

OVERLOOK

Cook County Historical Society

Fall 2018

NEAR TO NATURE: THE ART OF ANNA JOHNSON

Anna Johnson was known for a life-long interest in art, and the North Shore inspired much of her work. Favorite subjects for her painting included the Grand Marais Harbor, Split Rock Lighthouse, “The Pines” of the Gunflint Trail, and scenes near Gunflint Lake.



Born in Sweden in 1881, Anna Carolina Johnson emigrated at the age of 10 to Manistee, Michigan, along the eastern shore of Lake Michigan. Her interest in art was encouraged by an older brother, and she studied painting at Augustana College in Illinois.



She became a frequent visitor to the North Shore at the turn of the century. After a visit to Grand Marais in the fall of 1901, Anna returned in 1902 for a canoe trip from Grand Portage to Gunflint Lake. She had met local entrepreneur, Charlie Johnson, and her appreciation for the northern landscape deepened with winter dogsled and snowshoe trips. She married Charlie Johnson in 1907 and settled into a home on Broadway Avenue in Grand Marais.

Anna Johnson embraced her North Shore life - caring for a pet moose, accompanying her husband on fur-buying trips, enjoying summers spent on Gunflint and Clearwater Lake cabins - and found the inspiration from these northern scenes come alive in her art.

Charlie and Anna Johnson had one child, Lloyd, born in 1908. At the age of six months he accompanied his parents on a three-day hike to Clearwater Lake, and in 1909 Anna and Lloyd began spending summers there.

In 1906, Charlie Johnson had begun construction of a trading post in Grand Marais. Eventually, the trading post expanded to include a gift shop where Anna sold her paintings, etchings, stained glass, and ceramics that had been fired in her own kiln. She also taught watercolor and china painting classes.

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FRESH AIR, FISH FRIES, AND FRIENDSHIP: PLEIN AIR PAINTING IN GRAND MARAIS

Capturing natural light and the essence of changing attitudes of the landscape has been a focus of painters since the earliest brush strokes were made. To better achieve this feat, three separate movements in France, Italy, and England in the early 19th century encouraged painters to move their workspace outside to paint “en plein air,” which translates from French to “in the open air.” With the invention of paint in tubes in the 1840s, artists found it even easier to paint outside. The movement gained momentum and eventually spread across the ocean to places such as California and New York. By the late 19th century, artists had discovered the beauty and ever changing nature of Lake Superior’s North Shore. Early Cook County residents such as Anna Johnson (see article



Birney Quick and student on the harbor in Grand Marais in 1948

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above) were well known for capturing the rugged beauty of Cook County’s landscape in oils and watercolors. The widespread practice of Plein Air painting in Grand Marais didn’t start until much later, however.

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OPEN HOUSE & HISTORY TALKS

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Another busy summer is coming to an end. We had great exhibits at the Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery with a nice variety of styles. The opening receptions and shows have been well attended. We will once again have the Plein Air show in September, which is always popular. This year it is jointly hosted by the Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery and the Outdoor Painters of Minnesota. Everyone is encouraged to see the show.

The new sound system at the Johnson Heritage Post has made presentations much easier to hear and enjoy. Thank you to those people involved in sharing their stories with us.

Dan Helmerson put together a fun slideshow featuring early Cook County residents for the Old Timer's Gathering during the Fisherman's Picnic. It brought back memories fueling conversation for attendees.

As stated before, all this work would not be possible without a dedicated staff and volunteers. Thank you to everyone for all your hard work.

Barb Backlund, President,
Cook County Historical Society

June 9, 2018, was a lovely day for our Historic Cook County Open House. Each of our five sites was open for visitors all day. At the JHP we welcomed guests and offered the opportunity to share their Cook County memories on our "story map." The map of Cook County was filled with Post-its about visits to the area: *Our first time here in Grand Marais to celebrate our first grandchild's 3rd birthday! Beautiful country...In Grand Marais for honeymoon 3½ years ago. Now here for baby moon!...Lived on Saganaga Lake – Cache Bay. Came to Grand Marais for some 'Town Time'.*

Leah Thomas and John Jacobsen interviewed and videotaped those with longer stories to share about their Cook County connection. We enlarged and printed a banner-sized photograph from the Maude Small Toftey collection. Jerritt Johnston of True North Consultants brought his instant camera and film to provide guests with an image of themselves and this wonderful backdrop. Jerritt has worked with us for two years of our Capacity Building process. Thanks to Lloyd K. Johnson Foundation funding, the Society has had time to regroup, restructure, and set a strong foundation for our growing organization.



Several history talks this year have brought out crowds of folks interested in hearing stories and learning more local lore. Jennifer Case read from her book *Sawbill: A Search for Place*, sharing her love of Cook County's natural beauty. Staci Drouillard told "Stories of Work and Play in Chippewa City" at St. Francis Xavier Church. We eagerly anticipate the 2019 release of her book about the history of the village! Ray Nagy, David Hammer, and Gene Hagen (below) gave their perspectives in a panel discussion about the rescue attempt in 1958 in which Carl Hammer and Helmer Aakvik were lost on Lake Superior. One of the most well-known stories in Cook County's past was remembered by these three men with direct ties to that event. Carl, who was never found, and Helmer, who was rescued by the Coast Guard, were honored and remembered fondly.



COOK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD AND STAFF

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in this 2018 issue of the *Overlook*



Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery

115 Wisconsin St., Grand Marais
 jhp@boreal.org | 218-387-2314
 www.JohnsonHeritagePost.org

DATES	ARTISTS/GROUP
August 17 - September 9	<i>Fragments of the North</i> Oil Paintings by Reid Thorpe
September 7 - 14	<i>Plein Air Grand Marais</i> Painting Competition
September 14 - October 7 Opening Reception: September 14 from 6-8 p.m.	<i>Plein Air Grand Marais Exhibition</i>
October 12 - November 4 Opening Reception: October 12 from 5-7:30 p.m.	<i>George Morrison</i> Surrealist Forms & Other Drawings
October 13 2:00 p.m.	<i>Briand Morrison Presents:</i> Musical Impressions - The Art of George Morrison
November 9 - December 2 Opening Reception: November 9 from 5-7 p.m.	<i>Exploring the Visible & Invisible</i> Felting & Weaving by Elise Kylo & Triscia Bielke

Where does the time go? I've already noticed some yellow leaves along the shore in town which means fall is right around the corner! The Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery has been busy as ever with our rotating exhibits, rentals, and events all summer long. We've also been prepping for the annual Plein Air Grand Marais. As many of you know, the JHP Art Gallery is now hosting and coordinating the event. We hope to see you during the competition week of September 7-14, and at the exhibition which opens September 14.



Northwoods Fiber Guild demonstration

The Northwoods Fiber Guild exhibited this summer with "Through Our Hands V—A 30th Anniversary Celebration of the Guild and its Members." The Gallery was filled with beautiful fiber pieces - from felted artworks to journals. It was really an extraordinary exhibition! The opening reception was a hoot with many of the Fiber Guild in attendance with their families and friends. During the Art Festival weekend, Guild members set up their looms and crafting stations in the Gallery and outdoors to demonstrate their work. The public was in awe of their technique and skills.

After the Northwoods Fiber Guild Exhibit, the Gallery was busy in preparation for Hazel Belvo & Marcia Cushmore's exhibit titled "Belvo | Cushmore: Paintings & Drawings 2018." The opening reception was a huge success with many people enjoying listening to Hazel and Marcia explain their creative process. The day after the opening Marcia gave an Artist Talk. We look forward to having them both back to exhibit in 2021!



Hazel Belvo and Marcia Cushmore exhibit



"Spring Canoe" by Reid Thorpe

Our current exhibit, "Fragments of the North," features oil painter Reid Thorpe. It is a fantastic mix of Minnesota scenes and nature that can be appreciated by all who live or have visited the area. The exhibit runs through September 9 and really should not be missed. The Gallery has also finalized the 2019 schedule so keep your eyes open for the release of the lineup of artists coming next year.

Keep an eye out for Plein Air competitors from Sept 7 through the opening of the Plein Air Grand Marais exhibition on the 14th. Donations are still being accepted to go toward the cash awards for competing artists. If you are interested in contributing to the event please call!

(Continued from page 1...Fresh Air, Fish Fries, and Friendship)



Brochure for the original summer art colony eight week course in Grand Marais in 1947

In 1930, a teenager named Birney Quick came to Grand Marais to fish for brook trout with his father. This trip was instrumental to the continuation and growth of Plein Air painting on the North Shore. As a young man, Birney studied at the Vesper George School of Art in Boston, Mass. His teaching career blossomed at The Minneapolis School of Art (later to become the Minneapolis College of Art and Design) when he was hired as one of their instructors. Dreaming of heading back north to fly fish, he successfully suggested the school sponsor a summer art colony in Grand Marais. As one of the first instructors for the 'Grand Marais Outdoor School of Painting' in 1947, he brought 20 soldiers studying on the GI Bill to learn the techniques of outdoor painting. For two summers, art students were brought to Grand Marais for an eight week course where they



The original Grand Marais town hall was converted to an art colony (1962)

were housed in local homes, resorts, or cabins. Tuition was \$72 for 240 hours of instruction. After the first two summers, the Minnesota School of Art decided to try a new location in Red Wing, Minnesota, for their summer school. In the end, the popularity of Grand Marais drew the program back northeast, and the tradition of painting outdoors was here to stay.



Critiquing student work at the end of the session during the exhibition and sale in 1947

In 1952, Byron Bradley joined Quick as an instructor for the now six week summer course run out of the old town hall which prompted the name change to the Town Hall Art Colony. Eventually, the Minnesota School of Art dropped its summer course, so Quick and Bradley decided to run the program on their own in 1959. They renamed their business the Grand Marais Art Colony and moved to the former Maple Hill School when the old town hall needed to be torn down. Soon, they were able to relocate to the former St. John's Catholic church on 3rd Ave W. where the organization still resides.

students on Monday nights with a public art demonstration following. (Birney would occasionally have enough fish to share from his forays with students to brook trout streams to paint!) The other tradition was hanging artwork along a rope at the end of the session. The 'clothesline art show and sale' was born.

Two distinct traditions developed from these summer art classes. One was a fish fry for the



Byron Bradley and Harvey Turner at one of the weekly fish fries in 1974



Neil Sherman captures the beauty of the Grand Marais lighthouse in icy conditions proving Plein Air painting is a year-round activity in Cook County

Painting in the great outdoors, of course, is not without its challenges. As reported in the *News-Herald* in 1958:

"The Coast Guard came to the rescue last week when Joan Hill's painting blew into the lake. She went home and donned a swimsuit intending to swim out to get the picture. She changed her mind when she put her toes in the cold water. Then she called the Coast Guard. They accommodated her and retrieved the painting."

Another minor outdoor painting mishap occurred when Neil Sherman, a well-known contemporary Plein Air artist in Grand Marais, had to worry about the fate of a hummingbird that dipped its beak into his palette, unfortunately choosing the toxic cadmium yellow!

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from page 4...Fresh Air, Fish Fries, and Friendship)

Over the years, the focus of the Grand Marais Art Colony expanded from teaching outdoor painting in the summer to hosting short courses year-round in all varieties of art forms. Its roots in Plein Air painting have not been forgotten, however. In 2002, the Art Colony hosted the first annual Plein Air Grand Marais Competition and Exhibition. Honoring tradition, a fish fry was included as one of the events. The focus of the annual festival as defined in a 2008 Art Colony brochure is “to have fun in Cook County while enjoying our incredible scenery and making beautiful art work.”

A new Plein Air event was added in 2009 to honor the year-round nature of beautiful landscapes. Held at YMCA Camp Menogyn in January, the Winter Plein Air competition and exhibition is for hearty painters willing to brave frigid temperatures. Other opportunities such as a guided three day trip into the BWCAW with local artists Neil Sherman and Nancy Seaton provide Plein Air students an opportunity to explore the Cook County wilderness with expert instruction.

Thousands of Plein Air artists have come through Grand Marais, either drawn on their own to the raw beauty of the place, or through organized events such as competitions, art classes, or retreats. The tradition of teaching and forming friendships through festivals and events is still going strong in Cook County. How fortunate for Grand Marais that 18-year-old Birney took a fishing trip which later brought his teaching talents north to plant the seed which has spread the joy of Plein Air painting for generations to come.



Byron Bradley demonstrating for some of his earliest students



Plein Air artists on the Point in 1974

In 2018, the fifteen year tradition of a Plein Air competition and exhibition will be carried on by the Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery in conjunction with Outdoor Painters of Minnesota. Watch for painters throughout the county the week of September 7-14, then come to the opening reception on September 14 to view the amazing work these talented artists have produced. The artwork will be displayed until October 7. Also, look for a winter exhibit at the JHP in January!

Honor the Past, Enrich the Future

*(Continued from page 1...Near to Nature:
The Art of Anna Johnson)*

Anna Johnson died in 1944 at the age of 63 at a Duluth hospital, and her husband, Charlie, followed her in death ten months later.

The site of the original Johnson trading post is now the Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery. Its west wing is dedicated to the original artwork of Anna C. Johnson through a donation by her son, Lloyd K. Johnson. The permanent exhibit is a lasting testimony to her leadership in the arts. Anna typified the strength of early 20th century women pioneers and she gave this raw frontier her influence as an art teacher.

Anna Johnson with dog team



**CLIP AND RETURN THIS FORM ALONG WITH A CHECK TO:
COOK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, PO BOX 1293, GRAND MARAIS, MN 55604**

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Please send my *Overlook* newsletter by email

Individual	\$20	_____
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Please keep me up-to-date on any events, happenings, or news for the following sites:

- Bally Blacksmith Shop
- Chippewa City Church
- History Museum
- Johnson Heritage Post
- Neegee* and fish house replica

BECOME A MEMBER OF HISTORIC COOK COUNTY

We invite you to join HISTORIC COOK COUNTY—one membership supporting all of our sites—the History Museum, Bally Blacksmith Shop, Chippewa City Church, Johnson Heritage Post and the replica fish house with *Neegee*. Benefit from your annual membership!

- \$20 Individual** Quarterly newsletter the “Overlook” delivered to your mailbox or inbox and 10% off one gift shop purchase.
- \$30 Family** Three digital photo reproductions.
- \$50 Friend** Half hour sneak peek prior to all openings at the Johnson Heritage Post.
- \$100 Patron** 20% off a gift shop purchase.
- \$200 Business** Your business or organization mentioned in our newsletter.
- \$300 Advocate** One free four-hour rental at the Johnson Heritage Post.
- \$1000 Lifetime** Name on permanent display and the book *Pioneers in the Wilderness*.

All Membership level benefits include the benefits of all preceding levels.

VOLUNTEERS ARE STILL NEEDED:

If you are interested, please contact us at
(218) 387-2314 or 387-2883



Members of the families of Victor and John Samskar volunteered their time to repaint the *Neegee* at their family reunion this summer. The Samskars emigrated from Larsmo, Finland, in the late 1800s and settled on the North Shore. Victor was a sea captain on boats such as the *Thor* and *Red Wing*. John was a commercial fisherman out of the Grand Marais Harbor. John’s son, Randolph, was also a fisherman and had the *Flo*, a similar fishing tug. Family members came from Alaska, Washington, and Wisconsin as well as Grand Marais.

The Historical Society thanks them for their efforts and honoring their ancestors in this way that helps preserve our local history!

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If you shop on Amazon.com, are you aware that if you initiate your purchase on the website SMILE.amazon.com a portion of your purchase price will go to the charity of your choice? The Cook County Historical Society is one of the many non-profit organizations from which you can choose to have .5% of your sale benefit. While we are not advocating for or encouraging you to choose Amazon for your purchases, if you have already made the choice to shop on Amazon, please keep us in mind!

Historic Cook County won “Best of Parade” for our float in the Fisherman’s Picnic Parade. A beautiful wooden boat from the Hammer Family Collection was filled with history lovers of all ages. Our amazing local history expert and all around community treasure - Eleanor Waha - was honored with cheers along the parade route! Eleanor just retired from her position as Society Treasurer to which she’d dedicated herself for 27 years!



Other Fisherman’s Picnic events included demonstrations and tours at the Bally Blacksmith Shop. Blacksmith Don Hammer engaged children in his work (left).

Dan Helmerson (below) giving a presentation at the JHP, an event called “Remembering Cook County’s Old-Timers” - a gathering to honor a tradition that dates back to the early days of Fisherman’s Picnic.



Many thanks to Gene Erickson who has organized the Planked Trout Dinner since 2007. Using the specifically designed ring donated by Ron Poynter, former owner of IGA in Grand Marais, Gene shares his techniques with John Jacobsen (left). An age-old tradition continues to be perfected!

Special thanks to ALL those volunteers who helped make the 2018 Planked Trout Dinner a success. Loyal volunteers Tim and Mo Pratt wired fish onto planks (right).



COOK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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A friendly reminder—your next membership payment is due on the date to the right of your name on the address label.

If you are a lifetime member—no payment is due, but please consider an additional donation if you are able!

DATES	EVENTS
Competition: September 7-14 Opening Reception: Sept 14 at 6 p.m. Exhibit: Sept 14-Oct 7	Johnson Heritage Post and Outdoor Painters of Minnesota Present: PLEIN AIR Grand Marais 2018
Thursday, September 20 Meeting at 5:00 - Dinner at 5:30 <u>RESERVATIONS REQUIRED</u> by September 8 387-2883 or amy@cookcountyhistory.org	Annual Meeting/Volunteer Appreciation Dinner, St. John’s Catholic Church Presentation by Carrie Johnson: Photography of Maude Small Toftey Tickets are \$25, a portion of which provides complimentary meals for our dedicated volunteers. Enjoy a delicious buffet dinner by Alyce’s Catering. Prepayment is required
November 9 - 5:00 p.m. Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery	Presentation by Stephen B. Daniel: Shipwrecks of Grand Marais
November 16 - 5:00 p.m. Johnson Heritage Post Art Gallery	Tim Cochrane book presentation: Gichi Bitobig, Grand Marais: Early Accounts of the Anishinaabeg and the North Shore Fur Trade

FALL HOURS AT THE HISTORY MUSEUM
September 1 - 29: Tuesday-Saturday, 10 am. to 4 p.m.
After September 29: Friday 1 to 4 p.m. & Saturday 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
 Museum office hours are Monday - Friday
 Please call ahead for research requests or special tours

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