



U.S. General Services Administration

*Murals at Ariel Rios  
Federal Building  
1935 - 2006*



Post Office Department, Washington, DC  
Delano and Aldrich, Architects

*The works of art commissioned for the Post Office Department Building serve not only as artistic interpretations of history, but also as catalysts for dialogue about the nature of public art and an artist's freedom of expression. The artwork neither sanctions any specific event, nor censures any culture or heritage. Rather, these works of art offer an opportunity to juxtapose contemporary views of American history and expansionism with those prevalent in the 1930s, to question perceptions and stereotypes, and to explore the history and heritage of all Americans.*

# Murals at Ariel Rios Federal Building 1935 - 2006

THE GREAT DEPRESSION OF THE 1930s brought not only a deflation of incomes but also of hope. The "New Deal" programs of President Franklin D. Roosevelt offered federal relief, recovery and reform, and restored the confidence and optimism of the American people. As we approach the 75th anniversary of the "New Deal," we celebrate this unique period of federal patronage of architecture and the visual arts.

THE SECTION OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE, later the Section of Fine Arts, was administered by the U.S. Treasury Department from 1934-1943. The goals were "to secure suitable art of the best quality available" and "to bring about a more effective correlation of mural and sculpture decorations with the architecture of the buildings..." The Section awarded commissions through competitions, and paid artists a lump sum for their works of art for newly constructed federal buildings and post offices. The new Post Office Department was designed by the New York firm of Delano and Aldrich in 1931, and President Herbert Hoover laid the cornerstone on September 25, 1932. Bulletin Number 1 of the Section of Painting and Sculpture, March 1, 1935, announced the First National Project to embellish the building with "Romantic Subject Matter in History of Post" for an expenditure of \$95,128.

THE FINE ARTS COLLECTION OF THE GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (GSA) contains over 17,000 paintings, sculpture, graphics, and textiles originating from the 1850s. Located in federal buildings and public institutions across the country, these civic works of art are preserved as part of our cultural heritage and as a tribute to the important tradition of individual creative expression.

*Bulletin Number 1, March 1, 1935 and Bulletin Number 2, April 1, 1935, Section of Painting and Sculpture, Public Works Branch, Procurement Division, Treasury Department, Washington, DC*

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\*\*\*\*\* NATIONAL AND LOCAL PROJECTS NOW GOING FORWARD \*\*\*\*\*

**ARTISTS WILL SOON START WORK ON TWO NATIONAL AND LOCAL PROJECTS**

THE STAFF OF THE SECTION OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE HAS COMPLETED MANY PRELIMINARY ARRANGEMENTS NECESSARY TO BE CARRIED OUT BEFORE ANY PARTICULAR PAINTING OR SCULPTURE PROJECT CAN BE BEGUN. OBVIOUSLY, BEFORE PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS CAN BE ASSIGNED TO A DEFINITE JOB, THE PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS OF THE JOB MUST BE DETERMINED. DIMENSIONS OF WALL SPACES, POSSIBLE POSITIONS OF SCULPTURES, THE MATERIAL IN WHICH THE WORK IS TO BE DONE, ALL OF THESE POINTS HAVE TO BE CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD AND DECIDED BEFORE THE BEST METHOD FOR SELECTING THE RIGHT ARTIST TO DO THE WORK CAN BE SEEN. THE STAFF OF THE SECTION HAS BEEN AT WORK IN THE SECTION'S OFFICE IN THE FEDERAL WAREHOUSE IN WASHINGTON MASTERING THESE PRELIMINARY DETAILS. IN AS MANY BUILDINGS AS TIME HAS PERMITTED, NINE OR FOURTEEN, ELIGIBLE WALL SPACES HAVE BEEN MEASURED AND THE PLACING AND SCALE OF THE SCULPTURE DECIDED UPON.

**PAINTING AND SCULPTURE FOR THE WASHINGTON P.O.**

UNDER A PLAN ANNOUNCED BY SECRETARY MORGENTHAU ON JANUARY 17 WITH THE APPROVAL OF PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT, 26 PAINTERS AND SCULPTORS WILL BE EMPLOYED BY THE TREASURY DEPARTMENT TO EMBELLISH THE NEW POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT BUILDING IN WASHINGTON. THE PLAN CALLS FOR AN EXPENDITURE OF \$95,128.00. IT IS THE FIRST NATIONAL PROJECT TO BE DEVELOPED BY THE SECTION OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE.

THE GENERAL SUBJECT MATTER TO BE INTERPRETED BY THE ARTISTS WORKING IN THE POST OFFICE BUILDING WILL BE THE HISTORY OF THE POST. IN THIS CASE, AS IN ALL OTHERS, THE SECTION EXPECTS THE ARTISTS TO TAKE A BROAD VIEW OF ANY ANNOUNCED SUBJECT MATTER SINCE IT CONSIDERS THAT A VITAL AND DISTINGUISHED DESIGN IS MUCH MORE IMPORTANT THAN QUIBBLING OVER DETAILS. AFTER THE ARTISTS HAVE RECEIVED THEIR APPOINTMENTS, THEY WILL BE GIVEN THREE MONTHS IN WHICH TO SUBMIT SKETCHES DONE ON A QUARTER SCALE.

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\*\*\*\*\* NATIONAL AND LOCAL PROJECTS NOW GOING FORWARD \*\*\*\*\*

**ROMANTIC SUBJECT MATTER IN HISTORY OF POST**

THE STORY OF THE POST IS HIGHLY ROMANTIC AND, OF COURSE, A VERY IMPORTANT PART OF AMERICAN HISTORY. BEGINNING WITH THE DAYS WHEN THE COLONISTS FIRST RECEIVED THEIR MAIL IN A "REPUTABLE TAVERN" AND GOING DOWN TO THE DAYS OF STEAMSHIPS, AIRPLANES AND ZEPPEL TRAINING, THERE IS AN ENORMOUS AMOUNT OF DRAMATIC MATERIAL. MANY FIGURES, EMINENT IN THE HISTORY OF OUR COUNTRY, HAVE PLAYED AN IMPORTANT PART IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE POSTAL SERVICE. ANDREW HAMILTON, BILLIONAIRE, BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, ABRAHAM LINCOLN WHO CARRIED THE POST OFFICE IN HIS HAT AND SAMUEL OSGOOD, FIRST POSTMASTER GENERAL UNDER THE UNITED STATES POST OFFICE.

**COMMITTEE TO BE APPOINTED**

AN ADVISORY COMMITTEE, COMPOSED OF ARTISTS, ARCHITECTS, MUSEUM DIRECTORS AND OTHER EXPERTS, WILL ASSIST THE SECTION IN SELECTING THE ARTISTS FOR THE POST OFFICE BUILDING IN WASHINGTON, D.C., AND THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE BUILDING. IT HAS BEEN THOUGHT ADVISABLE NOT TO GIVE OUT THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES ACTING UPON NATIONAL PROJECTS UNTIL AFTER THE MEMBERS HAVE REACHED THEIR DECISIONS. THIS METHOD, WE BELIEVE, WILL ASSURE IMPARTIALITY.

THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ARE INDIVIDUALS OF A WIDE KNOWLEDGE OF THE ARTS AND REPRESENT THE BROADEST POSSIBLE TASTE.

IT IS THE AIM OF THE SECTION TO SECURE THE BEST CONTEMPORARY ART FOR THESE TWO BUILDINGS, AND THE SELECTIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE WILL BE BASED UPON THE OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ARTISTS OF THIS COUNTRY.

**WHAT HAS BEEN DONE FOR MAIN SUBJECT OF JUSTICE BUILDING MURALS**

\$75,000 HAS BEEN ALLOCATED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE BUILDING FOR MURALS. AS SEVERAL PEOPLES HAS ALREADY POINTED OUT, THE SECTION DOES

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\*\*\*\*\* NATIONAL AND LOCAL PROJECTS NOW GOING FORWARD \*\*\*\*\*

**THE NEWEST METHODS**

TRAINING  
STEAMSHIP AND AIRPLANE.  
SPECIAL DELIVERY ON BICYCLE AND MOTORCYCLE.  
PARCEL POST BY TRUCK.  
TUGS AND ROBOBATS TRANSFERRING MAIL FROM LARGE STEAMERS.

**AMERICAN HISTORICAL EPISODES**

COLONISTS GET SHIP MAIL FROM ENGLAND IN REPUTABLE TAVERN.  
LOVELAKE'S POST BETWEEN NEW YORK AND BOSTON.  
MCALE UNDER WILLIAM AND MARY GETS MONOPOLY.  
ANDREW HAMILTON GETS POSTAL ACTS PASSED IN COLONIAL ASSEMBLIES.  
WILLIAM PENN HAS THE SYSTEM.  
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN IN POST OFFICE LINDCOLN WHO CARRIED THE POST OFFICE IN HIS HAT.  
ANDREW HAMILTON GETS POSTAL ACTS PASSED IN COLONIAL ASSEMBLIES.  
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BENJAMIN FRANKLIN IN POST OFFICE LINDCOLN WHO CARRIED THE POST OFFICE IN HIS HAT.

**1800 - 1850 METHODS**

COACH SERVICE.  
MAIL RIGGERS.  
SAIL BOATS.  
STEAM SHIP (1812).  
ERIE CANAL (1825).  
STEAM RAILWAY (1825).  
CANAL LINE TAKES OVER THE ENGLISH PACKET SYSTEM (1830).  
COVERED WAGONS WITH INDIANS ATTACKING AND BRIGANDS.  
PONY EXPRESS.

**DELIVERY SERVICES**

SMALL OUTPOST CABIN STATION.  
GENERAL STORE.  
BLACKSMITH SHOP.

**THE COLONIES**

Puerto Rico, Guam.  
Honduras, Somal.  
Alaska (Don or Reindeer sled).  
Philippine Islands.  
Panama Canal.  
Virgin Islands, etc.

**THE WORK IN THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT BUILDING, WHICH IS LIMITED TO MURALS, WILL PROBABLY BE BASED ON LESS REALISTIC DATA THAN IS OFFERED BY THE HISTORY OF THE POST. JUSTICE, THE LAW, DEVELOPMENT OF OUR LEGAL PROCEDURE - ALTHOUGH MANY OF THEIR IMPLICATIONS ARE DEEPLY AND EMOTIONALLY REALISTIC - SUGGEST A BROADER INTERPRETATIVE TREATMENT.**

MUCH STUDY HAS BEEN DEVOTED ALREADY TO A TENTATIVE OUTLINE OF THEMES FOR THE MURAL PAINTINGS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE BUILDING. THE RESULTS OF THESE STUDIES ARE GIVEN HEREIN FOR WHATEVER HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS THEY MAY HAVE, BOTH FOR THE ARTISTS WHO WILL COMPLETE FOR THE UN-ALLOTTED MURALS IN THIS PARTICULAR BUILDING AND FOR THE ARTISTS WHO ARE AMBITIOUS TO TRY THEIR HANDS IN COME-



## *Letter From Home and The Family Letter* Alexander Brook, 1939



*Maverick Art Colony, Woodstock, NY, 1930. Alexander Brook on right with artists Peggy Bacon, Isabella Howland, Armando Zegril, and Bertie Shelvin. Courtesy State University of New York at New Paltz*

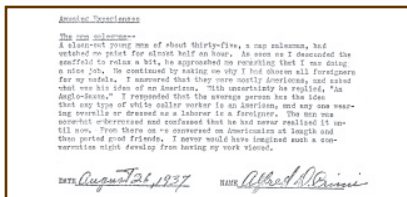
Alexander Brook wrote of his commission for the murals, "I prefer painting figures in space rather than action; simple interiors, and landscapes not over crowded. After some consideration I decided to take as my theme 'The family letter – read away from home.'"

Alexander Brook (1898 – 1980) was born in Brooklyn, New York, and studied at the Art Students League. A deep respect for human personality characterizes much of his work, often with overtones of wry humor or irony. He was hailed by *Life* magazine in 1940 as "one of America's best painters." Today his works are in such prestigious museums as the Toledo Museum of Art, the University of Nebraska, and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City.

### *Preliminary sketches*



# Post Office Work Room and Transportation of Mail Alfredo deGiorgio Crimi, 1937



The story of The Map Salesman. Alfredo Crimi, third from left, and other Public Works of Art Project artists in Key West, Florida, ca. 1935

In the words of the artist, the murals illustrate “A typical suburban railway depot where the produce of a community is gathered for shipping through various means of transportation, such as express truck, parcel post, etc. Human interest and the influence mail has on the development of industry are portrayed by the mailman receiving a letter from a child, and the messenger boy on a bicycle ready to be on his way again. Names of street signs such as Export Place and Rail Street were suggested by the panel itself and are indicative of how streets, places and communities sometimes acquire their names.”

Alfredo de Giorgio Crimi (1900 – 1994) was born in Italy and came to America when he was 10 years old. He studied at the National Academy of Design and the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design in New York City, and at Scuola Preparatoria all Arti Ornamentali in Rome. He taught at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, City College of New York, and Pennsylvania State University. Today his work is in such noted museums as the Museum of Modern Art and the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, and the Art Institute of Chicago.





## *Arrival of Mail in New Amsterdam and French Huguenots in Florida* Karl Free, 1938



Artist Karl Free with completed *French Huguenots in Florida*

These two historic scenes represent the role of communication in the colonization of America. The first shows Peter Stuyvesant receiving post and trade from the from Holland. Peter Stuyvesant was the Dutch Director-General of the colony of New Amsterdam from 1647 until it was ceded to the English in 1664. The second mural illustrates the return of Rene Laudonnière and 304 French Huguenots to the original landing spot of the French, known as *Ribault's Pillar*, at the St. John's River near modern day Jacksonville, Florida. The mural references a 16th century drawing by Jacques Le Moyne de Morgues (c.1533 – 1588), an artist who accompanied the expedition.

Karl Free (1903 – 1947), artist and educator, was born in Davenport, Iowa, and studied at the Art Students League in New York City. He worked as Associate Curator of Graphic Arts at the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City. Today, his work is in such noted institutions as the Museum of Modern Art in New York City and the Davenport Municipal Art Gallery.

*Engraving based on Le Moyne's drawings depicting Athore, son of the Timucuan chief Satouriona, showing Rene Laudonnière a monument placed by Jean Ribault. Courtesy Florida Center for Instructional Technology*



## *Ben Franklin, Colonial Postmaster and Post Dispatch Rider, 1776* George Harding, 1938



Courtesy Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

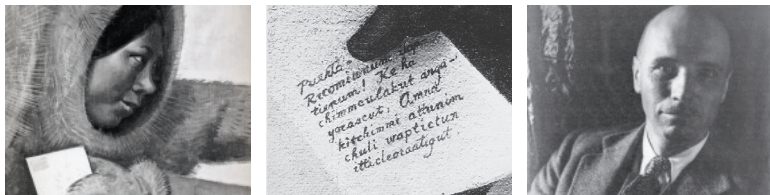
Benjamin Franklin was the printer of the Indian Treaties, the Colonial Laws, the original charters of the City of Philadelphia, and the publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. He was appointed Postmaster General from 1775 – 1776. Post riders on their weekly trips north and south delivered their collected post to his printing shop. He is represented in the mural signing the Post Receipt Book.

George Matthew Harding (1883 – 1959) studied architecture and art at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. He traveled worldwide as an illustrator and writer for the *Saturday Evening Post* and *Harpers* magazines, and was the official artist for the American Expeditionary Force during World War I. He headed the Department of Illustration and later Mural Decoration at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and also taught at the School of Architecture, University of Pennsylvania. His New Deal murals include the U.S. Post Office in North Philadelphia; the Montgomery County Courthouse in Norristown, New Jersey; and the J.J. Audubon Shrine in Mill Grove, Pennsylvania.





## *Mail Service in the Tropics and Mail Service in the Arctic* Rockwell Kent, 1937



Photograph of Artist (right). Courtesy Library of Congress

The murals show the advent of mail delivery from Alaska to Puerto Rico, and caused a controversy when a reporter deciphered the Eskimo dialect on the envelope in the *Tropics* mural. The artist translated the message in a letter to *New York Times* on September 17, 1937, "To the people of Puerto Rico, our friends! Go ahead, let us change Chiefs. That alone can make us equal and free." He explained his statement as "stirring and beautiful a message as can be sent from anywhere at any time in history from one people to another. That is the American message of good will to a people in its aspirations for freedom." Six months earlier, in the "Ponce Massacre," Puerto Rican police killed 20 people and wounded 100 when a Nationalist Party parade for independence was stopped. The statement was viewed as supporting Puerto Rico's independence from the United States.

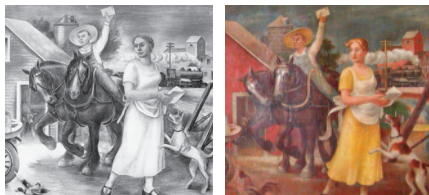
Rockwell Kent (1882-1971), artist, author, and political activist was born in Tarrytown, New York. He traveled worldwide painting vigorous, exotic landscapes, and his art is notable for its stark, powerful style. Today his works are in major museums including the Metropolitan Museum in New York City, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Art Institute of Chicago.

Sketch for mural (Note grid lines in the background)





## *General Store and Post Office and Country Post* Doris Lee, 1938



*Details of sketch and final mural*

The murals represent the importance of mail delivery and the post in rural America. Executed in a simple style, the scenes illustrate the role of the mail as a central part of the community. Rural ingenuity is represented by the mail boxes at the crossroads nailed to a wagon wheel mounted on a post.

Doris Emrick Lee (1905–1983) was an American Regionalist painter in a style that combined realism with modernism. She settled in Woodstock, New York, having followed her teacher and husband, Arnold Blanch. During the 1940s, her work became more flat and simple in appearance, reflecting the emerging abstract movement. Today, her works are in the collections of such prestigious museums as the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City and the Art Institute of Chicago.

*Artist in studio. Courtesy Doris Lee Papers, Special Collections, Library and Research Center, National Museum of Women in the Arts*



## *Consolidation of the West and Opening of the Southwest* Ward Lockwood, 1937



*Ward Lockwood and assistant working in fresco technique*

The murals depict the westward advance of communication and settlement. They provide panoramas from the Native Americans represented by the Hopi Indian Snake Dancer, to the Spanish Conquistadors, buffalo hunters, and trappers in the left mural, and to the early settlers and “Peace with the Indians” in the right mural.

Ward Lockwood (1894 – 1963) studied at the University of Kansas, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and the Academie Ranson in Paris. He moved to Taos, New Mexico, in the 1920s and became a member of the Taos Society of Artists. He founded the University of Texas Art Department in the late 1930s, and developed the lithography program at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center. He taught at the University of California-Berkeley, the University of Kansas, and the University of Washington. His style matured from academic realism to cubism.

*Preliminary sketch*





## *Sorting the Mail and Unloading the Mail* Reginald Marsh, 1936



*Watercolor Sketch*

Inspired by the railway mail service located under Penn Station in New York City, the murals capture the frenzied pace and movement of organizing the mail. The artist interviewed postal workers and spent hours sketching and photographing them while they unloaded and transferred mail cargo. The murals capture the rush, tempo, and mass of modern life.

Reginald Marsh (1898 – 1954), son of mural painter Frederic Dana Marsh, began his career as an illustrator for the *New York Daily News* and *The New Yorker*. During World War II, Marsh served as an Artist War Correspondent for *Life* magazine. Today, his works can be found in prominent institutions including the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art in New York City, the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

*Reginald Marsh working in fresco technique*



## *Pony Express and Dangers of the Mail* Frank Albert Mechau, Jr., 1937

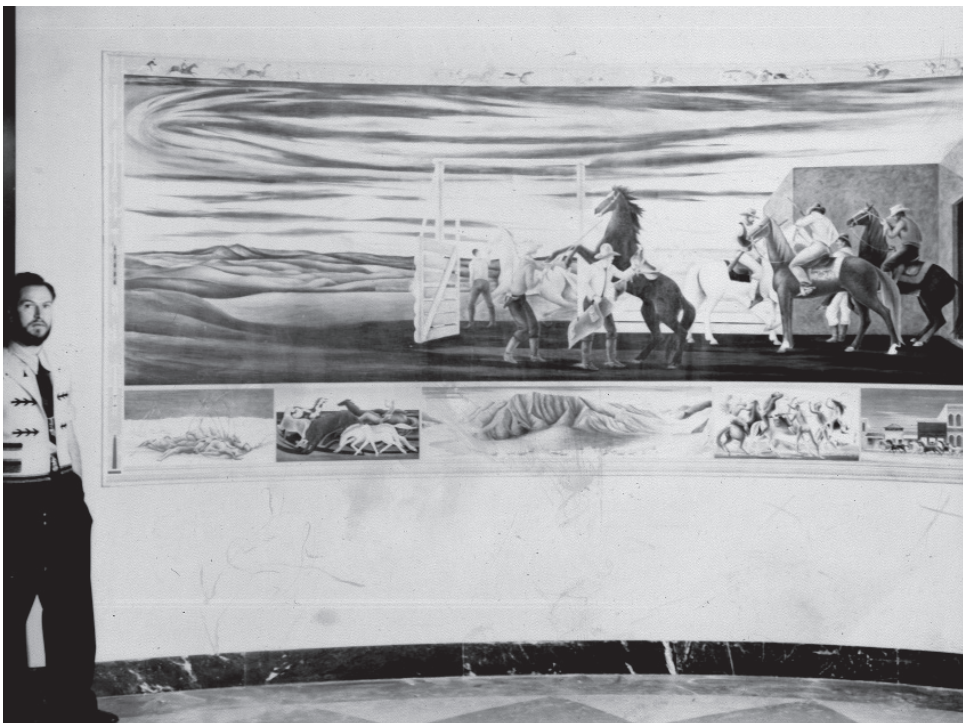


*Frank and Paula Mechau, 1934 (left) and Frank Mechau in studio (right)*

The Pony Express was a private commercial venture from April 1860 until October 1861. With hopes of lucrative federal contracts, financiers sought young, male riders to transport mail from Missouri to California. Riders traveled between 75 to 100 miles in one stretch, frequently changing horses along the way. The companion scene of the dangers of mail delivery is an artistic depiction of shapes and contours. As the artist explained, “No artist cared or wished to be considered an archaeologist or ethnologist. My intention was to create an imaginative reconstruction of a massacre into a pattern of forms simplified, and arranged and intensified into plastic inevitability.” The small predella paintings at the murals’ lower edge offer scenes of the historic West.

Frank Albert Mechau, Jr. (1903–1946) studied at Denver University and the Art Institute of Chicago. Raised in Colorado, he was influenced by the culture and history of the Western Slope and was the first Colorado artist to be awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1934. His work was acclaimed for its semi-abstract style, its use of perspective, and its sense of mystery. Today, his work is in major collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art in New York City.

*Artist Frank Mechau with completed Pony Express*





## *Mail Coach Attacked by Bandits and Covered Wagon Attacked by Indians* William C. Palmer, 1937



*Preliminary Sketch (left) and William Palmer at Morrow Point Dam (right). Courtesy Bureau of Reclamation, Department of Interior*

Artists were given subjects from the history of the U.S. Postal Service. One of these from the period “1800 – 1850s Methods” was *Covered Wagons with Indians Attacking and Brigands*, which is illustrated here. In 1857, the Postmaster General contracted with private stagecoach companies for mail service in the western territories. Stagecoach lines transported the mail, gold shipments, bank transfers, and cash in registered mail sacks. They were frequently ambushed and robbed. In 1881 alone there were 86 stagecoach hold-ups in the United States. Jewelry and other valuables were often taken from passengers at gunpoint.

William Palmer (1906 – 1987) was born in Des Moines, Iowa. He studied at the Art Student’s League in New York City and at the Ecole des Beaux Art de Fontainebleau in France. He also created New Deal murals for U.S. post offices in Boston and in Monticello, Iowa, and for the Queens General Hospital in New York. From 1941 to 1974, Palmer served as the director of the Munson-Williams-Proctor Arts Institute in Utica, New York.

*The Deadwood Coach, 1889 © Grabill. Courtesy National Postal Museum*



*Messenger of Sympathy and Love; Servant of Parted Friends; Consoler of the Lonely; Bond of the Scattered Family; Enlarger of the Common Life and Carrier of News and Knowledge; Instrument of Trade and Industry; Promoter of Mutual Acquaintance; Of Peace and Goodwill Among Men and Nations*  
 Eugene Francis Savage, 1937

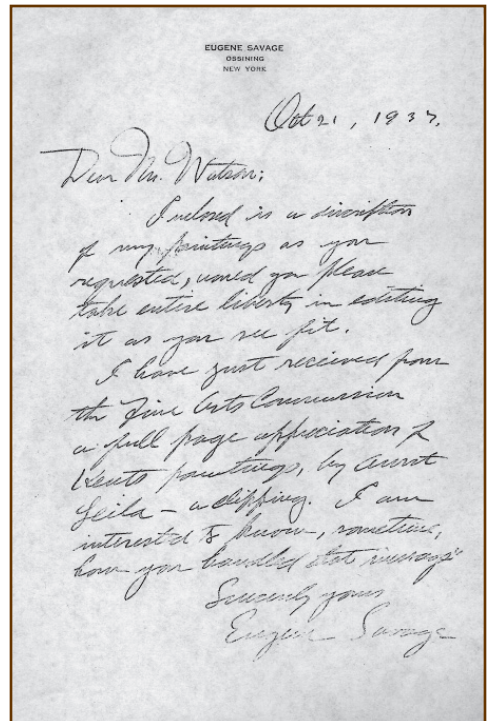


Sketch for mural (Note grid lines in the background)

The titles of the murals repeat the inscriptions that adorn the former Washington, DC City Post Office, now the Smithsonian Institution's National Postal Museum. Entitled *The Letter*, they were written by Dr. Charles W. Eliot, educator and President of Harvard University from 1869 – 1909. The artist shows the relation of the mail to people in all circumstances, grave, happy, tragic. Wherever we go, whatever we do, whatever happens to us, the written message brings word from afar changing or confirming our thoughts.

Eugene Francis Savage (1883 – 1978) studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Corcoran School of Art in Washington, DC, and the American Academy in Rome, Italy. He taught at Yale University and served on the National Commission of Fine Arts. His work is in many notable museums, including the Art Institute of Chicago, the Los Angeles Museum of Art, and the Smithsonian American Art Museum. His murals embellish Yale University and Columbia University.

Self Portrait, 1924. Courtesy National Academy Museum, New York







*Courtesy of Franklin Roosevelt Library*

*FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT, THIRTY-SECOND PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES FROM 1933-1945, assumed the Presidency at the depth of the Great Depression. He brought hope as he promised prompt, vigorous action, and asserted in his Inaugural Address, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself."*



**U.S. General Services Administration**  
Public Buildings Service  
Office of the Chief Architect  
Design Excellence and the Arts