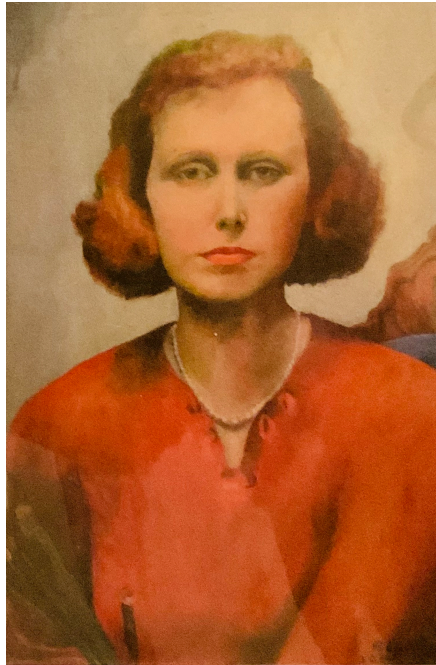


Ann Curtiss Scoville (1919-2024)

The Soul of an Artist



Self- Portrait - Ann Scoville, 1940s

“Ann Curtiss was one of the most interesting and gifted female artists of the last century - but not many people got to see her art! Just imagine that tiny woman bending metal and fire to her will [to create such] exciting sculptures.”

- Elizabeth ‘Betsy’ Childs Gill
member, *The Norfolk Country Club*

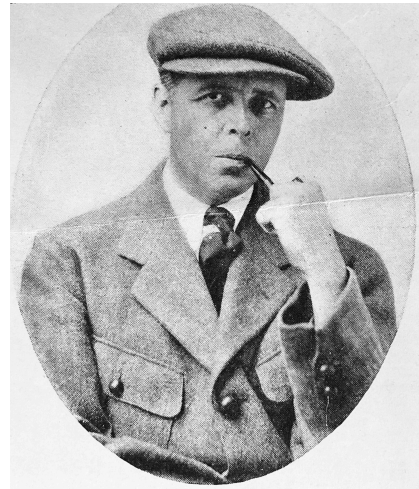
On August 5, 1850, Herman Melville met Nathaniel Hawthorne for the first time hiking up Monument Mountain in Stockbridge, MA in anticipation of a champagne picnic with other literary luminaries of the time. Just as the party of ten women and men were laying out their blankets and provisions at the top of the mountain, a summer thunderstorm rumbled in. Melville (age 31) and Hawthorne (age 46) took shelter under a ledge where they had the opportunity to converse at length. Thus began an intense literary friendship that deeply effected Melville intellectually and emotionally. After that first meeting on Monument Mountain, Melville rhapsodized: *“Hawthorne has dropped germinous seeds into my soul”*.

Ephemeral as the seeds of creativity may be, papery samara fluttering aimlessly, they may germinate in receptive, sensitive souls almost anywhere: in the sophisticated canyons of large, crowded cities, in the working class neighborhoods of Liverpool, England - or on a family farm in the foothills of the Berkshires in rural northwestern Connecticut - not far from Monument Mountain.

Ann Curtiss was born in Norfolk, CT on July 16, 1919, the second daughter of English actress, **Maude Ida Frederica Knust** and author, **Philip Everett Curtiss** (profiled for the NCC last summer on this platform).



Maude Ida Knust Curtiss (1892-1965)



Philip Everett Curtiss (1885-1964)

Ann and her sister Joan were homeschooled (at '*Curtiss College*') because Philip Curtiss firmly believed that his daughters could learn all they needed to know from reading books, particularly The Classics. Ann began drawing at an early age and showed such promise as an artist that her parents set up a studio for her in an upstairs bedroom of their ancestral home, the 1794 **Solomon Curtiss House** on Mountain Road in Norfolk.

By age 14, Ann was taking art lessons from her father's friend, noted artist and prominent New York art critic, **Guy Pène du Bois** who was painting and giving lessons in 'old man Buckley's barn' on Roughland Road in Norfolk which had been converted into an art studio. A formidable presence in New York's heady art world of the 1920s and 30s, du Bois socialized with and wrote professionally about all the important artists of the era and was best man at **Edward Hopper's** wedding in 1924. Having studied at age 15 with American Impressionist, **William Merritt Chase**, du Bois was sympathetic to modern impulses in art, but was an enduring champion of *Realism*. He was profoundly influenced by realist painter, **Robert Henri**, founder of **The Ashcan School** and leader of '*The Eight*', a rebellious group of artists who painted realistic, gritty scenes of the underbelly of New York City. Du Bois always adhered to Henri's artistic credo: *art for life's sake*.



Guy Pène du Bois (1884-1958) Stands in Front of His Painting, *The Battery* - 1936

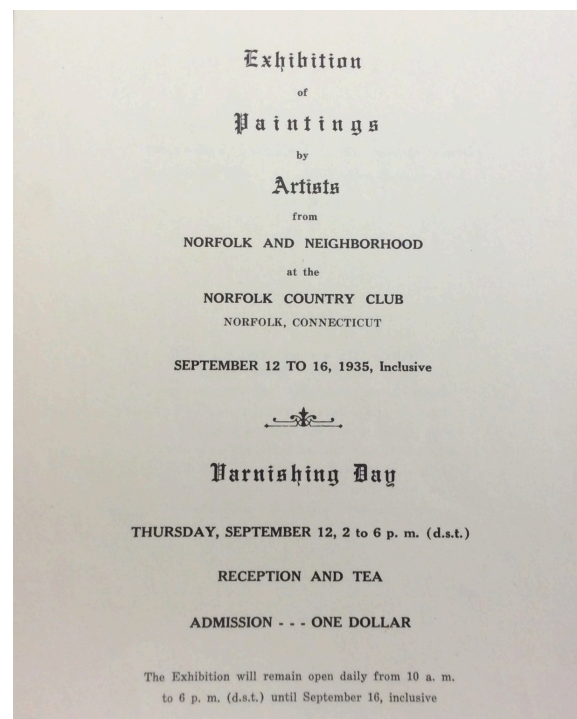
Du Bois' paintings bristle with incisive observations of upper class society between the two world wars. His subjects seem physically and psychologically isolated from one another and have eerie, doll-like faces bordering on the grotesque. Awash with electric colors, his stylized paintings burlesque the superficial glitter and emptiness of the fashionable world of his day.



***Supper Club* - Guy Pène du Bois - 1925**

In 1935, Norfolk's fledgling art colony was flourishing. Art patron, **Dr. Edward Quintard**, Mark Twain's personal physician, maintained an art studio and exhibition space in a red barn on his property **Knolly Brook** on Greenwoods Road (now owned by NCC members, **Emily Bode** and **Aaron Aujla**) - where well-known artists such as **Ernest Lawson**, (one of the '*The Eight*'), were able to paint, teach and sustain themselves during the financial challenges of The Great Depression.

Norfolk's short-lived art colony culminated on Thursday, September 12, 1935 when an ambitious art exhibit at the *Norfolk Country Club* debuted with a reception and tea called '**Varnishing Day**'. A major undertaking, the 5-day exhibit featured 90 paintings by 41 artists, professional and amateur. Notable painters represented were **Childe Hassam**, **Ellen Emmet Rand**, **Ezra Winter**, **Rex Brasher**, **Ernest Lawson**, etc. - and of course, **Guy Pène du Bois**, who headed the art committee and exhibited five of his own paintings in the comprehensive, historic show.



Cover of *Varnishing Day* Program - Norfolk Country Club, September 12, 1935

Coincidentally, famed golf course architect, **A.W. Tillinghast**, who is credited with designing the Norfolk Country Club's 1928 golf course, was in Norfolk on September 12, 1935 inspecting the NCC course for the **PGA**. While there, Tillinghast drew up a plan for combining the NCC course with the adjoining **Norfolk Downs** (1897) which was never realized. There is no documentation that Tilly was a guest on Varnishing Day but it's hard to fathom that he didn't get caught up in the excitement and enthusiasm of the compelling art show that opened in the NCC Clubhouse on the same day as his visit.

Included in the NCC art show were two paintings by Guy Pène du Bois' prized art student, 16-year old **Ann Curtiss**. One of her paintings was called **Indian Girl** - the other was a portrait of her grandfather, Everett Philip Curtiss, shown below. As did her mentor du Bois, Ann Curtiss favored a dark palette early on in her paintings.



Portrait of My Grandfather - Ann Curtiss, age 16 - 1935

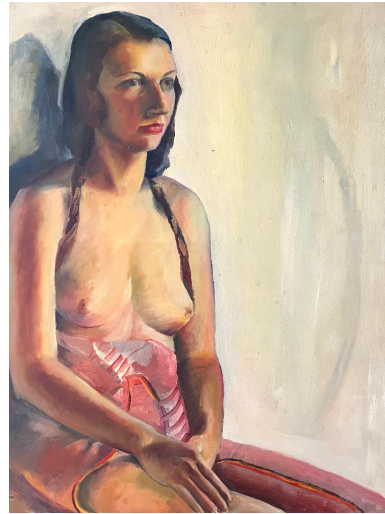
Because Ann Curtiss gained a reputation in Norfolk as a precocious artist, several of her parents' friends asked her to paint portraits of their children. Some of these portraits may still be seen today in households around Norfolk, such as the vivid one below that Curtiss painted when she was 15.



Young Polish Girl - Ann Curtiss, c. 1934

(photograph courtesy of **John Allyn** whose mother, **Mildred Matula** sits for her portrait, age 10)

Indicative of how evolved and serious Ann Curtiss was as a young artist are the two strikingly bold portraits (below) from the 1930s. The portrait on the right may well be **Indian Girl** which was shown at the NCC Varnishing Day exhibit in 1935.



Portraits of Two Unknown Models - Ann Curtiss - Norfolk, CT - 1935

A Teenage Bride

Homeschooling seems to have agreed with Ann Curtiss. In addition to becoming an accomplished artist, she was preternaturally mature, perhaps due to being exposed to her parent's many cosmopolitan, artistic friends (such as writers, **Sinclair Lewis, Booth Tarkington, Julian Street**, etc.), who were often guests at their 1794 homestead on Mountain Road.

Attractive and self-assured, Ann had several suitors from nearby prep schools such as Hotchkiss, and was invited to many dances, football games and social events. At a dinner party when she was 15, Ann met a Yale student by the name of **Herbert Scoville, Jr.** Smitten by the young, pretty artist from Norfolk, Scoville, known as '**Pete**', immediately set his cap for her. Soon after Ann turned 16, Pete asked her to marry him. Ann's parents may have been dubious, but after months of love-letter writing and romantic weekends in New Haven, Norfolk or the Scoville estate in Salisbury, Ann Curtiss, at the age of 17, married Herbert Scoville, Jr. June 27, 1937 at the Church on the Green in Norfolk - a few weeks after Pete graduated from Yale.



Ann Curtiss, c. 1935 - Not Long Before Her Wedding

The Scovilles of Salisbury

The Scoville name (which derives from *Escoville*, a village in Normandy, France) has long been prominent in the town of Salisbury, CT. Not to be confused with the brass manufacturing Scovill (note the different spelling) family of Waterbury, CT, the Salisbury Scovilles were major factors in the iron ore industry that flourished in the 19th century in Northwest Connecticut. **Samuel Church Scoville** started mining iron ore he discovered on his farm in Salisbury in the early 1800s. Two of his sons, Jonathan and Nathaniel, were involved in the iron ore business in South Canaan, CT before moving to Buffalo, NY in 1860. They built a foundry (they also built one in Toronto, Canada) and made their fortunes manufacturing railroad car wheels made from high grade limonite iron ore forged in blast furnaces in and around Salisbury, CT. Jonathan Scoville became mayor of Buffalo in 1884.

Jonathan and Nathaniel Church Scoville Railroad Wheel Advertisement, c. 1870

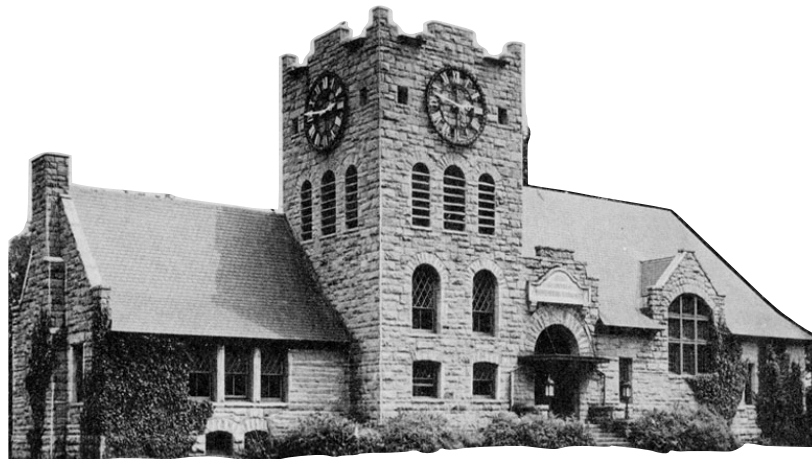
**J. & N. C. SCOVILLE'S
CAR-WHEEL WORKS,**
LOCATED ON
Hamburg Street Canal, cor. Louisiana Street,
BUFFALO, N. Y.

The Iron used in making these Wheels is manufactured by ourselves from the
CELEBRATED SALISBURY ORES,
And made with great care and expressly designed for
CAR WHEELS.

This Iron has a world wide reputation for great strength and peculiar adaptation to this kind of work.

Nathaniel Church Scoville married Frances Wasson in 1872 when he was 40 and she was 19. After Nathaniel died in 1890 at the age of 58, Frances (who lived another 54 years until she died in 1944 at age 91) moved with her five children (including **Herbert Scoville, Sr.**) from Buffalo to New York City. In 1894, Frances built a large stone house on a dairy farm on Beaver Dam Road in Taconic close by her Scoville relatives. The stone house burned down in 1914 as did its replacement in 1924. On the same site in 1927, Herbert Scoville, Sr. and his wife **Orlena** built an imposing French Norman manor house they called **Hill House** which evolved into a mainstay for the extended Scoville family.

The **Scoville Memorial Library**, established in 1803, was the first library in the United States open to the public free of charge. In the 1890s, Jonathan Scoville left \$12,000 in his will (which was supplemented by donations from other Scoville family members) for a new library building. Constructed with marble quarried near Lion's Head Road in Salisbury, the dignified gray building opened in 1894 and features, over the fireplace in the reading room, a 15th century stone carving from Salisbury Cathedral in England. The massive clock tower which chimes on the quarter hour with notes from Wagner's *Parsifal*, was donated by another family member, Grace Scoville.



Stone, Carpenter & Willson, architects - 1894

Herbert Scoville, Sr., a partner in the New York law firm Dwight & Scoville, married a Brooklyn banker's daughter and Smith College graduate, **Orlena** ('Teedles') **Zabriskie** in 1908. In 1936, while residing at 137 East 68th St. in Manhattan, they bought a run-down 1480 palace in Portugal called **Palácio e Quinta da Bacalhôa** that was the centerpiece of a neglected, ancient vineyard. Only a year later, Herbert, Sr. died suddenly at age 58 (the same age his father had

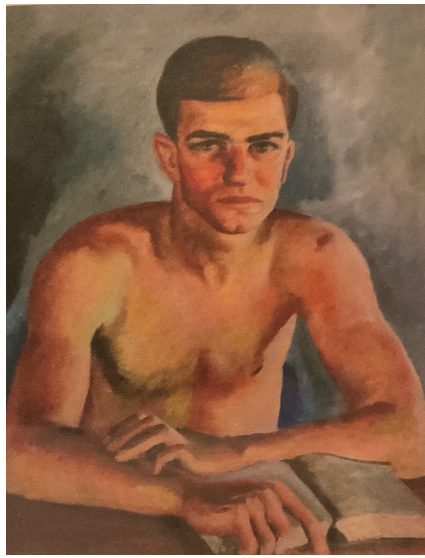
died) just 3 months before Herbert, Jr. (Pete), a senior year at Yale, was to be married to Ann Curtiss. Determined to carry on, Orlena made refurbishing and reviving the magnificent palace which is decorated with priceless, antique Portuguese tiles, her life's work. Orlena's grandson, **Thomas Scoville** (Ann and Pete's son) turned Bacalhôa into the largest, most successful wine producer in Portugal. Palácio e Quinta da Bacalhôa is now a Portuguese national monument.



Palácio e Quinta da Bacalhôa, Azeitão, Portugal - 1480, CE

Honeymoon in England

Shortly after their wedding, Ann and Pete moved to the UK, where Pete enrolled at the **University of Cambridge** (founded in 1209) to study for his PhD in physical chemistry. For two years the young marrieds embraced being expats (though Ann expressed frustration at not being able to find a good art teacher), blissfully enjoying an extended honeymoon. But after Britain entered World War II in September, 1939, they were forced to return to the United States before Pete could finish his PhD at Cambridge.

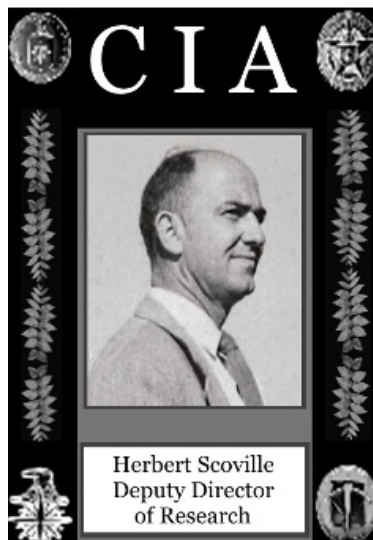


Portrait of Herbert ('Pete') Scoville, Jr. - Ann Scoville, 1939

Repatriation

The young couple moved to Rochester, NY where Pete completed his PhD at the **University of Rochester**. Their first son, Anthony, was born in 1940. Ann continued to paint and somehow, while also nurturing her toddler, had the gumption to take flying lessons and became a flight instructor training young pilots who were going off to fight in World War II.

After Pete received his Doctorate in 1942, he joined the National Research Defense Committee where he worked on mitigating the effects of poison gas in chemical warfare. After the war, he was named technical director of the Defense Department's Armed Forces Special Weapons Project and was on-site for 23 nuclear tests in the Pacific Ocean. From 1955 to 1963 he was deputy director of research and technology for the Central Intelligence Agency.



Herbert Scoville, Jr. (1915-1985) - c. 1960

Having been involved in the development of nuclear weapons, Dr. Scoville witnessed firsthand the fearsome, terrible power of nuclear weapons and became convinced that humanity was on a path to self-annihilation if nuclear weapons continued to proliferate. Scoville dedicated the latter part of his life to sounding the alarm. He was a familiar figure on Capitol Hill lobbying lawmakers to stop the madness, travelled the world lecturing at symposiums on disarmament and wrote books, including ***Missile Madness*** (1970) proselytizing for nuclear restraint. He was assistant director for science and technology in the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, helped found The Arms Control Association and led the Arms Control Project for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. As early as 1954 Scoville argued for a Soviet/U.S. Test Ban Treaty. In 1987, **The Herbert Scoville, Jr. Peace Fellowship** was founded in his honor for the express purpose of promoting cooperation and peace among nations.



Washington, D.C. and the Virginia Suburbs

“Creation is a hard Master - it does not settle for the pat, the obvious solution. And it grants life only to those thoughts which meet its challenge to push into uncharted territory and to find unsuspected ideas - it demands something for its money.” - Ann Scoville

By the time Ann was 30, the Scovilles had four children and were raising their family in McClean, Va, a suburban haven for politicians and government officials across the Potomac River from Capitol Hill in Washington.

Devoted as Ann was to her children, she maintained her strong artistic work ethic, continuing to create in most every medium: oils, watercolors, pastels, pen and ink, gouache, charcoal and chalk while taking art lessons at American University. A great admirer of **Tintoretto** and **El Greco**, the young mother was especially drawn to **Picasso**. As part of a group show at the Corcoran Gallery in D.C. in the early 50s, Ann exhibited a painting of her children that, in mood and tone, is an *homage* to a famous Picasso painting, illustrated below.



Family of Saltimbanques
Pablo Picasso, 1905



The Scoville Children
Ann Scoville, 1952

A Significant Change in Artistic Direction

“I work until I have drained myself of the origins of the idea and then put away what I have done. When I look at it after [a few] months, I can tell what is worthless and sometimes when there’s something to be salvaged... in sculpture, the construction sometimes presents the solution of a problem” - Ann Scoville

The main focus of Ann’s Scoville’s artistic sensibility had always been the human figure. As Guy Pène du Bois’ teenage art student, she accompanied a group of fellow students to a meadow in Norfolk for an *al fresco* lesson on painting landscapes. Much to the chagrin of du Bois, Ann returned to the studio with her painting which centered on the figure of a man working the land. Shaking his head, du Bois referred to Ann Curtiss as, “*that incurable portrait painter.*”

Ann was always digging deep into her heart and soul seeking more meaningful, challenging ways to express her artistic passions, even dabbling in abstracts for awhile. In her late 40s, not satisfied with “where painting was taking her”, she took an adult welding course at a local high school and embarked on what would become perhaps the most fulfilling period of her life as an artist: creating welded steel sculptures of lifelike figures arrested in space and time, brimming with the illusion of being in motion.

In her garage studio in McLean, she assiduously went about mastering the physically challenging work of crafting and molding metal into dramatically beautiful sculptures. So engrossed would she become in her work that often around 9pm, Pete would tap on the floor above the garage with his cane to inquire if Ann was ready to come up for dinner.

The Moscow Circus

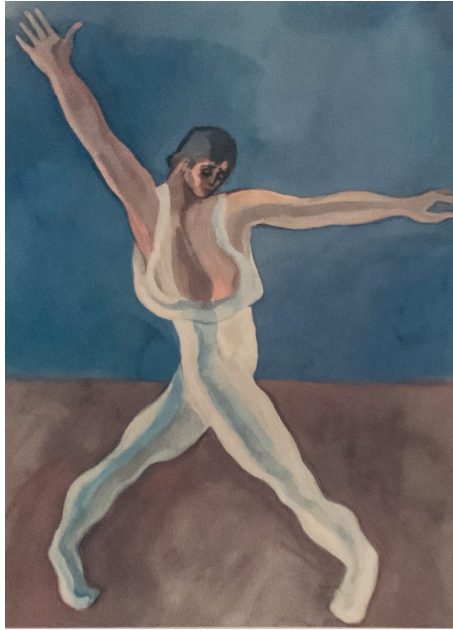
"I lost my heart in the Hippodrome" - Ann Curtiss

In 1936, Ann went to the famed *Hippodrome* on Sixth Avenue in Manhattan and became enthralled with the circus. During the Cold War between the United States and Russia, Ann Scoville's fascination with the circus and Russian culture crystallized when she saw **The Moscow Circus**, a propagandist traveling extravaganza meant to burnish the image of Communist Russia. Ann was not interested in politics so much as she was intrigued by the figurative movement of the jugglers, acrobats, clowns, trapeze artists and dancing bears. Subsequently, she created a series of sculptures based on the Moscow Circus which toured nationally with the *Smithsonian* and was shown at the *National Museum of American Art* and at *Chesterwood* in Stockbridge, MA. For a few years her sculpture, **Man Dancing with Bear**, was on display outside the American Embassy in Moscow.



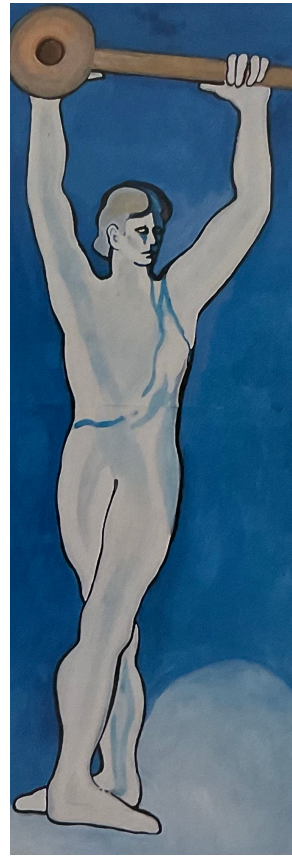
The Moscow Circus (partial) - Foyer of Hill House, Taconic, CT

In what may have been a catalyst for yet another subtle change in artistic direction, Ann was venturesome enough, after being captivated by a performance by legendary Russian ballet dancer, **Mikhail Baryshnikov**, to greet him after a show and proclaim: "I think I know your body better than you do." After this encounter with the man considered by many to be the greatest male ballet dancer of all time, Ann focused her artistic endeavors on paintings and sculptures celebrating the intrinsic essence and nature of the ballet.



Mikhail Baryshnikov

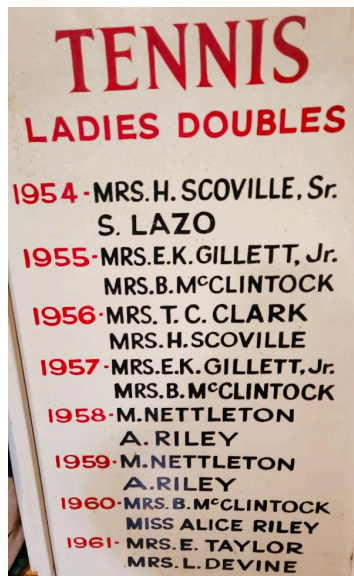
Gouache on Paper - Ann Scoville, 1980s



Ann's interest in Russian culture never waned. In the 1990s, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union when Ann was in her 70s, she traveled alone in the dead of winter to St. Petersburg to live with a Russian family. She wanted to observe for herself, the cultural changes taking place after the Cold War and to work on her command of the Russian language which she had been studying for years.

Connecticut Was Always Home

By the time Ann Scoville was 30 years old in 1949 she had a houseful of four children. Most summers with Pete busy in Washington, Ann would take their children to Taconic to be near the Scoville relatives and her parents in Norfolk; and to give her kids a taste of summer in the country, especially by partaking in activities at the Norfolk Country Club. Always a fearless and intrepid outdoors person (she loved hiking and backcountry skiing in the Alps), Ann was a crack tennis player who won a number of tournaments at the Norfolk Country Club - as evidenced by the vintage plaques below which Club Manager, **Peter Destler**, recently discovered hidden away upstairs in the NCC Clubhouse:



NCC Tennis Plaques from the 1950s and 60s

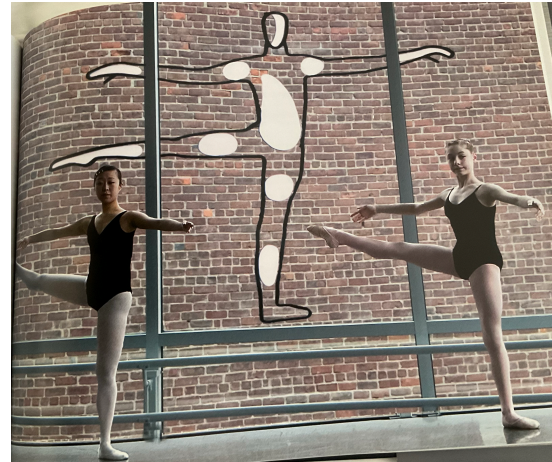
"I am eternally grateful to Pete, my wonderful Pete." - Ann Scoville

Six years after her husband Pete died at age 70, Ann Scoville left Virginia when she was 72 and moved to **Hill House**, the French Norman Scoville family estate. Situated on 100 acres on Beaver Dam Road in the hamlet of Taconic in Salisbury, CT, Hill House became a refuge for Ann where she could paint and concentrate on creating her sculptures of ballet dancers, several of which she installed on the lawn in back of her home.

Hill House - Taconic, CT - Joseph Leland, architect - 1927



Ann was able to actualize her desire and determination to sketch, design and weld sculptures of ballet dancers by frequenting rehearsals and performances at the highly-regarded *Nutmeg Ballet Conservatory* nearby in Torrington, CT. Several of the resulting sculptures are on permanent display at the Nutmeg Ballet Conservatory.



***The Nutmeg Ballet Conservatory* - downtown Torrington, CT**
at right: **ballet dancers attempt to capture the artistry of an Ann Scoville Sculpture**

Though Ann dearly missed her husband Pete, (“*[sometimes] I feel totally alone without my beloved Pete to give me strength, to bring his quiet wisdom to every situation*”), she was able to find solace and contentment living mostly on her own at Hill House for almost thirty years after he died. She would wake up before dawn and have breakfast in bed accompanied by her dogs Rondo and Bogart. Before going to work in her studio, she would linger in bed warmed by a fire burning in the fireplace, reading (she loved books on science and philosophy), listening to classical music and enjoying the splendid view of the Berkshires outside her window. Ann was never concerned with promoting, showing or selling her art. For her, it was always about the creative process, the striving, the work ethic; but in 2007 some of her sculptures were exhibited at the **Art 101** gallery in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. The following quote from the gallery’s owner sums up the impact of Ann Scoville’s sculptures:

“Her figures seemed to leap off the pages, sending their energy ricocheting around the room and right into my core... her work is energy and grace incarnate; the sculptures inhabit entire rooms; even the outdoors seems to yield.”

- Ellen E. Rand
- granddaughter of *Ellen Emmet Rand*



***Dancers on Hill House Lawn with *Baryshnikov (Étendre)* in the background
Welded Steel - Ann Scoville, c. 1990s***

Ann Scoville was happiest when she was working in her garage studio clad in mechanic's overalls welding torch in hand with sparks flying all around her. She continued to weld sculptures until her mid-80s and would sketch ballet dancers at the Nutmeg Conservatory for several years thereafter.



Into her 90s, Ann Scoville's Eyes Sparkled with Creative Intensity

Ann Curtiss Scoville passed away on July 17, 2014, a month after her 95th birthday, leaving a lasting legacy of kindness, quiet strength and creativity - plus a treasure trove of wonderful paintings and sculptures from a lifetime of commitment to the transcendent power that works of art can have on one's soul. Ann is buried next to her husband Pete at Center Cemetery in Salisbury alongside a touching marble memorial that vigilantly reminds the world what's at stake for the human race if the proliferation of nuclear weapons is not contained.



Scoville Family 'Statue of Hope' Overlooks Ann and Pete's *World Peace* Memorial Center Cemetery, Salisbury, CT

The End

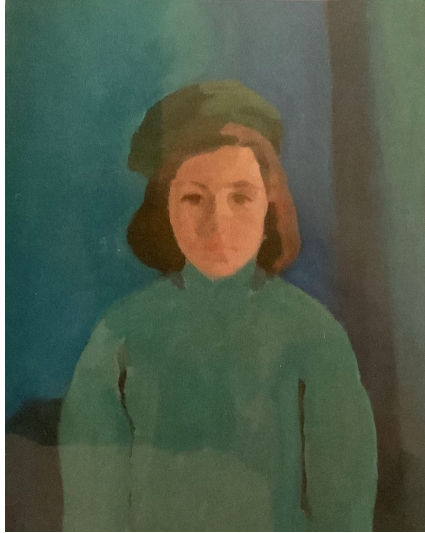
by Micheál Cummings Kelly

Club Historian

February 7, 2024

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to Ann Scoville's daughter, **Molly Fitzmaurice**, without whom this Profile would never have come to pass. Along with her brother, **Tom Scoville**, Molly generously and graciously shared her 'mummy's' notes, sketchbooks and photographs of her art works, and told entertaining stories and anecdotes that provided insight into what made Ann Curtiss Scoville such a naturally compelling figure.



Portrait of Mary 'Molly' Scoville - Ann Curtiss Scoville, 1958

Many thanks also, to Norfolk native, **John Allyn**, who casually mentioned on the golf course that two childhood paintings of his mother by Ann Curtiss have been hanging in his house for years. Readily and very kindly, John sent **Young Polish Girl** for inclusion in this Profile as well as his other 1930s Ann Curtiss painting of his (seemingly not-so-pleased-to-be-posing) mother shown below:



Mildred 'Milly' Matula - Ann Curtiss - c. 1934

Thanks also to **Hope Childs** who was kind enough to share ***Old Woman***, one of Ann Scoville's earliest paintings. Ann gave it to Cynthia Childs shortly after she painted it and its been in Hope's family ever since. *Old Women's* companion painting, ***Old Man***, (it's likely the two paintings were of Ann's grandparents on the family's Solomon Curtiss farm) has been kept in the Scoville family since it was painted and is on view in the home of Molly and Frank Fitzmaurice in Salisbury.



Old Woman and Old Man - Ann Curtiss, c. 1933