

Group transforms empty wall at Terryville library

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PLYMOUTH — An oven thermometer, a dress form, and a hot air balloon are some of the pictures that represent local history in a new mural next to the Terryville Public Library.

Lisa Ronalter said she, Jerry Milne and Susan Pinard came up with the idea to use the plain concrete wall in the library parking lot as a canvas for what is now known as “A Time in History.”

Ronalter is the founder of Art in Motion, a group of area residents who seek to beautify drab places around town.

“We came up with the idea of the mural that focuses on important pieces and places of history here, as a way to educate the next generation,” she said.

The mural is the basis for a kind of “I Spy” game, with a handout that children can use to check-off a list of things spotted in the painting and then read about what they mean, Ronalter explained.

The oven thermometer represents David Cooper, who invented it and founded the Cooper Oven Thermometer Co. in 1885 on Canal Street in Pequabuck. He is buried in Hillside Cemetery in Terryville.

The dress form is for Betsey Johnson, the fashion designer famous for her wild designs. She grew up on Bemis Street. “The invitation to one of her fashion shows featured Johnson’s own 1958 prom-night photo from Terryville High School,” according to the handout.

The hot air balloon is for Silas Brooks, who was born in Plymouth in 1824. He was hired by P.T. Barnum to create unusual musical instruments and then was called on to fill in for a balloonist who fell ill. Brooks then became a celebrated “aeronaut” who made balloon ascensions all over the country.

Among the many symbols are also a horseshoe, a pitcher of milk, and a train tunnel to represent Horseshoe Falls, Buttermilk Falls and the Pequabuck Tunnel, three historic and scenic spots in town.

A pile of cannonballs is for the monument in Baldwin Park to Dorence Atwater, Plymouth’s Civil War hero who documented the names of Union soldiers who died at Andersonville.

A cave entrance brings to mind the Tory Den, a refuge for Tory loyalists during the Revolutionary War. The cave later became a regular shelter for the eccentric 19th Century wanderer known as the Leatherman.

The images were painted by Ronalter and others, including her sons Brent, 13, and Easton, 11.



Mural

Susan Corica | Staff
Lisa Ronalter and son Brent, 13, stand next to the mural they helped create commemorating Plymouth history.

Brent said he went online to find a picture to copy for his painting of a knight, representing Ted Knight. Born Tadeusz Konopka, Knight grew up on Allen Street and went on to star in “The Mary Tyler Moore Show” on TV and the movie “Caddyshack.”

Others who helped create or fund the mural include Greg Ronalter, Cathy Milne, Samantha Harnish, Alexa Harnish, Quinn Harnish, Randy Olmstead, Alan Jacobs, Steve Shatas, Sarah Shatas, Fran Block, Hailey Tinney, the Main Street Community Foundation, United Way Day of Caring volunteers, the library’s Booktique volunteers and the town’s Beautification Committee.

The project took months to accomplish. During the hot summer days the paint would dry too quickly, making it hard to blend, and Brent would hold an umbrella over the young students as they painted to shield them from the sun, Ronalter said.

The mural was officially unveiled Oct. 8, as part of a day of events and tours celebrating local history.

“We’re actually still working on it,” Ronalter said. “We want to add some more detail to the pictures and some color to the background of it, so it will be an ongoing project.”

This is Art in Motion’s third project in town. Ronalter and friends had put up painted plywood panels over the door and windows of the Terryville Trust building, just down the street from the library.

The Terryville Trust was a landmark on Route 6 for decades, but had sat empty and deteriorating for some 20 years before being torn down earlier in July. It is represented in the mural by the date “1928,” for when it was first built.

Art in Motion’s first project in town was decorating vacant storefronts along Route 6 with artwork from local middle and elementary school students in 2015.

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