

X

1954 - 1956

The Second and Proceeding Murals

In 1949 my husband discovered the qualities of duco paint - one of several media he had introduced to Canada, and Spain. We needed some small tables for our living room and this is where it started. Framed and well-supported masonite seemed ideal. He did a magnificent one as our coffee table and two more later on drawing boards as he was too impatient to wait for other materials. Another was a large circular, metal table on our patio but the metal was shiny (though he roughed the surface) and not rigid enough, so it chipped. A great shame as it was such a handsome painting.

On special occasions he did tables for friends, the first for Jean and Cleeve Horne for their new ultra-modern farmhouse at Claremont, Ontario. He did one for Jack Wildridge, his dealer at Roberts Gallery, for his new ski and golfing chalet, unfortunately it was stolen. One of the best (in reds) he did for his friend in Tenerife, Dr. Carlos Pinto Grote.

Our little group of artists, referred to as "The Gang" had many long, crazy weekends at Grand Bend on Lake Erie, the summer home of Joanne and Ettore Mazzoleni, better known as "Mazz." In appreciation York did a table for "the Mazz's." Again his creative urges of the moment backfired. The Mazz's had only a metal table on hand. It might have worked but was left out in the weather over long periods. When last seen it was chipping and not long for this world.

Many creative costume parties were held at the Mazz's, as well as Ping Pong, tennis and bathing. The Gang consisted of the Cleeve Hornes, Syd and Helen Watson, Bobs and Peter Haworth, Isabel McLaughlin,

Yvonne Housser, Violet and Herman Voaden, Joanne and 'Mazz' Mazzoleni and ourselves. There were some later additions or sometime visitors, such as Elsie and Mac Samples - Barbara and Peter Ivy, Beryl and Dick Ivy and others.

This group had grown in size from the small group which had included the Syd Hallams and the Alex Pantons until the early demise of Syd and Alex.

York won a competition for the design of a mural for the new Redpath Library extension at McGill University in Montreal. It was administered by the RCA in 1953. It had to include the various university buildings and the portraits of the six founder members, but York always did enjoy a challenge. The cartoon was painted in the rented Toronto studio of the deceased artist historian, C.W. Jeffries.

He felt honoured to use Jeffries' small mural steps and eventually acquired them. York took the large cartoon, painted in duco on masonite to Montreal by train for presentation. It was accepted.

In the annual Society exhibitions York showed mostly Moroccan paintings including the N.G. But along with Fez, Morocco with the RCA at the MMFA his McGill Mural Cartoon and an on-the-spot portrait of Oscar DeLall were included. This unusual portrait coincidence happened because of our early arrival for the jury for the RCA exhibition, Oscar DeLall had suggested he would like to do a portrait of me and as a "thank you" York did one of him. Both were included in the exhibition; the wet oils being handled carefully through the jurying and onto the wall of the MMFA.

The Redpath Library was a good two stories high and the mural was to go in the upper part. A scaffolding was installed and Wilson went to work with his duco paints, adding sand or celite to eliminate the shine and give it texture. Work went along well with interesting chats from time to time with university professors like Hugh Maclellan.

Press notices: McGill gets work... Design by York Wilson was selected

in national competition -Only mural painted in duco - To be unveiled on Founder's Day, Tuesday October 6th, 1953.

The Gazette reported: A 12 foot wide by 18 foot high mural, painted by Canadian artist, York Wilson, R.C.A., O.S.A., adorns the north wall of the main reading room.

Four months in the making, the huge mural depicts the historical building of McGill—from the summer house and land first donated by Founder James McGill through succeeding structures to the present buildings—and commemorates six men who are outstanding in the university's history.

Portrayed on the mural are Founder McGill; Bishop George J. Mountain, first principal of McGill; Sir William Dawson and Edwin Meredith, both former principals; Dewey Day, first chancellor; and William Molson, famous banker, who built McGill's first library.

The mural was done with pyroxalin paint, one of the new synthetic mediums, and is the only one so painted in Canada.

The winning sketch for the mural was shown in the Montreal Star with Robert W. Pilot, President of the RCA alongside.

Wilson was well represented at the AGT in November: A three-man exhibition with Housser - Pantou - Wilson and three small paintings in the Women's Committee Exhibition—Moroccan Group - Florista - Moroccan Types.

York was asked to do a portrait of a Conservative hopeful running in the Rosedale riding, David Walker, QC, later Senator Walker. The portrait was presented to Senator Walker by the Rt. Hon. Arthur Meighen and now hangs in the Albany Club of Toronto.

In the winter of 1953-54 York learned that Rico Lebrun was going to be 'Artist in Residence' at the Instituto Allende in San Miguel and could hardly wait to get to Mexico. He had been aware of the work of this artist since 1925 when Rico arrived in the U.S. from Naples, Italy and his work with its superb draughtsmanship began to appear in American publications. Apparently Lebrun had also been fully conscious of the Canadian artist, York Wilson and, both were in a high state of excitement anticipating the meeting. Dr. Francisco (Paco) Olsina had a small dinner party to welcome

us on arrival, including the Brooks and Lebruns. After the introductions, Rico and York were so self-conscious, they didn't have a further conversation the rest of the evening. The next morning, I met Constance Lebrun, daughter of a California architect, in the market and invited them for drinks. They came, and it was love at first sight for all, Rico and York talked and talked and talked until long past dinner time. I asked if they would like to share whatever I could put together. They would and Constance revealed it was Rico's birthday, so we had an impromptu celebration.

York's studio was at Hospicio No. 8, its windows faced north onto the street, and a door (seldom used) inside the street door opened into the studio. The day following Rico's birthday, he turned up at York's studio, tapping on the window. Unknown to me York let him in by the seldom used door. I had permanent instructions York was never to be disturbed before five o'clock in the afternoon. They had been chatting quietly for some time when I appeared shortly after 5 p.m. On hearing my approach, Rico hid behind some plants. Obviously he was to be the exception and we laughed. He invited us to his home for dinner that night. This was the pattern for most of the winter.

Rico was an early bird, starting in his studio at daybreak and working until 2 p.m. He saw all of York's work, discussing it in detail, and then invited York to his studio. They exchanged ideas, talking endlessly; fortunately Constance and I were just as interested. Constance usually sat at Rico's feet, and gazed adoringly at her husband while he spoke, seeming to hang on every word. It's possible they hadn't been married very long.

Rico worked on a very large scale, and fast. He had great sheets of brown paper all over the studio floor, apart from endless small studies. He was a great draughtsman but not much of a colourist. His work was based on many ideas, often to do with "man's inhumanity to man" - the title of his fine triptych in the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He was well versed in art history, and his lectures at the Instituto Allende were something

that even seasoned painters did not want to miss. One morning, on arriving, Rico said to York, "You are giving the lecture this morning," and York pleaded, "But I'm not prepared." Rico replied, "You don't have to be, just tell them what you are trying to do by way of your work."

This way of looking at it made it easier, and York gave a most interesting lecture. He knew he had to, with Rico sitting in the front row. After Rico's first two lectures, he asked York if he had any criticism, and York replied, "Well, if I have to think of something, it might be that you always seem to be talking directly to me." Rico said, "I am, because if I start to talk bullshit, I know that you will know, and no one else here knows enough."

Rico always placed York centre front and gave his whole lecture to him. He was so relaxed, walking back and forth as he talked, because he knew his subject well. In one lecture, he gave the history of the era, what was happening politically and in every direction, showing how it affected painting and why such and such had to happen. He covered many periods this way, noting them with dates on the blackboard.

A visiting Concert Pianist and Professor of music at the University College of Los Angeles, John Crown, happened to attend this lecture. He proposed that he do the same thing with music, but with a smaller, select group around his piano, which he had in one of the larger studios at the Instituto. Rico was delighted, a day was set, and John and Sally Crown invited a few friends. John outlined the eras in the same way and showed us on the piano the music of the time and why it had to go in such-and-such a direction. It was a fascinating lecture and much appreciated. The Crowns, almost on arrival, had become our friends, and were part of our small interesting group. When John went on a concert tour, he begged time off at UCLA. While Rico had long since been one of the moving forces in the West Coast group of artists; he and John hadn't met before.

One afternoon when Rico sneaked into York's studio, he found York

working on a painting, and apparently there were a few hot licks in it. Rico gave him hell, punching every word through gritted teeth, while pantomiming slapping his face from side to side, saying, "Don't ever let me catch you doing that sort of thing again." It really shook York, as it was a facility that he had to fight from his days of commercial art. Since Rico evolved the same way, he spotted it immediately.

York had recently concluded his presidency of the OSA and the RCA had him in mind as its next president. While they discussed these things, Rico convinced York that his life should be dedicated to painting and not carried away with honours of this kind. These things were all very good for a young artist almost in his prime, and this was the make or break period for an artist. York was fortunate in having a few older friends who understood these traps. If an artist has too much acclaim too early, it is likely to be harmful. If an artist still has to struggle while maturing, he is apt to continue experimenting, and grow, thereby having a better chance of reaching his potential. To use a few hot licks and to work a popular method to death, may sell paintings every time. Neither of these tendencies, however, is any good for the artist who hopes to make a contribution.

We spent many an evening with the Lebruns, and the conversation nearly always turned to art. Often Rico would stretch out on the couch as the conversation continued, punched with four-letter words, his dark eyes flashing with excitement. Both men had very strong opinions as to what art was all about.

Came the time to go home to Canada, Rico proposed that we go with him to Los Angeles. There were many people he wanted York to meet and perhaps collaborate, but York had other commitments. Rico felt that York shouldn't waste his time on murals. York felt, however, that murals were right for him - he liked large spaces and had the gift of being able to visualize proportions accordingly. Rico had never done a mural. Nothing could have pleased York more than spending time with Rico, but fate may have

been kind. Rico was a strong personality - too much time with him could be damaging.

This possibility later proved to be the case with our friend Jimmy Pinto at the Instituto Allende. As mentioned earlier, Jim was a good painter and colourist we had met in 1949 in San Miguel, a Yugoslav, who had moved here from California. During another sojourn in San Miguel he and Rico Lebrun had become close friends, referring to themselves as brothers. Rico felt he would like to spend a year in Italy, his native country and invited Jimmy to go along. A year with Rico changed Jimmy noticeably, he was now moody and testy, as though something deep-rooted was bothering him. His painting was less interesting, his colour sense different and not as good.

Rico was offered a mural at the University at Pomona, California and asked York to assist him but York had to explain that he was not an assistant but a muralist. Rico then asked Jimmy Pinto to assist him. The mural was finished, a small one, but very much Rico Lebrun - practically no colour, and, of course, Jimmy was not mentioned. Jimmy continued to teach advanced painting at the Instituto Allende, winding up as Dean of Painters there. He seemed to go into a sort of a decline for a while. He and his wife had a serious motor accident, which left Rushka lame. At the time there was speculation that it may not have been accidental. Many years later his work became more interesting, but he was cocky and no longer the same person. Jimmy died about 1989, and Rushka was so distraught that she didn't wish to live either and took her own life. It was goodbye to two dear friends.

Italy didn't work out too well for Rico either. He believed his own country would welcome him as the accomplished artist he had become in the United States, but his reception was noticeably cool.

York was on the Exhibition Committee at the AGT and was instrumental in offering Rico Lebrun an exhibition. His arrival caused much

excitement, the Mazelow Gallery concurrently gave him an exhibition, and the Ontario College of Art (OCA) a workshop. He left many people aware of his work, especially artists and collectors. The AGT acquired two of his works. Our neighbours, Dr. Wallace and his wife Kay Graham played host, as we were not there. Rico said later, it was ironic that he was next door to our home, looking at our place.

When Rico Lebrun was invited as artist in residence at Yale University, he invited York and me to visit them. It was a very happy and fulfilling week that we would always remember.

York had been trying to 'get by' since 1943 using the master bedroom as his studio at our home. We finally decided to do something about it and started looking at houses but it seemed impossible to find a ready-made studio and switched to looking at 'lots' to build.

We talked with architect friends, Gordon Adamson said he would give us any advice possible, but the job was too small to put through his office. John Parkin said much the same, but both were delighted when we chose John Layng, saying if they weren't going to build their own houses, John Layng would be their first choice. John Layng had been in the news with his round schoolhouse. It was practical with the auditorium in the centre, requiring no heat and not needing daylight. Other types of work had slackened off for him and he was delighted to take on the job. He said he visualized a small piece of property with little upkeep, giving us almost the freedom of an apartment.

At this point we happened to be spending the weekend with the Wallace Grahams at Cleve Horne's farm near Claremont. Wally was talking about his high taxes in Wychwood Park, almost \$1,000 on about 120 foot property; he was thinking of selling 40 feet for about \$5,000. We said, "Okay, we'll take it at \$5,000." Wally demurred, saying he would have it evaluated. Eventually a price of \$7,000 was agreed upon.

Our only instructions to John Layng were that it must be an interesting

house, and York gave John approximate dimensions for the studio, including two stories high and a wall of north light. John said, "Would you go for a butterfly roof?" York said, "Sure." John said, "Do you know what a butterfly roof is?" York said, "No."

By this time we had spent time in other countries and had enjoyed flagstone floors. John Layng didn't agree, he felt they would shale and be dirty. They hadn't been done before in Ontario's climate. Adamson said the same thing and did not advise it. However, the builder, John Goba agreed with us, saying he would push for it and it was finally agreed. They would finish them with silicone to harden the surface.

Radiant heating was in vogue, it was supposed to be healthier with no drafts and no radiators taking up space. There would be a six inch block of cement which would contain the hot water pipes in the ground floor, covered with the flagstones. The bedrooms on the second floor would have an extra depth of plaster wrapped around the pipes in the ceiling. It was amusing that Gordon Adamson hurried to use flagstone in a house before ours was finished.

While waiting in an apartment on Yonge Street, the musical "Guys and Dolls" came to the Royal Alexander Theatre. Our new friend Graeme Wilson brought the lovely star, Margo Moser, to visit. Margo gave us two tickets for the show, and this was the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

Finally in June, 1955, we were able to move into 41 Alcina Avenue, the last house in Wychwood Park. It was an exciting time. At long last York had a studio especially designed for his needs, and I had the pleasure of arranging the rest of the house and garden.

Kay Graham was very keen on the poetry of Emily Dickinson and early Canadian pottery, among other things. She became more and more interested in the visual arts and loved to visit York's studio on any pretence just to watch him work, which didn't exactly please him. She would turn up with fascinating things to paint, such as an oak branch with buds just

beginning to open.

Dr. Wallace Graham would often wander over to our back patio in his dressing gown on a Sunday morning. One such morning he turned up to find York complaining about a painful toe. Wally examined it and decided it was gout. He had done his thesis on gout, hadn't see a case in years so became quite excited and suggested York have a couple of beers to see what would happen. Gout is very painful, and York told him to go to hell, Wally laughed. The gout soon cleared up though; Wally stressed diet and may have given York some medicine from the South American lily, Colchichine. This had been found to relieve the pain of gout quickly. We had many pleasant times together, often playing croquet on their spacious lawn.

Canadian Art ran a reproduction of the McGill Mural and an article on two important murals in Montreal, the one at McGill and the other at College de Saint-Laurent by Stanley Cosgrove. Welfare Worker came back to haunt us, reproduced in Saturday Night along with a beer parlour crowd and a scene on a Trolley-car by Franklyn Arbuckle - and Midnight at Charlie's (a late night snack in a greasy spoon restaurant) by William Winter. The article was entitled HOW CANADIANS BEHAVE THEMSELVES.

An item in the paper mentioned that we were in Mexico and were studying vinyl acetate as a mural medium. It was more flexible than pyroxalin (duco) and remains "mat." Keeping the surface lustreless was one of the problems York had to solve in his mural for McGill. The Williams Memorial Art Museum, London mounted a two-man exhibition of York Wilson and Roger Lariviere. A London paper reproduced the work of each artist along with a fine article.

Wilson was again invited to have a solo exhibition at Hart House, University of Toronto, in September. Interesting and complimentary articles appeared in the University's VARSITY paper and the Globe and Mail by Pearl McCarthy. She also mentions the Seagram Collection of Cities of

Canada saying, York Wilson's painting of Sarnia was among the best. York was still teaching three evenings a week at least.

While in Mexico, Rico Lebrun had a student from Toronto, Bob Hedrick, and Rico felt that York was the only one who could help Bob stay on the right course. He gave Bob a letter to deliver to York. York invited Bob to visit, doing his best to get Bob's trust and interest in an effort to find out how he could assist him. However, Bob seemed sullen and difficult. York couldn't reach him so could only invite him to get in touch anytime. Bob went from painting to sculpture which has been included in exhibitions abroad.

The RCA opened at the MMFA in Montreal and York sent a large canvas of a Seated Figure, back view, which was reproduced in the catalogue. In Montreal, a solo exhibition opened late October at the Watson Galleries. The Gazette gave it a good review; La Presse an extremely long and thoughtful review; Robert Ayre of the Montreal Star ended his excellent piece:

This is a show that calls for serious attention. You should take your time with it. Its quality comes out in contemplation.

Macleans Magazine, November 15, 1954: A GALLERY OF NORTHERN PAINTING - Four famous Canadian artists and a gifted amateur paint the Canadian north in all its moods from the bustling Alaska Highway to the high Arctic. The half page lead photograph, in colour is Wilson's Mile 804, Alaska Highway.

Wilson made the sketches for this painting in fifty-below weather, while taking a taxi from Whitehorse to Teslin at a cost of \$72. He made ragged notes with a pencil held in mittened hands, peering through a hole in the inch-thick frost that covered the window of the automobile...

Wilson's other painting shown in the article, Main Street, Whitehorse,

Caption: Like Wilson's other painting, this was made for Imperial Oil which wanted to record movement of the refinery from Whitehorse to Edmonton. The artist worked from the hotel window to get this

street scene in freezing 50-below weather.

Two of A.Y. Jackson's paintings are shown, Barren Lands and Port Radium, Great Bear Lake - F.H. Varley's, Summer In The Arctic - Lawren Harris', Mountain, Baffin Island and Sir Fredrick Banting's, Craig Harbour, Ellesmere Island.

The article mentions: The other two artists are York Wilson, one of the most talented members of the generation that followed the Group, and Sir Frederick Banting, a gifted amateur...

York sent Echo to the CGP at the AGT in 1954, and the London Museum in 1955 a 30" x 40" painting but I have no record other than #81 in the catalogue. Mexican Madonnas went to the CNE.

The Telegram, Rose MacDonald: ...York Wilson's work becomes more and more subtle, more of the essence...

In 1955 McGill University of Montreal celebrated its 100th Anniversary with a commemorative exhibition of the work of Sir William Dawson, who was Principal of McGill from 1855-1893, in the Peter Redpath Museum. The booklet produced for the occasion shows York Wilson's mural on the cover with the information below:

Mural by York Wilson, RCA, in the Undergraduate Reading Room of the Redpath Library - Sir William Dawson appears as the third figure from the left.

1955 started with a solo exhibition at the Roberts Gallery with mostly Mexican themes:

The Telegram, Rose MacDonald: A one-man show of distinction has opened this weekend at the Roberts Gallery. It is York Wilson's and is comprised of the recent work of this artist, whose stature has so markedly heightened in the last few years.

Mr. Wilson at one time was fond of white. Recently—especially since his last return from Mexico and following his Spanish and North African experience—has successfully been using subtle tonalities of

color: color frequently used transparently and, though this is not emphasized, with reference to the purposes of the cubists.

Those who saw a short while back his fascinating town clinging to a mountainside, will find the present exhibition a still more refined and fascinating impression of rising streets of houses. This time the patterns found in our city.

Mr. Wilson, by the way, is still devoted to the pyroxalin medium.

His figures, veiled rather than clarified by intense sunlight, hold one's interest, Mexican Madonnas, Market by Day may be cited.

A procession of fish is sort of a microcosm drawing attention to the great underwaters of the world. Apparently the artist found his rhythmically expressed theme in a friend's fishbowl!

The OSA at the AGT also opened early January to its second largest audience of over 1700. The growing interest in art and the great social event was due to the dedication of its members, touring exhibitions, lectures, demonstrations, rigid jurying (95 out of 400 submissions), publicity seeking and Wilson's live broadcasts from the gallery during Openings. The Telegram: ...Jury which decided which paintings would be exhibited is composed of Jack Bush, Oscar Cahen, Society President Sydney H. Watson, A.J. Casson, Peter Haworth and York Wilson. Behind them is a "scoreboard" on which their opinions were registered. Only the President and the Secretary can see the results on the board. The President asks the panel of each painting "Yes?" "Doubtful?" and "Out?" Each panellist presses a button and the board lights up. On majority rule, "Yes" paintings are hung, "Doubtful" ones are re-judged later, and "Out" paintings are simply "out."

Canadian Art, Spring number, by George Elliott, OSA: ...These are the leaders... York Wilson... in his Growing Forms, creates an upward feeling... Toronto's Mayor, Nathan Phillips, introduced Mayor Charlotte Whitton of Ottawa, who spoke and opened the exhibition... Review... differently expressed but impressively stated, is York Wilson's Growing Forms...

Mayor Charlotte Whitton with a few of the artists and their wives were invited back to the home of the president, Sydney Watson and his

wife Helen. We drove Mayor Whitton to the Watsons and were the first to arrive, only to find chaos. The Watson home had been broken into and all the liquor was gone as well as other items. The police were called and arrived in minutes. While officers accompanied the Watsons to investigate the house, another stood guard at the door. Cleeve and Jean Horne arrived next, discovered the problem and rushed home to get more liquor. Meanwhile Mayor Whitton declared, "I'm in charge here!" and began instructing the police. As people arrived they sat down in the rows of chairs facing the policeman at the door. Conversation buzzed as each newcomer learned of the disaster and one could hear Mayor Whitton's voice giving orders. As everyone looked at the policeman on guard and he stared back, someone called out, "Do you know who that is giving orders?" "No" came the answer. "She is Mayor Whitton of Ottawa." The Policeman was shaken, he cried: "Jesus Christ, I thought I had seen that puss before."

An opportunity for Canadian artists to show in England was sponsored by the Ontario Government. Most of the paintings were drawn from British collections but 45 were selected and shipped by Laing Galleries of Toronto. It was officially opened on January 19, 1955 by Field Marshall Earl Alexander at the galleries of Fortnum and Mason, owned by Canadian business magnate Garfield Weston. The President of the Royal Academy, Sir Gerald Kelly, gave Wilson's Mexican Women an honourable mention, the Illustrated London News reproduced in sepia tones, the works of: Franklin Arbuckle, Frederick Coburn, Lawren Harris, Grant Macdonald, York Wilson, Harold Beament and Robert Pilot.

Helena Rubenstein who became interested in new developments in art through her association with Picasso, commissioned a collection of works by Canadian artists, called "The Four Seasons." It was shown at the Park Gallery (one of Melville ["Bud"] Feheley's interests) in Toronto, through the assistance of Paul Duval. On Rubenstein's death, the collection went to her niece of Toronto, Mrs. Henri Kolin.

The CNE Art Gallery showed Seagram's Cities of Canada on which Pearl McCarthy of the Globe and Mail wrote:

The Seagram pictures are shown to their best advantage. Those that seem best of the collection are still York Wilson's Sarnia, Tonnancour's Sherbrooke, Goodridge Roberts' Saskatoon, Casson's Hamilton and Pilot's Sherbrooke. Mr. Wilson could not have been better if he had been painting merely to please himself instead of to fill a commission.

The long neglected direction of drawings was brought to the fore by members of the OSA having an exhibition at Eatons College Street Galleries. Some of York's drawings were, Ballerina, a fine sensitive work and Today's Religion with a row of houses, all with television aerials.

Some of Toronto's interior decorators did special rooms at the CNE and one displaying the furniture of the U.S. designer, Edward Womley, hung Wilson's Moroccan Conversation over the fireplace. The AIO toured two Special Sections of the OSA, Chair and Painters' Art throughout Ontario. York showed Monmartre at Night at the MMFA's Spring Exhibition. The CGP exhibited in London, Hamilton and the N.G. Ottawa and included Wilson's Echo. The AGT acquired another duco, Janitzio Island and the Winnipeg Show exhibited Monmartre at Night. The STUDIO, England, March '56 ran a four-page article by Paul Duval on the RCA with seven reproductions of artists' works, including Wilson's Moroccans, noting: In the field of creative figure painting, York Wilson's Moroccans...

The new Salvation Army headquarters on Albert Street, Toronto, behind the old City Hall, was designed by Parkin Associates and opened in 1955. John Parkin chose York Wilson to do the mural in the Prayer Room and Jack Nichols to do a drawing mural at the entrance. York had some difficulty with the Army Officer's over his first proposal. He felt that in a prayer room, there should be nothing to distract in their communication with God. He proposed a vision of Christ, with outstretched arms, indicating "Come Unto Me." The area was 4 feet high and 17 feet long, at the front of the chapel. The board didn't like this idea, so York presented

the Twenty-third Psalm as a theme. There was still difficulty so he told Parkin he wished to withdraw.

He received a call very soon after from the new commissioner general, who had just arrived in Canada. He was the grandson of the founder, General Booth of the Salvation Army. General Booth requested a meeting at his home with the artist to discuss the mural. They had a long conversation, General Booth asked him how well he knew his bible? York answered, "Not very well."

This was a bit of an understatement. Not only had York been a choir boy but had taught Sunday School, and took the sermon from time to time. This did not alarm the General! He wanted to get to know this man and they talked for two or three hours over tea. The conversation finished by General Booth asking York to re-present his sketch which he did. Again the members of the board started with their same objections. General Booth took the floor, patiently explaining many things (he himself had a great interest in art) and the sketch was accepted. The wall was ready in the small chapel and York went ahead with his new medium, vinyl acetate, with which he had been experimenting. He engaged our daughter, Virginia, as an assistant; she was already familiar with the new medium as we had all worked in finding the materials for the formula. In conversation with chemists, often we found the ingredient went by a different name here and sometimes only available in large quantities. Obliging chemists solved this by giving us samples, quite enough for the small mural 4 feet by 17 feet.

All the necessary ingredients had been assembled and now, the first mixing of the formula. York put them in a huge container while I stirred steadily. We noticed a buildup of heat, became frightened that it might explode, and backed away. Later many gallons were mixed without a worry. The groundwork was enormous, including checking with so many chemists here and in the United States and with the help of the Dupont Company in Canada.

Nearing the finishing of the mural, York began to have chest pains. He told no one, making excuses to lunch alone to give himself some respite. He was pretty sure what the problem was and knew if Virginia discovered it she would tell me. He was anxious to finish the mural before giving in, maybe foolish but humans are like that. We had moved into our new house six months earlier with its own problems. He was teaching three evenings a week and with the difficulties with the Salvation Army Board. It was all too much.

On finishing the mural he admitted that night that he had been having chest pains. It was midnight. I called our friend next door, Dr. Wallace Graham who came right over in his dressing gown. After questions and an examination, he told York that he didn't think it was too serious but just to be on the safe side, he would take him down to the hospital for an examination in the morning. Wally told me as he left he was pretty sure it was a heart attack, just to keep him quiet and put a few things in a bag for the morning.

York was a little surprised when on arrival at the hospital, he was put in a wheel chair, Wally passed it off as nothing, just easier he said to get to their destination. Wally had arranged for his friend the heart specialist, Dr. W.F. Greenwood to examine York. He was then put in a bed, just to be sure that all was well, maybe a day or two. York was quite content to rest, he felt exhausted. It wasn't until the second day that he heard the retiring nurse telling her relief that the case was a cardiac arrest. He looked around to see what case she meant and in his puzzlement asked the new nurse what his card said at the end of his bed. She confirmed that it was a cardiac arrest. His friend Wally and Dr. Greenwood seemed to treat it so casually that he felt foolish. He had just turned 48 years old.

He chose to be in a ward and in no time was the life of the ward and the darling of the nurses. He was not allowed bathroom privileges or visitors, but many amusing notes, letters and flowers arrived. After three

weeks in the Toronto General Hospital, he was home for Christmas, warned to take it easy.

When the Salvation Army was finished, some Board members wanted changes. They felt it wasn't finished. John Parkin, architect of the building and president of the RCA, called a meeting. John listened until everyone had their say and York explained his thinking related to the mural. John then turned to York and said:

"Mr. Wilson, are you satisfied with the mural?" York replied, "Yes." John said: "Is the mural finished?" York said: "Yes, the mural is finished." John explained to the Board: "The artist says the mural is finished and we must listen to what the artist says."

At which point, he disbanded the meeting and walked out!

The Globe and Mail ran the story on the front page, January 9, 1956 with a reproduction of Wilson's 23rd Psalm and Jack Nichols' mural at the entrance.

Caption: Jack Nichols studies his mural in comparison with a sketch. Figures express human compassion and faith in brush drawing on special composition that will not discolor or gather grime.

Caption: Mural in colour in prayer room by York Wilson. The six panels express the six verses of the 23rd psalm. New synthetic resin used to paint it is believed to be resistant to downtown smog.

Although the scaffolding and building curtains were still in place, it became apparent this week that Toronto has two new major art works that bid fair to give inspiration lasting far beyond their period. They are the murals by Jack Nichols and York Wilson, respectively, done for the new Salvation Army headquarters designed by the Parkin architectural firm.

Nichols' mural facing the main entrance of the building above eye level, gives the impression of being a great brush drawing on white, showing three figures five times life size.

This is a triumph as a concept. One bit more shading or one bit less drawing, and it would have lost its spiritual if not its artistic suggestion. As it is, it has a kind of floating idealism. The female figures are humanistic in appeal, but not suggestive of the very rare human type. The drawing manages to suggest the transcending fineness to which any human being who passes that street corner might at least aspire. York Wilson's mural, covering one wall of the prayer room near the main entrance, tempts the notion that if the consumer would risk more of producer artists, and leave them alone to produce it, the consumer

would get more satisfying results.

Wilson is an excellent man in composition and color, but for that very reason we are more annoyed if some piece of his brilliance seems sterile. There is nothing sterile about this mural.

It is in color, in six blended panels to express the six verses of the 23rd Psalm. And the color, as well as the form, justifies that much-abused word, significant. It is a theme which nearly everybody in the Western world has visualized, but there would be a new vision for any one who sees this Canadian artist's "He leadeth me beside the still waters," or the transition from the valley of the shadow to light.

The murals must be taken in conjunction with the Parkin building. It is probably Canada's most humanistic expression of modernism, being, as the saying goes, "of our day" but not a mean day or a whited sepulchre of taste. It has the courage to suggest permanence, and it is founded on rock.

The Salvation Army may chuckle over the fact that it is the first to use a downtown Toronto roof for delight and rest. The whole area over the auditorium part of the building, with approach from the penthouse section and the dining room, will be bright with evergreens and flowers, and a tiny bandshell on the roof completes the idea.

In all aspects, the building is the most inspired piece of modernism to date in Canada. It does look like an echo of a passing trend.

During his convalescence York had been able to give much thought to the mural about to be commissioned by Imperial Oil for their new headquarters on St. Clair Avenue, near Avenue Road. He was able to put his enforced rest to good use reading about the history of oil and all its ramifications. We had recently bought an up-to-date Encyclopedia Britannica and coupled with our good library, he had all he needed.