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VAWTER WINTER LANDSCAPE NETS \$20,000 AT JACKSON AUCTION

The above headline appeared in the September 27, 1993, edition of *Antique Week*. Snow scenes have always sold well during Dennis Jackson's Indiana art auctions, but few people would have guessed that an oil painting by Will Vawter would realize \$20,000 during the auction on September 12 at Anderson, Indiana. Entitled "Winter Locked," the 20-by-24 inch painting showed a house and several outbuildings near a small stream. Jackson said he has sold only five works by Vawter during the past 13 years.

A smaller Vawter painting, entitled "Brown County Trees in Summer," sold at auction for only \$260 in 1986, and those seen for sale in galleries have usually been in the \$3,000 - \$6,000 price range. At least three VVV members are owners of Vawter paintings, and another member has two pencil drawings by the popular Indiana artist. Paul E. Vawter, who lives in Hightstown, New Jersey, had the privilege of meeting Will Vawter and visiting his studio and home in Nashville, Indiana.

Those who attended the 1987 VVV Reunion in Columbus, Indiana, may remember going to Nashville to the Brown County Art Gallery. There a special exhibit of Vawter paintings and memorabilia were displayed and a reception was held for our group. The Brown County Art Gallery Association was organized 3 September 1926 at the home of Will Vawter.

Will Vawter is also well known as an illustrator of many books of Poetry, especially those of Indiana poet James Whitcomb Riley. Several VVV members have collections of these books.

WILL VAWTER, 13 APRIL 1871 - 11 FEBRUARY 1941

By Frank M. Hohenberger (1941)

"The citizens of Nashville [Indiana] were deeply shocked Tuesday morning when the message came over the wires that Will Vawter, the artist, had passed on. The Angel of Death had gently touched his arm at 7 o'clock and led him into the land of eternal, peaceful rest. Mr. Vawter was hurried to St. Vincent's Hospital, Indianapolis, last Saturday, suffering with a threatened case of pneumonia. He was progressing beyond expectations Monday and fond hopes were built up to bring him to his home fully recovered in a short time. But it was not to be, for his heart took a rapidly weakening condition early Tuesday morning and he passed away suddenly, yet peacefully.

"Brief funeral services in charge of Rev. Charles Johnson of the Methodist church, were conducted at the Bond Funeral Home at 11 a.m. today, and the body was taken to Greenfield where the Masonic Lodge of that city had charge of the burial in Park Cemetery at 2:30 o'clock.

"Mr. Vawter was born in Boone County, Virginia, April 13, 1871, the son of Dr. Louis A. Vawter and Emma Mary Dameron Vawter. The family moved to Greenfield when he was six years old. There he attended school and when he grew up he became a warm friend and admirer of James Whitcomb Riley, a number of whose poems he illustrated as the years went on. The young Virginian displayed a great deal of art talent in his youth and in a short time was handling paint and brushes with a determination that brought forth recognition by friends and neighbors. Mr. Vawter was never a dreamer and seemed to get right down to what he wanted to do and get it over with. Like all other youngsters, he loved the great outdoors, and a close study of his wash drawings would convince anyone that he never neglected incorporating objects that would fit in with the typical scene.

"Mr. Vawter married Mary Howey Murray, of Baltimore, in 1902, the marriage ending in divorce 17 years later. In September 1923, he married Mrs. Ola Lackey Genolin, widow of the late Charles Genolin, pioneer druggist of Nashville, and one of Mr. Vawter's closest friends. The widow and his brother, Charles, of Little Rock, Arkansas, are the only close relatives.

"In the summer of 1908 the Vawters moved here from Greenfield and located on the hill overlooking Salt Creek, just south of town. Many of his paintings featured the paths leading through the beech woods to their home.

"The *Indianapolis Sentinel* hired him to work as an artist in 1891, and in 1897 he wrote and illustrated a series of humorous verses for the *Cincinnati Gazette*. In 1899, collaborating with his sister, Clara Vawter, he produced a child's book, 'Of Such Is the Kingdom' - the title later being changed to 'The Rabbit's Ransom.' He made illustrations for *Judge*, *Life* and *St. Nicholas*.

"Mr. Vawter received many prizes and honorable recognition of his work; prizes included the Hoosier Salon, 1925, 1926, 1928,

1930, 1932 and 1935 (two prizes). He had a special room showing of 32 oils at the Hoosier Salon in 1932. In 1934 he received the Vance Memorial prize from the Brown County Art Gallery Association, an organization in which he has been an untiring worker since its inception. He was also a member of the Hoosier Salon and Chicago Galleries Association.

"Invariably words seem inadequate when one desires to eulogize a friend of the community, state and nation, and it is not an uncommon occurrence to unconsciously overlook some of the finer attributes of a man who has endeared himself to a vast audience. Will Vawter was a man who loved life. Things vibrating had an appeal for him. His humorous nature virtually 'jumped out' in all his illustrations for humorous publications. It was always a clean, refined humor that would cause a gentle smile to ripple across the reader's features.

"I first met Will here in about 1910 and at the time he was illustrating some books. I recall he needed some illustration copies from work he had in hand and I visited him off and on in his studio over the present Star store. His workroom soon became a mecca for tourists, so much so that he was obliged to keep his door locked if he wanted to get any of his assignments completed. Not a few Nashville people have posed for Mr. Vawter and they were always well paid. He did drawings exclusively up until about 1912 when an Indianapolis friend called to talk over with him his art future. Before he left, Will asked, 'What would you advise me to do?' and he was told to get down to painting at once, and up until a few days before his death he did that very thing. In company with Mrs. Vawter, he made numerous trips to the Maine coast, borders of Gulf of Mexico and the Indiana country adjacent to the Ohio River. They were always the very finest companions and Mrs. Vawter proved a delightful inspiration to his work.

"We seldom know whether anyone's generosity is deep or shallow but if any movement was undertaken to better the conditions of Brown County or its citizenry, Will Vawter could be counted on to dig deeply into his purse. In the first world war, he hired a horse and buggy at his own expense and toured the county for the sale of Liberty bonds. He was not given to broadcasting what he had a notion to do, wanted to do or ought to do - he just up and did it and kept the matter to himself. And after all, press notices lauding one's art achievements should never change the position of one's head. Will was never affected that way. If you knew him at all you will agree that he always met you at eye level with a friendly greeting. Like everyone else, he had his sad moments, but he managed to keep their effects in the back of his head. Yes, he loved life deeply, and we regret that his time for going away seemed to come so soon.

"As a story-teller Mr. Vawter could be classified as exceedingly clever. As a painter, everyone loved his canvases. As a citizen, few, if any, could be referred to as towering above him, but he never lost sight of the biblical statement that in God's sight all men are equal. As a student, he was equally

conversant on subjects covering the finer, worthwhile things in life. Everybody, especially the children, seemed to love Will. He enjoyed his fun, too, and no prankster in the village where he lived could take all the honors. Seriously, Will was the type of man almost everyone would care to become acquainted with. Yessiree, Will, we're missing you. 'Good-bye' is not the word, so let's say 'So long - we'll all be joining you one of these days.'"

#### BOOKS WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY WILL VAWTER

The following is a list of books illustrated by Will Vawter. It is probably not complete, and any additions would be welcome.

James Whitcomb Riley:

A Child World

Child Rhymes

His Pa's Romance

Songs O' Cheer

Songs of Friendship

Songs of Home

Songs of Summer

Riley Fairy Tales

Riley Hoosier Stories

Farm Rhymes

Riley Love Lyrics

The Book of Joyous Children

The Boys of the Old Glee Club

A Summer's Day and Other Poems

When the Frost Is on the Punkin

The Old Swimmin' Hole and Other Poems

The Prayer Perfect and Other Poems

Down Around the River and Other Poems

Knee-Deep in June and Other Poems

A Defective Santa Claus

Wallace Bruce Amsbary:      The Ballads of Bourbonnais

Robert J. Burdette: Smiles Yoked with Sighs

Charity Dye: The James Whitcomb Riley Reader

Marcus Dickey:      The Maturity of James Whitcomb Riley  
                            The Youth of James Whitcomb Riley

Wilbur D. Nesbit:      The Trail to Boyland

Barton Rees Pogue:    Fortunes in Friendship  
                            The Omnibus

Clara Vawter:      Of Such is the Kingdom (This is the same book,  
                            The Rabbit's Ransom published under two titles.)

A word of warning! Many of those who collect these books have found it to be addicting. The books can be found in different bindings - cloth or leather - and several different colors, picture covers or plain covers, with or without dust jackets, first editions or reprints, etc.

JAMES HARDY VAWTER

Contributed by Ralphe B. Vawter

James Hardy Vawter was born 12 August 1892 near North Madison, Indiana, the son of Willis Isaiah and Mary McIntyre Vawter. He was one of five children. Willis Vawter died when the children were young, and their mother moved to Campbellsburg, Indiana.

During World War I, he achieved a senior staff noncommissioned officer rank of Ordnance Sergeant. He attended Doane Academy in Granville, Ohio, as a pre-ministerial student. After service he worked for several automotive companies, including Cole Motor Car Company. He sailed on the SS Leviathan, which our country received from Germany in reparation.

For many years, James Hardy Vawter was a salesman for the Raytheon Company and was successful in converting their national sales program from direct to manufacturers representatives. He also served many radio component manufacturers until World War II eliminated civilian goods, as all turned to defense products. In later years he worked for Westinghouse in Buffalo, New York. He was an avid collector of American cutlery and wrote a monograph on the subject.

He was married to Mary Virginia Glover in Washington, DC, in 1919. They had two children, Jean and Ralphe. James Hardy Vawter was very proud of his family heritage.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thank you to Ralphe B. Vawter for contributing this biography of his father. Ralphe and his wife, Caroline, live in Gulf Breeze, Florida, and attended a VVV reunion for the first time in 1993. Ralphe's sister, Jean Vawter Robinson, spoke at the 1990 reunion, telling about her trip to Trematon Castle in Cornwall, England.

THE CLOWN AND THE PREACHER DISCUSS GENEALOGIES

At the 1993 reunion, Roger Byler and "Lotta Buttons" (aka Beth Melton,) presented a skit written by Roger entitled, "The Clown and the Preacher Discuss Genealogies." Several people requested that the skit be printed in the newsletter, but the length prevents doing that. Anyone who would like a copy can contact the news editor. There is no charge, but please send a business size s.a.s.e.

Although the skit is *copyrighted*, Roger has given permission for any VVV members to use it, asking only that authorship be acknowledged.

## THOSE WERE THE DAYS

By Paul Edward Vawter

Paul Edward Vawter writes this about his grandparents:

"Jesse Philemon Vawter married Minerva A. Ross on October 31, 1874, in Vernon, Indiana (founded by John Vawter in 1817.) He was nineteen; she was twenty-eight. Grandpa (known as Pa to his family) could neither read nor write. Grandma (Ma) had the responsibility of all written communications, the only form of communication available since they had no telephone.

"Grandpa had an unpleasant addiction to chewing tobacco, not unlike that of today's baseball players. The frequent expectorations through his straggly white beard created a continual appearance which was somewhat less than charming. Although I'm certain that Dad wasn't happy with his father's habit, I never detected any manifestation of displeasure or annoyance, although he had a very strong conviction that the use of any form of tobacco was sinful. I well recall the strapping Dad administered to me when he discovered I had recently smoked corn silk, a not uncommon activity indulged in by boys. Many parents believed that corporal punishment was the only way to discipline a child. It never occurred to Dad, apparently, and to many parents, that a more effective and humane form of guidance was available, e.g., reasoning or by the withholding of privileges. I never permitted Grandpa's habits to detract from my affection for him. He was always most kind and considerate and devoted to Grandma, who was chronically disabled.

"Grandma was comparatively short and overweight, a condition which, apparently, affected her health and the ability to move about. As a result, she was not physically able to maintain their home in a neat, clean, and orderly manner. And poor Grandpa, with his lack of experience and motivation, was not qualified to improve the situation. To him, everything was normal."

### TREASURE TO TRASH TO TREASURE

A few years ago following the death of an elderly woman in Vernon, Indiana, her family began to dispose of her possessions. Among the things deemed of no value to anyone was a large box of photographs, both snapshots and portraits. The box was put out to be recycled with old newspapers.

Someone came along, saw the pictures, and knew they should not be destroyed. They were given to the Jennings County Historical Society. About half the pictures were not identified, but of those that were, four were of Vawter women. Two were Sarah Parks Vawter, wife of Jesse R. Vawter; one was Sarah's daughter, Aramantha Vawter West; and one was Aramantha's daughter, Sadie West.

Indeed, "One man's trash is another man's treasure."

## CURRENT EVENTS

### ROGER WICKER ANNOUNCES CANDIDACY

"All state Sen. Roger Wicker has to do to become a member, of the U.S. House of Representatives is survive what apparently will be a bruising *Republican* primary, then win the general election for the First District seat that's been held for the past 51 years by a political legend, Democrat Jamie Whitten.

"But that scenario is nothing new for Wicker, a Tupelo [Mississippi] Republican, who announced his candidacy Tuesday during a series of stops across the district.

"He's been elected three times from a state Senate district that hadn't elected a Republican since Reconstruction."

This is a portion of an article that appeared in *The Commercial Appeal*. Roger is the son of Fred and Wordna Wicker of Pontotoc, Mississippi. He and his wife, Gayle, have three children, Caroline, Margaret and McDaniel.

### INDIANA GENEALOGIST

An article in, the June 1993 issue of *Indiana Genealogist* was co-written by Eric Jason Taylor. It tells of Earlham College's position during the Civil War. Earlham College, located in Richmond, Indiana, was founded as a Friends Boarding School by the Indiana Yearly Meeting in 1847. Eric is a 1992 graduate of the school. He is the son of Dr. Thomas C. and Diana Taylor, of Nairobi, Kenya, and the nephew of VVV news editor, Bonita Welch.

### BILL VAWTER IS HONORED

Bill Vawter, of Houston, Texas, was selected by the National Freedom Foundation of Valley Forge to receive the George Washington Honor Medal for a lifetime of service in the category of humanitarianism. The award was made on November 3 by the local chapter at a luncheon given at the Junior League of Houston.

Congratulations, Bill!

### DOROTHY VAWTER

As this newsletter was being completed, word was received that Dorothy Vawter, wife of VVV president Bill M. Vawter, has died. Her death occurred on January 12, 1994, after being hospitalized for two weeks following a heart attack. Dorothy and Bill were hosts for the 1993 VVV reunion in Oklahoma City.

We will have her obituary in the next newsletter.

IN REMEMBRANCE

Clarence A. Vawter, 69, of Warrenton, Virginia, died 4 August 1993. A memorial service was held September 7 at St. James Episcopal Church in Warrenton. He was born 6 January 1924 in Merrifield, Fairfax County, Virginia. He graduated from the University of Virginia, and before enlisting in the U.S. Navy during World War II, was a cadet at Virginia Military Institute.

After retiring from McGraw-Edison Company in 1975, he became a local realtor and was a member of the Million Dollar Club for several years.

Survivors include his wife, Virginia Henderson Vawter; two daughters, Dorcas Buffkin of Knoxville, Tennessee, and Ann Kehoe of Warrenton; three grandsons and one granddaughter; a brother, George Vawter of Arlington, Virginia; and a sister, Clara James of Media, Pennsylvania.

FOR SALE

VVV Family Association Decal, 3"x3", perfect size for your car windshield. \$1.00, plus a s.a.s.e. Order from: John Vawter, Route 6 Box 370, Nacogdoches, TX 75961

*Vawter, Vauter, Vaughter(s) Vital Vittles* (Cook Book) Volume 1, published 1984, 81 pages; Volume 2, published 1985, 107 pages. Both are paperback, spiral bound. \$7.50 each, including postage. Order from: Bonita Welch, 4145N 900W, Scipio, IN 47273. (There is a limited supply.)

*The Family of Albert and Josie Vawter*, published 1985, hardbound, 539 pages with index. Contains much information about the ancestors of Albert Vawter. \$40.00, plus \$3.00 postage. Order from the author: Shirley Vawter Byler, Route 1 Box 319, Sweeny, TX 77480.

*Those Were the Days - A Chronology*, paperback, spiral bound, 171 pages. A chronology of experiences and events related to the author and his parents, Clarence Merrill and Edythe Barricklow Vawter. The book has not been mass produced, but the author, Paul E. Vawter, will make a copy for anyone who is interested. The price is \$40.00, which is Paul's cost for having one made. Order from: Paul E. Vawter, Meadow Lakes #45-04, Hightstown, NJ 08520.

*Growing Up Rich in Vernon, Indiana*, published 1992, hardbound, 288 pages with index. A child's-eye view of a small town in the 1940s and '50s. \$19.95, plus \$1.50 postage, Indiana residents must add 5% sales tax. Order from the author: Carol Layman, 2730W Co. Rd. 200N, North Vernon, IN 47265.

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