THOMAS E. WOLFE: VALUING THE LIFE AND WORK OF AN APPALACHIAN REGIONALIST ARTIST WITHIN HIS COMMUNITY

Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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2012
Abstract

The purpose of my research is to offer insight into the life and work of Thomas E. Wolfe, who exhibits self-determination both as an artist and as an art educator in an Appalachian region of Southeastern Ohio. By presenting Wolfe’s life story, I make connections to the influences of culture, social experiences, regional identity, and family traditions that play to his development as an artist and art educator. My research questions focused on how he perceives himself, how others perceive his presence in the community, how his artwork is valued by his community and how his teaching practices helped develop a greater sense of community. Specifically, I was interested in which historical moments and events in his life that were important to him in recollecting his life story. In my narrative analysis of Wolfe’s life stories collected through oral history from Wolfe and 26 of his friends, family members, former students and community members, I considered selectivity, slippage, silence, intertextuality, and subjectivity to analyze his life story (Casey, 1993; Casey 1995-1996).

Thomas Eugene Wolfe began making art as a child and evolved into an accomplished artist. As an art educator he had a prolific teaching career that spanned forty plus years. During this time, Wolfe developed his artistic style as a Regionalist watercolor artist, one whose work reflected a rural Appalachian landscape, architecture, and culture of the Perry County, Ohio community in which he lives and taught.
The primary objective of this study is to document Wolfe’s life and art depicting the Perry County, Ohio region; and consider how his work might have influenced his community. Wolfe’s background and life stories are explored across both the similarities and differences from other Regionalist artists in order to situate a broader understanding of the many ways in which he, as an Appalachian Regionalist artist interacts with his community.

The literature review for this study involved chronicling the historical background of Regionalist artists in America in order to provide an artistic and social context for Wolfe and his work as both a teacher and as an artist. It also included an examination of Wolfe’s life, based on the oral histories I collected from the artist, his family, friends, and community members.

This research recognizes that self-determination and community involvement are significant components in creating a personal identity and in helping to construct a community identity. In analyzing the oral histories collected, the value of Wolfe’s artwork and presence within his community emerged. Through his paintings he has captured images of a vanishing local landscape, architecture, and culture that the community deeply appreciates. The community testimonies evidence a valuing of Wolfe’s images and his work to preserve the local history. As a Regionalist artist, and through his teaching practices, he has helped others to come to know and understand the value of art to this community.
Dedication

Dedicated to my grandfather, Thomas E. Wolfe, whose life serves as a lesson to work hard, be persistent, and to also have fun and make friends along the way.

To my mother, Beverly Jane Van Horn, who has always been an inspiration to attain great things and who has been supportive and loving through it all.

Finally, to my husband, Dr. Jon Michael Frey, for inspiring and motivating me to finish, and my sons, Timothy and Theodore, whose little hands were always reaching under the office door to say, “Hi mommy!” They kept me focused on what was important.
Acknowledgments

Though only my name appears on the cover of this dissertation, a great many people have contributed to its production. My deepest gratitude is to my mother, who painstakingly transcribed all of the fifty plus oral histories collected during the course of my research. Without her transcribed files of the audio recordings, I never would have finished my dissertation. She also provided financial and emotional support, but more importantly, several weeks of her life were dedicated to watching my twin sons so that I could have time to write. In addition, Julia Lathin provided much needed assistance.

I am grateful for my advisor, Dr. James Sanders. I have been amazingly fortunate to have an advisor who gave me the freedom to explore and research on my own and at the same time provided the guidance necessary to focus my study. Additionally, my dissertation committee members, Dr. Christine Ballengee Morris and Dr. Sydney Walker, were essential to the overall success of my dissertation. Also at The Ohio State University, I would like to show my appreciation to Sally Muster and Harry Campbell who provided advice and the facilities for me to properly clean and preserve artwork my grandfather created while in high school.

Finally, I am extremely appreciative of the participants in this study, namely my grandfather, Thomas E. Wolfe, and the 26 other individuals who volunteered their time and recounted stories to help me develop a fuller understanding of my grandfather’s life, work, and influence on the Perry County community.
Vita

February 17, 1973 ........................................Born – Zanesville, Ohio.

June 1991 ............................................................New Lexington High School

1994 ........................................................................B.A.E. Art Education, The Ohio State University

1995-1996 .............................................................Art Educator, Harpeth High School (Kingston Springs, TN)

1997 ........................................................................M.A. Art Education, The Ohio State University

2000-2003 .............................................................Art Educator, Chinese American International School (San Francisco, CA)

2003 to present .....................................................Graduate Student, Art Education, The Ohio State University

2006 to present .....................................................Visiting Instructor, College of Art, Art History and Design and College of Education, Michigan State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Art Education
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“A place will give up its stories if we tap the internal vein of human drama.”

- Ginette Aley (2008, p. 98)

Why Study an Appalachian Regionalist Artist?

Regionalism, also commonly referred to as American Scene Painting, was a style of painting that captured traditional rural imagery including the natural landscape and people of the Midwest. As a style of painting it took place alongside the Urban Regionalism movement, also happening in the U.S., and the modern European Abstract art movement which was gaining popularity both abroad and in the United States in the early part of the Twentieth Century. Regionalism reached its height of social acceptance between 1930 and 1935, however, its appreciation has gained momentum in the last few decades and its significance as a renewed movement has increased as the global community grows and, in effect, shrinks modern life. As more and more people become assimilated into the instant communication/news media global life, there is a growing demand for holding on to that which makes each region and place unique. Through studying the life and works of an Appalachian Regionalist artist, a greater understanding about regional culture and identity, as well as efforts to retain that culture, can be gained.
The selection of an Appalachian Regionalist artist over other Regionalist artists for this study was based mainly on two factors; the first is that I am from the same Appalachian region of Ohio as the artist and the second is that I have a very close relationship to the artist, Thomas E. Wolfe, in that he is my grandfather. Both factors contributed to my research since I could provide personal insight regarding the region and I could engage with the artist and his work on a more intimate level than someone who was an outsider to the family. Garry Barker notes the significance of having a native write about Appalachia, “We all have our own perceptions of our own worlds, but Appalachia has been dissected so often – and so often by sociologists, folklorists, and scholars from somewhere else – that native voices are usually ignored,” (1995, p. 7). Therefore, by selecting the Appalachian Regionalist artist that I did, my research has helped to allow native voices to be heard; including mine, my grandfathers, and the Perry County community members who took part in my research.

**Background on Author**

Where to begin is always the hardest part. So I will begin with what I know, I will begin with me. I became who I am today because of the narrative that has become my life. Therefore I have become an Art Educator because everything in my life has led me to this profession. I did not want to be an art teacher. I did not want to be in college any longer than I needed to be in order to get a degree. I did, however, want to pursue a degree that was art related. I should explain that although I grew up in an Appalachian region of Ohio, at the time I did not know what that meant nor did I feel underprivileged. My mother was a teacher and valued education, so I never felt like I had a choice about
going to college. It was an unspoken assumption that I would get a degree in something and I was encouraged to think about what I would like to study.

Being the youngest of three children, I feel that I was also always encouraged to pursue art more than my brother, Michael, and sister, Letitia. Well, I should not say encouraged. I should be honest. Michael and Letitia are just as creative and talented as I am, but I was able to wear my mother down more than they were ever able to. If you ask Michael, being the oldest, he would say that it was not fair that me and my siblings were not treated equally. In high school he had to take all of the advanced classes, including Calculus and Physics. Letitia somehow managed to convince my mother that she did not need to take Calculus, but she could not finagle her way out of Physics. I on the other hand was able to convince my mother that I would never need Calculus or Physics, and after hours of trying to dissuade me, finally gave in and allowed me to enroll in advanced art classes. Little did I know at the time that I should have listened to my mother, but I was just happy because I thought that I had won. After all, I thought that having significantly less homework to do than my siblings was the point of high school.

Well, the story of me being lazy did not stop there. When it came time to pick a university to apply to I didn’t want to research which discipline I would like to study. Nor did I want to read about and select from all of the universities sending me packets of information in the mail. My brother was at Ohio State studying engineering. My sister was at Ohio State studying agriculture education. My boyfriend at the time was at Ohio State studying political science. So, Ohio State seemed to be the place for me. I applied early and was accepted before winter break my senior year, so I just enjoyed my art classes all of spring, not thinking about what I would study upon arriving at OSU. It was
during the spring, though, that a former art student came into our class to visit with the art teacher, Ms. Terry McCray. Ms. McCray was my favorite teacher and I highly valued her opinion. So when she was talking to the former student, Ryan, I sat nearby and eavesdropped, hoping to hear something that would help me shine more in her favor. What I heard was how excited she was over Ryan’s selection of a major. He was pursuing an architecture degree and she was beaming with pride. So that settled it. I started my undergraduate program at The Ohio State University as an architecture major. I wanted to pursue a real profession; one that I thought would be looked up to not only by Ms. McCray, but by society as well. Societal acceptance was something that I was slowly becoming aware of as I was beginning to sense more and more what being Appalachian meant to people outside our community.

However, at the freshman orientation for Architecture majors, an OSU professor, whose name I cannot recall, said to all of us eager and excited students, “Look left. Now look right. Those people won’t be here next quarter.” I guess his prediction was correct, at least for me. After a quarter of being asked to think abstractly about art and architecture (something that my Appalachian education had not prepared me to do), studying advanced math, and the fear settling in that I would have to take physics after all, I left the major feeling extremely dejected.

In trying to think about what else I might like to study, I decided if I couldn’t design the buildings, the next best thing would be to design the interiors of buildings. My other thought at the time was that I loved to shop even though I did not have the money to support such a habit. Being an Interior Designer seemed desirable since I would be able to continue to shop but with other people’s money. I quickly went to the Art
Department at OSU hoping to change my major to interior design, only to find out that OSU did not have a FIDER accredited program. I was told that if a program was not FIDER accredited there would be no hope of me landing my dream job. So the search began; what did FIDER mean and who had a FIDER program? Since my search began before common use of the internet, it was a bit more of a challenge but I did find that FIDER stood for the Foundation for Interior Design Education Research. My search then led me to the University of Kentucky, and it also led me to many arguments and discussions with my parents about switching universities. The problem was not that it was far away, the problem was that it was out of state, i.e. more expensive. My brother and my sister were also both at OSU at the time, so the thought of spending even more money for tuition was not something my parents wanted to take on. But somehow I convinced them that I could take out student loans and be responsible for paying them back. So I applied to UK during my winter quarter at Ohio State and was accepted. I finished out spring and summer quarters at OSU so that I would transfer as a sophomore rather than a freshman, and then headed to Lexington.

I thoroughly enjoyed the classes at the University of Kentucky, but in all honesty, I was used to being close to home. I did not fare well being four hours away. I have always had a close relationship with my family since all of my extended family lives within three miles of my grandparents and I missed seeing them all on the weekends. Maybe on reflection, the Appalachian characteristic of valuing family was influencing my life more than I realized. Therefore, I only lasted one semester at UK. I returned home and, in trying to save my parents money and pay back my loans, attended OSU Newark and lived at home. Being back home provided me the opportunity to think about
the culture and family that I was accustomed to and I related my thoughts to the selection of a new major. My grandfather, grandmother, mother, and two uncles were all teachers and my father had served as the president of the school board. They valued education and I began to realize that I valued it too, so I declared my major Elementary Education. However, in selecting my courses at OSU Newark, I came across three art history courses that would fulfill some of the requirements for an Elementary Education degree. One course, HA 211, dealt with the history of art from the renaissance to the present. The second course was HA 212, the art of Africa, and the third course was Arts College 160 (which would later be changed to Art Ed 160) which focused on the history of art and music from 1945 to the present. Those three courses changed my career path once again. I was hooked on art history. I loved all of the courses tremendously, so I changed my major once again.

After two quarters at OSU Newark, I returned to the main campus and went to speak with a professor in the art history department about my future options as an art historian. I was very excited about the meeting going in, but left feeling very discouraged. He, Dr. Morganstern, suggested that in order to be more marketable, a master’s degree would be highly recommended, oh, and there was a language requirement that I would have to fulfill. Not one for wanting to be in school any longer than necessary, and also not seeing the value of learning a second language at the time, I started to look for a major that would allow me to use all of the courses I had already taken without losing any credits. I wanted out of school, but my parents would not let that happen without a degree, so I was very happy when I stumbled upon the Art Education
program at OSU. Not only could I use all of my courses previously taken to fulfill requirements for the major, I could also graduate within a year.

So, it was set, I was to become an art teacher. My grandfather would be proud, since he too was an art teacher. In fact, he was my art teacher near the end of his 42 years of teaching. When I thought about it, I was happy with my decision. I always enjoyed his classes and he always seemed to enjoy teaching. Hopefully I was going to be like him. I went through all of the course work, a year of student teaching, and then found a job teaching high school art just outside Nashville, Tennessee. I was having fun, but I also felt like something was missing, and not much had changed in the way of being homesick. So after a year of teaching, I returned to OSU to pursue my master’s degree, something that I never thought that I would do, but my parents felt that if I couldn’t find a job close to home, the next best thing would be to continue taking classes and work towards a graduate degree.

That year I pursued my thesis topic with a focus on museum education and thought that that would be my future career. I graduated with my M.A. at the end of summer in 1997 and anticipated finding a museum education position. I got engaged the following New Year’s eve at Times Square in New York and subsequently moved to California to live with my fiancé, Jon Frey, (a graduate student at U.C. Berkeley). I was excited to find a job at the Triton Museum of Art (in the South Bay area) as an outreach educator, but after commuting 2½ hours each way I only lasted 6 weeks as a museum educator. I then took at job at Berkeley as an archive assistant for the excavations at Nemea, Greece but eventual found a position teaching art at the Chinese American International School (CAIS) in San Francisco. Wow, what fun it was to be back in the
classroom! What a wonderful feeling to go to work every day teaching the sweetest children I had ever met. I found a second home with both the faculty and students at CAIS. I would have happily stayed there until it was time to retire, but my husband informed me that his studies would be taking him to Ohio for one year and then to Greece for two so that he could complete his Ph.D.

My choice of staying in the bay area alone was not financially feasible. So I began to look for other options and with the difficulties inherent in searching for jobs 3,000 miles away, I took my parents’ previous advice and went back to graduate school. I began pursuing my Ph.D. at OSU with a focus on the studio glass movement since I had recently taken classes on blowing glass and was completely mesmerized by glass as an artistic material. I completed course work during the 2003-2004 academic year and then moved to Greece so that my husband could complete his research at several archaeological sites. I tried to pursue my studies abroad by contacting a few Greek glass artists (Kostas Voratas and Nicos Troino) to see if I could work with and interview them, but in the end I spent most of my days teaching private English classes, editing text for another archaeological scholar, designing bed linens, and painting murals in private homes. It was not until my husband and I took teaching positions at Michigan State University in the fall of 2006 that I began to consider seriously pursuing my research again. However, on Thanksgiving of that year, my husband was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s Lymphoma and underwent chemotherapy and radiation treatment until July of 2007. As a result, I did not pass my candidacy exam until December of 2007.

Also during December of 2007, my husband was working on putting together a study abroad program in Greece for the following summer. As the program developed it
became evident that he would need a program assistant, but he had not factored that into the program’s budget. Therefore, I volunteered to help organize, supervise, and drive students around between May and June, 2008. After the students left that summer, Jon and I traveled to a friend’s dig on Cyprus and then went to work for another archaeologist on Crete in a cave no less. Well, somewhere between Cyprus and Crete I became pregnant and I would soon find out that I was carrying twins. No one was as surprised as we were since the doctors had told us that after Jon’s chemotherapy treatments, he would not be able to have children. With the gift that we were given, we decided that I should take exceptional care of myself and, as a result, basically stayed in bed for the next 9 months except on the days I was teaching. When the babies finally arrived in March of 2009, my dissertation was the furthest thing from my mind. It was only when they turned one, and were a bit more independent, that I felt comfortable returning to my research. But just as my life has changed dramatically in the last four years since I advanced to candidacy, the focus of my research has also changed dramatically. I have returned, as I always have, to my family and the place where I grew up. It is what I am comfortable with and it is what I know. So now, after this lengthy introduction, I can explain that this personal narrative of mine is leading to the personal narrative of my grandfather, Thomas E. Wolfe, the art teacher and Appalachian Regionalist artist that I have always admired and looked up to.

**Background on Artist**

My grandfather, Thomas (Tom, Tommie, Coach) Eugene Wolfe was born May 23, 1923. His parents, Franklin Pierce Wolfe and Maude (Hilliard) Wolfe married August 4, 1902 and lived the majority of their married life at 123 Lincoln Street in New
Lexington, Ohio. Tom likes to say he was born at the home on Lincoln Street because he wanted to be close to his mother. Table 1 contains a list of his and his siblings’ dates of birth, and death if the case may be, along with his parents.

Tom boasts that his father was very artistic, working as a pattern mould maker at the local Ludowici-Celadon tile plant, and while his mother raised her twelve children she also occasionally baked bread for others. He also commented that he enjoyed growing up with his siblings with a bit of a care free spirit about him since he was the youngest boy and had few chores to endure (and many sisters to dote on him). Like his father, Tom proved himself to be quite artistic and was asked to both design the cover for and illustrate his high school year book. In addition, he was the quarterback of his high school football team and upon graduation in May of 1942, knowing that he would be drafted, he signed up to serve with the Navy during World War II.

During service his right knee was injured on a gunner ship after it was hit from the recoil of a 3”/50 caliber gun and he received an honorable discharged on August 6th of 1943 at Norfolk, Virginia. Upon leaving the Navy Tom married his high school sweetheart, Thelma Letitia Smith on November 3, 1943. Letitia, as she was more affectionately known, was the daughter of Perry Jacob Lemuel Allen Smith, Sr. (12/10/1894 – 1/7/1978) and Thelma Jane (Shoemaker) Smith (10/8/1904 – 5/7/1982). Together Tom and Letitia had five children (see Table 2 below) and were married until Letitia’s death on October 10, 2004. They had been married 61 years.
Table 1: Record of Births and Deaths in Franklin and Maude Wolfe’s Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date of Birth:</th>
<th>Date of Death:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Franklin Pierce Wolfe</td>
<td>August 11, 1882</td>
<td>January 7, 1970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maude (Hilliard) Wolfe</td>
<td>January 24, 1885</td>
<td>November 29, 1966</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruth Irene Wolfe</td>
<td>February 4, 1903</td>
<td>May 6, 1904</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethel Marie (Wolfe) Christie</td>
<td>January 15, 1906</td>
<td>February 2, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ida May Wolfe</td>
<td>September 9, 1907</td>
<td>April 24, 1909</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James Franklin Wolfe</td>
<td>September 15, 1909</td>
<td>March 23, 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia Belle (Wolfe) Belinski</td>
<td>December 27, 1911</td>
<td>February 14, 1998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Evelyn (Wolfe) Shahan</td>
<td>August 25, 1913</td>
<td>February 14, 2002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Robert Wolfe</td>
<td>April 14, 1916</td>
<td>April 5, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russell William Wolfe</td>
<td>June 9, 1918</td>
<td>August 7, 1963</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah Maude (Wolfe) Harris</td>
<td>September 10, 1920</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Eugene Wolfe</td>
<td>May 23, 1923</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Louise (Wolfe) Ansel</td>
<td>June 2, 1925</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gladys Rose (Wolfe) King</td>
<td>July 1, 1928</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Record of Births and Deaths in Thomas and Letitia Wolfe’s Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Date of Birth:</th>
<th>Date of Death:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Eugene Wolfe</td>
<td>May 23, 1923</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thelma Letitia (Smith) Wolfe</td>
<td>June 6, 1926</td>
<td>October 10, 2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perry Thomas Wolfe</td>
<td>May 24, 1944</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beverly Jane (Wolfe) Van Horn</td>
<td>January 25, 1947</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Randy Smith Wolfe</td>
<td>September 25, 1950</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher Eugene Wolfe</td>
<td>October 12, 1954</td>
<td>April 14, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick Winfield Wolfe</td>
<td>May 21, 1957</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During their 61 years together, Tom attended The Ohio State University (OSU) under the G.I. Bill where he studied Physical Education, Science and Art. His first physical education teaching position was at Commercial Point, Ohio in 1945. He had several other teaching positions before settling into teaching art and science at the New Lexington City School’s Junior High. By the mid 1970s he was only teaching art and he held that position until his retirement in 1988. While teaching, Tom continued attending OSU off and on until his graduation. Having entered OSU on March 13, 1944, he did not graduate with a Bachelors of Science in Education until August in 1960.

Also during this time, he painted with watercolors, took up the practice of farming (moving to the family farm in Junction City, Ohio in 1953), and became involved in his local community. He took painting classes with Leland McClelland in Lancaster, Ohio and became friends with one of his art history professors, Ralph Fanning, who also
painted and had an influence on his personal artwork. In addition, he worked various other part time jobs, such as driving a school bus, coaching football and basketball teams, and welding. He also ran a small grocery store with Letitia in the one room building attached to their house in Bremen, Ohio during the early 1950s. This led him to also delivering produce to other small grocery stores along his drives back to Bremen from OSU.

During his career with New Lexington City Schools, he was joined by a few family members. My mother, Beverly Jane (Wolfe) Van Horn and my grandmother, Letitia, began teaching for New Lexington in the early 1970s and my uncle, Christopher Wolfe started in the latter half of that decade. My grandfather may have wanted to retire before 1988, but my mother made him promise to keep teaching until after he had taught me, her youngest child. To this day, he continues to be an active member of the Perry County community and still enjoys painting and in effect “preserving” images of the county to this day.

Statement of Purpose

To be honest, the original purpose of this study was to have the opportunity to talk at length with my grandfather to learn more about his life and work. This desire to research my grandfather came as the result of the lost opportunity to do so with my grandmother, Thelma Letitia. She was diagnosed with Leukemia two weeks after I moved to Greece in the fall of 2004. Before I left she seemed perfectly fine, it was the end of summer and she was tired often, but it was very hot that year and there was no other indication that anything was wrong. So when my mother called me in Greece to tell me she was in the hospital, I left the next day on a flight home. I spent time with her off
and on when other family members were not there and I would ask her questions, but she was tired and she could not always focus on the answers. Also, she had always been a very private person, so asking her to open up seemed a bit odd and out of character. She passed away two weeks after her diagnosis and I was left wanting to know more about her and my family’s history.

After advancing to candidacy and with my dissertation research looming, I spent the next five years hemming and hawing around the topic of the Studio Glass Movement before being brave enough to admit to myself and to my advisor, Dr. James Sanders, III, that I wanted to change my topic to my grandfather in January of 2010. Based on conversations with Dr. Sanders, I decided that I wanted to explore the value of Regionalist artists and their contribution to local communities. By focusing on my grandfather, Thomas E. Wolfe, as a study of an individual Appalachian Regionalist artist and his influence on his local Perry County, Ohio community, my hope at the time was to be able to theorize about Regionalist artists in general. What actually came to fruition, though, was a study of Thomas Wolfe and his work as an artist and art educator as viewed through a critical theory lens which examined class issues with regards to the Appalachian community in which he taught and worked. Issues regarding my grandfather’s romanticized images of Perry County are not the focus of my research and are thus not addressed here.

According to University of California Berkeley Psychology Professor, John F. Kihlstrom, critical theory is an expression of postmodernism, in that it argues that meanings are essentially arbitrary social constructions, and that alternative “readings” are not only possible but essential. Oral history could take one of two positions.
On the one hand, if one participant's memories are considered as valid as another's, the exercise would seem to be somewhat post-modernistic in nature. On the other hand, if the purpose of the confrontation [collection of stories] is to get at the truth of what really happened, then the exercise is modernistic…,” (Kihlstrom, 2012, para.6, emphasis in the original).

The focus of my work was not in finding a truth from the stories collected; rather it was on listening to the voices of the artist and how those in his community regard his work. In setting out, I decided to include an investigation into Thomas Wolfe’s influence on his community as well as biographically construct a record of his life and work based largely in oral histories. Oral history is one of the methodologies that Peter Burke’s contributor, Gwyn Prins, addresses in his book, *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (1991). In discussing ‘The new history’ Burke notes that it, is history written in deliberate reaction against the traditional ‘paradigm’, that useful if imprecise term put into circulation by the American historian of science Thomas Kuhn…We might also call this paradigm the common-sense view of history, not to praise it but to make the point that it has often – too often – been assumed to be the way of doing history, rather than being perceived as one among various possible approaches to the past. (Burke, 1991, p. 3)

The new history is not easily defined since new historians are entering into new territory, but Burke lists a number of reasons for the addition of the new history into historical research by critically examining the traditional methods for historical data collection. I considered a few of Burke’s reasons, according to the traditional paradigm mentioned in the above quote, in that history is almost always concerned with politics, it
offers a view from above of the great deeds of great men, and is objective in relaying the facts. What Burke notes and I find to be relevant to my selection of oral history as my methodology, is that the new history, “has come to be concerned with virtually every human activity. ‘Everything has a history,’ as the scientist J.B.S. Haldane once wrote; that is, everything has a past which can in principle be reconstructed and related to the rest of the past,” (Burke, 1991, p. 3). He further notes that, “The philosophical foundation of the new history is the idea that reality is socially or culturally constructed,” (Burke, 1991, p. 3) and that, “Our minds do not reflect reality directly. We perceive the world only through a network of conventions, schemata and stereotypes, a network which varies from one culture to another,” (Burke, 1991, p. 6).

Prins continues Burke’s line of thought regarding the traditional paradigm’s approach to history from above. She notes that Paul Thompson, a strong proponent of and leader in the field of oral history, “champions the value of oral sources in modern social history as giving historical presence to those whose views and values are disenfranchised by ‘history from above’,” (Prins, 1991, p. 115). She also notes Jan Vansina’s deep passion for oral sources within non-literate societies.

Although none of the participants in my research are illiterate, there are several non-literate individuals in the Perry County community so Vasina’s passion resonated with me. Furthermore, Perry County as an Appalachian region is not well represented in traditional historical records; therefore the concept of giving historical presence to the community was very appealing. Thus the oral history methodology was selected for the framework of my research. Oral stories of family, friends, community members, and numerous conversations with the artist himself were recorded. After many hours of
transcription from voice recordings, over 1500 pages of written texts were amassed. I am extremely grateful to my mother for her transcription services. Without the written texts an analysis of the collected data would have been next to impossible.

I also looked at my grandfather’s life history as documented in official records, media coverage, and exhibition records, and I worked to record and note the significance of his artistic production. In collecting and publishing these oral histories/stories, the tongue of native speakers (with the exception of two individuals), have expanded the written information available about Thomas E. Wolfe and I was thereby able to analyze his influence and community involvement as a regionalist artist, and I hope to encourage others in the field to critically consider documenting other Appalachian artists.

Additionally, I hope to pique interest and promote further research by art educators and other academics who could be documenting other Appalachian artists’ stories. It should be mentioned that the research achieved its original intended focus. I was able to spend a significant amount of time talking with my grandfather and I enjoyed spending time with others who taught me more about my family’s history. I also learned from my research that my grandfather’s self-determination and community involvement are significant components in creating and constructing one’s personal identity as well as helping to construct a community’s identity. As noted in *Culture, identity, representation: the economic policies of heritage tourism*, with regards to self-determination’s relationship to one’s community,

Self-determination is in part defined by one’s membership in a given community, a definition illustrated by the tale that Jim [Sanders] recounts of retrieving his job application slides from a search committee member’s workplace. About to enter
that office, an exiting janitor remarks, ‘Why you’re Virgie Patterson’s grandson ain’t ya? I used to play pool and fish with your grandpa Clarence. Fine man he was’. What serendipity, that this family friend was there to affirm my lineage for Leo Rainey, a regional economic development specialist for the Arkansas Agricultural Extension Service, and advisor to the Ozark Foothills Handicraft Guild, just days before I assumed its executive director position. Neil Crowe’s comment confirmed I was of local stock, even if I did have a Yankee accent. (Ballengee Morris & Sanders, 2009, p. 135).

**Significance of the Study**

Deedee Wigmore wrote, regarding the initial American Scene and Regionalist Movement, in the introduction to *American Scene Painting and Sculpture: Dominant Styles of the 1930’s and 1940’s*,

The result of this powerful amalgam of depression, nationalism, idealism, government support and critical acclaim was the creation of a uniquely American style. While Europe rushed into surrealism and abstraction, The American Scene Movement absorbed influences from The Hudson River School, The Ash Can School, Folk Art, and the Mexican muralists to create a rich realistic style that has always been recognized as such in Europe, but which has only recently regained attention in America. (1988, pp. 3-4)

This renewal of interest has led to a renewal of the movement by contemporary regionalists, but it has also provided the impetus to learn more about previous regionalists. Identifying and researching regionalist artists that do not include the most commonly cited, namely the *triumvirate* of artists who are attributed as the major
founding figures: Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood, has significant importance in properly defining the stylistic movement. Therefore my research will provide others the opportunity to learn about the locally renowned, but otherwise unknown, artist and art educator, Thomas E. Wolfe, whose artwork has influenced his students and the community members of the Perry County Appalachian region of Ohio where he lives and works. The need to learn more about individual regionalists is evidenced in *Regionalism and the Humanities*, which documents the papers presented at the 2003 Consortium of Regional Humanities Centers national conference.

…the general perception shared by most of the humanists at the conference: in a modern world increasing homogenized and standardized by the forces of globalization, the regionalist impulse is still very much alive. Once viewed as a reaction against the forces of modernism, it has emerged in a globalized world as a repackaged, more aggressive endeavor to make a claim for the role of place and space…in the effort to understand ourselves and what it means to be human. What distinguishes regionalism from these other efforts at self-understanding is its focus on locating oneself in the space lived in, inhabited, made home, or traveled through…the ongoing erosion of space and place as factors in identity formation in modern life has given regionalism its continuing impetus, indeed, its renewed urgency and vitality. (Mahoney & Katz, 2008, pp. iv-v)

Another factor which helps to define the significance of my study is the fact that the Midwest is a ghost among regions, meaning that it is underrepresented in scholarly text. Many times it is either overlooked as being culturally rich or is labeled with grossly
inaccurate stereotypes. Ginette Aley mentions in her article, “Dwelling within the Place Worth Seeking: The Midwest, Regional Identity, and Internal Histories,” that reviews of Midwest studies point out the lack of scholarship, especially of larger interpretive works. She also notes that,

Recent reviews have labeled the region historiographically as a “forgotten province when it is not [being] denigrated,” …The underlying problem is that historians still do not know enough about the region’s history – its major and minor dramas, characters, plots, subplots, themes, and so on – and this prevents identification of those things that distinguish it from (and, conversely, connect it with) other regions. (Aley, 2008, p. 99)

In an effort to provide more historical text regarding the Midwest in general and about the Southeastern Ohio’s Appalachian Perry County region specifically, it is important to recognize the value of distinguishing between the distinctive regions within the Midwest and not using one to define all regions within a given locale. Stephen C. Behrendt notes of such difficulties in his article “Regionalism and the Realities of Naming,”

Complications seem inevitably to arise whenever one tries to define either regionalism in general or a specific region like the South or Great Plains or to categorize the art and artifacts that come from or relate to that area by means of such language. (Behrendt, 2008, p. 150)

Aley also mentions this aspect of regionalism, “In the case of the West, for example, many ‘Wests’ exist and have existed…” (2008, p. 97). Just as many Appalachian regions
exist and have existed. One method that she has employed to deal with this difficulty is by,

adapting feminist standpoint theory’s “situated” framework to theorizing regionality and interpreting regional histories. This is, the concept of a situated framework encourages both narrative writing and interpretation about a place from within it, in order to create an internal perspective, grounded by the scholar’s articulated (and situated) perspective and knowledge…This avoids the problem of universalizing identities and experiences within and across regions and stimulates a paradigmatic discourse on distinctiveness. (Aley, 2008, p. 97)

In the case of my research, I work to provide both personal and group narratives with regards to my grandfather and his work as situated within the Appalachian region in which I grew up and where my grandfather continues to live and paint. The importance of researching him as an artist should not be overlooked since he helped to shape a region’s distinctiveness and, in a sense, identity through the visual images he created. A comparison between writers and artists can be made to understand this importance. As Guy Reynolds points out,

When we talk about writers, we often think in regionalist or nationalist terms: novelists or poets explore “authentic” features of a culture, giving voice to the deep structures of a region. Writers have their “place,” which they embody in writing; in marking the page with words, they also mark the terrain. (2008, p. 79)

Whereas an author uses words which “marks the terrain” and helps to define a region, an artist uses his brush and paint, creating visual images and replacing text as a means of establishing distinctiveness. Understanding distinctiveness, with regards to a specific
region, expands the appreciation of one’s national identity, and ultimately it helps us as an individual define our identity, further attesting to the significance of this study. As noted in the introduction to Sources of Regionalism in the Nineteenth Century: Architecture, Art and Literature, “The many layers of the ‘concept’ of identity are here related to the different regions, each of which has its own particular identity that can differ sharply from the national identity while at the same time being a building block of that identity,” (Van Santvoort, De Maeyer, & Verschaffel, 2008, p. 9). Therefore, this study helps to define the identity of Thomas Wolfe, his Perry County community and the Appalachian region where he lives and works.

**Guiding Questions**

The most important objectives guiding this research and collection of oral histories have been; firstly, to gain a better understanding of my grandfather’s life and work and; secondly, to get a sense of how his artistic creations, teachings, and presence within the Appalachian region of Ohio in which Perry County is situated, influenced the cultural identity of that area. The following questions further focused my study and allowed me to meet my objectives.

1. What is “story worthy” about Thomas E. Wolfe’s life and work; which historical moments and events were important to him in telling his life story?

2. How do those stories, along with other participants’ stories, construct his personal history and identity?

3. What value is there in viewing and understanding his works of art by both Perry County Appalachians and outsiders?

4. In what ways has Wolfe influenced his local Appalachian community and region?
Overview of Research Design

A more thorough description of the research methodologies I employed in this study can be found in Chapter 3, but the following constitutes a brief outline of the qualitative research methods that framed my dissertation. First, it was important to consider how my grandfather’s history was to be constructed. As Sharan Merriam states in *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, “Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world,” (1998, p. 6, emphasis in original). I decided that the best source for information regarding his personal history would be him, and also felt that other family, kin, friends, acquaintances, and community members could help to expand upon Wolfe’s own oral history. Therefore, I decided that I would use the methodology of oral histories as the primary basis for the data I collected. I feel the same as Valerie J. Janesick who notes in her preface to her book *Oral History for the Qualitative Researcher: Choreographing the Story*, “I have often said that I did not find oral history; rather, oral history found me,” (2010, p. v). When reviewing my options for research design, oral history kept gaining my attention over other methods for data collection and I soon realized that I was not alone in my interest. As Janesick comments,

Oral history is of interest in many disciplines…Likewise, oral history is an interpretive activity of communication that is extremely active in the technological environment of the postmodern era. In addition, in this postmodern era, in-depth interviews are still the quintessential substantive dataset. Most important, memory is a fascinating part of the social world and of our individual
lives and contributes to the documentation of oral history projects. (2010, pp. 13-14)

As a means for analyzing and presenting the data collected, I created an experience narrative of my grandfather’s life based on the transcribed oral histories. I then was able to review the narrative to identify distinct, and sometimes similar, qualities within stories that helped to clarify how my grandfather is perceived within his community. Reoccurring themes (intertextualities) were identified and examined, the analyses of which are the subject of Chapter 5.

**Selectivity, Slippage, Silence, Intertextuality and Subjectivity**

Probably the most obvious limitation to my research is the possibility of misinterpretation of the narratives created based on my data collection and interpretation of the oral histories. But limitations of the study can also be the responsibility of those sharing their oral histories. As Kathleen Casey notes in *I Answer with My Life: Life Histories of Women Teachers Working for Social Change*, “in all life stories, there are selectivities and emphases, and the particular details and their ordering, as well as the implicit and explicit understanding in which they are set,” (1993, p. 30). When someone tells their life story, either through personal narrative, oral history or while interacting on a daily basis, they do so by selecting what they want to share with their listeners. Furthermore, as Casey quotes Todorov, “no utterance in general can be attributed to the speaker exclusively; it is the product of the interactions of the interlocution, and broadly speaking, the product of the whole complex social situation in which it occurred,” (1993, p. 26).
Therefore, I needed to consider *intertextualities* along with *selectivities* present in the collected data. Selectivity is what those sharing their stories choose to reveal from their history and intertextuality is the process of searching for patterns and themes with the stories provided. Casey draws upon Bakhtin, to examine and analyze the oral histories collected not as evidence of a true past, but as remembered through a plurality of meanings and situations.

The plurality of social situations creates a multiplicity of languages, according to Bakhtin, for, like society, “a language is stratified not only into dialects in the strict sense of the word,” but also “into languages that are socio-ideological,” such as languages belonging to professions or generations. “This stratification and diversity of speech will spread wider and penetrate to even deeper levels as long as a language is alive and still in the process of becoming” (Bakhtin in Holquist, p. xix). So, for example, in this book the language of the teaching profession is further stratified by gender dialects, by religious dialects, and so forth. (Casey, 1993, p. 21)

I steadfastly attempted to sustain an awareness of the same types of variations in dialects within my research. Similarly, M. White, in discussing narrative analysis, identifies the construction of the past through a plurality of factors.

The stories that persons live by are rarely, if ever, “radically constructed” – it is not a matter of them being made-up, “out of the blue,” so to speak. Our culturally available and appropriate stories about personhood and about relationships have been historically constructed and negotiated in communities of persons, and
within the context of social structures and institutions. (as cited in Riessman, 1993, p. 65)

Moreover, Casey asserts that in researching personal narratives, one should be attentive to silences and slippages that modify and adjust the research participants’ history in addition to selectivities and intertextualities (Casey, 1993). Silences are pauses in the dialogue; moments when the narrator chooses to omit details or events from their stories being shared. Slippages occur when one part of a story contradicts another part of the story. For example, in telling their life stories, participants had moments of silence perhaps taking time to consider what to share, what to keep silent, or how to organize their thoughts in order to continue their stories. The participants may not have been conscious of these silences, but they were evident to me as the researcher and they were noted in the transcriptions of the interviews. I was also aware of, “‘Factual disparities’ or discontinuities between the structural and the cultural readings [that] become, in the Popular Memory Group’s alternative epistemology, sources of valuable insight, not problems of distortion,” (Casey, 1993, p. 12) that Casey labels as slippages.

The Popular Memory Group (PMG) envisioned their project as an extension of political practice: “History—in particular popular memory—is a stake in the constant struggle for hegemony,” (PMG, 1982, p. 213). The group sought to use history as a tool to challenge common sense notions of the world and organically assist social groups in acquiring an awareness of the broad context of collective struggles. The goal was to use history and memory as a vehicle for engendering competence at transforming the world into a better place (PMG, 1982, p. 214). Therefore, the Popular Memory Group’s view of these slippages was important to me and my research especially since my research
focused on the economically depressed Perry County Appalachian region and my grandfather, who at almost 89 years of age had several slippages throughout my data collection (as will be reviewed in Chapter 5). Rather than view such slippages as a distortion or negative aspect of the collection process, following the opinion of the PMG, others, like me, can come to view his slippages as a positive component to this research. As Casey mentions, regarding the PMG’s view, “The principal value of oral history is that its information comes complete with evaluations, explanations, and theories, with selectivities [slippages] and silences, which are intrinsic to its representation of reality,” (Casey, 1993, p. 13). Therefore, in conducting my narrative analysis of the stories I collected through oral history methodology, I used selectivity, slippage, silence, and intertextuality to help analyze and construct my grandfather’s life story (Casey, 1993; Casey 1995-1996).

I also considered my subjectivity as the researcher, that included my emotions and life experiences that related to the stories that I was collecting. It was important that I was cognizant of how my personal thoughts and emotions regarding the oral histories collected might influence my research and my interpretation of the data. “Our identities and life experiences shape the political and ideological stances we take in our research,” (Kleinman & Copp, 1993, p. 10). Therefore, I needed to be aware of how I felt about my grandfather, both in the past and currently. Having grown up in the same Perry County Appalachian community in which he lives and then moving away as an adult, I needed to maintain attentiveness to my subjectivity towards the region in general and specifically with regards to how I now feel like an outsider even though all of the participants in my research treated me like family; like I was one of them. Therefore, care was also taken so
as to not make false generalizations about the Appalachian region, or the Midwest for that matter, based on my subjectivity toward my research.

Another factor, that my subjectivity as the researcher is also based on the fact that I am documenting my own family’s oral history, should be mentioned. In order to conduct this research in the manner that I have, Thomas E. Wolfe needed to be very familiar and comfortable with me. Casey notes that, “Only by being an ‘insider,’ someone who identified with and sympathized with the person speaking, could I become part of the conversation,” (1993, p. 18). Because I was an insider I was able to spend days off and on for over two years asking him questions, sorting through old papers, going through garages and barns, looking at and handling original works of art. The privileges to interact with him and conduct searches in this manner would not have happened for a researcher outside of our family.

But this closeness to Wolfe also had its limitations and disadvantages. It was hard to separate myself from the collected material in order to analyze it. As Angela Zusman mentions, “This relatively simple format of getting family members to talk to and about each other can be effectively utilized within an oral history project. As with larger, community-based oral histories, family-based projects can amass valuable anecdotal information and historical documents,” (2010, p. 22). For myself, it became very challenging deciding which valuable documents and artifacts to include in my dissertation, and in doing so, I have interjected my own subjectivity into the research at hand.

Additionally, many times, I felt like I could not press my grandfather for answers. His stories would often overlap, leaving many stories without a definitive or conclusive
ending. Perhaps other researchers would have felt comfortable with going back and asking him again and again until he could fill in the blanks, but I know him too well. I could sense when he became frustrated with his own failing memory and when he showed signs of fatigue. I also know that he does not like to be corrected, and asking him to go back and retell a story is a form of correction that I often feared would upset him and keep him from sharing more with me.

Furthermore, I should mention the consideration that needs to be taken into account when recognizing the generation gap between myself, the interviewer, and my grandfather, the interviewee.

An intergenerational oral history goes one step further than a traditional oral history by specifying exactly who participates. This form of oral history brings together people of different generations, generally youth and elders, for the purpose not only of collecting stories but also creating a bridge between generations. In addition to contributing to history, this story bridge opens up new worlds for both parties. (Zusman, 2010, p. 20)

The new worlds my grandfather constructed for me at times, proved to be a limitation since it was hard to learn some stories about my family’s history, as I am sure that it was hard for my grandfather to share them.

**Conclusion: Overview of Chapters**

This chapter provided a general background about me as the author and the artist, my grandfather, as well as an overview of my research purpose and methodology. In the next chapter, I provide a historical account of the Regionalist Movement in the United States through a review of relevant literature. As previously mentioned, Chapter 3 is a
more in-depth presentation of my research methodology. This is followed by the constructed history of my grandfather’s life and work in Chapter 4. An analysis of historical records, oral testimonies, and reflections concerning his impact on the Perry County community are explained in Chapter 5 and in the final chapter I offer my thoughts on the potential implications of my research for the field of art education and offer recommendations for researchers interested in furthering this line of research.
CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH CONTEXT

All the good ideas I ever had came to me while I was milking a cow. –Grant Wood

Regionalism is a stylistic movement within American art history. It is part of the Social Realism movement and is also known as American Scene Painting. Table 3 provides approximate dates for Regionalism and the various movements that came before and after Regionalism based on information collected from arthistoryguide.com, artyfactor.com, and the art history for dummies website, dummies.com.

Table 3: Time Line for Art Historical Movements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Romanticism</td>
<td>1765-1850</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realism</td>
<td>1840-1880</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impressionism</td>
<td>1870-1890</td>
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<tr>
<td>Post Impressionism</td>
<td>1885-1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fauvism and Expressionism</td>
<td>1905-1910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modernism</td>
<td>1915-1945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regionalism (Social Realism)</td>
<td>1920-1940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract Expressionism</td>
<td>1946-1956</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstraction</td>
<td>1930-1969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surrealism</td>
<td>1924-1939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimalism</td>
<td>1960-1975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postmodernism</td>
<td>1970-Present</td>
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</tbody>
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31
This chapter is broken into four sections: Setting the Stage for Regionalism, Regionalism, Downfall of Regionalism, and Second Generation Regionalist Artist, Thomas Wolfe. The first three sections provide relevant historical events pertaining to the emergence of, appreciation for, and downfall of Regionalism. The final section looks at Thomas Wolfe, as an artist who continued to work in a Regionalist style even after Regionalism fell out of public favor.

**Setting the Stage for Regionalism**

Historical events often lead to changes in direction for the art world. The events of October 29 (Black Tuesday), 1929, are no exception, but this one day did not change the art world overnight. Many events led up to the stock market crash, and those events also shaped the changes taking place in American art, both literally and visual.

As Wayne Craven alludes to in his book *American Art: History and Culture*, during the final decades of the nineteenth century, Americans endured a cultural tug-of-war with Europe. Although many American authors and painters traveled to Europe for training and/or inspiration, not all hailed Europe as the great cultivator of the arts. He notes that there was a very strong pro-American sentiment in which Mark Twain firmly believed, and is evidenced by his account of his first trip abroad in *Innocents Abroad* which Craven quotes:

> We had cared nothing much about Europe. We galloped through the Louvre, the Pitti, the Uffizi, the Vatican – all the galleries – and through the pictured and frescoed churches of Venice, Naples, and the cathedrals of Spain; some of us said that certain of the great works of the old masters were glorious creations of genius…, and the others said they were disgraceful old daubs. We examined
ancient and modern statuary with a critical eye in Florence, Rome, or any where we found it, and praised it if we saw fit, and if we didn’t we said we preferred the wooden Indians in front of the cigar stores of America. (2003, p. 329)

Twain’s views were seen as being very realistic and based on common sense, and this realistic view carried over to the realism that was present in both his and his contemporaries’ fictional writings, as well as evidenced in his visual counterparts’ artwork. For the purposes of this dissertation, the work of Winslow Homer will serve as an example of the tug-of-war over the acceptance of realism in the visual arts during that time.

Homer was born in Boston in 1836 and apprenticed to a lithographer there between 1857 and 1859 before moving to New York to become a freelance illustrator for such periodicals as Harper’s Weekly. He was mainly self-taught, and although he did spend almost a year in Paris after the Civil War, he remained a realist throughout his career. This realistic representation of nature in Homer’s work, however, was not appreciated by all. As Henry James recorded in his review of a New York art exhibition with specific references to Homer’s painting Milking Time (Figure 2.1):

Mr. Homer goes in…for perfect realism, and cares not a jot for such fantastic hair-splitting as the distinction between beauty and ugliness. His is a genuine painter; that is, to see, and to reproduce what he sees, is his only care; to think, to imagine, to select, to refine, to compose…, all this Mr. Homer triumphantly avoids. He not only has no imagination, but he contrives to elevate this rather blighting negative into a blooming and honorable positive. He is almost barbarously simple, and, to our eye, he is horribly ugly; but there is nevertheless
something one likes about him. What is it? For ourselves, it is not his subjects. We frankly confess that we detest his subjects – his barren plank fences, his glaring, bold, blue skies, his big, dreary, vacant lots of meadows, his freckled, straighthaired [sic] Yankee urchins, his flatbreasted [sic] maidens, suggestive of a dish of rural doughnuts and pie, his calico sunbonnets, his flannel shirts, his cowhide boots. He has chosen the least pictorial features of the least pictorial range of scenery and civilization; he has resolutely treated them as if they were pictorial, as if they were every inch as good as Capri or Tangiers; and to reward his audacity, he has incontestably succeeded. (Craven, 2003, p. 330)

Figure 2.1. Winslow Homer, *Milking Time*, oil on canvas, 1875 (Delaware Art Museum)
William Kloss, an independent art historian associated with the Smithsonian and
the White House, as well as a lecturer for the Teaching Company, is able to look at
*Milking Time* retrospectively and has a very different take than Henry James. He is also
able to view Homer’s travel to Paris with a bit more attention to the influence this
experience may have had on Homer’s American style of painting. From a lecture Kloss
prepared for the Teaching Company:

Homer turns to the land, to rural America; that's where the sustenance is. It's like
looking for roots, and after the war and in the 1870s in particular, he turns to the
land. *Milking Time* is the name of this painting...When Milking Time was
exhibited, it was criticized for the fence: "The eye cannot but be offended by the
straight lines supposed to represent rails, occupying the most important point in
the composition." In fact, Homer was, here, shall we say, a modern artist, and he
was, as the same critic said, "pushing his individuality too far." Yet pushing the
envelope (in the modern vernacular) to make a strong, individual painting is what
Homer was doing. Those rails organize the surface, rather abruptly to be sure, but
they also established the basis for the grid created when the two vertical figures
were placed in front of them. And, by the way, look at the woman: The rails,
which were painted first, show through the dress...That milking time is here is
known from the title, and I presume the young woman waits for the boy to take
pail and stool from her, but since she looks away, we can't see if she speaks to
him. What we do see in her is one of the most classically conceived figures in
American art, not a supple nude of the 5th or 4th century B.C. in Greece but an
archaic Greek figure. Her arms are contained inside the contour of her body; the pleats of her dress hang like the flutes of a column. I have always distrusted Homer's assertion that he didn't learn much about art in Paris during his 10 months there in 1865-1866. We know he was in the Louvre; he did a drawing of the Grand Gallery for a wood engraving in Harper's. The Louvre was a large museum even then, but I think that he probably found the Classic galleries, and when he did, he found the statue, or kore, known popularly as the *Hera of Samos*, from the early 6th century BCE. I offer it to you for what you may make of it, but I find it not necessarily this work, though it's likely—but other archaic Greek sculptures gave him that sense of Classical columnar form to translate into his rural setting. (Kloss, 2010, para. 23-26)

Kloss touches upon the fallacy that Homer didn’t learn much while in Paris. As part of the cultural tug-of-war that existed in the U.S., perhaps Homer did not want to admit that he did in fact learn valuable artistic skills or that he was inspired by the art and sculptures he viewed while abroad. Many Americans at that time mocked the style of European art, and turned to American Realism instead. As Craven notes in support of Walt Whitman’s “Starting from Paumanok,” “America’s time has come. As an heir to European culture, having learned from it, it is time to dismiss it. America must rise to its own glorious place in the sun, on the strength of its own culture,” (2003, p. 330).

This sense of pro-American sentiment carried over into the new century with such writers as Upton Sinclair and art critics such as Hamlin Garland. Sinclair drew attention to the realities of life for immigrants in *The Jungle* and Garland called for art that was not based on European traditions and that favored themes from real life. In the visual arts,
John Sloan and Andrew Wyeth carried realism into the twentieth century. Sloan was a member of "The Eight" (a group of artists) who exhibited as a group at the Macbeth Gallery in New York in 1908.

Eight painters—Robert Henri, John Sloan, Everett Shinn, William Glackens, George Luks, Ernest Lawson, Maurice Prendergast, and Arthur B. Davies—collaborated not due to their formal affinities but in their desire for academy-independent exhibitions. Cast as a band of renegades bent on overthrowing the established regime, many of these same artists joined together to plan the Armory Show as the Association of American Painters and Sculptors (AAPS). (American Studies, 2010, para. 4)

The exhibition originated at New York’s Macbeth Galleries and was seen as a reaction against the, “National Academy of Design (NAD) which was the most influential presence in the American art scene...NAD was a fundamentally conservative and elitist association of artists that held annual exhibitions of primarily European art,” (Osborne, 2009, para. 2). The Eight exhibition later traveled around the U.S to nine different cities between March, 1908 and May, 1909. The act of touring the exhibition helped to broaden the independent movement into a national campaign. Judith Zilczer, in her article “The Eight on Tour, 1908-1909”, cites a Philadelphia reporter’s account of the exhibition.

“The Eight” exhibit has been traveling for sometime in the West, has been shown in Chicago, Toledo and Detroit…These strong individualists have created a commotion, irritated the placidity of those who wish to stand still, and jarred the taste of those whose cult it is to consider art as a sort of concoction of “pleasing
artificialities.” On the whole, this exhibition has been a success – making many friends and bringing home to the American public something of the principle of real art. (1984, p.21)

The Eight had different artistic styles but agreed on the main themes and subjects. The Talking Proud, Service & Sacrifice website provides the article, From McSorley’s Pub to the Ashcan Art Movement, our American Heritage is Fun, which mentions, “This is a most interesting group of artists, in part because they were rebellious at a time when a little rebellion in the country was sorely needed,” (Talking Proud, 2003, para. 11). The article goes on to cite, Richard Schiff’s writings for sohoart.com, entitled “The Ashcan School, America’s first and only National Movement,” in which he wrote:

Spurning the safe road of genteel society portraiture, for which they were all trained, The Eight painted men and machines at work, women at leisure. In time their brand of personalized realism earned them the nickname, "The Ashcan School". Robert Henri, who had taught four of the eight, insisted that artists should "make pictures from life," and the city life these artists saw was not fixed in one stiff pose…”Forget about art!” Robert Henri told his classes, "and paint pictures of what interests you in life,”… The group's preference for ordinary people and commonplace settings came only partly from Henri’s teaching. For Glackens, Luks, Shinn and Sloan it also came from their training as newspaper artists. Rapidly and accurately they had sketched the news of the day: murders, fires and parades. As painters they retained their eye for the immediate scene. Detesting false charm, they expressed the moods and caught the excitement of the
city as no American artists had done before them. (Talking Proud, 2010, para. 12-14)

The Ashcan School, or rather the term, grew out of the group of eight artists, with Glackens, Henri, Luks, Everett Shinn, and Sloan being associated with both. However, unlike The Eight, the Ashcan School was not a formal, organized group. Rather, their unity consisted of a desire to tell some truths about the city and they were viewed as revolutionary not because of their artistic style but rather because of the realistic subject matter that they rendered. The subject matter was rooted in the truth of everyday life and often depicted unpleasant scenes including those from the working class, alleys, bars, and streets.

The tug-of-war between European and American art and culture could once again be seen in the critical writings relating to The Eight exhibition. Although many critics found the subject matter in the paintings bold and untraditional, others noted that compared to their French counterparts, The Eight were hardly revolutionary. Zilczer cites James Gibbons Huneker from the New York Sun,

The truth is that New York in the matter of art is provincial. Any young painter recently returned from Paris or Munich – the Munich of the Secessionists – would call the exhibition of the eight painters very interesting but far from revolutionary. (1984, p. 35)

Zilczer further cites William B. McCormick from the New York Press,

Surely it is not “revolutionary” to follow in the footsteps of the men who were the rage in artistic Paris twenty years ago. Nor is it “a new departure in American art” to paint after the manner of Manet, Degas, and Monet… (1984, p. 35)
However revolutionary these artists were viewed, as mentioned above, several of them helped to organize the Armory Show in 1913, which was viewed as overwhelmingly revolutionary, with many classifying the exhibition as the first real presence of Modernism on American soil. The University of Virginia American Studies program’s provides a virtual Armory Show website which includes the article, *As Avant-Garde as the Rest of Them: An Introduction to the 1913 Armory Show*, which notes,

> America in 1913 was primed for an artistic revolt, specifically through the guise of an art exhibition. Though not all actions outside New York’s official art organ, the National Academy of Design, were couched in terms of rebellion, revolutionary rhetoric came thundering out for the 1908 exhibition of the Eight, seen as the American predecessor to the Armory Show. (American Studies, 2010, para. 4)

As the Armory Show was being organized, more than a few journalists began writing about the impending exhibition.

…journalists described the exhibition as an invasion of modern art on America. In the *New York Times* and *Sun*, headlines like "It Will Throw a Bomb Into Our Art World and a Good Many Leaders Will be Hit" and "Cubist, Futurists, and Post Impressionists Win First Engagement, Leaving the Enemy Awestruck" greeted the public, emphasizing the paintings of Duchamp, Matisse, and Picabia and the sculpture of Brancusi as intellectual warfare. (American Studies, 2010, para. 1)
The Armory Show, officially known as The International Exhibition of Modern Art, took place between February 13th and March 13th, 1913 at the 69th Infantry Regiment Armory building in New York City and included examples of the most advanced movements in European art, including Symbolism, Impressionism, Post-Impressionism, Neo-Impressionism, and Cubism. “Despite the critical focus on European, primarily French artists, over half the exhibitors at the New York show were citizens of the United States. Although most American artists were ignored by critics, some received attention for their movement away from representational form,” (American Studies, 2010, para. 9).

Among the American artists having works on display at the Armory, most were unknowns to the art world at that time, but are well respected today. They included...
Marsden Hartley, John Marin, Joseph Stella, Edward Hopper, Stuart Davis, and Charles Sheeler. Artists from the Ashcan School also had works on display, but although their works prior to the Armory Show were seen as rebellious, their individual artistic style was perhaps the most provincial and outdated compared to the European works hanging nearby. John Quinn formally opened the exhibition by delivering a speech that effectively detailed what the AAPS was intending to accomplish with the Armory Show:

The members of this association have shown you that American artists- young American artists, that is- do not dread, and have no need to dread, the idea or culture of Europe. They believe that in the domain of art only the best should rule. This exhibition will be epoch making in the history of American art. Tonight will be the red-letter night in the history not only of American but of all modern art. The members of the Association felt that it was time the American people had an opportunity to see and judge for themselves concerning the work of the Europeans who are creating a new art. Now that the exhibition is a fact, we can say with pride that it is the most complete art exhibit that has been held in the world during the last quarter century. (Osborne, 2009, para. 6)

These two exhibitions, The Eight and the Armory Show, helped to define the dichotomy that would exist within the appreciation of American art for at least the next decade. For example, although the Ashcan School artists considered themselves modern due to their chosen subject matter, with their work placed side by side alongside European style modernist paintings in the Armory Show, it became evident that the two were being viewed much differently. Basically, there were two camps within the art world, those who supported Modernism and thus European art, and those who supported more
traditional subject matter and thus American art. As Matthew Baigell notes in his article, “The Beginnings of ‘The American Wave’ and the Depression,”

The development of this particular aspect of American art is complex to deal with because it involves not only an American vs. European confrontation, but also one between traditional and modern art as well. From a survey of the art journals of the 1920’s and 1930’s, it appears evident, but not easily demonstrable, that gradually (and then very quickly in 1930-32) those who preferred traditional to modern art began strongly to identify traditional with American and modern with European in their minds. What once had been more of a contest of styles (traditional vs. modern) transformed itself along nationalistic lines (American vs. European). To prefer modern art meant support for French art; interest in traditional or middle-road art indicated preference for American art. (1968, p. 338)

In order to better understand this dichotomy, it is important to consider the political and social environment of the United States during that time. “The period 1900-1940 was time of radical change. It was an era when socialism, communism, and anarchism challenged capitalism and the values of the upper-middleclass,” (Craven, 2003, p. 444). It was also a time when the American rural, lower and lower-middleclass Regionalist artists were shaping the aesthetic of the art community, something that had previously been a determination made by upper class society members. Several major historical events took place during this time period, including two world wars, prohibition, industrialization, and the Great Depression which aided the Regionalist artists in creating an appreciation for their aesthetic.
Between 1920 and 1929, 5,819,000 people left farms (Chandler, 1970, p. 55) to move to the industrialized cities and the rural environment was in a stage of transition with the multitude of technological advances including the additions of electricity, telephones, and tractors, although the acquisition of such advances was slow growing. With the influx of individuals and families moving out of rural settings and into the urban environment, rural life was passing away in the face of urbanism and industrialization. Many people became nostalgic for their pre-industrial, traditional lives they had to leave behind. “…by 1935 nine out of ten farms had no electricity, (and) they were afraid of losing what was already slipping away,” (Baigell, 1968, p. 388). The nostalgic feelings for “life as it was,” rather than “life as it is,” continued during the Great Depression that followed Black Tuesday. In American Expressionism: Art and social change, Dijkstra cites a passage from the historian Lawrence Levine’s essay “American Culture and the Great Depression,”

There can be no attempt to understand the Great Depression and its effect upon our own society without attempting to understand the reactions and attitudes of the American people, and there can be no understanding the American people without a serious attempt to understand the everyday culture they were exposed to and interacted with. (2003, p. 19)

Dijkstra noted that Levine was:

emphasizing the importance of our understanding of the popular arts of the period, but his remarks are just as applicable to the field of “serious” art, which during the thirties (precisely because the profit motive – read: the shaping role of the dealers – had to a large extent disappeared from the scene), took on the
concerns of “everyday culture” to a far greater extent than we are willing to countenance even today. (2003, p. 19)

The two world wars also heavily influenced the focus of American art. “The years before World War I were filled with artistic experimentation and rebellion – the forging of powerful new means of expression ranging from realism to abstraction…After the war, however, the modern movement quieted down in America…,” (Craven, 2003, p. 439).

Patronage for America became more pronounced and the country became isolationist, looking for inspiration from within its own borders. Additionally, America had a desire to compete with and surpass European achievements in the arts, thereby announcing to the world their own cultural coming of age, ‘The American Renaissance’.

With the same type of messianic zeal that saw, for example, Wilson turn World War I from a series of battles into a war to end all wars and a war to save the world for democracy, so the proponents of The American Renaissance saw art as a tool of moral, spiritual, and cultural uplifting, a thing bringing beauty and goodness into each American’s household. This point of view, supported by most art organizations and a basic policy of The American Magazine of Art and the Art Digest (but not the two other leading magazines, Creative Art and The Arts), is well summed up by Eugen [sic] Neuhaus who wrote The History and Ideals of American Art, as he said, [we should] “…develop a pride in our artistic achievements and also [to] contribute to the formation of good taste.” (Baigell, 1968, p. 389)

After Black Monday and the Great Depression that followed, “the nation became absorbed with its own problems, causing it to turn even more inward as it coped with
439). By the early 1930s America experienced a phenomenon now recognized as the
‘American Wave’. This social movement swept across the U.S. as citizens searched for a
stable America; some might say a nationalist vision and tradition. This wave brought
about the Regionalist movement (also known as American Scene Painting) and not only
included the visual artists, but literary artists as well. They all played into a nostalgically
motivated movement that magazines and the government (to an extent) helped to deliver
with regards to both the art and literature of the time.

Between its founding in 1935 and its abolishment in 1942, the Work(s) Progress
Administration (WPA), created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, provided almost
eight million jobs, many of them to artists. This created a truly unique environment for
artists, one that had previously never existed and has not been attempted since.

On December 8, 1933, in the depths of the Great Depression, the Public Works of
Art Project of the Civil Works Administration was established under the aegis of
the Treasury Department, with Edward Bruce, an artist of some distinction
himself, as the head of its Advisory Committee on Fine Arts. Various other
programs succeeded that first endeavor to take artists out of the world of
patronage and treat them as workers…a unique alliance had come to exist
between the government and the arts. (Dijkstra,2003, p. 16)

Several art critics, especially Thomas Craven and Payton Boswell, Jr., also gave the
American Scene movement powerful support, along with the major magazines, such as
Thomas Craven vehemently opposed European art and was a strong advocate for developing an American style of art.

By 1925, he had propounded three related ideas that he, and others, would repeat with increasing frequency and xenophobic intensity in the following years. First, modern European art was already old and sterile, and its American followers were financial and artistic failures. Second, modern European art, really only a “question of technique,” could not function as a medium for communicating the experience of mankind. Third, Americans were not able to create a viable native art by copying Frenchmen, for the American soil could not “… nourish a metaphysical imported style.”…He (Craven) did not hold an elitist view of art but one based on reflecting the experiences of the greatest number of people. (Baigell, 1968, p. 388)

Craven’s views and sentiments were also shared with two conservative and influential publications, the American Federation of Art’s The American Magazine of Art, and Art Digest. Although most Americans did not subscribe to art centered publications, many did subscribe to Life magazine. Life helped to fan the ‘American Wave’ sweeping across the U.S. and it also aimed to shape the history of American art as well.

In 1939, Peyton Boswell, editor of The Art Digest, delineated the socio-political significance of this movement (American Scene Painting) succinctly in his Modern American Painting, a hugely successful volume of color reproductions “selected from the series on contemporary American artists published in Life.” Given its popularity and its wide availability (for it was, of course, vigorously promoted by the magazine) this was the book that, in subsequent years, became
for many (including, one suspects, postwar critics) the standard source of evidence concerning the style of the art produced during the thirties. But though the book presented itself as a comprehensive survey of contemporary American art, it contained virtually no reproductions of work of an expressionist, or for that matter, socially conscious, nature. The Life editors had made certain of that. They had clearly chosen Boswell to write the accompanying text because they knew that he could be counted upon to support the boosterist [sic] tone of the volume: “The nationalization of American art,” Bowell declared, “is today the most significant art movement of the Twentieth Century.” (Dijkstra, 2003, p. 19)

**Regionalism**

Regionalism is often referred to as American Scene Painting, and can be classified in the most simple of terms: the act of an artist painting what is around them, what they know, and what they see.

Few people realize that from approximately 1927 to 1945 the dominant style in American painting was a frankly realistic and democratic style that was uniquely American. This “American Scene Movement,” as it was called originated in New York in reaction to the preoccupation of the pioneer modernists with European-inspired style, abstraction and intellectual elitism. Instead the American Scene artists focused on the realistic representation of American life, explored American history and commented on uniquely American landscape and social customs…Themes of these painters tended to be positive and idealistic, even in the midst of the depression. Both urban and rural painters, called *Regionalists*
within the American Scene Artists, concentrated on picturing things that made America strong both in the country’s history and in the character of its people.… By creating a new American art, artists of the American Scene were young idealists trying to use their training and skills to make a positive contribution to the collective well-being of society…The American Scene Movement was dominant for over twenty years because it so suited the socio-economic situation of the country. Not only did the art depict the rural, urban and social topics which preoccupied society, but its realism and democratic attitudes made it highly accessible to the public. And, in a period of intense American isolationism and nationalism, its purely American focus and emphasis on traditional values was readily accepted. (Wigmore, 1988, p. 3)

Although Regionalism as a stylistic movement is fairly well defined, there is room for interpretation as to the dates assigned to the style within the field of art history.

The first clear signs of a renewed interest in the countryside and its folk can be seen in painting and in particular in pleinaireisme, a movement linked to the legendary French village of Barbizon, where an artists’ colony developed after 1840. In truth, the rise of such artists’ colonies in the countryside was a widespread, international phenomenon from the middle of the nineteenth until the very end of the twentieth century. (Van Santvoort et al., 2008, pg. 12)

Regionalism in the United States began during, and it can be argued as a reaction against, the Industrial Revolution of our country.

Regionalism began in the 1920s, but the height of the movement was not reached until the 1930s. Artists who aimed to establish a connection with the laboring
classes of America conducted this movement, which was characterized by
democratic stylization. Thus, Regionalism became a realistic art movement, with
the subjects of the paintings often being ordinary people alongside those in
positions of power. The movement was also a social commentary for how
resources were being utilized across the nation at the time, as well as a review of
urban and industrial life. Thus, production of Regionalist art moved away from
appealing solely to the upper classes, and instead focused upon all levels of
American society. (Thomas Hart Benton, 2011, para. 2)

Debra Bricker Balken, in her book After Many Springs: Regionalism, Modernism & the
Midwest, discusses the aesthetic debate taking place in the midst of the Great Depression
between modernist figures and artists who sought a revival of tradition.

Where Alfred Stieglitz had once worked…to promote the painting of Arthur
Dove, John Marin, and Georgia O’Keeffe by touting their American ingenuity
and content, Thomas Hart Benton and artists such as Grant Wood and John
Steuart Curry would soon assail their abstract emphases, believing that American
subjects could be conveyed only by straightforward, recognizable imagery.

(Balken, 2009, p. 5)

Artistic battles were waged in the Midwest and New York during the 1930s and early
1940s.

In the years immediately following the stock market crash of 1929, the American
art scene became particularly embattled, with little critical consensus as to
whether one unifying narrative, movement, direction, or trend prevailed. The
-crash had been calamitous, destabilizing large sectors of the workforce as well as
inducing widespread economic fallout. And while these circumstances obviously had a negative impact on the nation’s relatively small community of artists as well, in terms of the modest gains in sales of American art before the crisis, it was the resurgence of a conservative tradition in art that many advocates of modernism perceived to be the most damaging cultural setback. This resurgence offset the lively aesthetic debates that had surfaced in New York starting around 1915, debates that had centered on the nature of modernism itself, on its manifold subjects and forms. (Balken, 2009, p. 17)

By the early 1930s patronage for American modernism began to evaporate, “The marketplace [sic] for progressive art had never ever been expansive in New York, with few collectors and museums willing to make a commitment to their homegrown radicals until the late 1950s,” (Balken, 2009, p. 25). The art critic, Thomas Craven, found a niche for his writing that expressed his disdain for French paintings as well as their American followers.

In short, he would become one of the most fervently ideological and conservative critics to emerge during the 1930s, as well as the architect of a new movement known as Regionalism that sought to advance the work of its primary practitioners, figures such as Benton, Grant Wood, and John Steuart Curry. (Balken, 2009, p. 25)

Regionalism was mainly associated with the *triumvirate* of artists which consisted of: Grant Wood in Iowa, Thomas Hart Benton in Missouri, and John Steuart Curry in Kansas. The region associated with these artists, the rural Midwest, consisted of the area just beyond the Mississippi River bordered by Iowa, Missouri, and eastern Kansas.
Wood, Benton, and Curry came to be ranked as the uncontested national champions of Regionalism basically because they coincidentally shared in setting a precedent during the crucial two-year period (from the fall of 1928 to the end of 1930) when the term ‘American Scene’ gained its official status. (Dennis, 1998, p. 13)

Furthermore,

Boswell identified Charles Burchfield and Edward Hopper as “pioneers in the American Scene movement, even before it claimed its popular title.” Then, he added dramatically, “like a clap of thunder came the now famous Midwest Trinity of American Scene painters – John Steuart Curry of Kansas, Thomas Hart Benton of Missouri and Grant Wood of Iowa. Their renown, sweeping the country almost overnight, marked the true beginning of a revolt, the effects of which have not yet been realized.” Regionalism, Boswell crowed, “caught the imagination of artists, young and veteran alike, and by the closing years of the ‘30s had assumed the proportion of an irresistible force – with no immovable object in sight.” (Dennis, 1998, p. 20)

Urban painters, such as Edward Hopper, Reginald Marsh, Isabel Bishop, and the Soyer brothers, never qualified as regionalist artists, nor did artists from other regions outside the triumvirate’s general locale. Therefore, southern artists (Robert Gwathmey, John McCrady, Peter Hurd, and Alexander Hogue), New England artists (Stephen Etnier and Lauren Ford), and Ohio artists (Charles Burchfield and Clarence Carter) were not fully recognized as regionalist and failed to be included in the Regionalism rhetoric (Dennis, 1998).
The idea of community was very attractive to the Regionalist trio, “And in the wake of ongoing bankruptcies, nostalgia would become a powerful motivating force, as the Regionalists sought to reclaim a protective, shared image of rural harmony…,” (Balken, 2009, p. 111). In his book, Renegade Regionalists, James Dennis explains that Wood felt that

Free from institutional dictation or authoritative expertise, artists and viewers could instinctively set aesthetic standards suitable for the community they shared. In total, regional art works would emit a national stylistic identity through a democratic diversity of techniques, compositions, subject matter, and content. (Dennis, 1998, p. 53)

Wood also felt that in order for the “new movement” in art to truly be American, it needed to be free of any European influence, academic or avant-garde. Although all three painters, Wood, Benton and Curry, were proponents of Regionalism and community, there was not one unifying stylistic manner in which to paint. Rather, the three “shared the democratic urge within Modernism to eliminate the traditional divisions between elite and popular subject matter, the high and the low,” (Dennis, 1998, p. 5).

Dennis goes on to note that there was mixed reception of the three artists’ work.

On one hand, urban viewers of art, and especially those who write about it, look down upon farm folk, people working the land, as little more than quaint. Their appeal is picturesque. On the other hand, the city, in good times or bad, can become disturbing and oppressive, causing a yearning for escape into the open countryside of the middle landscape…At least at a pictorial distance, the barnyard looked better to the city dweller than either the traffic-jammed thoroughfare or the
back alley. Thus in spite of disdain for “hicks,” a market for anecdotal farm themes in all media intensified. (1998, p. 16)

Although the focus of the Regionalists was on their community, there was criticism that the subject matter depicted in their work did not address the economic hardships of the Great Depression. They maintained images that displayed sentimentality for a pastoral ideal even though photographic evidence of the exact opposite was evident in the works of artists such as Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Russell Lee, and others.

Another reading of regionalism could also be offered here as it correlates to an example given within the literary world. As Mark Storey notes:

In one influential account of regionalism, Richard Brodhead has argued that the genre’s cultural work was to act as a “literary supplement to a more general production of inhabitable backwardness,”… in other words, it was to provide an urban consumer-reader with an imaginatively knowable rural “other” against which they could measure their own sophistication. Although regionalism is therefore “one of the principal nineteenth-century means by which the forces of social change were imaged, grasped and known,” it paradoxically registers these changes in its very evasion of them. (2010, p. 197)

**Downfall of Regionalism**

Not everyone viewed the works of the triumvirates as modern. Ad Reinhardt, a modernist critic and theorist from the 1930’s through the 1960’s, created a now famous cartoon in 1946 entitled, “How to Look at Modern Art in America.” (The entire cartoon can be seen in Figure 2.3 and a detail including the names of Wood, Curry and Benton in a corn field is provided in Figure 2.4). Reinhardt’s cartoon demonstrates the movement
away from Regionalism after the end of WWII, as evidenced by the weight labeled “Regionalism Illustration” pulling down the branch of the tree in the cartoon.

The 1946 version of Reinhardt’s cartoon was originally printed in the newspaper P.M. and was reprinted in ARTnews in 1961. The text at the top of the cartoon reads as follows:

Here is a guide to the galleries – the art world in a nutshell – a tree of contemporary art from pure (abstract) “paintings” (on your left) to pure (illustrative) “pictures” (down on your right). If you know what you like but don’t know anything about art, you’ll find the artists on the left hardest to understand and the names on the right easiest and most familiar (famous). You can start in the cornfields, where no demand is made on you and work your way up and around. Be especially careful of those curious schools situated on that overloaded section of the tree. Which somehow think of themselves as being both abstract and pictorial (as if they could be both today). The best way to escape from all this is to paint yourself. If you have any friends that we overlooked, here are some extra leaves. Fill in and paste up… (Art charts, 1997, p. 3)

Reinhardt was a modernist critic and theorist and an Abstract painter associated with the Abstract Expressionism movement in New York. His writings were well read,

With the rise of abstraction and Abstract Expressionism in the 1940s, Regionalism suffered the same loss of art-world status as the conservative critics who promoted it in the 1930s… Regionalism has ultimately suffered from a greater misrepresentation and misunderstanding than any other Modernist art, a misrepresentation that continues today. (Sioux City Art Center, 2011, para. 9)
Figure 2.3. Ad Reinhardt, “How to Look at Modern Art,” 1946
Figure 2.4. Detail of Reinhardt Drawing
Balken also identifies the fall from grace that Regionalism had. She noted, “As the Depression eased and the United States entered the war in 1941, Regionalism would cease to retain an aesthetic foothold, dwindling as a movement even in the Midwest,” (2009, p. 176).

Many artists who had studied and practiced in the Regionalist style made a conscious decision to forgo the representational foundation of their work for more abstract components. For example, Jackson Pollock had studied with the Regionalist Thomas Hart Benton but his work subsequently evolved into practices framed as Abstract Expressionism. As Balken notes:

The influences that Benton exerted on Pollock’s painting during the 1930s, in fact, emerge as a potent metaphor both for the demise of Regionalism and for the eventual displacement of a nationalist agenda…Pollock’s engagement of the Midwest would recede by 1938. However, the insistent nationalism that he gleaned from Benton would always hide behind his work, surfacing in the interviews, statements, letters, and quips that he would use to build his self-mythology… [Pollock knew not only that] the United States had emerged as a cultural leader in the mid-1940s but that American art no longer had to fend for its identity, that its authenticity was critically intact and assured by writers such as James Johnson Sweeney and Clement Greenberg…he would assert that he had usurped Benton. “It is here. It’s not Paris,” he stated. “It used to be with Benton, but now it is with me.” (2009, pp. 186-192).

Balken further notes that Benton was fully aware that Regionalism had lost its favor and pushed a great deal of blame on the art critics who he felt capitalized on the
shift in international politics during the Second World War. Although he still championed the value of Regionalism to the discourses on art well into the 1950s, Benton provided the following passage in the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1951:

As soon as World War II began, substituting in the public mind a world concern for the specifically American concerns which had prevailed during our rise, Wood, Curry, and I found the bottom knocked out from under us. In a day when problems of America were mainly exterior, our interior images lost public significance. Losing that, they lost the only thing which could sustain them, because the critical world of art had, by and large, as little use for our group front as it had for me as an individual… The coteries of high-brows, of critics, college art professors, and museum boys, the tastes of which had been thoroughly conditioned by the new esthetics of twentieth-century Paris, had sustained themselves in various subsidized ivory towers and kept their grip on the journals of esthetic opinion all during the Americanist period. These coteries, highly verbal but not notably intelligent or able to see through momentarily fashionable thought patterns, could never accommodate our populist leanings… Immediately after it was recognized that Wood, Curry, and I were bringing American art out into a field where its meanings had to be socially intelligible to justify themselves and where aesthetic accomplishment would depend on an effective representation of cultural ideas, which were themselves generally comprehensible, the ivory-tower boys and girls saw the danger of their presumptions and their protected positions… in the end they succeeded in destroying our Regionalism and in returning American art to that desired position of obscurity and popular
incomprehensibility which enabled them to remain its chief prophets. (Benton, 1971, pp. 105-106)

Benton’s passage suggests a loss for American art and the process of dehumanization that he noticed taking place in America at the onset of World War II. He also clearly indicated a sense of classism that was taking place between the art created in the metropolitan areas versus the art being created in rural settings. This class bias directly correlates to my research with regards to my grandfather creating art in an Appalachian setting. Benton was not alone in feeling the effects of the downfall of Regionalism and he took notice of his close friends, Wood and Curry. Benton wrote about watching them struggle with the acceptance that Regional art had fallen out of public favor.

Having long been separated from my teaching contacts, I did not immediately notice the change of student attitude which went with our loss of public attention. But Wood and Curry, still maintaining their university positions, were much affected and, in the course of time under the new indifference and sometimes actual scorn of the young, began feeling as if their days were over.

It was one of the saddest experiences of my life to watch these two men, so well known and, when compared with most artists, so productive and so enormously successful, finish their lives in ill health and occasional moods of deep despondency… Oddly enough, although my wife Rita and I tried hard, our friendly encouragements never seemed to equal the discouragements which Wood’s and Curry’s campus brothers worked up to annoy them. (Benton, 1971, pp. 109-110)
Benton points out that both Wood and Curry died severely discontented with their own style of art. Wood, he says, came up with the idea of changing his identity, “as he lay dying of liver cancer…he told me that when he got well he was going to change his name, go where nobody knew him, and start all over again with a new style of painting,” (1971, p. 110). With regards to Curry, Benton, during one of his last conversations with him, asked Curry if he was happy that he had secured a place for him and his artwork in American art. “I don’t know about that,” he [Curry] replied. “Maybe I’d have done better to stay on the farm. No one seems interested in my pictures. Nobody thinks I can paint. If I am any good, I lived at the wrong time,” (Benton, 1971, p. 111).

**Second Generation Regionalist Artist, Thomas E. Wolfe**

As mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, Thomas E. Wolfe, was born and raised in New Lexington, Ohio and he has lived the majority of his adult life on his farm in the adjacent village of Junction City. Chapter 4 provides a more in-depth description of Wolfe’s life and career as an educator, therefore what is presented here in Chapter 2 relates only to his artwork created in the Regionalist style. I refer to Wolfe, my grandfather, as a second generation Regionalist artist, not because he studied with any of the first generation Regionalists. Rather, I refer to him as second generation since chronologically his work was produced after the downfall of Regionalism. Nearly twenty years had passed between the onset of the Second World War and when my grandfather began settling into his signature artistic style. Although he would have been attending college during the Abstract Expression movement, he informed me that he never had any notion of the type of artwork that was in vogue at the time. He never took an art history course which dealt with current art movements and none of his studio art professors introduced him to the
works of such artists as Jackson Pollock. He also noted that he did not have any personal
time to explore what was happening in the arts since he was continually busy being a
father and teaching high school in addition to being a student. Therefore, his most
influential professor at The Ohio State University during his college years was not an art
professor, but rather an art history professor, Ralph Fanning, who helped my grandfather
outside of the classroom. Fanning happened to be an art history professor and a
watercolor Regionalist artist, but I cannot find any records that my grandfather actually
took a class with him. A friendship however did develop between them and Fanning
shared his paintings with my grandfather.

Ralph Fanning (1889-1971), was an Art Professor at OSU. Fanning came to OSU
in 1920 to teach art history courses and became a full professor in 1924, but he was also
an avid painter.

Some in his department questioned his artistic skill; they claimed he would paint a
picture in the 12 minutes between classes… Fanning was popular as a lecturer and
insisted he sketched and painted to observe things better and enhance his own
memory. (Historian's notebook, 1999, p. 4)

The fact that some in his department questioned his artistic skill, recalls the situation in
which Wood and Curry found themselves while teaching at their respective universities.
Regardless of his colleagues’ perspective on his work, Fanning continued to paint
extensively in a Regionalist style. My grandfather talks about the historic homes all over
Ohio that Fanning chose as subjects for his paintings and he even proudly displays one of
Fanning’s paintings in his own home. So, in understanding that Fanning was a
contemporary of the triumvirate Regionalist artists, it is easy to see that Thomas Wolfe could be viewed as a second generation Regionalist.

I also classified Wolfe’s work as Regionalist based on first generation Regionalist’s philosophies. Wolfe has always based his artwork on personal experiences, he has championed the concept of community, and he has always had an aesthetic eye for harmonious rural scenes. Furthermore, his images are accessible, as Wigmore noted, to all and are highly relatable due to their realistic nature and familiar subjects. His paintings signify the importance of the everyday scenes of American rural life and he has interpreted artistically the history and culture of his Appalachian Perry County community in an easily understandable style.

With regards to the split between Regionalism and Modernism being equated with the split between favoring American art over European art, I can attest to my grandfather’s love for his country and his nationalistic spirit. At the age of 88, he can still recite with complete accuracy his Boy Scout oath of, “On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country,” and he has lived his life by that oath.

**Appalachian Stereotypes**

My grandfather’s love for his country not only fits with the Regionalist artist character, but also with the stereotype that Appalachians are deeply patriotic. Unlike most of the stereotypes attached to Appalachians, patriotism is not viewed as derogatory or demeaning. In *They Say in Harlan County: An Oral History*, Alessandro Portelli quotes Appalachian native, Ewell Balltrip regarding his sense of nationalistic spirit,

> The Appalachian character [is] fiercely patriotic. These people, the people who settled Appalachia were the dregs of society from England and Scotland and
Ireland; and they were the people who were waving the flag of glory, when the Declaration of Independence was signed. Boy, it’s simply the patriotic thing to do to join the armed forces, to serve your country. (2011, p. 249)

Patriotism is not the only positive stereotype associated with Appalachians; there are several others such as hard working, love of family, honesty, and spirituality. However, when such stereotypes are presented in popular media culture, they often present a beautifully romanticized version of poverty, like in the television series *The Waltons*. As Garry Barker comments in his book, *Notes from a Native Son*, “In *The Waltons*, there was no harsh poverty or hopelessness, none of the endless frustration that often leads to drinking and shooting, no hillbilly jokes, none of the bawdy, almost rowdy humor…,” (1995, p. 6). Although my grandfather may also present a romanticized Appalachia through his art, I did not address that issue in my research due to sentimental reasons.

Furthermore, this romanticized poverty is not the typical presentations of Appalachians; in most situations they are referred to as Barker points out, *hillbillies*, and are negatively characterized by derogatory stereotypes that are reinforced through the images and personalities presented in the various forms of media. Anthony Harkins asserts in his book *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (2004) that the portrayal of, mountain people as pre-modern and ignorant “hillbillies” is one of the most lasting and pervasive images in American popular iconography, appearing continuously throughout the twentieth century in nearly every major facet of American popular culture from novels and magazines to movies and television programs to country music and the Internet. (2004, p. 3)
Harkins theorizes that the hillbilly’s whiteness has been central to its longevity in popular media, “Because producers could portray images of poverty, ignorance, and backwardness without raising cries of bigotry and racism from civil rights advocates… the crude and often negative hillbilly stereotype continued long after cultural producers had abandoned previously accepted yet equally offensive and racist stereotypes,” (2004, p. 8). Harkins’ book also provides a detailed account of how the term hillbilly came to be used after the American Civil War, when the Appalachian region became increasingly bypassed by technological and social changes taking place in the rest of the country. He notes that prior to the Civil War, the Appalachians were not significantly different from other rural areas of the country. But as the large numbers of people migrated further west, the Appalachian region retained its frontier character, and the people themselves came to be seen as backward, quick to violence, and inbred in their isolation.

Harkins examines hillbilly stereotypes as portrayed through social media over the years and notes, “Although the hillbilly image has remained relatively unchanged, the meaning of these representations and the word itself have continuously evolved over the past century in response to broader social, economic, and cultural transformations in American society,” (2004, pp. 3-4). He further notes that hillbillies are,

Uniquely positioned as a white “other,” a construction both within and beyond the confines of American “whiteness,” the hillbilly has also been at the heart of struggles over American racial identity and hierarchy. Finally, in the same oppositionally dualistic way, southern mountain folk both denounced it as a vicious slur and embraced it in defense of their value system and in celebration of their cultural heritage. Thus, while often dismissed as a debased and trivial
“mass” culture stereotype, the hillbilly has instead served at times of national soul-searching and throughout the twentieth century as a continually negotiated mythic space through which modern Americans have attempted to define themselves and their national identity and to reconcile the past and the present. (2004, p.4)

Although Thomas Wolfe lived in the Appalachian culture of Perry County, he does not now, nor has he ever, considered himself a hillbilly. That is not to say that he does not consider himself Appalachian, but rather that he associates the word hillbilly with negative implications that he does not associate with being Appalachian. Additionally, within the Perry County area (as there are in most Appalachian areas) there are various levels of poverty and, although he lived through the Great Depression in an Appalachian area, my grandfather did not regard himself or his family as poor when he was growing up. Though he had economic struggles as an adult, he always felt he had more than enough to survive. He never considered himself disadvantaged. This aspect of his life is further explored in Chapter 4, but it is mentioned here to provide a foundation for the regional identity that he associated with most closely.

Even though he does not classify himself as a hillbilly that is not to say that he has not fell victim to or felt the oppression of the negative stereotypes associated with the term. For example, when he began taking classes at Ohio State, he did not feel as if he was a part of the campus community of students. I would suggest that is why he did not stray far from the Physical Education Department that helped former soldiers to get acclimated to the university setting. He felt like an outsider and I would propose that was a result of his regional identity, whether verbally expressed or visually understood. There
is a story about his experience in a course that was titled Pragmatics in Philosophy at OSU I include at the end of Chapter 4 that perfectly addresses his regional identity as being viewed as an outsider with the academic community. The purpose of the story is to demonstrate his love of God even when confronted with flunking a course by a liberal teacher who questioned the existence of God.

When I review the positive Appalachian stereotypes mentioned earlier in this chapter, I can think of no better words to describe my grandfather and his regional identity; hard working, love of family, values honesty, and deeply spiritual and patriotic.

**Regional Identity**

In looking at Wolfe’s work and considering the term *identity*, one might never come up with the term *Existentialism*. However, if one considers the essential quality of Existentialism in that it refers to the philosophical thought that the essence of something is determined by its existence then perhaps the connection could be made. Wolfe’s emphasis on the distinctiveness of personal experience builds on the Existentialist philosophy that places stress on individual ethics and on the authentic experience of selfhood, on freedom, and choice. In this regard, I feel that Existentialism can in fact relate to his artwork. I can see that his essence, as an artist and educator, is a product of his existence. In reviewing his artwork, there is little doubt that he has painted his personal experiences which are a result of his existence defined by living and working in Perry County. Not only does he capture the images of rural farm life in his work, he has also lived the life of a farmer. Also, through both teaching and being socially active, he has been able to relay his distinctive life experiences through speech, his visual images, and his community involvement.
Another theory that I would relate to my grandfather’s work is that of Hippolyte Taine’s theory of art and literature according to his *Philosophie de l’Art* (1893) and *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (1903). Taine’s theory approached a contextual study of a work of art or literature based on the aspects of what he called "race, milieu, and moment" (in French *race, milieu et moment*). In the introduction to *Sources of regionalism in the nineteenth century: architecture, art and literature*, the editors, Linda Van Santvoort, Jan De Maeyer and Tom Verschaffel, explain Taine’s theory in more layman’s terms, “People are like plants; they grow from a seed (the race) and you cannot implant a foreign root on it; you can only try to interfere with the environment,” (2008, p. 62). The editors also note the significance of Regional identity and assert that,

The notion of identity can be approached from various perspectives and related space (territory, frontier, region) and time (a shared history), to community (race, ethnic group, nation) and to social and ideological aspects. Regionalism here occupies a specific place as a binding factor – tying the knot, as it were – and as the most emphatic proof of the anchoring in place and context… identity is “a human condition”, which can be defined or construed differently according to the context. (Van Santvoort et al., 2008, p. 9)

Thomas Hart Benton related his own theories about Regionalist identity to Taine’s theory of race, milieu, and moment. In looking at the French meanings of the words rather than the English meanings, which are, roughly, "nation", "environment" or "situation", and "time", Benton noted:

[A]ccording to which art production was determined by the people who made it, the period in which it was made, and the place where it was created. In short, art
should grow from the needs of the people and reflect their desires and aspirations.  
(Benton, 1971, p. 6)

In looking at Wolfe’s artwork with regards to Benton’s comment, it is evident that he has visually recorded his local history, local customs/culture, and local industries, thereby recording experiences growing from and relevant to his Appalachian environment/community. The images of his art provided in Figures 2.5 – 2.18 provide evidence for his works to be considered Regionalist in style and also draw attention to local regional identity. Although one may look at some of his images (such as Figure 2.9 or 2.19) and assume he is presenting a romanticized version of the region, upon further reflection, it can be noted that his images represent a sadness regarding the state of decay that the region is undergoing, with both its architecture not being maintained (the barn in Figure 2.9) and its economy (defunct coal bucket shown in Figure 2.19 representing the loss of mining jobs).

Taking the Perry County Appalachian area of Ohio, as depicted in Wolfe’s images, as the point of departure, the issue of cultural identity is examined. For her article *Mountain identity and the global society in a rural appalachian county*, Susan Keefe conducted research in an Appalachian county in Western North Carolina to examine residents’ socially constructed identity as “mountain people.” Unlike previous studies of Appalachian communities, the results of Keefe’s research indicated a strong, positive cultural identity among the native participants. She notes the major themes that helped to define the mountain peoples’ cultural identity as self-sufficient, trustworthy and morally upright, and embedded in personal communities with a deeply rooted heritage. She also notes that
Identity in Appalachia is characteristically defined in terms of social class identity, for the common paradigm used to interpret the region is one of class oppression (e.g. Billings & Goldman 1983; Eller 1982; Gaventa 1980; Lewis et al. 1978; Whisnant 1980). This paradigm leads to an emphasis on socioeconomic divisions within the region’s population and the development of internal class conflict… The concept of cultural identity developed from tribal and ethnic studies in which cultural groups are conceptualized as having common beliefs, values and attitudes which form the basis of a group-held sense of peoplehood. The concept of culture is based on the idea of a core pattern of beliefs and behaviors in the cultural group, rather than emphasizing the range of diversity encountered in the group. Cultural identity is typically considered only one of many manifestations of identity held by members of the group; other identities include social class identity, national identity, gender identity, personal identity, family identity, etc. In other words, cultural identity and social class identity are not mutually exclusive concepts. It is argued here that both must be taken into account for a complete understanding of a cultural group. (Keefe, 2000, p.2)

After reviewing Keefe’s research and my own research data, I was a better able to understand how the cultural and socioeconomic identity of my grandfather and his community influences the appreciation for his teaching style and personal artwork. I feel that, just as there is a vernacular pattern of speech in the Perry County area of Ohio, there is also a vernacular artistic aesthetic. This aesthetic incorporates the appearance of the rural countryside that is anchored to this region through Wolfe’s imagery relevant to the community’s collective memory and identity.
We make decisions based on our ethnic, occupational, recreational, gender, and generational identity, as well as our sexual orientation, abilities/disabilities, and political identities. Economic class is also important. Based on these considerations, community groups or cultures vary as to what they find [aesthetically] pleasing...Decisions we make about our clothing are only one of the ways that we show how aesthetic decisions vary among community groups...The artwork we surround ourselves with helps us define and redefine our cultural identities. It is rooted in history, ancestry, and ritual. Throughout our lifetime we adhere to these cultural identities even as we reshape who we are. (Congdon, 2004, pp. 15-17)

In this regard, the vernacular aesthetic emerges as a central component in interpreting Thomas Wolfe’s Regionalist style. The concept of regional identity is thus related to the vernacular aesthetic and serves as a building block of that identity.

I approach this vernacular aesthetic with a critical (visual) literacy approach. In the article *Saving Black Mountain: the Promise of Critical Literacy in a Multicultural Democracy*, critical literacy is examined as a method for promoting democracy by challenging inequalities in society and a tool for helping, “students to unlock the hidden cultural assumptions and biases of texts,” (Powell, Cantrell & Adams, 2001, p. 774). Literacy is both a social and a cultural phenomenon, “it is created and used in social contexts to communicate with others – to express our ideas, to share our stories, to give us a voice,” (Powell et al., 2001, p.774).

I feel that visual literacy can be defined in the same manner, especially in a culture where not everyone is “literate”, that is, not everyone can read. For example, an
older couple, Charlie and Hazel Myers, who used to rent an apartment from my parents came to be good friends with my grandfather and incidentally came to appreciate his work. Neither Charlie nor Hazel could read, but they had a fondness for and an understanding of my grandfather’s artwork due to the vernacular visual literacy and aesthetic that exists in Perry County. Learning to recognize one’s visual literacy is very important and critical literacy methodology helps one to accomplish this.

Students learn how power works to promote particular interests over others, such as by denigrating the cultural knowledge, language, and experiences of subdominant populations while simultaneously elevating the status of dominant cultural knowledge, language and experiences. These messages of inferiority and superiority are subtle yet powerful, and they become part of our taken-for-granted assumptions about the world. (Powell et al., 2001, p. 774)

Issues of power, bias towards dominant culture, and inequalities in society are very relevant to the Perry County community and their cultural identity. The challenges that my grandfather has experienced during his life are closely related to these issues, but he has not let those challenges stop him.

**Freedom and Self-Determination**

Although Taine’s theory may seem like an appropriate lens through which to view Wolfe’s work, there is a major criticism of race, milieu, and moment in that it does not take into account the individuality of the artist; for example, an artist's temperament might lead him to make unique artistic choices distinct from his environment. Mark Wolff notes in *Individuality and l’Esprit Français: On Gustave Lanson’s Pedagogy* that Lanson acknowledges Taine's immense contribution to the study of literature [and art],
but he feels that by pinpointing the influence of an author's race, milieu, and moment one cannot completely explain individual originality. “Despite the flaws in Taine's critical objectives...he at least recognizes the influence of an author's surroundings,” (Wolff, 2001, p. 243). So although Taine provides a focal point in which to consider Wolfe’s surroundings as being a major influence on his artwork, Taine’s theory does not account for the artist’s sense of freedom, self-determination and autonomy over his work. Elina N. Lempert Shepel comments on Vygotsky’s developmental perspective, “to be free is to reflect on alternative modes of being in the world and to be the responsible author of constructing multiple socially meaningful realities, creating the history of one’s own development,” (1995, p. 426). Lempert Shepel further notes that Vygotskian scholars feel that

To be free means to be aware of the possibility of conscious choice versus simply existing, acting in order to…look for openings… Freedom is characterized by a subject-subject relationship. Being a subject is one of the fundamental human abilities – to construct and transform his or her own life. The freedom of self-determination allows man to become an agent of existing socially meaningful activities and to create new ones. A subject is a person who acts. Being a subject means to analyze a cessation of action, reflect on the lack of means, formulate the goals, and actually take a step in order to reach them. (1995, p. 426)

As Chapter 4 documents Thomas Wolfe’s life, there is evidence threaded throughout the chapter which touches upon his sense of self-determination; for although he was born into an economically oppressed community, he did not let his fiscal struggles define him. He has remained very active in his freedom and has constructed multiple
socially meaningful realities for himself and for his community. His self-determination was not confined to his personal life. As a teacher, Wolfe was also able to share his cultural, political, and educational beliefs in his classroom, helping to construct meaningful experiences and realities for his students and his Perry County community. As an Appalachian, Wolfe is not alone in his self-determined approach to life. As Keefe notes, self-sufficiency is the primary trait mentioned in her research by mountain people. According to a twenty-year old fire fighter, “Mountain people know how to live off the land, know how to hunt and fish, know how to grow a garden,” In other words, mountain people have a self-image of resourcefulness, and they have the store of knowledge and common sense necessary “to survive if it comes down to survival.” They are especially proud of their quality of resilience in the face of adversity, whether it be sudden unemployment or a natural disaster such as a storm or flood. There is the sense that mountain people can make do with low-tech solutions when necessary. As part of their can-do attitude, mountain people are self-admitted hard workers, and work is at the core of their identity as individuals and as a people. (2000, pp. 7-8)

Hard work and self-sufficiency have been the foundation for my grandfather’s self-determination and his success in life. “For any people to overcome cultural oppression, they must develop strategies for self-determination, and decide who is served or disserved by the development of these identities,” (Ballengee Morris & Sanders, 2009, p. 140). The identity that emerges from my grandfather’s life story presented in Chapter 4 will highlight his strategies for self-determination and the service his Appalachian Regionalist identity provides for his community.
Figure 2.5. *Untitled*, Corn Stalks, Wolfe Family Farm, Junction City, OH, 1979.

Figure 2.6. *Untitled*, Mail Pouch Barn, US 22, Somerset, OH, 1980.
Figure 2.7. *Untitled*, New Lexington Railroad Depot, 1988.
Figure 2.8. *Untitled*, John McGaughey, Jr.’s Barn, Junction City, OH, ca. 1990.
Figure 2.9. *Untitled*, Clayton Bussey’s Barn, Somerset, OH, ca. 1990.

Figure 2.10. *Untitled*, Covered Bridge in Fall, Location Unknown, 1997.
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"You start with who's alive and has a good memory, and then expand out."

- Willa Baum, the director of the Regional Oral History Office at U.C., Berkeley

**Qualitative Research Background**

This dissertation research focuses on Thomas E. Wolfe as an individual Appalachian Regionalist artist and one who influenced his local community as a coach, farmer, and art educator. My research considered Wolfe’s role in the Perry County, Ohio Appalachian community where he lives. I created a biographic record of his life as collected through oral histories and illustrate these narratives with photographic representations of his works of art. The data collected was analyzed and cross checked against available documents and written text. The biography of Wolfe that this study constructs is centrally based on semi-structured interviews conducted between January 2010 and January 2012 (see questions attached in Appendix A). Twenty-six individuals were interviewed and over twenty conversations with Wolfe were recorded and transcribed. Due to my close relationship with Wolfe, I also had several personal conversations with him that contributed to the data collected and the narrative I constructed.
The compilation of collected data offered opportunities to organize the testimonies of his colleagues, peers, family, friends, former students, and larger community acquaintances and focus on the life and career of Wolfe as an artist, citizen, and educator. By collecting and publishing these oral history narratives, I have expanded the written information available about Thomas E. Wolfe and formulated theories about his active participation in constructing an Appalachian regional identity. My research challenges others in the field to consider how local artists impact the field of art education and the academic communities in which they are situated. I argue that as a field we have much to learn from the oral histories of regional artists/educators. This study considered Regionalist artists in general, and Thomas E. Wolfe in particular, utilizing oral history as the primary data collection methodology. I analyzed the data collected using a critical theoretical lens and contemplated how Regionalist artists assume self-determined stances.

**Qualitative Research Overview**

In *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (1998), Sharan Merriam details five key characteristics of qualitative research that I find closely aligned with my conception of oral history as a type of qualitative research. Table 3 lists Merriam’s characteristics on the left, with my rational on the right, for situating this research’s methodology within a qualitative research framework.

My research fits what Merriam also discusses as the other more or less common characteristics:

Ideally, for example, the design of a qualitative study is emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress. This is not always the
case, however, as thesis and dissertation committees, funding agencies, and
human subjects review boards often require the design of the study to be specified
ahead of time. Sample selection in qualitative research is usually (but not always)
nonrandom, purposeful, and small, as opposed to the larger, more random
sampling of quantitative research. Finally the investigator in qualitative research
spends a substantial amount of time in the natural setting of the study, often in
intense contact with participants. (Merriam, 1998, p. 8)

I was in close contact with the nonrandom, small group of participants contributing to
this study and I spent a substantial amount of time in the Perry County setting.
Furthermore, the design of my study was flexible and responsive to change as the study
progressed and as the stories unfolded.

Oral history is frequently used to promote or celebrate a common identity – that is
to say, a sense of community – within a particular social group. Using oral history as a
medium by which people actively participate in connecting with the past and with each
other. In her book, Merriam quotes Michael Patton’s *Qualitative Research & Evaluation
Methods*,

the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience. These
essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon
commonly experienced. The experiences of different people are bracketed,
analyzed, and compared to identify the essences of the phenomenon, for example,
the essences of loneliness, the essence of being a mother, or the essence of being a
participant in a particular program. (1998, p. 15, emphasis in italics in original).
Table 4: Comparison of Research Characteristics between Merriam and Van Horn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Characteristics of Qualitative Research</th>
<th>Rational for Employing Qualitative Research in My Study</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the researchers.</td>
<td>I collected oral histories and created a regionalist artist’s narrative based on Thomas E. Wolfe’s roles as an educator and his artwork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.</td>
<td>All research and analyses was conducted by me, and involved my identification of recurring patterns, variables, factors, themes and similar occurrences between oral histories accounts of participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The research usually involves fieldwork.</td>
<td>I engaged in multiple interviews with the artist himself, his family, friends, former students and community members from the artist’s Appalachian region of Ohio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy.</td>
<td>Due to the nature of data collection from semi-structured, open-ended interviews, my research was inductive rather than deductive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Because the research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding, the product of the study is richly descriptive.</td>
<td>Oral testimonies helped to construct a richly descriptive history of the regionalist artist, Thomas E. Wolfe.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to oral histories, I considered other published and historic documents (news clippings, birth certificates, art objects, etc.), not only because it made these stories public knowledge, but because narrators invariably intertwine their personal history with public events and lives lived in a community. Oral history, though documenting a private, personal past, is nonetheless also very much about a community’s present self-understanding; therefore, I was open to whatever data emerged and was not dependent on some finite predetermined theory or conceptual constraints. I anticipated that the participants, who volunteered to share their stories, would provide “information rich” narratives that would be useful and would include informative insights. R. Murray Thomas provides a description of experience narratives which I find describes the type of inquiry I conducted.

The term experience narrative, as intended here, refers to an account of an event – or of several related events – as described by a person who was involved in the described episodes, either as an active participant or as an observer…The purpose of experience narratives (also known as personal stories) is to reveal individualistic perceptions of selected life episodes. The emphasis is on differences among people in their experiences and in their way of viewing their lives, with the account including individuals’ own modes of communication – words, gestures, songs, dances, symbols, art works – rather than described solely in a researcher’s words. In the experience-narrative approach, the researcher acts chiefly as an organizer or compiler of the narratives…Experience-narrative research assumes a comparative form when two or more individuals’ accounts are included in the study. In that case, the researcher will likely point out common
themes, similarities, and contrasts which appear in the several accounts. (Thomas, 2003, pp. 38-39)

Through transcribing and writing narratives for the research participants, I was able to discover unique qualities and similarities among the stories (intertextualities). By finding similarities, and patterned ways of speaking (Bakthin, 1981) about Thomas E. Wolfe, I was able to clarify the influence he has had on his community.

[As] the stories people tell constitute the empirical material that interviewers need if they are to understand how people create meaning out of events in their lives.

To think of an interviewee as a narrator is to make a conceptual shift away from the idea that interviewees have answers to researchers’ questions and toward the idea that interviewees are narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own… Yet interviewees often speak in generalities rather than specifics, even when talking about their experiences, because they assume (often accurately) that researchers are interested in what is general rather than particular about their experience. (Chase, 2005, pp. 660-661)

Since the particulars of my informants were key components to my understanding the life and work of Thomas Wolfe, I worked toward overcoming this potential pitfall of interviewees attempting to generalize their stories. Chase notes that, “This requires a certain kind of preparation before interviewing; it requires knowing what is ‘storyworthy’ [sic] in the narrator’s social setting.” (2005, p. 661). I feel that by growing up and spending the vast majority of my life in the same Appalachian community where I collected the oral histories regarding Wolfe, I was able to grasp what should be
considered ‘story worthy’ from the interviewee’s standpoint, and as it pertains to Wolfe’s life as a regionalist artist.

In addition to determining what is ‘story worthy’ I considered the interviewing strategies recommended by Robert K. Yin in his *Case Study Research Design and Methods*, “The interviews will appear to be guided conversations rather than structured queries. In other words, although you will be pursuing a consistent line of inquiry, your actual stream of questions in a case study interview is likely to be fluid rather than rigid” (2003, p. 89). So while I began all face-to-face interviews by explaining the purpose of my dissertation research, I attempted to keep the interview fluid by not expecting those interviewed to stick directly to the research topic that I had constructed. Recognizing, as Alcoff, (1991) reminds us, that one cannot presume to know what is valuable to the informant, I welcomed digressions from the topic because those digressions may have contained valuable information about Wolfe, or his associates that I had not envisioned. Yin comments:

…interviews are of an open-ended nature, in which you can ask key respondents about the facts of a matter as well as their opinions about events. In some situations, you may even ask the respondent to propose his or her own insights into certain occurrences and may use such propositions as the basis for further inquiry. The respondent also can suggest other persons for you to interview, as well as other sources of information. (2003, p. 90)

As can be seen in Appendix A, I worked from a broad set of open-ended questions that guided the interviews initially, but that also invited personal narratives to emerge from the interviewees. By inviting stories and digressions, the unique, particular qualities of
each individual and my grandfather brought about in-depth descriptions. But, being prepared to invite a story or narrative is not easy. As Chase points out:

Narrative interviewing involves a paradox. On the one hand, a researcher needs to be well prepared to ask good questions that will invite the other’s particular story; on the other hand, the very idea of a particular story is that it cannot be known, predicted, or prepared for in advance. The narrator’s particular story is not identical to – and may even depart radically from – what is story worthy in his or her social context. (2005, p. 662)

So although I worked from guiding questions, I remained flexible and reviewed interview data, sometimes multiple times, to identify what was story worthy. Andrea Fontana and James H. Frey, in their article *The Interview: from Neutral Stance to Political Involvement* discuss the postmodernist’s reflexive concern about the ways in which the researcher might influence the interview both in data collection and reporting of the findings.

This concern led to new ways of conducting interviews in the hope of minimizing, if not eliminating, the interviewer’s influence. One such way is through polyphonic interviewing, where the voices of the respondents are recorded with minimal influence from the researcher and are not collapsed together and reported as one through the interpretation of the researcher. Instead, the multiple perspectives of the various respondents are reported and differences and problems encounter discussed, rather than glossed over…as postmodernists seek new ways of understanding and reporting data, we note the concept of “oralysis”. (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 709)
Traditional orality couples oral forms of interviewing with audio recording. Therefore, with the permission of the interviewees, I digitally recorded each interview and took as detailed notes as possible during the interview and revisited them shortly thereafter to expand on any data necessary.

In reviewing the sound files, I looked for clues and prompts to encourage narratives during the next interview session with my grandfather since I conducted multiple interviews with him on several different occasions. Also in reviewing the sound files, I made an effort to draw attention to the complexity and peculiarities within each interviewee’s voice, noting the diversity of each narrators’ testimony in describing their experiences with Wolfe.

Working with each participant, I gathered personal stories and experiences that helped to shape my understanding and provide meaningful descriptions for study readers. Through the interviewees’ narratives and my analysis of these stories, I was able to identify intertextualities that could be of value to the field of art education and support readers’ deeper understanding of the value of Regionalist artists as educators and cultural producers. As F. Michael Connelly and D. Jean Clandinin (1990) suggest in their article, “Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry,” that themes establish the complexity of a story, adding depth to the subject’s insights and understanding of an individual’s experience, can be incorporated into the passages retelling the individual’s experience, or as a separate section of the study.

I attempted to collect basic demographic data on all participants interviewed for this study, including age, sex, race, and time lived in the Perry County Appalachian Region of Ohio. But I did not ask such questions directly, therefore, I did not provide any
sort of data set regarding participants’ demographics with regards to their relationship with my grandfather. As a side note, so as to not offend the survey participants, attention was paid to the difficulties inherent in race identification and options suggested by Mertens were used to allow for nontraditional answers, such as “multiracial” (2005, p.185).

The Value of Stories

If there is one thing all human beings have in common apart from their biology, it is stories. Stories are loved, told, remembered and retold by humans of every age, gender, tribe and point in history…Aside from being a family heirloom, this story [referencing a story regarding the author’s father returning from war] also nicely illustrates oral history. It combines an historical event with personal circumstances. (Zusman, 2010, pg. 9)

Stories have been a defining aspect of my life, but I do not think that I was aware of it growing up. It was not until I met and married my husband, a man who did not grow up in the same type of environment or locale as I did, that I realized how much oral history had shaped my personality. Over the last 17 years that my husband and I have been together, there has been countless times that he has said, “I know, you’ve told me that story at least five times already.” It was through hearing that expression over and over that I came to realize that the most significant events in my family’s as well as my own history, are remembered through stories that have been repeated and retold with little variation.

For example, I learned to never be too proud or boastful when success would come my way because of one particular story involving my mother’s brother, Randy.
Although the story was not presented to me in that regards, rather I think it was just retold many times for humor at my uncle’s expense, it is a story from which I learned a life lesson. I cannot remember how Randy came into possession of a VW Bug, but I do remember hearing that he was very proud of it. I am sure that it was not a new car, as my mother’s family never had an excess of funds when she was growing up, but it was new to Randy and he wanted to show it off. So one morning, while driving to school, he decided to pass the school bus, allowing all of his friends to see his new car. However, in demonstrating how fast it could go, he was not prepared for the curve ahead and proceeded to roll the car into a ditch right in front of the bus. Every time I drive past that curve (which is quite often since it is on the main road between New Lexington and Junction City) I am reminded of that story and, unfortunately if my husband is in the car, I often retell it. Thankfully Randy was not hurt and because he was not hurt I think that it makes a wonderful story. Not that the car was ruined or that it is a bit funny, but because it teaches the lesson of not being in such a hurry to show off what you have to others.

My grandfather’s philosophy on life is deeply rooted in learning moral lessons from such stories. He has often told me that his mother’s education did not go past the fourth McGuffey Reader, but that she had memorized it by heart and could recite a story as needed to teach her children a moral. The story by Marian Douglas, *The Pert Chicken*, is a perfect example of a morality tale, and one which my grandfather has quoted to me on several occasions.
1. There was once a pretty chicken;  
   But his friends were very few,  
   For he thought that there was nothing  
   In the world but what he knew:  
   So he always, in the farmyard,  
   Had a very forward way,  
   Telling all the hens and turkeys  
   What they ought to do and say.  
   "Mrs. Goose," he said, "I wonder  
   That your goslings you should let  
   Go out paddling in the water;  
   It will kill them to get wet."

2. "I wish, my old Aunt Dorking,"  
   He began to her, one day,  
   "That you wouldn't sit all summer  
   In your nest upon the hay.  
   Won't you come out to the meadow,  
   Where the grass with seeds is filled?"  
   "If I should," said Mrs. Dorking,  
   "Then my eggs would all get chilled."

   "No, they won't," replied the chicken,  
   "And no matter if they do;  
   Eggs are really good for nothing;  
   What's an egg to me or you?"

3. "What's an egg!" said Mrs. Dorking,  
   "Can it be you do not know  
   You yourself were in an eggshell  
   Just one little month ago?  
   And, if kind wings had not warmed you,  
   You would not be out to-day,  
   Telling hens, and geese, and turkeys,  
   What they ought to do and say!

4. "To be very wise, and show it,  
   Is a pleasant thing, no doubt;  
   But, when young folks talk to old folks,  
   They should know what they're about."
   -Marian Douglas
Although my grandfather and I both grew up in an Appalachian rural community, where oral history tends to be valued, I do not think that our upbringing is the only factor in the relevancy of storytelling. In 2003, the International Journal of Information Technology and Management published an article which identified four main reasons stories are valued.

Stories are… crossing boundaries of language, culture and age. Second, they mirror human thought. All evidence from neurology and psychology leads to the conclusion that humans think in narrative structures… Third, stories define who we are. Our sense of identity is forged by the stories we tell ourselves, the ones we come to believe and those we choose to dismiss. Fourth, stories build and preserve a group’s sense of community. Stories align and motivate by portraying the world in vivid terms that build emotional connections among constituents, giving them a sense of shared purpose. (Roche & Sadowsky, 2003, p. 377)

I believe that these four factors hold true for works of art as well and I can use my grandfather’s artwork as a perfect example. Because of the rendering of his subject matter, tending more towards the realistic rather than the abstract, his work can cross boundaries of language. I know this to be true because in June of 2010, during the MacGahan American-Bulgarian Foundation of New Lexington’s Januarius A. MacGahan Festival, I witnessed my grandfather sharing his artwork with Bulgarian nationals, some of whom did not speak English, but who none the less were honored and appreciative of his work. Figure 3.1 shows my grandfather’s presentation of his artwork (Figure 3.2) to the Consul General of Bulgaria from Chicago, IL, Consul General Valentin Dontchev.
Consul General Valentin Dontchev later presented my grandfather’s painting to the museum in Batak Bulgaria, the town that was decimated by the Turks and the one which Januarius MacGahan focused on in his dispatches to the *London Daily News*. 
History and Benefits of Oral History

The beginning of hearing and the retelling of stories cannot be pinned down to a particular date in history but since the spoken word predates the written word, it seems logical that that oral histories were a part of the daily lives of those living in a “prehistoric” epoch. For many cultures throughout the world, the oral sharing of stories has helped to educate communities of people and provides a common history for them to share. A recorded oral history serves as a primary historical source, a glimpse of history through the eyes of a direct participant. Herodotus, the Greek historian, realized the
importance of primary sources and recorded the personal accounts of those involved in the Persian Wars in the 5th century B.C. In doing so, a collected oral history becomes a valuable historical document.

In the 1890s, the U.S. Bureau of Ethnography dispatched researchers to record on wax cylinders the songs and stories of Native Americans. During the Depression of the 1930s, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) hired unemployed writers to chronicle the lives of ordinary citizens. Especially valuable were the WPA’s interviews with former slaves. Four decades later, when historians finally accepted these records—comprising more than 10,000 pages of interviews—they helped to alter fundamentally the historical interpretation of American slavery. (Ritchie, 1995, p. 21)

Franklin D. Roosevelt must have valued the significance of oral history since in addition to the WPA interviews he also contributed to an elevated respect for military personnel’s wartime experiences by overseeing the collection of those as well. Under his direction, “the U.S. Army dispatched historians into the battlefields armed with heavy wire recorders…they pioneered the post-combat interview, debriefing soldiers immediately after the battle to reconstruct the events of the day.” (Ritchie, 1995, p. 21)

Although the types of documents/recordings created from these interviews would seem to fall under the category of oral histories, the first modern oral history archives were not created until 1948 when Allen Nevins established a collection at Columbia University.
Recognizing that modern communication and transportation were making letter-writing and diary-keeping obsolete, Nevins founded the Columbia Oral History Research Office. This new effort raised complaints from those who considered “Oral History” either too imprecise or too Freudian. But by the 1960s Nevins’s successor, Louis Starr, could point out that the term had so worked its way into the language that newspapers were referring to it in the lower case. (Ritchie, 1995, p. 22)

Other programs followed on university campuses, U.C. Berkeley started an archive in 1954 and UCLA began one in 1958, and just as significant, if not more so, were the presidential collections started by the Harry S. Truman Library in 1960. “The founding of the Oral History Association (OHA) in 1966 sought, “to bring together all persons interested in oral history as a way of collecting and interpreting human memories to foster knowledge and human dignity,” (OHA, 2011) and helped to solidify oral history’s significance within the context of historical documents.

For my research, the data set of primary sources contains the audio files of the interactions between the interviewees and me. The method of interviewing and recording the participant may not seem that different from the work of a journalist, after all, the writing up of one’s oral history becomes a secondary source just as a published article by a journalist does. However, there is a greater importance placed on the actual preservation of the primary source by the oral history researcher. For that reason, I am working with the Historical Society of Perry County to preserve the oral history recordings as well as the transcribed files.
Another difference between a published journalistic article and an oral history collection is the element of truth. Truth is relative to the narrator’s position and the narrator’s memory. Two individuals who experienced the same event will remember and feel differently about said event. As one’s retelling of the event cannot be viewed as more truthful than the other, it is important to recognize that recollections should not be considered as the facts of the event, rather the perspective of the participant.

Today, thousands of books and articles teach the methods and share the fruits of oral histories. Several universities offer academic degrees in oral history and some, such as UC Berkeley, house their own oral history collections. The Library of Congress maintains an enormous and growing collection of oral histories, and new projects spring up every year in all corners of the world. Perhaps this is because oral history truly is history for and by the people. (Zusman, 2010, p. 20)

It should be noted that this dissertation writes about a Modernist time period from a Postmodernist perspective and that the oral histories and personal narratives collected from the interviewees provide the socially constructed reality that this dissertation is based on. Although the finer details of postmodernism can be augured, it is generally accepted that postmodernism is rooted in the multiplicity of voices that can contribute to the recalling/retelling of a historical event.

Postmodernists also see oral history as a way to repair the historical record by including the voices of participants outside the mainstream of society…The postmodernist oral history project offers the opportunity to widen the repertoire of
techniques, interview questions, and competing points of interpretation and data analysis… (Janesick, 2007, p. 111)

The scientific approach to history, one based on finding a single “truth”, is no longer socially accepted. Truth has become much more open ended in the wake of postmodernism. For the purposes of this dissertation, I refer to Valerie Janesick’s article, “Oral History as a Social Justice Project: Issues for the Qualitative Researcher”, for a defining description of postmodernism as it relates to oral history and ultimately my research.

In the postmodern era, oral history can consist of tapes (audio, video, digital) and transcripts. However, that is only the first step. The next step is the analysis and interpretation of the data in those transcripts… Thus, the reason for me to connect oral history at this moment in time with qualitative research rests on the notion of interpretation. Why do we want to hear the stories of individuals? Why do we take pains to record on tape and even type transcripts about the past? Why do researchers undertake such projects? We do this to understand the lives of those whom we interview in order to understand ourselves and our worlds… Thus, oral history becomes particularly useful to qualitative researchers for we are documenting multiple histories, of multiple individuals, to make sense of our world. (Janesick, 2007, pp. 112-113)

Janesick goes on to further define her perspective of postmodernism qualitative research through oral histories.

In this perspective, oral history takes on more texture and possibly more credibility. This postmodern oral history is characterized by the following characteristics.
Postmodern oral history becomes an interpretive approach, which may include the participant in the project as a co-researcher. Both interviewer and interviewee take active roles in the project. This may involve a political context as well as a racial, class, and gender context. Often, the postmodernist will probe into spiritual and aesthetic topical areas as well provide a well-rounded picture of the participants in the research project. In addition, the use of ordinary language in the final report, to make the story understandable to the widest possible audience, is a hallmark. (2007, p. 114)

The value of recoding an oral history with a Postmodernist approach can be just as varied as the stories collected. There are obvious educational reasons for beginning an oral history project in order to gain a broader understanding of history, but there can also be other benefits, such as benefits to the interviewee, especially if they are an elder within a community.

One of the greatest challenges facing elders today is a sense of isolation and futility. Whether they are living alone at home or within a care-giving environment, there is a real danger of losing touch with the world and the ability to experience fulfillment and meaning. The practice of life storytelling, or reminiscing, is a scientifically proven method for improving elders’ quality of life. Reminiscence serves a number of functions, including promoting self-understanding, transcending physical limitations, increasing self worth, alleviating depression, and helping people deal with crises, loss and life transitions. In fact, the act of bringing positive memories into the present has even been shown to contribute a resistance to disease, including dementia and Alzheimer’s disease. (Zusman, 2010, p. 26)
By sharing stories with family and caregivers, elders are able to provide a greater understanding and respect for the elderly population and it also helps to strengthen their personal relationships with such people. Often, as with the intergenerational approach to oral history collection, elders are provided the opportunity to engage with younger people and feel a sense of contributing to the younger individual’s life. This contribution enables elders to have a new sense of self worth.

**Oral History Methodology**

The methodology employed for conducting oral history research involves both the recording and preserving of oral testimony as well as the product of that process. It may appear simple enough, beginning with an audio or video recording of a first person account made by an interviewer with an interviewee (also referred to as narrator), but a critical analysis needs to be employed during the oral testimony and interpretations. Both the interviewer and interviewee need to have the conscious intention of creating a permanent record to contribute to an understanding of the past. A verbal document, the oral history, is the main result of this process and should be preserved and made available in different forms to other users, researchers, and the public. The written text that is produced, in this case a dissertation, based on the interpretation of the verbal document will be preserved and made available to researchers and the community.

At the beginning my research, I wanted to only have open-ended conversations and avoid leading questions, but given the central figure in this study’s ability to seamlessly shift between topics, I knew that I would need to direct the conversations to some extent. I also recognized that not only was there a large generational gap between
my grandfather, as well as most interviewees, and me; there was also an undeniable
gender gap. I took both into consideration during the data collection process. The guiding
questions for the interviews conducted can be found in Appendix A. I also took into
consideration that interviewing is not a neutral process.

Asking questions and getting answers is a much harder task than it may seem at
first. The spoken or written word always has a residue of ambiguity, no matter
how carefully we word the questions and how carefully we report or code the
answers. Yet interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in
which we try to understand our fellow humans…Increasingly, qualitative
researchers are realizing that interviews are not neutral tools of data gathering but
rather active interactions between two (or more) people leading to negotiated,
contextually based results. Thus, the focus of interviews is moving to encompass
the “hows” of people’s lives (the constructive work involved in producing order
in everyday life) as well as the traditional “whats” (the activities of everyday life).
(Fontana and Prokos, 2007, pp. 9-10)

Additionally, in collecting Appalachian’s personal stories, special attention needed to be
paid to respecting the voices of the participants. As the editors of Listening for a Change:
Oral Testimony and Community Development explain, oral histories should give voice to
the otherwise voiceless, but they also warn

There are many ways to benefit from the knowledge that belongs to the poor, to
minorities, to the powerless…The anthropology student gains a PhD and
academic advancement; the development consultant signs another tax-free
contract; the photo-journalist copyrights the exotic human image; the environmentalist wins a prime-time sound-bite. But what of those who freely share their views and experiences? (Slim, Thompson, Bennett, & Cross, 1993, p. 148)

Therefore, it is important to me to write and present my research in an easily comprehensible manner and I have found that writing in a narrative style is the most beneficial way of making this research accessible to all. Since I am from the same region as my grandfather and the research participants, speaking with my own voice throughout this research helps to communicate my writing to all who may have interest in reading it.

Another consideration that I made in collecting participants’ oral histories was the recognition that as the listener, I was never passive. Bakhtin’s view is that the listener is an active partner in the communicative act. He considers words and sentences as units of language, not units of communication. It is the whole *utterance* that conveys meaning and is therefore the unit of communication. As Carolyn M. Sheilds notes,

We may choose words and sentences to convey meaning but it is only when we have completed a thought, conveyed all that we want to say in that moment about a specific topic, that we have completed an utterance. As Bakhtin conceives of the utterance, it may vary in structure, in length and complexity, but it has clear-cut boundaries…An utterance is only complete when the speaker cedes the floor, when it is the turn of another to respond, either through silence, words, or action. An utterance is a “link in the chain of speech communication.” (Bakhtin, 1986b, p. 84, as cited by Sheilds, 2007, p. 41)
In my role as the listener, I was aware that I could not become inactive. I understood the active role that I needed to play, but I was also careful not to be too active as I did not want to lead or direct the conversations.

**Reliability of Memory**

Although oral history collection seemed the most appropriate for my research, I was aware that there were some potential pitfalls that I needed to watch for during data collection. In *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, (translated from French by H.M. Wright) Jan Vansina notes that, “Failure of memory may bring about omissions and confusion... As this may occur in all kinds of oral tradition, it is necessary to find out the degree of distortion any particular tradition may have undergone through failure of memory,” (2006, p. 40). Although issued in reference to oral histories between several generations the remark is quite relevant to my study. Failure of memory was a prime obstacle in my collecting of stories from community members, family, friends, and especially my grandfather. In understanding failures of memory, Vansina states, it is a well established fact that a decisive factor in the tremendous storage capacity of the human memory is the amount of attention given to the data that have to be memorized. Practice in the process of memorization is another factor that comes into play. Consequently failure of memory is directly related to the method of transmission, the degree of control exercised over recital of the testimony, and the frequency with which the testimony is repeated. These three factors together provide some means of estimating the amount of attention that has been given the process of memorization...” (2006, p. 40)
By having the ability to interview my grandfather on more than 20 occasions, and through countless more informal conversations, I have taken notes of the three components Vansina identifies and factored such slippages into the types of stories that I collected from my grandfather and others.

However, I also considered what Gwyn Prins remarks about memory reliability in her text, “Oral history,” from *New Perspectives on Historical Writing* (1991) by Peter Burke. She looks at historians’ skepticism regarding the value of oral history in reconstructing the past and examines the reasons why they find a history based on oral sources less satisfactory than one drawn from documents. She notes, with regards to memory reliability, that,

The biochemistry of memory is still poorly understood. But tests on different types of memory tend to agree that long-term memory, especially in individuals who have entered that phase which psychologists call ‘life review’, can be remarkably precise. People acquire an ‘information pool’ filled by personal relationship. It is circumscribed by their social context, obviously forms personal identity and has remarkable stability. This, observes David Lowenthal, is especially true of the intense, involuntary recollections from childhood, when one sees and remembers what is there, not (as do adults) what is expected. Life review is the end-product of a lifetime of reminiscence. A stable life-review narrative in the information pool is the beginning of a long-term oral tradition…It has been the use of just such recollection which has been the biggest contribution made so far by historians like Paul Thompson. They are social historians and they use oral
data to give voice to those who are voiceless in the documentary records…as Thompson says in the first lines of *The Voice of the Past*, ‘All history ultimately depends upon its social purpose,’ and oral history best reconstructs the minute particulars of the lives of ordinary people for those who wish to do this…What personal reminiscence can bring is a freshness and a wealth of detail which is not otherwise to be found…It gives historians the means to write what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz has called ‘thick description’: richly textured accounts which have the depth and the contours to permit substantial anthropological analysis. (Prins, 1991, pp. 133-134)

She ends her article by noting the importance of oral histories in a historian’s knowledge of the past. The metaphor that she employs demonstrates the light oral histories shed on historical accounts.

Without access to such [oral] resources, historians in modern, mass-literate, industrial societies, that is, most professional historians, will languish in a pool of understanding circumscribed by their own culture, like abandoned lovers standing in the flickering circle of light under a single lamp-post in a dark and wind-swept street. (Prins, 1991, p. 137)

So, although there may be slippages in memory, Prins’ article further backed my decision to pursue oral history as the methodology that I would employ for my research. The next step was to seek permission for conducting my oral history study from the Office of Responsible Research Practices at The Ohio State University.
Collection and Analysis of Oral Histories

In collecting, analyzing, and constructing detailed and intriguing narratives of each interviewee’s stories I relied on narrators’ experiences and reflective insights. I worked with the understanding that the past is selectively constructed by each participant. “A personal narrative is not meant to be read as an exact record of what happened nor is it a mirror of a world ‘out there.’ Narrativization assumes a point of view. Individuals exclude experiences [silences] that undermine the current identities they wish to claim,” (Riessman, 1993, p. 64). Participants construct a different narrative even for the same event, therefore I recognize the need to sustain and reconcile multiple points of view and competing versions (slippages) of events related to my grandfather.

As my study progressed, I questioned how my selection of interviewees may have affected my findings. How did I make my choices regarding who to interview? Whose experiences did I include? Whom did I exclude? To make my selection of individuals to interview, I started with my grandfather and his children. They made suggestions as to who else might be included in the project and then these new individuals also made further suggestions. This participant driven sampling regarding whose voices to include, shaped my research findings and the construction of my grandfather’s narrative.

Project Preparation and Overview

The Office of Responsible Research Practices (ORRP) is the office that reviews applications for the Institutional Review Board (IRB), whose approval is necessary if human subjects will be part of one’s study. After looking over the ORRP’s website, and after discussions with Dr. Sanders, it became apparent that the type of research I
anticipated conducting should qualify for “Exemption” status from the IRB. In preparation for submitting an exemption application, I attended a “Human Subjects Research Exempt Forms Help Session” sponsored by the ORRP on January 20, 2010. During the help session, I realized that the IRB application also required the completion of online training modules.

All investigators and key personnel who participate in the design, conduct, or reporting of human subjects research (including exempt research) must be appropriately trained in the protection of human subjects. Additional training in the responsible conduct of research and good clinical practices may also be required by funding agencies and other research sponsors…The University uses the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) web-based human research courses to satisfy the requirement for OSU researchers for training in human research subjects protection. (ORRP, 2011)

I completed the CITI courses online January 31, 2010 and submitted my exemption application to Cheri Pettey, MA, Certified IRB Professional and Senior Protocol Analyst for Exempt Research in the ORRP on February 2, 2010. In the application, I provided information about the study including a summary of my research interest, rationale, proposed methods, and plans for presenting my findings. I assured the institutions that my intention was to record oral histories and produce narratives regarding my grandfather and his work, rather than judgmental evaluations of the interviewees. Due to the nature of my research, I expected that all subjects would be agreeable to being identified and quoted. However, I did indicate in my application that if a subject wished to have their
confidentiality protected, I would offer to code their responses/data that could be linked to them during the analysis of the data and that I would not publish their responses beyond the final writing of the dissertation (notes would be shredded and audio recordings would be erased).

Fortunately, I received a prompt response through email which notified me that the application for having my research considered exempt from IRB review had been approved on February 10, 2010 and was assigned the project number 2010E0078.

Institutional Support

I have always found that my life relies heavily on serendipity. It seems that when I need something, it presents itself just at the right time. Finding help and guidance with my dissertation research proved no different. Just as I was beginning the process of setting up interviews for collecting oral histories in March of 2010, an amazing opportunity presented itself. The Ohio Humanities Council and the Rural Life Center at Kenyon College, in cooperation with the Ohio Historical Society (OHS) and the Ohio Association of Historical Societies and Museums (OAHSM), was offering a research institute regarding oral history June 8th through June 10th, 2010. I applied for the Catching Stories, Oral History Institute, as well as for a scholarship to attend and received notification in May of 2010 that I had been both accepted into the institute and was a recipient of a partial scholarship.

Several faculty members from various institutions presented material and topics relating to oral history (see Table 5) and as a participant, I had the opportunity to engage in a mini research project. This participation involved being active on both sides of an
interview. I sat for an interviewer to get a sense of what it feels like from the interviewee’s perspective and I also had the chance to act as the interviewer. I had the opportunity to transcribe and present the oral history that I had collected through the active learning process. Not only did faculty members walk us through the transcription process, but they also provided information on how to locate an organization for archiving collected stories and transcriptions. It was through this experience that I decided to contact a member of the Perry County Historical Society, John McGaughey, Jr., who was also participating in my research. He invited me to attend the society’s next meeting on June 16th, 2010 and present my oral history project for their consideration to include in their archives. After speaking with the society members, it was decided that I would work closely with member Lena Bowman, the former media specialist at New Lexington Jr. High, in archiving the oral histories I have collected with the society.
Table 5: Summary of Presentations at the Catching Stories, Oral History Institute

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Topics Presented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Donna DeBlasio (Youngstown State</td>
<td>“Transcribing Oral History”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steve Paschen (Kent State University)</td>
<td>“Planning an Oral History Project” and “Archiving Oral History”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howard Sacks (Kenyon College)</td>
<td>“Why Do Oral History?” and “Model Interview and Discussion”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank Dunkle (Ohio Humanities Council)</td>
<td>“Funding Oral History Projects”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the assistance and knowledge that I received at the institute, I also turned to the national Oral History Association’s website for guidance. The OHA encourages individuals and institutions involved with the creation and preservation of oral histories to uphold certain principles, professional and technical standards, and obligations. These include, “commitments to the narrators, to standards of scholarship for history and related disciplines, and to the preservation of the interviews and related materials for current and future users,” (OHA, 2011). In conducting my research I adhered to the OHA’s guidelines for oral history collection and preservation.
CHAPTER 4

PERRY COUNTY COMMUNITY AND

THE LIFE AND WORKS OF THOMAS E. WOLFE

“To be very wise, and show it,

Is a pleasant thing, no doubt;

But when young folks talk to old folks,

They ought to know what they’re about.”

Marian Douglas

From Lesson LXXII, “The Pert Chicken” in the McGuffey’s Third Eclectic Reader

This chapter presents an in-depth biographical account of the artist and visual art educator Thomas E. Wolfe. It also documents his various other occupations, including but not limited to grocery store owner, produce delivery driver, coach, bus driver, welder, and farmer. To capture in a chapter a complex life, one intertwined with various jobs and lived experiences, is a task that requires a great deal of selection. This selection was made after extensive review of the data set which, as outlined in Chapter 3 contained over 1500 pages of transcribed interviews. This chapter has been structured to narrate Wolfe’s life concisely and in chronological order. The result is a document that is accessible to both the academic community and all who participated in the study. The focus is placed upon
the people, events, and places that were influential in Wolfe’s development as a Regionalist artist. I have divided the chapter into four broad periods, each denoting transitional times within Wolfe’s life, namely 1923-1943, *Childhood up to the Navy*; 1943-1960, *Middle Years and Early Teaching Jobs*; 1960-1988, *Becoming an Acknowledged Artist and Educator*; and 1988-Present, *Life after Retirement*. Throughout the chapter I have attempted to contextualize this life narrative by providing information on the historical and social aspects of each of the designated time periods.

I open this chapter with a lengthy description of the Perry County Appalachian Region of Ohio in which Thomas Wolfe’s life unfolds in order to help readers understand the context in which he lives and works. The section on Perry County is broken down into four components; (1) *General Appalachian Information*, (2) *Perry County Geographical Information*, (3) *Historical Information*, and (4) *Demographics of the area*. The major sources for my biographical rendering are the oral histories collected from the artist himself, from members of the local community and from Wolfe’s friends and family. Literary sources and official documents are referenced to help establish the context of these oral history accounts. An overview of Perry County as a community is followed by an examination of four periods in Wolfe’s life. The artwork created by Wolfe, initially introduced in Chapter 2, is further explored in this chapter.

**General Appalachian Information**

For me, there are two sides to Perry County that need to be described in addition to the historical, geographical, and demographic information. As I was growing up, Perry County represented a safe haven and I have heard it said, “If you go back far enough,
you’ll find everyone in Perry County is related to everyone else.” If most people of the world are theoretically separated by six degrees of separation, then I would propose that the people in Perry County are only separated by two degrees. For example, my mother has over one hundred first cousins and when I graduated from high school I had one first cousin and at least six second cousins in my graduating class alone. People of my parents’ generation tended not to stray far from their place of birth, and as such, I was always surrounded by family throughout my childhood. Therefore, I knew that whenever I needed help, no matter where I was, someone, perhaps even a relative would likely come to my aid.

However, there is a flip side to the county that I should describe. Perry County is very economically depressed and has been for some time. Being defined as an Appalachian community, it is almost a given that a high percentage of people live in poverty, that there is a lower per capita income compared to the rest of the nation, that there is a higher than average high school dropout rate, and that there is a presumed outward migration from the area. Although there used to be a thriving coal industry along with other forms of employment, during my upbringing, many companies went out of business and several of the county’s coal mine companies left the area. Therefore, I always knew that I would not live in Perry County as an adult since I would go to college, and upon graduation, would need to find a job. Having obtained a college education, and wanting to find employment in which I used that education, would almost guarantee that I would no longer call New Lexington, or even Perry County, my home. Most of the industries in the area closed during my high school years and there is little
opportunity for employment even today. For me, Perry County holds many wonderful memories and provided a loving community in which to grow up, but it was not a community in which I would ever be able to raise my own family.

That being said, I think it important to present Perry County’s geographical, historical and demographic information in order to support the discussion to follow regarding the life of my grandfather and his work.

The Appalachian Region of the United States was formally identified as an area in need in the 1960s. It is a roughly 205,000-square-mile region that follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains from southern New York to northern Mississippi. Included in the area is all of West Virginia and parts of 12 other states: Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia (see Figure 4.1). According to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC),

Forty-two percent of the Region's population is rural, compared with 20 percent of the national population. The Region's economy, once highly dependent on mining, forestry, agriculture, chemical industries, and heavy industry, has become more diversified in recent times, and now includes a variety of manufacturing and service industries. (ARC, 2012a)

Although there have been recent improvements to the area, generally in the mid sixties one in three Appalachians lived in poverty and many still do today. As the Appalachian Regional Commission identifies:
In the mid 1960s, at the urging of two U.S. presidents, Congress created legislation to address the persistent poverty and growing economic despair of the Appalachian Region. A few statistics tell the story:

- One of every three Appalachians lived in poverty
- Per capita income was 23 percent lower than the U.S. average
- High unemployment and harsh living conditions had, in the 1950s, forced more than 2 million Appalachians to leave their homes and seek work in other regions.

President Lyndon B. Johnson used the President's Appalachian Regional Commission’s, (PARC), report as the basis for legislation developed with the bipartisan support of Congress. Submitted to Congress in 1964, the Appalachian Regional Development Act (ARDA) was passed early in 1965 by a broad bipartisan coalition and signed into law (PL 89-4) on March 9, 1965. (ARC, 2012b)

The ARC is a regional economic development agency that represents a partnership of federal, state, and local government. Since its inception, Appalachia has improved its economic status to an extent, but despite the progress,

Appalachia still does not enjoy the same economic vitality as the rest of the nation. Central Appalachia in particular still battles economic distress, with concentrated areas of high poverty, unemployment, poor health, and severe educational disparities. And recent economic data show that the Region has fared far worse in the current recession than the rest of the nation. (ARC, 2012c)
Geographical Information

The counties that make up the Ohio Appalachian region covers a vast portion of the state, stretching south along the Ohio River and as far north as Lake Erie. Geographically, Perry County is part of the Allegheny Plateau region and is considered part of the Buckeye Hills-Hocking Valley Regional Development District within the Ohio Appalachian area. With regards to the entire U.S. Appalachian area, Perry County is located within the North Central Region, but is considered to be in the Southeastern region of Ohio, officially known as Region 11.

![Maps of Perry County and the Appalachian Region](Image)

Figure 4.1. Maps of Perry County and the Appalachian Region
Howe’s Historical Collections of Ohio: The Ohio Centennial Edition, Vol. II, copyrighted 1888 notes that in 1887 the acres cultivated were 66,700; in pasture, 102,176; woodland, 33,929…,” (pg. 328). Much of the area is still farmed today and has fairly fertile soil, including both the flatter terrain of the northern part of the county and the rolling hills in the southern part. This split of the terrain into two sections is due to the glaciers that helped to define the county’s topography.

The northern portion of the county is a region of glaciated soils and contains productive farmland and was settled first. The Southern portion of the county remained unglaciated [sic], this is a land of sharp ridges, narrow ravines, and numerous creeks. (Daughters of the American Revolution, 2003, p. 149)

Originally the county seat was claimed by Somerset in the Northern part of Perry County, but New Lexington is the largest community in the county and, so, the county seat was moved there, to the Southern part of the county, in 1857. Although it was at one time considered a city based on census records prior to 2000, it is now considered a village, and therefore, Perry County is only made up of small towns and villages. New Lexington and Junction City are adjacent villages and share the same school system that Wolfe taught in for the majority of his 42 years in the classroom. The two villages are located in the southern portion of the county, and although there are many hills and valleys, farmers still work the land and grow crops. My grandfather became, and has continued to be, one of the county farmers since buying his family farm in 1953, located at 1729 Garey Road, Junction City, Ohio.
In addition to the availability of fertile farmland, the area contained substantial deposits of clay and coal, which supported both a thriving pottery community and a coal mining industry in the 19th century and for most of the 20th century. Today, there is much evidence for the once thriving coal industry. There are numerous strip mines that remain with little attempt being made at reclamation of the land. The clay industry has also declined but several pottery companies remain in business in the Roseville area. McCoy, Weller, and Roseville were some of the first potteries to establish successful businesses in the area that would eventually be known as the "Pottery Belt" and "Clay Corridor".

In addition to the clay and coal mining industries, there is a tile plant that has been in operation for over 100 years, the Ludowici Roof Tile Company. The company’s name has changed over the years, but when my grandfather refers to it even today, he still calls it Ludowici-Celadon, or Ludowici’s for short. The tile plant is relevant to this dissertation because my grandfather’s father, Franklin Pierce Wolfe worked there along with two of Tom’s uncles and his brother, Russell Wolfe. Due to the creation of the tile company’s business in New Lexington, there was a large Italian immigrant population at the time my grandfather was growing up and he relates to their existence in the county on a number of occasions.

**Historical Information**

Regarding the historical significance of the county, more than one hundred Indian mounds attest that the Mound Builder culture once inhabited the county (Daughters of the American Revolution, 2003, p. 148)
Prehistoric mound builders inhabited Perry County centuries before the Delaware tribe lived in the area. The ancient peoples created over 100 burial mounds and other earthworks in Perry County… Germans from Pennsylvania first settled the area in the early 1800s. Between 1800 and 1815 the road through Perry County's territory served as the main thoroughfare between Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio and the East. A constant stream of immigrants rolled westward along the road before steamboats created a new era of travel.

The county was formed March 1, 1818… In addition to Germany, Perry County's settlers came from England, Wales, Ireland, Scotland, France, Sweden and Norway. They provided constant business to the hundreds of tavern-keepers stationed at short intervals along the route, and they consumed all the spare grain for miles north and south of the road. They also cleared patches of forest and built log cabins. (Appalachian Ohio, 2011)

A concern to early settlers was that Perry County had no navigable waterways, but there are numerous small creeks that run throughout, including Little Rushcreek and Big Rushcreek, both of which relate to the oral history provided by my grandfather. Many railway lines crossed the county at one time to ship the coal from the region. However, many of the rail lines are now defunct. In a collection of oral histories compiled by authors Bob Lasley and Sallie Holt in Cold outhouses and kerosene lamps: Tales from the good old days in southeastern Ohio, Carl L. Cooperrider paints a picture of the village of Glenford in the northern part of the county as being a rural community where two railroad lines converged.
The two most famous individuals to be recognized as being born and raised in the county are General Philip Sheridan (1831-1888), a notorious Civil War hero and Januarius A. MacGahan (1844–1878), “the Liberator of Bulgaria”. General Sheridan’s experiences and victories of war are well documented through historical accounts, but the statue (Figure 4.2) that stands in Somerset, Ohio (Sheridan’s birthplace) deserves some mention here since it later became the subject of one of my grandfather’s paintings.

Figure 4.2. Photograph of Village Square, Somerset, OH, ca. 1920
The bronze equestrian statue commemorates General Phillip Henry Sheridan and was commissioned by the Ohio Governor Myron T. Herrick in 1905. It depicts Sheridan's ride to Winchester and was created by the artist Carl Heber of New York.

Januarius MacGahan, was a war correspondent for the New York Herald and the London Daily News, and published articles describing the massacre of Bulgarian civilians by Turkish soldiers in 1876. His writings initiated public outrage in Europe, and were a major factor in Britain’s decision to not support Turkey in the Russian-Turkish War of 1877-78, which preceded Bulgaria’s independence from the Ottoman Empire (MacGahan, 1876, p. iii). Sheridan and MacGahan shared a meeting that would later lead to my grandfather meeting the Consul General of Bulgaria from Chicago, IL, Consul General Valentin Dontchev.

While many were advising America's youth, "Go West, young man," Sheridan advised MacGahan to do the opposite to find the adventure he sought. “Go East,” he said, “far to the East, in fact, all the way to Europe.” (Vasilev, 2008)

My grandfather donated a painting to the Consul General of Bulgaria from Chicago, IL, Consul General Valentin Dontchev in June of 2010 which depicted the statue of General Sheridan in Somerset (see Figure 3.2).

**Demographics of the Area**

According to the 2007 Census of Agriculture County Profile for Perry County, Ohio, there were 643 farms, consisting of 97,965 acres in the county. Of the 643 farms, 241 reported that farming was their primary occupation (Census of Agriculture, 2008). Out of the 88 counties in Ohio, Perry County ranked 49th with regards to the sale of cattle and
calves. And based on the 2010 Ohio County Profiles prepared by the Office of Policy, Research and Strategic Planning, Perry County’s land use/land cover consisted of 70.66% forested areas, 21.57% cropland, 6.43% pasture, and 0.88% urban. These statistics clearly demonstrate the rural aspect of the county and the following data, from the 2010 Census, describes the population of the county by race, educational attainment, and household income.

The racial makeup of the county was 97.9% White... For persons age 25 or older, 11.2% do not have a high school diploma... About 14.2% of families and 18.5% of all of the population were below the poverty line, including 26.4% of those under age 18. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012)

As stated in the Perry County Agriculture Land Use Report from February 2004, “Perry County is normally one of the highest-ranking counties for unemployment in the state,” (p. 4). According to February 2012 estimates, prepared by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, Perry County ranks 14th out of Ohio’s 88 counties with regards to their high unemployment rate of 11.5%.

1923-1943, Childhood up to the Navy

What follows is a selection from the stories that my grandfather, Thomas E. Wolfe, told me through numerous interviews conducted over almost a two year span of time between the spring of 2010 and the winter of 2012. As was evident during the interviews, and even more so in reviewing the transcripts, his memory fails him on a number of occasions. Sensing that this bothered him, I tried not to press him for detailed
information after asking a question twice without receiving an answer. Instead, I relied upon the other interviewees’ responses when possible.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Thomas Eugene Wolfe was born May 23, 1923 in New Lexington, Ohio. He was the tenth child born to Franklin (Frank) Pierce and Maude (Hilliard) Wolfe, who had twelve children together. His father was 40 years old and his mother was 38 at the time of his birth. Frank was born in Richland Township in Fairfield County, Ohio on August 11, 1882 (or 1881, depending on which record is referenced). His birth record leaves a lot to be desired, as it is very cursory and was written by hand.

Maude (Hilliard) Wolfe was also from Fairfield County, born on January 24, 1885, and raised in Bremen, Ohio, and she had several siblings. As Tom’s sister Gladys (Wolfe) King recalled there was, “Aunt Blanche [Blanche Davis], and Aunt Belle [Belle Morgan], and Aunt Alice [Alice Coffman], and Uncle Enoch [Enoch Hilyard] was the only boy,” (6/15/10). A few would later become neighbors to my grandfather on Lincoln Street in New Lexington. As Gladys recalled, “They lived beside Mom and Dad. Aunt Alice and Uncle Enoch and Aunt Nan and Uncle Bill Morgan… Mom would say she could remember when our house was the only one and looking over toward Broadway, it was all just field,” (6/15/10). Gladys also shared with me that her parents and her mother’s siblings may have moved to New Lexington to work at the local tile plant, the Ludowici-Celadon company.

Franklin and Maude Wolfe were religious people, practicing their faith at the First United Methodist Church in New Lexington which is the very same church where I was
baptized and attended as a child. When asked about attending church with his family, Tom responded that all of the children attended Sunday School,

Yeah...when our Sunday School class was over, my biggest joy was going through, past the, the uh, whatever you call the altar. And I’d get to go back to sit with my dad in the Twentieth Century Bible Class. County superintendent [O.E. Hearing] was the, was the teacher and that, I always felt thrilled about that, getting to sit back there and listen to the adults talk. (2/2/11)

Church was not the only place though that Thomas learned about morals. He was a member of the Boy Scouts and can still recite the promise he made upon joining to this day, but it was his mother who had perhaps the greatest influence on him. Although she only had the equivalent of a fourth grade education, he noted that he, “even carried my mother’s early life up to Ohio State.” He was referring to the morals that he learned as a child that she had recited to him from the Fourth McGuffey Reader that she had memorized during her childhood education.

On July 29, 2011 I asked him what he had wanted to be when he grew up in order to gain a better sense of what his childhood dreams consisted. As would become typical, he gave me an answer I was not expecting. He said, “I wanted to be just as good as my mother and dad. They was [sic] uh, top examples. Yeah, and of course my art work. I was interested in art and I had, Pearl Wilson was my mentor years ago. And I had some good critics along the line, positive critics.” The critics that he listed were older members of his neighborhood and included Ben Pletcher and his wife, Hazel, and Andy Mansfield who had a barber shop right next to Pletcher’s. From Andy he learned about accepting people...
for who they are and from Hazel he learned one of the most important lessons in life, *persistence*.

The house in which Tom was born and raised, 123 Lincoln Street, had a connection to Abraham Lincoln for Tom beyond just the street name, “When we was [sic] coming out of the kitchen, my favorite room is just as soon as you come in. And I don’t know what that area would be called, but that’s where my dad had the big green blackboard and drew [sic] Abraham Lincoln for me,” (2/2/11). This comment followed up almost exactly on an earlier telling of his story of his father and the blackboard. For on June 4, 2010 he told me, “Oh, my dad was, he was good. He would sit there. You come out of the kitchen, and go into the, I don’t know what you’d call that room. But it had a big potbellied stove there and Dad had a big piece of slate on the wall. And he really could draw Abraham Lincoln. And he was a master designer for Ludowici-Celadon, tile factory.” His sister Gladys also recalled her father drawing on the chalkboard, “Dad would just, when he was walking past draw a picture for us… He’d be passing and draw a picture and I, I don’t know that he encouraged Tom, but Tom probably got his education,” (6/15/20). Tom’s son Randy Wolfe also has memories of the slate chalkboard in the house on Lincoln Street, only his are based on his father drawing on the board rather than his grandfather, Frank Wolfe. During the interview that I conducted with him on June 27, 2010, he noted that:

> You’d go into the front room and then you would walk into another room before you got to the kitchen. And the slate board would be there. But he [Tom] would draw a picture of a cat with a hole in the wall with the little mouse, which would
be coming out and the cat would be laying there with his one eye open watching the mouse, seeing whether he was getting ready to come out or not. That was one of his drawings that he would do.

On February 2, 2011, Tom further commented on his father’s drawing of Lincoln, “But you know, I told you, that big thing, hey when I was a young kid, my dad drawing Abraham Lincoln. And he was good at it, looking left or looking right. And we learned uh, we learned, (chuckles) what side of his hair did he part it on.” His fond memories of the family chalkboard were also shared by his children. My mother, (Beverly) Jane (Wolfe) Van Horn, affectionately remembers the chalkboard located in her grandparent’s home and on June 4, 2010 she joined me while I was interviewing her father and she provided a reference to the size of the chalkboard, being at least five feet by three feet. She also reminded her father of what her grandfather used to draw for them, a boxer dog starting from a drawing of a box. Upon being reminded of the boxer dog, my grandfather was then able to not only explain how to draw the dog, but he proceeded to draw it as well:

Right here. First thing he told me about drawing a box. And of course I’ve showed Malory [Malory Abram, Tom’s great granddaughter]. And if you do it just right [he starts drawing] you’ll have that dog that’s been on television [Marmaduke]… Yeah. All right, there it is. And then you, you do this [continues drawing]. Then you do this. Then you do this. Then you do this… [A boxer face] out of a box. (6/4/10)
Although the above quote does not provide the necessary detail to be able to complete the drawing based on how Tom described it, it does provide evidence that there was a process to drawing the dog that his father had taught him. Tom was able to memorize the process and has since been able to share it with others, such as his great-granddaughter and my niece, Malory Sue Abram. He even, in retelling the story, referred to the dog from television as “MaloryDuke,” a cute expression that I am sure he came up with while drawing the dog for Malory just to put a smile on her face.

Tom also shared some memories about his elementary school days during a conversation he had with my mother and me on January 6, 2012. He mentioned two teachers that he recalled having an impact on him and his art and a principal who helped keep him on the straight and narrow. The principal, Floyd Bream, was very strict, and Tom remembers that he never got caught throwing spitballs, because when other boys did, the principal’s office door would close and he could hear a thud going on inside. That left an impression on him and he said that, although he may have been in Floyd’s office a few times, he learned his lesson about being good. As a contrast, Tom’s teachers Madeline Underwood and Mrs. Rose, were very loving and patient. He remembers Madeline as a red haired teacher who used to take her class outside, down where Tom put his origami boats in the water, and let the students draw from nature using colored chalk and pencils. Mrs. Rose made an impression on him as well, and he even remembered where she used to live, in a big brick house on the left just before Selby’s farm. He said that she thought he was special, both for his personality and his artistic abilities, and that
she catered to him. For example, if she wanted something done, she would call on him to do it which she knew would make Tom happy to have an excuse to get out of class.

Tom’s sister Sarah mentioned another reason why she and her siblings may not have been fully aware of the impact from the Great Depression,

Well of course Ned [Ned Harris, her husband] always said because Dad always had a good job out at the tile plant with a weekly pay check and he thought we were fortunate, like we were rich. And if we were, I didn’t know it. So, I mean you always got what you needed not what you wanted. (8/23/11)

Although this comment would indicate that the family was well off, the fact that my grandfather commented, upon joining the Navy, he received more clothes than he had ever had in his whole life makes me believe that the family still struggled, just not as much as most during that time period.

In going through old papers at my grandfather’s house I came across a letter from him to his parents while he was in the Navy. In it he wrote that he missed his dog and his chicken. When I asked him about it on June 22, 2010, he told me that his family used to keep chickens behind their house on Lincoln Street so that they would always have fresh eggs and that most people kept chickens back then during the depression. In addition to keeping a chicken coop, his father used to have a woodshop where he would make his children gifts.

Tom recalls that his father always made toys for him and his siblings for Christmas and that sometimes his father would let him sit and watch the carving process. “Oh, he’d make me a little fire truck with the extension ladders on it. Cause he’s got a
shop right back of our house there on Lincoln Street. Used dowel rods for the rungs going up and down.” His father also maintained a small garden in their backyard in addition to the grapes. It is evident that Tom held his father in high regard and I would propose that his father’s garden was what inspired Tom to become a farmer later in life.

Figure 4.3. Franklin Wolfe and his dog, Bud, in front of woodshop, ca. 1940.

Since he considered his father an artist I propose that he respected the work of artists and pursued an artistic career as a result. His father, Frank, was a master mold maker for Ludowici’s and he made a seven (or eight, depending on which oral history I reference) piece mold of a boxer dog at one point for his family. “And he was an artist in his own way, pattern maker and a mold maker. And I still got his molds. Boston Terrier,
eight pieces, you couldn’t [*sic*] put those eight pieces down in front of people and they couldn’t put it back together,” (2/2/11).

Tom and his father also shared a love for dogs. In a letter that Tom wrote during the Navy he asked about a dog and I found a picture he drew in 1939 of a dog when he would have been 16 years old (see figure 4.4). Margaret said that the drawing was Bud, her father’s dog.

Figure 4.4. *Untitled*, pen and ink drawing, 1939.
While Tom was in high school his artwork was greatly influenced by Pearl Wilson. My grandfather said that Pearl was a, “master with a pen and ink, Indian ink. And I always appreciated her letting me in, in the beginning to watch her draw,” (6/4/10). She was married to Clyde Wilson who ran a creamery on Main Street in New Lexington. When she didn’t have customers at the creamery, she would pass her time at work by sketching with pen and ink. The location of the creamery would have been ideally placed between Tom’s house on Lincoln Street and the high school he attended. As Tom noted, Well Pearl was (pause), I’d stop there to show her my art work. Then she’d show me hers. But she was a master at the pen and ink. Good at it. And uh, we put a
comic strip together. And we always signed it under each one W&W, Wilson and Wolfe (chuckle) that’s how that got pen[ned]. And uh, I’ve got the whole comic strip. We had to have them prepared for a year. So in case somebody would pick up the option to buy them, newspaper, then you had to have them ahead for a year in case you’d get sick and couldn’t perform. But uh, I’ve got them home, some place (laughs) in a trunk. (6/13/10)

That last comment, that he had them at home somewhere, sent me on a treasure hunt for a good part of the summer of 2010. At my grandfather’s farm there are several places those comic strips could have been hiding. He was convinced that they were located in an old trunk, which is where I started my investigation. There were steamer trunks in the side storage section of the barn. There were steamer trunks in the garage in the barnyard and there were boxes of papers and such in the upstairs of the garage next to his house. Additionally, there were boxes, cabinets, chest of drawers and cases full of his artwork and papers in the basement of his house. Needless to say, after a few months of sifting through mouse and bird manure, brittle papers that turned to dust upon handling them, and quite a few cobwebs, I finally did find the comics that my grandfather created with Pearl Wilson in a chest of drawers in his basement (see Figures 4.6 and 4.7).
Figure 4.6. *Sarabelle Haye* Cartoon Created by Wolfe and Pearl Wilson, ca. 1938.

Figure 4.7. *Sarabelle Haye* Cartoon Cell, ca. 1938.
During the search for them, I started to think that perhaps his mind was not as sound as it used to be and that he hadn’t actually created a year’s worth of comics. So I was completely surprised and blown away with the discovery of them. The condition that they were in was amazing given the fact that they were over 70 years old. Although there was evidence of mice having come in contact with them; in the corners of some of the cells there were chew marks and there was also discoloration most likely due to mouse urine, when I came out of his basement with them, he was extremely happy to say the least. I think that he had started to think that I would not find them, so I will never forget his look of complete happiness when I set them in his lap. His eyes had a gleam in them like that of a child on Christmas morning. I have to admit, I was not expecting to be impressed with the artistic work of a high school student and a young woman with an eighth grade education working at a creamery, but the quality and quantity of the work really was on the level of professional comic strip artists. Upon finding them, I took them to the Preservation Department of The Ohio State University Library where I had worked as an undergraduate and discussed with both Harry Campbell and Sally Muster the method by which I should best preserve them. Both Sally and Harry were extremely impressed with the quality of the work and suggested that I contact the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum at OSU about archiving the cartoon series with them. I will discuss the comic strips more fully in Chapter 5.
In getting back to stories from my grandfather’s high school years, I want to present the story he told me about one of the art teachers that he had had and how they compared to Pearl Wilson.

But my big remembrance about high school, some of the art instructors didn’t know beans. Don Thatcher was one of them. And he just got the job because his brother, one of them, was on the school board. So they had an opening for an art teacher and a shop teacher. No, Don Thatcher, he didn’t know, to me, he didn’t know straight up and probably wouldn’t know what you meant. Oh, I think, if my memory serves me right, I think Wade Kimball was on the school board. And his sister was a teacher, married Don Thatcher. That’s how he got in but he wasn’t as good as Pearl Wilson. No, Pearl was, no she was good and dedicated. And she was good at calligraphy. She had every pen. (2/3/11)

It is very evident that he valued his friendship with her and was very appreciative of the time she took to work with him after school to teach him how to draw and work in pen and ink. He even told his friend Jimmy Thompson, “Oh that Pearl Wilson, she was a good artist.” His sister, Sarah, remembered him working on the comics, although she was not aware of Pearl Wilson’s involvement. She said,

as a kid I remember him making, uh, newspaper cartoons. And it seemed like they were, he had some upstairs underneath the linoleum rug. I don’t know why that was, but that seems to be in my head. Like whether that’s where he kept them, I don’t know but yeah he did do that. (8/23/11)
From looking at the actual comics and finding that some still needed the lettering completed, I would propose that he and Pearl drew in pencil and that he would ink the drawings followed by her inking the words. When I asked him about their method of creating them he said that they would talk about the story line together and then take turns drawing and that I was probably right in my estimation that she did the lettering.

On June 13, 2010 my grandfather shared with me some stories about jobs that he maintained during high school. “Then I worked for…Park’s [Emmett Park] chicken farm on 345 [State Route 345]. I worked for Tom Selby and that was an interesting experience. He was a dealer in horses. And we bred horses, mares and that was very interesting. But up at Park’s chicken farm, we candled eggs to make sure they was [sic] good health order.” He also noted that while he worked for Park doing farm work, his future wife, Letitia, worked there as well, inside the house helping Amelia Park with cooking and taking care of their son.

A funny story about a dirigible goes along with his work at Selby’s farm. He has told me, and I am sure countless others, the dirigible story on several occasions throughout my life. The story is simple enough; he was the first to grab onto the mooring lines as a dirigible was landing unexpectedly at Selby’s farm. He was lifted into the air only briefly, but I think that he learned a great lesson that day, not to be the first one in life to grab onto something new. I think that the experience taught him to sit back and watch others for a bit before grabbing hold. Here is his retelling of the story:

That’s when it [the dirigible] was parked up at Selby’s bottom. They dropped the mooring lines over, six of them. And they wanted us to grab those ropes to pull it
down so you can anchor it. And I got hold of mine and that taught me never to get hold of a rope again. But the wind changed and picked me up as high as a pine tree. Probably 12 or 15 foot tall tree. And when it let, got down, I stayed down. Oh they, they finally got a hold of it. But I must have been the first one to grab it (laughs). Hold of a big knot. My whole life has been full of excitements. That’s it, it was a Goodyear. They was [sic] coming into town to advertise Newlon’s Goodyear Tire dealership. Come from Akron. Got a hold of that rope (whispers), I’d never do it again. (6/13/10)

My grandfather’s carefree days however were cut short, as most teenagers’ were, due to the installation of the draft for World War II. He enlisted with the Navy after graduating high school and started his short-lived military career at the Naval Station Great Lakes, which is where approximately a fourth of all Navy men for World War II were trained. He cannot recall a lot about his training at Great Lakes, “Well I mean, most of the training was at my other assigned bases. Like, like the subchaser [submarine chaser] base down in Florida. That’s where you get your training. All you do is get [sic] military introduction up at Great Lakes,” (2/20/11), but he was able to tell me a bit about his favorite extra-curricular activity. He engaged in boxing training and participated in several matches while there.

In reviewing his Certificate of Discharge, I found that he enlisted on January 27, 1943 as an Apprentice Seaman: Seaman Second Class. The document noted his training at Great Lakes, followed by training at the Submarine Chaser Training Center in Miami, Florida. From Miami he went to the Naval Training Station in Norfolk, Virginia and
ended his military career at the U.S. Naval Hospital in Norfolk. During my interview with Jackie Hoover on June 11, 2010, He mentioned his military work at Norfolk in further detail:

We was [sic] on a 72 foot craft and they had the K-guns. [The K-gun was the primary depth charge projector starting in 1942.] If you get a sounding, and sounded like a submarine, then you dropped one off the back end, the aft, a depth charge. We’ll say 70 to 75 feet, then the K-guns would shoot two off the side. We’ll say they was [sic] 100 foot deep and go off and then one in the middle, then one (pause). Out in front and then run as fast as you could run on the boat because the biggest gun we had was a 3 inch 50 [the Naval gun that fired a projectile 3 inches in diameter and had a barrel that was 50 calibers long]. But submarines had 4 inch guns.

It was during his time at Norfolk that Tom was injured by the recoil off of a 3 inch 50, “I didn’t get out of the road of the recoil. That’s what hit my leg,” (6/4/10). He was knocked down and was sent to the infirmary for evaluation upon which they told him that, “it was called internal rearrangement of my right knee. That’s how they had it classified,” (2/2/10). He was discharged on August 6, 1943 and was awarded his Honorable Discharge Button on March 25, 1944. On being asked if he learned anything important while serving in the Navy, Tom responded, “I think so. Know when to speak up and know when to shut up. Yeah, you know it is like that bird. If it had kept its mouth shut, the cat wouldn’t have ate [sic] him,” (2/3/11).
The story that he is referring to in the previous quote was told to me on January 31, 2011 during a conversation about his time at The Ohio State University, but I wanted to relay the story here for the sake of clarity. In discussing the benefits of being a conformist, he said:

And I think that’s where I got that story about a sparrow. Turned winter time, and uh, he was a nonconformist. And he didn’t fly south with the rest of them. But it really got cold and he decided that he was going to go fly south and he took off and froze right in the air. And, he landed right in a cow corral. Now just think about this for a minute. Froze stiff and a cow come along and crapped on him. Warmed him up, see. Now just because somebody disagrees with you, you might think they have crapped on you. But, but actually that cow did him a favor and he shivered around there for awhile. He got all loosened up and he started to chirp.

Now here is the rest, [the] moral of [the] story. A cat happened to be walking through the corral and heard it chirping and ate it. See, and the moral of that story is that bird wouldn’t have got eaten if he had kept his mouth shut.

Upon being discharged from the Navy, my grandfather returned to New Lexington, Ohio. As stated on his Certificate of Discharge, he was furnished with a travel allowance at the rate of 5 cents per mile from Norfolk, Virginia to New Lexington, Ohio, totaling a payment of $74.09 upon discharge. He worked a couple of jobs in the Newark, Ohio area during the time between his discharge and starting his studies at Ohio State, and he also reconnected with my grandmother. Their reunion must have been quite romantic, for three months later they were married and 6 months after their wedding day
my grandmother gave birth to my uncle, Perry Thomas Wolfe. Commenting on where
and why he and Letitia got married in Greenup, Kentucky, Tom said, “Because you just
go in and get married and vamoose… Now, having a big shindig wasn’t the first thing in
our mind. And I don’t know where we ate. We got in and out of there fast… No we
started for home,” (6/7/10).

1943-1960, Middle Years and Early Teaching Jobs

In March of 1944 when Tom began his studies at The Ohio State University, he was one
of the first 25 veterans of World War II to attend (conversation with Wolfe, 1/4/12). Ohio
State accepted the first 100 veterans just prior to the official passing of the Servicemen’s
Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the G.I. Bill of Rights, in June of 1944.

In attempting to clarify exactly when my grandfather started at OSU, I helped him
request his official transcript, something he claims to have never seen before, online in
the spring of 2011. His transcript notes that he started at OSU on March 13, 1944. Wolfe
was indeed one of the first 100 WWII veterans to be accepted and to begin studies at
OSU in March of 1944. As found in the “Vets Returning” article of the June 1944 issue
of The Ohio State University Monthly, a publication by the Ohio State University
Association, veterans who had been medically discharged from WWII were returning
(and in my grandfather’s case, newly enrolling) at OSU. “Events are moving with
fantastic speed at the University. This was forcibly demonstrated last month when
registrar’s mid-quarter reports showed that 100 veterans of the present conflict are back
in classrooms and laboratories!” (1944, p. 1). The issue goes on to note that both the
University Personnel Council and the Junior Council stated:
The University should avoid any activities which would serve to make a display of an individual veteran in the society of the community. However, provision should be made for veterans to receive individualized attention by selecting persons whose responsibility it would be to assist the veterans in making adequate adjustments in studies and living”…the Physical Education Department reviews each veteran’s case and indicates requirements accordingly. (1944, p. 1)

The following month’s issue of *The Ohio State University Monthly*, had an article entitled “G.I. Bill Passes,” which noted the addition of 100% increase in the enrollment of discharged war veterans for Summer Quarter 1944. “An additional 100 (veterans) registered for the summer term bringing the total of already enrolled to 200,” (1944, pg. 5). The issue also notes that in the anticipation for more veterans who would start enrolling, not all would be veterans who were returning students whose studies had been interrupted by the war, “but there will be additional thousands of others who would not have attempted college without the financial benefits provided in the new law,” (1944, pg. 5). Even though my grandfather may not have thought about furthering his education upon graduating high school, or considered himself college material, the U.S. government did provide him with a path in life from which he benefited greatly.

My grandfather and I discussed his guardian angels at OSU, Professor Lewis A. Hess and Professor Chalmer G.Hixson on February 20, 2011 when I asked him, “What did they teach you about, the most?” He responded as he typically does with a brief answer that related to something else, but he did say that they taught him the most about life. We were going through some of his old college papers that I had found in an old
steamer trunk in the barnyard garage at the same time as the interview and I stumbled upon an essay of his for a physical education class. I read a passage aloud for him which was relevant to what we were discussing, “General Intramural Objectives: The intramural program must appeal to the students and the opportunity to play must be the objective most obvious to him,” (2/20/11). In reviewing the transcripts of this discussion, I can see where this passage relates to my grandfather’s overall attitude about life. He has always tried to present himself as agreeable and appealing to all in addition to demonstrating an obvious sense of play and enjoyment for life in his personality.

When my grandfather first began taking classes at OSU, he did not have a place to stay near campus. He commented that they (he and my grandmother) did not have enough money for them both to stay in Columbus and with the drive between New Lexington and Columbus taking well over an hour, many nights he slept in his car on campus near the Natatorium (aka Larkins Hall and what is now the Recreation and Physical Activities Center, RPAC).

It was during one of his sleepovers in his Essex that, “an early morning walker,” as my grandfather likes to say, found him curled up in the backseat. That walker was Ralph Fanning, an Art Professor at OSU and an avid painter. He was also a very generous man, donating over 2000 original watercolor paintings to the Art Department’s lending library, with many ending up in the OSU medical community. The *House Call* publication’s article, “Historian’s Notebook; Ralph Fanning; The Cultivated Mind. The Skilled Hand,” quotes Dr. Robert Myron, Professor Emeritus of Art at Hofstra University as saying, “I can still hear Ralph Fanning saying, ‘The purpose of life is that people do
things for other people,’” (p. 4). Fanning must have been a man of his word, for he did take it upon himself “to do things” for my grandfather. Upon finding him, Fanning knocked on the Essex’s window and asked him what he was doing, to which my grandfather awoke and replied:

I told him that’s where I slept and I then I go into the Natatorium and take a shower or bath and shave. And, he said well he’d find me a place to sleep down at the stadium which he did. It just had a sheet on the bed. I think mine was underneath the concave. It was just one bed there. But of course, I told you that I saw the football players lining up to go for breakfast. And I think I took my M&M smart pills and got in line with them. But after a while they shut me off.

(6/22/10)

Although his free meal plan did not last long, his housing situation did as a result of Fanning’s assistance; my grandfather was provided a place to stay at the stadium at no charge. Fanning was also a source of inspiration to my grandfather and he cherished their friendship. Through a stroke of luck, my visit to the Art History Department at OSU on June 14, 2010 coincided with the department’s preparations for moving to a new location on campus. Gwyn Schwindt Dalton was in the office the day I stopped by and she recalled just sorting through a lot of information regarding Ralph Fanning while boxing files up for the impending move. She was not really familiar with Ralph’s name before coming across the files, so if I had stopped by a week earlier, I may not have been as fortunate to receive information about Fanning and his art. Through reading through copies of personal letters and university press releases that Gwyn provided, I was able to
learn that Ralph was a widely traveled art historian who used his sketches as a way to train his memory. He felt that he would be more likely to remember a structure or landscape if he had taken the time to sketch and paint it. In an OSU press release dated March 7, 1953, it noted that Fanning had traveled with his sketch pad through most of the countries of Europe and the Middle East, Mexico, Canada, and the United States. It also noted that a group of 30 Fanning watercolor paintings of Ohio homes, churches, farms, and people was touring the state as part of Ohio’s Sesquicentennial celebration.

My grandfather often speaks about Fanning’s personality and paintings and he is most proud of the fact that Fanning wanted him to have a painting of his. The painting is of a historical home in Marietta, Ohio. The way in which the painting is framed though does not reveal Fanning’s signature. But my grandfather has never removed it from the frame; rather, he has kept it just as it was given to him. Being a bit skeptical of whose painting my grandfather actually had, I did a bit of research on Fanning before visiting the OSU Art History Department. I was under the assumption that he mainly painted architectural images of foreign buildings, but the press release that Gwyn provided revealed that Fanning also painted several scenes and architecture from Ohio. Therefore, I have no reason to doubt my grandfather’s claim that the painting is a Fanning original. As he recalled for me, “But isn’t that funny, they (Ralph Fanning and Leland McClelland) wanted me to have one of their pictures. I’ve always, I’ve thought about that a lot of times. It’s like Fanning. Now he didn’t have to give me anything. I was just, I admired his work and they might not have had any family,” (6/7/10). My grandfather always refers to Fanning’s assistance in the same manner, stating that Fanning didn’t
have to help him, but he did. I think that that was a very educational moment for my
grandfather because he has always tried to help others since that experience.

For example, as revealed during an interview with my Uncle Randy Wolfe, my
grandfather was once due for a raise, but he asked his employer at Westerman Company
to give the raise to another employee who my grandfather felt needed the raise more
(6/27/10). My grandfather mentioned, “They needed it more than I did. So I just told
them to give it to him… the scriptures says [sic] to do good to those who despitefully use
you,” (6/27/10). His comment, “despitefully use you” was referring to his foreman, John
Jackson, at Westerman’s who he said had a chip on his shoulder due to my grandfather
pursuing a university degree.

Perhaps Fanning would have been proud of my grandfather for helping a less
fortunate man out, just as he had in finding my grandfather shelter at OSU. I know that
my grandfather still looks up to Fanning and his artwork. He proudly displays Fanning’s
painting in his dining room. During a recent encounter with OSU’s President Gordon Gee
in Junction City, Ohio, Tom donated one of his paintings to the President and he was
overjoyed at learning that Gee would hang it next to one of Fanning’s in the OSU
presidential home.
When I asked my grandfather how he decided to become an art teacher, I assumed that he would mention Fanning as an inspiration. I was not aware that his teaching degree from The Ohio State University was a Bachelor of Science in Education, majoring in Physical Education. I had always assumed that he had majored in art as well, but he informed me that, “Well, when I had the privilege of going to Ohio State and I’d take tests, art examinations. And I got 18 credit hours and only had to take six more to get my minor in art (6/4/10). He said that he would go into an examination and they would ask him to draw certain things and then keep his drawings as evidence for passing a course.
Therefore, he does not remember taking very many fine art classes. However, in reviewing his official transcript, it appears that he received examination credit for only Basic Art (Fine Arts 421), a 5 credit course, and actually took Elementary Design (Fine Arts 431), Freehand Drawing (Fine Arts 423A and 423B), Sculpture (Fine Arts 461B), Art for Elementary Teachers (Fine Arts 569B), and Ceramic Lab (Fine Arts 485A). In addition, he also took History through the Ages (Fine Arts 501). His official transcript does not list his minors, but he told me that he had both a Fine Arts and Science minor. I would assume that he is correct, or at least he sought certification for Fine Arts and Science, since he taught both in addition to Physical Education for a number of years before settling on teaching only art.

Learning about my grandfather’s actual degree was not the only new information that I learned from talking with him. I also learned that his time of living on campus was also not what I thought it was. He only slept at the stadium for one quarter. After that, he and my grandmother moved in with his Aunt Blanche and Uncle Bill Davis who lived at 25th and Cleveland Avenue in Columbus. His Aunt Blanche was his mother’s sister and she had a family of her own, but she took my grandfather and grandmother in shortly before my grandparent’s first son, Perry Thomas, was born. Tom recalled that Blanche took care of her own family first and that if there was any leftover food, that is what he and my grandmother got to eat. Basically, Blanche’s family got the meat and my grandparents got the gristle. Although their time with Blanche was not ideal, they lived with her from May 1944 through the summer of 1945 at which time they moved to Commercial Point while my grandfather was teaching at Scioto High School.
Figure 4.9 and Figure 4.10 are from a couple of my grandfather’s college notebooks. Figure 4.9 identifies his family at that time, consisting of him, his wife and son, Perry, and Figure 4.10 provides some of the earliest examples of his sketches.

![Figure 4.9. Inside, Back Cover of Wolfe’s College Notebook](image)

His time at Blanche’s marked the only time that he was a full time student without additional work related responsibilities. Therefore, 1945 was a transitional year for my grandfather. He began working as a physical education teacher at Scioto High School in Commercial Point, Ohio while also attending classes fulltime at OSU.
Figure 4.10. Back Cover of Wolfe’s College Notebook.
I assume that the work load and the course work were an incredible challenge for my grandfather as evidenced by the grades he attained in his courses. Perhaps that is why his 1945-1946 academic year was the last year that he was a full time student at OSU. From then on, my grandfather only attended classes during summer quarters until his final quarter as an undergraduate in 1960.

In 1946, so as to be closer to their families in New Lexington, my grandfather applied for a teaching position at the New Lexington High School, see Figure 4.11.

Figure 4.11. Photograph of 1946-1947 New Lexington High School Grade 7 (Wolfe on top row, far right)
My grandfather’s connections from childhood aided him in becoming employed at New Lex in 1946. He was a family friend of the Plecters. Elmer Ray Pletcher was a classmate of his and Ben and Hazel Pletcher, Elmer Ray’s parents, cared a great deal for my grandfather and looked out for him as if he were their own son. My grandfather shared a story about Hazel Pletcher chasing flies which taught him the importance of persistence and this story, concerning her husband Ben, is what taught my grandfather the importance of giving someone a chance. Ben was the president of the New Lexington School Board; therefore, he was leading the school board meeting the evening that they were deciding who to hire with regards to the open position for which my grandfather had applied. Upon listening to the rest of the board members’ feelings concerning hiring my grandfather, Ben decided to take a stand in hiring him. As my grandfather told me on June 7, 2010, “Oh mercy, yeah, he [Ben Pletcher] said. He said, ‘We’ll just sit here till midnight, until you give that Wolfe boy a chance.’”

The board members, not wanting to stay until midnight, went against their better judgment and agreed to hire him. Regarding this story, my grandfather told me, “But don’t you see how lucky I was. He said he’d just sit there till midnight,” and further commented on June 13, 2010, “Then I blessed him [Ben Pletcher] the rest of my life…somebody that believed in ya [sic].” The way that my grandfather blessed Ben, was by doing the same favor to others. He believes that everyone in life deserves chances, especially the students in his classrooms at school. I think that my grandfather’s own situation is what helped him to be able to identify students during his teaching career that may have needed a chance and provided one for them.
During that same 1946-1947 academic year that he was teaching at New Lexington High School, he also served as the assistant to the Varsity football coach, John Neff. I have included a newspaper clipping (figure 4.12) of the Varsity football team with my grandfather at the far right of the second row. He is easy to identify since he and the other coach are wearing different jerseys. He is wearing the number 42, the same year he graduated from high school, 1942.

My mother was also born at the end of January in 1947, so I assume that my grandfather was very busy. My grandparents had moved from Commercial Point into a
house on Lincoln Street in New Lexington, but after that year, my grandfather took a position at Pleasantville High School (from 1947-1949) in Fairfield County (adjacent to Perry County) and moved his family into a small house in Bremen, Ohio to be closer to his work in Pleasantville. The home had a tiny room attached to the front which they used as a grocery store that my grandmother ran until they purchased the family farm in 1953.

During the summers, my grandfather would drive back and forth between Bremen and Columbus so that he could continue his studies at OSU. The grocery store business supplemented his teaching salary, and it also helped him to pay for the gasoline required for his commute to Ohio State. As John McGaughey, Jr. relayed to me on June 21, 2010.

…when he was going to Ohio State. He commuted and he would stop I think it was on Fifth Avenue in Columbus…the area where there were a lot of produce houses up there… Tom talks about he [sic] would stop on his way home… he had a routine, and he would buy a case of bananas or a case of cabbage, or something like that. And, would bring it home and stop at some little stores in Bremen and, and sell some of whatever he bought. And, sell some in Junction, but he just picked up a few dollars that way and helped buy his gas and stuff… I kind of thought it was a neat idea.

After John shared this story with me, I asked my grandfather about it the next day, June 22, 2010. He was able to elaborate on it and said, “Right. And, I even sold it [produce] to two other grocery stores in Bremen. Yeah that helped. I mean it, I could buy 40 pounds of bananas for $3.25 a box and I would sell it to Shannan and Kelly’s for $4.00. I would make [almost] a dollar on the box…I could haul 10 boxes in my old Essex.”
My grandfather changed jobs while living in Bremen, from Pleasantville High School to Rushville-Union High School in 1949. He taught and coached basketball at Rushville-Union until 1951 and then took a position at Diamond Power Specialty Corporation in Lancaster, Ohio until 1953. In 1953, he and my grandmother purchased the family farm in Junction City, Ohio and he then took a position at McLuney High School in 1954 and taught there until the spring of 1960. Figure 4.13 is an copy of my grandfather’s photo from the 1958 McLuney year book and Figure 4.14 is a photo of the art class from the same publication.

Figure 4.13. Wolfe’s McLuney High School Yearbook Faculty Photo, 1960.
While at McLuney High School he learned valuable life lessons. For example, during a conversation with both my mother and grandfather on June 6, 2010, my mother mentioned that she thought he had built a lot of life size statues with his students out in front of McLuney School for either Christmas or Easter. My grandfather responded by saying,

You couldn’t believe what we did. No isn’t that funny. Every place I went, they let us all be creative. And I still got pictures of everything we made down there. Oh boy. You know I had those three boys that went out the window. And Mr. Herriot wanted to know if I was going after them. They went out there by the big Iliff Church, going. And I told him I was damn glad they’s [sic] gone. And right outside the window was another cemetery. And that one boy wanted to pattern his
life after Al Capone. What an influence, what an influence. You have to be careful what you say.

On June 27, 2010 my grandfather was talking with his friends Jimmy and Joyce Thompson and he continued with the story about the boy who wanted to pattern his life after Al Capone. He told Jimmy about the 1960 graduates from McLuney’s 50th class reunion that he had been invited to the previous week.

And they even presented me with the 1960 year book. And, of course I went through that. And, I came to a boy that Walter Herriot, the superintendent, said it would never happen again as long as he was superintendent. I was going along there and reading all the nicknames of all the students. There I saw the picture of Tony “Al Capone” Burton. Now he wanted to live up to that nickname. See about two years ago they found him in a cornfield with a bullet in the back of his head. Just blewed [sic] his brains out. Now he was either in drugs or this or that. Found him in the corn field.

Jimmy asked my grandfather if Tony Burton had been connected to the mob in any way and my grandfather continued:

…he probably was yeah. But…Walter Herriot said that’ll [giving students a nickname] never happen again as long as he was superintendent because kids tried to live up to the name… Walter Herriot came into my room he said, “I want you to be careful,” because his dad was a graduate of the penitentiary.

From this experience, my grandfather learned the valuable lesson of being careful with what he said to his students. He learned that students are very impressionable and that a
teacher has a responsibility to set worthy expectations for their students, even with regards to the nicknames one might come up with for them.

Another lesson that he told me about that involved McLuney High School was learned on the basketball court. My grandfather was the Jr. Varsity boys’ basketball coach and assistant to Bob Frame who was the Varsity boys’ coach at McLuney. I learned about this story after a casual conversation with one of his former co-workers at New Lexington Junior High School, Lena Bowman. I attended the Perry County Historical Society’s monthly meeting in June of 2010 and Lena was at the meeting. She is the Vice President of the Historical Society and is also the person that I am working with to archive the oral histories that I have collected through my research.

According to her, my grandfather was coaching the reserves [Jr. Varsity] at the time and he [Bob Frame] was coaching the Varsity. One particular evening, the reserves played incredibly bad; so much so that my grandfather thought that he should have them practice more. Needless to say, Bob was shocked to walk out of the locker room at the end of the first half of the Varsity game and find my grandfather’s Jr. Varsity team on the court scrimmaging one another with shirts against skins. My grandfather decided that they had played so poorly that they needed all of the practice they could get and took advantage of an open court. Although this event may seem a bit out of line, it made me realize my grandfather’s resourcefulness. There was an open court and he had players who needed to practice, it was an easy decision for him to make. Seeing an opportunity and taking advantage of it was a well learned life lesson. It is also one of the philosophies of which he lives by even today.
From 1960-1961 my grandfather took a position as principal and teacher for a split grade level class at Madison Local. His superintendent was O.E. Hearing, who had also taught the men’s 20th Century Bible Class at the First United Methodist Church. Madison Local was quite small, consisting of only three split grade level classes, including one 1st/2nd grade class, one 3rd/4th grade class, and one 5th/6th grade class, taught by Anna Hazlett, Vivian Walton, and my grandfather respectively.

Given he had such a small school population and the magnitude of an educational opportunity the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy presented, my grandfather made arrangements to take all three classes to a local family’s (Web’s) farmhouse so that the children could watch the president being sworn in and listen to his inaugural address on the television. It just so happened, though, that January 20th was also the day when Margaret (Maggie) Klinger, his supervisor, had decided to visit the school. Upon finding no one there, she became very upset. As my grandfather recalls,

Well anyway she [Maggie] pulled in and we was [sic] just getting back. And uh, she said, she had to know everything. She said, “Where have you been?” I said, “We’re just coming back from the inauguration.” “No,” she said, “I want to know where you’ve been.” And I said, “We’ve,” people’s name Web lived close to the school and I told her, “We’ve just, coming back from the inauguration.” And she didn’t like that. And the school buses, garage out, parked on back, and she spun her tires and threwed [sic] gravel clear on the school buses getting out of there. She didn’t like that [that they had left school to go watch the inauguration]. Yeah she couldn’t understand that. She wanted to know why I didn’t tell her where I
was going. Well, it wasn’t any of her business. And we didn’t have time to, the parents said we could go and we all went. Right up the road, yeah. And she, “Where have you been?” Now what was I, now I answered her question the best I, I said, “We’ve been to the inauguration.” “No,” she said, “I mean where have you been?” and I had to tell her again we was [sic] at the inauguration. Um, and she threwed [sic] gravel, and then she went back and told O.E. Hearing… That was the highlight of my life. “Where have you been?” I said, “We was [sic] just coming back from the inauguration.”

I enjoyed hearing the story and asked him if she thought he meant that they had just come back from Washington, D.C. and he said, “I don’t know what the hell she thought.”

Amidst his laughter, he continued, “Oh, I told you, she threwed [sic], she threwed [sic], gravel clear over on the school buses.” Although there are many more stories to tell from his teaching experiences prior to 1960, I will end with the humorous inauguration story which demonstrates his ability to seize an opportunity when it presents itself whether he has permission to or not.

My Uncle Perry perfectly described his father’s personality when he said, “Well…he’s an optimist. His glass is always half full. It is never half empty. So when everything looks bleak or doesn’t look like it is going the best, he always has a positive outlook. Positive spin on things,” (12/29/10). My grandfather’s friend of over fifty years, Richard Sayre made a similar commented on his personality by stating, “[He is] a real gentleman and he tells it like it is. He doesn’t stray from anything and if he thinks something is wrong he’ll tell you. Yeah…he always wants to put a smile on somebody
else’s face,” (5/26/11). It is that last expression, putting a smile on someone else’s face, that I feel was my grandfather’s greatest strength as a teacher and the following section will outline some stories that touch upon bringing happiness to his students and others.

The next section will also describe how he became an acknowledged artist within the Perry County community and details the artistic lessons he learned from watercolor artist Leland McClelland and oil painter Leslie Cope. I will end this section of his life by mentioning one last story that also put a smile on several peoples’ faces; his graduation from The Ohio State University.

Although it took him 16 years, my grandfather did complete his Bachelor of Science degree in August of 1960 and his family was there to see him graduate at St. John’s Arena. My mother recalls that my great-grandmother, Thelma Smith, had made all of my uncles new dress shirts that they wore to the graduation ceremony. She also recalled her grandfather, Franklin Wolfe, attending along with her Uncle Bill Smith and his daughter Kathy. She mentioned that a trip to Columbus was very rare, so it was quite an event for the whole family to attend. My grandfather recalls that both of his parents, Franklin and Maude Wolfe, attended the ceremony and that they were very proud of him.
Figure 4.15. Wolfe (middle) and OSU President Gee (right) at the 1960 50th Class Reunion, 2010

1961-1988, Becoming an Acknowledged Artist an Educator

In 1961 my grandfather returned to teaching within the New Lexington City School District. It had been fourteen years since he had last taught for the New Lexington City School system and upon returning, he took a position within the junior high school which was temporarily located in Junction City. This position involved him teaching science, art, physical education and industrial arts, as well as coaching the junior high football, basketball, and track teams. His students from the 1970s provided me with some
very colorful stories about my grandfather’s teaching practices and art projects. George Adams, a very artistic student, was extremely helpful in gathering stories about Tom. George graduated New Lexington High School in 1972, so he would have had my grandfather as his seventh and eighth grade teacher between the years 1966 and 1968. As he recalls,

Yeah, yeah it was, well seventh and eighth grade. I had him for science in, in, seventh grade and uh, one year I had him I think for physical education… I [also] had him for wood shop both years, seventh and eighth [grades], and then the regular art class both years… he taught, he did everything… and he coached all the sports that we had. Boys football, basketball, and track and he took the edible garbage home to the pigs from the, the cafeteria… he was dean of boys… he took care if there was a particular discipline problem. Like if a couple of us would get in a fight… If we were fighting, there was a standard thing and he was generally in charge of it. [Tom would] Say, “OK you two, you be here at such and such time and you can put the gloves on.” That was, they knew what it meant. “You be here and we’ll put the gloves on.” Well, that was so we could just work it out. If we were going to fight, well we could fight. So we, he’d, he’d give us boxing gloves and he’d referee and he’d just let us. He’d decide when we got it out of our system and he’d call an end to the fight.

Although my grandfather’s disciplinary tactics would be considered unconventional today, if not illegal, he did try to provide students with an outlet for their frustration, allowing them to act on it and then move past it. George went on to tell me
about a fight that he had with one of his classmates that, after putting on the gloves and fighting each other, they became the best of friends. George was also able to tell me about one particular project that my grandfather came up with to have his students make which focused on boomerangs. Students made the boomerangs in the industrial arts classroom, decorated them in the art room, and learned about the physics and aerodynamics of their flight in the science classroom.

Esther Poling mentioned boomerangs when talking about her son, Bob, who was a student in my grandfather’s industrial arts class,

And then they also made boomerangs. They were quite good at making boomerangs. And as a matter of fact my son Bob, the oldest boy, he was pretty much a boomerang champion… he [Bob] got to talking about the boomerangs and uh, but Tommy [my grandfather] makes [made] it fun for the kids. (6/22/10)

Gary Wilson, another former student of my grandfather and a classmate of Bob Poling’s who now writes for the Perry County Tribune, a local newspaper, also remembers making boomerangs. Esther told me about a featured story in a 2010 issue of the Tribune that Gary wrote about he and Bob working with the boomerangs. Gary also wrote about the experience again in the January 4, 2012 issue of the publication. In the 2012 article, “Another year of gooberin’ and hi-jinks!,” Gary noted that, “it [the boomerang] crashed through a restroom window and landed in the occupied stall of one very startled lad named Benedeen,” (p. 4A).
Gary Wilson was also very kind in helping me to collect stories about my
grandfather and took the time to write me an email on January 26, 2010 that was very
poetic in its description of being a student in my grandfather’s classes.

That is how I first met Tommy Wolfe—as a seventh grade art student at Junction
City Junior High School. Prior to this, art had always been an occasional subject
observed but not taught, throughout elementary school days whenever time
permitted. I recall being amazed at the notion of having nothing but art instruction
for an entire period of school, and I had been inspired by the first “television
artist,” Jon Gnagy, whose various “Learn To Draw” instructional shows appeared
on TV quite often.

Prior to meeting Mr. Wolfe, my art work had consisted of drawing comic book
heroes, dinosaurs, or the parade of monsters we youngsters were currently
viewing every Friday night courtesy of a show entitled “Chiller Theatre.” The
concept of drawing a tree, a building, a landscape or a portrait didn’t seem as
much fun as drawing the Frankenstein monster for example. But Mr. Wolfe’s art
class introduced youngsters to the real world of art, and he pulled no punches as
he taught us how to draw plants and trees, faces and structures using basic rules of
shading and perspective.

His advice to “Draw what you see,” is still with me today. Although the concept
of perspective and vanishing points puzzled me at first, I was a natural at drawing
portraits from life. Tommy caught on to this and set me up with a simple booth
during a school science fair, as I drew one portrait after another in pencil, looking at seated live subjects.

This sudden explosion of talent within me led my parents to buy me a deluxe “Jon Gnagy Studio Art Set” for Christmas. Now this was exciting, as I now had my very own art tools and access to charcoal, pastels, oil and watercolors. All because a fellow named Mr. Wolfe had the insight and ability to draw out my talents.

He loved to experiment through his students. One day, out of the blue, he gave me a sketch pad and charcoal pencil and instructed me to draw as many sketches as possible within a half-hour lunch period. I believe I handed in around ten, and some of them weren’t too shabby I must say.

Looking back, Tommy didn’t regard us as the awkward, youthful students we were--he was often instructing us in the ways of art as you would college students. In those days we had no distractions such as cell phones and video games, and only scientists had computers. Even students with only a handful of art talent were doing their best under Wolfe’s guidance. Life was much simpler in those days, and the majority of students had much more respect for their instructors than in today’s times.

Gary’s letter provided great insight into the type of art teacher my grandfather was in the late 1960s and George Adams was able to help me further understand what my grandfather was like teaching science. As George relayed to me:

And I, he’d give me experiments, special experiments to do... And, I thought he knew what the result was going to be... So when he’d tell me to do this, I thought
he knew what was going to happen. And, I’d go and do the experiment and I
couldn’t make it work and I thought man I can’t go back to, I didn’t want to go
back to him and tell him it didn’t work so I’d try and try and worry about it and
finally I’d go back to him and say Mr. Wolfe, you know, it didn’t work. And, he’d
say, “OK, I just thought it was something worth trying.”… We learned a lot of
practical things… identifies a problem, figures out what, what the resources are,
and how to solve the problem with the resources available. And he’d tell us
stories… he said, “George I couldn’t get up the hill in my truck. My fuel pump
wasn’t working and I couldn’t get up the hill so I turned around and backed up the
hill so it would gravity feed. And it was just that sort of thing, here’s the problem,
here is what I have to work with, and here is how to solve it. Um, (pause) and that
he did. (6/2/10).

Creativity in thought was something that my grandfather tried to stress upon his
students with his art projects. He also encouraged them to make monumental works and
that if they were going to make something, to make it grand. This was particularly true
with the sculptures that he had his students create. There are three in particular that I
would like to share to demonstrate his sense of making creative monumental works. The
first story involves a project that he had George Adams create and the second and third
concern works that were created as presidential gifts for Presidents Ford and Eisenhower.

To begin with, George related my grandfather’s teaching style in science to his
teaching style in art, “in the art he was always looking for, trying, trying to get us
experimenting with that too. I mean, you know, to start out the year he’d have, OK,
everybody, you know, everybody work on this. But, he was always looking to have individuals to branch off. And, and, that kind of lead to, to the Lincoln head,” (6/2/10).

My grandfather must have picked up on George’s interest in learning because, in addition to having him do science experiments at home, and later in front of his class, my grandfather also had George tackle an incredible art project of carving the head of Lincoln. As he told me on June 2, 2010:

But just, kind of to, elaborating on how that got started, he [Tom] said well you know to bring in some piece of Styrofoam. Well, you know, I think I may have been the only one that did. But you know, I’m thinking hey, if Mr. Wolfe said to bring Styrofoam I’d better, better not show up without Styrofoam. So what I, I couldn’t find a block but I found some sheets. And, so I glued them, I cut it in fourths and glued it together into a block. And, so that made it kind of unwieldy for, cause the layers and the glue. But anyway, so I had my Styrofoam and I don’t remember if anyone else brought any in or not. I’m not sure anyone else did but since I did… He took the Styrofoam, he showed me some pictures. So here’s some, uh, a picture of a carving of some aboriginal looking head and so I carved that you know. The best I could do with the Styrofoam. And then he said, “OK, well here.” And he brought out this chunk of sandstone… he said, “OK, now do the same with this now.” So that is how I kind of got specializing in sculpture.

Images of George carving the larger than life bust of Abraham Lincoln can be seen below in Figure 4.16. I came across the two images of George while looking for the comic strips that my grandfather made with Pearl Wilson. I thought that they were
amazing at capturing the enjoyment George had during the carving process. When I asked George if he considered himself an artist he told me that, “Well I’ll say as far as considering myself an artist, I was an artist for him. I was an artist in the employ of Tom Wolfe. And that’s the only time I have been an artist,” (6/2/10). Figure 4.17 was taken June 2, 2010 and shows my grandfather and George visiting the sculpture where it stands today, in the entrance of the Peoples National Bank, Junction City Branch located at 106 E. Main Street. I was able to get George and my grandfather together on June 2, 2010 after Gary Wilson had featured George and his sculpture in a March 3, 2010 article for the Perry County Tribune. Gary also mentioned George and my grandfather in an article that he published in the December 20, 2011 Tribune article, “Celebrating Christmas all year ‘round,” which featured the Christmas ornaments that my grandfather paints. Wilson wrote,

When asked if he had any advice for young people showing an interest in art, Wolfe told of former student George Adams’ experience with chiseling a bust of Abraham Lincoln from stone... Adams asked Wolfe, “What should I remember about you?” Tommy, referring to George’s chiseling, said, “George, in life, you want to make every peck count!” (10A)
Figure 4.16. George Adams Carving in Eighth Grade, Junction City, OH, 1967.

Figure 4.17. Wolfe and Adams with Sculpture of Abraham Lincoln, June 3, 2010.
The stone that George carved was taken from the foundation of an older structure in Junction City. My grandfather took George and the rest of his art class to the mill so that George could pick out a stone to use for carving. The process of picking the stone out and getting back to school was relayed to me by both George and my grandfather. As George remembers it:

I was wanting something sort of cubicle. So the thing I found I thought was going to be a block about this square [hand gestures 20 inches] but that was just cause the corner was lopped off. And the flat… side, it still shows up on Lincoln as his head looks like he fell on the sidewalk when he was a baby. The back of his head is kind of flat… But, that flat side was parallel to the surface. So looking at what was sticking up out of the ground… looked like it was going to be a block like that. But, it wouldn’t budge so we started digging and it still wouldn’t budge. So we got more shovels and more kids… we came up with that block… I remember uh when we were moving it into the shop uh he had us lay some pipes down, you know, for rollers…he was telling us this is the way the Egyptians made the Pyramids. They put the blocks on the rollers and some scholars don’t agree with that now. But, anyway that is what he, what, but and it worked for us. He was telling us… the Egyptians, would have that available to them to move it on rollers. So, there again, it was, he was working, trying to teach us as much information as he could impart to us in connection with everything we did. (6/2/10)
Speaking of seizing an opportunity, George was able to provide another story that detailed just that:

There was a basketball practice. I was the manager and he [Tom was the coach], and the call came in and one of the farmers around Junction City needed him cause a sheep was having trouble giving birth. And so the owner called him at school. So he said, “Come on George,” and uh, and uh he just wanted me to see it… But, I remember after he pulled it out and he [the farmer] was appreciative of it… And, and after the fact he said, “I got to be honest with you I didn’t find the legs. I just got it out of there and it turned out okay.” But uh you know it was like he made that on the spot decision, that don’t have time to do it by the book, got to get it done… he just, he just wanted me to have that, that learning experience.

(6/2/10)

The other two stories that I will share about sculptures that my grandfather inspired his students to create involve clay plaques and plaster casts. The clay plaques were portraits created in the likenesses of President Eisenhower and President Ford during each of their presidential terms. Therefore, President Eisenhower’s plaque was created while my grandfather taught at McLuney and President Ford’s was created by his student at the Junction City Junior High School. In both cases, my grandfather asked a local pottery business to donate the clay and the kiln space to fire and glaze the plaques. They were then given to each of the Presidents and are now archived in each president’s library. A former student of my grandfather, John Cronin, made the plaque for President Ford and another student, Charles Cherry, made the one for Eisenhower. I think that John
Cronin’s plaque stands out in my grandfather’s memory because he and John had the opportunity to actually meet President Ford in Columbus, Ohio and present him with the plaque. In interviewing a classmate of Cronin, Mike Vigue, on December 30, 2010 I was able to learn more about the monumental work.

And one of my fellow students, his name was John Cronin, and John was a good, he was quite good at drawing. I think he went into drafting or architecture for his career. He lived down on Fowlers Lane. But he made a clay, I’ll say, like a bust of clay but it was a plaque. Like a low relief plaque of President Gerald Ford. And Mr. Wolfe and him went to Columbus to present that to Ford. And I can remember different ones of us saying, “Well I can just see Mr. Wolfe meeting a secret service agent up there,” and different little side things like that. But I think they actually met the President and presented that to him… That was a big deal to us [students of Wolfe].

I contacted the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum on February 16, 2012 and received two replies the next day regarding the clay plaque made by Cronin. The Registrar, James W. Draper, was able to confirm that the plaque was in their collection (1989.397.1) and that,

According to the White House Gift Unit card found in our files, this item was given to President Ford on May 26, 1976, during his trip through Ohio. Mr. Joe Williams (chairman) on behalf of the Committee to Elect the President, New Lexington, Ohio is listed as the donor. The description refers to it as a portrait of
the President done in ceramic made in to a plaque - made by John Cronin. Our database says that it's 25"H x 24"W x 2"D. (Personal correspondence, 2/17/12)

The Registrar was also able to attach a photo of the plaque and can be seen in Figure 4.18.

![John Cronin's Plaque of President Ford at the Ford Library, 2012.](image)

The second reply that I got was from the Archivist, Jeremy Schmidt who informed me that:

The Ford Library holds the correspondence that led up to the donation [of John Cronin’s Plaque]. This is includes letters from Wolfe to the President offering the gift; the White House acknowledgment that they would accept the gift; Principal Swinehart to Rep. Clarence Miller requesting a meeting be arranged for Cronin
with the President in order to present the gift; Rep. Miller to the White House to see if a meeting was possible; and the White House response to Miller indicating that a meeting was unlikely, except maybe during a Congressional Hour.

(Personal correspondence, 2/17/12)

As for Charles Cherry’s plaque (see Figure 4.19) of President Eisenhower, I was able to locate an article in the Sunday March 6, 1960 issue of the Zanesville, Ohio *Times Recorder*. The article, “Fine Arts Class At McLuney Creates Many Unique Works,” began with the statement,

> Shortly now President Eisenhower will receive a ceramic likeness of himself cast by a member of the Fine Arts Class at McLuney High School. The plaque, which measures 20 by 23 inches, was made by Charles Cherry, 17, a senior, and was modeled from a photograph which he found in a World Book Encyclopedia in the school library. (1960, p. 4B)

Cherry’s plaque is not the only focus of the article; it mentioned several other sculptures that students created, but with regards to Cherry’s work it noted:

> Young Cherry, son of Mr. and Mrs. Webster Cherry of Crooksville Route 2, first made a clay model of the plaque, working under the direction of his instructor, Thomas Wolfe. Then a plaster of Paris mould was taken. The Watt Pottery at Crooksville provided the “slip” (liquid clay) which was poured into the mould. After drying, the plaque was removed from the mould, covered with a reddish glaze and burned in a kiln at the pottery. Several hours later the plaque was
removed from the kiln and allowed to cool before being packed for shipping. The plaque will be sent to Washington this week. (1960, p. 4B)

The other works mentioned in the article included a clay head with Polynesian features, self portrait plaster masks, and a 9 foot sculpture of Christ on the cross (see Figure 4.20) that was used in an elaborate Easter display in front of McLuney High School. The *Times Recorder* article was able to confirm my mother’s recollection of driving past the sculptures;

Figure 4.19. McLuney High School Yearbook Photo of Charles Cherry, 1960.
There are 17 members in the Fine Arts class which Wolfe instructs along with the Industrial Arts Class, and classes are held in a frame building adjacent to the main school. While some members of the class work individually on subjects of their own choosing, others team up on projects which include plaques and drawings. Three members of the class, Tommy Allen, Richard Grevey and Rodger Miller, combined their talent recently to mould a nine-foot figure of Christ on the cross to be used as a part of an elaborate Easter decoration to be placed in front of the school located on Route 75, a short distance south of this Perry County village. (1960, p. 4B)

Figure 4.20. McLuney High School Yearbook Photo of Nine Foot Sculpture, 1960.
The making of the clay plaques, just like finding the stone for George Adams, further demonstrated my grandfather’s resourcefulness in locating local materials for his students’ use. He was able to get Ludowici to help in preparing the plaque molds. And my grandfather’s childhood friend, Joe Agriesti, helped to make sure that the students had the right frame to go around the clay mold. As my grandfather recalled,

We pressed the frame into the clay. So we could fire it… And the tile plant glazed it for us and uh, and to think we give that, and I can’t recall who we give [sic] it to at the airport, but they took it. But it’s hanging in his [President Ford’s] library. Yeah two different presidents’ libraries our work’s in. Now a lot of people would call that going big time. But we just thought it was what we liked to do. See that uh, Cronin followed in George Adam’s footsteps. See created something and he was good at it. And he could make it look like him. That’s the secret, John Cronin. (6/7/10).

This next story, involving my grandfather and his students’ sculptures, deals with the use of plaster of paris as a casting medium and was first brought to my attention by John McGaughey, Jr. when he and I talked on June 21, 2010. He described how my grandfather would have students make casts of their own body parts that would then be used for another art project. For example, a student might make a cast of their hand that then would be used as the base for making a lamp. He then described how that concept prompted my grandfather to have another idea for an art project.

And they did several of those [cast body parts]. Well, well Tom came up with the idea that they were going to make a face mask. So this Hill boy, I can’t, I don’t
know his first name. I can’t recall that… But, they fixed up this box, for the pattern and they had straws… Well, I think they put cotton in his nose and they had the straw in his mouth to breathe through. And he was to put his face down into the plaster… while they were pouring the plaster, part of the mold broke and the plaster ran back into the boy’s hair. And uh, they couldn’t get it out… they had to break the mold so he didn’t have this big gob of plaster on, on his hair you know. And uh, they tried everything and they couldn’t get it out. And uh, Tom called the National Gypsum something or other that makes plaster… and explained the situation and wanted to know what he could use to reverse the drying process. And, and, this guy said, “I’ll tell you what Mr. Wolfe,” he said, “if you can figure that out you’re a millionaire… So they, they ended up with a pair of sharp scissors… Tom called the boy’s mother… her son was going to have a weird looking haircut when he got home from school… I don’t think he made any more plaster casts for a while (laugh). But I think when he came to New Lex he might have made a couple of hands and an arm and stuff like that but didn’t try the face again. (6/21/10)

Upon hearing this story I immediately related it to the story about my grandfather assigning George Adams science experiments that he had never tried himself. Although my grandfather was ambitious with his art projects and ideas, he didn’t necessary always know what the results were going to be. Another story about my grandfather using plaster as a casting medium while he was teaching at New Lex relates to casting a calf. Tom was reminded of this particular story by former student, Curt Guisinger.
I took a baby calf down that passed away [on his farm]. Then covered it up with, with plaster paris. Then when that dried we [he and his students at school] filled it up, the mold back up with concrete… We had a box around it. And made, then we pulled the calf out and buried it, some place down at school. And uh, after that set up, then we, in a day or two, we mixed up cement and filled it up with concrete…

Just pulled the calf out and left all the details of the hair… Well I thought it was [a good idea] uh, and it worked. Then, whatever hair stuck to the plaster paris, we just cleaned it off and had a perfect detail of a calf. (6/27/10)

My grandfather went on to tell me that the calf needed to be good for something and that since it died he was able to make it useful for his students. This story, just as the one about delivering the baby lamb, reminded me that on top of being a teacher, my grandfather was also a full time farmer, the superintendent of studies at the Junction City Penitentiary, the coach for basketball and football, and a 4-H group leader.

His time as the superintendent of studies at the Junction City Penitentiary came about through the connections my grandfather had with the father of one of his students, Dave Lehman. The penitentiary housed aged or disabled convicts with good behavior records from the State Penitentiary and they were sent to the Junction City prison to make bricks in the furnaces on site.

Most of the classes at the penitentiary were taught by other inmates and my grandfather supervised them, but he was mainly responsible for administering and grading the grade level competency examinations. When I spoke to my grandfather over the phone he explained the incentive prisoners had to pass the exams. He said that if an
inmate passed a grade level then they could go before their parole board a month or so early and that it was a system set up to educate the men before releasing them back into society. He also commented that most men only had the equivalent of a second grade education coming into the prison. My Uncle Perry has memories of my grandfather working at the prison. When we spoke on December 29, 2010, he commented:

Dad worked at the penitentiary as I recall, he was superintendent of schools at the Junction City Prison Farm. Mostly it was a farm where they sent prisoners that were probably there for life or uh, was low, low probability they would be a problem inmate. And so they taught, they had a school there and would take uh, prisoners from elementary right on through college level work. So he administered the education program there at the prison for a number of years.

A story that my grandfather shared with me about the penitentiary is one that I often tell to my own art education students at Michigan State University. It focuses on the importance of positioning one’s self as the teacher within the classroom environment as being just as important as what one teaches. It is also the story I remember him telling me in 1995 when I took my first art teaching position at a high school just outside of Nashville, Tennessee. He told me about an inmate that came up to him after class was over. My grandfather was sitting at his desk grading papers and thought that he was alone in the classroom. But to his surprise, he was not; an inmate had walked quietly up behind him and put his hands around my grandfather’s neck. As he retold me the story on June 6, 2010, he said,
But you know I had my desk away from the wall. And after that episode, I put my desk back in the corner where the two walls met… and his [the inmate’s] first comment was, it was almost too late to be jumpy, and that’s what he said. He said, “You’re not very jumpy are you?” He took his hands off my throat but that’s, that’s when I got those M&M smart pills. That’s when I put my desk back so nobody could walk behind me. That’s where I graded the papers… I mean it was a big lesson. I don’t think he laughed. He just said, “You’re not very jumpy are you?” And what were you going to do? You wasn’t [sic] going to have him thrown in the hole were ya [sic]? I took his advice when I first started teaching and have followed it ever since by putting my desk in a corner where no one can get behind me. I also encourage all of my pre-service teachers to do the same in their own classrooms for their own safety and peace of mind.

In addition to working at the prison, my grandfather also coached the junior high boys’ sports teams, including basketball, football and track. There was no baseball team at the time, but he helped to create a program at the high school and was later given the Humanitarian of the Year Award in 2011 by the Perry County Baseball Hall of Fame for all of his efforts. In many ways my grandfather used the same strategies for motivating players as he did for his students. Mike Vigue, a former student of his and an art teacher himself, told me about my grandfather’s common expressions that could be heard both in the classroom and on the field:
“Are you tired Vigue,” that goes to the persistence issue again. But that was something he always said as a coach and I used it on our kids down there [where he teaches today]. And they [Mike’s art students] had no idea what I was talking about. I had to explain it all to them, you know. And his second line to follow it was, “Sheridan [New Lexington’s rival high school] loves it when you’re tired. All right, when you’re tired in the fourth quarter that’s when they are going to put the whooping on ya.” (12/30/10)

John McGaughey, Jr. shared some stories with me about my grandfather’s coaching and teaching styles. John’s nephews, Dan and Bob Poling, played basketball for him and John described what Tom was like as a coach when he would watch his nephews play.

I went to a couple of the ball games the boys played in and Tom coached. And, I can still see him sitting on the stage at the gym there in Junction City… He’d just watch the game. He never got real excited you know just real laid back fellow… and then I moved to New Lex and taught high school for a year. Then I went into the Jr. High and Tom had the art room right across from the shop. So we were going back and forth all the time uh, having fun with the kids and enjoying each other. And Tom, you know, he had a sense of humor and one of the things that stand out in my mind, and this was kind of Tom’s approach to teaching, uh I went over one day and ask him if he could draw a picture of a train for some reason. I can’t recall why. And, some little seventh grader was probably standing there and I have no idea who it was. And Tom turned and said, “Mr. McGaughey wants you to draw a picture, draw a picture of a train. Draw one for him.” And the boy
looked like a picture of a deer in the headlights, you know. [The boy said] “I can’t do that” and Tom said, “I didn’t ask you if you could do it or not I asked you to do it.” And the kid drew a train and it was pretty good. But that was just his, his uh. He just had a way about uh, he got as much out of a person as was there. I mean he had the ability to pull that talent out and then some of the kids I think surprised themselves. They had ability they really wasn’t [sic] aware of and they could do things that uh, would never, I don’t know. I always just admired him for that ability. (6/21/10)

Esther Poling, John McGaughey, Jr.’s sister and Bob and Dan Poling’s mother, also shared a little bit about my grandfather’s coaching style. She said:

They played in the old Junction gym. And, Tom was the coach… [He] would sit on the stage, and cross his feet, and cross his arms, and sit there, and swing his feet. And he had a whistle and the boys would play ball. And they would get, the first team would get ahead a few points and the whistle would blow and out they’d come and five more boys would go out on the floor. And, they would play, maybe get behind and then he would take them out and put some more in. But, everybody got to play. It was not how good you were, or whose kid you were, you all got to play. And it made for a good, the boys got along well together and they considered themselves equally... And, I admired that... I know they all got equal opportunity. And both of our sons played under him and really liked him.

During one of our first conversations that I recorded on June 3, 2010, my grandfather shared a little bit about why he enjoyed teaching. He said:
Yeah, but the most impressive thing is how much they [his students] remembered. Well see they was [sic] just like a sponge. They absorbed it see, but my main thought was getting the lessons prepared. See there’s a difference.

On January 31, 2011, I inquired about what he wanted his students to take away with them when they left his class. His reply was quite simple, but it was something that if they left with it, would make for a future full of opportunities. He said,

Desire. And if they got the desire, they, they’ll try to meet the challenge. There’s a lot of difference, see. Desire, and I think my, even here in the late stage of my life, that every time I see something, it gives me the, a challenge. It’s just like I saw that penguin in a magazine, just a picture of it, and I spent better than a day and a half deciding what color I was going to make it’s belly.

He also mentioned to me on June 27, 2010 that he thought it important to teach students morals just as his mother learned morals from the McGuffey Reader while in school. He said,

See, and they don’t want you to teach morals in school anymore. Only values.

And I think that’s wrong. And even one of my principals come to me one day and said don’t you know you can get fired for teaching morals. And my response was, ‘wouldn’t that be a wonderful way to get fired.’ But they didn’t [fire him]. No, I mean lord that’s terrible [that they don’t teach students morals].

After learning so much about his teaching and coaching practices, I was very curious as to when he ever found the time to paint. To which he responded, “Well, it is like I’ve told you, it’s just a fever. You get a fever and you have to relieve that fever,” (6/6/10). He also
told me that in his home he had his painting supplies set up in the basement and when he would finish working on the farm he would retire there to paint a bit before bed.

However, when I spoke with his son, Randy, he did not have really any memories of his father painting at home. Rather, he said, “I would say that he would do a lot of the painting at work and in his free time when probably not so many people [were] around,” (6/27/10). Whether he painted at home or at work, though, the fact is that he painted; he painted a lot! He said, “See it is difficult for me to recall all the, the scenes I did. Yeah, I mean you know I just painted hundreds of them,” (6/6/10). As testament to his statement that he painted hundreds of images, my brother, Michael Van Horn, compiled over a thousand images in 2006 to put together a visual catalog of my grandfather’s work. Michael visited all of the extended family members’ homes and photographed what they had on display and then printed color copies of the images and had them bound for each family member.

It was a large undertaking, but it lacked a lot of relevant information, such as the work’s approximate size, what medium the work was created with, the name of the work of art, etc. In most cases he photographed the work behind glass and did not use a copy stand so the image is typically skewed and there are sometimes glare marks from the camera’s flash represented in the final image. Additionally, many works of art were left out of his visual collection. For example, while I was looking for the comic strips my grandfather created with Pearl Wilson, I uncovered at least fifty artworks that my brother did not capture. So his catalog is by no means comprehensive. But it did provide me a
great reference from which I could ask my grandfather questions about his work and his artistic style.

In reviewing his work together, we were able to not only converse about the individual works, but we were also able to discuss other artists who influenced him. Two names, in addition to Ralph Fanning’s, kept coming up. They were Leslie Cope (August 10, 1913 – April 11, 2002) formerly of Roseville, Ohio and Leland McClelland (May 23, 1914 - March 22, 2002), formerly from Bexley, Ohio. My grandfather was a long time friend of Leslie Cope and his wife Velma and he and my grandmother would visit the couple at Cope’s Gallery in Roseville often. In my search for the comics, I also unearthed a couple of Cope Gallery flyers that my grandfather had collected. I found it interesting to read the description of Cope’s work, because if one were to change the name “Cope” with “Wolfe” it would be almost just as accurate a description of my grandfather’s work as his. The flyer was titled *Cope Gallery* and provided the following text:

Leslie Cope is a prolific artist dedicated to his craft and committed to the simple virtues of rural life, seascapes and landscapes here and in his native England. Popular among his works are subjects that deal with the common work horse, Amish country, barnyards, blacksmith shops, coal-mining from the early 1930's, covered bridges, nostalgic rural landscapes, village sketches, fair and carnival scenes, horse pulls, horse sales and canal studies, to mention a few…The artist and his wife also make frequent trips to the western states revelling [*sic*] in the sight of small herds of roaming mustang and wild horses they find and sketch. Cope paints desert towns as well, Indian encampments. Pueblos and the red clay
rust of mountains that break the tedium of vast, open space…Cope has also contributed to numerous local publications that tell of regional history including a series of sketches for The Times Recorder which illustrated, among others, Ebenezer Zane’s marking of the National Trail called Zane’s Trace…Countless thousands of Cope’s sketches, etching, watercolors, pastels, acrylics and oil paintings are owned by hundreds of people from every walk of life. Many of the works can be traced to buyers in central and southeastern Ohio…In March 1983 Leslie Cope was commissioned by the Coca-Cola Company to produce the 75th anniversary commemorative tray for the Zanesville Bottling Company. The subject being the Y Bridge in Zanesville circa 1902. The anniversary date coincided with the christening of the new bridge in October 1984.

As described in Chapter 2, my grandfather painted very similar subjects as Cope, right down to the Y Bridge in Zanesville, Ohio. It would seem that Cope and my grandfather shared not only a friendship, but a love of regionalist art as well. In flipping through the hundreds of images my brother compiled of my grandfather’s artwork, there are Amish farm scenes, covered bridges, barns, horses, nostalgic rural landscapes, and fair and carnival scenes. When I asked my grandfather to discuss the similarities in style he commented:

Realism, yeah. And I told you about he [Leslie Cope] always painted horses coming toward you. And it’s like I told his wife, Velma, I always painted most, a lot of mine going away from ya. People ask me, “hows come you did that?” Well I said, “that just proves that there’s more horse’s asses than there are horses,”
(chuckle). Now, now he uh, see he taught me a lot about painting the background first. And bringing everything when he got up, finished the middle ground and the foreground. He was finished. And he taught me what you don’t paint is just as important as what you do paint. And boy there’s a lot of truth in that. And Leslie Cope, know [knew] when to stop, know [knew] when to stop... No, but that’s the biggest thing he taught me was what you don’t paint. (6/6/10)

In Gary Wilson’s December 20, 2011 article, he provided a description of the type of artwork that my grandfather has created and that he has hanging in his home. He wrote,

A visit to Wolfe’s home entails a wonderful journey through his art studio, with each wall displaying acrylic and watercolor paintings, his two favorite mediums. There are also many examples of hand-painted gourds, often featuring one of Wolfe’s favorite subjects, American Indian chiefs. Cats and clowns are among other favorite subjects, especially covered bridges and barns. (p. 10A)

Although Cope was 10 years older than my grandfather, they did establish a close friendship. As my grandfather explained, he met Leslie Cope while teaching at McLuney High School which, although it no longer stands today, was located very close to Roseville, Ohio. Therefore my grandfather’s friendship began with Leslie in the mid 1950s and lasted over 45 years until Leslie passed away in 2002. Over the years the two exchanged artwork with one another and my grandfather proudly hangs Leslie’s artwork in his home alongside his own painting.
Although there are similarities in subject matter and the overall style of art were the same, the two had distinctively different methods and techniques for the application of paint and each of them preferred a different medium; for Leslie it was oil paints and for my grandfather it was watercolors. I will use two paintings in particular to help define their individual application of materials to the canvas. The two images that I have selected are images of the same subject, the Y Bridge in Zanesville, Ohio, and both were commissioned works; Coca-Cola commissioned Leslie to paint the bridge and Pepsi-Cola hired my grandfather. Figure 4.21 is the Y Bridge by Cope and Figure 4.22 is the Y bridge during a different era, by Wolfe. Zanesville is located at the convergence of the Muskingum and Licking Rivers in Ohio. The city decided to build a Y-shaped bridge at the meeting point between the two rivers rather than build two (or three) bridges to get from any shore to another. There have been over the course of almost 200 years, five different “Y” bridges.

The first bridge was built in 1814 and was made of wood and stone. It was used until 1818 when it fell into the river. The second bridge was built a year after the collapse of the original. After thirteen years of unanticipated heavy traffic, the owners of the bridge decided it needed to be replaced. Many illustrations show the bridge as covered… In 1832 a new Y-bridge opened and it carried traffic until 1900. The fourth Y-bridge opened in 1902 and it remained in service until 1983. The fifth and current Y-bridge opened in 1984. (Brusca, 2011)

Although differences between Leslie’s and my grandfather’s paintings are easily identified due to the fact that my grandfather painted the second bridge and Leslie painted
the fourth, there are also differences due to the artist’s selection of materials. Leslie’s
choice of oil paints and my grandfather’s selection of watercolors made each rendering of
the “Y” Bridge completely unique to each artist. I think that it was their differences in
 mediums that made them such good friends rather than rivals. They could each respect
what the other was creating even if they were sharing the same subject matter.

Figure 4.21. Leslie Cope, “Y” Bridge, Zanesville, OH, 1984.
As for Leland McClelland, my grandfather did not have as strong of a friendship, but he did consider Leland a mentor. He had the opportunity to meet and work with Leland while taking Leland’s watercolor painting classes at the Lancaster, Ohio YMCA. He participated in several of Leland’s course offerings during the late 1970s and early 1980s, including an Outdoor Painting Class in 1983 for which he still had the original flyer and course enrollment form.

Just as there were several similarities in artistic style between Leslie Cope and my grandfather, there are also several comparisons that could be made between Leland McClelland’s work and Tom’s artwork. But, in addition to the stylistic similarities, my
grandfather and Leland shared other similar experiences. To begin with, Leland was born on May 23, 1914 and my grandfather on May 23, 1923. With only nine years between their births, it might seem natural that they both claim to have enjoyed the same type of things as a child. Leland is cited on the Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum’s website as saying, “From the time I was old enough to read the funnies I wanted to be a cartoonist on the *Columbus Citizen*... I've always loved cartooning and... I'll always consider myself a cartoonist first and something else second,” (Billy Ireland, 2012.)

Leland McClelland was formally trained as a comic artist and created 1,100 cartoon pages of “Cartoon Parade” for the *Columbus Citizen*. The *Eastside Messenger* (weekly newspaper published in Bexley, Ohio) article, “From cartoons to watercolors, Leland McClelland filled [a] broad canvas of life,” mentions that McClelland founded the Bexley Area Art Guild and the Central Ohio Watercolor Society. In addition, he also taught at Columbus College of Art and Design for 18 years, along with private art classes like the ones my grandfather took at the YMCA in Lancaster, Ohio.

My grandfather’s work with Pearl Wilson in creating the *Sarahbelle Haye* comic strip demonstrates his childhood desire to be a cartoonist as well. Additionally, in looking through old steamer trunks on my grandfather’s property, I came across a number of newspaper clippings from 1938 that focused on cartoon art. He must have collected the images while he was working with Pearl to help guide his own drawings. Furthermore, I found an original comic page created by Bill Freyse (1898 - 1969), in the upstairs of my grandfather’s garage (see Figure 4.23). Freyse was a cartoonist based out of Detroit, Michigan who took over the syndicated comic *Our Boarding House* in 1939 and
continued to draw it until his death in 1969. When I brought the comic page that I had found to my grandfather, he told me that Leland had given it to him since they both shared a love of cartooning. The fact that he kept the comic cell all of those years also adds weight to the suggestion that Leland was his mentor and that my grandfather valued their relationship.

Figure 4.23. Our Boarding House, Original Cartoon Cell by Bill Freyse.

In addition, both Leland and my grandfather enjoyed painting rural images and landscapes from the comforts of their vehicle. I think that my grandfather’s experiences
of working on his own farm helped him to appreciate the everyday beauty in rural settings and I believe that Leland’s childhood afforded him experiences on his uncle’s farm that left a lasting impression and helped him to garner the same type of appreciation. The “Home-grown watercolorist looks back on lifetime of images,” article in the June 4, 1998 edition of the *Columbus Dispatch* notes that Leland spent his summers at his uncle’s in Hancock County where he helped to plow and plant the fields. The article cites him as saying, “I like to get in the car and drive out so I can see farmland,” (p. 2E).

It also cites Leland’s daughter, Susie Rath, remembering he “would drive off in what, more often than not, became his ‘portable studio’: He sketched in the front seat and painted in the back,” (Chapman, 1998, p. 2E). Furthermore, Leland stated for Kirsten Chapman, the *Columbus Dispatch* writer for the article, “I placed my paints and water on cardboard, and I’d sit there all day long. On hot days I’d look for a high and windy hill, and roll down all the windows,” (Chapman, 1998, p. 2E). His artwork captured the local countryside and central Ohio neighborhoods and he said that, “You like a place where you were born and grew up,” (Chapman, 1998, p. 2E).

I can recall my grandfather sketching in his truck when I was a child and it is something that he continues to do, although seeing him paint at his kitchen table, working from photographs taken while driving around in his truck, is becoming more and more the norm. However, in talking with an acquaintance of my grandfather, Bob Thompson, I learned that he does still draw and paint while in his truck occasionally. Bob told me, he has only known my grandfather for about 10 years, so his story is much more recent than
my childhood memories of my grandfather painting on location. As Bob recalled his and my grandfather’s first encounter, he said:

Yeah, and, I need to tell you how this happened. When he and I first became acquainted uh, met at the post office… One day not too long after that, I’m sitting in my house, my farmhouse out on Flagdale Road and I look out and here’s a truck half way up my lane…Well, I didn’t recognize the truck so… When I get out there, here it’s Tom sketching my barn, big old time barn… a few weeks after that he brought me…this nice picture of the barn. And the thing that is so nice, is that he pointed out he even put in some pigeons on top of the barn because I have homing pigeons there. He did the complete number and, and gave me the painting and now it proudly hangs in my kitchen. (8/20/10)

Another acquaintance, Sister Christina Kraus, a Catholic Sister of the St. Francis of Penance and Christian Charity from the Stella Niagara Franciscans who attended and taught for a number of years at Saint Aloysius, the former Catholic high school in New Lexington, had a similar story to Bob Thompson’s. I asked her about the first time she met my grandfather and she was able to relay one of her first memories of my grandfather to me on August 19, 2010.

…about 40 years maybe more like 30 years ago uh, they tore down the original building at Saint Aloysius. It’s that oil, I guess that’s watercolor. That he painted up there and the story I like the best…of course they had these big wreckers. They didn’t carry it away; they just put it down the hill…I guess it annoyed him that they were taking down… architecturally, [it] was valuable. So he went over and
parked his car, and took his watercolors out and was painting. I mean he was parked right on top of the wreckers. And, and he was painting away and they said, “Sir, you just have to leave. We are trying to do some work here.” So he turned around and left and came up the back way and went right on painting. And that’s the way he is, he’s a determined man… I went to school at Saint Aloysius and also taught there in the high school. So it’s very dear to me. That’s why I am living in Perry County.

Sister Christina’s recollection helped me to realize that my grandfather had been sketching and painting in his vehicles long before I was even born. It also helped me to think about why he might have started painting in his car or truck, and the answer seems simple enough. Due to many of the rural settings that he paints, it is necessary to drive long distances to reach them. When he started to paint with watercolors in the late 1950s to early 1960s, he didn’t have a camera, so when he reached the destination of what he was to paint an image of, he remained in the comforts of his truck. It became his private, portable studio, just as Leland McClelland’s car did. Over time, and even after he owned a camera, my grandfather continued to prefer to paint on location and his vehicle afforded him the comforts and set up he required.

Both Leland and Tom painted on location and the similarities in their artistic styles are very evident when viewing both Leland’s and my grandfather’s artwork side-by-side. Perhaps that is because of Leland’s teaching style. Tom does not remember much about Leland’s course, but I was able to speak with another one of Leland’s students, Jim Gerkin, on January 16, 2012. Jim described what Leland’s classes were
like. He said that he was given a list of supplies to bring to class and that Leland would have an image for them to look at hanging up. Their first job as students was to draw whatever image Leland had drawn. Then Leland would have the students gather around him and watch him apply what he called the first “passage” on the painting. Jim said that a “passage” may be a sky or whatever else was to be the lightest part of the painting. After demonstrating a passage, Leland would have the students return to their work area and then proceed to copy what they had just witnessed him painting. Leland would walk around to work one-on-one with the students while they worked on the passage, providing individual assistance as needed. After the students had completed the passage, they would again circle around Leland for instructions on how to paint the next passage. This cycle of demonstrating a passage and then having students complete the same task continued until the work was complete. Many times a painting would take a couple of classes to complete and the finished result of the students would mimic Leland’s original from the demonstrations.

Jim went on to say that the reason that this system of instruction worked is because, “you believed it could be done because he [Leland] just did it in front of you,” and that Leland used to always say, “The secret to a good watercolor is a good drawing.” In that regard, it would be of no surprise that my grandfather’s artwork resembled Leland’s since he was asked as a student to copy Leland’s work. One particular painting technique that Leland taught really resonated with my grandfather; putting a few tree branches at the top of a painting to suggest a foreground and to help frame the image. This is evidenced by the number of paintings Tom has painted with suggestive branches
in the upper corners. I think that it would have been hard for my grandfather not to have
developed a similar style of painting as Leland. Acting as his teacher and mentor, Leland
took my grandfather to see and draw things that he found aesthetically pleasing and
ultimately that influenced my grandfather’s own aesthetic tastes.

There is one last person that I would like to mention. I feel that Clayton Bussey
had a great impact on my grandfather and his artistic creations in the early 1980s. He was
a well liked individual, like my grandfather, and most locals knew him as a farmer who
would tell tall tales and bring a smile to their face. For example, when my grandfather
was talking with Jimmy and Joyce Thompson, he mentioned, as he was preparing to tell
them a tall tale and that they should be prepared because, “I’m worse than Clayton
Bussey.” He was talking about gourds and the various types that he grew when my
grandfather told them that, “Now these long handled dipper gourds are for people that
had short arms,” which made everyone laugh loudly. Enjoying his ability to entertain his
guests, he continued to tell them another story and said,

and last year, I raised short handled dipper gourds. They was [sic] only this big…
But I had short handled dipper gourds. And Pat made me a trellis down here for
this year’s. And they grew up in the pine tree. And, people would stop and say
(tries to keep from laughing) what kind of a tree is that? (laughs out loud). And of
course anybody would know it was a damn pine tree. And I’d give them a Clayton
Bussey. I’d say, “That’s a dipper gourd tree.” (6/27/10)

Tom Althauser actually became a friend of my grandfather through Clayton Bussey.
Althauser and Clayton were friends for quite some time before Clayton and my
grandfather started the local pumpkin show in the early 1980s. But as Clayton’s and my grandfather’s friendship grew Clayton wanted Althauser to meet my grandfather. Althauser said of their first meeting:

The funniest story I know about him was him and Bussey. Maybe you have already heard it. About the WHIZ [television station] over in Zanesville has a five minute segment at noon every day that you can go in. So they went in, they went in to publicize the pumpkin show in Somerset. And after, after they had been on television, you know, after they were happy and things like that, they went to Bob Evans restaurant to eat breakfast. And uh, your grandfather said to the waitress, “You know we’re famous people. You know who we are?” She looked at him and said yeah, “You’re Bartles and Jaymes,” which was an ad running on television years ago for some kind of wine I think. And uh, they just went along with it. And uh, the first time I ever met him he had either a ‘Bartles’ or ‘Jaymes’ hat on. So did Bussey. (8/20/10)

The pumpkin shows that Clayton and my grandfather worked on putting together for the local Perry County community inspired my grandfather to begin creating a new type of artwork. Although it may be viewed as more of a craft, my grandfather created a marriage between his artistic talents and his fall harvest of pumpkins and gourds. Figure 4.24 shows an image of Clayton and my grandfather with many of my grandfather’s carved and painted gourds on display.
With a new “canvas” on which to create art, my grandfather found another opportunity to involve the local community; the addition of pumpkin and gourd decorating contests to their fall pumpkin show. When Clayton and my grandfather would be out in public, they would freely distribute pumpkin and gourd seeds. If there was a chance that they did not have any, my grandfather would tell people to write a request and address it to, “The Gourd Man, Somerset, Ohio,” which oddly enough always seemed to reach Clayton. The two men together promoted not only farming, but inspired people to be creative as well.

Although my grandfather had several more accomplishments as an art teacher and even more stories about being a practicing artist, I will only mention one more story that
he is very proud of before moving on to the section concerning his life after retirement.

As documented by the “New Lex Boasts Two Poster Winners,” article in the June 12, 1976 *Perry County Press*, my grandfather had two students gain national recognition for their winning Bicentennial Poster Contest submissions sponsored by the American Educational Publications. The article notes that Debbie Hatem and Marty Masterson, both ninth graders, had their poster designs selected out of nearly 2,400 entries and were chosen to receive the Charles Palmer Davis medal for outstanding posters. The article also noted that, “Mr. Tom Wolfe, Art teacher at New Lexington Junior High School has been informed that New Lexington Junior High School became the only school in the United States to have two winners in the recent Bicentennial Poster Contest… held to honor the 200th birthday of our country,” (p. 4).

**1988-Present, Life after Retirement**

As noted in the proceeding sections regarding his life before retirement, my grandfather learned many important lessons. He also learned to perfect his watercolor painting techniques and began to faithfully record southeastern Ohio’s landscapes and rural landmarks. But perhaps more importantly, he touched the lives of many students and helped to increase their individual creativity. After retirement he was afforded more time to devote to the creation of his art. Even now, after retiring from 42 years of teaching, he still continues to paint, touch peoples’ lives, and helps to increase the appreciation for the Perry County landscape through his artwork. There are many relevant stories that I collected during my research which illustrate this point and I will
present some of them here along with mention of several accolades he has received over the last 24 years.

But first I would like to explain why, after being eligible to retire in 1976, he continued to teach until 1988. Initially, he enjoyed teaching and did not feel ready for retirement, but at a certain point he would have been making just as much money in retirement as he was teaching school full time. He told me that my grandmother pointed that out to him, “Well Letitia, she was checking my, what I was getting as salary compared to what I would get in retirement from the State Teachers and I was teaching for fifty cents a day. Yeah, fifty cents. Yes, so I just decided to hang it up,” (2/3/11). Even though he claims that the salary was his motivation for retirement, I believe that he had another motivation. My mother had made a special request that she did not want him to retire until he had taught all of her children, including me, her youngest child. When I had my grandfather as my art teacher, he was teaching at the New Lexington Junior High School which consisted of 7th through 9th grades. My last year at the junior high school was 1988, which is when he chose to retire, so I believe he took my mother’s request to heart. I feel very fortunate that I did have him in school since I was able to learn a great deal from him artistically as well as educationally. He is the reason that I went on to pursue both my undergraduate and graduate studies in art education and in many ways his style of teaching was very evident in my own manner of managing and teaching an art class.

That being said, he has continued to teach me artistic techniques and life lessons throughout his retirement and I believe that I am not the only one he continues to reach
out to. When I asked him on February 3, 2011 if he missed teaching after he retired, he responded,

Uh, yeah, you really do. I mean because I think I’m still capable of influencing some kid.Yeah and uh, it’s like that boy over there by Sister Christine’s. They played it up like he was just messing around with the gun and he shot himself in the mouth [referring to a young boy who lives near my grandfather who may have shot himself on accident in 2010, but more likely it was an attempted suicide]. And he’s back in school but I volunteered to, I’d handle, teach him or look at his work.

Sister Christina Kraus also mentioned the young boy who was shot when I spoke with her on August 19, 2010. She said,

I have to tell you one more thing about him. He’s, he’s just very compassionate. Uh, we had an accident in our neighborhood, you probably didn’t hear about it. But this summer a young boy, who is 12 or 13, my neighbor was cleaning his gun up in his room. And he shot himself in the face. And uh, was in children’s hospital, and they had to wire his mouth shut, and he had a trachea, and a feeding tube. They eventually brought him home and he is doing much better. But your grandpa said, “I’m going to go down and see if it is possible if I can teach that young man some art work, how to do artwork. Because if he is recuperating, he’ll need something to distract him.” And he did go down but I don’t think he has gotten a reply yet. But I imagine he didn’t even, he didn’t even know their last name. But there he was uh, free lessons.
Therefore I think that my grandfather still has a desire to teach and share his knowledge about art. This assumption is further supported by the data collected from the many Perry County community members with whom I spoke regarding his continued interaction with them as well as the creativity he inspires. For example, during my conversation with Gary Wilson on January 12, 2012, he mentioned that,

…of course it’s not easy to forget your grandfather… I’m sure he’s influenced many lives, helped a lot of people. His story is, it’s a story of three people really. Tommy Wolfe the artist, the farmer, and the coach. And so, he’s touched so many lives and is respected in so many different circles. It’s just amazing and he keeps going and going. He’s kind of like the Energizer Bunny. He just keeps going and going… he makes the news and then we report on it. He doesn’t sit down. So he has these, you know, he gets involved in the farmers market. That is one thing. He gets involved in some kind of an art contest or something… in short he gets involved. And when you are that involved in the community on different things, well you’re making news. So, you know, any stories we have done is not something we’re creating it’s reaction to what he’s doing, you know. And uh, he’s, he keeps busy. Anybody that [who] knows him knows, and as I said they know him in different circles, you know. And somebody who is uh, uh, done farming most of their life, well they know Tommy Wolfe, the farmer, you know… it’s just amazing to me how well one person can wear those three hats there. And do justice to all of them…and he knows that the more you practice the
better you get. And uh, I think he's afraid if he goes a day or two without doing any painting he’ll, he’ll lose his touch.

Previous to my interview with Gary Wilson, I conducted an interview on June 23, 2010 with the Perry County Court of Common Pleas Probate/Juvenile Judge, Luann Cooperrider. She was also able to discuss my grandfather’s contribution to the local community and stated:

I first met Mr. Wolfe, Tom Wolfe, in 1990. Um, I was a lawyer here in Perry County and I met him because he approached me about joining the, becoming a life member for the New Lexington FFA [Future Farmers of America]. He convinced me to do that… That is how we met and then various things I would see him at over the years… through pumpkin shows, through the fair, through New Lexington FFA, through scholarships… I’ve watched him make a happy moment out of a tragic death [my Uncle Chris’s taking of his own life on April 14, 2009]. In the form of giving scholarships to honor his son, and his wife, and his family. He is such an instrumental person in the lives of young people and such a leader in education… he is very good about seeking me out and bringing me things he wants to talk to me about which, I’m glad that he does… He has been a friend to me as well through personal endeavors such as campaigning… for example when I was campaigning the last time, my opponent had made, become very negative and Mr. Wolfe came in and quoted to me the McGuffey Reader verse by verse. And one of them I’ll never forget, “He who throws dirt loses ground.” So it got me spurred on not only how great is this man but how
knowledgeable he is and so it spawned me into reading the McGuffey Reader, which is a classic. Only an educator would be able to do that. (6/23/10)

Luann, in addition to serving the county’s juvenile court system, also writes a column, “Views from the bench,” for the *Perry County Tribune*. In her February 17, 2010 article she touched upon my grandfather as a prominent figure within the community. As she told me about the article, she said,

And it was “Five Things to Do in 2010.” And one of them was to spend ten minutes of your time with Tom Wolfe… One of them was to spend time, spend ten minutes of your time with Tom Wolfe. Uh, so I just think people like that are just so worth our time. He’ll come to see me [at the Perry County Court House] you know. Sometimes I’m busy, but I always make a point to spend time with him. Because I learn something, because it is good for me, and because he won’t be here forever. And so if I can’t make ten minutes of my own time to spend with a guy like that, a man like that, he’s just a true gift from God to me… My staff knows if Mr. Wolfe comes in, the Judge will stop whatever she’s doing. (6/23/10)

My grandfather has held small art competitions within the community and has showcased the work at the Peoples National Bank in New Lexington. For one such competition, he asked Judge Cooperrider to act as an art judge and she noted to me the value of such an event and his ability to inspire others in the community to make art. She went on to note the value he places on education and mentioned that, “He is such an inspiration. Not only with his art work, but just he personally is inspiring people to be the best they can be, go to college. It doesn’t matter where you are from,” (6/23/10). Her last comment is very
true. My grandfather did not come from the typical background of a college graduate. If it had not been for the G.I. Bill he never would have pursued an education. Knowing the value of someone giving the underdog a chance, the scholarship that is set up in his and his family’s name was established to help such individuals who might not otherwise have the chance or encouragement to further their education.

As far as the small art competitions go, it was something that I started with him in the spring of 2005. My grandmother had passed away a few months before in October and my mother had told me that my grandfather was not painting like he used to. I knew that my grandmother’s death was difficult for him to get over, mainly because it happened so fast. He really did not have time to prepare himself; she was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia and died approximately two weeks later. I was living in Athens, Greece at the time that she was diagnosed and I took a flight home the next day and had the opportunity to spend time with her before she passed away. But I had to return to Greece shortly thereafter and could not be there to encourage my grandfather to continue to paint. So I did the next best thing, I asked him to have an art competition with me. Knowing how competitive he had always been in sports, I knew that he would accept the challenge and work with great energy to win. I asked him pick a photograph of an image he would like to paint and had him send me a copy. We both worked on it without being able to see one another’s work until we were finished. I think that that was the spark he needed to continue with his artwork, because he has been painting every day since and has organized several other small competitions with the local high school art students and other artistically inclined community members.
The art competitions also help to introduce new works by my grandfather into the community. I feel that there is a level of appreciation by community members for his artwork as a result of the great importance they place on my grandfather’s choice of subject matter in his paintings. In interviewing Tom Althauser on August 20, 2010, I was able to hear why he finds my grandfather’s artwork valuable to the local community.

…but he’s very generous with his art work and gives it for all kinds of charitable auctions or donations… he also paints things that are our heritage… he paints them before they are torn down. So for local history, he does a really great job… what I like is the scenes he draws or paints uh, about Perry County. I do like that and another thing about him is he doesn’t just do, he’s still learning. I mean every time he learns something he’ll show you, like look what I done here. He’s 87 and still learning and still proud of the fact that he’s still learning… It’s just that kind of attitude that makes you want to be associated with him. Really impresses me that way.

Tom Hill, a local Certified Public Accountant with McLain, Hill, Rugg & Associates, Inc. in New Lexington, was also able to touch upon the significance of my grandfather’s choice of subject matter in his paintings. Hill grew up in New Lexington and had attended the Saint Aloysius Academy and commented that, “But it’s such a small community, it didn’t matter where you went to school you still knew everybody,” (7/6/10). He mentioned that he pretty much knew the entire Wolfe family and that, as he got older, he got more interested in local art and history. As he told me,
I really think my wife and my, one of our purposes in life is to preserve the past…
we collect and what better way to preserve the past than paint it… I just really
love your grandfather’s work… I have a couple of originals… all the stuff [the
subject matter in my grandfather’s paintings] peaks my interest in, everything
usually has a story behind it. But uh, you know, just here again I think it’s our [his
and his wife’s] passion, is part of our purpose. (7/6/10)

Tom Hill also commented on my grandfather’s notoriety within the local community. He
said, “he reaches an easy rapport with everybody. I think everybody knows him.
Everybody! I mean you can go anywhere…everybody knows him. And it doesn’t have to
be Junction or New Lex, it could be you know Somerset, or Corning.”

In going through old boxes at my grandfather’s, I came across a letter from
Adrian Nader, a former New Lexington High School teacher, dated June 8, 1991 (see
Figure 4.25). The letter was thanking my grandfather for the gifts of his artwork that he
gave to Mr. Nader and his wife. It also detailed why Mr. Nader treasured the works of art
so much, especially the one of Saint Aloysius (referred to as St. Al) which depicted the
school that Nader’s father helped to build.
Hi, Tom!

What a surprise...The visit of you three '42ers to our room that first night in New Lex was the highlight of the week-end. We were especially touched, Tom, with your gift of three Wolfe prints and the fact that you came all the way from Junction City to see us.

Martha found an elegant gold frame for the Bush Creek Schoolhouse and it is now hung in our guest bedroom, where it fits the decor and adds a perfect touch. The St. Alonius had a spot waiting for it in our living room, opposite a watercolor print of the Muskingum River near Marietta, done by a friend.

We had a great week-end in New Lex and met lots of former students and friends. Went up to St. Al Sunday afternoon to see what they had done to it, and it was sad--modern buildings without any character...so now your painting means even more, for my father built one of the old St. Al additions.

We'll treasure that 50th anniversary pottery, also, with your sketch and the names.(Haven't got back to doing a column for the Trib yet, but when I do I won't mention that.) Mrs. Nader joins me in sending our sincere thanks and best wishes.

As ever,

AFN

Mr. Thomas E. Wolfe

Junction City, Ohio 43748
I asked my grandfather about his community involvement on January 31, 2011, about what motivated him to interact with so many people. He responded by saying, everybody wants to contribute and they’re just asking, just waiting for somebody to ask, to let them contribute… You be surprised how many people want to help… I don’t know it’s uh, I think you have to be concerned uh, to [for] others… But see that’s what I am telling you, and you want to know hows [sic] come you’re influenced, because you do those little things, see (pause). And those little things, they add up to big things.

I then asked him what his philosophy on teaching had been and he said, “I think probably to give your inner self to others. Give that inner feeling and you, that will come out in your art. It’s just like Leslie Cope told me and he was a big influence, what you don’t paint is just as important as what you do paint in the picture,” (1/31/11).

Over the years, I have witnessed my grandfather receiving many awards and recognition and I have to say that he has thoroughly enjoyed the attention. In many ways, I feel like my grandfather still has a very childlike approach to life; very innocent approach to everything. Whenever he has received accolades for his efforts, either artistically or from community involvement, he usually is wearing a smile that would rival a child’s on Christmas morning. For example, I had the opportunity to accompany my grandfather to the Januarius MacGahan Festival lunch held in New Lexington, Ohio on June 12, 2010. At the lunch he presented a work of his art to Consul General of Bulgaria from Chicago, IL. Figure 3.1 depicts my grandfather handing his work of art over to Consul General Dontchev. The painting that my grandfather gave to Dontchev
was of Somerset’s Village Square at the intersection of St. Rt. 13 and U.S. Rt. 22. In the middle of this intersection stands a statue of General Philip Sheridan who, as mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, had a personal connection with Januarius MacGahan. My grandfather created the painting for the 2007 Somerset, Ohio Bicentennial celebration and it was put onto stamps for local distribution through PhotoStamps.com. The framed print of the painting that my grandfather gave to Consul General Dontchev also had a stamp included with it. His presentation was made to Dontchev so he could take it back to Bulgaria and present it to the museum in Batak, the town decimated by the Turks and the one which MacGahan focused on in his dispatches to the London Daily News. Although it was a small ceremony at the festival’s lunch, my grandfather completely enjoyed himself and talked about it with his friends Jimmy and Joyce Thompson on June 27, 2010.

Another award my grandfather has received since retiring, and that he is very proud of, came about due to his extensive work with the New Lexington High School’s chapter of the Future Farmers of America (FFA). My grandfather has been very involved with local agricultural issues since purchasing the family farm in 1953, but when his son, Christopher Wolfe, took an agriculture teaching position at New Lexington High School in the late 1970s, Tom’s level of involvement increased even more rapidly. Christopher was a leader in the high school’s agricultural education program and he, along with my grandfather’s help, brought national recognition to the school’s FFA chapter. As noted in “Tom Wolfe to Receive Top FFA Alumni Award,” in the November 15, 1991 edition of the *Times Recorder*,

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New Lexington High School FFA and FFA Alumni is well represented during this year’s National FFA Alumni Convention Nov. 13-16 in Kansas City, Missouri.

Receiving the FFA Alumni Outstanding Achievement Award will be Tom Wolfe of Junction City. This award Recognizes FFA Alumni members for outstanding service to agricultural education, the FFA, and American Agriculture. This is a very exclusive award since not more than three can be presented on the national level in a given year.

Wolfe, a diversified livestock, grain and fruit farmer and a retired school teacher of 42 years, has been a FFA alumni charter member at New Lexington since 1975. His recruiting abilities have brought in over 210 life members to New Lexington and has made them number one in the nation three times for Most Life Members. (p. 4A)

The article goes on to note my grandfather’s other activities, including being credited for founding the Perry County Pumpkin Show, raising over $16,000 for the local FFA chapter, serving as a speaker at the State FFA Alumni Conventions, and donating his personal artwork to local, state and national alumni auctions. Regarding my Uncle Christopher, the article mentions,

Also nominated to receive the Honorary American FFA Degree award is Tom’s son, Chris Wolfe, who serves as the agricultural education instructor and FFA adviser at the high school.

Chris was nominated for the degree by the Ohio FFA Association and the nomination was approved by the National FFA Board of Directors… The degree
is awarded on the basis of points scored by a teacher for his/her accomplishments as an agricultural instructor, FFA adviser and participant in professional agricultural teachers organizations.

My grandfather’s involvement in the local agricultural scene comes as no surprise, since his love for the local farmland is evident in his paintings. He has continued to stay involved with the FFA and the local pumpkin show, even after the passing of his son, Chris, in 2009. Tom Althauser and Judge Luann Cooperrider both mentioned my grandfather convincing them to become life members to the FFA Alumni Association.

The pumpkin shows and the FFA organization are not the only way that my grandfather has continued to be involved with the local community. He has been active in the Junction City American Legion James E. Fisher Post 376. Additionally he served as the Grand Marshall for the Junction City Fourth of July Parade in 2010 for all of his community activities such as donating works of art for charity auctions for the Junction City Fire Department, New Lexington Toys for Tots, and various other organizations, as well as financially helping to support the Junction City Little League (see Figure 4.26).
My grandfather also designed the drawing that was etched onto the New Lexington, Ohio monument commemorating those who died during World War I, World War II, and the Korean War. Richard Sayre was serving on the committee for selecting a drawing to be put on the new commemorative monument and he recommended my grandfather. As he recalls,

Yes, I was cochairman of the large monument that’s in Monument Square down here [New Lexington, Ohio] and uh, I told the other gentleman that was cochairman with me, James Triona, that I knew somebody that I felt would and could do a drawing to put it on the stone. And so I went over and talked to Tom about it and he was glad to do it. He done a wonderful job on it. Uh, if you go down there and look at it, it is a wonderful job… But anyway he done a
wonderful job on it… Well we raised money for the stone. And his [Tom’s] drawings, I took it to the committee. And they [the committee] agreed that this was super, which like I say, it is. It tells all five, I think five different, what Navy, Army, Marine Corp, Coast Guard, Air Force. It had all the services. Yeah. Yeah, and it is kind of unusual because you don’t see that on any other monument. I’ve never seen it on any other monument, you know. They agreed, and that’s what they took, yeah. (5/26/11)

Figure 4.27 is of the South facing side of the World War II Monument in New Lexington which depicts his drawings of each of the U.S. military divisions. Figure 4.28 is the same monument, facing North. The last image of the monument, Figure 4.29, was taken on January 11, 2012 and shows my grandfather pointing at his drawing for the branch of the military for which he served, the Navy. The monument was dedicated on November 11, 1990 during the Veterans Day Celebration.
Figure 4.27. South Facing Side of World War II Monument, New Lex., OH, 2012.

Figure 4.28. North Facing Side of World War II Monument, New Lex., OH, 2012
There are a few other items worth mentioning regarding my grandfather’s engagement within the Perry County community that I will present before ending this chapter. They include his participation in the Perry County and Crooksville Arts Council’s Art Walks, being selected in 2004 by the New Lexington Alumni Association as the “Teachers’ Hall of Fame Honoree,” being selected by the Perry County Opera House and Cultural Arts Center, Inc. (PCOHACAC) to have a solo show of his artwork, and having his wine featured in *The Columbus Dispatch*. His participation in the Art
Walks (2003-2010) demonstrated his support for the arts in Perry County and his recognition from the New Lex Alumni Association serves as evidence for his excellence in teaching and helping local organizations.

The honor of being selected by PCOHACAC to kick off their “Third Sunday” Art Series, Aug. 21, 2011, with a solo exhibition of his work was a real delight for my grandfather. My mother helped me to select, organize, and hang the exhibition which was very well attended by family, friends, and community members. The arts organization decided to start hosting the “Third Sunday” art series as a way to raise awareness of the arts in Perry County and bring much needed attention to the Appalachian area for local residents as well as increase tourism to the area. The organization requested that a work of art by my grandfather be donated to them for inclusion in their anticipated spring 2012 auction to help raise much needed funds for implementing their art programs, which my grandfather was happy to do for them. Included in the show were examples of his watercolor paintings of barns, covered bridges, rural landscapes and historical buildings from the county. Also included were some of his more recent works painted on nontraditional surfaces, such as feathers, leafs, rocks, and turtle shells, and a small collection of his decorated and painted gourds.

The item that I mentioned, regarding my grandfather’s wine being featured in the Columbus Dispatch, involved a story about his time at The Ohio State University that I would like to share. Mike Harden wrote, for his September 16, 2007 article, “Vintner’s high spirits aged over a lifetime,” a description of my grandfather by saying, “He is not only a vintner but also an avid naturalist, and ardent watercolorist, a retired teacher,
former Sunday school teacher and a self-appointed park-bench philosopher,” (2007, p. B1). Harden had been a friend of my grandfather for quite some time and had visited him on a couple of occasions. For this particular article, Harden visited my grandfather to try some of his homemade wine. But he also shared a very telling story. As Harden quoted my grandfather,

“I took a philosophy course at Ohio State one time,” Wolfe recalled. “I believe the course was titled Pragmatics in Philosophy. On the first day of class, this professor asked each of us to name three classics we had read. I answered, ‘The McGuffey Fourth Reader, the Bible and Little Women.’”

“This guy behind me tapped me on the back and said, ‘You’ve just flunked this class.’

“Then the professor asked how many of us believed in God. I raised my hand. Only three of us in the whole class did. And that guy behind me tapped me on the back again and said, ‘Now you have really flunked the class.’”

He passed.

After college, he said, “I thought I’d teach school until they found me out. They never did. I ended up teaching 42 years.” (2007, p. B1).

Indeed, my grandfather has worked hard to inspire and educate his local community, even beyond his 42 years of teaching, and he has done even more for his family. I know that as a teenager, I was not fond of the Perry County, Appalachian community in which I grew up and I was not proud of the images that my grandfather created. However, now that I am much removed from my selfish adolescent days, I have
come to hold his work in the highest regards and am now able to appreciate the rural Appalachian setting in which I was raised. In fact, my grandfather has influenced my own aesthetic so much so, that his love for covered bridges carried over into my selection of wedding sites for my marriage to Jon Michael Frey on September 11, 1999. Figure 4.30 is an image of the covered bridge where Jon and I were married, seeing the bridge makes me feel both proud and grateful to call Thomas E. Wolfe my grandfather.

Figure 4.30. Mary Ruffner Covered Bridge, between Thornville and Somerset, OH.
CHAPTER 5
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ORAL HISTORIES COLLECTED

“If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.”
-Rudyard Kipling

Storytelling is the essence of the formation of history. Through the process of collecting and publishing stories, an event, situation, and/or an individual’s experiences can be recorded and shared. It can become the foundation for further study and knowledge acquisition. The benefits of collecting stories are not reserved only for global events such as World War II. Preserving one’s community history can focus on specific features – including characters, dialects, customs, history, and landscapes – of a particular region. Storytelling is very important and may constitute the formation of community identities.

In *Oral History and Public Memories*, editors Paula Hamilton and Linda Shopes note Ramirez declares that oral history, “is public history, not only because it makes these stories public but because, in his experience, narrators invariably intertwine personal history with public events and lives lived in community,” (2008, p. 105). He further discusses the layers of memory and truth that oral history unearths and expresses his own
sense of public responsibility. “Although his research was conducted for his dissertation, he also held himself to a high standard of community accountability,” (2008, p. 105).

The stories that I have collected for my dissertation establish a refreshing perspective of Appalachian history that values one’s resourcefulness, imagination, and self-determined approach to life. The history, which focuses on my grandfather and the Perry County Appalachian Ohio community in which he was raised, worked, and continues to live, also provides a perspective that is beneficial to explore within the field of art education. Through examining free will and autonomy with regards to artists and their artwork, art educators can help their students to understand less dominant cultures’ struggles, specifically with becoming recognized as artists.

Throughout my research, I found it necessary to weave in historical information to scaffold the oral histories I collected about my grandfather. The end result of this research is a snapshot of the community in which my grandfather has been a practicing Regionalist watercolor artist for over a half a century. The cultural identity of that community is also a part of this snapshot. However, knowing that oral histories are not an unproblematic source, I considered the reliability of the stories I collected and attempted to verify each account through data triangulation across multiple data sources.

Another closely related subject of concern is that of regional culture with cultural identity, stereotypes, and inequalities being paramount to the discussion. For example, with reference to Thomas Wolfe’s rural Appalachian community, stereotypes of the people from Appalachia could be discussed along with the economic inequalities that exist in Appalachian regions of the United States. In her book, Outlaw Culture (1994),
bell hooks examines representations of the poor. She states, “Poverty was no disgrace in our household. We were socialized early on, by grandparents and parents, to assume that nobody’s value could be measured by material standards. Value was connected to integrity, to being honest and hardworking. One could be hard working and still be poor,” (1994, p. 195). She also notes that during college, in comparison to her upbringing, she “was shocked by representations of the poor learned in classrooms, as well as by the comments of professors and peers that painted an entirely different picture. They almost always portrayed the poor as shiftless, mindless, lazy, dishonest, and unworthy,” (1994, p. 195).

Wolfe and his sisters, Margaret, Sarah, and Gladys, presented similar descriptions to hooks’ regarding their upbringing and the idea of being poor. Wolfe stated, “we didn’t know that we was poor. You know we’d be at the supper table and I might want a little bit more and my mother said, “You’ve had plenty.” (chuckles) So I knew we must be rich if we, if I’d had plenty,” (2/2/11). He went on to say that he didn’t complain because, “Everybody was poor. So it was everything, they had everything in common,” (2/2/11). His sister, Sarah Harris, responded to questions about living through the Depression by saying that, “I didn’t know we had one…Yeah, I’d say, you know, life went on. You just did with what you had… So, I mean you always got what you needed not what you wanted,” (8/23 /11). Both of their comments could be informative if students explored issues of poverty during the Great Depression versus issues of poverty today. Sarah made an observation that students might want to consider, “Yeah, that’s what’s wrong with kids today. You give them what they want. There’s too much of that. I think you can go
to extremes. They get to a point where they don’t appreciate anything. They just want, want, want,” (8/23/11). Keefe also makes mention of the older Appalachian generations’ apprehension that they associate with how society is changing. She notes,

Bradforders worry about young people not learning skills like gardening and not learning to assume responsibility at a young age. Part of this has to do with the changing economy, since children no longer grow up doing farm chores. But it also has to do with changing expectations in the younger generation. (2000, p. 12)

Keefe cites one of her participants, Mona, an 81 year old widow, as stating, “Children need to want something once in a while, not just have everything handed to them. I think they need to want something and really work for it, earn it. It makes them appreciate it more,” (2000, p. 12).

Both Sarah’s and Mona’s comments underscore the concern they feel for the breakdown of cultural values, like honesty and a hard work ethic, that is happening within their Appalachian communities. Keefe further notes the almost universal opinion of her Appalachian research participants’ view of the moral decline of our nation. She quotes a retired woman as saying, “There is so many people now that can look you in the eye and lie to you. When I was growing up, I didn’t even think about things like that. It didn’t happen,” (Keefe, 2000, p. 13).

Appalachians are not alone in feeling this sense of moral decline, nor is it a concern only of Americans. I witnessed the same type of occurrence within the Egyptian culture that I encountered during the summers of 2000, 2002 and 2004. I participated in the archaeological excavation at El-Hibeh, about three hours South of Cairo, and during
that time was able to develop a close friendship with our driver, Ezzat. Over the course of
the three summers that he and I had the opportunity to talk, he relayed to me how the
dynamics of rural life was being undermined by the government who was building large
scale apartment building complexes to move people into more urban environments. He
noted that as a result, no one knew their neighbors anymore and crime was becoming a
problem where it had never existed before. Due to the outward migration from the rural
areas that once held honesty and knowing their neighbors in high regard, the country was
experiencing a downfall in moral character. Therefore, both the Appalachian and the
Egyptian cultures provide relevant topics to rural concerns that students could consider in
critically examining how globalization and urban sprawl are affecting the subcultures
within their and others’ countries.

**Appalachian Identity and Classism**

Issues of Appalachian identity and classism were components that presented
themselves during the analysis of the data as viewed through a critical theory lens. As a
subculture of American society, media images have exacerbated negative stereotypes of
Appalachians. The ‘culture of poverty’ as a social theory implies that the poor are not
simply lacking resources, but rather they perpetuate the cycle of poverty through their
unique value system. Anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1998) indicated,

The people in the culture of poverty have a strong feeling of marginality, of
helplessness, of dependency, of not belonging. They are like aliens in their own
country, convinced that the existing institutions do not serve their interests and
needs. Along with this feeling of powerlessness is a widespread feeling of

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inferiority, of personal unworthiness… People with a culture of poverty have very little sense of history. They are a marginal people who know only their own troubles, their own local conditions, their own neighborhood, their own way of life. Usually, they have neither the knowledge, the vision nor the ideology to see the similarities between their problems and those of others like themselves elsewhere in the world. In other words, they are not class conscious, although they are very sensitive indeed to status distinctions. (p. 7)

Lewis’ article originally appeared in the 1960s but despite major criticism by prominent academics who argue that descriptions of the poor as being culturally unique have little instructive power, the culture of poverty concept persists in popular culture. This contributes to the misconceptions of Appalachians and the community in which I conducted my research.

Paul Gorski criticizes Lewis in his article, “The Myth of the Culture of Poverty,” citing that differences in values and behaviors between the poor is just as significant as those between the poor and the wealthy. “In actuality, the culture of poverty concept is constructed from a collection of smaller stereotypes which, however false, seem to have crept into mainstream thinking as unquestioned fact,” (2008, p. 32). Gorski notes, and provides evidence for dispelling, several myths; (1) Poor people are unmotivated and have weak work ethics, (2) Poor parents are uninvolved in their children's learning, largely because they do not value education, (3) Poor people are linguistically deficient. He argues though, that focusing on the myth of the culture of poverty diverts attention from the real issue, the culture of classism.
The most destructive tool of the culture of classism is deficit theory. In education, we often talk about the deficit perspective—defining students by their weaknesses rather than their strengths. Deficit theory takes this attitude a step further, suggesting that poor people are poor because of their own moral and intellectual deficiencies (Collins, 1988). Deficit theorists use two strategies for propagating this world view: (1) drawing on well-established stereotypes, and (2) ignoring systemic conditions, such as inequitable access to high-quality schooling, that support the cycle of poverty.

The implications of deficit theory reach far beyond individual bias. If we convince ourselves that poverty results not from gross inequities (in which we might be complicit) but from poor people's own deficiencies, we are much less likely to support authentic antipoverty policy and programs. Further, if we believe, however wrongly, that poor people don't value education, then we dodge any responsibility to redress the gross education inequities with which they contend. (Gorski, 2008, p. 34)

The culture of classism that emerged while critically looking at the transcribed oral histories collected through my research also brought to light issues of assumed deficiency regarding Appalachians. Victoria Purcell-Gates immediately touches upon this assumed deficiency at the opening of her article, “…As Soon As She Opened Her Mouth!: Issues of Language, Literacy, and Power,”

A warm afternoon in a Midwestern U.S. city: A fourth-grade teacher grinned up at me knowingly as she condemned a young mother: ‘I knew she was ignorant
just as soon as she opened her mouth!’ This teacher was referring to the fact that Jenny, the mother of Donny, one of her students, spoke in a southern mountain dialect, a dialect that is often used to characterize poor whites known variously as ‘hillbillies,’ ‘hicks,’ or ‘ridgerunners.’ As this teacher demonstrated, this dialect is strongly associated with low levels of education and literacy as well as a number of social ills and dysfunctions. (2002, p. 123)

Teachers preconceived thoughts, based on a student’s language and social class has the potential to deny students an equal opportunity to education.

If the goal of deficit theory is to justify a system that privileges economically advantaged students at the expense of working-class and poor students, then it appears to be working marvelously. In our determination to "fix" the mythical culture of poor students, we ignore the ways in which our society cheats them out of opportunities that their wealthier peers take for granted. We ignore the fact that poor people suffer disproportionately the effects of nearly every major social ill. They lack access to health care, living-wage jobs, safe and affordable housing, clean air and water, and so on — conditions that limit their abilities to achieve to their full potential.

Perhaps most of us, as educators, feel powerless to address these bigger issues. But the question is this: Are we willing, at the very least, to tackle the classism in our own schools and classrooms? (Gorski, 2008, p. 35)

Gorski’s question underscores the importance of my research in that through examining Thomas Wolfe’s life and work as an artist and educator, issues of classism can
be explored by teachers in their classroom. The importance of addressing classism and
deficient theory through the analysis of my data became quite evident as found myself
feeling similar to how bell hooks (1994) describes her sense of poverty, “I was especially
disturbed by the assumption that the poor were without values. Indeed one crucial value
that I had learned from Baba, my grandmother, and other family member was not to
believe that ‘schooling made you smart,’” (p. 196). Her close connection with Baba is
similar to my relationship with my grandfather. During the course of my interviews with
him I was able to record a similar comment to hooks’:

[T]alking to my mother… I found out the difference between intelligence and
wisdom. And, there’s a big difference. You talk to some people that’s [sic] really
intelligent and don’t know nothing. No wisdom at all. No reasoning. And she
could recite every page in the McGuff[ey], fourth reader, from page to page,
everyone. And she had wisdom. And, one reason that she had wisdom is because
the McGuffey Readers was full of morals. (6/27/10)

My grandfather’s life story that emerged from oral testimonies with regards to his own
education speaks to what Purcell-Gates notes as the reason for teachers viewing students
as deficient, or not prepared to learn. It also speaks to the important role a teacher plays
in children’s achievement in school. In Purcell-Gates’ description, neither of Donny’s
parents could read or write, he therefore, “grew up understanding that life did not include
print. In fact, they [he and his parents] did not understand that print existed as a
meaningful semiotic system; it did not ‘mean,’ did not function in their lives,” (Purcell-
Gates, 2002, p. 127). What Purcell-Gates explores through her article is the experiential
differences children bring to school with them and how those experiences, or lack thereof, can determine how they are treated by teachers.

Without an understanding that written language *communicates* – that it *means*, he had no idea what to do when he was “taught” to “sound out” words, to match beginning letter sounds, to fill in blanks using words he was supposed to have learned…I want to state *unequivocally* that this not a deficit theory, nor is it placing blame on the children, their parents, or their homes. This is where the “Power” part of my title comes in. What I have been describing, and what I have been documenting is *experience*, I have been documenting the ways in which experience – in this case, experience with written language use – varies across homes. What I am saying is that children come to school with different experiences. The experiences they have as young children are culturally driven…The implications of this stance of cultural *differences* instead of *deficit* for educators is profound… whether we interpret differences among children – or adults – as *deficit* or *difference* depends primarily on our preconceptions, attitudes toward, and stereotypes we hold toward the individual children’s communities and culture. (Purcell-Gates, 2002, pp. 128 – 130)

During a discussion with my grandfather he relayed to me how he was perceived in high school based on his home’s location and his dialect. Compared to two other students, “Jack McGonagle, that was Judge McGonagle’s boy, lived on First Street, and Jimmy Adrian, [he] lived at the jail [both located uptown in New Lexington]. His dad was sheriff at that time,” (2/2/11). Because of the street where my grandfather lived, Lincoln
Street [located on down the big straight hill and on the other side of the railroad tracks], he said that Jack and Jimmy were treated, “Oh, probably first…because if you was [the] judge’s boy, you was smarter than everybody else. Now you have to remember that we’re [his family lived] down on Limerick and that’s the word you want to put in there… maybe they would have called it Lincoln but they couldn’t pronounce it right,” (2/2/11).

Knowing that if it had not been for the G.I. Bill, my grandfather would never have attended college, I am left to wonder what my life story would have been. His perseverance and self-determined attitude enabled him to ‘lift himself up by his bootstraps’ as he would say, and provide a stable home environment where education was valued. Because my mother grew up understanding the importance of education, there was never a thought, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, whether or not I would attend college. And I never had a sense that my cultural dialect would impede me or present me as deficit in life; that is until I began my studies at The Ohio State University where I encountered professors and fellow students who showed prejudices towards me based on my speech patterns and Appalachian accent. Therefore, I can directly relate to Purcell-Gates closing remarks in her article,

My greatest hope is that we can begin to move away from these old, uninformed notions about language and literacy. We must begin to comprehend and deal with the real issues involved in the failure of the schools to teach, to their fullest potential, the millions of children and adults from minority and low-socioeconomic communities. (2002, p. 140)
Critical Literacy and a Multicultural Approach

As noted in Chapter 2, critical literacy helps students to understand cultural assumptions. It also helps them to comprehend, “that no knowledge is neutral but is always based upon someone’s perception of reality, someone’s perception of what is important to know,” (Powell et al., 2001, p. 774). Students are encouraged to consider all sides of an issue, “including views of persons whose perspectives traditionally have been marginalized or even silenced in schools and in society…They are also learning about the power of literacy – their literacy – to make a difference,” (Powell et al., 2001, p. 775).

Learning to critically recognize the validity and value the work of Appalachian artists can hold for varying viewers is important for students who are developing interpretive skills, their ability to construct meaning from works of art, and constructing their personal identity. As Christine Ballengee-Morris and Pat Stuhr note:

Since prehistoric times, all peoples have had informal and, at times, formal teachers who have helped the younger generation to understand and create meanings of and for life. We may have lost sight of this essential teaching mission, of life’s meaning, and we may have become bogged down in the teaching of school subjects or disciplines in a way that they are no longer connected to the students' lives in contemporary institutional education. For this reason, it is important to understand culture and cultural diversity because culture provides beliefs, values, and the patterns that give meaning and structure to life. It enables individuals within the multiple social groups of which they are a part to function effectively in their social and cultural environments, which are constantly
changing. Education is part of cultural experience; therefore, it cannot be reduced to disciplinary parameters but should include issues of power, history, and self-identity (Apple, 1999; Bromley & Apple, 1998; Dewey, 1916; Freedman, 1995; Friere, 1978; Neperud, 2000). (Ballengee-Morris & Stuhr, 2001, p. 6)

In understanding personal connections with Regionalist artists’ images, students may come to appreciate such artists’ work while learning that works of art are not cut off from the artist’s culture and history, nor is creating meaning separate from the viewer’s experience. The construction of meanings explored by students can be considered part of the inter-relationships between lived experiences, culture, and history of the artist and the viewers. Also, the examination of the social, historical, and cultural context of an artist’s life with regards to community identity can help students to understand and interpret works of art not just created by Regionalist artists, but all artists in general. While much of my dissertation presents data that is personal and idiosyncratic, the information can be taken out of the personal realm and the research methodology employed can serve as a guide for others who have an interest in pursuing similar types of Regionalist artists studies. The remainder of this section will present educators with reasons for including Regionalist artists in their curriculum as well as suggestions for such incorporation.

Visual art teachers and instructors might consider balancing their curriculum with the works of Regionalist artists working within communities in which they are situated; those who have typically been ignored or included only peripherally. “Art study often focuses on artists in major museums while neglecting the art and artists in our communities. Studying works by local artists can provide richness to curricular activities,
while making educational activities more meaningful to students and community members,” (Congdon, 2004, p. 41). By doing so, teachers can encourage an appreciation for America’s cultural diversity as presented in visual forms. As Grant and Sleeter (2003) presented in their promotion of a multicultural education approach, such inclusion could benefits students’ educational experience. It can also help to meet their goals which are based on two ideals, equal opportunity and cultural pluralism:

1. To promote an understanding and appreciation for America’s cultural diversity;
2. To promote alternative choices for people regardless of race, gender, disability, or social-class background;
3. To help all children to achieve academic success;
4. To promote awareness of social issues involving unequal distribution of power or opportunity. (Grant & Sleeter, 2003, p. 200)

After reading the multicultural educational approach goals, it became evident to me that the study of rural Appalachian Regionalist artists definitely has a key role to play in the classroom. Goal one is addressed through the data generated regarding my grandfather. He may not, at first appearance, seem to hold the title artist by modern aesthetic values, but nonetheless he certainly has achieved that designation as self-determined by those in the region he served. This data provides much needed contextual and interpretive material about him as an artist as well as provides insight into the Appalachian region of Ohio.

The second goal is met with the biographical data regarding my grandfather and his selection of subject matter. Students can begin to understand that being an artist is a
tangible thing; something attainable by them and not just for people found in art history texts whose lifestyles differ from theirs dramatically. Students can be presented local artists to study with whom they can personally relate to and be inspired by, in addition to recognizing the artist as “one of them” and engaging in a lifestyle similar to their own. Furthermore, as noted at the end of Chapter 5, Thomas Wolfe’s self identification as an artist that is supported by his interpersonal engagement with his community underscores the value of his selection of subject matter. Allowing students to understand how psychologically, the value of my grandfather’s creating works of art and having them appreciated by others has propelled him through many of life’s hardships such as the loss of his wife, is very beneficial. bell hooks describes a similar experience for her grandmother, Baba in making quilts.

Fascinated by the work of her hands, I wanted to know more, and she was eager to teach and instruct, to show me how one comes to know beauty and give oneself over to it. To her, quilting was a spiritual process where one learned surrender. It was a form of meditation where the self was let go. This was the way she learned to approach quilting from her mother. To her it was an art of stillness and concentration, a work which renewed the spirit. (hooks, 1990, p. 116)

The process of creating and sharing his work has helped my grandfather to find an ongoing will to live, a renewed spirit. And thanks to the time and attention paid to him as an artist, he continues to be an active community member, supporter of local organizations, friend and mentor to many. Thus, his existence within the community
promotes creative (alternative) opportunities for people regardless of race, gender, disability, or social-class background (addressing the second goal of the multicultural education approach). Even though not all students will become practicing artists, by learning about the value of creating, students can begin to understand the significance of becoming involved with their community.

Although goal three could be addressed in a number of ways, goal four is specifically met by the subject matter Thomas Wolfe’s paintings address; those of an economically depressed Perry County region of Ohio. Issues of power and privilege, with regard to Perry County and the state of Ohio could further be explored through discourses regarding wealth-based disparities in educational funding in the state. By identifying location based disparities, along with the impact of federal programs like the G.I. Bill and Flexible Learning programs, students might begin to understand and value the culture, survival strategies of self reliance, and familial and community networks that have sustained artist and members of the Appalachian community.

In *Dialogue with the Past*, Glenn Whitman addresses common concerns from his own oral history research and that of many other teachers and students. His book is a great reference for the classroom teacher since he clearly lays out the background and methodology of oral history, guides them in creating and conducting an oral history project in the classroom, and directly addresses the issue of meeting standards.

**Identifying Themes**

My selection of participants, interpretations and analysis of the stories collected, along with my own subjectivity, has made my research distinct from what someone else
might have written if they had conducted the research. “The story is being told to particular people; it might have taken a different form if someone else were the listener,” (Riesman, 1993, p. 11). As the Personal Narrative Group notes,

 Sometimes the truths we see in personal narratives jar us from our complacent security as interpreters “outside” the story and make us aware that our own place in the world plays a part in our interpretation and shapes the meanings we derive from them. (1989, p. 261)

 In beginning the analysis process, I had to have a strategy for tackling the seeming mountain of data. I needed to sift through the transcripts and documents, look for intertextualities, and determine what to include and what to exclude, but I also needed a plan for presenting the analysis findings. I turned to Valerie Raleigh Yow’s *Recording Oral History: A Guide for the Humanities and Social Sciences* (2005), for guidance on such matters and found that, “One way to analyze a life history is to discern the roles the individual played…considering the parameters of a person’s life, the principal turnings, and the person’s characteristic means of adaption,” (p. 283). She also mentions another approach that examines, “the individuals’ developmental history, that is, life stages and life experiences…” (p. 283). I followed Yow’s guide and was able to break my grandfather’s narrative into four time frames which signified principal turnings in his life story. The four time periods look at how his personality and approach to life developed based on life experiences. Furthermore, I looked at Yow’s writings in which she quotes Norman Denzin’s, *Interpretive Biography* (1989), regarding ways,
individuals identify turning points in their lives, “epiphanies”: (1) the moment that changes your life; (2) the moment that has been building when you know change is irrevocable; (3) the “minor epiphany,” a symbol that brings insight to understanding an event or a person; and (4) those episodes that compel you to relive an event and give it meaning. (Yow, 2005, p. 283)

Therefore, in reviewing my grandfather’s interviews, I also looked for epiphanies and episodes that compelled him to share and retell particular meaningful events in his life in order to write the narrative provided in Chapter 4. The guiding questions that I employed during the interviews (see Appendix A) with my grandfather and the other participants also influenced the themes that I was able to identify during the analysis of the data.

The primary objective of this study is to document Thomas Wolfe’s life and art depicting the Perry County, Ohio region, as well as how he and his work have influenced his Appalachian community. After identifying several themes (intertextualities), including the encouragement he received from others for his artistic talents, the persistence that he had throughout his life, his dedication to championing the underdog, and his community involvement, I am able to propose that the significant contributions Wolfe makes to his community are through helping to shape local identity, local history, and in helping to define the regional distinctiveness of the Perry County Appalachian region. He always treats others as he himself would want to be treated, which should come as no surprise since he is a deeply spiritual person and his actions follow the Golden Rule; do onto others as you would have them do onto you. Many qualities of the Perry County Appalachian region’s identity can be seen in his life story, including strong
family bonds, working together as a community, neighbors helping neighbors, deep spiritual faith, working on the farm, and being patriotic.

His life story and contributions to constructing the region’s identity are akin to what I have found in the literature regarding Regionalist/American Scene painters’ work. Although the time periods and factors affecting our country have changed since the beginning of the American Scene movement began, similarities do exist between those artists’ work and my grandfather’s.

By creating a new American art, artists of the American Scene were young idealists trying to use their training and skills to make a positive contribution to the collective well-being of society…The American Scene Movement was dominant for over twenty years because it so suited the socio-economic situation of the country. Not only did the art depict the rural, urban and social topics which preoccupied society, but its realism and democratic attitudes made it highly accessible to the public. And, in a period of intense American isolationism and nationalism, its purely American focus and emphasis on traditional values was readily accepted. (Wigmore, 1988, pg. 3)

I found that my grandfather’s art was accessible to the community for a number of reasons, but mainly because it realistically depicted images with which people could readily identify. Subject matter often holds personal meaning for the viewer and my grandfather tends to portray traditional values and scenes that are appreciated, relatable, and easily understood by community members. For example, many of the barns he has painted images of over the years are actually located on well traveled roads in Perry
County therefore, many people will recognize his subject matter as landmarks with which they are already familiar.

Christine Ballengee Morris examines the significance of Appalachian artists’ work which touches on my grandfather’s artwork being so easily relatable for his community members. In her article, “A Sense of Place: the Allegheny Echoes Project,” she notes that,

Colonialist organizations view art forms as a style that can be taught by anyone with emphasis on skill. These organizations separate the art forms from each other and from the place. The Mountain Cultural artists view the forms as cultural language that emphasizes contexts, oral traditions, and cultural, political components. The Mountain Cultural artists believe that a sense of place influences the art forms and the art forms naturally integrate and interrelate with each other.

(2000, p. 180)

Similarly, Holtorf (2011) had noted the personal meaning that someone derives from a work of art is based not only on personal experiences, but also on the social and cultural setting in which the person lives and interacts. Not only were my grandfather’s images familiar to others, but I found through various participants’ oral histories, that several of his life stories were also well known. Reoccurring themes within the stories that participants shared kept cropping up. This was especially with true with my grandfather’s own story telling. Over the course of the two years that I interviewed him, he revisited several stories on separate occasions. As an example of his retellings, and as an illustration of the rigor employed in analyzing the data that I collected, I have closely
examined four retellings of a story my grandfather recounted regarding his first fist fight with Chuck Smock. In reviewing the transcripts of our conversation, I have been able to identify at least 9 points that my grandfather retold in almost identical language. The following table shows the date on which my grandfather said a particular expression and provides comparison to similar expressions on the other days that the story was told.

My grandfather’s repetition of expressions leads me to believe that he has a system for remembering the story of his first fight. This repetition of expressions confirms the four retellings maintained the same plot and structure, with the exception of the ending on June 27, 2010, in which my grandfather got “tattooed again”. This leads me to theorize that his retelling of stories constitutes his self created mythology. By retelling the same story numerous times, to various people, he has effectively created a perceived interpretation of the event mentioned, which may still include distortions of the actual event. While I recognize that he has, in effect, conflated a mythological narrative with a historical reality in the collective memory of the community, it does trace how popular memories come into existence. Similarly, Grant Wood suggests modestly that "all the really good ideas I'd ever had came to me while I was milking a cow.” Although there is debate as to whether he actually said this or not, even if he did not say it, the mythological impact of Wood’s remark has become ingrained in the minds of art historians. As far as my grandfather is concerned, the story of his first fight is not the only story that he has used to help form this type of reality for his local community.
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<tr>
<td>1. Direction he traveled to the boat launch.</td>
<td>Then when school was out, we’d go down through the woods on East Water Street…</td>
<td>And, we’d go down through the woods… and we’d go down over the hill and that, on Water Street…</td>
<td>We would always come from grade school… Well one day we were going over the hill…</td>
<td>No but we would go down over the hill through the woods on West, East Water Street.</td>
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<td>2. Treatment of boat</td>
<td>…some boy took a big rock and he scuttled my boat.</td>
<td>But Chuck Smock he threw a rock at mine… He scuttled my boat.</td>
<td>…and Chuck Smock threw a rock at my boat and scuttled it.</td>
<td>Well Chuck Smock, his wasn’t doing any good so he took a rock and he scuttled mine.</td>
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<td>3. What happened during the fight</td>
<td>And he tattooed me, my face.</td>
<td>And of course, you know, we got into a fight then.</td>
<td>And of course he tattooed me…</td>
<td>…he tattooed me.</td>
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<td>4. Smock’s arm length compared to his.</td>
<td>But he had about a six inch reach on me.</td>
<td>Hey but he had, he had that much reach on me. Eight inches</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>But, he had a reach on me. He was tall, had a reach on me about that [holds hands out to show how far].</td>
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<td>5. What he did to cover his black eye up.</td>
<td>Then put powder on my face to try to cover up the black eye.</td>
<td>And uh, and I went home after the fight and put as much powder on my face as I could trying to cover up the black eye.</td>
<td>…and I went into the bathroom to put some powder on my face to try to cover up my black eye.</td>
<td>That’s when I went home and went to the bathroom and, and put powder on my face.</td>
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<td>6. What his brother Charles said</td>
<td>And my brother Charles said, “Come on we are going to go back.” and that was with my brother Russell.</td>
<td>And my brothers Charles and Russell said… They said, “Come on we’re going.”</td>
<td>And my brother Charles wanted to know what’s going on… and he said, “Come on.” And he took me back to Chuck Smock.</td>
<td>And my brother Charles said, “What happened to your eye?”… He said, “Come on we are going back.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. What he thought would happen.</td>
<td>And I thought they was [sic] going to fight Chuck Smock.</td>
<td>I thought Charles and my brother Russell was going to do the fighting.</td>
<td>And I thought Charles was going to fight him.</td>
<td>I thought he was going to fight Chuck Smock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. What Charles said when they saw Chuck Smock</td>
<td>And we got up there to his house and my brother Charles said, “There he is.”</td>
<td>No he said, “There he is.”</td>
<td>Charles said, “There he is.”</td>
<td>…and all he said was, “There he is.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. His response to seeing Chuck Smock again.</td>
<td>Why I said, “I didn’t want him.”</td>
<td>Well hell I didn’t want him… Well he tattooed me again.</td>
<td>Hell I didn’t want him again. I didn’t want him again. I just stayed as far away as I could…</td>
<td>Well I had him once and I didn’t want him anymore. No, and I said, “Let’s forget it.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Another example is his constant retelling of a Catawba tree story from his childhood which he retold on several occasions during the collection of his stories. The story involved him, along with his friends, Joe Agriesti, Rocky Dibari, and Butch Lollo, all smoking Catawba tree bean pods. On three different occasions (June 13, 2010, July 9, 2010, and January 31, 2011) my grandfather relayed how his friends of Italian descent told him that the bean pods were Italian Crooks, a type of cigar, and that the bean pods could be smoked. In each retelling, my grandfather mentions all three friends’ first and last names, that they were on their way to Rich McGonagle’s farm, that his friends identified the Italian Crooks, and that they ended up in a ditch sick from smoking them. Just like his retelling of his first fight, he was very consistent with the specifics of the Catawba tree story that he wanted to stress. By being sure to provide his friends’ full names, he insured their connection with his childhood and ties the story to a specific time and place. Also, he wanted to stress that he was gullible enough to believe that the bean pods were Italian Crooks, which draws upon his innocent nature that is at the core of his self-determined approach to life.

Control Over Stories and the Creation of Myth

Through the process of remembering and telling (and retelling) stories concerning his life history, my grandfather has been able to take great control over the stories that are remembered about him. In effect, he has created much of the collective memory about him that is shared by members of the Perry County community. By staying very connected with community members, he ensures that the stories about his life will be heard and perhaps retold, which promotes memory retention on the part of the
community. This method of helping the community to retain knowledge about him and the county’s history will help subsequent generations to know more about the artist when they see his work hanging in local business establishments. It also helps them to retain information regarding local history, events, and landmarks depicted in my grandfather’s painting. Therefore, each becomes an element in his retelling of life stories.

However, through my research I have found instances of slippages in his stories, which leads me to refer to them as myths or at least myth-like. In helping to retain these myths within his community, there is the possibility that he is misleading others into believing something as fact rather than an exaggerated tall tale. For example, his retellings of ‘launching a mouse into space’ story shared similar language regarding specific aspects, but when I would ask questions outside of the rehearsed story, his answers would vary.

The story about sending a mouse into space demonstrates my grandfather’s resourcefulness in involving his community in helping to educate his students. It also evidences my grandfather’s attempts to bring current events into his classroom since Sputnik was launch in 1957 and the U.S. Explorer was put into space in 1958. By helping his students to put a mouse into space, he showed that he believed in his students and their ability to achieve great success. As my grandfather explained:

…teaching science down at Junction City School, they, some of the students brought me [a mouse] and a parachute. Yeah, brought it in, they found it. And uh, so we called Dayton weather people. And we wanted to buy a couple of those balloons which they donated them to us. And Ralph Masterson [a local
veterinarian, former classmate, and friend of my grandfather], I discussed the whole thing with him. And he said you better make sure when, we had a capsule built out of a Maxwell coffee can. And the kids designed a trap door with rubber bands. And we had a big, we used a big long clothes hanger, straightened it out and attached it to the coffee can and it was about a foot, 18 inches down below the can and whatever it touched the rubber bands flew off. So Ralph said we could put that mouse in there…Then Fay Newlon from New Lexington come over to fill our balloons up. But Ralph said you better make sure you got plenty for that mouse to eat on his trip. And we put grains of corn and, and soaked them in water with rice because Ralph said if that balloon would happen to come down…some lady might find that and sue us and report us to animal cruelty. But uh, it didn’t come down in Pittsburg. It come [sic] down in a very famous valley, where a great big Goodyear dirigible went down in a storm, the Shenandoah Valley.

The slippages of the story were noted when I asked him for further details. The exact location of where the mouse came down was a bit confusing based on the questions that I asked my grandfather after his retelling of the event. On July 9, 2010, he mentioned that the mouse went down in the Shenandoah Valley, where, “They was [sic] putting the interstate through down by Saint Clairsville. And, she [the lady who found the weather balloon] thought maybe her boy left his jacket, his orange jacket [his safety vest/jacket from working on the construction of the intersection of interstates 70 and 77] on a fence post. And she went down to recover the jacket and that’s where she found the orange parachute and the balloon and the mouse was gone.”
My research regarding the crash of the *USS Shenandoah*, brought to my attention that the air ship actually broke into pieces before reaching earth and that 3 main sections fell in different areas. Ava, Ohio was the closest city to the largest part of the ship to crash, another large section came down near Sharon, Ohio which is about 10 miles south of Ava along interstate 77. Although my grandfather explained that the road Mrs. Clark’s son was working on at the time was near Saint Clairsville, Ohio, it is actually the area southwest of the intersection of interstates 70 and 77 where the *USS Shenandoah* came down and provided the nickname for that area of Ohio, the Shenandoah Valley. So, in listening to my grandfather’s retelling of the “mouse into space” story, and without conducting further research, community members could be misled. Perhaps they would believe that the mouse made it all the way to the Shenandoah Valley in West Virginia and Virginia, or maybe they would believe that the area in Ohio is the nationally recognized Shenandoah Valley. This prompts me to sometimes refer to his stories as myths rather than factual stories.

The myths concerning his life, that are memorized in specific text and retold by my grandfather, have been shaped by him to relay a particular message or convey a specific event. When others take what he says as completely true there is the possibility for falsely believing in the mythical narrative. However, to my grandfather, his recollections are not myths. The way he has chosen to recall certain facts, either consciously or not, has altered reality not just for his listeners but for himself as well. The altered reality that he presents though is a construction of identity he created within his community. As Deborah Schiffrin notes, personal narratives/myths are stories not just for
the development and presentation of a self, but as someone located within a social network and cultural world.

[N]arrative structure is a way to arrive at an understanding of the self as a whole; our actions and experiences gain meaning through their relationship to one another, as well as their relationship to general themes or plots. J. Bruner argues (1987, 15) that we eventually "become the autobiographical narratives by which we tell about our lives" [emphasis in original]. One reason that narrative can have this self-transforming role is that narrative language provides a process of subjunctivization: it reveals our presuppositions (our implicit meanings), permits multiple perspectives (different prisms through which we can view the world), and allows subjectification (reality can be filtered "through the consciousness of protagonists in the story"; Bruner, 25)… [T]elling a story allows us to create a "story world" in which we can represent ourselves against a backdrop of cultural expectations about a typical course of action; our identities as social beings emerge as we construct our own individual experiences as a way to position ourselves in relation to social and cultural expectations… The way we tell our stories also reveals a self that exists within a cultural matrix of meanings, beliefs, and normative practices. Research from a variety of traditions reveals that both the style and substance of stories are sensitive parameters of ethnicity (Michaels 1981, Gee 1991, Minami & McCabe 1991, Blum-Kulka 1993); social class (van Dijk 1992); gender (Riessman 1990, Attanucci 1993); age (Cohler 1982,
My grandfather’s story about the mouse being sent into space is a perfect example of how his personal myths have transformed his reality. I came across a newspaper clipping among his files (see Figure 5.1) which featured an article about my grandfather and his students preparing a chipmunk, not a mouse, to be sent up into the atmosphere. The article mentions that the chipmunk’s name was Tom and there is an accompanying photograph highlighting the balloon, cage, students and my grandfather. Finding this clipping demonstrated my grandfather’s ability to place importance on the story rather than recall specific facts and how his creation of a myth relating to life experiences has actually altered his perceived reality. He believes that what he recalls/says is the truth, that they sent a mouse into space, when clearly the article accounts differently.

However, as Casey points out, I needed to view my grandfather’s slippages as a positive rather than a negative component to oral history research. His retelling of the story happens within the same community that would have had access to the newspaper clipping. Others could be aware that it was a chipmunk and not a mouse, but to my knowledge, no one has ever corrected him. This speaks to the level of respect he receives within the community and signifies that others understand the importance of the story beyond the specifics. They realize that the story is ultimately about providing students the opportunity to think creatively and to push boundaries, not about which animal that was sent up into space. “Cultural memory is hence not about giving testimony of past events,
accurately and truthful, but about making meaningful statements about the past in a given present,” (Holtorf, 1998, p. 24).

His teaching practices, as evidenced through the testimonies of former students, were very successful at motivating students to learn and push the boundaries of what they thought that they could achieve. His curriculum, against the advice of his principal, was based on the moral education that he received as a child and the lessons he learned through life as outlined at the beginning of Chapter 6. He taught honesty, respect for others, respect for oneself, truthfulness and persistence. “[T]ruly magnificent leaders embody the message they advocate – that is, they walk the talk, practice what they preach, and expect everyone else to do likewise,” (Gardner cited in Duffy, 2006, p. 137).

One aspect of his teaching practices and personal character that speaks to his ‘walking the talk’ is his constant support for the underdog. Jack Lybarger was the principal at the Junction City School for 21 years, starting in 1959 and he shared fond memories of many co-workers in an article for the Perry County Tribune, including comments regarding my grandfather, “now-retired Tommy Wolfe, a jack-of-all-trades teacher who coached and taught art, shop class and general science to name a few…Tommy was always a champion of the underdog of his classes and he’s a wonderful artist,” (Community Service, 2003, p. 7A).

Championing for the underdog demonstrates his walking the talk because, he, like many of his students in Perry County, was a child whose home life may have been a bit more difficult than others due to the large family size and economic hardships experienced during the Great Depression. His financial means as an adult were less
fortunate than many of his peers at The Ohio State University as was his social status. He was also likely regarded less socially acceptable due to his Appalachian regional identity. But people like Ralph Fanning saw my grandfather as the underdog and chose to help him. I would propose that is why his heartfelt compassion lies in helping the underdogs in his community. He feels that it is his moral duty to help neighbors in need.

**Collective Memory and Identity**

In recording my grandfather’s stories and coming to settle on calling them myths about his life, I began to consider the effects of myths. Although myths are not always 100 percent truthful, they can have at their core a moral lesson or parable that can teach a powerful lesson and/or have a positive impact on a community. Myths are not only about the world or community in which they originate, they also help an individual to create and/or construct his or her world, or rather his or her collective history. In my use of the term myth, I am working with the understanding that myths can refer to any story originating within traditions and which are loosely based on factual events. Cornelius Holtorf makes mention of *social memory* that I found helpful. He says,

[H]uman memory does not behave like the hard disk of your computer; it is not always accurate and reliable. Human memory can fail completely or it can be influenced by a variety of different factors, and the past can thus be altered. One important group of such factors, as Maurice Halbwachs argued (1980), derives from the social arena, which people always inhabit when they remember. He therefore introduced the term 'collective memory' (mémoire collective). Halbwachs stressed how strongly social processes influence not only people's
personal memories of their own lifetimes, but also a community's shared memories of the past. Such collective memories are crucial for the identity of groups such as families, believers of a religion, or social classes. James Young reminded us, however, that societies cannot remember in any other way than through their constituents’ memories. He suggested therefore that we speak of ‘collected memory’ rather than ‘collective memory’. (2011, para. 3)
Holtorf goes on to note that,

scholars in the humanities have argued that memory of the past is not only influenced but constituted by social contexts of the present… [therefore,] it
becomes fruitless to discuss whether or not a particular event or process remembered corresponds to the actual past: all that matters are the specific conditions under which such memory is constructed as well as the personal and social implications of memories held… The distinction between individual and cultural memory is thus not necessarily a sharp one. Both reflect first and foremost the conditions of the present in which they originate. (2011, para. 6-8)

The idea of cultural memory and/or collected memory interested me with regards to my grandfather, especially since he taught for so many years. For every story about teaching that he relayed to me, there were students who had shared in the experience and were able to provide their perspective. Therefore, I was able to gain more insight regarding the Perry County community’s collected memory through various participants’ testimonies. As Vansina mentioned:

It is usually easy to evaluate the effects of failure of memory if one has at one’s disposal several testimonies belonging to the same tradition. It is enough to observe the extent of variation between the various versions recorded to arrive at an accurate assessment… If, however, one has only one or two testimonies at one’s disposal, it is usually impossible to do more than make a rough check on the final informant’s powers of memory. To do this, one must try to obtain further statements from him at longer or shorter intervals. The variants in his testimonies will then give some indication as to his powers of memory. (2006, pp. 43-44)
Memory Slippages

In addition to collecting multiple participants’ testimonies, I also tried to account for slippages and silences by interviewing my grandfather on multiple occasions and at various intervals. I sought out historical documents to provide support for his recollections. But what is important to remember is that when my grandfather, Thomas E. Wolfe (along with all of the other participants in this research), talks about his experiences in life and he chooses what to recall. He determines what is important to him and chooses to reveal those experiences as his truth. Therefore, it is relevant to relate the Public Memory Group’s views to the Personal Narrative Group’s view.

When talking about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a lot, exaggerate, become confused, and get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths. These truths don’t reveal the past “as it actually was,” aspiring to a standard of objectivity. They give us instead the truths of our experiences. Unlike the truth of the scientific ideal, the truths of personal narratives are neither open to proof nor self-evident. We come to understand them only through interpretation, paying careful attention to the contexts that shape their creation and to the world views that inform them. (PNG, 1989, p. 261)

For example, I asked him about the artwork that he helped his students, John Cronin and Charles Cherry, make for Presidents Ford and Eisenhower on a few occasions. I also contacted the Presidential Libraries for copies of correspondence that my grandfather conducted in preparation for presenting each President with the plaques made in their likeness. Furthermore, I reviewed correspondence that my grandfather had
with the Nelson McCoy Pottery company who supplied him with the necessary clay for constructing the Ford plaque and a Zanesville Times Recorder article which noted that the Watt Pottery company supplied the slip for the Eisenhower plaque (Fine Arts Class, 1960, p. 4B).

By using multiple sources of information and testimonies, as Vansina suggests, I did find one slippage between my grandfather’s retelling of the story and his personal correspondence with regards to the plaque of President Ford that Cronin created. My grandfather fondly recalled his high school classmate, Jim Self, then superintendent of Ludowici Celadon tile factory, as supplying the clay for construction of the plaque. However, in a letter dated June 3, 1976 my grandfather wrote to Mr. Fuller at Nelson McCoy Pottery in Roseville, Ohio, “Your tireless efforts and considerate kindness toward helping us construct the plaque in order that we could witness firsthand the personal qualities of our great Republican leader, and the next President of the United States, will always be remembered.” In looking through more of his papers, I also found letters addressed to Robert Hampton at the Rushcreek Clay Company in Junction City dated June 3, 1976 and to Robert Hull at Hull Pottery in Crooksville, dated June 7, 1976. These letters read almost word for word as his letter addressed to Mr. Fuller. This suggests that his net for collecting free clay for his art department was cast wide across the county. It also suggests that he wanted to show his appreciation to all who might have been involved in the creation of the plaque. This may also account for the slippage present in his retelling of the story.
Therefore, I have to assume that my grandfather’s memory is not fail (or slippage) proof, but I also assume that his retelling of the story carried no ill intent. Jim Self and Joe Agriesti probably did assist my grandfather and his student, John Cronin, at the school the day that the plaque was cast, but it is unclear who actually supplied the clay for the art project. Perhaps this slippage should be viewed in a more positive light in that it speaks volumes to my grandfather’s ability to collect so many donations for his students from local community establishments. Also, since he did not distinguish which clay company’s clay was actually used, he allowed for a seemingly greater community involvement in the art project. Through noting the slippage in his speech, I was prompted to look for documented evidence of his letters. Had it not been for the slippage, I never would have realized the magnitude of community involvement he facilitated.

**Personality and Characteristics of an Artist**

Although there is no set description of what a “typical artist” is like, based on my upbringing, experiences, and education, I was led to believe that there were a few particular characteristics that a “true” artist embodied. Those characteristics included (1) the artist being viewed as selfish, (2) being labeled an outcast, (3) emotionally dramatic, (4) tormented, and/or psychologically unstable, and (5) working in solitude; none of which describe my grandfather, at least not with regards to his being an artist.

Rather than working in solitude, I believe my grandfather enjoyed painting in front of his classes. By painting and working on his personal artwork while teaching school, he was able to demystify the artistic process an artist goes through in creating a work of art for both his students and fellow teachers. Students were able to witness
firsthand the steps involved in sketching a composition and painting it to completion, similar to how Ralph Fanning demonstrated his artistic talents to his students between classes at The Ohio State University. With the desire to inspire all of his students to rise to the challenge of creating art, my grandfather painted in front of them just as his watercolor instructor, Leland McClelland, had modeled for him.

My grandfather did not live as an “outcast” within his community, nor did he live an overly dramatic life. He has always seemed quietly composed, the only times that I recall him yelling and being visibly upset was while I watched him coach basketball, and then it was only when the referees appeared to be unfair. His lifestyle as a farmer and local teacher practically demanded that he interact within his community on a social level. Furthermore, his extroverted personality is far from that of one tormented or psychologically unstable. Tom’s children know him and his personality the best, and they provided descriptive portraits of him. My Uncle Randy, described his as an individual who considers laughter the best medicine, “and he is able to instill laughter in a lot of individuals,” (6/27/10). Randy continued, “He would make a lot of people laugh…he had a way interacting with individuals to a level that he would make the individuals laugh…And they just enjoyed his conversations.” In example, my Uncle Randy relayed a story to me about a time when he was about 12 years old, riding in a car with his father, when a highway patrolman pulled them over. Although it was not a pleasant experience to be pulled over, my grandfather tried to use humor to relieve the stress from the situation.

On the short cut off of 37 [State Route 37] going to the farm, the highway patrolman pulled him over. And uh [the highway patrolman] said, “It doesn’t look
like you have a blinker and stuff, so I want to check your truck out. Honk your horn.” And the horn honked. “And try your brakes.” And the brakes worked. He says, “That checks out good, your left signal, your right signal, now try your emergency brake.” And, Dad said, “Well my arm’s not long enough.” And the highway patrolman said, “Why? Why isn’t your arm long enough to reach down there to release it and stuff?” He [Dad] said, “Well my brake cable is up in my barn yard.” (6/27/10)

My Uncle Perry commented that, “Well…he’s an optimist. His glass is always half full. It is never half empty. So when everything looks bleak or doesn’t look like it is going the best, he always has a positive outlook. [He puts a] positive spin on things,” (12/29/10).

Whereas my mother, Jane said, “He always liked to be involved in everything and liked to be the center of attention… He is very social. You know, always has a story to tell or [was] always talking to somebody… They [people in the community] will say, ‘Your dad is a character, you know, always joking, always has a story to tell,’… he always likes to leave a parting thought for, for people. Something to think about,” (7/6/10).

Even members of the community who were interviewed provided similar descriptions of my grandfather. Jackie Hoover, a clerk at the Perry County Recorder’s Office and former student of my grandfather, noted that,

he was an inspiration even back then [when she was in his 7th grade art class in 1970] as much as he is an inspiration today I think for everybody within our county. He always had a smile on his face. It didn’t matter how bad I was at art or how I wanted to give up he would just [say], “Jackie, come on, let’s keep going.”
You know, he made everybody in the class feel like they was [sic] not a dumbbell. That eventually one of these days they’s [sic] going to be able to accomplish it… But you know, there was never a time that I can ever remember not looking forward to going into that class. You know, he was just that type of person. Didn’t matter if you could do it or not. It was a class everyone enjoyed going to because of him. He made it fulfilling… Oh, I just, you know, you just, you have to be either very lucky to have been able to share or spend any time with him. And even in school, you know, he was a joy and a pleasure to be. But, I think as you get older, as an individual, you look back and think wow, you know. I look so forward to him coming in here [to the county Recorder’s office], I really do, and sharing all his portraits with us. So he’s kind of the inspiration just himself. (6/11/10)

In talking with the County Recorder, Barbara Fox, who was also a former student of his in science class, I learned more about my grandfather’s presence within the community and about her reasons for displaying his artwork within her public office.

Well, I’ll tell you what. There are some days when my office is very quiet and sometimes it’s very crazy. But, the door will open and someone will come bouncing in and sometimes you will hear, before you see anyone, “Good morning glory” and it’s Mr. Wolfe (laugh) with paintings, or stories, or uh competition, art competition that I have to be in, and or, uh just something usually about art or the community or something. Something he’s involved in and usually it’s either something dealing with the community, or the farmers market, or art and, and that
aspect… I know he does a lot with promoting it for the youth and anyone be it of any age. He, he involves people and you, you just can’t say no… [He is] Persistent, and unique, and just sparkly, and bubbly, and uh just over flowing with enthusiasm of anything he takes on… Oh, no and several years ago, long many years ago it was in the ‘80s. Uh, I happen to go into a dentist office and see that painting [she points to the Rushcreek school house painting on her office wall] and my father had gone to that one room school. And, uh, so for Christmas that year uh, wonderfully I was surprised. I got an original painting of that school house by him. And, I have by choice, that’s mine, and when I leave this office it’s, going to go with me. (6/11/10)

When I asked Barbara about her father attending the Rushcreek school house, she corrected her story by saying, “Well, yeah (pause) my grandfather. My mother used to say, ‘your dad went to that school.’ My dad didn’t live in that area but my grandparents [did]. My grandmother and my grandfather [were the ones who attended Rushcreek School].” Because of her family members attending the one room school depicted in my grandfather’s painting, her personal connection with the image makes her value his artwork even more which is why she chose to display it in her office. She also noted that the image is familiar to many others in the community and that, “Yes, and it’s, and people know who [sic] it is. And, we just bought, Jackie just bought a print for one of the title examiners that came in and said, ‘Oh, I drive by that school and I’d like to have.’ So he just bought a painting not too long ago,” (6/11/10). bell hooks makes a similar connection to a quilt that Baba, her grandmother made.
When given a choice of quilts, I selected one made of cotton dresses in cool deep pastels. Baba could not understand when I chose that pieced fabric of little stars made from my mother’s and sister’s cotton dresses over more fancy quilts. Yet those bits and pieces of mama’s life, held and contained there, remain precious to me…This quilt (which I intend to hold onto for the rest of my life) reminds me of who I am and where I have come from. (1990, p. 121)

Perhaps Barbara’s personal connection to my grandfather’s painting reminds her of who her family is and where she came from. I should mention that Barbara was not only a former student of my grandfather; she was also a former girlfriend of my Uncle Chris. Therefore her relationship with my grandfather was a bit closer during the time she dated his son. Her recollection of his homemade wine was based on her being invited to his home because of her relationship with Chris. She said:

Well, I think of, you know, one of my favorites is, that uh not only does he do the farming and the teaching and all the things he has done throughout life, is going over to the old barn and sitting out there and having a sip of his, the best wine in the world. And, and I brag on it um always. And it was the best wine I ever had in my life. And, for Christmas every now and then, not every year, but every now and then he’ll come. Meandering in with a bottle and I savor it. And I take just a little bit, you know drink just a little and it warms you all the way down. And, that is kind of the way he does, he just kind of warms everybody up. And, when he walks into a room it’s consumed, it’s warmed up, and it’s full of life. And, uh, he is just a blessing to have around. (6/11/10)
Because my grandfather is such a jovial individual, some people upon meeting him may not make the connection that he is an artist. As John McGaughey, Jr. noted during our conversation on June 21, 2010, “I’m not being facetious or anything but he, you know, when you stop and see Tom and talk with him. You’d never guess he had such artistic abilities. I mean it just doesn’t. I don’t know if it is a mold artist come out of (chuckle) or anything, but Tom doesn’t seem to fit that [mold]...” I appreciated what John said because it demonstrated my grandfather’s determined inclinations to achieve success despite what his appearance may suggest to others.

**Wolfe’s Artistic Style**

Sister Christina Kraus touched briefly upon my grandfather’s aesthetic when I spoke to her, she said,

That’s what I said he’s a legend. He’s also kind of a mystic in that he can see something wonderful, like in my little house and in things that are very common...But something about when he paints them, he lifts them up to another level. And I see that, he’s always got a personal touch. But the house is wonderful. And he said, “That poor little brown shed was begging to be included.” And so he said, “I went back and included it.” (laughs) This is true…Yeah, he told me he said, “It was begging to be included.” (laughs)

(8/19/10)

Seeing something wonderful in what others see as something very common, an everyday scene for example, is at the core of the aesthetic that my grandfather strives for in his work. The following descriptions about his artwork relates to his watercolor and acrylic
paintings and not his work created on natural objects such as gourds, shells, leafs, and rocks. His son Randy described Tom’s paintings by saying,

Describing, it’s unique… He has made drawings and pictures of farm and very realistic of what the farm looks like. So yes, it’s the type of artwork that shows realistic type pictures… Probably the different experiences which he has had growing up has given him a lot of ideas on the type of pictures and drawings which he has done…. And he likes to go back to something that he enjoys, and something that he can relate to, and he has an interest in, and he’s good at.

(6/27/10)

Randy’s brother, Perry, described his paintings in a similar manner when I asked about how he talks about his father’s paintings to other people:

Well I’m certainly always proud to mention…artwork that Dad has done. I think…artist have their own style. So his, you know, Dad has his own style of painting and uh. I don’t know if I know enough about the art to characterize it… he’s done quite extensively uh, old barns, and farm life scenes, and covered bridges…when he was growing up, [it] was in a different era than where we’re at today. And, like where there would have been covered bridges like between New Lex and Rehoboth on 345 that he would have an image in his mind that we would not because the bridge is gone. It’s not there anymore… But uh, I think it’s just a skill that he had, he had developed at an early age and just, you know, continued with it. Obviously, you know, he went into fine arts and industrial arts in college
and teaching so, you know, it has been an interest of his or passion of his...

(12/29/10)

Pat, Tom’s youngest son, was more brief in his description of his father’s paintings, “Oh, I’d say he’s pretty detailed on his art work. You know, he just has his style doing art different ways. Probably not as detailed as some people but, you know, you get what he’s trying to portray,” (2/12/11).

But his son, Kevin provided additional commentary on Tom’s artwork:

I think it’s detailed but like you don’t see anybody else like his… He puts details in some parts of it, like, like a barn but sometimes the barn don’t [sic] really stand out. But he puts his details in certain spots that make it, you know what it is… I don’t know if I have ever seen, hardly ever seen, indoor scenes of paintings. They are all outdoor barns, or bridges, or trees. I mean, I can’t think of any indoor ones really that he’s painted. (2/12/11)

Kevin’s comment about him painting outside scenes made me reflect on the interviewing experiences that I had been having with my grandfather and I responded to Kevin by saying, “He [Tom] seems to be, like whenever I am interviewing him, he’ll be sitting there watching the birds outside. Seems like he is very conscious, kind of, what’s going on around him and he tends to paint scenes, like things he notices in his environment. Like you’re saying, they are outside.” Tom’s daughter, Jane, provided her view of his work:

He always had a definite idea what he wanted to paint, like bridges or barns. And one time I told him I wanted him to paint a fireplace screen for me and I, but I
told him I didn’t want any bridges or any barns (laughs). And he could hardly imagine what he was going to do for a while. You know, it might have just, threw him for a loop because he always wanted to do what he wanted to do. But he did a really nice stream with, you know, the sun coming through the, like over the top of a hill and it turned out really nice. And I think he was impressed with it. But he just, he just always liked to do barns and he liked to do uh bridges. I asked him once why he did those and he said, “Well the barns are falling down” and he’s, “just kind of preserving history, and all the covered bridges are just about gone.” So I think that’s what he thought he was doing. (7/6/10)

As my mother commented, my grandfather has always been very determined to paint bridges and barns, even when she asked him to paint something for her. He felt compelled to paint them since there was a threat of them falling down. In effect, the structures’ days were numbered, just as a human’s days are numbered. Perhaps my grandfather was subconsciously reflecting on his own days being numbered and with each bridge or barn that he painted, he was not only declaring that the structure was still there, but that he was also still there. By painting the structure, he not only captured the image, he also helped the structure to live on in the memory of the viewer and by being associated with the image, he too will live on in the memory of the viewer.

**Value of Wolfe’s Artwork**

When I asked my mother about the meaning of his work she said that she could not identify one herself. She said, “I mean a covered bridge is a covered bridge. I mean you could probably imagine if you wanted to, you know, what transpired during that
bridge’s life time. You know but, no real deep thoughts.” When asked if she valued one of his works of art over any others, she said,

I like the one he did of the Bremen store… he gave it to me as a birthday present once… He did a nice job on the bricks in the building and the old cars in front…

Yeah. I went in it as a child. It was kind of like the 5&10 in New Lex. It was the Bremen Variety Store. So they had all kinds of boxes and things in it. (7/6/10)

My mother’s remarks reminded me of Barbara Fox’s comment that she valued my grandfather’s work because there was a personal connection she was able to make with the image depicted. In effect, my mother relayed the same reason for why she valued her father’s paintings. She grew up in Bremen until she was 7 and had memories of frequenting the store depicted in my grandfather’s painting. Tom Hill was also able to discuss his appreciation for my grandfather’s artwork with the same sentiment. He talked on July 6, 2010 about how a work of art can hold a lot of history. He said,

…as I got older, I just got interested, more interested, in uh local art and history. And you know it’s, you know, I, I really think my wife and my, one of our purposes in life is to preserve the past. So we, you know, we collect and what better way to preserve the past than paint it. So, and, you know, I just really love your grandfather’s work.

Sister Christina Kraus’ story, provided in Chapter 4, which detailed my grandfather painting the St. Aloysius Academy building as it was being torn down, is a perfect example of how his paintings can hold a lot of history. She noted the importance of him taking the time to paint the academy before it was too late and she also noted his
continued efforts to preserve local landmarks through his paintings. She said, “But imagine at his age to be that interested in seeing things and then putting them on paper so other people can see them,” (8/19/10). If my grandfather would not have taken the time to paint the St. Aloysius building, its architecture and presence within our community would have been lost. So when he says that he helps to preserve history with his works of art, his capturing them in paintings is what he means. As it is, many people in the community proudly display a print of his original painting of Saint Aloysius and Sister Christine noted that many of her sisters also proudly display it in their residences. She said,

And then the Saint Aloysius Academy picture which so many of us had taught there or gone there to school, uh, is a favorite of everybody… My sisters have them framed and in their homes in Columbus… the sister that taught me turned 100…but she passed away this past winter… when they were taking her things apart, they had a framed picture of Saint Aloysius. She taught me there. (8/19/10)

Tom Althauser also reflected on the Saint Aloysius Academy painting by my grandfather:

I am always impressed with people who have the talent to draw realistic pictures… I went to Saint Aloysius Military School here in New Lexington years ago back in the ’40s. And he had drawn a picture or painted a picture in watercolor I believe of Saint Aloysius. Somebody asked me if I wanted a copy of it and I took it… that’s how I got to know his art. And…every time you go to his house you get to take something home with you. Generally a little postcard thing and I have a lot of them. And I have some of the drawings like the statue [referring to statue of General Sheridan in Somerset, OH] out here and the postage
stamps he had made which are really neat... Uh, but he also paints things that are our heritage. Paints things, he paints them before they are torn down. So for local history, he does a really great job, I think. And, does it real, I mean, remember he is in his eighties, and he still, still, you can still tell what he is drawing... what I like is the scenes he draws or paints uh, about Perry County. I do like that and another thing about him is he doesn’t just do, he’s still learning... He’s 87 and still learning and still proud of the fact that he’s still learning. It’s just that kind of attitude that makes you want to be associated with him... There are very few people I’ve ever talked to who have lived in Perry County for a while and don’t know who he is or haven’t been taught by him. (8/20/10)

As a number of community members, family and friends noted they find value in the subject matter of the artwork that he creates and they also mentioned that he does a great job of realistically rendering an image.

I had always thought of his work as being representative of the area where I grew up. But, I also saw his work as being simply an exercise in recreating an image. I felt that he only approached each painting as a personal challenge to recreate an image set before him, whether it was a photograph or an actual structure or landscape. My reason for feeling this way towards his work is partly the result of finding several sketches that my grandfather drew in 1938 while a freshman in high school. The images were mainly of sports figures and showed great detail for someone his age. I also found the original newspaper clippings, also from 1938, that provided the images that he worked from for his sketches. Figure 5.2 shows two pages from the 1938 Sports Parade section of the
*Columbus Citizen.* Interestingly, Leland McClelland was a comic artist working at the *Columbus Citizen* at the time my grandfather was collecting the clippings and learning to draw from them. McClelland’s *Cartoon Parade* would have been seen by my grandfather as evidenced by his clippings from the *Columbus Citizen* in which *Cartoon Parade* was featured. Figures 5.3 and 5.4 provide the sketches that I found and the accompanying newspaper clippings that he worked from.

Figure 5.2. “Sports Parade” Clippings from the Columbus Citizen, 1938.
Figure 5.3. Wolfe’s Sketch Based on Image from “Sports Parade” ca. 1938.

Figure 5.4. Wolfe’s Sketch of Joe Lewis from Newspaper Clipping, ca. 1938.
This collection of sketches and newspaper clippings clearly show that at a young age my grandfather was most interested in the challenge of drawing realistically. Drawing what was in front of him did not require much thought about the composition or emotional quality it was conveying, but it did require technical skill and a determination to successfully render the image. Although he was quite young at the time these sketches were made, his desire to perfect his technical skills was something that he carried over into adulthood. I will use his painting of the “Y” Bridge in Zanesville, Ohio as an example (see Figure 5.5).

Upon first viewing Wolfe’s Covered “Y” Bridge the image may seem very interpretive since the bridge depicted would have been destroyed more than a hundred years before he made the painting and would have been replaced by a non covered “Y” bridge. However, after looking for images of the bridge online, I found two images (Figure 5.6) that I would argue he worked directly from. The similarities are too great for him not to have used them, but I cannot be sure since he has not confirmed my theory. He only responds to my questions with, “I don’t know; I can’t remember, honey.” Where he would have acquired the images I propose he used, I do not know. Obviously the ease of searching for images on the internet was not available to him during the time that he painted the image, but somehow I suspect he must have acquired them.

I feel strongly that my grandfather’s artwork is more about documenting images, rather than taking artistic liberties in creating composition or an emotional quality. However, I do not feel that his work should be considered any less a work of art than a work that does exude a tremendous amount of creativity. There is value to what he
creates, as evidenced by the community members’ and former students’ comments, and it is important to recognize that there can be various interpretations as my students clearly demonstrated. Therefore, I feel, as a Regionalist artist, he could be considered successful.

Figure 5.5. Wolfe, Untitled, Covered “Y” Bridge, 1988

Figure 5.6. Early 1900s Postcards of the Zanesville, OH “Y” Bridge
Community Approval

From my own experience, being the baby of the family can have its perks but it can also mean that you have to try very hard to get attention. Although my grandfather was not the youngest in his family, he was the youngest boy. Growing up in that type of environment, I think that my grandfather became accustomed to gaining attention by being praised for his artistic talents, something that I feel he has not outgrown. I feel that his constant connection with community members exemplify this quite well. As Sister Christina Kraus told me,

He brings everything over so I, like I can edit it, as if it were a writing. But I never seen a messy, anything he has done. And at his age to do the little, fine point things that he does, is remarkable… because he called me and he said, “Do you want to see how far I’ve got? I don’t have the shutters on,” or something like that (laughs)… Do you want to see it and then he’d bring me the original over…
(8/19/10)

Tom Althauser also mentioned my grandfather’s desire to share his artwork with him,

And he always wants you to see what he is doing. I mean, not just cursory but get down into the depths of it. I’ll never forget when he showed me, you say he is 87, I didn’t realize that old. He showed me, this was just in the last three or four months that he’d made this sky with this felt pen. A blue felt pen. He took water and he showed me how he did it. I have to admit, you know, that’s phenomenal. And I always thought if you were an artist you got to have paint, you know. He
uses everything... But, I like, I like people who make a difference without being selfish. He’s the most unselfish man I have ever met in my life. (8/20/10)

Althauser’s comment documents my grandfather’s love not only for attention, but also for constantly trying new things and learning new art techniques. It also speaks to his resourcefulness for using old materials in new ways and the joy he feels in teaching someone else what he has just learned and created. My mother also relayed her feelings about his sharing his new creations during a conversation she and I had in November of 2010 in which she said,

I think he enjoys painting so that he can show off his work to other people. He enjoys letting people see what he’s able to do with his watercolor and he thrives on attention… So I think he enjoys doing it but he also enjoys having people admire his work and telling him how talented he is… he even did the sketches for his yearbook when he was in high school. And uh, he was very proud of being the featured artist in it. And it’s always, if there has been a public figure, like there was a lady, Tammy Green, that became a LPG, well the Lady Professional Golfer, and, and he read an article about her in the paper. Well of course he did a pen and ink sketch of her to give to her. He did a pen and ink of Woody Hayes and uh, just anybody that he thought he could give them one of his pictures. And he would uh, you know, enjoy the picture but also he would enjoy getting the recognition from it… He enjoyed his art classes at school. And uh, enjoyed doing projects where they could get recognition in the paper… Or enter contests. He was very interested in showing off the art of himself or his students… No, just like he
craves attention at times… And you know, he just enjoys, he just beamed when they said, “Oh, aren’t those really nice.” (11/5/10)

I do not assume that my grandfather is alone in appreciating the praises he receives or his time in the spotlight since most people value affirmations from others. I would venture to say, though, that the praises that he receives is vital to his overall well being and quality of life. I feel that my grandfather’s creation of art serves as an important avenue for communicating with others. He told me that he feels compelled to paint every day and is very happy when he feels good enough to paint and finish a work (personal conversation 4/18/12). Once finished, he is quick to share the new work with family, friends, and members of the community and within the last 3 years he almost always takes a new work to Sue McGreevy, the New Lexington City School’s secretary. He has maintained his relationship with the school system and, since the school values his friendship and artistic skills, Sue McGreevy always makes color copies of my grandfather’s newest paintings free of charge. She even has a system set up so that she can reduce the image and position it so that he can make greeting cards with his painting on the cover. The pride that he takes in sharing the copies with others is easy to detect for he still has a child-like smile that comes over his face when he says, “Lookie here. Look what I was able to paint.” I feel that the happiness he gains from sharing his work with others helps to keep him young at heart, but it is not just the sharing that he enjoys.

When I asked him what he thinks about when he paints, he told me that he thinks about the challenge each new image presents. Everything is a challenge and he loves pursuing the challenge, so the actual act of creating also has value to him. His comment
reminded me of an article, “The fully functioning self,” in which the author Earl C. Kelley wrote, “This is indeed the critical point, because it is what the person sees that is enabling or disabling. The crucial matter is not so much who you are, but who you think you are. And all of this is always in relationship to others,” (1999, p. 4, emphasis in the original). Kelley describes the fully functioning person as thinking well of themselves, feeling able and competent while being aware of limitations. They also think well of others, recognize their importance as opportunities for self-development and self-determination. In addition, fully functioning persons develop and live by human values rather than external demands. They are creative and have the ability to recognize the value of mistakes as sources of learning and profit from them.

I can see where Kelley’s text truly speaks to my grandfather’s functioning self. Because of the praises my grandfather has received throughout his life for his artistic talents, he sees himself as someone who can rise to any challenge an image presents him with and through his interpersonal communications with family, friends and community members about his art, his perception of who he thinks he is (an artist), is reinforced. Furthermore, he is able to learn from mistakes, both in his art and in his life experiences.

When I asked him how painting makes him feel he said that, “it makes me feel like I had some good people behind me; that’s one of the best feelings. My dad, Leslie Cope, Fanning, all of them,” (personal conversation 4/18/12). This comment, too, made me think of all of the interpersonal interactions he has had throughout his life that have reinforced his perception of himself as an artist and demonstrates his thinking well of others. From the early drawings he made with his father, the grade school teachers who
doted on him for his artistic talents, Pearl Wilson, his high school graduating class who appointed him the class yearbook artist, the list goes on and on of the praise he received from others in his community. What stands out to me is how grateful he is to all of them. The support and praises that he has received from others has helped him to define the self-determined identity he embodies.

Knowing how much he enjoys having the spotlight on him, I knew that choosing to write my dissertation based on his life and artwork would bring him great happiness, which it has. He tells everyone he meets what I am working on, so much so, every time that I am in Perry County, people will stop and ask me when I am going to be finished and where can they get a copy. Since I started this research endeavor over two years ago, I have been responding to their questions with, “Soon, and I will put a copy in the Perry County District Library for all to read,” for far too long. It finally is soon, and I will be adding a copy to the library’s collection hopefully before his 89th birthday, May 23, 2012. I think that would be the greatest birthday present I could bestow upon him.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

“The best classroom in the world is at the feet of an elderly person.”

- Andy Rooney

Summary

It has been noted in this dissertation that Regionalism in the visual arts can be defined as painting what an artist lives with, in, or around. Regionalist artists chose everyday life as subjects for their art and attempt to make their subjects easy for all to understand. The Regionalist movement was highly regarded by the art community during the Great Depression but it fell out of favor after World War II (as detailed in Chapter 2). Regardless of the movement’s fall from grace, many artists continued to practice Regionalist styles as evidenced by my grandfather’s life history. By recording oral history following collection methods described in Chapters 1 and 3, a fuller understanding of Thomas E. Wolfe as an individual, community member, farmer and artist emerged in Chapter 4. Based on the stories recounted by the artist himself, and the 26 other individuals who shared their stories, I compiled 2 lists; Table 7 summarizing the
lessons that my grandfather learned throughout his life and Table 8 outlines his accomplishments as an artist. Some of these lessons pertain to teaching art or practicing art, but for the most part, they represent rules by which one might live one’s life.

Table 7. Life Lessons

1. Do your best to serve God and your country.
2. Know what people are about before making assumptions and speaking out of line.
3. Try to be just as good as your mother and father.
4. Accept people for who they are.
5. Persistence. Never forget to be persistent.
6. Try not to be the first in life to grab hold of something new; rather sit back and observe others before grabbing hold.
7. Know when to speak up and know when to shut up.
8. Do not always go your own way; rather know when to be a conformist.
9. One must make learning appeal to the students and the opportunity to play must be the objective most obvious to them.
10. The purpose of life is that people do things for other people.
11. You have to be good to those who despitefully use you.
12. Give everyone a chance.
13. You have to be careful in what you say, especially with regards to giving students nicknames.
14. If you see an opportunity, take advantage of it so long as it is beneficial to all.
15. Be a good listener, and you will learn from even those you assume do not know anything.
16. Look out for yourself and your family and stand up for what you believe.
17. Help others when they need it.
18. Think fast on your feet because there will not always be time to think about it before taking action.
19. Be resourceful and use materials available to you in your community.
20. Learn from your mistakes and take action so as to not make the same mistake twice.
21. Look for the challenge and encourage the desire in others to rise to the challenge.
22. Champion the underdog.
Table 8. List of Thomas Wolfe’s Artistic Accomplishments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1942</td>
<td>Selected as the artist for The Lexingtonian 1942 class yearbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 1944</td>
<td>Accepted for study through the G.I. Bill at The Ohio State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 6, 1960</td>
<td>Tom Wolfe’s art class featured in article in the Zanesville Times Recorder. It was noted that his student Charles Cherry would be sending President Eisenhower a plaque he made of the president.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 26, 1960</td>
<td>Graduate from The Ohio State University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>George Adam, student of Thomas Wolfe makes a statue of President Lincoln from sandstone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 12, 1976</td>
<td>Debbie Hatem and Marty Masterson, art students of Thomas Wolfe selected as winners in the national Bicentennial Poster Contest sponsored by American Educational Publications.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>John Cronin, a student of Thomas Wolfe, presented a plaque he made to President Gerald Ford at Port Columbus. Tom was also present for the presentation of the art.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>His design for the Perry County Korean, WWII, and WWI Memorial selected to be engraved on the monument.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 29, 2004</td>
<td>Selected by the the New Lexington Alumni Association as the 2004 Inductee - Teacher Hall of Fame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer 2008</td>
<td>Selected by the Perry County Farm Bureau to paint a barn to represent the county.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 12, 2010</td>
<td>His painting of the statue of Phil Sheridan in Somerset, Ohio selected to be presented at the MacGahan Festival for the Museum in Batak, Bulgaria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 30, 2011</td>
<td>Recipient of the Perry County Baseball Hall of Fame Association’s Humanitarian of the Year award.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 2011</td>
<td>Presented OSU President Gordon Gee a print of his watercolor of the Rushcreek School house when Gee visited Junction City, Ohio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 21, 2011</td>
<td>Selected by the Perry County Opera House and Cultural Arts Center as the featured artist for the Third Sundays Fall Artist Series.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 21, 2011</td>
<td>Thomas Wolfe’s art featured in the Perry County Tribune article Celebrating Christmas all year round.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Implications for the field of Art Education

The research and data presented in this dissertation has implications for visual arts educators, art history instructors, and teachers in the field of education in general. The information derived from this study can be used by educators who seek to make their curricula more relevant and representative of Regional artists in general. Specifically, educators can relate Thomas Wolfe’s artwork, created in an Appalachian community, to their existing curriculum to further students understanding of rural cultures. Additionally, the method for data collection is significant for educators in considering and valuing multiple voices and points of view in interpreting art and history. Instead of accepting one source or authority for appreciating art or a particular rendering of history, this research instead forefronts the value of multiple data sources when constructing an oral history and considering how print media and other visual forms, interpretations, and analyses can open up new perspectives on any given theme or subject.

Teachers can help students understand the importance of Regionalist images to their overall cultural and community identity and help them to question what can be learned through studying such images and refutation of more formalist/elitist values that render local initiatives as wanting. By engaging in discussions with their students, teachers can foster the appreciation of art based on community standards as well as appreciating formalist aesthetic standards. Not all artwork must have emotional or highly creative content to hold value for the viewer and teachers can help students understand this by presenting them with Regionalist artists’ work in their classroom for critical analysis.
Inviting Regionalist artists into classrooms is another great way for teachers to provide their students with the opportunity to ask a local artist questions, and perhaps more importantly, to have the opportunity to witness an artist create. In demonstrating their artistic talents, Regionalist artists can help others understand their commitment to their work, time involved, and overall motivation for creating. By demystifying the artistic process that they go through, Regionalist artists can challenge the stereotypical concept of eccentric artist types and help students garner a greater appreciation for works of art that feature their local and regional community. As noted earlier in this chapter, John McGaughey commented on my grandfather’s physical appearance and personality as not fitting the mold of what one expects an artist to be.

Regionalist artists can also help students assess the role of art as a vehicle for examining history and as a form of social commentary. By learning how to critically examine and discuss Regionalist artists’ work, students might be better equipped to understand their own local history which will, in turn, help them to shape cultural identities in the future. Swamp Gravy, the Official Folk Life Play of Georgia, is a perfect example of how students could use learning about their local community in a creative production, whether it be a work of art or a play. Swamp Gravy was started by a group of individuals who recorded stories from their community, Colquitt, Georgia. They then transcribed the oral stories and gave them to the playwright Jo Carson who put them together into a script. Initially the performance was only presented in the local elementary school auditorium, but has since grown into a seasonal production of 32 shows each year. It has become a valuable example for learning about one’s community, but it is more than
just a community project, it also contributes to the emotional and economic healing in Colquitt, Georgia (Swamp Gravy, 2012).

I further contend that students should be encouraged to speak with family, friends, and community members about Regionalist artists’ work and consider cross generational research that could potentially help students more deeply appreciate the experiences and life stories on which their own are based. Through sharing what they are learning in art class, students can make personal connections with others that will build on their knowledge of their community. Discussions could be started regarding the artists’ position within the community, how they are viewed, and how they help to document the history of the area. Families, too, could begin to examine issues of regional pride and cultural awareness as well as cultural differences and deeply think about the productions of power in which they have been invested.

There is also great value in discussing regions and Regionalist artists both within and outside a teacher’s or their students’ home areas. Cross-cultural interactions could take place through various forms of communication such as internet hosting sites that would allow Regionalist artists to talk directly with students in classrooms around the country and open up dialogue across regions, populations, and communities. Sister schools could be established that might involve Regionalist artists working directly with students in an urban school setting. Comparably students in a rural setting might learn from urban artists (online or in a rural setting) as visiting artists. By having students observe and create similar works of art alongside the Regionalist artists, students could
discuss the different approaches they took in creating their own artwork. They could share their experiences through email exchanges or live chat sessions.

Directly related topics of discussion in the classroom could be, “who is labeled an ‘artist’ and what does the term ‘artist’ imply?” As there is concern for a more culturally responsive approach to teaching art, resulting from a move toward deconstructing the artificially-imposed polarities of artists and their work (Krug & Neperud, 1995), students could be assisted in expanding their perspective on artists and begin to understand and acknowledge non-mainstream artists and their work. Further, teachers should be concerned with their students’ understanding of how the arts can help us understand rural America in the new century: how we construct urban-rural connections and how we talk about the rural outward migration that has happened within our country.

Wolfe’s aesthetic approach to art could serve as inspiration for students and could help them consider creating art that mimics nature. Building on that knowledge, students could be asked to work on both their drawing and painting skills at recreating a common scene/object from nature through realistically rendering it in 2-D. By working in a natural setting, or from a photograph or object, students can gain an appreciation for Regionalist artists’ work that is painstakingly realistic even if it does not seem to contain deeper meanings.

They could also be introduced to the idea that art can serve a functional aspect, that of documenting history through visual forms. Students could be asked to identify local landmarks or historically significant sites and then propose ways that they could preserve the memory of such landmarks and sites through their own art. They could work
with local historical societies, archives, and/or libraries to preserve their artwork for future generations. Such a project would help to build relations between the school and local community and could serve to help archive images for future community members. Furthermore, this project would be a great way to integrate literacy into the art room in that students could be responsible for creating a written record along with their visual record.

An art teacher needs to consider, though, that by only approaching Regionalist artists in their classroom and not across the entire school curriculum they can be doing a disservice to their students. Ballengee-Morris’ research, which has examined Mountain Culture, can be related to Regionalist artists and culture. She notes that,

A comprehensive, interdisciplinary unit that integrates arts, local history and other subjects provides students an opportunity to analytically and experientially explore visual arts as a part of life… Presenting Mountain Cultural visual arts as a separate subject is problematic because the art forms are removed from the context and reduced to a visual exercise. Connecting subjects bridges book learning and practical application by promoting understanding of the world and self through similarities and possibilities… The arts and humanities help foster acceptance of multiple cultures and perspectives. They offer educators myriad ways to view and know the world. Through categories of human condition, cultures and art can be examined from a multitude of perspectives, including contemporary, historical, local, regional, and worldwide. Our job as educators is
to connect children to their culture, learning, thinking, and the world. (1998, p. 19)

Therefore, it would be beneficial to create a collaborative curriculum plan focusing on Regionalism and Regionalist artists that would include not only art teachers, but also classroom teachers, principals, artists, community members, and family involvement.

Furthermore, I would propose that my research serves as evidence for the importance of preserving a community’s history through oral history collection in two ways. The first being the documented source that is created and can be read by others. The second is the interactions that take place between the interviewer and the interviewee. Through younger individuals speaking with older generations of people, cultural traditions can be passed on. Although I would propose that first and foremost students be assigned the task of collecting oral histories with regards to local Regionalist artists, there is great value in preserving as much community history through recorded oral histories as possible.

Therefore, I think that an entire school, not just an art class, could become engaged with oral history projects and that there could be great benefit for all involved. By encouraging cross-generational relationships across the community a greater respect may be secured for elder community members and one’s own local history. Oral history collection, by all ages of students, can support learning across the curriculum. It can help students to develop a wide range of knowledge, listening and speaking skills, and understanding, not to mention that it could help build direct links between students and their wider community.
In conducting my own cross-generational research, and constructing a narrative of my grandfather’s life, I was able to learn that the self-determined approach in life that he has taken has helped him to retain the quality of life he has experienced. It has also propelled him to help preserve that quality of life for future generations. For example, the *Times Recorder* in Zanesville, Ohio ran an article on April 15, 1991 regarding my grandfather and Clayton Bussey’s effort to distribute over 90,000 hard shell and ornamental gourd seeds freely to local youth demonstrating the value my grandfather and he placed on farming and their desire for local youth to value farming as well (Hutmire, 1991, p. A4 “Seeds Packaged”). Tom Althauser also noted Bussey’s interest in preserving Perry County’s rural landscape for future generations. He said,

> I’ll tell you another story about that. He [Bussey] claimed he got them [walnuts, hickory nuts, butternuts, hart nuts] from his farm... he had six different kinds of them. I said, “Clayton what are you going to do with those?” Hoping he would give them to me (laughs) the hart nuts. And he said, “Well I am going to plant them.” I said, “Clayton, you’ll never live to see them.” He said, “No I won’t but somebody will.” I never forgot that. (8/20/10)

**Suggestions for Further Research**

My research has been very informative, but most of the information gathered pertains directly to the Appalachian Southeastern Ohio community in which my grandfather, Thomas Wolfe, paints and lives. The information is regionally specific and generalizations cannot be made about other regions within the United States, therefore many possibilities are open for further research regarding Regional visual artist/educators.
across the U.S. and their relationships within community, local histories, peoples, and landscapes. For every small region of the United States, there is likely someone recording the areas images through various visual art forms. Each regional artist, therefore, represents another area for future study. Even if one particular regional artist has already been studied and well documented, comparative studies could be conducted with multiple regions being examined.

The local vernacular aesthetics of the Perry County region could also be explored in relation to the regions’ connections with outside communities. There could be an investigation into the styles of art from other artists in different regions. Additionally, it became evident through my research that the more participants that I interviewed, the better I was able to identify the vernacular aesthetic; therefore, students could consider how a local aesthetic is constructed by a community. The interpretations that I recorded provided me with a more comprehensive and complex understanding of Thomas Wolfe’s work as a Regionalist artist, and the multiple ways community members value it.

For example, since I was teaching a modern art history course at Michigan State University fall semester 2011, I asked some of my students who were not familiar with my grandfather’s work to write a critical analysis of one of his paintings. Their responses represent a small sampling of the multitude of ways my grandfather’s artwork could be interpreted. I am providing a few of the students’ comments because they proved to be very insightful for me. Being so close to the artist himself, it has been difficult to take a step back and try to look at my grandfather’s artwork with a fresh perspective. My students, however, had no such difficulty.
The first student’s response that I wanted to read was, Yaesel Ma, a junior who was born and raised in China. Knowing that the subject matter of my grandfather’s paintings would be the most foreign to her, I was excited to read her reflection on his work. The image that I provided for her can be seen in Figure 6.1

![Figure 6.1](image)

**Figure 6.1** *Untitled, Small Barn on Hill with Brown Tones, 1979.*

Yaesel began her analysis of the 1979 Small Barn on Hill with Brown Tones by saying that:

> By looking at this landscape painting the word that comes to mind is sorrow. The artist tries to depict the desolation and loneliness of the landscape in the countryside. The artist’s style of regionalism helps viewer to appreciate the beauty
and unique characteristics of the area. The artist came from a small Southern Ohio community and he was probably familiar [with] the landscape and would have been acquainted with the exodus of people from the rural areas to cities. This setting was once [a] prosperous farm, cared for and is now desolate and abandoned. The choice of fall contributes to the sense of the “end of” something. It also dedicates [sic] to the feeling of death and coming winter. He expressed his emotions in the art piece. In my opinion, using techniques of watercolor was appropriate to describe the feelings of this delicate and fragile nature… The solitude has a unique atheistic beauty. I was deeply moved by this painting even though the fascinating art piece almost made me cry. (12/8/11)

Another student, Jessica Cady, a sophomore Criminal Justice major, viewed an image of a train painted by my grandfather in 1977 (see Figure 6.2), and wrote:

The painting titled 1977 Steam Train Locomotive immediately brought me back to my childhood. This led me to a connection with the story of The Little Engine That Could. Displaying lots of pastels, this locomotive steam train from 1977 brings forth childhood memories of movies and storytelling. The story of The Little Engine That Could has been told and retold many times. Some critics would contend that the book is a metaphor for the American dream. Connecting the story of The Little Engine That Could and Thomas Wolfe’s painting, you can easily depict that Wolfe is trying to display the scene as the American dream. The smoky cloud that is streaming from the smoke stack shows how previous generations, weren’t concerned with the effects it has on the environment like
people in today’s society. This painting represents the happy thoughts of post war America and having the motivation to succeed in anything that a person sets out to do – just like the small engine in the story of *The Little Engine That Could.*

(12/8/11)

Figure 6.2. *Untitled*, Steam Train Locomotive, 1977.
Alex Faraj, a senior at Michigan State, had a similar image (figure 6.3) to Jessica’s. In fact, it is the same image but painted in different years by my grandfather and with a different color palette. In comparison to Jessica’s positive interpretation of the “little engine that could,” Alex looked at my grandfather’s work as having a negative connotation towards the advancement of technology. He felt that,

What really stands out is the leading locomotive. Not only is the train the center focus of the piece, but the lead locomotive has a stream of dark exhaust that goes through the middle of the picture horizontally from right to left. To me I believe this picture is expressing the ugliness that comes along with the advancement of an industrial nation. The colors of the landscape and nature are very aesthetically
pleasing. However there is a powerful force blocking and disrupting the serenity of this scene. I believe the locomotive depicts the advancement and growth of our technology. I feel as though the locomotive has a negative connotation. The dark grey smoke that pours from the smokestack seems to have some effect on the grayish sky in the distance. Also it seems to thunder through the landscape, forever changing the way it once was. (12/8/11)

Adam Harrison, a sophomore, also looked at the 1973 *Steam Train and Cars* and commented:

While some may view this scene as a mere portrayal of a train on its journey, I think the artist uses this piece to convey a deep and meaningful message about the environment. Combining the tones in the background and the time period in which the artwork is set, one can conclude the deeper meaning, being the effects of coal on this planet. I think the artist is using this mechanism to explain that our nation is not concerned enough with things such as environmental efficiency and global warming. He also puts much of the environment in the scene, with giant manmade transportation such as trains and boats overpowering them. This could have a significance of man destroying nature’s peace, while putting its own priorities first. (12/8/11)

Although Alex and Adam had a similar reading of the 1973 *Steam Train and Cars*, Nicole Hagen had another interpretation:

I think that Wolfe was trying to celebrate the technological innovations and the strides that we have made as a population…big things happened in 1973, two of
them being, the World Trade Center becoming the tallest building in the world and the Alaska Oil Pipeline Bill passed allowing construction of this modern marvel. With all of this as background knowledge and the prevalence of the train, and boat to a certain extent, in this work of art it can be taken as a celebration and marker of the technology that was present in the day. (12/8/11)

After reading my students’ interpretations of my grandfather’s artwork, I realized that, although I was not garnering a deeper meaning from his work that did not mean others were not. I would like to share one last student interpretation of his work simply because it was so comical. My grandfather loves humor and I know that he will enjoy reading Jazmin Connor’s comments about his painting of a covered bridge, his favorite subject (see Figure 6.4).

When I first looked at this picture I got a warm, happy feeling. Here’s a man that went out and got a Christmas tree and he’s bringing it home to his family. It made me think of the old days when people didn’t have cars and they had to come up with other ways to transport their stuff. Another thing that aged the picture for me was the bridge. It looks so old and now-a-days the road commission would never let a bridge like that stay standing. It’s a complete safety hazard. I don’t like that he’s going to walk through that bridge. The bridge looks like it’s going to collapse at any minute. What kind of Christmas would that be if grandpa got squished by a bridge on his way home from getting a tree? Sounds like a bad version of “Grandma got run over by a reindeer”.
As I looked at the picture more I started to wonder why he’s dragging this tree all by himself. For some reason I just assume that he’s elderly and it makes me wonder where his grandkids are? Is he going to surprise them with the tree? Or maybe he doesn’t have any and he’s just dragging the tree home to his wife. The dreary, dark sky kind of bothers me too. After looking at it for a while it gives the picture a more depressing feel, although that’s kind of what winter feels like to a lot of people. Then I start to wonder if grandpa has anyone at home to enjoy the holidays with.

Over all I liked this painting and it made me think of Christmas and the upcoming holiday season. I liked how the artist mixed the watercolors, I’m assuming they are watercolors, and although the painting has a blurry quality to it, you can still make out all the objects clearly. The painting makes me wonder what the artist was feeling when he created this work. Was he thinking lonely thoughts at the time or was it something else? I’m always curious to know the thoughts behind an artist’s work, just to see if it gives me a different impression of the piece.

(12/8/11)
In reviewing the student interpretations, I was able to see that many of them approached my grandfather’s paintings with global perspectives, namely that of environmental concerns. It was very interesting to see how someone outside of the Perry County community, or the rural American Midwest for that matter, could interpreted the artist’s intended message as well as Yaesel did. She touched upon several aspects that are central to Regionalist artists’ work, such as abandonment of the rural areas, the artist’s...
personal connection with the scene, and the concept that a specific region can become knowable through images.

The interpretation that was presented last was originally viewed as being quite humorous. I believe that that is what Jazmin originally intended, but just as Jazmin’s interpretation became more serious, so too did my reading of her interpretation. Perhaps, like Jazmin suggests, the person preparing to cross the bridge is elderly. Her comment made me think more critically about who the person actually was. Did my grandfather paint his own likeness into the composition? Has the loss of his wife brought about a sense of loneliness, especially around Christmas, as Jazmin proposed? I appreciated the insights that my students provided because they helped me to look at my grandfather’s work on the deeper level that I was wanting to but had difficulty finding on my own.

**Further Study of Wolfe’s Artwork**

With regards to my grandfather’s artwork specifically, there are a few areas that I would still like to pursue in hopes of furthering the research presented here. First and foremost, I think that a public exhibition of his work outside his local community would be very beneficial not only for him, his community and family, but also for those outside the region. Having an exhibition would showcase his artistic skills and it would introduce images of the Perry County region of Ohio for others to appreciate and garner a greater understanding for our Appalachian community. The images might also serve as the starting point for public discourse not only related to the Appalachian area and culture but also regarding the process of creating; which has sustained my grandfather throughout his life. His commitment to creating art against all stereotypical presumptions about how an
artist looks, the resourcefulness he employs, and the curiosity that he maintains is the most significant aspect of him as an Appalachian artist. It is not the value placed upon his art or teaching from a formalist point of view or garnering the esteem of those who have historically rendered rural artists and working class folk as incapable of making work that is significant. Rather, the significance to me is that it is his creation of art that has driven and propelled him, kept him young, engaged in his community, and respected by family, friends, and community members.

In conjunction with an exhibition, it would be ideal to publish a more comprehensive collection of Thomas Wolfe’s art work. A catalogue to accompany an exhibition might not only feature his Regionalist watercolor paintings, but his paintings on natural objects as well. It would also be wonderful to locate and take good quality photographs of selected Perry County historical buildings, landmarks, and landscapes he painted throughout his career (as part of a catalogue raisonné). This depth of documentation could help establish the current condition of the subject matter represented in his paintings. Typically he painted barns, bridges, and buildings in various stages of decay and it would be interesting to see how many of the structures are still standing, and, if they are still standing, what their current state of decay is today. By noting the current condition of the landmarks, landscapes and architecture that he captured over the years in his paintings, attention can be paid to how Wolfe’s works have preserved their images for future generations and the collective memory of the community.
Further study could also include chronicling the lives of Thomas Wolfe’s students who went on to be either art teachers, practicing artists, or careered in an art related field. In effect, tracing the ripples created from his impact on the surface of the field of art in Ohio. While talking about my own experiences in my grandfather’s art class, I commented to his prior student and now art teacher, Mike Vigue, that,

[My grandfather] tried to draw on the resources of the community like you were saying with Roseville and Crooksville [pottery industries]… he had us bring milk jugs in and then he would take them down to Roseville and they would fill them up with the slip [for free]. (12/30/10)

I can also recall using the retired clay molds that several of the Roseville and Crooksville pottery companies donated to my grandfather’s art program. In fact, since the art teacher replacing my grandfather upon his retirement did not want the molds, my grandfather has kept and stored them on his farm. He still believes that someone will want to use them someday in their art classes or for a personal art project and he also feels that they contain a lot of our county’s history. Perhaps his appreciation for the clay molds was cultivated by his father, Frank Wolfe, creating the 6 to 8 piece mold of the boxer dog. In understanding and explaining the thought process behind making a mold, my grandfather was able to relay the importance of mold makers within the local pottery community to his students, as evidenced by Vigue’s desire to use similar molds in his classroom. As he recalled for me,

Same as with slip casting, you know. I can have my laziest kid that won’t pick up a pencil and once they get that little figure to paint on, buddy they come in there
every day and [they get really involved in the project]. Uh-huh. And I think that, those kind [sic] of things kind of evolved from him, his example… But the word persistent, one day, met him down here at the post office, of course, “Well, do you see that weed in the concrete? How did that thing get there?” [Mike is imitating Tom’s voice then laughs] I don’t know Mr. Wolfe how did it get there? “It was persistent. Nobody planted it there. Somehow that seed got dropped there, it grew in that concrete, that’s your lesson for the day, is to be persistent.” I’ve used that with kids when they were getting ready to quit. You know, be persistent. (12/30/10)

Mike Vigue’s final comment, to be persistent, is something that I, too, have learned from my grandfather. If it were not for persistence, I would not have finished my research, nor all the writing phases of this dissertation. So I will end by saying, “Thank you Grandpa, for teaching me to be persistent in life.”
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APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Semi-structured Interview Questions for Former Students and Team Players:

Tell me, how do you know Thomas E. Wolfe? (Tom or Tommy Wolfe, Coach Wolfe, Mr. Wolfe depending on what is known about the participant’s relationship with him).

What was your first encounter with him?

Are there any memorable events involving him that stand out for you?

(If participant had him as a teacher) What can you recall about your experiences in his classroom?

How would you describe his teaching style?

Could you describe any art projects you recall making in the class?

How did he help guide your art making?

How has he impacted your engagements with art?

What do you remember about his artwork? Could you describe any of them to me?

Do you own any of his paintings? And if so, in what ways do you find his artwork of value?

Have you stayed in contact with him since having him in school?

(If the participant was not an art student, but was a player on either his basketball or football teams) How would you describe his coaching style? Are there any outstanding memories that you have about playing for him?

Did his coaching inspire you in any way?

What do you remember most about him?

Are there any other thoughts about Tom that you’d like to share?
Semi-structured Interview Questions for Family and Friends:

What is your relationship with Tom?

What is your first memory of him?

Can you provide any biographical information about him?

How do you fit into the story of his life?

Can you tell me a story about him that probably nobody else knows about?

Did he have any influence on your life? Did he inspire you in any way?

Tell me about his artwork. What do you find the most meaningful; the most valuable?

Do you own any of his work? If so, how did you come to own it?

If you do own his work, how do you display it? If someone else sees it, do you talk about it? What do you tell them about the work or the artist?

Why do you think he paints? Why does he choose the subject matter that he does or the mediums that he uses?

How do you see his personal life affecting his artistic creations?

What do you think influences him as an artist? Do you see/read a deeper meaning in his work?

How does knowing him affect your appreciation of his work?

Are there any other thoughts about him that you’d like to share?
Semi-structured Interview Questions for Community Members:

What is your relationship with Thomas E. Wolfe?

What is your first memory of him? How did you meet?

How do you stay in contact with him?

Can you tell me a story about him that probably nobody else knows about?

As a local artist, do you feel that he has contributed to the community?

Tell me about his character and personality.

Has he ever influenced and/or inspired you and/or other community members?

Tell me about his artwork. Do you find it meaningful or valuable?

Do you own any of his work? If so, how did you come to own it?

If you do own his work, how do you display it? If someone else sees it, do you talk about it? What do you tell them about the work or the artist?

Do you have a local business or office? Do you display his artwork there; if so, why? Is there value in displaying his work?

What do you know about his life?

Are there any other memories or stories that you would like to share?
Semi-structured Interview Questions for Thomas E. Wolfe:

Tell me about yourself and your family (parents, brothers, sisters, relevant aunts or uncle, grandparents).

Tell me about your childhood. What do you remember the most?

Did you mother or father encourage you to draw, paint, and/or pursue art?

What do you remember about your elementary education; middle school; high school?

Did anyone influence you artistically as a child?

Did you play sports in school? If so, what do you remember? Tell me about your various coaches and their coaching style.

Did you take art classes in high school? Tell me about your teacher and any projects you remember creating.

How did you meet my grandmother? Did she appreciate your artistic abilities?

Tell me about your time in the military and how you choose to attend OSU after you were honorably discharged.

Let’s talk about your time (16 years, off and on) at OSU. Tell me about your professors in art and the physical education program.

Tell me about your teaching experiences. How did they shape you as a teacher?

How did you like being the art teacher? Which did you enjoy more, teaching art or coaching?

How did you come to start painting with watercolors? Did you take any classes? If so, who was your teacher? What do you remember about them, their teaching style, and personal artwork?

What other artists influenced/inspired you? Tell me about your early years as an artist.

When do you think people started to notice and value/appreciate your artwork in the community? Does it matter to you if others value your work?

Tell me about your artwork, why you choose the materials that you use and the subjects that you paint. Do you think that your work is easy to understand or do you think that it is misunderstood?

When someone sees your work, do you explain it? What do you tell them? Are there any other memories or stories that you would like to share?
APPENDIX B: IRB EXEMPT RESEARCH

APPROVAL LETTER
February 19, 2010

Protocol Number: 2010E0878
Protocol Title: REFLECTIONS ON THE LIFE AND WORK OF APPALACHIAN REGIONALIST WATERCOLOR ARTIST THOMAS E. WOLFE, JAMES SANDERS, SUSANNAH VAN HORN, ART EDUCATION
Type of Review: Request for Exempt Determination
ORRP Staff Contact: Cheri M. Pettry
Phone: 614-688-0389
Email: pettry.6@osu.edu

Dear Dr. Sanders,

The Office of Responsible Research Practices has determined the above referenced protocol exempt from IRB review.

Date of Exempt Determination: 2/10/2010
Qualifying Exemption Category: 2

Please note the following:

- Only OSU employees and students who have completed CITI training and are named on the signature page of the application are approved as OSU Investigators in conducting this study.
- No procedural changes may be made in exempt research (e.g., recruitment procedures, advertisements, instruments, enrollment numbers, etc.).
- Per university requirements, all research-related records (including signed consent forms) must be retained and available for audit for a period of at least three years after the research has ended.
- It is the responsibility of the Investigator to promptly report events that may represent unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others.

This determination is issued under The Ohio State University's OHRP Federalwide Assurance #00006378.

All forms and procedures can be found on the ORRP website - www.orrp.osu.edu. Please feel free to contact the ORRP staff contact listed above with any questions or concerns.

Cheri Pettry, MA, Certified IRB Professional
Senior Protocol Analyst—Exempt Research

Exempt Determination
Version 1.0