

III

1936 - 1943

Watching and Waiting

It was very difficult for an artist to live by his work alone and few did in the 40's. The AGT held a non-jury exhibition in 1943, York sent Local Dance, a lively group of dancers, including me. My partner was an amazing character, so vivacious he nearly swung me off my feet. Saturday Night carried a reproduction:

...one of the liveliest paintings in the non-jury exhibition... Is there unrecognized talent... an artist who can make his figures move (something unusual in Toronto) is York Wilson, in his gay sextet of jazzers entitled Local Dance.

It was a great occasion when the AGT bought Local Dance in 1943. The London Art Gallery also bought three small works in the 40's, including the Auction Sale, from which the print was made during wartime. Meanwhile York was getting the cream of commercial work, painting used in advertising for clients like Elizabeth Arden, Yardley, Imperial Oil, Seagrams, Abitibi Pulp and Paper and the Federal Government.

In 1942 York was elected a member of the OSA and shortly after on the executive. Within months he was invited to write an article for WORLD AFFAIRS which reproduced Welfare Worker on the cover, the caption explains:

A model sat for this astringent record. Artist disowns any intent to caricature his subjects and only sets out to paint them truly. The hands of Welfare Worker were repainted five times to acquire the effect of softness and grooming in contrast to the harsh surroundings and the cactus plant.

The model was a social worker (Christine Connor) from a comfortable family. Her hands were soft and had long, painted nails, which had just come into vogue. York added the old-fashioned steel-rimmed glasses and the unattractive hat. He placed her in a poor home and her charge (revealed slightly in the mirror) had

served her tea in a thick, cheap, clover-leaf cup. The cactus on the window sill indicated something needing very little care.

In an exhibition at the Winnipeg Gallery the work caused a furor. There were demands that it be taken down from the wall. The painting remained. A few years later, when a film was being made on social workers in Vancouver, the Director noticed a reproduction of Welfare Worker on their wall. He asked why? They said,

“To remind social workers not to be like that!”

The Director sought permission to include the painting in the film. As a result of so much interest, including many a reproduction in the Press it has become one of York's best known paintings. The Ottawa owner says he will consider giving it to an art gallery eventually.

WORLD AFFAIRS - December 1942 / CANADIAN ARTISTS - York Wilson

THERE'S NOTHING COMPLICATED ABOUT ART

Having been invited to set down, briefly, some views on our own painting and some thoughts on art in general, we shall skip the former and take liberties with the latter. To explain why we paint the way we do would be quite as difficult as it would be for most men to explain why they walk as they do. Both painting and walking have something to do with our physical and mental mannerisms, and a good deal to do with where we are going. In taking a shot on commenting on art in general, we have decided to be specific—and perhaps a bit nasty. We intend to aim a verbal broadside at the serene but misinformed individual (you have met him) who declares with some pride: “I don't know a thing about art, but I do know what I like.” This particular blight on the artistic horizon invariably decries what he calls the tendency of artists to “get away from Nature.” He often points the triumphantly accusing finger at a deviation from photographic detail, and from his lofty pinnacle he sometimes jeers at a piece of anatomy which he claims is absolutely incorrect. To our way of thinking, this is the chap who knows how the country should be run. He is the bright fellow who would be ever so much funnier than our favourite radio comedian if he were but given the opportunity

and a network spot. On his first visit to a modern cannery, we can easily picture him saying, "I don't know a thing about canning, but that machine is upside down."

Why have we singled out this type of person for our subject? Because he interferes with the quiet enjoyment of art by many people. As an artist we are naturally in favour of people enjoying art in their own way. It really isn't difficult or complicated. The enjoyment of art is as simple and satisfying as the appreciation of good music or literature. We are quite likely prejudiced, but we believe that the appreciation of art is the simplest of the three.

A composer (we forget his name) said that no one should express an opinion on a piece of music until he had listened to it fifty times. This may be overdoing things a bit, but imagine how much better we would understand the character and nature of a musical selection if we did listen to it quietly, many times, before attempting to express our reactions. Imagine, then, how much better informed one would be about a painting if he looked at it sympathetically; seeking its character, or its story, or its emotional appeal. In the case of literature, consider how much more you gained from reading a good book for the second or third time. Each time, you discovered delicate shades of meaning, little beauties of characterization which escaped you the first time through.

If the chap we singled out as our Horrible Example would agree to look at a painting for only half an hour—remaining silent until he has given the picture a chance to establish itself, to 'reach' him, he could never again say he knew nothing about art. A sympathetic seeking for the meaning or significance of a picture is the finest form of art education.

It is not necessary to be a composer to enjoy a symphony. It isn't necessary to be an artist to enjoy a fine painting. In both cases, however, some knowledge of the technique involved adds greatly to the appreciation of the work. The music lover gets his knowledge by listening to music and reading about musicians. A logical (and little used) approach to art is as near as your local library. Here, in magnificent array, are reproductions of the great paintings and stories of the world's outstanding artists. Here one can find splendid books on the "art of enjoying art." If this sounds obvious—check among your friends and find out how many of them have ever read a

book on art appreciation.

In case we are beginning to sound stuffy with our literary allusions, let us give you a practical example of how the knowledge of painting opens your eyes to the enjoyment of art. Imagine going to a football game with someone who knows nothing about the rules or the plays—and imagine your horror if your guest began to criticize your team from the kick-off, claiming loudly that your best plunger was a dull fellow for trying to get through the thickest part of the opposing line. Gruesome? Then please be patient with us when we speak up against that classic example of The Closed Mind who says, “I don’t know anything about art, but I do know what I like.”

Winding up this little piece of our mind, we would like to emphasize one thought: It isn’t necessary to say anything about art. If you are tongue-tied; if you are moved to silence when you look at a picture; that’s wonderful. You are beginning to really enjoy art—and the words can come later. Above all other things, if you voice an opinion on art be sure it is your own opinion—and nothing else.

York Wilson

An item appeared in the Toronto Telegram, December 15, 1942 after Ray Avery and his wife Peggy had their first child.

COMING UP - Lynne Gay Avery - daughter of Mr. and Mrs. R.J. Avery - was the recipient of an extremely unusual gift on the occasion of her baptism recently. It was an unfinished canvas - (truth to tell ‘unfinished’ was a gross exaggeration but that’s what the artist called it). It was a framed blank canvas with a card appended in one corner and inscribed as follows: “This space reserved for Lynne Gay Avery.” The gift giver was York Wilson - artist - member of the Ontario Society of Artists and godfather to Lynne. He presented the canvas to be followed up with a portrait of the young lady.

York loved Lynne dearly and was proud of her but he preferred painting older young ladies and wiggled out of his promise by giving her a painting.

York and his friend Melville (Bud) Fehelley often went sketching together. This time they were favouring the Port Credit area. Sometimes they stayed overnight with the Blacks, a local farmer.

Mrs. Black promptly put the social notice in the local paper, adding:

Mr. Wilson says he could spend a whole year in the Credit Forks vicinity without running out of subjects.

The Telegram's art critic observed:

York Wilson has dealt with vigor and surely selective sense with various aspects out of the Ontario landscape and has been successful. Somehow we have usually thought of Mr. Wilson as an urban painter.

During wartime when no lights could be exposed for security reasons, York prepared Dimout or Early Closing for the OSA. Sampson Matthews, a Toronto engraving house, used the photo of Dimout commenting:

...his paintings of typically Canadian characters and situations have won him recognition as one of Canada's outstanding young artists, and his style is admirably suited to the theme of our 1944 calendar.

Dimout now titled Early Closing was also used on the North American Life Insurance Company's calendar in 1943, followed by four paintings (one for each three months) of Pioneer Life in Canada. Sadly I have no record of the whereabouts of this painting. It belongs with the war records in the National Gallery.

Blood Donors went to the OSA exhibition at the AGT in 1943, was reproduced in the catalogue, on the cover of Saturday Night and in The Telegram, whose art critic commented:

...doing his sketching from the vantage point of the kitchen sink, literally rubbing elbows with the two washers-up constantly at work at the sink which practically filled the tiny kitchen space. Each donor is depicted solemnly balancing a thermometer in his mouth.

York was his own harshest critic and sadly he destroyed Blood Donors, another excellent wartime painting. It was felt by many to be a key picture of World War II, Canada. At least a photograph and slide exist. Walter Yarwood was another harsh self critic. When he visited San Miguel de Allende, Mexico in the early 50's, he told

us he had destroyed most of his early work; very distressing to his young wife and also York.

When York's parents sold their house at 117 Mackay Avenue, we suggested they move in with us. We no longer had boarders and had plenty of room in the 28 Hambly Avenue house. It worked out well, we were able to afford our first cleaning lady once a week. Pop Wilson used to love polishing the brass on the front door and gardening. Mom Wilson had a bad heart suffering from angina. When in pain she would become very religious and prayed urging Pop to put his trust in God. Pop had become accustomed to this over the years and would try to relieve her pain by making her laugh with the retort, "Yes, trust in God and keep your bowels open." It isn't difficult to know where York got his mischievous nature. Mom was a dear little lady who sometimes sat on a park bench chatting with anyone near by. People would tell her all their troubles and in some instances she would bring them home for a good meal.

The senior Wilsons never drank much. When York offered his father a scotch or beer he would ask his mother if she would have some. She usually replied, "Yes, dear, just a thimbleful meaning just that. York would give her this tiny amount and she felt devilish thinking she could feel it. In his youth Pop made some kind of wine, fig or elderberry, which he would take in moderation perhaps when returning home on a cold night. He always advised his sons never to abuse it, offering them a glass under similar circumstances. One might hope such civilized behaviour would become habitual but, alas, it did not. They stayed with us for a few years and then rented a small house in north Toronto. York's brother Art was living alone in Orillia, later they went to keep house for him. When York's mother passed away we brought Pop Wilson back to stay with us until we departed on a painting trip.

York's sister, Dorothy, then invited Pop to stay with her and her husband, Ross Gillespie (Toronto's City Auditor) in their apartment. Dorothy was a little too fussy for Pop. He smoked a pipe, so she placed a covering around his favourite chair to protect the carpet should he spill tobacco when lighting his pipe. Pop then returned to Orillia, a worry for us as Art would be away working all day and seldom home in the evenings. However they enjoyed a good relationship aided by a kind of telepathy as evidenced when Pop fell out of bed one night. Art claimed he heard it and rushed home.

Pop Wilson stayed with us again when he was in his late

eighties and sporting a flowing white beard. We enjoyed taking him out with us in the evenings. Old friends, Jean and Cleve Horne, liked Pop and kidded him which he enjoyed. When we left on another painting trip abroad, he returned to Orillia once again with Art. One morning Art found his father had passed away in his sleep. He was sadly missed.

Now after seven years in the palatial Hambly Avenue house, we sold it in 1943 to a large Quebec family. We bought a new house in north Toronto at 8 Apsley Road in Armour Heights off Yonge Boulevard for \$8,500. The Toronto Cricket Club, with open fields between lay to the north of our house and here Virginia and her dog Suzi liked to roam. The house had a large recreation area with fireplace. York invited his artist friends to dinner, a couple at a time, to pay the piper by painting a decoration of their choice on the recreation room walls.

Cleve Horne painted a tremendous crack on the ceiling which looked so real that York's mother cried out, "Oh dear, whatever happened to your new house?" Syd Watson started below ground level painting earth, worms, stones and garbage cans, giving the appearance of a broken wall in one corner. Syd Hallam used a radiator pipe (three quarters the way up the wall) painting a musician with puffed cheeks and the radiator pipe became a tuba which seemed to be coming out of his mouth. A.J. Casson exactly copied two windows either side of the fireplace, making a third over the fireplace, drapes and all, with a peeping Tom looking in the fake window. York painted a framed nude in the corner, half going each way extending beyond the frame. Jack Bush did a framed picture, complete with a cord in the centre of a wall. Bill Winter painted a man coming out of the door frame raising his hat but the head separated remaining attached to the hat. I can't remember what Angus MacDonald painted. When we sold the house 12 years later the purchaser insured with our agent, Wallace Clancy. Wallace told him he had the most valuable room in Canada. The new buyer, the Stronachs, understood and preserved the room for posterity.

Jack and Mabel Bush bought a house about the same time for \$10,000 in the Armour Heights area where they raised their three boys. Jack and Mabel were having a bad time with one son aged four who used the foulest language. Jack threatened him again and again but it didn't stop him. Finally in exasperation Jack put him over his knee giving him a sound spanking. As the tearful little tyke was going out the door he turned to Jack and said, "You dirty

old married bastard.” When he left the room Jack exploded with laughter.

York Wilson seems to have been the exponent of palette-knife painting in Canada. The Telegram comments on the OSA’s “Little Picture Exhibition” at the Robert Simpson Art Gallery in 1944:

PALETTE-KNIFE TECHNIQUE J.S. Hallam and York Wilson both have had a happy and successful time involving the technique of the palette-knife. To the landscape of both it has given character, a sort of “juiciness.” Mr. Wilson, by the way, has also done a most engaging, sensitive study of an adolescent girl, “Fourteen,” he calls it. Again that sense of the ludicrous with all bubbling good humor, with which this artist can invest the satirical is cleverly made apparent in his “Noel, Noel.”

Agustus Briddle of the Star simply comments:

No comics — except York Wilson’s tipsy “Noel.”

Jack Bush and York Wilson often sketched together. On one occasion Jack did a quick little pencil sketch of York sketching at Thorold, Ontario, 1946, which he kindly gave to York shortly before his death in 19 . The AGO borrowed it for the retrospective of Jack Bush’s in 1985, which then toured for two years. The Women’s Art Association invited them to exhibit together in their Prince Arthur Gallery in Toronto in 1944.

G&M: The Women’s Art Association opens its exhibition season with two very strong painters—York Wilson and Jack Bush.

Burlesk No. 3 was sent to the CGP exhibition at the AGT in 1944. A reproduction in Saturday Night showed a burlesque actress putting on make-up through the dressing room’s open door and two other actresses descending the stairs. The famous comedian, Phil Silvers (while at one of Toronto’s famous burlesque houses, the “Casino”) helped persuade the actresses to stay still while York made his sketch for Burlesk No. 3. Robert Alda and Gypsy Rose Lee were others York encountered in Toronto’s two burlesque houses of the period.

The University of Toronto invited York to mount an exhibition

at Hart House in September-October 1944. He hung 37 paintings, his first exhibition at Hart House. The University's magazine *Varsity* observed:

By far the most striking work is entitled Street in a Dim-Out. This painting has yet to be acknowledged as being one of the finest works in the whole of Canadian Art. The green mysterious darkness of the sky, only broken by the faint glimmer of the moon, pervades the whole picture and casts greenish shadow on the silence of the houses. With comparatively few but admirably used colours the artist manages to convey the whole complexity of impressions with which this scene struck him. Zoot Suits and Gypsies shows two zoot-suiters talking in a business-like manner and two gypsy girls. The picture is very successful in the use of colours and the contrast between the matter-of-fact attitude of the zoot-suiter and the easy venality of the girls. Generally speaking Mr. Wilson is less interested in the psychology of faces than in the posture of people as a medium expressing his attitude towards his object; facial expression serves to stress posture and movement.

However in Public Library Mr. Wilson manages old-fashioned dress, trying to break strict morality by keeping the fingernails of her heavy hand long and painted. The humorous effect, obviously intended, is rather weakened by the background. Mr. Wilson knows how to use colouring for a great variety of effects. He uses different shadings of the sky, and cloud formation, to emphasize his theme, movement and general sentiment of the picture. A very successful illustration of this is a painting showing men Burning Twitches on the rich dark-brown soil on the furrowed slope of a hill.

York was invited to lunch and give a lecture during this exhibition at Hart House. Later he told me the students were a tough audience - no holds barred - they put you on the hot seat. He was very honest and spoke to the point articulating clearly on the very essence of art. I often noticed how well he was able to hold his audience giving them a glimmer of what really constitutes art. He had a rare vision and did much for art, not only in Canada but the many countries in which he painted and visited.

Among our friends were some fascinating characters including

most of the members of the Group of Seven. A.Y. (Alec) Jackson bought a Wilson painting and often praised his work in public. Arthur Lismer taught children's classes at the AGT and our daughter, Virginia, was often seated on his knee while he explained something. Arthur would argue fiercely with York in an Art Society meeting but during a break would put his arm around him affectionately as much as to say, "Underneath it all, we're friends."

After F.B. Housser, who wrote "On a Canadian Art Movement" 1926, lost his wife Bess to Group of Seven member Lawren Harris, he married Yvonne McKague, a lively redhead, always interesting and a good painter. Yvonne and Isabel McLaughlin spent much time together painting and studying in Paris. They were lifelong friends until Yvonne's recent death. Fred Varley painted and drew many excellent portraits, including a drawing portrait of Reva Brooks, who made her name in photography and wife of the Canadian painter Leonard Brooks. Varley's colour, always unusual was creative also.

When the founder of the Doon School of Fine Art, Ross Hamilton, invited York to chair the Board, and teach, it was an easy decision when he learned that Fred Varley, A.Y. Jackson, A.J. Casson and others would be on the staff. They took their meals together spending their evenings talking about art. York was president of the OSA and was being wooed to follow Casson as president of the RCA. Varley was at Doon at the time and advised him not to waste his time on these positions, though prestigious, they were administrative jobs and an artist of his talent should only paint. York turned down the offer, as well as another, to head the OCA. All the Group were close friends of York's including J.E.H. Macdonald's son Thoreau whose woodcuts were much admired. In later years the Frank Carmichaels became good friends, but during York's sojourn at Sampson Matthews in his teens, he hadn't appreciated having to do the lettering jobs for Carmichael over and over even though the jobs were a blessing in disguise improving his ability in lettering.

When A.J. Casson was president of the OSA, York was his vice-president; following as president with Jack Bush his vice-president. Jack became ill and had to resign so Cleeve Horne replaced him. Casson, Wilson and Horne served many years on the executives and juries of the art societies; positions elected by the members. When Casson was asked what young artists to buy, Wilson headed the list. York, always out in front presenting something new, was

one of the few figure painters of the period.

Before our marriage York had spent much time with Franz (originally Frank) Johnston and family because he was attracted to daughter Wenawae. Frank changed his name to Franz Hans Johnston because it worked out better in numerology. York had become quite a favourite with the family. Franz was a little irresponsible with money, it slipped through his fingers. When he was to receive a cheque, his wife, Florence, sent some of the children with him to bring him directly home. It sometimes worked in reverse and they would all come home outfitted in new clothes. Franklin (Archie) Arbuckle, a promising young artist was smitten with the elder daughter Frances Anne, herself an accomplished painter. The men became engaged to Franz' daughters before my time, and shortly before our engagement York confided they had agreed to break their engagement.

Franz believed in Christian Science but if he were seriously ill he would read Mary Baker Eddy but also call in the Doctor. Once he had a critical abscess and was told if it broke on the outside he would be alright, but if on the inside he might die. After the Doctor left Franz insisted York stay with him all night, talking and holding his hand until the crisis was over. York listened patiently all night to some of Mary Baker Eddy followed by a little pleading with God. Toward morning the abscess broke on the outside and York was allowed to go home.

York remembered when the Schultz exhibition came to the Eaton Art Gallery. Franz spent a great deal of time there studying Schultz's work of snow scenes, intrigued that they sold so well and at high prices. He reasoned that if he painted a few snow scenes, enough to get a little money ahead, then he would go back to his own painting. They began to sell so well, even when he raised his prices; sadly this became his way!

Eatons Fine Art Galleries showed interesting exhibitions at that time, whether they paid their way or not, and were able to get the best artists of the day. Two memorable Directors were Rene Sera followed by Richard Van Valkenburg. In 1944, 14 artists were invited to exhibit in "Adventures in Art." From Toronto there were: Jack Bush, Hedley Rainnie, Donald Stewart, York Wilson, Wm. Winter; from Montreal: S. Borenstein, Charles Daudelin, Anita Elkin, Marguerite Fainmel, Norman Leibovitch and Jori Smith; from Quebec City: Benoit East, Madeleine Laliberte and Jean Paul Lemieux.

An earlier exhibition in the spring included Muhlstock, Fritz Brandtner, Peter Haworth, Jori Smith, Philip Surrey and John Lyman. The Telegram said:

We should say that the outstanding contributions to the show had been made by Wm. Winter, York Wilson, Philip Surrey, Hedley Rainnie—yes and by Madeleine Laliberte and Jack Bush.

York Wilson who has been forging ahead this last year or so, is perhaps the artist showing who has the most catholic variation in style. We find here some of his street scenes which are keen and often amusing character studies, and we find also the most charming, luminous landscapes in quite lyric vein...

Globe and Mail:

In the midst of the alarums and excursions of the display there is a well-executed piece of genre by York Wilson, International Affairs, in which two cronies argue and slake their thirst at a kitchen table.

Six artists were invited to show at the original (Guy) Roberts Gallery on Grenville Street in Toronto—John Alfsen, Helen Fitzgerald, Fred Hagan, Hedley Rainnie, Donald Stewart and York Wilson.

The OSA 1944 exhibition was shown at the Musée Province de Québec and a selection went to Cornell University which included York's Lovely Ladies of the Ensemble, a group of 'lovelies' at the local burlesque house. The 65th RCA exhibition at the AGT included York's Pie Social at Willisville. One evening at Willisville York came across a Pie Social in the making. It was being held at the local schoolhouse. The ladies were arriving by boat, pies in hand, walking up in the dark to the well-lit schoolhouse. Going to the La Cloche area, Frood Lake, Willisville, Whitefish Falls (Lake Superior) was the furthest York had gone to sketch in Ontario. Parts of the area were surrounded by water which made it unusually exciting and he found it comforting to see some evidence of members of the Group of Seven who had cleaned their brushes on the rocks. A sympathetic government towards the arts would put a railway car at the disposal of the Group, take them to a siding to paint and leave the car for their shelter. They were picked up again at an appointed time. Casson and A.Y. Jackson often talked about these sketching trips. Casson was generally the cook and would open a can of beans and

fry up a mess of onions.

Two American sculptors who had spent time together in Paris had settled in Toronto, Florence Wyle and Francis Loring. They were the founding members of the Sculpture Society of Canada (SSC). They bought a church on Rose Avenue, Toronto. The basement provided living quarters for them and their cats. They had little money but always had time and food to help young sculptors like Dora de Pedery Hunt and Francis Gage. Florence did beautiful wood carvings; her best known works would be female nudes carved from sumach wood. A group of them was titled The Rivers of America. Wyle and Loring were referred to as “The Girls” and we, among many others, had delicious stews, bread and cheese at their long dining table. Francis did most of the cooking. She was very feminine with long hair rolled up into a bun. Later she became extremely plump while Florence remained slim and mannish with cropped hair. The Montreal portrait painter, Liliás Torrance Newton did a fine portrait of Francis Loring. Liliás occasionally used York’s studio when she had a Toronto commission. Francis’ works included a life-size hockey player, the lions on the Toronto Lakeshore near the Canadian National Exhibition grounds (CNE) and bronze busts of A.Y. Jackson and Dr. Frederick Banting, the discoverer of insulin. She usually had her bronzes cast in Italy. Feeling that even with shipping costs it was better economically than the United States and the work was better.

Florence Wyle asked York if he would trade a sketch for one of her figures. He was delighted to do so and when they came to dinner Florence brought three or four carvings, each covered with a silk stocking. York chose one and Florence chose Acambay, Queretaro, Mexico, 1950. Some time before her death she gave York’s sketch to the Art Gallery of London. When our daughter Virginia married, “The Girls” gave her one of Francis’ large white, clay tablets incised with a bird design.

In their senior years Florence’s memory gave out as did Francis’ legs. She would send Florence to the store to buy food but she could seldom remember what she came for. The saying was “Florence had good legs and Frances a good mind” and so together they managed.

In their will they left their church to the RCA, which was sold to create a foundation which now serves many good causes, sometimes assisting elderly artists but mainly donating works of art (or assisting in the buying) to art galleries across Canada. The

foundation or RCA Trust Fund as it is known has been wisely managed by Cleeve Horne with Maxwell Henderson as treasurer and Meredith Flemming as legal adviser. Two recent artists' bequests have added considerably to the foundation.

The AGT had an evening in February, 1944, inviting members and the public to "Look Over the Artist's Shoulder," York Wilson was demonstrating palette-knife painting.

During World War II, Sampson Matthews was delegated to produce a number of silkscreen prints to decorate officers' messes overseas and domestic. York's Auction Sale, Belfountain, Ontario, 1941 was chosen. Artists were happy to supply their work gratis and were given ten prints, 30" x 40". After the war they began to appear in banks, schools and government offices. As recently as 1985, the assistant curator at the AGO Christine Boyanoski, requested one. I wasn't too anxious to revive it, I guess because I have graduated all the way from realism to pure abstraction. In retrospect, Christine was right, it represents a certain period in York's long, slow drive to abstraction. On arrival, abstraction was purely his and no one else's.

H.O. McCurry, Director of the National Gallery, Ottawa, writing to thank York for the use of his painting for the silkscreen prints said, more than 15,000 had already been supplied to the Canadian Armed Forces, 2,000 prints to the British Army and they were hoping to supply the R.A.F. with 1,000 plus many more to schools.

Along with a short biography of the artist on each print, it is mentioned:

There is much quiet humour in this scene of Canadian Country Life, with its typical "folks," familiar to all. To the country dweller the picture will bring memories of home, for it is a faithful record, painted with insight and sympathy, of that rural civilization which is still the proud and invaluable background of our country.

Hedley Rainnie and his wife Ursula, artists fresh from England, both handsome and interesting people; their work soon caught the eye of the Canadian art scene. The 1944 OSA theme for the special section was "Artists Paint Artists." Rose MacDonald of The Telegram headed her column on the 1944 OSA exhibition at the AGT:

“Artists Paint Each Other” ...When it was suggested to the members of the OSA that they paint each other the idea “took” at once and as a result the Octagonal room at the Gallery is mounted with portraits formal and informal, mostly the latter, of artists as they are seen by their fellows... Two portraits of unusual interest are Hedley Rainnie’s of York Wilson, and York Wilson’s of Hedley Rainnie. Both are informal, each quite different in treatment from the other, both clever, intimately alive.

Saturday Night, Paul Duval

Artists Portray Fellow-Artists in OSA Show ...and the techniques used range from the competent ultra-conservatism of Kenneth Forbes’ portrait of Fred H. Brigden to the gay modernism of Yvonne McKague’s double-portrait of Rodey Kenney Courtice and the palette-knife expressionism of York Wilson...

York’s portrait of Hedley now hangs in the Art Gallery in Sarnia. Hedley’s portrait of York appeared on the cover of the Canadian Review of Music and Art in 1946. Hedley said he had not been pleased with it, had destroyed the painting but would do another. Sadly he never got around to it.

Hedley and Ursula quickly became part of a group that included the Lister Sinclairs, John Drainies, Bernie Bradens and us. None had much money but the Sinclairs had a fine collection of classical records, stored in boxes on the floor. We spent many pleasant hours listening to music there. Their downtown apartment was small and bare, a curtained-off section of the living room served as bathroom. The Rainnies had a small downtown apartment consisting of two studios. After a few years the Rainnies left for New York where Hedley did more acting or “voice-over” for Charles Laughton than painting. Eventually they returned to England where Hedley died in a short time because of his asthma, which was the reason he had left in the first place. John Drainie, well-known actor in plays produced by the CBC. He too died young, leaving his eminent columnist daughter Bronwyn. The Bernie Bradens went to England where Bernie had a very popular program on the BBC and Barbara, a well-known actress on the British stage. When Bernie’s parents, living in Vancouver, passed on, first his mother, Bernie asked York to do a posthumous portrait, as his father was spending far too much

time at her grave. York did not like doing posthumous portraits but did so in this case and when the Senior Rev. Braden wrote to say, "You have given me back my wife," he was glad he did.

When the Reverend Braden passed along a couple of years later, Bernie again pleaded for a portrait of his father which York did and Bernie was so pleased to have these memories of them both.