



PRO VIRILI PARTE P • A • P • E • R • S

Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of
Birmingham University School

Issue No. 5

The Town Hall Gallery (1965-1975)



This portrait of Eivor Callahan, painted by Katharine Blackford in 1966, now hangs in the main lobby of the Callahan Eye Hospital.

On many Sunday afternoons, beginning in the mid-1960s, the assembly room in the new lower school building known as “The Town Hall” was transformed into a reception room, complete with tea-table and walls covered with original art. According to Tim Callahan, the idea of the art shows was launched by three people: Martin Hames, Bob Moring, and his mother, Eivor Callahan.¹ One day, the three of them were standing in the Town Hall assembly room, and Mrs. Callahan said, “How sterile the environment is around here!” Thus, they developed a plan to dedicate this somewhat plain, messy space for noble purposes. One purpose was to promote local artists and give them a well-located venue to display and sell their work. The business arrangement allowed the school to bank 20% of the proceeds, as well as keep selected pieces that the artist was willing to donate. As reported in the February 1965 issue of the *Omni-BUS*, the first exhibit presented paintings of Helen Boswell

Issue 4 of the *Pro Virili Parte Papers* recorded the B.U.S. centennial celebration dinner, held in Altamont’s Patton Gymnasium on September 10, 2022. It was a joyous evening and an opportunity to honor Frank Marshall and Phil Mulkey, two beacons of excellence for B.U.S. students of the 1960s and 1970s. No two people could better exemplify the school’s Ciceronian ideal of *pro virili parte* – doing everything to the best of one’s ability. Issue 5 of the *Pro Virili Parte Papers* shifts its focus to honor B.U.S. families. To appreciate the Town Hall Gallery

¹ Eivor Holst Callahan (1913- 2002) was born in Hofors, Sweden and immigrated to the United States with her parents in 1919, settling in Anitoch, California. She was educated at U.C.L.A. and then worked in San Francisco as publicist until she married Alston Callahan in February of 1941. The Callahans lived in Atlanta during World War II and then moved to Birmingham after the war, where Dr. Callahan continued his medical practice specializing in ophthalmology. He was a pioneer in the field of reconstructive eye surgery. Over the next 50 years, his efforts led to the establishment of the Callahan Eye Foundation Hospital at UAB. Dr. and Mrs. Callahan were the parents of three B.U.S. alumni – Pat Callahan (1962); Mike Callahan (1964); and Tim Callahan (1966). Their two daughters alumnae of Brooke Hill, Kristina Callahan (Class of 1959) and Karin (Class of 1972).

story, the reader must first remember that the B.U.S. experience was entirely different than one at a boys' boarding school. Many of the families lived near the campus at 3609 Montclair Road, and parents were frequently present, assisting teachers and students. It was through these joint efforts that the B.U.S. community not only celebrated the arts in Birmingham but also built for the future Altamont School one of the most impressive collections of art in the entire city.



A portrait of Captain Basil Manley Parks (1888-1954) painted from a family photo in 1965 by W.W. S. Wilson.



Robert Moring

The Art and Landscape Committee

In September of 1965, the school organized an Art and Landscaping Committee, headed by Mrs. Gordon Ross, mother of Lamont Ross in the Class of 1968, and included other parents and teachers. One of the committee's first actions was the commissioning of a portrait of Captain Basil Parks, the school's founder, which was painted by W.W.S. Wilson, one of Birmingham's premier portrait artists at the time.² In addition to his leadership of Town Hall Gallery project, Bob Moring, with the help of parents and students, greatly improved the landscaping of the Montclair-Road view of the main school building.³

Moring, a graduate of the University of Alabama, came to B.U.S. in 1957 as a teacher in the Lower School. Before getting his bachelor's degree, he served in the military in Korea, but his typing skills rescued him from front-line artillery duty. He was remembered by students as a demanding geography teacher, as students were expected to recite 50 state names with their 50 capitals – fifty times. When interviewed fifty years later many alumni could still recite partial lists on the spur of the moment.⁴ Additionally, parents fondly remembered Mr. Moring for sponsoring student trips – trips to Nassau, Europe, and perhaps even to a few of those state capitals.

Subject matter for the art exhibits were varied – portraits; landscapes; still life; and abstract. Media included watercolor; pen-and-ink; charcoal; oil; acrylic; etchings; and later sculpture was added. Most of the artists were familiar names from Birmingham's art scene at the time. Even so, some artists were from elsewhere. For example, Mrs. Callahan sponsored an exhibit of Italian artists who were represented by the Crescenzi Gallery in New York City. The exhibit consisted mainly of northern Italian landscapes, which included a small Tuscan village and a harbor-scape.⁵ Before a Sunday Town Hall Gallery event, teachers, students, parents, and even artists, scurried around in preparation – all directed by Mr. Hames. Occasionally, according to student memories, abstract artists sometimes continued to paint on their pieces after they were hung for the show.

2 *OmniBUS*, 1965. Portraits by William Wallace Symington Wilson (1928-1986) can be seen today at the Birmingham Museum of Art, as well as in many other Alabama collections.

3 Thomas, p. 110

4 Thomas, page 77

5 From *OmniBUS*, March-April, 1969.



Bob Moring writing “SOLD” on a name label for one of Jordan Warnock’s paintings (Photo from the Altamont Archives)

It just so happened that as the Town Hall Gallery was getting started, there were a number of B.U.S. parents who were artists. One artist/parent was, Jordan Warnock, mother of Robert Burdick Warnock, Jr. and William Edmond Prince Warnock (Class of 1971). She was a founding member of the school’s Art and Landscape Committee, and her art exhibit in the Fall of 1965 was an important event for the new Town Hall Gallery. In writing about her work for the October 1967 *Omnibus*, Martin Hames first mentioned her versatility, as well as her comfort with various media. He also mentioned her powerful imagination, complimenting her as creating an “aura of beauty with various textures and colors.”

JORDAN PHILLIPS WARNOCK (1925-2002)

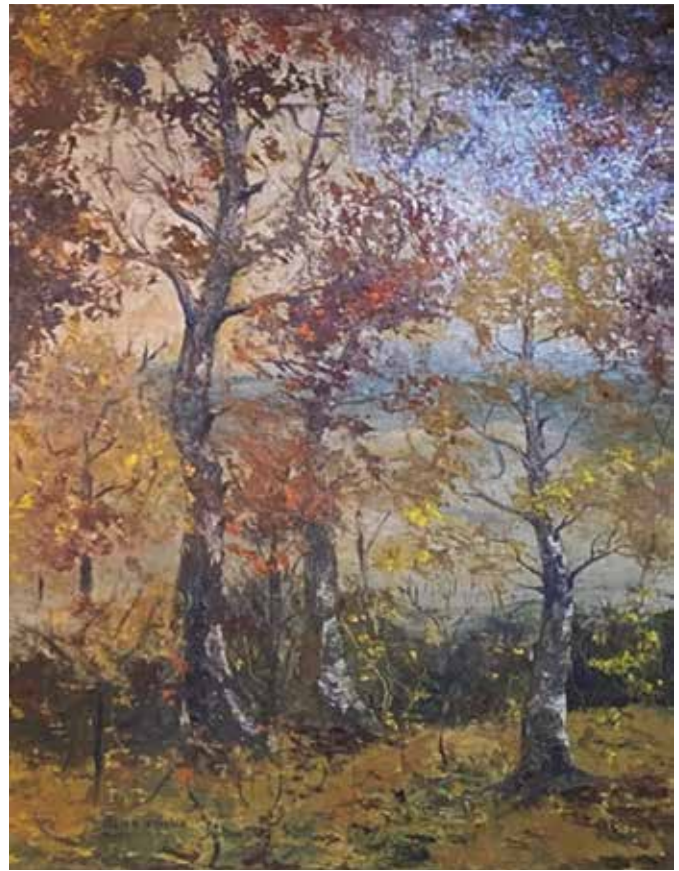
Jordan was born in Birmingham and was a lifetime resident. Her parents, Jordan Prince Phillips, and Fredrick Neal Phillips, as well as her grandparents Dr. Edmond Mortimer Prince and Sarah Hillhouse Prince, were also Birmingham natives. She showed great talent and passion for drawing and painting at an early age and found a wealth of subject matter for numerous drawings on the farm of her grandfather, Dr. Edmond Prince in nearby Blount Springs. Upon graduation from Phillips High School, Jordan Phillips studied art at a small college in Florida. Through a friend, she met her husband Robert Burdick Warnock, who was originally from Tulsa Oklahoma.

Jordan Warnock pursued art as a dedicated professional her whole life and her body of work includes still life, landscape, portraits, and abstract works. Her son, Prince, recalled how her family members jokingly referred to some of her most recognizable paintings as being her “Dead Tree Period”. Pictured here are several of these pieces. It’s easy to see in them the “aura of beauty” Mr. Hames recognized about her work in a 1967 Town Hall Gallery exhibit.⁶



Collection of Elizabeth Meadows, a longtime family friend.

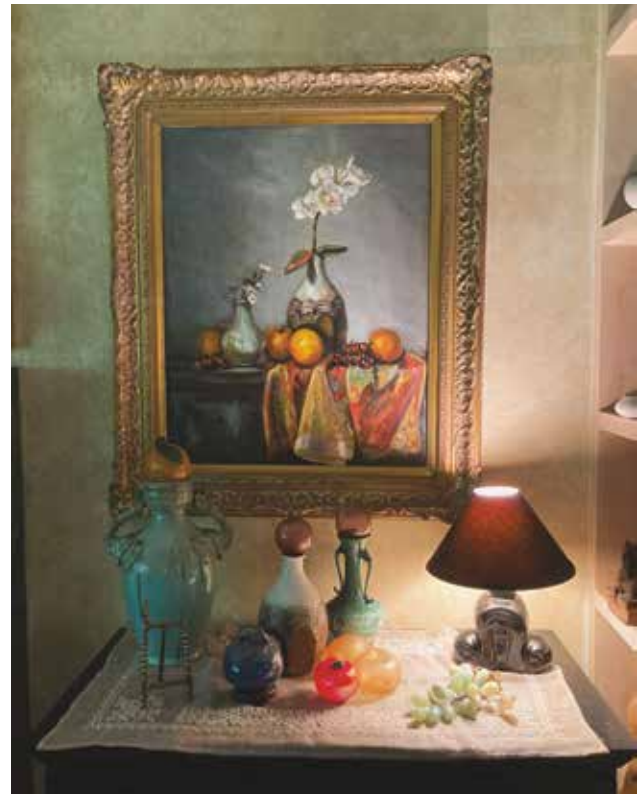
⁶ *Omnibus* 1967



Collection of Prince Warnock Collection of Prince Warnock

This “bullrushes” piece belongs to Elizabeth Meadows and was painted in the late 1950s or early 1960s when the Warnock family was visiting the Meadows family at their cabin on the Coosa River. Her son, Prince, has many of her works in his home including this pictured still life. He also treasures her self-portrait which she painted from a photo taken by his father, Bob Warnock, while his parents were on vacation together in the Virgin Islands.





Jordan Warnock not only exhibited at the Town Hall Gallery on many occasions but at other Birmingham galleries including Littlehouse-on-Linden in Homewood. Along with the Birmingham Museum of Art and the Birmingham Art Association's Sidewalk Art Show, and the Town Hall Gallery at B.U.S., Gene Smith's "Littlehouse Gallery" was another ardent and early supporter of visual arts in Birmingham.⁷ Many friends and family members of Jordan Phillips Warnock are extremely proud and thankful for the lovely paintings that they can look at daily on the walls of their homes.

⁷ The Birmingham Art Association was founded in 1908 as the Birmingham Art Club. In 1938, the Art Club began having the Sidewalk Art Show in Woodrow Wilson Park as a fund raiser for the future Birmingham Museum of Art. On a Saturday afternoon in May this annual event was held in Woodrow Wilson Park, later renamed Linn Park. That show is now organized by Operation New Birmingham and called "The Magic City Art Connection," which was held in Linn Park before the pandemic. This annual event is now being held at the Sloss-Furnace park.

CORNELIA JACKSON McINTIRE RIVERS
(1912 – 1969)

Another popular Birmingham artist whose paintings adorned the walls of the Town Hall at B.U.S. and later the Altamont hallways was mother of B.U.S. students David and Paul Rivers. For her March 1965 exhibit, Mrs. Rivers expressed the view in the *Omni-BUS* that if young people could live around art as they were doing here at B.U.S., they would have a greater appreciation for it in their later years. Mr. Hames totally agreed with these comments of Mrs. Rivers both in word and deed as he also understood the importance of constantly encouraging the B.U.S. boys, (whom he teasingly referred to as “barbarians”) to experience the arts. Mr. Hames believed in the arts as a way of knowing – as important as any other way of knowing. He understood that the arts appeal to and enrich the interior life which is essential for fulfilment. He knew that the arts hone the sensibilities and that the sensibilities inform perception – how we make sense of and function in the world.⁸



Collection of Mary Evelyn and David McKee.



Collection of Altamont School.

Jordan Warnock and Cornelia Rivers were good friends and painted together frequently in the studio Mrs. Rivers had in her home on Carlisle Road. Prince Warnock remembered his mother mentioning that the work of Cornelia Rivers influenced the style of her self-portrait, which was perhaps painted in Mrs. Rivers’s studio. The Warnocks, the Rivers, and the Callahans were all members of the Birmingham artsy set. They often had gatherings of artists in their homes. B.U.S. teachers, particularly Martin Hames and Bob Moring, were frequently included. This practice of inviting school faculty into the family home was reminiscent of the 1920s and 1930s with Captain Parks, Captain Johnson, and others who taught the boys there at 1211 28th Street. Mr. Hames and Mr. Moring also entertained Town Hall Gallery patrons in their own homes.

⁸ Webb Robertson described Martin Hames this way in a piece he wrote for *Larger than Life: Memories of Carl Martin Hames* (2012),page 18

ELLIE SMYER WHITE (1920-2001)

The mother of Shuford White (B.U.S. Class of 1968) was another artist who, over the years, exhibited her work in the Town Hall Gallery. Mrs. White graduated from Ramsey High School and then studied art at the University of Alabama. She married W. Bruce White in 1940. Her daughter, Lucile White, remembered that her mother did not really do much painting when her three children – Lucille, Bruce, and Shuford were young. Later, she set up a spot in her basement and began with still life paintings, frequently containing a pitcher like the one pictured here. This portrait Shuford, was painted in 1954. Later, Ellie White and a group of her friends who enjoyed painting began to work outside and gained experience in painting landscapes. The colorful abstract piece pictured here serves as an example.

In addition to being an artist, Ellie Smyer White will always be remembered in our community as a founder of the First Light downtown ministry for homeless women. In 1983, Mrs. White, her daughter Lucille, and other members of the First Presbyterian Church in downtown Birmingham organized volunteers for a women's emergency night shelter in the basement of the church. After 10 years of operating this basement shelter, everyone knew that more space and services were needed. In 1998 the church purchased the old Granada Hotel, which had recently burned. Today, First Light is located at 2230 4th Avenue North, and its volunteers provide daily meals for homeless people. First light also offers multiple services for women and children and living space for permanent residents that are unlikely to live independently.



Still Life with Pitcher, collection of Amanda & Lant Davis



Portrait of Shuford White (age 4),
collection of Lucile White

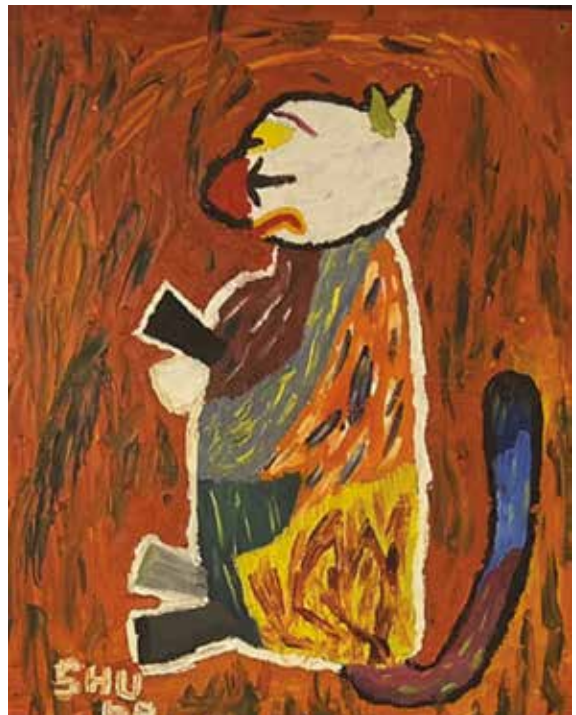


Landscape, collection of Lucile White

SHUFORD STANLEY WHITE: Shot-Putter and Artist

In 7th grade, Coach Mulkey came to Shuford White (B.U.S. Class of 1968) and told him he was going to be a champion shot-putter. “If you had seen me then,” said Shuford, “you would have understood why that was such a joke.” But, in fact, he did become a state champion shot-putter. When interviewed for Chris Thomas’s 2010 book, *A History of Birmingham University School*, he said of Mulkey, “He gave you goals and built you into something you never thought you could be.”⁹ Influences of his mother and Mr. Hames were also at work on him during his years at B.U.S. Along with her mother’s paintings, Lucile White also has several of Shuford’s paintings that he had done at B.U.S. hanging in her home.

However, after college, Shuford felt callings more in the direction of teaching and coaching than art. His first job was teaching Lower School students at B.U.S. and then Altamont. His sister remembers how much joy these years working at his alma mater brought him. Then, later, he felt a call to ministry and became a church pastor. In addition to serving multiple churches throughout the Southeast, he served abroad in both New Zealand and South Korea. In January of 2023, Shuford delivered a beautiful tribute at a memorial service the “Mulkey Boys” had at Altamont for their beloved coach.



Paintings from Shuford White’s “Dog & Cat Period.” Collection of Lucile White.

⁹ Thomas, p.99

TERRY KAY SIMMONS (1943 -2021)

Another professional artist who exhibited in the Town Hall Gallery was Terry Simmons. She was a native of Jasper, and the sister of Al Simmons. Al and Betsy Jordan Simmons (Brooke Hill Class of 1964) have many of her pieces in their home in Birmingham.

Terry Simmons received a B.A. in applied art from Auburn University; an M.F.A. in painting from the University of Alabama; and an M.A. in art history from Tulane. She began her teaching career at Walker College and was instrumental in establishing an art department there. She spent 25 years at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi and was named to the Mississippi Institute of Arts and Letters.

Included in this newsletter are two of Terry's paintings from the collection of Al and Betsy Simmons. Terry's nieces and nephew also are Altamont alumni – Margarett Simmons and Albert Haston Simmons, Jr., who graduated in 1993. Katherine Simmons Berdy (Class of 1991) was formerly an English teacher and Director of Altamont's C. Kyser Miree Ethical Leadership Center, which offers students ways to develop their leadership skills through experiential education.

Left: Newspaper clipping is from the Altamont Archives.

Shades Valley Sun, Wed., May 1, 1968

Fine Arts



TERRY SIMMONS ART AT TOWN HALL GALLERY—
... Paintings and drawings by Terry Simmons are on display at the Town Hall Gallery of the Birmingham University School, 3609 Montclair Rd. The show includes drawings and paintings of both non-objective and figurative nature. Miss Simmons prefers not to identify with any particular style but uses abstract expression. A native of Jasper, she has studied at Auburn University and the University of Alabama, where she received her master of arts degree. She is a member of the Birmingham Art Association.



Paintings from the collection of Betsy and Al Simmons.



The Village Painters

Members of a local group of artists well-known in the community as “The Village Painters” were frequent exhibitors at the Town Hall Gallery. About 1950, Katharine Blackford, a local artist, gathered a group of her friends who wanted to take up painting and contacted Professor Raymond MacMahon, the newly appointed head of the Art Department at Birmingham-Southern College. Within a week or two Mrs. Blackford had invited 15 members to join the group – a group that met with MacMahon every Tuesday, September through May, for the next 16 years. The Birmingham-Southern gym was the group’s first home. In 1952, they acquired their own studio space above Gilchrist’s Pharmacy in Mountain Brook Village and were thereafter known as the “Village Painters.”



Throughout their years of association, these women enjoyed painting together in their studio, as well as painting “*en-plein-air*” near and far. They took excursions to Lake Martin, the Blue Ridge mountains, Mexico, and France. Furthermore, members of the Village Painters have supported every kind of local art endeavor, serving through the years on both the Birmingham Art Museum Board and the Birmingham Art Association Board, and the Art Education Council. They also made annual arts events such as the Beaux Arts Ball and the Sidewalk Art Show a reality.¹⁰



Elizabeth “Bibby” Smith. collection of the Altamont School.

Members of the Village Painters group with B.U.S., Brooke Hill, or Altamont connections were Katharine Blackford; Jane Branscomb, Julia Hamilton Gunn; Jane Hawley; Mimi Head; Jeanne Marks; Mary St. John; Nell Scott; and Elizabeth “Bibby” Smith.

ELIZABETH TAYLOR SMITH (1914-2011)

This member of the Village Painters, known to her friends as “Bibby,” was born and raised in Fort Valley, Georgia and graduated from the University of Georgia. She studied at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky and then returned to her home state and served as principal of Swainsboro High School. During World War II, she served as leader in the Women’s Army Corps (WACs) and was a member of General Eisenhower’s staff in North Africa. During the war, she met her husband, Herbert E. Smith, Jr. from Birmingham, Alabama. Herbert Smith was a graduate of B.U.S. and was awarded the the J. Frank Rushton Cup two years in a row – 1931 and 1932.¹¹ She retired from the army as a Lieutenant Colonel, and Mr. and Mrs. Smith then moved back to Birmingham where he ran his family business, Vulcan Rivet and Bolt.

¹⁰ In addition to their organizational and financial support of the Sidewalk Art Show, the Village Painters were always well-represented among its artists. The Sidewalk Art Show in Woodrow Wilson Park was a fundraiser for the Birmingham Art Association https://www.bhamwiki.com/w/Birmingham_Art_Association.

¹¹ The J. Frank Rushton Cup was the highest honor a student at B.U.S. could receive and is still presented to an Altamont senior boy today. Thomas, p 158

In the early 1950s, the Smiths built a home in the Abingdon neighborhood, which was near the city but still rural enough for residents to keep horses. Other B.U.S. schoolmates of Herbert Smith, Lee “Pete” McGriff and Bill “Jig” Miller also built homes nearby. Because the Smiths had no children, they adopted the neighborhood children as their own. A neighborhood event that children and adults looked forward to every year was the Fourth of July parade, for which “Aunt Bibby” and “Uncle Biddy” were the perfect leaders. In the late 1950s or early 1960s Katharine Blackford, a founder of the Village Painters, envisioned this memorable event in a painting. Riding in the Jeep behind the trumpeter and flag bearers was Lieutenant Colonel Elizabeth Taylor Smith, the highest-ranking military officer. Standing on the back of the Jeep was Herbert Smith (a.k.a.) Uncle Biddy, and behind him riding the horse was “Uncle Jig” Miller. Painted vignettes surrounding the parade are idyllic scenes of life in the Abingdon neighborhood of the 1950s and 60s.



Katharine Blackford, collection of Laurie Miller Allen (Brooke Hill Class of 1968).

MARY JACKSON ST. JOHN (1911-2002)

was born in Albertville, Alabama and attended Ward-Belmont College for women in Nashville, Tennessee (now Belmont College). She married Finis Ewing St. John, Jr. from Cullman, Alabama and after living most of her adult life there, moved to Birmingham in the 1960s and joined the Village Painters. She was a close friend of Martin Hames, who visited her often, asking her if he could take home particular paintings. Then, he asked her to teach art at B.U.S. In her years painting in the Mountain Brook Village studio over Gilchrist’s, she experimented with a variety of media, including oil, watercolor, and acrylic. The bright acrylic painting of the amaryllis pictured here is in the home of her daughter-in-law, Irma St. John.

Mary’s husband and son, Finis Ewing St. John, III, both served as members of the Alabama Senate. Their Cullman law firm of St. John and St. John was founded in 1892 by Finis Ewing St. John, Sr. and is still operating today. Finis Ewing St. John IV (Fess) still practices law in Cullman and is currently serving as Chancellor of the University of Alabama system. Mary was the first member of the St. John family to be associated with the school,



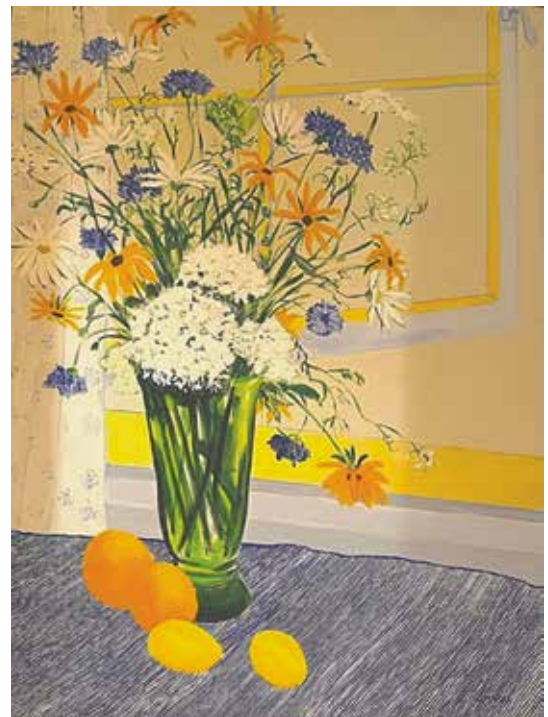
but she has grandchildren and great grandchildren who are Altamont graduates. Her three grandchildren are Warren St. John (Class of 1986); Mary Claire St. John Butler (Class of 1987); and Susanna St. John Davis (Class of 1989). Susanna's twin daughters Annabel and Mimi (Mary's great-granddaughters) graduated in the Altamont Class of 2019.

JEANNE ALDEN VIGEANT MARKS(1921-1999)


Born in Kansas City, Missouri, Jeanne met Caldwell Marks (a B.U.S. alumnus) during World War II in New York City where she headed up a Department-of-Censorship staff of 500 people who read letters going to soldiers. They met on a blind date when he was in port in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. After a short courtship, which was typical of the times, they eloped in 1945 just before Caldwell shipped out with a fleet headed for the North Atlantic.

Jeanne Marks was a longtime member of the Village Painters, and pictured here is a colorful, cheerful still-life from the collection of Jeanne's daughter, Margaret Marks Porter, who was a 1968 graduate of Brooke Hill.

In addition to participating in earlier Town Hall Gallery exhibitions, she had a one-woman show on January 12, 1975, the last winter before the merger with Brooke Hill during the summer of that year. As was the custom, Jeanne and Caldwell Marks were hosts of a Sunday supper at their home for friends and family that evening. January 12, 1975 was also Caldwell and Jeanne's 30th wedding anniversary. Thus, Jeanne and Caldwell Marks also remembered that wartime day in 1945, which was the beginning of their life journey together. Those who attended the dinner at the Marks home on Cherokee Road included children and spouses: Margaret and Kip Porter and Randy and Buffie Marks. Others who attended with B.U.S. connections were Katharine and Frank Blackford; Percy and Betty Brower; Martin Hames; Jane and Beverly Head; Bibi and Herbert Smith; and Fran and Buzz Seibels.¹²



Jeanne Marks
Paintings
Town Hall Gallery
Birmingham University School
3609 Montclair Road
Birmingham, Alabama 35213
OPENING RECEPTION
Sunday, January 12, 1975
3—5 p. m.



J. MARKS

¹² Peggy Trechsel, "Scriblers" column in the *Birmingham News* (January 14, 1975)

1969 (and Beyond) at The Birmingham University School

Martin sat down next to me, and, having noticed that I was interested in his art collection, he began talking with me about it. He asked a lot of questions – what I liked and didn't like, what I thought about different pieces. He seemed generally interested in the thoughts of a 12-year-old, and when I pointed out something that interested me, he told me about it: who painted it, when, where and what he liked about it. Even though I grew up in a family that valued the arts, I had never had a conversation like this before.

Webb Robertson, B.U.S. Class of 1974

As was happening all over the nation, things were changing at B.U.S. in the late 1960s. The trans-Atlantic influence of Beatlemania was dramatically changing hairstyles, school dress, and music preferences. Frank Marshall resigned as headmaster in the spring of 1968, accepting a professorship at Marion Military Institute. He explained that the administrative demands and money problems deprived him of what he enjoyed most of all – teaching.¹³ The 1969-70 school year was Phil Mulkey's last year of employment at B.U.S., but his new job in the insurance business allowed him to remain in Birmingham and continue his associations at B.U.S. Even with these changes, Martin Hames, a young graduate of Birmingham-Southern (also Frank Marshall's alma mater) was still operating at full speed on the B.U.S. campus. Using the tools and supports now offered him by the Town Hall Gallery endeavor, Mr. Hames began to encourage career interests and lifelong passions for the arts among his students.

Scott Fuller: Artist and Graphic Designer

Scott Fuller, Class of 1969, was one of the first B.U.S. boys Mr. Hames mentored toward an arts career. After graduating, he received a B.F.A. from Birmingham-Southern and an M.F.A. from the University of Alabama with an emphasis in printmaking. Today, his etchings can be found in many local and regional collections as well as the Birmingham Museum of Art. Scott's career in graphic design began in 1971 at the *Birmingham News*, as a part-time masking artist. Victor Hanson, the newspaper's publisher, was impressed with the way Scott painted the architect's (Fritz Woehle) design for the basement wall of his home and turned it into a work of art.

He worked at *The Birmingham News* for the next 19 years, but in 1990, he moved to Icon Graphics and began his involvement in desktop publishing. In 1999, he started his own company, Scott Fuller Graphic Design. His primary (but not exclusive) focus is on book production. Over the last 30 years, his clients have included Birmingham Historical Society, Birmingham Landmarks, the Alabama Theater, Books-A-Million, DK Publishing, U.S. Pipe & Foundry, and Buffalo Rock.



Basement wall of Victor and Betty Hanson's home designed by Fritz Woehle.

¹³ Thomas, p 126

Spring Break 1969: New York City

Scott's career in the visual arts had its beginnings (a perfect internship) during his senior year at B.U.S. when he accepted the job of *Omni-BUS* editor for 1968-69. Using a cut-and-paste process laying out headlines, text, and photos, he learned fundamentals of graphic design. Also, under the leadership of Mr. Hames and of the B.U.S. art teacher, Mary St. John, Scott's high-school years included drawing, painting, and experimenting with other media. However, in retrospect, Scott credits his Spring-of-1969 trip to New York City with Mr. Hames as an unforgettable and life-changing experience.



First night of New York trip at Luchows (14th St. & Broadway), March 8, 1969

Excerpt from Martin Hames's Account of the Spring Break Trip (March 8-15, 1969)

On the morning of Wednesday, March 12, 1969, our group headed to the Guggenheim Museum at 1071 Fifth Avenue on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. Just being in this amazing Frank Lloyd Wright building was a thrill, but there was more. We were there to see the first U.S. exhibit of the Peggy Guggenheim Collection. In the catalog, she introduced her collection perfectly by saying that she never dreamed she would be viewing it while descending the ramp of this museum – like “Nude Descending the Staircase.” From there we went to the Whitney to see a Helen Frankenthaler show – characterized by giant oversized canvases filled with gorgeous clean color and wide-open spaces. On our last day, Saturday, March 15, a few of the boys on the trip went with Mr. Hames to see the Willem DeKoonig retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art. We were so lucky to see such a beautiful thing! ¹⁴

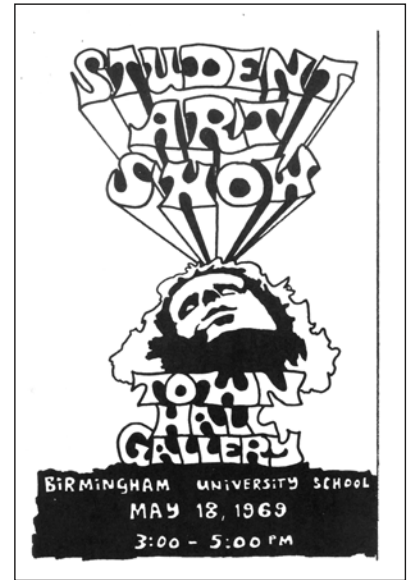


Outside and Inside: The Guggenheim Museum, New York City

¹⁴ In addition to Scott Fuller, the trip included B.U.S. boys Keith Jacquot, Fennel Mauldin, Hugh Nabers, Drew Scott, Sam Upchurch, Prince Warnock, Jimmy Wiygul; and a group of girls chaperoned by Scott's mother Marj Fuller.

The 1969 Student Art Show

The 1968-69 arts season at B.U.S. culminated with the Student Art Show. Preparation for the show was, in some ways perfunctory as the Town Hall Gallery already held opening receptions that year for artists including—Bibi Smith and Louise Mc Spadden, who were members of the Village Painters; Ed Willis and Lula Barnett; George Spivey; and Henry Kimbrell. Preparation for a show began with moving furniture and tidying up (with the hope of measuring up to Hames standards). Students and teachers then “hung the show,” and afterwards, a group of jurors selected award-winning pieces. Unlike many schools, the doors of the B.U.S. buildings were not locked at 3:00 p.m. on Friday afternoon. Through Saturday afternoon, family members, teachers, and students brought in lacy tablecloths and linen; a tea service, silver and glass trays and set the table. Then, by noon on Sunday, an artistic and colorful arrangement of fresh flowers appeared as if by magic in the center of the Town Hall’s tea table (usually provided by a B.U.S. mother as all southern ladies have gifts for flower-arranging). Families also brought home-baked goods in Tupperware containers, and these would be set out on trays before the guests arrived. Also, before the arrival of the guests on Sunday, labels were attached to award-winning pieces. The Upper School and Lower School best-in-show awards went to senior Scott Fuller and seventh-grader Webb Robertson. Other award winners were Clay Collins; Stewart Hill; Ken Seale; Godfrey Fies; Marvin Taylor; and Danny Jones.



A southern-style tea table was frequently the Town Hall Gallery’s centerpiece. Pictured from left to right: Susan Fuller, Scott Fuller, Marj Fuller, and Jennie Robertson.



Scott Fuller stands beside his winning piece, to which he credits inspiration from the deKooning retrospective he saw at the Museum of Modern Art on his New York trip with Mr. Hames for Spring Break of 1969.



Left to right: Scott Fuller, Mary St. John (B.U.S. art teacher), and Martin Hames.



To enhance the afternoon's artistic ambiance, Hugh Nabers (Class of 1969) played guitar. Pictured with Hugh is classmate Drew Scott.

The Robertson Family

In telling the story of B.U.S., and particularly in Issue 5 of the *Pro Virili Parte Papers*, the message comes across clearly once again how families and teachers were personally involved in the education of the boys there. Jennie and Billy Robertson, parents of Webb Robertson in the Class of 1974, were generous in so many ways in their support B.U.S. The Robertsons were also actively involved in many arts organizations in Birmingham, including the Birmingham Civic Ballet and the Birmingham Festival of Arts, for which Mrs. Robertson served as President. Their daughters Melissa (Brooke Hill Class of 1965) and Jennifer (Brooke Hill Class of 1969) both studied ballet, and Jennie Robertson was a ballet teacher. Frequently they opened their home at 2426 Henrietta Road for events supporting the arts, as well as for gatherings with neighbors and friends. A rather unique generosity that the Robertsons family practiced was welcoming guests for "extended stays." In the early sixties, a B.U.S. teacher from Ireland, Brian McComish, lived there. Later, after the Robertson children were grown, the Robertsons welcomed many foreign exchange students.

Recall that a celebratory dinner for friends and families of the artists was a typical way to end the day of a Town Hall Gallery opening and the 1969 student show was no exception. On the evening of May 18, the Robertsons invited participating students, teachers and parents for a buffet dinner



Martin Hames and Scott Fuller at dinner following 1969 Student Art Show. Altamont Archives.

following Town Hall Gallery exhibit. The photo shows an 18-year-old Scott Fuller in conversation with his mentor, Mr. Hames, taking place in the Robertson's library. Family photos of Jennifer, Melissa, Webb, and Dr. Robertson, as well as a few miscellaneous drawings are on the desk and wall behind them. One can imagine possible topics of conversation: reminisces of the fabulous New York trip; details about exhibits at the Guggenheim and the Museum of Modern Art.

Webb Robertson: A Career in Music

The second article in Issue 5, begins with a quotation in a book of tributes to Martin Hames in which Webb Robertson describes the first conversation he ever had with Mr. Hames about art.¹⁵ In the early fall of 1968 when Webb was first starting B.U.S., he and his parents were invited to dinner at the apartment Mr. Hames shared with his mother Mary in Homewood. This dinner occurred before Webb won the award in the 1969 student show. Thus, Webb can be identified as another B.U.S. student whom Mr. Hames encouraged to become engaged in the arts. Scott was also a role model, as Webb and Scott shared an interest in playing drums as well as art.

Thus, it turned out that Webb attained a degree in music, with specialty in percussion instruments, at American University in Washington, DC. Then, he went on for a masters in music performance from Brooklyn College Conservatory, studying with Morris "Arnie" Lang, Percussionist with the New York Philharmonic. Before returning to Birmingham in 2000, he was musical director for the Laura Dean Dancers and Musicians, as well as a manager of several other non-profits in the New York City area. After Webb and his wife Mae Samford Robertson returned to Birmingham, he served as executive director of the Birmingham Music Club. They both remain active in the arts. Mae Robertson, a 1973 graduate of Brooke Hill, is a singer/songwriter and President of Lyric Partners record label. They have two children, Cally and Will, who both live in Los Angeles. Currently, Mae and Webb share their time between homes in Birmingham and Los Angeles.

Even though Jennie and Billy Robertson are no longer with us, their descendants continue their involvement in the arts and in Altamont School. Melissa Robertson Turnage raised her family in Atlanta but has moved back to Birmingham and teaches a movement class in the pediatric psychiatric ward at UAB and also teaches a much-appreciated movement class Episcopal Place. Jennifer Robertson Given and husband Bobby are the parents of three Altamont graduates, Melissa Given McNeil and Christian Given. Melissa and her husband Garrett McNeil live in Birmingham and are the parents of three children. Liam McNeil is a rising Altamont senior (Class of 2024) and Genevieve is in the Class of 2026. Their younger sister, Mila, is at Cherokee Bend Elementary. Jennifer's other daughter, Juliet Perry Given Hemingway graduated from Altamont in 1991 and now serves as Assistant Head of School (and English teacher since in 2000). Webb and Mae Robertson's daughter, Cally, graduated from Altamont in 2004. Clayton Hemingway is a 2023 graduate of Altamont and is son of J.P. and Stuart Hemingway and great-grandson of Jennie and Billy Robertson.



Webb Robertson

¹⁵ *Larger than Life: Memories of Carl Martin Hames* (2012) Carolyn Sloss Ratliff, Director and Scott Fuller, Designer.

The Move up the Mountain

During the summer of 1975, there were carloads and truck loads of books, furniture; gym equipment; and many, many paintings moved from 3604 Montclair Road up the big hill of Morningside Drive to 4801 Altamont Road. Construction began on a new gym A science wing, which was to be a one-story building, was constructed on the south side of the main school building. The main hall of the upper floor of the Brooke Hill School was mainly lined with lockers, and yes, was even more sterile than Mrs. Callahan found the B.U.S. buildings to be ten years earlier. The paintings – the bounty of the Town Hall Gallery project – would change that. It's easy to envision this main hall as Altamont's first art gallery. Furthermore, Brooke Hill's round library would make a great place to display some of the larger pieces.



Roy Green, Sarah Partridge and Leigh Sloss in *The Importance of Being Earnest*

A New Faculty and the Dramatic Arts

According to the merger agreement made between the two boards of trustees, all faculty from both schools were offered jobs for the 1975-1976 school year. Fortunately, both schools had about the same number of teachers, and it was an exhilarating experience for this new faculty to assemble. They were a multi-talented and committed cadre of educators who were given the opportunity to create a new school just like they wanted it to be. On the day after Labor Day in 1975, the largest student body in the history of either school came through those doors to the building at the top of the hill. The Altamont Class of 1976, composed of 28 girls and 20 boys, was one of the largest graduating classes as well.¹⁶

Another fortuitous benefit of having this exceptional faculty was that three of them were experienced drama teachers and directors. In fact, they already knew each other, as B.U.S. and Brooke Hill had participated in drama productions of the other school for more than five years. Their three productions for the 1975-76 school year were memorable. Georgene Gainey directed “The Importance of Being Earnest.” This tale of matchmaking for two British upper-class couples was interlaced with problems of unsuitable parentage; confused identities (who is Earnest?); and fabricated deaths. It was a treat for the audience on those evenings in the Fall of 1975 to watch female leads (Leigh Sloss and Susan Johnson) and male leads (Mike McCraney and Robert Slaughter) return to a nineteenth-century English drawing room.¹⁷



Kay Ackermann and Barry McRae in *Tiger at the Gates*

For the winter play, Martin Hames directed “Tiger at the Gates” in the new Altamont School's library's theater-in-the-round setting. All action took place within the city gates of Troy the day before the outbreak of the Trojan War.¹⁸ Hector the military commander and many of the Trojan women made anti-war arguments against fighting the Greeks, but the outcome of the play is in sync with Homer's poem. Barry McRae

¹⁶ The Altamont Class of 2023 had 56 graduates.

¹⁷ “The Importance of Being Earnest,” by Oscar Wilde, was first performed on February 14, 1895 at St. James Theater in London (Wikipedia). Furthermore, at Brooke Hill School (before they merged their drama efforts with B.U.S.) girls had to play male parts.

¹⁸ Written by French playwright Jean Giraudoux in 1935, it was titled “La Guerre do Troie n'aura pas lieu,” meaning “The Trojan War will not take place.” Christopher Fry translated it into English and renamed it, “Tiger at the Gates.” The English version was first presented in New York City in 1955. (Wikipedia)



Jim Barton in *Tiger at the Gates*

was handsome, tan, and fit as Paris, but Kay Ackermann stole the show in her rendition of Helen of Troy as a dumb blonde. Jim Barton (B.U.S. Class of 1970), who was teaching English at Altamont that first year, played the poet Demokos.

The spring production of Thornton Wilder's classic

"Our Town" was directed by Betty Caldwell. Jay Miller effectively carried out his role as the Stage Manager. But in the last act, the whole audience was in tears as Art Durkee, as George, threw himself down on Emily's grave.¹⁹



Susan Johnson and Art Durkee in *Our Town*

America in the 20th Century and a Picnic in a Sculpture Garden

After the first two or three years, this new faculty began to exert their passions for teaching by developing new courses. Mr. Hames created two courses that became Altamont School legends: the first was "Giotto to Talleyrand" (a.k.a. "Giotto"), a course on European political and cultural history. The second course he named "America in the 20th Century." Both courses included art history. As a culminating project for America in the 20th Century, each student selected a 20th century painter, sculptor, etc. (from Mr. Hames's "approved" list) and was required to create a piece of art inspired by the style of this artist. Many students chose to create three-dimensional pieces.

One spring shortly after Mr. Hames became Headmaster, he was talking with other faculty around the lunch table about how monumental pieces of outdoor sculpture – out in front of buildings or in museum gardens – were getting to be the rage. Then, he said, "Let's plan a picnic for the America in the 20th Century class in Dr. Sam Barker's sculpture garden at his home on the Red Mountain crest."²⁰ Dr. Samuel Booth Barker (1912-2002) was appointed as the first dean of the UAB Graduate School in 1970. He received his Ph.D. in physiology at Cornell in 1936. Barker and his wife Justine Rogers Barker were longtime patrons of the arts in Birmingham. The Barkers were remembered particularly for commissioning outdoor sculptures for the UAB campus – in front of academic buildings, in front of residence halls, and in green spaces.

Thus, Mr. Hames set the date for the picnic. When the day arrived, lunches were packed and students waited, sitting on the walls on either side of the front door. Before leaving the school that day, Mr. Hames lectured the students about behavior: behavior that would meet the "Hames expectations" – complete attention while Dr. Barker was talking; complete control of signs of boredom and barbarian tendencies; and definitely no smart-aleck remarks. And, of course, Mr. Hames used some of his familiar and colorful hyperbole, describing in detail what *not* to do. He also mentioned that Dr. Barker had recently lost his beloved wife and that students should remember to be particularly sensitive.

It was a clear and temperate spring day – a day Mr. Hames would have referred to as "glo-o-o-o-rious"! Everyone in Dr. Barker's sculpture garden that day learned something new. It was probably a similar ex-

¹⁹ Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" was first performed on January 22, 1938 in the McCarter Theater, Princeton, NJ.

²⁰ Dr. Samuel Booth Barker (1912-2002) was appointed as the first dean of the UAB Graduate School in 1970. He received his Ph.D. in physiology at Cornell in 1936. Barker and his wife Justine Rogers Barker were longtime patrons of the arts in Birmingham. The Barkers were particularly remembered for commissioning outdoor sculptures for the UAB campus – in front of academic buildings, in front of residence halls, and in green spaces.

perience that Webb Robertson had at Mr. Hames’s home as a 7th grader. Today, anyone who drives up the hill to the school sees, Brad Morton’s piece, appropriately named “Seminar.” Including “Seminar,” many of the pieces that the America in the 20th Century class discussed with Dr. Barker the day of the picnic would be left to Altamont in his will. Almost fifty years later, these sculptures provide students, parents, alumni, and others who visit the Altamont campus on top of Red Mountain with an instantaneous visual memento of Carl Martin Hames and a glimpse of the passionate love of art that became part of the Altamont ethos.



Pictured in a December 2022 photo (left to right): Oliver Gettinger ('23); Jaison Perkins ('23); Mimi Frei ('23)²¹; Richard Terrell ('24) Anne Marshall Strang ('23); Iman Zuberi ('23); Finn Pak ('23); Walker Wilson ('23)²²; Clayton Hemingway ('23)²³

21 Mimi Frei (Altamont Class of 2023) is great-granddaughter of Beverly Head, Jr.; granddaughter of Mimi Head and Beverly Head, III; and daughter of May Head Frei.

22 Walker Wilson is the son of Brantley Fry Wilson

23 Clayton Hemingway is son of Juliet Perry Given Hemingway and Stuart Hemingway.



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The mission of the Altamont School is to improve the fabric of society by graduating well-educated individuals capable of independent thinking and innovative ideas. To this end, the school attracts, nurtures, and challenges students whose commitment to truth, knowledge, and honor will prepare them not only for the most rigorous college programs but also for productive lives.