



William D. Hutchens, of Fayetteville, has written a coffee table book, "An Artist's Life: Frank Townsend Hutchens." It's about his great uncle, an Impressionist painter. One of the paintings in the books is called "Youth." (Stephen D. Cannerelli / scannerelli@syracuse.com)

'An Artist's Life'

FAYETTEVILLE

RETIREE BRINGS

HIS GREAT UNCLE'S

LEGACY AS

IMPRESSIONIST

PAINTER TO LIGHT

By Melinda Johnson
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William D. Hutchens was 5 years old when he met his great uncle Frank Townsend Hutchens, an Impressionist painter who grew up in Canandaigua. At the time, the summer of 1936, Frank Hutchens was living in Silvermine, Conn., an artists' colony. William Hutchens' only visit with his relation would change his life decades later. The Fayetteville resident, now 82, would devote eight years to researching and writing the 304-page book, "An Artist's Life: Frank Townsend Hutchens" (WDH Press).

The coffee table book with Hutchens' life story, 100 paintings, a few sketches, photographs, exhibition catalogs and personal letters was published this fall by William Hutchens. During his life (1869-1937), Frank Hutchens was prolific. He studied art in his hometown and in Auburn, New York City and France. At one point in the early 1900s, he opened an art school in Unadilla Forks in Otsego

County.

He traveled and painted in France, Tunisia, Florida, Taos, New Mexico, and in the Adirondacks. Hutchens' paintings were included in exhibitions in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, Paris, London and Amsterdam. His art might remind one of famous European painters, such as Monet or Cézanne. Hutchens worked in oil and watercolors and some charcoal.

William Hutchens, who retired as managing partner of the Syracuse office of PricewaterhouseCoopers in 1987, downplays the years-long commitment, from 2006 to 2014, in putting together the book. "It was a great opportunity that I had to bring it to other people's attention. It takes no skill on my part to do that. It's all just gathering the material together," he said, sitting in his light-drenched home office with windows exposing an expansive backyard of snow-covered trees and bushes.



William D. Hutchens stands in front of a portrait of his grandfather William C. Hutchens, painted by his great uncle Frank Hutchens, who grew up in Canandaigua. (Stephen D. Cannerelli / scannerelli@syracuse.com)

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Artist ‘constantly at work’

ARTIST, FROM PAGE I-1

By Hutchens’ count, he accumulated enough archival material — from Frank Hutchens’ correspondence, newspaper clippings, exhibit catalogs and more to fill 10 large file boxes, 10 three-ring binders and many CDs with digital images of paintings and photographs. Rows of folders are lined up atop a pool table while others rest on several folding tables adjacent to his executive desk. More files are contained in boxes on the floor.

Hutchens said it was fortunate his grandfather was a “pack rat.” A great deal of family information, from his grandfather’s scrapbook, was at his disposal. “I said, ‘Gee, if I don’t do this with this information that I have from my grandfather, who was Frank’s brother, this stuff is somehow going to get diluted or diffused or lost and it’s going to be gone. So here’s an opportunity to do something that nobody else would do.’”

He traveled far and wide for “An Artist’s Life.” Before he got the notion for the book, his journey started with a 1977 visit to see paintings his great uncle had bequeathed to the Ontario County Historical



“Farmhouse in Trepied,” by Frank Townsend Hutchens (1907), is included in the book “An Artist’s Life: Frank Townsend Hutchens.”

Society in Canandaigua. They were stored in the attic. A 2006 inquiry from a group in Silvermine seeking information about Frank Hutchens convinced Hutchens here was an opportunity. Hutchens’ research took him to Taos, Tallahassee, Maine and Michigan.

Putting order and making sense of the volumes of infor-

mation comes naturally to an accountant, said Hutchens. “I think accountants are that way. They tend to be compulsively square, constantly checking and rechecking, belt-and-suspenders type of people,” he said. “They drive other people crazy.”

Besides his artistic talent, Hutchens said he was impressed with his great

uncle’s integrity and industriousness. Hutchens advanced the careers of fellow artists by suggesting his collectors purchase their artworks, too. William Hutchens said Frank was constantly at work. He painted on the deck of a ship while he and his wife, Mabel, sailed from New York to Europe.

Hutchens admits his understanding of art, especially Frank Hutchens’ paintings occurred only in the last 30 years. Writing the book was an education in itself. “What I learned about art, I learned on-the-job training.”

As the project stretched into years, Hutchens knew many doubted he would finish. He said he could read their minds when they inquired about the project’s progress and when they knew he was nearing 80 years of age. He was not deflated.

“My reaction was just the reverse. I’m going to get this done, dammit. You watch. I am going to get it done. I am going to be persistent. I am determined to accomplish this because it’s a matter of pride. Again, if I don’t do it, nobody is going to do it.”

Onondaga Historical Society is selling “An Artist’s Life: Frank Townsend