of being an artist and rancher at the same time could stick. I had tried it, and it didn't work."
59. Porter, p. 66.
60. Stearns, p. 59.
61. Quoted in Stearns, p. 60.
62. Stearns, pp. 60-61.
63. Stearns, p. 63.
64. Peter Hastings Falk, *The Annual Exhibition Record of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1876-1913* (Madison, CT: Sound View Press, 1989), 385.
65. Stearns, p. 63.
66. Stearns, p. 63.
67. Porter, p. 71 and Stearns, pp. 65-66.
68. Stearns, p. 66.

69. Palo Alto City Directory for 1914, available at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com).
70. Peter Hastings Falk, *The Annual Exhibition Record of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Volume III, 1914-1968* (Madison, CT: Sound View Press, 1989), p. 374.
71. Porter, p. 72 and Stearns, p. 66.
72. Peter Hastings Falk, *Record of the Carnegie Institute's International Exhibitions, 1896-1996* (Madison, CT: Sound View Press, 1998), p. 271.
73. Stearns, p. 67.
74. Phillips, p. 9.
75. Birger Sandzen [hereinafter BS] letter to Oscar B. Jacobson, November 14, 1915, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery Archives, Lindsborg, Kansas [hereinafter BSMGA].
76. Smoky Hill Art Club membership ledger, BSMGA.
77. Stearns, pp. 71-74.
78. Stearns, p. 77.
79. HVP to BS, January 4, 1917, BSMGA.
80. Blanche Marie d'Hardcourt, "Art in California: Exhibition of Modern Painting," *The Wasp*, February 24, 1917, p. 10.
81. Laura Bride Powers, "Henry V. Poor Stirs Things," *Oakland Tribune*, March 11, 1917, p. 24.
82. Henry Varnum Poor, "Modern Art," *Oakland Tribune*, March 18, 1917, p. 24.
83. Stearns, p. 80.
84. BS letter to Alfrida Sandzén (in Swedish), August 6, 1917, Translated by Birgit Hegewald, Birmar Translations, Aurora, Colorado, BSMGA.
85. Stearns, p. 81.
86. BS letter to Alfrida Sandzén (in Swedish), August 6, 1917, Translated by Birgit Hegewald, Birmar Translations, Aurora, Colorado, BSMGA.
87. HVP to BS, March 26, 1918, BSMGA.
88. "Famous in Art at 30," *Kansas City Star*, July 7, 1918, (A *Winter Scene* is illustrated).
89. HVP to BS, June 11, 1918, BSMGA.
90. Phillips, p. 10.
91. Stearns, pp. 84-87.
92. The best sources for Poor's World War I years are Stearns, pp. 83-96; Phillips, pp. 10-12; and articles HVP submitted to the *Kansas City Star*.
93. Phillips, p. 11.
94. Undated article from *The Kansas City Star*, circa June 1919, vertical file collection of Dickinson County Historical Center, Abilene, Kansas.
95. Stearns, p. 92.
96. Undated article from *The Kansas City Star*, circa June 1919, vertical file collection of Dickinson County Heritage Center, Abilene, Kansas.
97. Paul J. Karlstrom interview with Jay De Feo transcript, June 3, 1975, *Jay DeFeo Papers, 1948-1976*, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, p. 4.
98. Stearns, p. 97.
99. For a comprehensive examination of Dorn's life and work refer to Christine Boydell, *the Architect of Floors: Modernism, Art and Marion Dorn Designs*, (Essex, Great Britain: Schoeser, 1996).
100. Porter, p. 87.
101. Hannah White, "The Sunwise Turn: A Bookshop Plus," *The Independent*, November 13, 1916, p. 280 and "Mary Mowbray-Clarke Is Dead; Art Critic Had Run Book Shop," *New York Times*, November 21, 1962, digital edition.
102. "If You're Thinking of Living in: New City," *New York Times*, September 17, 1989, digital edition.
103. Stearns, p. 103-105.
104. Watson, p. 27.

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# Henry Varnum Poor: Commemorating 125 Years

by Ron Michael, Curator, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

**Annotated Chronology** - August 2012

## 1920 through 1939

### 1920 Through 1929: Building a Home and Making Pottery:

Summary: In 1920, Poor exhibited in a one-person show at the Kovorkian Galleries in New York. After limited sales and a desire not to return to teaching, Poor established a pottery after constructing a house near New City, New York. Eventually he began showing pottery, and occasionally paintings, at the Montross Gallery in New York City. Once divorced from Marion Dorn, Poor married writer Bessie Breuer on November 30, 1925. He adopted her daughter Anne, and Poor and Bessie had a son, Peter, the next year. In 1929, the Poor family departed for Paris and La Ciotat, France, so that Poor can focus on painting.

**1920 January through February:** Poor continues to work sporadically at the house site near New City, but continues painting in preparation for an exhibit at Kevorkian Galleries in March.

**1920 March 17 to March 28:** Exhibits 22 oil paintings, and groups of watercolors, drawings and etchings at the Kevorkian Galleries in New York City.

- the exhibition follows a Charles Burchfield show and was coordinated by Mary Mowbray-Clarke. She helped with the catalog and other logistics. The paintings included several new pieces and others that had been completed in California (and were likely shipped to him by his parents). The list of titles were:

1. Three Men, 2. Woman at Table, 3. Head of Young Girl, 4. A Violinist, 5. Head of Young Man, 6. Man, Woman, Child, 7. A Young Man, 8. Woman in Red, 9. California Coast, 10. Mountain Orchard Country, 11. Colorado Mountains, 12. Red Rocks, 13. Trees in Spring, 14. Portrait of a Boy, 15. Head of a Woman, 16. Girl Combing Her Hair, 17. Barn and Trees Under the Ridge, 18. Trees, 19. The Valley, 20. Orchard in Winter, 21. Trees and Mountain, 22. A Painter and His Wife.<sup>105</sup>

- sales of works in the show were limited and although he acknowledged differently in some letters, they discouraged Poor from becoming a full-time painter and stimulated his interest in producing ceramics. In a letter to Mary Mowbray-Clarke following the exhibition he wrote:

"I'm very pleased by the sales, even tho [sic] a little regretful that things I liked had to go so low.

"I tell you exactly what I feel about it. If the low prices can really produce sales of enuf [sic] volume as to establish a real relation between production and the return from it, then it's fine. But if it's just a scattering few throughout the year, then such low prices seem to amount to nothing.

"That of course requires time to work out – if it can work out it's so much finer as an ideal that it's worth going for, certainly."<sup>106</sup>



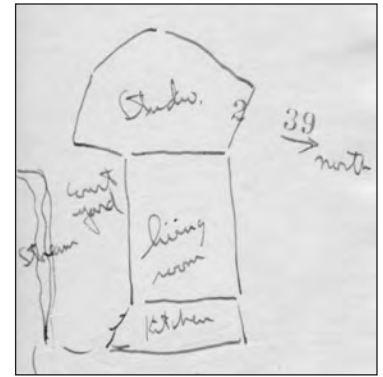
*Three Men*, circa 1917, oil on canvas. Private Collection. Included in Poor's exhibition at the Kevorkian Galleries.

**1920 Spring through Fall:** as ground frost subsides, begins to lay foundation for the house and

continues working on it through the year stopping in the late autumn of 1920.

- the feats Poor accomplished in building the house are related in several sources. One of the more dominant features of the house is the massive fireplace constructed in the living room.

“A stone fireplace belonged to his dream. Notice, in the photograph of the living room, the huge stone which forms the top of the fireplace and the mantle. Until he cut that out and squared it, it was part of the hill. But he did more than square and dress it. From front to back across the top it is nearly three feet thick; at the bottom only a few inches. Poor carved it out to form the smoke shelf of the fireplace. But before that was placed he cut and set the single block of stone which forms the hearth; carved the stone brackets which support the upper stone. Then the chimney, brick because of the space saved by that material, and a fireplace was built which is not only a monument to the skill and patience of one man, but also one which has never been known to smoke.”<sup>107</sup>



Sketch of Crow House on reverse of construction photos sent to Birger Sandzen in February 1921. Birger Sandzen Memorial Gallery Archives.

- HVP and Marion were able to move into the main portion of the house in late November 1920.
- the house was named “Crow House” by Poor and Marion after the crows that congregated to watch the construction.



Photo of archway from kitchen area into the living room. BSMG Archives.



“Myself at the Studio Door” written on back. Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery Archives

**1920 November 4 through**

**December 12:** Poor’s painting *Portrait Study in Black* [portrait of Marion Dorn] included in the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual Exhibition of American Oil Paintings and Sculpture at the Art Institute of Chicago. Ironically, the catalog still lists his address as “Leland Stanford University, California.”<sup>108</sup>

An article in the Kansas City Star reads “two western canvases by western artists have been “invited” to the coming American exhibition at the Chicago Art Institute. They are one of Birger Sandzén’s latest Colorado studies, three by four feet, and Henry Varnum Poor’s “Girl in Black,” a spirited figure in careless pose, for which the subject was the girl who is now his wife. The pictures were selected by George Eggers, director of the Chicago Art Institute, when he, with Virgil Barker, director of the Kansas City Art Institute, visited

Lindsborg this week to view works of the western masters.”<sup>109</sup>



Crow House fireplace in the living room. BSMG Archives

**1920 December:** Poor exhibits (under the name of Varnum Poor) along with Russell Cheney at the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, Connecticut. He exhibits watercolors that he painted during the War.<sup>110</sup>

**1921 February:** Poor finishes four mural panels for two shipping board ships in San Francisco.



Crow House soon after its initial completion. Photo from *International Studio*, May 1925.



Moves with Marion to 46 King Street in New York City to complete them since his studio was not finished at Crow House. Also, he has clearly decided by mid-February to take up pottery once the house is finished.

- writes to Birger Sandzén in Lindsborg on February 14:

“About one month’s work will finish it [Crow House], then I’m going to start a pottery, to do large simple decorative pieces. This to take the place of teaching as an income maker, and also to give us joy in the doing. The feeling of the unrelatedness of painting to our life ‘gets’ me more and more, and I want to do more things than paint pictures. The satisfaction in making the house has been tremendous, and the future work of carving and painting our huge beams and stones will be great. For the artists who like the competition for shows and publicity – let’em like it. For me, I want to make beautiful things so as to make our living as beautiful as possible, and where humans live in swarms like ants I don’t think wholesome beautiful living is possible.”<sup>111</sup>

**1921 March:** returns to Crow House early in the month to finish construction, make furniture for the house, etc.. Begins developing skills and tools necessary for working in ceramics.

- Poor studies by reading ceramics books such as *Pottery for Artists, Craftsmen and Teacher* by George J. Cox (NY: The MacMillan Co., 1914), *The Potter’s Craft* (NY:Van Nostrand, 1910), and *The Story of the Potter* (NY:Van Nostrand, 1901) by Charles F. Binns.<sup>112</sup>

- he built his own wheel from accumulated parts, including an old twenty pound washing machine flywheel, a crooked, sturdy stick he found in the woods, two-by-fours, etc. He constructed the wheel and cast a plaster bat as the wheel-head.<sup>113</sup>

- for the most part, he collected and processed earthenware clay that he dug locally – generally firing it between cone 06 and 02. He also had been influenced by the Persian pottery seen in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and like their works began using a white slip over the iron red earthenware. He then often scratched through the slip to create linear drawings that would be enhanced once the pots were fired. Additionally, coloring oxides were often brushed on the surface and the entire form was covered with a clear glaze and single fired in a kiln he had gotten from Morris de Camp Crawford (1882-1949).

**1921 Fall:** Poor has first exhibit of ceramics at Belle Maison Gallery in Wanamaker’s Dept Store in New York City. Sales during the show were very good, but HVP found that the prices were too low to compensate for his time and overhead<sup>114</sup>

**1921 September 26 through October 8:** Poor exhibits two paintings, *The White Barn* and *Mountain Landscape* in *An Exhibition of Paintings by American Artists* at the International Wheat Show in Wichita, Kansas. The exhibition is under the direction of the Wichita Art Association. In the catalog for the show, Poor is described as a “native of Kansas. Landscape painter of the modern school. Member of the art colonies of New Mexico and California.”<sup>114.1</sup>

**1921 November:** Poor’s work included in *Exhibition of Work by Birger Sandzén, Henry Varnum Poore [sic] and B. J. O. Nordfeldt* at the Kansas City Art Institute. The show of paintings includes a mixture of pieces Poor had in the Kovorkain Galleries show and works loaned by his parents and others.



*The White Barn*, circa 1912, oil on canvas, 23 x 29 inches. KSU, Beach Museum of Art. Painted in the early teen’s this work was exhibited in Kansas during the 1920s.

**1922:** at some point during the year, Poor takes time to build a small house for neighbor and textile designer Ruth Reeves along South Mountain Road. From the limited number of illustrations available, the house has similar characters to Crow House; showcasing exposed wood beams, stone walls and brick flooring.

**1922:** HVP visits the gallery of Newman E. Montross in New York City and they make arrangements for him to exhibit his ceramic work at Montross Gallery (550 5<sup>th</sup> Ave.). Montross began his gallery after serving as a clerk in a shop that sold art materials. His early exhibits included work by the group known as “The Ten American Painters,” but eventually moved into showing early modern artists and he was the first to exhibit Henri Matisse.<sup>115</sup>



An interior view of the house Poor built for neighbor Ruth Reeves. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution (AAA-SI).

**1922 December 2 through December 21:** Poor is given a one-person show of his “decorated pottery, paintings and drawings” at Montross Gallery.

- in the catalog introduction, Poor elaborated on his move from painting to pottery:

“The forms and simplifications of modern painting are largely drawn from the forms and simplifications arrived at in other less suave materials than paint and canvas. the sharp color divisions of mosaics, the sever simplifications of early wood and stone carvings, have greatly influenced modern painters. Distortions, so disconcerting in an easel picture, have a sense of rightness when arrived at through the demands of proper space filling in decorative art. I believe that the natural development of modern art lies in a closer application of things more related to everyday usage. In this direction the artist escapes the devitalizing isolation of the studio and finds in the appropriate materials those inherent limitations and demands which give a sense of necessity and fitness to the completed form.

“Making clay into decorated pottery completes a cycle, a beginning and end, form and enrichment controlled by the artist. The method of the pottery shown in this exhibition, known as Underglaze Decoration, is very simple. It allows the same subordination of technique that is shown in modern painting, and for the same reason; to keep clear the essential point of view which is judgment of relations in color and form.”<sup>116</sup>

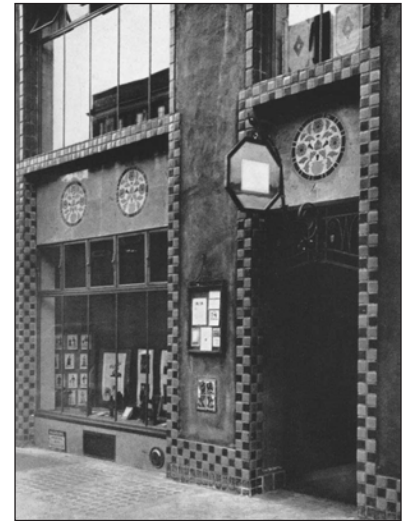


Examples of Poor’s early works in ceramics.

- a review in *The New York Times* endorses Poor’s sentiments: “starting from the standpoint of an artist who has worked along the lines of the modernists, H. Varnum Poor has turned his attention to applied art. His exhibition at the Montross Galleries justifies the conclusion, often expressed in the columns of this paper, that the path of the modernist leads legitimately to the decorative arts and away from easel pictures.”<sup>117</sup>

- Poor would later recall that he often delivered his ceramic pieces to the Montross in wicker cases carried in his Model T Ford. Once at the gallery, Montross “would stand and watch while I unwrapped everything, and he would teeter back and forth on his heels and toes and say, “Well, Henry, let’s see what merchandise you have now. . . He had that background of a love for merchandise, and it was sort of a joke between us that this was merchandise, and he sold it like merchandise too. And my prices were like merchandise. They were very low, and I sold everything I could do.”<sup>118</sup>

**1923:** creates four-part decorative tiles for E. Weyhe Book Store in New York City (794 Lexington Ave.), with ironwork designed by Rockwell Kent (1882-1971). Poor's association with this book store ultimately may have lead to his longtime friendship with woodcarver and artist Wharton Esherick (1887-1970).<sup>119</sup>



**Exterior of the E. Weyhe Book Store in New York City. Office for Metropolitan History.**

**1923 February:** HVP separates from Marion Dorn after she begins seeing graphic designer Edward McKnight Kauffer (1890-1954). Dorn at first traveled with Ruth Reeves to Paris, France, then moves in with Kauffer in London.<sup>120</sup>

**1923 late September:** Marion Dorn files for divorce – granted in Paris on Oct. 19.

- divorce granted “on the strength of letters received from her husband last February wishing her well, but telling her good-bye forever.”<sup>121</sup>

- Marion continued her career as a designer with many accomplishments and eventually moved back to New York as World War II broke out. She died in Tangiers in 1964.

**1923 November 12 through 24:** Poor exhibits recent paintings at Montross Gallery.<sup>122</sup>

**1924 January:** article in *The Arts* appears about Poor's paintings, drawings and pottery.

-near the center of the article, author Virgil Baker writes of the forthright nature of Poor's work:

“Varnum Poor's art is the expression of love for things and people. He perceives in some thing or some scene or some person a character which stirs a response in him; he makes his pictures out of those features of the subject which express the character he perceives. What does not help to express this character he omits, and it is this capacity for omission which gives his pictures their strength.

“Thus the simplicity which shines out of them is not the naïveté of unthinkingness, but the candor of a man who knows his own mind. These pictures are the works of one who has learned to be natural, who is educated without being sophisticated, who has harmonized his own complex personality and so is thoroughly at home in a most perplexing world.”<sup>123</sup>

**1924 May:** another article appears in *International Studio*. It discusses Poor's move from painting to pottery and begins “Those who know H. Varnum Poor personally are convinced that there is no one like him, while even those whose sole contact with him is through his pottery or his paintings are not long in recognizing his endowment of an unusual creativeness.”<sup>124</sup>

**1924 Late spring through October:** HVP travels back to France and stays in Cassis – painting and spending a short time with Russell Cheney and his friend H. Phelps Putman. Poor also goes to Marlotte (now Bourron-Marlotte) and Paris. He meets and befriends Jean Renoir (son of Pierre-Auguste Renoir) and Paul Cézanne, Jr.<sup>125</sup> At the conclusion of his trip, he departs via the *S. S. Paris* from Le Havre, France, docking in New York on October 19, 1924.<sup>126</sup>

**1925 April 14 through May 10:** Poor is invited to exhibit in *Group Exhibition of Watercolor Paintings, Pastels and Drawings by American and European Artists* at the Brooklyn Museum in Brooklyn, New York.

- Poor shows six works: *Farm House, Houses, Houses Under the Tree, Landscape, Landscape,* and *Three Pines*.

**1925 May:** article on Poor and Crow House titled “An Artist Rolls His Own” by James Fraser appears in *International Studio*.

**1925 June:** includes watercolors in Montross show.<sup>127</sup>

**1925 November 30:** marries fellow South Mountain Road resident Elizabeth “Bessie” Freedman Breuer (1893-1975) after an extended relationship and adopts her daughter, Anne (1918-2002). Anne’s father was Bessie’s second husband, Carl Kahler.

- Bessie Breuer was born in Cleveland, Ohio, but raised in St. Louis, Missouri. She was a writer and early in her career worked for the *St. Louis Times*, then the *New York Tribune*. Following her marriage to Poor, she continued writing and published her first novel, *Memory of Love*, in 1935. The book was eventually produced as the movie *In Name Only*, starring Carole Lombard and Cary Grant. She wrote three more novels through the years, developed a screen play, *Sundown Beach*, that was produced on Broadway and wrote numerous pieces for magazines. A book of her short stories was also published, titled *The Bracelet of Wavia Lea and Other Short Stories*.<sup>128</sup>

- actor and friend of the Pooors, John Houseman, recalled that Bessie was nearly the opposite of HVP, “dark, garrulous, loving, impulsive, and acutely sensitive to the vibrations of those around her.”<sup>129</sup>

- Anne followed in her adopted father’s footsteps and became an artist, often helping HVP with his large fresco projects. She continued to live at Crow House until her death.



*Plate with Bird, 1926, earthenware, 12 1/2 inches in diameter. Emprise Bank Collection, Wichita, KS.*

**1926 May 17:** Son Peter Varnum Poor born.

- Peter attended Harvard, served in the Air Force and became a highly-respected television director.

**1926 July:** HVP writes article “Anonymous American Art” for *The Arts* magazine, which champions Native American functional arts – “these unpretentious Indian tool sculptures start with the kernel itself, the structure and very bones of a functioning thing that must function to be at all, and to this structure they add grace and beauty and a degree of representation expressive of a simple and understanding vision.”



*Pitcher, 1926, earthenware, 10 x 8 x 8 inches. Rago Arts.*

**1926 October:** includes ceramics in a new venture called “The Potter’s Shop” at 755 Madison Avenue in New York City.<sup>130</sup>

**1927 Fall:** creates large ceramic ceiling tile mural for the “Byzantine” Room of the Union Dime Savings Bank at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and 40<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City.<sup>131</sup>

**1928 Fall:** participates in the *International Exhibition of Ceramic Art* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>132</sup>

**1928:** establishes relationships with other artists involved in the craft areas, which stimulates the organization of the American Designers' Gallery.

- most notable among these artists was Wharton Esherick, a wood related craftsman and artist from Pennsylvania. Born in the same year of 1887, both artists began as painters and shifted their focus to the craft areas in the 1920s. Ironically, the two artists also had sons named Peter, born in 1926, and Poor and Eshrick died in the same year – 1970.<sup>133</sup>
- George Biddle (1885-1973) lived across the Hudson River from the Poores in Croton-on-Hudson, New York. The two worked on a variety of projects throughout their careers and their families often socialized together.
- Herman Rosse (1887-1965) attended Stanford University at the same time as Poor and lived in neighboring Nyack, New York.
- additional members included Poor's neighbors along South Mountain Road – textile designer Ruth Reeves and Martha Ryther Kantor (1896-1981) a highly respected painter.



*Elements of a Dining Alcove, 1929. Exhibited in the American Designers' Gallery.*

**1929:** Poor's fame in ceramics continues to build – including exhibitions at the annual show of the New York Society of Ceramic Arts.<sup>134</sup>



Shower tiles installed in Crow House in 1931.

- one of the culminating points of this period is “Potter Poor,” an article in *Time* magazine:

“ . . .In rural Rockland County, N. Y., lives Potter Henry Varnum Poor who works with the diligence of a Greek, who never duplicates, who sells every piece he produces to pottery cognoscenti at prices often mounting into three figures. In U. S. ceramics, he is at the top.

“Potter Poor's method is Persian and difficult. Known today as “under-glaze decoration,” his method involves metallic oxide colors which must fuse with a glaze fully to reveal their tones. Most pottery methods involve repeated firings, which allow plenty of time for the potter to decorate and redecorate if he is not satisfied. Not so with the oldtime Persians, and Potter Poor. He must do his decorating swiftly and surely, and only once, for the glaze must quickly follow and the piece be fired without delay.

“Potter Poor justifies his exacting process by showing that it necessitates brisk, simple design – ‘the subordination of technique’ – and produces ‘depth of brilliance of color.’ The resulting ornaments – leaves, flowers, nude figures, abstract patterns – are so sketchy that the temptation is to call them naive. They are simplification of forms to only the essential contours, graceful and spontaneous. They are not precise and intricate geometry.”<sup>135</sup>



Toilet in Crow House

**1929 mid-October:** after having worked with dedicated fervor in ceramics for several years, the Poor family decides to embark on an extended vacation in France, where HVP can focus on painting.

- multiple stories have been related that the stimulus for the family going to France was that Bessie encouraged her husband to “get out of the plumbing business.” Another version is related by HVP's friend Inslee Hopper, longtime editor of *The Arts* magazine and an aid to Ed Bruce at the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts:

In an interview with Robert Brown, Hopper recalled “he [HVP] went off into ceramics for some years and did all sorts of things, winding up doing a most marvelous tile bathroom in his house in New City. From that he got several commissions to do tile bathrooms, which ended rather abruptly – I don’t know whether it was Mrs. Crane or Mrs. Kohler, telephoned Bessie one day and said the toilet wasn’t working in Henry’s bathroom. And Bessie said [laughs] ‘you’ve got just the wrong person, call a plumber, I’m married to the artist who created the damn thing.’ She said to Henry, ‘If you ever do another goddamn bathroom, I will divorce you.’ So that was the end of Henry doing ceramic bathrooms.”<sup>136</sup>

- the Poor family arrived in Paris in the fall of 1929. They stayed for two weeks, then go to La Ciotat (a southern coastal village between Marseille and Toulon) and finally back to Paris in early summer – renting an apartment on the rue de la Grande-Chaumière.<sup>137</sup>
- soon after the Poor’s left for France, the United States stock market crashed on “Black Tuesday” – Oct. 29, 1929. While the family does not appear to have been adversely affected, Poor’s father and mother lose substantial holdings.

### 1930 To 1940: National Recognition:

Summary: After returning to the U. S. from France, Poor’s paintings received critical success in multiple exhibitions during the 1930s. He continued to work in ceramics, home construction and a variety of other art mediums in addition to painting. Also, he was actively involved in arts organizations and government sponsored commissions. Critically, his work received favorable notice throughout the decade.

**1930 November 15:** the Poors return to New York on the *S. S. New York*, sailing from Cherbourg, France.<sup>138</sup>

**1931 February 9 through 28:** exhibition of over 50 paintings HVP completed in France at the Montross Gallery. The exhibition was a critical success and received positive reviews in the press.

- the *New York Times*’ Edward Allen Jewell wrote:

“There are still-lives, portraits and landscapes. Mr. Poor is perhaps at his best in the still-lives and portraits, though you encounter many a fine passage in the outdoor subjects. Do French influences assert themselves? Unobtrusively, here and there. For the most part this work is original, often poignant in its beauty. One would not have to know at first hand, anything at all about the Marseilles neighborhood to perceive that the Mediterranean in that vicinity yields admirable fish and that the gardens are, or should be, famous for their melons and peaches. Mr. Poor does handsomely by his adopted locale without turning himself into a travel publicity agent. You will never find Henry Varnum Poor going in for the “picturesque” nor will you find him dashing off casual impressions. Everything is carefully constructed, though nothing is dryly pondered. There is much freshness in this work; considerable ingenuity, too, in the matter both of subject and arrangement.”<sup>139</sup>

- additional positive reviews came from Carlyle Burrowes of the *New York Tribune* and fellow Kansan Murdock Pemberton in *The New Yorker*, who wrote: “By his new endeavors we would say that Mr. Poor has lifted himself into the front rank of America’s first ten [painters].”<sup>140</sup>

**1931 February:** begins building additions on to Crow House.

- areas added include a second story above his painting studio for Anne and Peter’s bedrooms, a bathroom with tiles used from the 1928 American Designer’s Gallery exhibition, a new pottery studio and an additional bedroom/study. All the added areas were built with cinderblocks,

Poor's favorite wall construction material from that period onwards.

**1931 April:** Poor's furniture designed for Donald Friede apartment is showcased in a *House Beautiful* article. The author notes "The furniture, designed and made by Mr. Poor, is of tulipwood, extreme in its simplicity, yet, in both design and texture, of unusual distinction." He continues "The wood is unfinished so that we are strikingly aware of the rhythmic markings of the circular saw which have been left to become an important part of the texture and decoration. The tops of the tables and the arms of the chairs have been waxed chiefly as a protective measure, but it gives the wood the mellow appearance of age."<sup>141</sup>

**1932 Early in the Year:** shows with Wharton Esherick and Ruth Reeves at the Philadelphia Art Alliance.

- the show demonstrates the artists' use of natural resources in their work. Poor is quoted as saying "The fullness of life has come to me all through the land, and I needed little or no money to induce the land to give me its natural riches. I think I have shown that the land can answer most of the important problems in our present-day depression. I am not willing to pay the price that most people pay for luxury – unending toil and drudgery for somebody else. I am satisfied with the real essentials of life . . . and because I am satisfied I enjoy my freedom and do only the sort of work that pleases me. . . The average American has to work every weekday from nine o'clock in the morning to five o'clock in the afternoon just to make a living, and has no time to create a single beautiful thing. This is an indictment of our present form of civilization."<sup>142</sup>



*Anniversary Dish*, 1932, earthenware, 5 x 14 1/2 inches in diameter. Gift of Mrs. H. S. Stone, H. E. Poor and Henry Varnum Poor in memory of Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Poor, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Made in honor of his parents' 50th wedding anniversary.

**1932 May:** Poor experiments with fresco painting to complete a three panel entry for *Murals by American Painters and Photographers* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

- three panels are titled *Home Life in the Country*, *The Arts and Crafts*, and *The City*.<sup>143</sup>

**1932 October through January 2, 1933:** participates in the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition of American Paintings and Sculpture at the Art Institute of Chicago and is awarded the Norman Wait Harris Silver Medal (and \$500) for *Hudson Valley at Bear Mountain*.

- the painting is now in the collection of the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas, and represents the first painting to be added to a Kansas art museum (then known as the Thayer Museum of Art).<sup>144</sup>



*The Hudson River at Bear Mountain*, 1932, oil on Masonite, 15 x 20 inches. Carnegie Fund Grant purchase 1935, Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas.

**1932 Late Fall:** *The Disappointed Fisherman* (1932, oil on canvas, 30 x 24 inches), a portrait of the artist's son Peter, acquired by the Metropolitan Museum

of Art.

- the painting was later deaccessed and eventually acquired by the Heckscher Museum of Art in Huntington, New York, in 2001 from the collection of Baker/Pisano.



Poor in his ceramics studio, 1932.

**1932 December 10:** Newman E. Montross dies from complications after breaking his hip in a fall near his Gallery.

- soon afterwards, Poor is asked to join the Frank Rehn Gallery at 683 Fifth Ave. in New York City.

Rehn Gallery opened in 1923, specialized in American Paintings, and exhibited artists such as George Bellows, Charles Burchfield Edward Hopper, George Biddle, George Luks, and Reginald Marsh. Rehn was a native New Yorker and earlier managed the Milch Gallery. His father was a painter and member of the National Academy of Design.<sup>145</sup>

**1933 January:** Poor family goes to Marco Island, Florida in hopes of helping Peter's chronic earaches. While there, they stay at the Marco Island Inn and often returned in future years during the winter.

- the family returned to Crow House in March following the bank moratorium on the 6th.

"All Henry's funds were in the Haverstraw Bank, which had closed, and which did not reopen until long after the federal government had lifted the ban on withdrawals. Even then, it paid only fifty percent on deposits. Henry wrote to his mother in Kansas that he might be 'down to bedrock again.'

"Then a check from the Metropolitan Museum for 'The Disappointed Fisherman' rescued the family finances. It was typical of the way Henry was, as Bessie would say, 'protected by Providence.' Whenever there was little of no cash in the bank – Henry had no real capital – and no prospects of work, a letter or a telephone call offering a commission would miraculously save the situation. As a result, Henry never worried long about money, for which he had a healthy respect but no great love. Like his father he was frugal but not stingy, and always bought the best, especially when it concerned a necessity or a gift for one of his family."<sup>146</sup>

**1933 October 19 through December 10:** participates in the 31<sup>st</sup> *International Exhibition of Painting* at the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh and wins third prize of \$500 with *March Sun*, a group portrait of Bessie, Peter and Anne seated around the family's table.

- *New York Times* critic Elizabeth Luther Cabby wrote, "Henry Varnum Poor's *March Sun* is beyond criticism on its purely technical side.

Seldom are we privileged to see finer craftsmanship than is displayed – or, to speak more justly, concealed – in Mr. Poor's canvas." After addressing the diversity of his work in ceramics, design, etc., she goes on to say, "the firm and delicate craftsmanship of *March Sun*, in which he is a painter pure and simple, with a painter's full bag of resources open to his selective hand."<sup>147</sup>

- *March Sun* (1933, oil on canvas, 54 ½ x 60 inches) is now in the Addison Gallery of American Art in Andover, Massachusetts.



*March Sun*, 1933, oil on canvas, 54 1/2 x 60 inches. Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts.

**1933 October 16 through November 4:** has first one-man exhibition of portraits, still-life and landscape



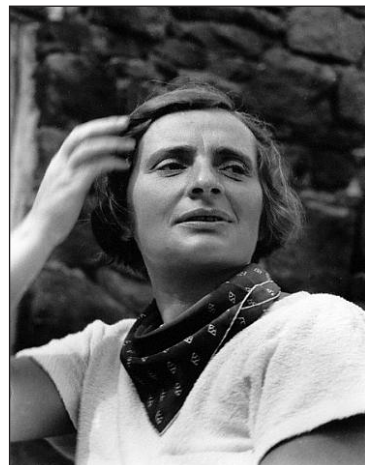
paintings at Rehn Gallery.

- in his review of the show, *New York Times* critic Edward Allen Jewell is particularly impressed with *March Sun, The Pink Tablecloth, Hellebore and Apples* and “the brooding gray” *View Over Nyack – Winter*.<sup>148</sup>

**1933 November:** article in *House Beautiful* by Bessie Breuer about the complications and satisfactions of her Crow House kitchen. As she alludes to, it was designed by an artist rather than a chef, housewife, or mother.”



*Henry Varnum Poor*



*Bessie Breuer Poor*



*Peter Poor*

All above photos by Imogene Cunningham, 1934

As she alludes to, it was designed by an artist rather than a chef, housewife, or mother.”

- in the opening section, she writes of first seeing her future husband eating in the kitchen:

“When I first saw my kitchen I fell in love with it and with the man who built it. He was sitting in it, the wide casement window with a wide, wide shelf of red brick at his back, and the green of the landscape and the peach tree outside coming through in a flood of greenish, moody sunlight over his shoulder. The man was seated at a table the like of which I had never seen in a kitchen or anywhere else. To begin with, it was six-sided and the wood a pale, ashy, blondish brown, and heavy the top and heavy the hand-carved three legs that held it up. There was no cloth on it, and as he ate his chop he deposited the skins of his boiled potato directly on the bare surface of his table. By his side were a pencil and drawing paper, and on the wide brick ledge a withered bouquet in a milk bottle; in a wooden trencher were a cauliflower and some lemons; on a wide platter of shining brown pottery there were piled rusty-brown pears, and on his kitchen dress there were plates of color and design, any of which I coveted for the Adam mantle of my own fireplace. The vigor and dignity of the man and the room were one and the same.”<sup>149</sup>

**1933 December:** Poor’s painting *Autumn Fruit* (lent by the Whitney Museum) featured in *A Loan Exhibition of American Paintings Since 1900*, which was the opening exhibition of the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art (now the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art) in Kansas City, Missouri.

**1934 Spring:** HVP’s watercolor *Pont-a-Mousson* included in an exhibition of the Prairie Watercolor Painters as a part of the annual *Midwest Art Exhibition* at Bethany College in Lindsborg, Kansas.

**1934:** Poor becomes involved in the development, along with George Biddle, Ed Bruce, Forbes Watson, Ed Rowan, and other leading artists and supporters, of the Treasury Department’s Section of Painting and Sculpture (Fine Arts). Biddle encouraged his former classmate at Groton School, Franklin D. Roosevelt, to endorse the formation of the organization, which was intended to provide employment for struggling



*Hellebore with Graps and Apples*, circa 1933, oil on canvas, 29 x 24 inches. San Diego Museum of Art.



*Vase*, 1933, earthenware, 9 x 6 x 6 inches. Rago Arts.

artists.<sup>150</sup>

**1934 Late December:** shows with George Biddle at Rehn Gallery in an exhibition titled *Paintings of the Hudson Valley*.

**1935:** Poor constructs a house for playwright and close neighbor Maxwell Anderson (1888-1959).

- Mark Simon describes the building as a “transitional structure” for Poor.

“With steeply sloping roofs and dormers reminiscent of the European farmhouse model, Henry is beginning to use materials, such as cinderblock and metal windows. Like “Crow House,” this house is sensitive to the sun, though it does not have a clear front and back side to it. Gardens and terraces on the south side become outdoor rooms which open up the forest for light. One enters along these gardens from the east end, where the house sits on a driveway circle. This with a garage across from the house, forms a sort of entrance court.”<sup>151</sup>

- like Poor, Anderson was a graduate of Stanford (1914) and went on to become one of the most well-known playwrights of the mid-twentieth century with *Winterset* and *High Tor*.

- this was also the first house that Poor used outside contractors to do much of the work:

He hired George and Robert Knapp to oversee the construction, Irving Keesler to do the plumbing and heating, Monroe Katt and Fred Stegmaier for the electrical work, and others to complete other needed tasks.<sup>152</sup>

**1935 February 3 through 25:** invited to exhibit in the *Midwest Artists Exhibition* at the Kansas City Art Institute in Kansas City, Missouri.

- the catalog indicates that “Three distinguished artists of Kansas and Missouri, now resident in New York, Thomas Benton, John Steuart Curry and Henry Varnum Poor, were invited to exhibit, not in competition, together with the members of the jury [Grant Wood, Birger Sandzén and Oscar Jacobson]. Poor exhibited *Ruth* (oil painting), *Nude* (drawing) and *Head of Negro* (drawing).<sup>153</sup>

**1935 March 24 through May 5:** exhibits in the 14<sup>th</sup> Corcoran Biennial Exhibition, showing *The Pink Table Cloth*.

**1935:** Poor selected as one of the artists to complete murals for the new Justice Department Building in Washington, D.C. as a part of the Treasury Department’s new fine arts program.

- the other artists selected were Thomas Hart Benton, George Biddle, John Steuart Curry, Rockwell Kent, Leon Kroll, Reginald Marsh, Boardman Robinson, Eugene Savage, Maurice Sterne and Grant Wood.<sup>154</sup>

**1935 August:** exhibits along with Morris Cantor, Harold Weston, Alice Stallnecht and Frederick Wight at the gallery of Ann Hamilton Sayre in Wellfleet, on Cape Cod.<sup>155</sup>

**1935 September:** Peter Poor attends school in his father’s hometown of Chapman, Kansas, for the 1935-36 school year. He lives with HVP’s sister Eva and her husband Herbert Stone.

**1935:** Poor’s wife, Bessie Breuer, publishes her first novel, *Memory of Love*.

**1936 April 5:** first awarding of an HVP designed plaque given



New York Drama Critics’ Circle award designed by Poor.

by New York Drama Critics' Circle for "the best new play by an American playwright produced in New York." The prize is called the Poor Plaque and is a silver relief depicting a performance at the John Street Theatre (an 18th-century Manhattan playhouse).<sup>156</sup>

**1936 March:** begins work early in the month on a fresco mural for the Justice Building in Washington, D.C.. Represents Poor's first fresco for a public building.

- he and Anne moved to apartment at 603 Queen Ct. in Alexandria, Virginia. She helps with the fresco painting by preparing materials and other necessary tasks.<sup>157</sup>

- creates surrounding works for four doorways – twelve separate works total.

1. First doorway deals with the Bureau of Prisons: *Imprisonment, Rehabilitation, and Release from Prison.*
2. Second doorway: *Unloading of Goods, Customs Inspection, and Surveying New Lands.*
3. Third doorway: *Anti-Trust, Kidnapping, and Federal Bureau of Investigation.*
4. Fourth doorway: *Tennessee Valley Authority, Symbols of Justice, and The Gold Case.*

- Poor's fresco colors were primarily earth tones and he and Anne often worked long days.

Monroe Stearns wrote that Poor "Kept those earth colors, somewhat limited in range, in tin cans or enamel pots, measuring out into muffin tins what he needed at a time. For mixing them he used a white enamel palette or a sheet of glass. His brushes were wide, long-haired sable, badger, or ox hair, and smaller round and flat ones with long bristles. Anne had to wash these before the lime could stiffen and ruin them. Henry built up his tones by hundreds of superimposed small strokes in order to give the final painting surface brilliance and transparency."<sup>158</sup>

- HVP also described his method of working on the mural to a reporter for *The Kansas City Times*:

"A plaster worked ahead of me pulling off the old plaster and preparing the wall for new. He would have put on the new for me, but I always have done a great deal of manual labor and preferred putting it on myself.

"It has to be just right, wet enough, but not too wet, when the color is applied, and the painter knows about how much he can color in the daylight hours ahead of him. Anne and I would mix and apply the plaster in the forenoon on a space large enough for me to color in the afternoon. As the plaster sets, it forms a film of lime carbonate.

"Fresco is perhaps the most nearly permanent medium for mural painting. Outside walls frescoed hundreds of years ago in some of the Italian cities have retained their original color. They neither crumble nor fade."<sup>159</sup>

- reviews of the murals are very positive.

- a July article in *The American Magazine of Art* by Forbes Watson gives Poor accolades for his ability to handle the panels, "Certainly these six [that is what he had completed by publication time] have been the strongest test of Mr. Poor's ability and I feel that he has met the test with



**Department of Justice Murals: *Goods, Customs, and Surveying New Lands.***



***Anti-Trust, Kidnapping, and Federal Bureau of Investigation.***

**Both photos by Carol Highsmith.**

outstanding capacity. He has been a good workman and done a good job.”<sup>160</sup>

- one negative aspect was reported in Poor’s depiction of a lawyer presenting a case to the nation’s highest court, “The mural depicts a lawyer in argument of the gold case with his back to the supreme court. Lawyers recalled that in one of the new deal cases before the court, a lawyer was cautioned by the court to direct his remarks to the bench and not to the spectators.”<sup>161</sup>

**1936 May 18 to July 1:** participates in the First National Exhibition of American Art at the International Building in Rockefeller Center.

- shows an oil painting titled *The Song*.<sup>162</sup>

**1936 August 29:** A. J. Poor, HVP’s father dies in Kansas. He attends the funeral after having just completed the Justice Department murals. He leaves Washington D.C., travels to Kansas for the service, then returns to his home on South Mountain Road.<sup>163</sup>

**1936:** Kansas State University purchases *Still Life with Wild Helibor* [sic] with proceeds from funds provided by the Friends of Art.

**1936 November:** Poor’s family travels to London, so that he can paint, and Anne and he can study fresco painting.

- soon after arriving, Peter develops spinal meningitis. He is cared for in London, but eventually the family relocates to Cannes in the French Riviera. Peter regains strength thanks to care by Bessie and other therapists.<sup>164</sup>



A. J. Poor, circa 1905. CAPS.

**1937 Late Spring:** Poor, Bessie and Peter return to America while Anne stays in Paris to study at the Académie Julian.<sup>165</sup>

**1937 March:** HVP selected to complete a mural for the Department of the Interior.<sup>166</sup>

**1937 April:** *Self Portrait*, an oil on canvas, purchased by the University of Nebraska from a temporary exhibition organized by New York art dealer and fellow Kansan, Maynard Walker.<sup>167</sup>



Advertisement for the summer school session at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center in 1937

**1937 Summer:** HVP accepts teaching position for the 1937 summer school of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.

- Poor is assigned to teach the landscape painting course.<sup>168</sup>
- Peter travels with him in hopes it will help his recovery from spinal meningitis. They live on a mountain ranch west of Colo. Springs.<sup>169</sup>

**1937 December:** exhibits paintings at the Rehn Gallery.

- receives a strong review from Edward Alden Jewell of *The New York Times*:

Near the end of the piece, Jewell writes, “Henry Varnum Poor has enlarged and galvanized his scale of color values this year, at the same time strengthening rather than enfeebling the sense of decorative subtlety that has always characterized his work, both as a painter and as a potter. I had thought he had settled into his stride, but now I truly believe he has just

begun.

“We used to be a little reticent about specifically comparing our own painters with the big shots overseas. Some of us, of course, must be resigned to carrying an inferiority complex to the grave. For my part, I will pit Henry Varnum Poor against any living artist anywhere, yes and against a lot of artists who have laid aside their brushes, quite confident that he can hold his own. If you fail to visit a show about which so many uncompromising and rash things have been set down in this reviewer’s cubicle, you will deprive yourself of one of the season’s most heartening experiences.”<sup>170</sup>



*Colorado Landscape*, circa 1937-38, watercolor, 14 x 19 inches., The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.

**1937 December:** selected (along with Thomas Hart

Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Reginald Marsh) by Limited Editions Club to illustrate a work of the artist’s choice. Those selected also receive a \$2000 award.

- Poor selects *Ethan Frome* by Edith Wharton – originally published in 1911.

- later, he was selected to illustrate *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne in 1940 and *Call of the Wild* by Jack London in 1959.

**1938:** Bessie Breuer’s second novel, *The Daughter* is published.

**1938 January 30 through March 6:** Poor’s painting of Waldo Pierce included in the *133<sup>rd</sup> Annual Exhibition* at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

**1938 February through March:** HVP works on a large mural for the new Department of the Interior Building in Washington D. C.

- the painting was titled *The Conservation of Wildlife in America* and measured nine feet in height by forty in length. In the scene, Poor included Henry Thoreau, John James Audubon, and Daniel Boone.<sup>171</sup>

**1938 April 28 through May 30:** *Night Scene*, *Paris* and *Nude*, two ink wash works included in the *17<sup>th</sup> International Exhibition of Watercolors, Pastels, Drawings and Monotypes* show at the Art Institute of Chicago.<sup>172</sup>

**1938 June 27 through August 20:** Poor spends his second summer teaching (and serves as the Acting Director of the Art School) for the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center in Colorado.

- HVP’s schedule includes teaching the landscape painting class (using oils and watercolors), Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to noon; helping with the mural decoration class open to advanced students; and critiquing students work in the etching and lithography class.<sup>173</sup>

**1938 September:** “Henry Poor: Art’s Robinson Crusoe” by Harry Salpeter appears in the September issue of *Esquire* magazine.

**1938 :** commissioned by Pennsylvania State University to complete a fresco on north wall of the Old Main building.

- although Poor’s work did not commence until 1940, funds were made available at this time by

the class of 1932 with the stipulation that “an American artist be employed on the project and that he depict the contribution to education made by land grant colleges and universities.”<sup>174</sup>

**1939 April 30 through October:** participates in *American Art Today*, an all-encompassing exhibition at the New York World’s Fair.

- Poor exhibits his oil portrait *Ruth Reeves*.

**1939 May:** exhibits in the Recreation Center at Kansas State College (now Kansas State University) in Manhattan, Kansas.

- the exhibit was the second mounted to augment commencement activities at the school. The first featured work by John Steuart Curry. Vice president of the college said “The college hopes to make these exhibits an annual event at commencement time if popular approval warrants it. Poor is one of America’s leading ceramic artists and the exhibit of his paintings, which the college has brought here, is representative of his fine work in oil and water color.”<sup>175</sup>

**1939 September:** Poor’s painting *In Western Garb* is purchased for the Wichita Art Museum by patron Louise Caldwell Murdock’s trust. The painting is a portrait of a boy attending one of the ranches Poor stayed at while teaching at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center.

- following the acquisition, Poor wrote a note about the painting to the trust’s representative: “*In Western Garb* was painted in the summer of 1937 on a ranch near Florissant, Colorado [near Colorado Springs]. My boy of 12 was spending the summer on this ranch. Aside from the ranch outfit, there was one other boy, Dave Linton, 14, staying on the ranch. He was from New York, son of a well-known anthropologist, but he had gone “Western” with a bang. Played a guitar and sang endless cowboy songs and lived in his sombrero. The almost humorous contrast of his delicate little face under the bold western hat was the real purpose of the painting.”<sup>176</sup>



*In Western Garb*, 1937, oil on Masonite, 24 x 20 inches. Roland P. Murdock Collection, Wichita Art Museum.

**1939 October:** receives a \$100 purchase prize for his *Nude* platter at *The 8<sup>th</sup> National Ceramic Exhibition* in the Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts (now the Everson Museum of Art).<sup>177</sup>

**1939 October:** Poor officially commissioned to complete a mural in the Old Main Building at Pennsylvania State University.



Poor, second from right, serving as a juror for the Treasury Department’s Section of Fine Arts along with Olin Dow, Maurice Sterne and Edgar Miller. National Archives.

- an article in *The New York Times* provides additional details: “It is hoped that the work will eventually become the central panel in a larger scheme of decoration, for which further funds would have to be obtained. Mr. Poor is already at work on sketches and hopes to be able to begin the actual wall work in February. For subject-matter he has been interested in the Morrill Act of 1862, which created the land grant colleges of which Penn State is one.”<sup>178</sup>

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- 114.1. *An Exhibition of Paintings by American Artists*, exhibition catalog, September 26 – October 8, 1921, BSMGA.
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173. *The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center Summer School catalogue*, 1938, Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center archival files, Colorado Springs, CO.
174. "Fund is Given Penn State for Murals; Class of '32 Donates \$4,500 for Work," *New York Times*, October 23, 1938, digital edition.
175. "A Poor Exhibit," *Abilene Reflector Chronicle*, May 25, 1939.
176. from a citation for *In Western Garb* on the "Search the Museum Collection" site for Henry Varnum Poor, [www.wichitartmuseum.org](http://www.wichitartmuseum.org).
177. "Prizes Are Awarded in Ceramic Exhibit," *New York Times*, October 1, 1939, digital edition.
178. "Murals by Poor," *New York Times*, October 15, 1939, digital edition.

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# Henry Varnum Poor: Commemorating 125 Years

by Ron Michael, Curator, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

Annotated Chronology - August 2012

## 1940 through 1959

### 1940 Through 1959: Hard at Work on Many Projects:

Summary: In 1940, Poor completed a large fresco mural in Pennsylvania State University's Main Building. During World War II, as a part of the War Artists' Unit, he traveled to Alaska, visually documenting the war activities and writing *An Artist Sees Alaska*. In 1946, he co-founded the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine and three years later spent over one year as resident artist at the American Academy in Rome. Throughout the 1950s, he continued working in multiple media, traveled extensively, and served the arts in many capacities.

**1940 February 5 through March 2:** exhibition at Rehn Galleries of works in several media that showcase Poor's endeavors over the preceding few years. The show includes oil paintings such as *The Chess Game*, ink wash illustrations from *Ethan Frome*, travel drawings, and mural studies.

- an article in *Parnassus* provides insights into including such a variety of work in the exhibition:

"'Why not?' asked Poor simply, when this was called to his attention. 'Must we show only museum pieces? Work, not theory, comes first. One must paint what is there, what is in one's character to paint. I am not a technician: I dare say I've been a bad craftsman as such. The craftsman is interested in things and processes in themselves while the artist is interested in the ends sought and in expression. But the artist finds himself by painting the thing he is impelled to paint, because he feels it and wants to paint it.'"<sup>179</sup>

- records from the Rehn Gallery indicate that the show sold relatively well.<sup>180</sup>

**1940 February 8:** a story is printed in *The Chapman Advertiser*, and subsequently in *The Abilene Reflector Chronicle* on February 14, about HVP's brother Herbert's activities in hobby ceramics.

- Herbert Poor, who lived adjacent to his parent's home in Kansas City, Missouri, at the time was very active in business, but still found time to make pottery:

"An evening at home, an infrequent event for Herbert E. Poor, 28 West Fifty-third street terrace, means an opportunity to turn out a few vases or ash trays with his home-made pottery equipment. Such evenings are few, because, in addition to having pottery making as a hobby, Mr. Poor is in the grain business, owns and operates a downtown garage, two farms and a dairy, is a bank president and lieutenant colonel of the 110<sup>th</sup> engineers of the Missouri national guard.

"It was chiefly through his daughter and his brother that Mr. Poor became interested in pottery manufacture. Mary Poor, the daughter had studied ceramics in college and desired a potter's wheel and other home equipment to continue her work. After its completion, Mary initiated him into the fascinating occupation. His brother, Henry Varnum Poor, a professional artist, also encouraged him to enter this new field."<sup>181</sup>



*The Chess Game*, 1939-40, oil on canvas, 36 x 30 inches. Purchased with funds donated by Marvin Bastian in memory of his wife, Bobbie Bastian, Wichita Art Museum.

**1940 April 16:** Poor's mother, Josephine, dies in Bonner Springs, Kansas, and is buried in Chapman.

**1940 April 26 through June 18:** HVP, along with Anne's help, completes the large North Wall mural for in the Old Main building at Pennsylvania State University.

- after completing the mural, Poor provided this analysis: "First, a mural must decorate a wall. Second, it should be a human document with real meaning to the people who use the place. From the architect's and purist's point of view, the first is more important."<sup>182</sup>

- the mural was dated and signed on June 18, 1940.



**1940 August:** pig problem near Crow House forces Maxwell Anderson and HVP to contact the Clarkstown Zoning Board in an effort to limit their number near their homes. Anderson tells the board that "The increasing odor from the pig pen which is wafted constantly to the study in which I write, and which is located a few hundred feet from the piggery, is so rank that unless corrected it will force me to abandon my home." Poor followed by stating "his own grievances and then concluded that obviously the pigs should be restricted, both in number and activities." The board decided to follow his recommendations and limit the number of pigs to twenty."<sup>183</sup>



**1940 December:** article written by HVP titled "Roots that Grow" appears in the December 1940 edition of *The Magazine of Art*. In the article he emphasizes the lacking tradition in American art and expands on one of his core philosophies – that nature should be the guiding force. "Basically, I think any movement has reached its end, is dead, when the bulk of work being done relates more to already achieved work than to some fresh and personal reaction to reality, and the return to health and new vitality is by way of the simple basic impulse, imitation of nature."<sup>184</sup>



**Initial mural painted by Henry Varnum Poor with assistance from his daughter Anne in the Old Main Building at Pennsylvania State University. Photos by Al Trapuzzano.**

**1941:** commissioned by the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts to complete a ceramic tile mural for the new Fresno, California post office.

**1941 June 25 through August 25:** participates in *Sixth Annual Exhibition of Paintings by Artists West of the Mississippi* at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. Poor includes the oil painting *Hudson River Near Athens*.

**1941 Summer:** spends much of the summer working at home on the lithographs to illustrate *The*

*Scarlett Letter* and on the Fresno tile mural.

**1941 July 17 through October 5:** has a watercolor and pastel landscape included in *The Twentieth International Exhibition of Water Colors* at the Art Institute of Chicago.<sup>185</sup>



**Milton Caniff house.** The Milton Caniff Collection, the Ohio State University Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum.

**1941 Late Summer through Fall:** oversees construction of a house for cartoonist Milton Caniff and his wife. Additionally, he designed a house for Isabel Padro that was largely build after Poor left New City for California.

- Caniff was best known as the creator of the syndicated cartoons *Steve Canyon* and *Terry and the Pirates*.

- the construction process kept Poor extremely busy – he wrote Frank Rehn, “My new house is jumping up these days and believe me, keeps me jumping from dawn till midnight, too. But it’s going to be a handsome house and I have no regrets.”<sup>186</sup>

- the constant time spent building also took a toll on HVP’s relationship with Bessie, which erupted in her accusing him of

not charging enough for his work: “She accused Henry of acting ‘for the Caniffs and against’ his own – and her – interests. Henry’s eventual response to her continued objections he put into a letter to her: ‘We live well enough considering that we really try to live for something else than making money. If the Caniffs are making and spending a lot of money, what do I care? That’s what they work for, and I don’t envy them.’”<sup>187</sup>

**1941 November 25:** leaves for California to oversee installation of his ceramic tile mural for the Fresno post office. He also visits daughter Anne in San Francisco and spends over three months painting in the Carmel area.

- prior to leaving on Nov 22, Poor wrote to Rehn, “I’ve been the most hurried and harassed guy I’ve ever been – that’s why you’ve not seen me – and Tuesday I shove off for Calif., ‘to get away from it all’ and so help me God to PAINT and think of nothing else for two months.”<sup>187.1</sup>

- soon after Poor arrived in California, Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7.

- once the tile mural was installed in the Fresno post office, he contemplated going back to New York, but at Bessie’s urging continued his plan to paint near Carmel – remaining there until the spring of 1942.



*Coast of Big Sur, 1942, oil on board, 24 x 36 inches.* Mid-America Fine Arts, Wichita, KS.

**1942 March:** returns from California with good paintings for an upcoming exhibition. Also, Poor became more involved in Government War activities related to artists and was a proponent for artists to be hired to create posters promoting America’s involvement in WWII.<sup>187.2</sup>



*Rocks and Black Cloud, 1942, oil on board, 16 x 20 inches.* Emprise Bank, Wichita, KS.

**1942 November 16:** Exhibition at Rehn Gallery features paintings,

watercolors and pottery. Many of the paintings are works he completed along the coast in California.

- a review in *The New York Times* says “Mr. Poor, whose style seems somewhat in process of change, has been making a special study of rocks and the sea.”<sup>188</sup>

**1942 Fall:** awarded commission for tile murals in the Chicago Uptown Post Office.

-works on design for them in the fall and the actual tiles were fired by the Federal Seaboard Corp. in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Because of delays in their production, Poor was unable to install them until the spring or late fall of 1943.<sup>189</sup>

**1943 January 9:** Henry Varnum Poor is elected to the National Institute of Arts and Letters.

- other artists receiving the honor at the time included Charles Burchfield, Eugene Higgins, Henry Lee McFee and sculptor Brenda Putnam.<sup>190</sup>

**1943:** Poor develops a proposal for “A National Court of Sculpture and Mural Painting in the War Emergency Building [the Pentagon].” He suggested using a small portion of the building’s budget to hire approximately thirty mural painters and ten sculptors to decorate the inner court of the structure.<sup>191</sup>

**1943:** Poor’s brother Herbert involved in war effort as a lieutenant colonel with the 110<sup>th</sup> engineers.



**Poor as a member of the War Artists Unit. Photo by George Moffett.**

**1943 February:** HVP assigned to the War Artists’ Unit and is sent to Alaska to sketch and paint the military activities in that region. He chronicles his time spent there in *An Artist Sees Alaska*, published by the Viking Press in November of 1945. Since the book documents his experiences so well they will not be addressed in detail here. The reader is encouraged to obtain a copy of their own because it’s an excellent read.

- Poor begins the book as he is leaving in mid-March from Penn Station in New York City and covers his travel across the United States. He records his stop to see family members in Chapman and from there proceeds to San Francisco, Seattle, and finally docks in Alaska near Fort Richardson on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. He flies to the Yukon, then back to the coast and follows

a northward seafaring path from Nome to Point Barrow with multiple stops and adventures along the way.



**Rescue on the River, 1943, gouche, 14 x 19 inches. Anchorage Museum. For additional images of Poor’s Alaskan works, visit [www. Alaskool.org](http://www.Alaskool.org)**

**1943 July:** by the time of his return to New City, Bessie is in New York City writing propaganda, Anne is serving with the WACs (and creates many well known works from that time period), and Peter is in Colorado with the Air Force.<sup>192</sup>

**1943 Fall:** soon after his arrival back home, Poor begins writing *An Artist Sees Alaska*. As with many of his writings, he composed in longhand with few corrections; contrasting Bessie who worked and reworked her pieces.<sup>193</sup>

**1944:** spends the remainder of 1943 and early 1944 writing, editing, painting, potting etc.

- in June, writes Frank Rehn about two canvases that were rejected for a Pepsi Cola Art Contest:
  - “I wonder if you will call up and tend to getting my two canvases back from that Pepsi Cola show? The jury refused them both. I wonder if I’m getting too good or too bad to please my fellow artists.
  - “Anyway, I’m bearing up fairly well and life is going on, with nothing else to do but paint for a change and that’s pretty wonderful.”<sup>194</sup>
- Poor would later serve as juror for the Pepsi Art Contest and was accepted into the 1947 exhibition.

**1944 August:** HVP has an article promoting craft work published in *Craft Horizons*. It is titled “Craftsmanship in the World of the Future” and as the publisher states in the introduction, “While many persons take a gloomy view of the future, Henry Varnum Poor sees in the years ahead a great opportunity for the craftsmen. In these trying days we are proud to present to our readers his constructive and forward looking message.”<sup>195</sup>

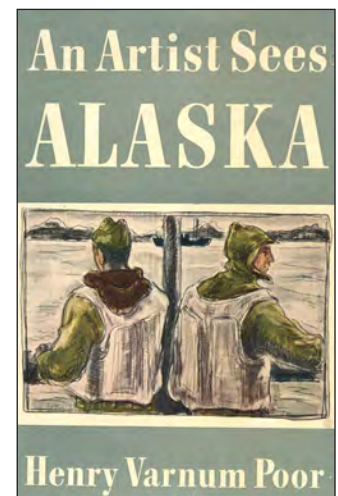
**1944 August:** named an art instructor at Columbia University – which constitutes approximately a 31 mile drive from his home in New City.

- hired to “teach a class in advanced drawing and painting.”<sup>196</sup>

**1944 October 30 through November 18:** show of 23 paintings, and groups of drawings, pastels and watercolors at Rehn Gallery. The exhibit includes portraits of John Steinbeck and his family, Joe Jones, and Mrs. Willard Cummings.

**1945 August:** Poor finishes editing *An Artist Sees Alaska* and the book is published in October.

- reviewer Edward Alden Jewell wrote, “Artist-correspondents have given us some excellent volumes based on their experiences. Easily one of the best is Henry Varnum Poor’s *An Artist Sees Alaska* (The Viking Press, \$3.50). The book reflects throughout Poor’s keen perceptiveness, his genial directness and simplicity, his complete sincerity, the warmth of his friendly humor. The reproduced drawings are superb. It is a book for every Christmas tree.”<sup>197</sup>



**1945:** Poor and Bessie purchase land in Truro near the tip of Cape Cod in Massachusetts.

**1946 January:** writes “Henry Varnum Poor Discusses Drawing” for *American Artist*.



House built for John Houseman in 1946.

**1946 Late Winter through Early Spring:** designs and oversees building of a house for John Houseman and his brother-in-law Julian Freedman.

- Houseman purchased land at the base of High Tor from Bessie, who had owned it prior to marrying HVP. Once securing the property, Houseman, Henry and Joan Fontaine proceeded to find a suitable place for constructing a house:

“Joan [Fontaine] and I spent several days following

Henry up the mountain, through the dense, second growth woods, trying to decide on a suitable site for what we had begun, without much conviction, to call “our” home. It must be high enough to overlook the valley and to have a distant view of the river, not too high or inaccessible for a road to reach it. The hills were covered with poison ivy, and every evening when we got home in the failing light, Henry made us undress and wash ourselves all over with yellow soap. We found the perfect place finally – a flat ledge of rock facing almost due south and Henry set about designing a house with a master bedroom that would catch the morning light, a living room that would be illuminated at noon and a kitchen from which one could watch the sunset.”<sup>198</sup>

**1946 February:** Poor is approached by Willard Cummings, who he grew to know through the War Artists Unit, about taking a leadership role with a school he hoped to establish called the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. It would be located in Skowhegan, Maine.

- Cummings invites HVP to be President in addition to teaching at the school.

The founders were composed of Poor, New England portrait painter Cummings (1915-1975), and sculptors Charles Cutler (1914-1970) and Sidney Simon (1917-1997). They “were committed practitioners of traditional artistic skills and saw these skills as forming the core of Skowhegan’s original curriculum, their design of the program reveals a unique capacious vision. They did not intend Skowhegan to be a retreat into the countryside to simply nourish their own artistic philosophies and fend off change, but to be a place that would develop artist by offering an honest, supportive forum for divergent viewpoints.”<sup>199</sup>

- in establishing the school, they hoped to get students attending art schools to go to Skowhegan during the summer. After organizing things, the founders took the following roles: Poor would be president; Charles Cutler, vice-president; Willard Cummings, treasurer; and Sidney Simon, executive manager. Additionally, Anne Poor was enlisted to teach and served on the board until her death in 2002.

- one of the school’s more prominent students, Alex Katz described Poor as “quite interesting. I disagreed with most of what he said, I guess, He was kind of interesting because he spoke of painting more on a philosophical level than on a craft level.”<sup>200</sup>

**1946:** with the development of Skowhegan, HVP becomes even more embroiled in the arguments of representational styles of painting (which he supports) vs. highly abstract and non-objective styles (which he feels are receiving inordinate recognition and support by influential museum administrations).

**1946 November:** Poor receives an award for his bowl, creamer and large tea cup at the *11<sup>th</sup> Annual National Ceramic Exhibition* at the Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts.<sup>201</sup>

**1946 November 18 through December 6:** show of twenty-five paintings and a group of drawings at Rehn Gallery.<sup>202</sup>

**1946 Fall:** commissioned to create a fresco mural for the Louisville, Kentucky, *Courier-Journal* newspaper building. The building construction delays hold up the project until late March 1948.

**1947 April:** exhibits Pottery at High Tor Associates in Mount Ivy.<sup>203</sup>

**1947 Spring through Summer :** works on mural sketches and cartoons in preparation for Louisville mural – some completed at Skowhegan “in the huge barn I have there.”<sup>204</sup>

- continues his teaching duties at Skowhegan in the summer.

**1947 October 1 through November 2:** Poor’s painting *Coast at Point Sur* included in Pepsi Cola



**Compote, 1948, earthenware, 6 x 10 inches in diameter. Rago Arts.**

Company's *Fourth Annual Exhibition Paintings of the Year* at the National Academy of Design and continuing on to The Rochester Memorial Art Gallery, The Corcoran Gallery of Art, and the Toledo Museum of Art.<sup>205</sup>

**1947 October 27 through November 15:** exhibition at the Art Center Association in Louisville.<sup>206</sup>

-HVP exhibits eleven oils, eleven drawings and nine pieces of ceramics.<sup>207</sup>

**1947 December:** Poor exhibits pottery at Rehn Gallery and near the end of the year asks for payment from his sales, "If you can, I would appreciate a little check. My bank account is about at bottom." He also seek's Rehn's approval for selling small pieces of pottery through Maynard Walker's Gallery in New York City. As mentioned earlier, Walker was also a native of Kansas, hailing from Garnett.<sup>208</sup>

**1948 March:** Poor is contracted to expand his murals in the Old Main Building at Pennsylvania State University, so, along with daughter Anne, briefly beginning work on the mineral science section of east wall.<sup>209</sup>

**1948 April 11 through May 9:** *Picture Hat*, an oil painting featuring daughter Anne wearing an elaborate hat, is exhibited at the *Sixth Biennial Exhibition of Contemporary American Painting* at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Wins the John Barton Payne Medal and the painting is purchased for the Museum's collection.<sup>210</sup>

**1948 April 20:** elected associate member of the National Academy of Design.<sup>211</sup>

**1948 April through June:** Poor and Anne work on the mural, featuring Daniel Boone, Henry Clay, John James Audubon, and George Rogers Clark, in the new offices of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*.<sup>212</sup>

- near completion he writes to Frank Rehn:

"The mural is just about licked. It has its ups and downs but all told is by far the best fresco I've ever done and has some really good painting in it. Each day is a long hard labor and some days I don't think I'll ever get thru, but I can't leave the wall alone until I've put all I've got into every piece. A lot of that is lost from the ground, since it starts 8 feet up, but I guess all I put in has its effect – at least keeps it safely away from my pet abhorrence 'decorative painting.' I hope it can stand as a human document."<sup>213</sup>



***The Picture Hat*, 1946, oil on canvas mounted to Masonite, 44 x 34 inches. Museum Purchase through the John Barton Payne Fund, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.**

**1948 Summer:** Poor teaches at Skowhegan, followed by time in Truro.

**1948 Fall:** Bessie finished writing her first play *Sundown Beach*. It goes into Broadway production and debuts on Sept. 7<sup>th</sup>. The play was produced by the Actors Studio, directed by Elia Kazan, and featured actors such as Martin Balsam, Jennifer Howard and Cloris Leachman. After poor reviews, it closes after 7 performances.<sup>214</sup>

**1948 Fall:** spends season painting and preparing cartoons for additional fresco at Penn State. In late September writes Frank Rehn from Truro, “Weather here is incredible and I’m red as a beet (or lobster) at the present moment, from salt and sun.”<sup>215</sup>

**1949 November 4 through January 3, 1949:** five ceramic pieces included in *Decorative Arts Today* at the Newark Museum of Art in Newark, New Jersey.<sup>215.1</sup>

**1949 January through March:** works, along with Anne, in a concentrated effort to finish east and west walls of *The Land Grant Murals* at Penn State. Also spends time preparing for a show in Dayton, Ohio, and a short time at Marco Island, Florida.<sup>216</sup>

- the final effort on *The Land Grant Murals* goes from April to first of June. The artists sign the work on June 1, 1949.<sup>217</sup>

**1949 March 18 through April 10:** retrospective exhibition at the Dayton Art Institute in Dayton, Ohio. The Institute also exhibits Anne’s work.

-the show features 51 oil paintings, 14 watercolors and pastels, many drawings and ceramics.<sup>218</sup>

**1949 June:** back at Skowhegan with 51 students enrolled, “Almost capacity and they seem to be a serious bunch.”<sup>219</sup>

- one of the students during that summer was painter Alex Katz and he recalled:

“The first impression of Henry Poor was that of a quite jovial man in pale clothes that hung off his shoulders. The painting instructors at Copper Union dressed more nondescriptly or with more focused tweeds with blue shirts, or plaids on plaids with tweeds. Henry tended towards light colors with very refined chroma changes. One remembers the effect and never the parts. He was the best dressed artist I had seen. As with some great dressers or actors, it takes at least three times to realize how conscious the choice is and how good it is.

“That year, 1949, a group of men on the G.I. bill arrived to study art at Skowhegan. They were large and loud and wrecked local bars for recreation. One night they decided to leg wrestle. Henry threw a football lineman like he was paper. He worked his way through the entire crew finishing with Big Joe Adams, a 250 lb. weight lifter from Pennsylvania. Henry had to be 65.”<sup>219.1</sup>

**1949 November:** HVP, Bessie and Anne leave for Italy so he can serve as resident artist at the American Academy in Rome.

- in a letter to friend Ray Foley, Poor is quoted as writing “How in the world they ever picked me?” and continued, “The appointment includes residential quarters in an Italian villa, with a substantial salary in Italian lira.”<sup>220</sup>

- Poor rents Crow House to John Steinbeck and his family, and takes a leave of absence from Skowhegan for the summer of 1950.<sup>221</sup>

- near the midpoint of his tenure at the Academy, Poor wrote to Frank Rehn about some of the activities:

“I’ve had a hard time getting going in this bloody place. If I could just enjoy a vacation,



Poor working on the miner section of the Penn State mural.



Penn State mural detail. Photo by Al Trapuzzano



that would be O.K. but I don't seem to have the temperament for it. I have to stew over something. I got led into setting up a kiln and clay working shop for this institution and it went on and on forever and I did a lot of terra cotta busts – seen with cold eyes, of very doubtful merit but they seemed hot stuff at the time. Maybe two or three are O.K. But did a lot of sketching too and for several weeks now have been trying to be a painter again. I have two landscapes done, but I want to live with them a while and get more and better work.”<sup>222</sup>

**1950 July:** arranges to have *Landscape in the Campagna* (a.k.a., *Campagna Landscape*) sent to Rehn for inclusion in the Carnegie Institute's *International Exhibition of Paintings* (October 19-Dec. 21, 1950). Campagna is a town in southern Italy about 30 miles west of Naples.

**1950 Summer:** when the heat is oppressive, stays at Anticoli – a town approximately 30 miles west of Rome.<sup>223</sup>

**1950 October:** attends Venice Biennial in Venice, Italy, before leaving for the U.S.

- writes to Frank Rehn that “The American Pavilion makes me sad and ashamed – seeing it as Europeans must.”<sup>224</sup>

**1950 December:** returns home to Crow House from Italy.

**1951 January 21 through February 25:** Poor exhibits *Artist in his Studio* at *The 146<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition* at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Wins Carol H. Beck medal for best portrait in oil.<sup>225</sup>

**1951 March 5 to 24:** exhibition at Rehn Gallery featuring mostly Italian landscape paintings, but also terracotta busts and drawings in crayon and wash.<sup>226</sup>

**1951 March:** exhibits at the newly opened Hutchinson Public Library in his native state of Kansas.<sup>227</sup>

**1951:** appointed Chairman of the Artists' Equity Committee on Museums in New York City.<sup>228</sup>

**1951 Summer:** teaches at Skowhegan. Begins giving lectures at opening of session. Also helped build a wood burning kiln, but doesn't teach ceramics (nor does he at any time in his teaching career).<sup>229</sup>

**1951 Fall:** gathers with group of likeminded artists to send letter to various museums decrying favoritism in selecting abstract and non-objective works for collections. Letter sent out in May 1952.

- a portion of their statement reads:

“The greater number of our group have what might be termed the ‘humanist’ outlook. That being our bent and our belief, we are acutely aware of the fast-spreading doctrine that non-objectivism has achieved some sort of esthetic finality that precludes all other forms of expression. This belief appears to pervade the schools, the museums, criticism, and as a result has a highly restrictive influence upon young artists.”<sup>230</sup>

**1951 November:** article published in *Craft Horizons* titled “Design. . .a Common Language.”

- the opening lines set the tone of the article:

“A good design is a living thing. It cannot be resolved into any demonstrable ‘good’ or abstract ‘right.’ In advance it is unpredictable. See the giraffe or the grasshopper. They were not invented, even by God. They evolved out of a need and a way of life – unpredictable and strangely beautiful creatures. So no good design is invented – it grows from and expresses a

way of life. An artist is a maker of images but the images he makes are not just his own, they too grow out of a time and a place and a way of life. They have the power and eloquence not of a single voice but of a community, even a race, speaking."<sup>231</sup>

**1951 December:** great worry in the family as daughter Anne is ill in New York City's Roosevelt Hospital. Remains there until Feb. 1952.<sup>232</sup>

**1952 Winter:** Poor participates in *Man at Work* exhibition at the Denver Art Museum in Denver, Colorado.

- exhibits *Coal Miners in the Light*, a study from the Penn. State murals.<sup>233</sup>

**1952 Summer:** spends most of summer at Skowhegan.



**Photograph of Poor from the March 1953 issue of *American Artist***

**1953 March:** article on Poor by Ernest Watson featured in *American Artist*.

**1953 March 30 to April 18:** exhibition of pottery and terra-cotta heads at Rehn Galleries.<sup>234</sup>

**1953 April:** first issue of *Reality: a Journal of Artists' Opinions* sent to a "long list" of interested, and maybe not so interested, people. Poor serves as unofficial head of the editorial committee.<sup>235</sup>

- he wrote about how the group began at the bequest of Raphael Soyer and stated the overall sentiment of their existence:

"So, like liberals in a free society, it is easier to state what we are against than what we are for. We are for the maintenance of values and liberties that we already have. To restate them means reviewing the whole history of art, or making generalizations that seem like clichés. We are against all forces that set up false values, that substitute obscurity for clarity, and that imperil our true democracy.

"So, here in this journal we make our statement. Whether we shall have a name, whether we shall form an organization, is all in the future. Now we are just 'Artists.'"<sup>236</sup>

**1953 Summer:** teaching again at Skowhegan and painting when time permits.

**1953 September:** Frank Rehn suffers a stroke and turns operation of Rehn Gallery over to John Clancy.<sup>237</sup>

**1953 September 22:** flies to San Francisco to serve on the jury for the City Festival of Art.

**1954 March:** along with Edward Hopper, assists John Clancy, Margueretta Rehn, and a designated attorney to settle the affairs of Rehn Gallery and transfer ownership to Clancy.<sup>238</sup>

**1954:** commissioned to create a tile mural for Klingenstein Maternity Pavilion at Mount Sinai Hospital (1176 Fifth Ave) in New York. The mural was eight feet high by twenty feet wide, and made up of 250 tiles. It was dedicated on December 7, 1954 and depicted scenes from the local zoo, boathouse and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.<sup>239</sup>

**1954 Summer:** spent at Skowhegan. For his annual lecture, Poor attempts to provide "some sort of analysis, or at least express an opinion, whether it is well analyzed or not, as to why the present-day situation in contemporary painting is so confused."<sup>239.1</sup>

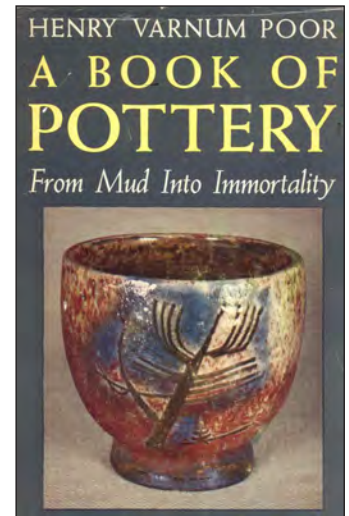
- 1954 November and December:** serves as visiting artist at the Kansas City Art Institute in Kansas City, Missouri.<sup>240</sup>
- 1955:** receives numerous commissions for tile murals.  
- locations included Deerfield Academy in Deerfield, Massachusetts; Abraham Lincoln High School in Brooklyn, New York; and Edward Bleeker Junior High School in Flushing, New York.<sup>242</sup>
- 1955:** befriends neighbors Alfred and Susan Rossin who live in the house Poor built for Milton Cannif in 1941. Alfred and HVP become especially close and the couple, both amateur potters, help with clay related activities and eventually buy a natural gas fired updraft kiln for Poor to use at Crow House.<sup>243</sup>
- 1955 January:** show at Rehn Gallery of new Maine and Cape Cod landscape paintings and drawings.<sup>241</sup>
- 1955 Summer:** Reality group prints their final publication. At Skowhegan, Poor gives his annual lecture on artists from Cézanne and Renoir, through Henry Moore. He discusses what he finds of interest in slides of the various artists.<sup>243.1</sup>
- 1955 Fall:** the Poor's spend time at Varadero Beach, along the northern shore of Cuba, rather than Marco Island.<sup>244</sup>
- 1956:** appointed a trustee of the American Craftsmen's Council in New York City.<sup>245</sup>
- 1956 Summer:** buys a farmhouse in Maine approximately six miles from Skowhegan.<sup>246</sup>
- 1956:** contracted to write book on pottery by publisher Prentice Hall.  
- writes to John Clancy that he's staying at Cape Cod for a few weeks to work on the book, which he says is "Quite a job and I wish I had never started."<sup>247</sup>
- 1957 February:** Poor writes to Raphael Soyer acknowledging that the Reality group has run its course.  
- he also suggests the publication should cease as well:  
"I've been very sorry, too, to see the Reality group disintegrate, but it was bound to happen and I don't think anything we could have done would have changed it. In the nature of things, a protest group, which this really was, has nothing to hold it together after it has stated its case. It could have continued to be a militant publishing group if we could have found the ideal editor to hold it and to do the work which none of us had time or inclination to do – even granted the ability.  
"We have done a useful thing, have enjoyed it, too and I congratulate you upon having started it – and you should take pride in it."<sup>248</sup>
- 1957:** Poor constructs a new cinderblock studio and living quarters on the grounds north of Crow House.
- 1957 Summer:** during his annual lecture at Skowhegan, Poor talks extensively about the challenges the students will face in being artists – from confronting the lack of tradition in contemporary art to the threat of the atomic bomb.
- 1958:** commissioned by Mary Meigs to create a ceramic tile memorial to her mother, Margaret Wister Meigs on the grounds of Fort Hunter Mansion and Park in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

**1958 October 17:** *A Book of Pottery: from Mud into Immortality* is published by Prentice Hall. The book is 186 pages and covers Poor's philosophies of art and provides in-depth details into his processes for making ceramics. It's a must read for any enthusiast of Poor or ceramics [author's note].

- a review from an unidentified newspaper clipping provides an overview:

"The most impressive feature of the almost legendary artist is his mature simplicity, and that feature emerges in this book. Mr. Poor's great love, and the real subject, is the earth. 'Pottery is earth begotten' he notes. His love and respect for his materials, told in poetical way, make this fascinating for layman and artist.

"While this is not a how-to-do-it book, Mr. Poor generously shares with mature artists the techniques he has acquired in his 38 years as a master potter. These are illustrated by 61 beautiful line drawings. Five color plates and 45 halftone illustrations present the finest of ancient and modern pottery."<sup>249</sup>



- according to Monroe Stearns, who was involved in its publication, the book sold quite well, "By the end of the year its sales had earned back the advance payment the publisher had made to Henry, and also by that time – and for years thereafter – letters of enthusiastic appreciation from all over the world filled Henry's mailbox."<sup>250</sup>

**1959 January:** receives the Pennell Memorial Medal for achievement in the graphic arts at the 154<sup>th</sup> Annual Exhibition at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts.<sup>251</sup>

**1959 Winter through Spring:** designs house for MacDonald and Judy Deming that, like many of its predecessors, is "a block house with heavy oak beams and wide-plank floors" and "bows across the south to capture as much sun as it can."<sup>252</sup>

**1959 April:** Eminent British ceramist Bernard Leach writes HVP to express admiration for *A Book of Pottery*.

- he complements Poor on his achievements over the years and potting philosophy:

"During my odd moments for several days past I have been reading and looking at your book with delight. I have known your name for perhaps 30 years. . . Now we are both getting old. We both draw and write besides making pots. I have been to America twice. Why on earth have we never met? I feel we have much in common. You say so many things which I have felt deeply and have expressed, in some cases, with different accent. . . I look at your pots in motivation, but still find life which, as your write somewhere, is the real test. . . Thank you for your life's work."<sup>253</sup>

**1959 Sumer:** Spent at Skowhegan.

- in his lecture for that year he covers three areas: 1. provides insights into art schools with special emphasis on Skowhegan's approach, 2. reads sections from his recently published *A Book of Pottery* (read so he won't forget anything), and 3. discusses Henri Matisse and why he is such an important influence in contemporary painting.<sup>253.1</sup>

**1959 August:** HVP resigns from active teaching at Skowhegan as school undergoes administrative changes.<sup>254</sup>

**1959 August through November:** after the Skowhegan summer session, he remains at his farm in Maine.

- biographer Monroe Stearns relates a story of HVP making improvements to the barn:

“Henry’s improvements to the Maine property almost ended his career. After engineering a rope-and-pulley device to hoist himself to the barn roof, where he cut an opening for a studio skylight, he accidentally kicked away the ladder by which he planned his descent to the barn floor. Anne found him dangling helplessly from the rope he had tied around his waist, and rescued him just in time.”<sup>255</sup>

**1959 November or December:** accepts commission to illustrate *Call of the Wild* for the Heritage Club (formerly the Limited Editions Club).<sup>256</sup>

**1959 Late Fall:** commissioned to create mural for Traveler’s Insurance Company at 125 High Street in Boston.<sup>257</sup>

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# Henry Varnum Poor: Commemorating 125 Years

by Ron Michael, Curator, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

**Annotated Chronology** - August 2012

## 1960 through 1970

### 1960 Through 1970: Winding Down:

Summary: In 1961, Poor was given a retrospective exhibition at Colby College Art Museum in Waterville, Maine. The following year he served as visiting artist at the Des Moines Art Center in Des Moines, Iowa. During the decade he spent time at home in New City and other areas: chiefly near Skowhegan, Maine; Truro, Massachusetts; and Marco Island, Florida. He died on December 8, 1970 and was buried in Mt. Repose Cemetery in Haverstraw, New York.

**1960:** *Call of the Wild* published with Poor's illustrations.

**1960 April:** signs letter with twenty-one other artists to Whitney Museum of Art in New York objecting to the underrepresentation of objective work in their annual exhibit. Of the 145 pieces in the show, "102 were nonobjective, seventeen abstract and seventeen semi-abstract, leaving only nine paintings in which the image had not receded or disappeared."<sup>258</sup>

**1960 April:** one-person exhibition held at the Philadelphia Art Alliance.

**1960 Summer through end of October:** spent at Skowhegan and farm. Takes break from ceramics to paint.

- Poor continues giving an annual lecture at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. In this year's talk he discusses a variety of issues including his approach to drawing and painting, along with how things have changed since he was a student.<sup>258.1</sup>

- wrote to Clancy after the Rehn Gallery changed locations in New York City, that he's doing best painting of his career:

"I'm staying up in Skowhegan and painting like mad and having a fine time. I'll have enough work that I can be fairly proud of, to have a show. In fact it's the best painting I've ever done – of that I'm sure. And about time!

So can we arrange a time of a show – say Jan, Feb, or March?  
Best of luck to the new place."<sup>259</sup>

- Rehn Gallery moved from its long time location at 683 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue to 36 E. 61<sup>st</sup> Street. In 1966 it moved to 855 Madison Avenue.

**1961 February:** contacted by Margaret Sandzén Greenough about having an exhibition at the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery in Lindsborg, Kansas.

-Poor wrote back to Mrs. Greenough:



*Sentinels*, 1960, oil painting, 26 x 30 inches.  
Private Collection.

“John Clancy said he had a letter from some place in Kansas which probably I didn’t want to do anything about but when I heard it was from Lindsborg I said I certainly did want to do something about it and wanted him to send whatever he could spare. And yesterday your letter came with the warm and very alive memories of my long ago friends in Lindsborg. I’m sure Clancy can send 6 or so things that won’t be too bad. I have pleased myself with my paintings of the past year – the first long stretch of time I’ve taken from ceramics for many years, so I’ll have a good show. When I see my old canvases some of them I like, and some I feel I should have burned up. I would be curious to see again the early ones that Thorsen got so long ago. Your father and he were about my first patrons – if you can call it that.”<sup>260</sup>

**1961 Late February through March 15:** at Marco Island in Florida. Staying at the Islander Motel – the Poors return there after having visiting Cuba for several years prior to the embargo going into effect in October of 1960.

- HVP sends a postcard to John Clancy saying “This is about the only place in Florida that is about as it was 20 years ago. A wonderful place for fish – which I don’t catch – and sunburn which I do!”<sup>261</sup>

- sent Clancy a group of shell drawings that he suggested can be “mounted on linen covered boards – no frames or glass – so they might be hung as a group from those hangers that can be stuck on a wall.”<sup>262</sup>

**1961 March 27 through April 22:** exhibition at Frank Rehn Gallery featuring primarily Maine and Florida motifs.

**1961 July:** leaves for Skowhegan, Maine, in early July and gives a talk at the school on July 14.

-in his talk this year, he included a large number of slides of his own work and provided details of how he developed as an artist and what art meant to him.<sup>263</sup>

**1961 September 8:** leaves for Truro for approximately a week, then back to Maine to help set up show at Colby College Art Museum in Waterville, Maine.

**1961 October 1 to 28:** retrospective *Henry Varnum Poor, A Comprehensive Exhibition* at Colby College Art Museum in Waterville, Maine.

-Poor expresses to John Clancy, “I don’t know the why of this show, or who will see it, but Bill Cummings urged it on me and Colby for co-operation purposes.”<sup>264</sup>

- the show included 42 oils ranging in date from 1932’s *Autumn Fruit* to work completed earlier in ‘61. As Poor had begun to do, he also showed examples of his other artistic endeavors, including drawings, watercolors, pastels, pottery, ceramic sculpture, furniture, books written and illustrated, and photographs of houses and other large scale work.<sup>265</sup>

**1962 January 1:** begins to sporadically keep journal, primarily to record thoughts and ceramic details, for the remainder of his life.

**1962 January 1:** an example of a partial journal entry: celebrates Anne’s birthday with granddaughters Anna and Candy, then into the New York City to drop them off and to see movie *The Mark* with Stuart Whitman, Rod Steiger and Maria Schell. Painting extensively during the month.<sup>266</sup>

**1962 January 6:** decides against painting a large (26 x 91 ft) mural for the William Penn Museum in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, writing “Tempting but not for me unless right conditions. 2 yrs. work.”<sup>267</sup>



- 1962 January 13 (Saturday):** discovers a hung-over Joe Jones parked in his front yard and has him in for “Breakfast and lunch and a good visit. Very sound and good review of my work. Paintings often miss the unity of my chalk drawings. Has always been so and I must do paintings over more times. Too inclined to leave them because of the beauty of part, and lazy I suppose.”
- the next day, Sunday, the Poors have “Julie Harris and family for feast. Pleasant day. She has grown a new personality – more petite and striving to be sexy [sic]. Helen Hays and friends in P.M.”<sup>268</sup>
- 1962 January 23 and 24 (Tuesday and Wednesday):** “Started self portrait sitting in the sun in my sun alcove. With all my self portraits find it impossible to see yourself as an overall object in the same way you see another head.” On the 24<sup>th</sup> writes, “Continued clear cold by but overcast. More work on “Artist Sitting in the Sun.” I won’t have as many self portraits as Rembrandt anyway.”<sup>269</sup>
- 1962 Early February:** suffering from gout – decides he may have to avoid his wine twice at meals and whisky before dinner.<sup>270</sup>
- 1962 June 8:** arrives in Des Moines, Iowa, and writes to John Clancy, “The Art Center is a handsome building. Des Moines the most spread out town I’ve ever seen. People very cordial and fine. Class over subscribed but number limited. Only for 6 weeks – thank Heaven.”<sup>271</sup>
- 1962 June 11 through July 20:** Poor serves as visiting artist at the Des Moines Art Center and gives two public lectures on July 12 and July 18.<sup>272</sup>
- during the lecture of July 18<sup>th</sup>, he lays out his “Painting Points to Remember:”
- In putting a still-life on your canvas, design by seeing the spaces around the objects as of equal importance to the objects.
- After drawing and designing as well as you can (an intellectual process) then practice putting yourself into a completely detached attitude to what is in front of you Practice the use of your eyes only, as your sole guide. Study the color and tone relation of each area to all other areas – forgetting what the objects are and being sure that you do not allow your eyes to focus on any one object. Things only exist in relation to what is around them and painter like seeing and fine painting is above all the establishing of true and characterful relationships.
- In simplifying, or introducing any element of style be sure that your style is drawn from a profound regard for the character of your subject – not imposed on it.
- Every time you look at your subject try to see it fresh and as a total and always be ready to redo it – never let it get frozen and finished. Scrape off and redraw it whenever you feel its freshness is getting lost. Don’t hesitate to use harsh descriptive lines even with delicate tonal painting. Remember it’s not an imitation of the object that you want – it’s an interpretation in pigment and canvas that you want.
- Don’t try to arrive at subtle delicate greys by vague manipulation on your canvas. Insist on reducing it to a good, solid paint mixture, put it down and let it register. Often these indefinite greys are the controlling factor in your color harmony.”<sup>273</sup>
- 1962 June 17 through July 15:** major exhibition, similar in nature to the earlier one at Colby College Art Museum, held at the Des Moines Art Center.
- includes 25 oil paintings, 19 drawings of Florida, 13 additional drawings, four ceramics busts, several photographs, and 62 ceramic pieces.<sup>274</sup>
- 1962 On or Near July 20:** drives to Chapman, Kansas, to visit his sister and relatives. Also takes time to visit the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery in Lindsborg, Kansas.

-while there, he is shown their collection of his early work that was purchased either by Birger Sandzén or Bethany College piano instructor Oscar Thorsen. Poor later agrees to have an exhibit at the Gallery in the spring of 1963.

“Needless to say I was very interested to see again, after very many years, so much of my own early work. Most of it has been scattered and lost so you have the best record of it that exists anywhere. Thanks to the generous faith of Birger and Mr. Thorsen.

“I will be happy to have a small group of my latest work shown almost any time you wish – next Easter would be very good. I do not think I’ll have a large show in N. Y. this winter, having had one in ‘61, but I do have a great deal of new work which I am happy to say is, I think, the finest painting I’ve ever done.

“Here in Maine I’ve been doing fruit and flowers mostly but have just done a self portrait which I thought of as bringing your collection up to the present – with a gap of some 45 years! I’ll send it with whatever I select as being my very best present day work.”<sup>275</sup>



**Eva Poor, circa 1950.**  
**From the May 22, 1952**  
**edition of the *Chapman***  
***Advertiser*.**

- HVP may also have stopped at the Bonner Springs farm to dig clay as he referenced using some in a journal entry on March 11, 1963.

**1962 Late July:** about a week spent at Truro, Massachusetts.

- a new house was under construction on his property.<sup>276</sup>

**1962 August 1 through October 10:** continues on to Skowhegan to paint at the farm, then back to Truro, and finally New City at the end of October.

**1962 November:** begins arrangements to have an exhibition at the Sandzén Gallery over Holy Week – April 7 to 14, plus two extra weeks.

- Poor writes to Co-Director C. Pelham Greenough, 3<sup>rd</sup> that he could have approximately 20 paintings and other things similar to what had been shown in Des Moines, “I want to send you the very best work I have. For the sake of easy and inexpensive shipping I have been framing my work in thin border frames and I would not include any paintings more than around 3 x 4 feet and only one or two of that size. The average would be small – perhaps 16” x 20”.”<sup>277</sup>

**1963 January:** includes ceramics in exhibition at University of Iowa in Iowa City. Once the show ends, they are forwarded to the Sandzén Gallery in Lindsborg, for his spring exhibition there.

**1963 January 28 through February:** three week show of paintings at Rehn Gallery.

- prior to the opening, HVP writes to Greenough at the Sandzén Gallery that the Rehn Gallery staff “agrees that it’s my finest painting. It’s certainly about time that I was learning to paint.”<sup>278</sup>

- show at Rehn Gallery includes 29 paintings and 6 drawings. Though the exhibit was not covered by the press, due to a newspaper strike, there were still 12 works sold.<sup>279</sup>

**1963 February 10 through March 4:** Poor leaves for two weeks at Marco Island, which he describes as a “sketching trip in the Everglades.”<sup>280</sup>

**1963 March 5:** once settled at home in New City, resumes pottery activities. Although exactly when is unclear, Poor began employing a local man named Bill Pica to help out around the house (especially with heavy chores), drive Bessie and Anne, and assist HVP with clay preparation,

cleaning, etc. Peter Poor described him as “Not an artist, but not just a day laborer, a gentle helpful man with good taste, who cared about the Pooors.”<sup>280.1</sup>

**1963 March 16:** stacks kiln for firing, selects work for his Sandzén Gallery exhibition, and “Re-reading an *An Artist Sees Alaska* and remembering Kotzebue. Isaac would be a man of 33 now!! I’m really ancient.”

- the next day, March 17<sup>th</sup>, Poor has dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Bob Swartz, who live in the house he built for John Houseman, and reflects “Always pleasant to see my biggest and best house and that they love it.” Housemen eventually moved back into the house after the Swartzs left and remained there until his death in 1988.<sup>281</sup>

**1963 March 19:** drives into New York City to take things to shipper (W. S. Budworth and Sons, 424 West 52nd Street NY) and select paintings from Rehn Gallery inventory to send for Sandzén Gallery show.<sup>282</sup>

**1963 March 24:** Enjoying the day and notes, “Really Sunny Warm and Wonderful! The Forsythia in the pottery starting to blossom. Certainly warmest day of the year and in the sun hot enuf [sic] to take a sunbath. Annie and Bessie to N.Y. for Carr’s party. I greatly enjoy the complete quiet of being at home alone. Leisurely making one nice round-bellied two piece pot.”<sup>283</sup>

**1963 April 1 to 22:** exhibits at the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery in Lindsborg.

-includes paintings, drawings, ceramics, and photographs of other efforts.

- the exhibit was visited on opening day by his sister Eva and her husband Herbert.<sup>284</sup>

- HVP is interested in having the exhibit travel in Kansas and contacts Maynard Walker for potential names; however, this doesn’t materialize.<sup>285</sup>

- sells two paintings and donates the earlier mentioned *Self Portrait* from 1962 to the Sandzén Gallery.



Charles Pelham Greenough, 3rd. with Poor’s ceramic head of Ben Shahn and the *Self Portrait* that he donated to the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery.

**1963 April 1:** records birth of grandson Graham Varnum Poor to his son Peter and Eloise Poor in New York City.<sup>286</sup>

**1963 April 9:** learns of good friend and fellow artist Joe Jones’ death and is asked by his widow to help sort through his art related estate items.<sup>287</sup>

**1963 May 18 through May 20:** juries Boston Art Festival with Edward Hopper and Robert Motherwell.<sup>288</sup>

**1963 June:** participates in Rockland Art Show with proceeds going to civil-rights organizations.<sup>289</sup>

**1963 Summer:** in Maine at Skowhegan.

- the intent for his annual lecture at the school is to discuss tradition in painting, but there is extensive question and answering interchanges between Poor and the students.<sup>288.1</sup>



*Self Portrait, 1962, oil on board, 26 x 18 inches. Gift of the artist, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery.*

**1963 September 23:** brother Herbert Poor, age 79, dies at the Veteran’s Hospital in Murfreesboro, Tennessee (near his daughter’s home in Oak Ridge), after over a year of declining health and dementia. He is buried in Kansas City’s Forest Hill Cemetary.<sup>290</sup>

**1963 Fall:** remodels house for neighbor Hume Dixon.<sup>291</sup>

**1963 December:** HVP accidentally bores a hole in his hand while trying to do the same to the bottom of a plate.

- he spends eight days in Roosevelt hospital after infection set in – required an operation as well and had a lingering stiff middle finger.<sup>292</sup>

**1964 February:** at Marco Island, busy with quite a bit of sketching.

- Poor becomes concerned about the developers that are beginning to infiltrate to area.<sup>293</sup>

**1964 July:** back at Skowhegan and gives address at a conference put on by Skowhegan and Colby College.

- in his address, Poor talks about the changing art scene:

“There is a feverish attempt to be new and different, and if possible, shocking. Abstractions made of paint, canvas, or pasted paper or welded metal are conservative.” He continues, “Then the over-life-size banalities of Pop art – plaster hamburgers, pepsi-cola bottles, any anti-art and banal object you can think of – all set up in art galleries and looked at by bewildered or snickering or deadly serious people. And next door a loan exhibition of Goya or Cezanne or the Impressionists, and these are much more crowded, and with serious quietly observant people than are the Pop art galleries. So the great majority of people seem to be out of step with their time, unhappy and uneasy over what so many of the young contemporaries are doing – wondering why they have to do it – through boredoms, or despair, or rank opportunism. I realize that this reaction is no proof of the lack of vitality in this work. The French people greeting the Impressionists with mixed scorn and wonder. But if this is a genuine reflection of our time, for how long? To what are we headed?”<sup>294</sup>



*Portrait of Henry Varnum Poor by Raphael Soyer, 1964, oil on canvas, 38 x 28 inches. Gift of the Joseph Hirshhorn Foundation in 1966. Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution.*

**1964 Into the Fall:** remains at the farm in Skowhegan painting and drawing.



**Poor’s nephew, Charles Stone, with Peter and Henry following the funeral of Eva Stone. Photo courtesy of CAPS.**

**1964 December:** exhibits 24 paintings at Rehn Gallery. Poor includes the usual mix of landscapes, still-lives and portraits.<sup>295</sup>

**1964 Oct. 26:** Poor’s sister Eva Stone dies in Chapman, Kansas. Poor and his son Peter return for the funeral, flying into Kansas City then driving to Chapman.

**1965 February 9 through March 6:** painting and drawing exhibit at Market Fair Gallery in Nyack, New York.

- the small catalog for the exhibit indicates Poor, “once

warned students against giving too great importance to ideas in verbal form, ‘lest you be uprooted from your own animal birthright of love for the *things* that surround you – animals, objects, material – things tactile and tangible.’ He calls himself ‘a maker of things.’”<sup>296</sup>

**1965 May:** at home in New City working with ceramics and digging clay.

- on May 26, Poor writes “To Perth Amboy and McHose clay pits with B and Rossins for clay and picnic. Very friendly and pleasant. Young McHose joked me as such a regular customer – once every 10 yrs!”<sup>297</sup>

**1965 October 9:** HVP’s painting, *In Western Garb* featured on the editorial page of *The Wichita Beacon*. Among the quotes included in the short biography that accompanies the image is “‘I used to be full of paint philosophies,’ Poor has been quoted as saying. ‘Now I just believe in painting. What you see with your eyes is rich and varied and beautiful to the point of heartbreak, and in your medium of paint you try to create something whole and perfect in this image, partaking of the beauty of the world you see and know.’”<sup>298</sup>

**1965 Fall:** commissioned to design house for Jules Billig on South Mountain Road. Basement and foundation dug by Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>. Works on house until winter sets in.<sup>299</sup>

**1966 January 10:** fires kiln owned by Alfred and Susan Rossin after his has problems with soot and reaching a high enough temperature.

**1966 Late January:** goes to Marco Island in Florida.

**1966 February:** exhibits at The Naples Art Gallery in Naples Florida.

- an article in the local paper preliminary coverage for the exhibition:

“Henry Varnum Poor, New York artist who will have a one man show at the new Naples Art Gallery in February, has visited Marco for over thirty years.

“One winter in the early 30s, Henry fixed up a studio on the top floor of the now demolished G. and G. Mercantile Store on the northern tip of the island. Here he studied to perfect his knowledge of fresco, the art of painting on fresh plaster. What he learned in his hours of study on Marco was useful later when he painted a mural in the Justice Department Building in Washington.

“Poor spent many winters at Marco Lodge in its old location, painting island scenes and exploring. His wife, the author Bessie Breuer, worked here and their daughter, artist Anne Poor, also sketched in her visits to the island.

“In more recent years, the Poors have stayed at the Islander Motel and at Mar-Good cottages in Goodland. In 1964, Henry and Anne rented the Fred Hamlin’s Little House on the Hill at the Caxambas end of Marco. Here Poor painted several pictures and has stated it was one of his most productive years on the island. These pictures will be the bulk of those to be shown at the Naples Art Gallery next month.”<sup>300</sup>

**1966 March:** Marco Island had changed dramatically since the Poors began going there in the 1930s, and so had New City:

“This teeming country place is like a town inundated by the sea. The valleys are awash with garden apartments. Neon rivers of shopping centers and pizza parlors rage down the main street.

“In 20 years the population has gone from less than 1,000 to more than 21,000. New City is, by percentage, the fastest growing community in the state. There are still a few islands from the recent past, when the seat of Rockland County was a sleepy refuge from New York City toiling 25 miles to the southeast. There are some stolid red Dutch farmhouses nestling in the high places, as they have for 200 years and more, and a few working farms. But much has given

way to the carpet of new houses, and the army of new people.”<sup>301</sup>

**1966 April:** Poor continues working on the house for Jules Billig after it has been “de-winterized.”<sup>302</sup>

**1966 April 26:** completes the first firing to bisque temperature in the new updraft gas kiln given to him by the Rossins. He records pleasing results.<sup>303</sup>

**1966 July until mid-October:** spends time in Skowhegan focused on painting small works.<sup>304</sup>

- gives his annual lecture at the School of Painting and Sculpture. Begins by relating he is “a very uncertain quantity as a speaker,” never quite knowing what avenues he’ll cover. The talk, however, is about the overall philosophy of the school and his own background studies in becoming an artist.

**1966 Dec.29:** Poor sees a doctor about pain in his left knee, likely caused from an earlier injury that has worsened with age. Overall, the doctor indicates he’s in good health.

- Dr. Richard Freyberg in New York City did the examination and wrote the report. A detail below:

“The patient is a healthy appearing well nourished elderly male. There is diffuse erythema [redness of the skin] and diffuse scars on the nose, cheeks. There is no pallor. He is comfortable in the chair during interview. He gets up from the chair with ease using his right leg as a principal lever for lifting his weight. He walks with an essentially normal gait and without pain at the knee. Height 69 inches, Weight 184 pounds. The ears are negative. Pupils are round, regular and equal. Throat negative. Teeth repaired. No lymphadenopathy [swollen lymph nodes]” etc.”<sup>305</sup>

**1967 March 13 through April 1:** exhibition at Rehn Gallery in their new location.

- the show is composed of primarily oil paintings and mixed media drawings. He sold nearly 2/3 of the work with the lowest piece priced at \$250 for a Hudson River drawing and the highest a self portrait for \$1200.<sup>306</sup>

**1967 March 28 through April 17:** exhibits in *Ninth Biennial Regional Exhibition* at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas.

- the University purchased two works and Poor donated another. In a letter, Friends of Art Director John Helm wrote:

“On behalf of Kansas State University and of Friends of Art I want to express to you our sincere thanks for your generous gift. We are delighted to receive the handsome painting, “Basket of Yellow Apples.” It is a real addition to our collection and is particularly interesting in relation to our earlier work by you. The new work must be about thirty years later than “Still Life with Wild Helibor [sic].” This really helps our collection.

“I expect that it will be possible to complete decisions on purchases by the middle of the coming week. I shall write to Mr. Clancy about these then. It looks as though we will purchase your “Dark Clustered Trees” and the drawing or pastel “Landscape.” If I can add these to the collection along with “Still Life with Wild Helibor” and “Basket of Yellow Apples” then I shall feel that Henry Varnum Poor is more adequately represented.”<sup>307</sup>



*Basket of Yellow Apples*, 1963, oil on canvas mounted to plywood, 17 1/4 x 20 inches. Gift of the Artist, Beach Museum of Art.

**1967 Mid-April:** goes with Anne to the Gulf Coast (20 miles west of Panama City) for 10 days.<sup>308</sup>

**1967 Mid-June:** busy in New City making pottery and attending to things around Crow House.

- in his journal on June 14, complains that cutworms are “nipping off my young grape vines – the tips. Trying a ring of steel-wool at the base of each vine. Also creosote-vaseline soaked ring of soft paper around main stem. Hope it stops the miserable creatures before they cut everything down.”<sup>309</sup>

- as work in pottery continues, sorry that he has not maintained better records and vows to do better in future. Implements a new system in mid-July.

- on June 15, wrote “In PM stacked big kiln – mostly for big plates – and going low to dry out and be ready to start in a.m. Seems to draw O.K. Gave myself a hose shower on the lawn – I find hot weather very tolerable.”<sup>310</sup>

**1967 July 7:** purchases new VW Bug for “\$1000+” to replace Morris Minor – “It is old.”

**1967 August 3:** Bessie goes to Cape Cod and HVP goes off to Maine a couple of days afterward.

- has an unfortunate firing before leaving: “Kiln open 11 AM. Very bad. Burned off glazes. Sooty color. 04 and 02 down – what wrong, I have no idea. Too much reduction at wrong time. As complete a failure as I’ve had in a long time! Hate to stop on such a sour note but a pause and fresh start may be best – anyway it’s the last firing before Maine.”<sup>311</sup>

**1967 Early August to Mid-October:** at farm near Skowhegan working primarily on “the best chalk-pen-wash things I’ve ever done. No doubt about it!”<sup>312</sup>

**1967 Mid to Late October:** cleans up Crow House grounds and begins making pots again.

**1967 October 24:** goes into New York City to see Raphael Soyer’s exhibition, calling it “A much finer show than I had expected, including work over his whole painting life – very impressive.”

-in the next day’s journal entry he laments fact that he hasn’t focused on painting, “As a painter I have no such body of work as Soyer – too much spreading of concentration between potting, painting and building – but I’m fairly content – can’t have everything – so must go along for whatever time remains in the same enjoyable way!!”<sup>313</sup>



*Autumn Apples, 1967, ink wash and pastel, 14 x 12 inches. Gift of Anne and Bessie Poor, Ulrich Museum of Art, Wichita, Kansas.*

**1967 October 27:** HVP again goes into New York City for a Skowhegan meeting. Writes in journal, “The two (Bill and Jack) so devoted and absorbed in School affairs that I felt they should, as a reward of endless time and energy, have things pretty much their own way. I’m thru putting any more sticks into the spokes of their wheel!!”<sup>314</sup>

**1967 October 29:** visits longtime friend George Biddle and his wife. Describes George as “spry and full of public spirited concern to set the U.S. straight on Art affairs. Should certainly have been Sect. of Fine Arts (if we had one).”<sup>315</sup>

- 1967 November 11:** visits Alfred and Susan Rossin, as he often does, to see the results from a recent firing. All the work is high fire stoneware, and Poor acknowledges, “their ash glaze stoneware (Cone 8 and 9) not up my alley but a very fine accomplishment.”<sup>316</sup>
- 1968 January 17:** “This a.m. opened [my] kiln. The most perfect firing ever achieved. Beautiful reds and shapes and decoration. No pottery like it! Modest estimate?”<sup>317</sup>
- 1968 February 10:** serves on the jury for the National Academy exhibition in NY. Writes on Feb. 12: “rather dull jury meeting at Academy. Big luncheon – many dull things to look at – and my own jury free landscape looked very dull. If it had come up unknown I would probably have turned it down – I wonder.”<sup>318</sup>
- 1968 Mid-May to Early June:** HVP and Anne go to Florida for “sun and salt water.” On June 12, in updating his journal he writes, “I still enjoy driving and covering the beautiful country mile after mile and luckily Anne does too.”
- on a different note during the same entry he laments Robert Kennedy’s shooting, records landscape conditions around Crow House, and records a narrowly averted disaster: “Laid myself up with a fall – doing an over window fresco and falling from a tall stool when it sunk into the ground. Could well have broken my back but x-rays show nothing bad and now O.K. and working at throwing little goblets to start going again.”<sup>319</sup>
- 1968 August 5:** after Bessie has gone to their house on Cape Cod, HVP and Anne leave for the Skowhegan farm, “House to be shut up. Hot, close, sultry, so good to be off for somewhat lighter atmosphere than Hudson Valley in August.”<sup>320</sup>
- 1968 Fall:** returns from Skowhegan and begins to prepare for upcoming exhibition of paintings and pottery at Rehn Gallery from March 10 through 20, 1969. Overall, “Very successful – very happy over it.” As a result of the show, HVP and Bessie decide not to go to Florida in early 1969.
- 1969 May 21:** he and Anne attend the American Academy of Arts and Letters awards ceremony: “Dull. Each time I say will be my last. Tennessee W. got a medal and made a sad spectacle of himself.”<sup>321</sup>
- 1969 July 18:** Poores get a new VW station wagon which HVP describes as “Very swank. Every extra possible on it which added much to the cost – some \$2850 – includes license, sun top, white wall tires, radio – everything the affluent buyer wants and (I don’t want) but of course will get used to. I think of it as Pete’s in a few years – just to ease my conscience in allowing it all to be put over on me! But probably very comfortable and I hope fool proof – with so many gadgets.”
- at the same time, HVP is also “cutting that stinking big fake bamboo grove that sprang up mysteriously” after caretakers had stayed at Crow House during one of the recent summers.<sup>322</sup>
- 1969 Late July through Mid-October:** HVP and Anne in Maine and Bessie in Truro.
- 1969 Undated Friday in November:** writes in his journal, “I must get my hands into the mud and see if I can make it do something worth doing – not just more pots for pots sake! I’ve got enuf [sic] junk cluttering up pottery and house and shed and studio. I should have a big bon fire.”<sup>323</sup>



- 1969 November Thanksgiving Day:** HVP and Bessie have another large Thanksgiving day event: “Inconsequential fussing and shopping. B’s [Bessie] determined drive, half sick, is inhuman – all aimed to Thanksgiving tomorrow and the big turkey (30 lbs) pies, etc. etc. without end – just when age should call to relax!”<sup>324</sup>
- 1969 December 3:** thieves broke into house through the studio and took a variety of things – no money. HVP felt it was retaliation for a boy they had earlier turned into police.<sup>325</sup>
- 1970 January:** in his first journal entry for the new decade Poor reflects on the passing time: “Seventy years into 1900! Strange to realize how long ago 1900 was. 1906 the earthquake – 1910 graduated from Stanford – no use of stringing all the other big events up to 1970 in this ratty record of potting! But to catch up a bit, B, home and recuperating well from her operation. Xmas came and went – usual mixture of much strain and pain for a little pleasure but at least one gay day of playing in the snow and feasting with all of Pete’s family out.”<sup>326</sup>
- 1970 January 21:** bitter cold outside but Poor is busy with pottery making and kiln firing. Writes in his journal “time to start the fire place and quietly sip Bourbon with trips to watch the kiln until 07 goes down.”
- 1970 June 23:** long lapse in journal “and little done.” Writes that he has been “mostly puttering with puttying and other over due [sic] repairs and maintenance on the big “estate.”
- 1970 July 1:** Charles and Vivian Stone donate *The Luncheon* and *Pines at Pacific Grove, California* to the Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery in Lindsborg. In February the paintings were appraised by Kansas State University faculty member John Helm.<sup>327</sup>
- 1970 July 31:** HVP leaves for Maine with Bessie and animals to follow. Writes the previous day, “Nobody very happy about it. B. follows in 2 days with Pica and 3 animals. Not a very good solution to all the problems – hope for luck.”<sup>328</sup>

**1970 Mid-October:** returns to Crow House from the farm in Skowhegan, Maine.

**1970 Late November:** Herbert Poor’s daughters donate *November in California* to the Sandzén Gallery.

**1970 November 23:** HVP revisits his journal after an extended absence, “My summer’s work – mixed chalk-ink etc. etc. – up for review. Best of such drawings I’ve ever done and this gives some contentment. But have foolishly strained my heart – brush cutting etc. – and am under doctors orders to be careful – very careful. So I, for first time in my life, feel old and must act old – at 83 I’m really very lucky. He revisits the state of his family and concludes, “Pottery in order and today started to work.”



Poor’s nephew, Charles Stone, with his wife Vivian along with Peggy and Dick Hurd holding *November in California*.

**1970 November 24-25:** for his final entry he writes: “Reviewed glazes – decorated a plate – went to dentist (Dr. Katz) patching up my big front teeth. Candy [his granddaughter] arrived in evening and much talk of family plans and troubles. All coming out for Thanksgiving I hope – tomorrow.

Today George Knapp and Roberts re-doing door of shed. I can't get used to just looking on! But I'll acquire the knack. Annie keeps me in line. Wonderful. Signing off."<sup>329</sup>

**1970 December 8:** Henry Varnum Poor dies from a heart attack suffered at his home.

- the day prior to his death, he had been actively working in the pottery. According to biographer, Monroe Stearns, on the 8<sup>th</sup>, "Anne heard Henry rattling his arthritis pills in their bottle, and went to the kitchen to make his breakfast. When she brought it upstairs to him in his room, she found him on the floor, slumped against his bed."<sup>330</sup>
- Poor's son Peter, recalls the end came when his father passed away quietly in the night.<sup>331</sup>

## 1970: After the Death of Henry Varnum Poor:

**1970 December 9:** Following Poor's death, condolences came from throughout the country. One letter from artist and former Skowhegan student Red Grooms summed up many people's feelings:

"I called Bill on business last night and he broke the news to me – it seemed so unlikely I almost asked "are you kidding?" Henry dead? He couldn't do anything like that, he wouldn't know how. But he did know how and I am sure he did it well. Bill said he just day down, smiled and died. I can see the smile (that marvelous sly indulgent smile), the dying part was Henry's little joke on all of us. We were silly to imagine he would live forever."<sup>332</sup>

- Obituaries appeared in many of the nation's leading publications, including *Time Magazine*, *The New York Times*, *The Nyack Journal-News*, *The Wichita Eagle* and *Beacon Magazine* and the *Chapman Advertiser*. Perhaps things are best summed up in an editorial that appeared in *The Nyack Journal News*:

"Henry Varnum Poor, the eminent artist of South Mountain Road, came to Rockland 50 years ago and built a house – with red sandstone that he quarried himself and with chestnut timber he felled and hewed in the yard.

"That was typical of his individualism which showed through so strongly in his artistic endeavors in the fields of painting, ceramics and house design.

"Mr. Poor must have enjoyed the soul-satisfying feeling that all good artists share – that their work will live on and be a source of pleasure to people long after they have left. But still when a creative mind is taken away, the artistic spirit of society is diminished to the extent of its contributions.

"Mr. Poor's contributions as an artist and as a resident of Rockland have been many. Those who live in houses he designed, those who possess his paintings and ceramic pieces will live with tangible evidence of his artistic strength. Those who were friends and neighbors will remember his geniality, and those who were simply admirers will recall the moments of pleasure from viewing his work.

"But it is sad to contemplate that the flow of his work has stopped."<sup>333</sup>

**1970 December 11:** a memorial service held at New City Methodist Church with interment in Mt. Repose Cemetery in Haverstraw, which overlooks the Hudson River.

- at the service, friend, neighbor and well-known cartoonist Bill Maudlin finished his eulogy by saying:

"Aside from the great affection Henry had for his family and the encouragement he gave them in their own artistic careers, he took care of them in a material sense, and it might be that one of his many strong contributions to our culture was to refute the idea that an American artist can't make a living without selling out to a certain extent. It was a living Henry was after, not a style of living, and I think he would rather be remembered as a man who would risk undercharging for his work than as one who was always looking for opportunities to put his thumb on the scale.

"Everything he created, from houses to paintings to dinner plates, will, of course increase greatly in value to their owners as time goes on, and Henry, a practical man, knew this. Yet I have

the feeling that he got exactly what he wanted from his work, in every way, and that makes him a most practical man in my book.

“If a full, inspiring, and beautiful life was ever lived, it was Henry’s, and he left plenty behind for us to remember him by, so that we are all gainers here today, not losers, and I believe that’s the way he would like us to feel.”<sup>334</sup>

- Henry Varnum Poor was buried with one of his completed pieces of pottery, a partially finished piece, some paint brushes and a small piece made by his grandson.

### Notes:

258. Philip Benjamin, “Painters Fuming at Two Museums,” *New York Times*, April 22, 1960, digital edition.
- 258.1 *Lecture by Henry Varnum Poor*, summer 1960, audio CD, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine.
259. HVP to JC, October 6, 1960, Rehn Papers, AAA-SI.
260. HVP to Margaret Sandzén Greenough (February 2, 1961), BSMGA.
261. HVP to JC, March 6, 1961, Rehn Papers, AAA-SI.
262. HVP to JC, March 13, 1961, Rehn Papers, AAA-SI.
262. *Lecture by Henry Varnum Poor*, summer 1961, transcribed by Judith Stoodley, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine.
264. HVP to JC, September 7, 1961, Rehn Papers, AAA-SI.
265. James M. Carpenter, *Henry Varnum Poor, A Comprehensive Exhibition*, October 1 through October 28, 1961, Colby College Art Museum, Waterville, Maine, Rehn Papers, AAA-SI.
266. HVP journal entry, January 1, 1962, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
267. HVP journal entry, January 6, 1962, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
268. HVP journal entry, January 13-14, 1962, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
269. HVP journal entry, January 23-24, 1962, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
270. HVP journal entry, February 4, 1962, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
271. HVP to JC, June 8, 1962, Rehn Papers, AAA-SI.
272. Stearns, pp. 392-393.
273. “Painting Points to Remember from Henry Varnum Poor,” July 18, 1962, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
274. “Untitled Art List,” HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
275. HVP to Charles Pelham Greenough, 3<sup>rd</sup> [hereinafter CPG], September 15, 1962, BSMGA.
276. Stearns, p. 394.
277. HVP to CPG, November 24, 1962, BSMGA.
278. HVP to CPG, January 24, 1963, BSMGA.
279. HVP to CPG, March 4, 1963, BSMGA.
280. HVP to CPG, February 9, 1963, BSMGA.
- 280.1 Peter Poor, email to the author, September 14, 2011.
281. HVP journal entries, March 16-17, 1963, HVP Papers, AAA-SI. Also Peter Poor email to author, September 25, 2012.
282. HVP journal entry, March 19, 1963, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
283. HVP journal entry, March 24, 1963, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
284. CPG to HVP, April 11, 1963, BSMGA.
285. HVP journal entry, March 28, 1963, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
286. HVP journal entry, April 1, 1963, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
287. HVP journal entries, April 9-11, 1963, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
288. Stearns, p. 397.
- 288.1 *Lecture by Henry Varnum Poor*, summer 1963, audio CD, Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine.
289. “Civil-Rights Groups to Gain From Rockland Art Show,” *New York Times*, June 27, 1963, digital edition.
290. “Col. Herbert E. Poor Obituary,” *Chapman Advertiser*, Thursday, September 26, 1963. Clipping at CAPS.
291. Steigleder, p. 34.
292. Stearns, p. 399 and HVP journal entry, April 10, 1964, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
293. HVP journal entry, April 10, 1963, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
294. “Skowhegan address, undated estimate of July 22, 1964, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
295. Exhibition List, December 1964, Rehn Papers, AAA-SI.
296. “Henry Varnum Poor, Paintings and Drawings,” February 9 – March 6, 1965, Market Fair Gallery, Nyack, NY, Rehn Papers, AAA-SI.
297. HVP journal entry, May 27, 1965, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
298. “Raison d’Etre’ for a Painting,” *The Wichita Beacon*, October 9, 1965, p. 8A.
299. HVP journal entries, November 29 – December 9, 1965, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
300. Jane Hamlin, “Hi! Society Goes to Marco,” HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
301. Paul Montgomery, “A Town’s Growing Pains,” *New York Times*, March 8, 1966, digital edition.
302. Stearns, p. 407.
303. HVP journal entry, April 26, 1966, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
304. HVP to JC, September 13, 1966, Rehn Papers, AAA-SI.
305. Report of Dr. Richard Freyberg, December 29, 1966, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
306. HVP journal entry, June 1, 1967, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
307. John Helm to HVP, April 8, 1967, Rehn Papers, AAA-SI.
308. HVP journal entry, June 1, 1967, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
309. HVP journal entry, June 6, 1967, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
310. HVP journal entry, June 15, 1967, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
311. HVP journal entry, August 3, 1967, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
312. HVP journal entry, October 21, 1967, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
313. HVP journal entries, October 24 - 25, 1967, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
314. HVP journal entry, October 27, 1967, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.

315. HVP journal entry, October 29, 1967, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
316. HVP journal entry, November 11, 1967, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
317. HVP journal entry, January 17, 1968, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
318. HVP journal entry, February 12, 1968, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
319. HVP journal entry, June 12, 1968, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
320. HVP journal entry, August 4, 1968, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
321. HVP journal entry, May 24, 1969, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
322. HVP journal entry, July 16, 1969, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
323. HVP journal entry, undated November, 1969, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
324. HVP journal entry, November 26, 1969, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
325. HVP journal entry, December 3, 1969, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
326. HVP journal entry, first 1970 entry, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
327. Carl Peterson acknowledgment letter to Mr. and Mrs. Charles Stone, July 3, 1970, BSMGA.
328. HVP journal entry, July 30, 1970, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
329. HVP journal entry, November 23-25, 1970, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
330. Stearns, p. 414.
331. Peter Poor email to the author, February 2, 2012.
332. Red Grooms to Anne Poor, December 9, 1970, HVP Papers, AAA-SI.
333. Undated editorial from *The Journal News*, Nyack, NY. Clipping from CAPS, Chapman, KS.
334. Bill Maudlin eulogy, quoted in Stearns, pp. 415-416.

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