

THE PORTFOLIO

THE NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM AT THE OLD CORNER HOUSE, STOCKBRIDGE, MASS.

Volume 1 No. 1

Winter 1984

On This First Issue of *The Portfolio*:

First, there was the matter of a name. It had always been thought of as the "newsletter". But that did not seem very original, and somehow it did not seem suitable. The time came to design the publication and it still was without a name. Brains were racked, ideas came and went. Then, miraculously, there was a drawing by Norman Rockwell of an artist's portfolio, drawings overflowing from the handy folder which artists have used for years to carry their drawings, their ideas, their sketches.

So this is *The Portfolio*. It will come to you twice every year, winter and summer, and will contain all manner of material which we consider germane to the *Norman Rockwell Museum* here in Stockbridge, and to the artist and his work.

This is the first issue; we hope you like it. And, of course, we welcome your ideas, criticism, suggestions. Like any artist's portfolio it will be filled with a variety of things and we hope you will enjoy browsing!

From the Permanent Collection

A new exhibit for 1984 is now on display. Highlights include a selection of rare early works, an exhibit of NR's political portraits, a small show of *Poor Richard's Almanack* sketches, and some old favorites. The exhibit can be seen from 10 until 5, daily except Tuesday.



Molly and Norman Rockwell: an informal moment in the studio.

Norman Rockwell Remembered

Call this an exercise in reminiscence. Think of it as calling from memory half-forgotten moments, incidents, conversations. It has been more than five years now, five years since the death. She came to me late that evening in November and said, simply, "He's gone." I knew then that the sickness, the bad days, the overwhelming urge to "go to the studio" when, really, there was nothing any longer to do there . . . all of this was over. It had come quietly, as it often does, the end of eighty-four years of life, a life that was crammed with sketching and painting, with observation of people, with friendships and family, with fame, not easily won but more easily worn. "I have always wanted to die at my easel," he had said, but the easel had been unused for many months, the last picture still on it, still to be worked on.

That was one of the traits: never to be satisfied, not even when the picture was removed from the studio, packaged and on its way to the *Post* or to *Look* or to the advertising agency which had commissioned it. "It still could be better." What was in the mind's eye had not found its way to the canvas. The great work proved elusive. "How do you like this picture?" he asked. It was a large canvas showing Lincoln the War President being photographed in the White House by Matthew Brady. The painted floor covering, a Brussels carpet of intricate and brilliant design, dominated the painting. Lincoln and Brady and his cumbersome camera seemed secondary props to that carpet. I said so. "Well, that's what was on the floor at that time," he said, half apologetically. "But I guess it doesn't do much for the picture." The next time I saw the painting, uncovered floor boards had been painted in, the carpet gone.

Continued on page 2

And the eye. Sharp and perceptive. In the Borghese Museum he stopped beneath the Caravaggio: "Look at that hand." I saw a hand, apparently well painted. He saw something else. One night he met the new minister. "You'd make a good model." That was the same eye which had appraised Mary Whalen, David Campion, Franklin Lischke, Carl Hess, Buddy Edgerton. He was the "casting director" who found the right models for the roles they were to play. They posed in their assumed parts against the backdrop, with the props, the lighting, the directions from the painter. And then he caught it all on the canvas. We believe in the truth of the speaker in the Vermont town meeting (Carl Hess) because, like any good actor, he *is* the person he is acting. The poignancy of the half-girl, half-woman who looks into the mirror is Mary Whalen's. But it is also that of every young woman at just that moment in her life. The old woman in the railroad cafeteria, head bowed, seems to us an inevitable figure. She is doing what came naturally to her, whether at home in the farm kitchen or in the crowded and dingy cafe with her grandson. Bathos to some, a moment of reality and genuine feeling to others.

Saturday, November 11th, 1978, the day of the painter's funeral, was a late-fall New England day of mild weather, bright sun and clear skies. Other than the flags at half-mast in the center of the village, and an unnatural quiet which seemed to prevail, there was no indication that it was in any way an unusual day. Yet in the three day period following his death, there had been national news coverage and reporters and television crews were to be on hand to record the last event in the life of Norman Rockwell. Messages had poured in from all parts of the country; the museum at the Old Corner House was besieged for information, for interviews, for any bit of relevant or interesting detail.

Two years and a half before, May 23rd, 1976, had been formally designated "Norman Rockwell Day". The proclamation, delivered to the Rockwell house by a small delegation of local friends, read: "Let it be known to all men, women, and children in ye olde towne of Stockbridge in this 1976th year of Our Lord, that May 23rd be proclaimed Norman Rockwell Day. We the townspeople of Stockbridge in appreciation of your contribution to our American Heritage will parade in your honor. (Signed) Stockbridge Bicentennial Commission."

And parade they did. On a bright May day the town was crowded. The reviewing stand in the center of town was gaily decorated; town officials escorted the Rockwell family to places of honor and, for the next two hours floats, bands, Boy Scout troops, hundreds of people paid tribute to Norman Rockwell. He was affable, puffing on his pipe, signing autographs for the few who disregarded the request to abstain. Even his discarded matches were quickly picked up as souvenirs.

There was then, as there has been for some time, the conviction that this man held some kind of quality which others greatly value. It could be that they recognized that this man created art for them which they comprehended, which did not need the jargon of critics to be understood. Or it could be that they sensed the innate warmth and humanness of the illustrator. Or his lack of any attempt to distance himself from people, except during those almost inviolable hours when he was working in the studio.

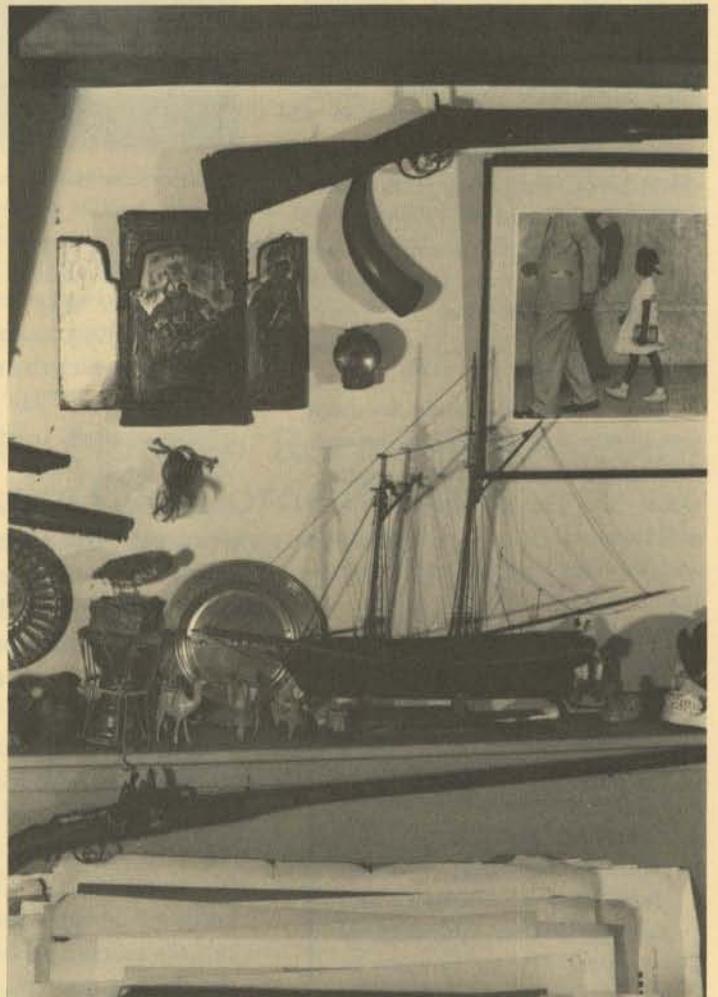
Continued on page 4

Studio Internship With Connecticut College

This January, the Norman Rockwell Museum at the Old Corner House participated in a career internship program with Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut. We were delighted to have our intern, Hope Murphy, a senior Art Major from Connecticut who spent three weeks with us in Stockbridge cataloguing all the artifacts in Norman Rockwell's studio. While all the original artwork left in the studio after Mr. Rockwell's death was inventoried in 1979, no documentation existed for the many objects found *in situ*.

The result of Miss Murphy's work in the studio is a complete photographic record of the entire studio which is accompanied by a descriptive catalogue of the hundreds of objects found there. This document is an important addition to the museum's archive and will prove to be an invaluable reference tool when the studio is moved in the future. Norman Rockwell's studio was left in trust to the museum prior to the artist's death in 1978. The studio will be moved and opened to visitors when plans are finalized for a new museum facility.

The staff and board of the museum express our sincere thanks to Miss Murphy and to Connecticut College for making this project possible. The internship was sponsored by Laurie Norton Moffatt, Curator at the museum and a graduate of Connecticut College.



A small sampling of the many interesting objects found in Norman Rockwell's studio.

One of the nicest ways any museum can add to its permanent collection is through gifts and bequests. The Norman Rockwell Museum at the Old Corner House has been very fortunate to have had several thoughtful patrons who have donated to our collection of paintings, drawings and sketches in this manner. A favorite painting of all who visit is the Mrs. George B. Sheldon bequest of 1979, Norman Rockwell's *Youth and Old Age*.

Painted in 1924, and winner of the Art Directors' Exhibition of Advertising Art award of 1925, the picture is reminiscent of NR's early Boy Scout illustrations. Warm, painterly and full of detail, it is a complete surprise to first time viewers to learn that the work was done for the Colgate Toothpaste Company. The advertising slogan used with the painting explains, "If your wisdom teeth could talk, they'd say 'use Colgate.'"

As our collection is not strong in advertising art, we were just delighted to have *Youth and Old Age* join the



Norman Rockwell's *Youth and Old Age*.

© 1984 Old Corner House. All rights reserved.

collection. Those of you who haven't seen this fine painting of the Civil War veteran with his grandson may do so this year as it is back on exhibit as of our yearly rotation of the collection this January 1984.

Norman Rockwell Definitive Catalogue

Laurie Norton Moffatt, Curator of the Norman Rockwell Museum at the Old Corner House has announced that the first cartons of manuscript and photographs for the long-awaited *Rockwell Definitive Catalogue* have gone to the printer. After a celebratory dinner on January 10th, Meriden-Stinehour officials Roderick Stinehour and C. Freeman Keith carefully stowed the materials for their trip to Lunenburg, Vermont, site of the Stinehour Press, which will do the typography.

Mrs. Moffatt's work as compiler, writer and editor of the catalogue has consumed much of the last six years, preceded by similar work by Elizabeth Shaker, Cynthia Quay and Michael Brazell. The catalogue will be a compilation of all known works executed by Norman Rockwell over a period of approximately seven decades. The listing will picture in black and white virtually every work known to have been done by the illustrator. Additionally, there will be one hundred color plates, all of these works not commonly seen in color in any of the previous Rockwell books. Listing in the catalogue is by category: cover illustrations, advertisements, story illustrations, portraits, and a miscellaneous section, 'ephemera'. Each entry contains all available information such as date, medium, variants, publication and present whereabouts. There will be a general introduction to the book written by museum Director, David H. Wood.

Publication date for *Norman Rockwell: A Definitive Catalogue* has not yet been definitively set, but is expected to be sometime in the autumn of 1985. Early next year a pre-publication mailing will go out to Old Corner House mailing lists, offering an attractive pre-publication price for the catalogue which will

be issued in a two-volume boxed set, comprising more than 900 pages. Also to be published at the same time will be a limited edition of the *Definitive Catalogue*, specially leather-bound and personally signed by Mrs. Norman Rockwell, whose interest in the project has been equal to that of the Old Corner House staff and board.

It is expected that libraries, art galleries, collectors and Norman Rockwell admirers will find the book, as its title suggests, to be the definitive listing of the work of the great American illustrator.

The Stockbridge Singers

The Stockbridge Singers, sponsored in part by the Old Corner House and directed by Jed David Watson, presented their annual holiday choral concert two evenings in the middle of December. Mr. Watson also performed two solos on the recorder, accompanied by a harpsichord. The concert was comprised of Christmas music, as well as a selection from Handel, Haydn, and other composers. The two evenings were certainly inspirational and well performed for the holiday season.

Special Exhibit Opening May 1st

The Norman Rockwell Museum at the Old Corner House is pleased to announce that a special exhibit of Norman Rockwell drawings will open on May 1st. Selected drawings from the museum collection can be seen together with a few private works on loan. Many of the pieces in the show have never been on public exhibition. The show will hang through the summer and fall. Also coming May 1st, The Telephone Lineman.

Friends of the Norman Rockwell Museum

In January, for the first time, the Old Corner House launched a membership campaign, mailing to a wide list of persons known to have an interest in the museum or in Norman Rockwell. Offering was made to "become a Friend of the Old Corner House" in one of several categories, ranging from individual membership at \$15 through "benefactor" at \$1000, and the response has yielded, as this *Portfolio* goes to press, almost one thousand memberships, far beyond expectation.

Also, for the first time in its history, the Old Corner House now has a Director of Development, Julia A. Forster. Coming to the museum from work with the Hellenic Foundation in New York, Julia is a native New Yorker, educated at Berkshire School in Sheffield and at Hartwick College in Oneonta, New York. When final plans have been made for the location and building of the new museum, she will work as coordinator with fund-raisers to insure the success of a capital funds campaign. She has emphasized the need for increased volunteer work among the friends of the museum, the strengthening of the base of support, and the widening of the museum programs, including the publication of the *Portfolio*. She is optimistic for the future of the museum and will oversee, in coming months, other projects such as the printing and distribution of a house poster featuring a fine-quality reproduction of the Rockwell *Checkers* painting in the Museum collection. Also in coming months a membership desk will be maintained during the summer to give information about the Friends organization and to solicit among summer visitors additional memberships. Perquisites offered to members include free admission to the museum, a 10% members' discount in the museum shop, and free gifts such as the house poster and books.

Development Director Forster is optimistic about the future. The success of the membership campaign has been accompanied by warm and enthusiastic letters from supporters, "You should have done this before. . . ." "We're anxious to help. . . ." And, during the crisis of the past few weeks while the museum waits anxiously for permission to use its new property, many

persons have called with helpful suggestions, praise for the museum and offers of help when and if it is needed.

Future issues of the *Portfolio* will keep members and visitors informed of progress in this, the latest phase in the Old Corner House museum's growth.

Norman Rockwell Remembered *continued from page 2*

It is spring in Rome. The Piazza Navona is alive with activity: people strolling in the bright springtime sun, eating at the outdoor cafes, tourists gazing at the Bernini fountain. And the sidewalk artists are plying their trade, offering portraits, ghastly garish oils, tortured sculptures. Here is a young man doing charcoal portraits and Norman, savoring what was to be his last trip to the Eternal City, stops to watch a young man sketch with deft strokes the likeness of a young Roman boy. "He's good," Rockwell says to me. "Shouldn't you tell him so?" I offered, "Then he could put up a sign, 'Approved by Norman Rockwell.'" Norman chuckled. "He'd say, 'Who the hell is Norman Rockwell?'"

"We're not supposed ever to ask famous people for their autographs," the flight attendant said to me as our plane winged back over the Atlantic. "But, more than anything, I'd like Mr. Rockwell to sign his name for me." I gave the artist a blank card and told him of the request. With his pencil he signed his name, inquired hers and wrote it, then drew one of his quick sketches of a "Rockwell mutt", handed it to her. Her smile was one of radiant appreciation.

From the roof dining room of the Hassler Hotel Rome was softly lighted against the May evening sky. Dinner was over; it had been well-served, delicious. The panorama of the ancient city drew our eyes. Very little had been said. Tomorrow would see us airborne, back to America after two weeks in Italy. Norman puffed on his pipe. "We're . . . where?" he said, uncertainly. "In Rome," we said.

"Yes," he said, "in Rome. Well . . ." and there was a long pause, "I like Stockbridge!"

David H. Wood, Director

Board of Directors of The Old Corner House

John M. Deely, Jr.	President of the Board
Lila W. Berle	First Vice-President
Harry T. Stuart	Second Vice-President
Henry H. Williams, Jr.	Treasurer
Patricia J. Deely	Secretary
Norma G. Ogden	Honorary Board Member
Mary P. Rockwell	Honorary Board Member
Rosamond E. Sherwood	Honorary Board Member

Patricia Barrett	William J. Napolitano
Gary W. Burger	Edward Ochtman
Jane P. Fitzpatrick	Stanley I. Piatczyc
Donna K. Gray	Rosemary Schneyer
David L. Klausmeyer	Mark L. Selkowitz
Barbara Lee	Richard B. Wilcox
Chauncey C. Loomis	



The Norman Rockwell Museum at the Old Corner House

Stockbridge, Massachusetts 01262

PROPERTY OF THE
NORMAN ROCKWELL MUSEUM
REFERENCE CENTER

Old Corner House Staff

David H. Wood	Director
Mrs. John T. Batty	Assistant Director
Laurie Norton Moffatt	Curator
Julia A. Forster	Development

Copyright © 1984 Old Corner House. All Rights Reserved.