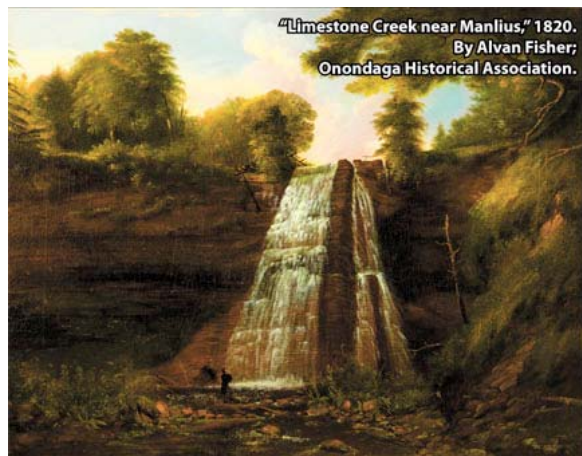


SALT TAKES

Some locals believe that Syracuse's best days are behind us. Those folks prefer living in the past—commenting on the glory days of Salt City manufacturing, reminiscing about the throbbing hub that was downtown, talking about the good old days. Thankfully, there seems to be a new attitude in town, driven in large part by a young and vibrant artistic community. Still, there's [merit](#) in revisiting from whence we have come.

A [collaboration](#) between the Everson Museum of Art and Onondaga Historical Association melds that juxtaposition beautifully in the exhibit *People, Place and Progress: Local Landscapes in Paint and Print*. This impressive, multi-gallery showcase runs through Sept. 2, making it a timely escape from all things State Fair, if you so desire.

Everson assistant curator Sarah Grzymala gives a gallery talk on Thursday, Aug. 16, at 6 p.m. Grzymala started at the Everson a year ago, and this is one of the first exhibits Everson curator Deborah Ryan asked her to put together. She worked with OHA curator of history Dennis Connors to select the images for the show: both the paintings and the photos that place those paintings in a real, historical context.



"Seventy-five percent of the paintings are from our collection," Connors says. "The twist that we mutually came up with was to make it a photographic history. We have photographs that show a particular landscape that is in a painting, setting it in historical times. Deb Ryan thought it would be interesting to display the landscape, and how the artist saw the photograph."

In some instances, a photo hangs side-by-side with the representational painting, or it's sealed up in a case to protect it from greasy fingers. It's understandable that the photos are out of touch but walking back and forth between wall and case presents a disconnect. Including photos presented a challenge for the curators as well.

"The paintings are stored in sliding racks at the OHA," Connors explains, "so I was able to go in and browse, and started selecting potential candidates for the show. More challenging was matching up a photographic scene with a painting. In some cases the scene is well known: the Culverhouse painting of Clinton Square, for example. But there were other paintings that I looked at, and I could see it is a nice landscape but I wasn't sure if we have a photograph to go with it."

After about four months, Grzymala and Connors had winnowed down their list. "Because the show is at the Everson, she decided where the paintings were going to be lined up," said Connors. "Still, we had more candidates than we could fit into the two galleries, and the process of wheedling down even more took some back and forth."

What results is a dynamic show that spans decades of both paintings of Syracuse and painters of Syracuse. Many of the Everson-owned paintings—Beatrice Wose-Smith's "Winter Night, Fayette Park" and Levi Wells Prentice's "Hopper's Gorge, Onondaga Valley"—feel like visiting old friends. The OHA's contributions, most notably Adelaide Morris' "Durston Building from Parking Lot" and Johann Culverhouse's breathtaking "Clinton Square by Moonlight," feel like you're home. Wose-Smith and Prentice both lived in Syracuse for a time.

A good number of the paintings (and photos) show buildings that no longer exist, a continuing municipal shame. William Mann's "Old Mill on Furnace Creek" and its counterpart, the 1940 photograph "Old Mill in Elmwood Park," prove that we could be idiots about historical structures even in our recent past. "Onondaga Arsenal" by Adelle Brigham hangs alongside a photo of the War of 1812 munitions store that stood on Onondaga Hill. At one time, the nearby placard states, this was *the* ruin to paint in the county.

There are more examples of historic buildings no longer standing—and a gander at our glorious past is well worth a visit to the museum—but one felt especially poignant. Just up the street from *The New Times* at the corner of West Genesee Street and Erie Boulevard West sat an infirmary that was torn down in 1968, a mere 44 years ago. It's memorialized in an OHA-owned painting, "Botanic Infirmary." What stands there today? Denny's. Now that's a grand slam.

If you want to check out the exhibit, a good place to start would be Grzymala's talk. "We'll be walking through the gallery, tying the big art movements into what the Syracuse artists were doing at each of the different time periods," Grzymala says. "A lot of the local artists either knew or trained with the artists that you tend to come across in the general art history textbooks. A lot of the minor artists don't get named in textbooks. James Cantwell (1856-1926), for example."

Cantwell's painting, interestingly, gives viewers a look at the Erie Canal that is completely different than Culverhouse's romantic, and likely unrealistic, nighttime view. "Erie Canal Scene," which Cantwell painted in 1891, shows the waterway, heading west into Clinton Square, with exposed rocks, trash and blowing smoke, presenting a grittier look at the original Thruway.

Both paintings are a study in contrasts, much like the rest of *People, Place and Progress*. Contrasts and surprise. "We know full well that the collections at the OHA are incredibly rich," points out Everson director Steven Kern, "and we know the expertise at OHA is incredibly deep, and we can say the same thing for here. Because they're a historical association, and the museum is one component, that does make for a bigger surprise when items come out of storage.

"Here, things circulate: They're always in a new context, there's always a new conversation between the works on the walls, and by tweaking the context you make artwork and subjects look entirely different. That's one of the great surprises by taking OHA stuff out of the OHA. You put them into the Everson gallery context and you see them in an entirely different way."

People, Place and Progress: Local Landscapes in Paint and Print continues through Sept. 2 at the Everson Museum of Art, 401 Harrison St. Summer hours are in effect through Sept. 3, with the galleries open Wednesdays through Fridays and Sundays from noon to 5 p.m., Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Suggested donation is \$5. For more information, call 474-6064 or visit everson.org.

