

THE CENTER PIECE

Fall 2018



Brandon History Center, 105 Holmes Avenue, P. O. Box 514, Brandon, MN 56315

Website: www.brandonmn.com Email address: brandonhistory@gctel.net Phone No. 320-524-2260

Who Is Elsa Laubach Jemne?

Elsa Laubach Jemne is one of Minnesota's first generation of female artists. Her work can be found in our historic Brandon Auditorium and in various other public buildings around the state of Minnesota and beyond. She is recognized for her oil paintings and large-scale murals.

One of seven children, Elsa was born on July 7, 1888, in St. Paul to Mr. and Mrs. Albert Laubach. Due to an unfortunate turn of events in her father's business, the responsibility for funding any post-high school education fell on Elsa; so she went to work for several years as a commercial artist at Brown & Bigelow, an advertising firm in St. Paul. This was not the type of artist she wanted to be.



Elsa Jemne at her easel

Unsatisfied as a commercial artist, Elsa enrolled at the St. Paul School of Art, attending classes in the evenings or as her work schedule allowed. Elsa did well in her classes and won a bronze medal for drawing. She also took classes in murals.

Longing to move somewhere so she could do "real" work which could change the world, in 1912, Elsa moved to Philadelphia to study at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts. Leaving her mother was difficult for her.

She went to work at the *Philadelphia Record* and Gimbel's Department Store, where she found herself doing fashion drawings, which she did not enjoy but it paid the bills.



The Chinese Screen oil painting on canvas
by Elsa Jemne

The Center Piece

Elsa's most influential teacher at the Pennsylvania Academy was Violet Oakley, who was a prominent mural artist. In 1914 she received a fellowship for study and travel in Europe. She spent most of her time studying in Italy, doing frescoes and sculptures. Meanwhile, World War I broke out so she returned to St. Paul for her third year of education. She did later return to Europe after the war for further study. After graduating, her career took off; and she was commissioned to do several murals in Pennsylvania and New York.

Elsa intended to return to the Eastern U.S.; however, she married Magnus Jemne, whom she met while staying at a St. Paul boarding house. Magnus was an architect by training and worked with Cass Gilbert whose firm designed many homes, churches, and public buildings in the Twin Cities, including the State Capitol.

Elsa and Magnus raised two daughters. Yet Elsa was determined to continue her career.

Murals were a major part of her work. Elsa's murals can be found at the post offices in Hutchinson, and Ely, MN, and Ladysmith and Lake Geneva, WI; the Stearns County Courthouse, St. Cloud, MN; the Minneapolis Armory; Central High School, Minneapolis; St. Paul's Women's City Club; and our own historic Brandon Auditorium (as well as other places around

the country). Pictured below are murals in Brandon and St. Cloud.



Elsa Jemne with the mural which is currently found in the Brandon Auditorium.



Jemne mural located in the Stearns County Courthouse, St. Cloud, MN

The Great Northern Railroad commissioned Elsa to do paintings and murals for them. Subjects of her work included Native

The Center Piece

Americans, which can be noted in the Brandon and St. Cloud murals. She apparently felt it important to depict the culture of each community that had commissioned her to create art work for them.

Elsa taught at the Minneapolis School of Art from 1946 to 1950. At that point in her life, she began focusing on easel painting and works on paper, which she exhibited regularly at the Minneapolis Institute of Art, the Walker Art Center, the Minnesota State Fair, and other venues in the Twin Cities.

Jemne suffered a serious stroke in 1962, after which she was not able to work much at her art work. Both of the Jemnes' daughters also became artists.

Elsa Jemne was very dedicated to her work and her family; and she was able to juggle the demands of both. She was admired for her ability and productivity in many art mediums and was an inspiration for many women pursuing careers outside the home.

Elsa died in 1974 at the age of 86.

Elsa's grandson, Adam Granger, has graciously provided the History Center with a portion of her diary entries while she was working on the Brandon project. It appears that she also may have done the art work for the two carved side panels (the Native American and trapper) that used to hang on either side of the stage.

Her notes indicate that she also worked on

designs for light fixtures for the "Brandon Community House."

According to Elsa's diary entries, she began her Brandon art work in December of 1935 and finished it sometime during the summer or fall of 1936. Elsa commented on her "struggling over the stagecoach wheels." Her diary entries can be found at the History Center—very interesting reading.

Much more could be said about Elsa Laubach Jemne, but her art seems to say it all. We feel very fortunate that we have one of her murals here in Brandon.

Information for this article was gleaned from *Minnesota's First Generation of Women Artists*, authored by Julie L'Enfant, Afton Press, Afton, MN, and Elsa's diary entries provided by her grandson, Adam Granger.

Artists and their works are a vital part of our history. Art depicts life during an era of history and can be appreciated forever.



Mural at Ely Post Office (*Wilderness*)

(Continued on next page)

The Center Piece

Veterans Corner



Douglas Backlund

Douglas Backlund was born September 1, 1936, in Holmes City Township, MN, the son of Swan and Clara Backlund. Doug graduated from Alexandria High school in 1954.

Doug entered the U.S. Army in November of 1956. After his discharge, he was employed by MNDot where he worked until retiring in 1997. Doug was united in marriage to Lois Roiland in 1961. He was a member of Grace Lutheran Church in Brandon and a member of the Brandon American Legion Post 278.

Doug died on June 2, 2017, and is survived by his wife, Lois, three daughters, his grandchildren and great grandchildren. Funeral services were held with military honors by the Brandon Legion.



Elroy Wibstad

Elroy Wibstad was born May 31, 1932, in Brandon, MN, the son of Simon and Nora Wibstad. He attended school in Brandon.

Elroy served in the U.S. Army for three years during the Korean War. After his discharge, Elroy worked for Ray Strom, owned and operated a towing business, and worked for Pro Ag until he retired in 1995.

Elroy was a lifetime member of the Brandon American Legion and Alexandria VFW. He died July 31, 2018. He is survived by four sons, one daughter and his grandchildren and great grandchildren. Funeral services were held with military honors by the Brandon Legion.

The Center Piece

Military Uniforms



On October 29, 2017, at the Brandon Legion Bingo, the History Center displayed all of the donated military uniforms. There were twelve in all, representing the various branches of the U.S. military.

Thank You . . .

A huge thank you to the many folks and organizations that donated to the Brandon Auditorium kitchen remodeling and repair work on the gymnasium walls! Looks wonderful!

\$145 from the Brandon Class of 1967

\$100 in memory of students & faculty of
Brandon Class of 1957

\$40 in memory of Roger Hanson from
Margaret Hanson

\$400 from REA Operation Round-up for
purchase of archival storage items

\$100 from James and Dorothy Anderson
family

\$25 in memory of James Anderson by
Sandy and David Harris

\$185 in memory of Charles and Hulda
Rossum

Collection of pictures and newspaper clip-
pings from their great grandmother
by Mary and Mark Cariveau and Ann
and Nick Combs

A copy of *History of Brandon Township*
researched and written and donated
by Mike Cleary

Book entitled *Old German Families* from
John Nelson

1971 Douglas County Plat Book from
Pat Carroll

1942 confirmation picture from Grace
and East Moe Churches from
Karen Peterson.

Picture of Orvin Salto from Norma
Blankenship

Collection of photos and newspaper clip-
ping from Jean Johnson family

Collection of photos and newspaper clip-
pings from Terry Strom

George Drexler's scrapbook from Greg
Thoennes

Various Brandon historical items from
Dick Gulbranson, Cindy Haffner,
Lynn and Sharon Rossum, Lillian
Olson, Kay Larson, Odie Bitzan

Four file cabinets from Andrew Steidl and
Associates of Parkers Prairie

Other Tidbits . . .

On November 22, 2017, about 22 mem-
bers of Leadership Alexandria toured the
historic Brandon Auditorium with their
tour guide, Barb Grover, from the Douglas
County Historical Society.

The Center Piece

Other Tidbits (cont'd)

Mary and Mark Cariveau and Ann and Nick Combs visited the History Center on October 28, 2017, when they delivered their great grandmother's donated items. Mary and Ann are granddaughters of Irene L. Tamble Maslonskowski. They are cousins of Shirley Boeddeker Anderson.

It is good to see people from other communities visit and appreciate our History Center. The Center and the historic Auditorium showcase the Brandon and Millerville communities. Thank you to all who enjoy what we have to offer!

The 2017 annual meeting of the History Center was held on October 9, 2017, at

The 2017 annual meeting of the History Center was held on October 9, 2017, at which time Deb Shea was elected to the Board of Directors upon the retirement of Chris Korkowski. Thank you, Chris, for serving as our president for so many years. Chris will continue to volunteer at the Center. At the board meeting following the annual meeting, Ruth Plaster was elected as our new President.

Our 2018 annual meeting will be held this fall, so watch for details.