

THE LARKINS, THEIR NEPHEW AND ART; WHO NURTURED WHO IN THEIR INTEREST IN FINE ART?

From previous articles, we know that the Larkins were major players in the cultural world of Buffalo. But that had not always been the case. Neither John (JDL) nor his wife, (known as “Frank”) had been particularly educated about art nor had had much exposure to it. Their early years were focused on building the business and building their family.

The first sign that they would move in the direction of a more cultured life began as an offshoot of one businessman helping another one out during the other’s financial crisis. As recognized and respected players in the Buffalo business community, JDL and John Albright had forged a trusting relationship. Albright had embarked, in 1890, on the ambitious project of building a major art gallery to be located in Delaware Park near the lake. It was to be a classic marble monument to and for great paintings and sculptures, but Albright ran out of money. JDL came to his rescue and loaned him the money required to complete the project. Undoubtedly he and Frank felt a proprietary interest in the development of the building and its exhibits. A Larkin family descendant, Alexandra Stocker, notes that JDL was a Director of the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy (i.e. the Albright Art Gallery) circa 1910. They had also become quite involved in the development of the Buffalo Public Library system, also a subject of an earlier article.

With their financial world secure and comfortable, the Larkins also began, in 1897, to engage in international travel, accompanied by other of their wealthy friends. A trip to England that year was accomplished via luxury ocean liner. Once in England, they participated in major sightseeing around the countryside and in the city. The high point came, according to Daniel Larkin, JDL’s grandson and biographer, when they visited the National Gallery in London.

Dan Larkin (hereinafter, D.L.) reports in the biography, at p. 93, that Frank was overwhelmed by the artwork she was experiencing for the first time in her life. They included works of Rosa Bonheur, Rembrandt, Reynolds, Michelangelo and Turner. D.L. goes on to opine, “Her comments on the students she observed in the gallery foreshadow her interest in and support of her nephew, George Carlock’s career in art and perhaps suggest a sense of something lacking in her own life.”

Frank’s diary entry reflects that introspection: “I think I was as much interested in the students as the pictures. Some women with their gowns covered with red aprons were between fifty and sixty years old and as rapt and interested as any of the younger artists. This is what makes life worth living – to be really interested – intensely so, if you can – in doing and accomplishing something – but the hopes, fears, aspirations, jealousies and heartaches of being just an artist – and not being a great artist.” (pp. 93-4)

In 1898 their children accompanied them on a trip to England and Europe, and again in the following year. However, in 1899 the Larkin’s lives were to change.

Stepping back at this point, I will turn to the family of Frank's sister, Daisy. Daisy was the youngest of the Hubbard children. D. L. tells a lot of their story, but I was particularly helped by the research in a document entitled, "George Read Carlock: A Sketch" written in 2015 and revised in May, 2020 by Dan Pollitt. He has generously entrusted his work in order for me to understand the detail of the Carlock family and George in particular. George was Pollitt's great half uncle.

George's parents were Daisy Hubbard Carlock and Alvin Carlock. Daisy's (and Frank Larkin's parents, the Hubbards) had worked about a mile from where the Larkin Center of Commerce is now located on Seneca Street. They had met each other when both worked at the Seneca Indian Village, down the street in what is now the Seneca –Babcock area. Silas Hubbard was a physician and Julianna Read was a school teacher in the Seneca village. After their marriage they had moved to Illinois where her parents resumed their professions. Daisy was born in Illinois in 1861. She attended school in Illinois. In the meantime her sister, Frank met John Larkin, who had founded a soap company with his partner, Justus Weller, in Chicago.

John and Frank met, fell in love, married in 1875 and moved to Buffalo. Daisy, who had become a school teacher, married Alvin Carlock in 1881 when Daisy was 19. Alvin had been operating a dry goods store. Their son, Frank, was born in 1882 and George was born in 1884. They continued to work in Illinois till 1889 when the family moved to Berea, in Kentucky. The move had been precipitated by Alvin's contracting tuberculosis and his need to be in a better climate. Both Daisy and Alvin worked at a college in Berea.

In 1891 Alvin succumbed to the tuberculosis and was buried in Berea. George was only 5 when he had made the move to Berea and 6 when his father died. Pollitt says that George missed his father, frequently speaking of him and putting flowers on his grave. Daisy was only 29 and now a single mother with two young children. Her sister, Honor, moved to Berea to assist her, and also taught at the town's grammar school.

Daisy tenaciously proceeded with her life, becoming, according to Pollitt, a rather significant public figure in central Kentucky as a teacher, speaker and temperance advocate. From June 1892 to November 1893, Daisy took a 17 month leave-of-absence from Berea College to work for the Women's Christian Temperance Union in Illinois."



They all spent the summer together back with the maternal grandparents, the Hubbards, in Illinois. At the end of the summer, Daisy went to Chicago to resume work for the Women's Christian Temperance Union. She returned to her family in November 1893 and returned to her teaching position. In 1894 Daisy met, and in 1895, married F.S. Pollitt, a local Methodist minister. By then George was 10. Immediately after the wedding, the family moved to Frankfort, Kentucky so that Daisy's new husband could resume pastoring his congregation.

Not unexpectedly, Daisy was soon pregnant. The baby boy, born in July 1886, was named Basil Hubbard Pollitt (Dan Pollitt's

grandfather) ; George was now 11 years of age. But more change for him to adjust to quickly occurred. Pollitt had taken a new pastorate requiring a move to Covington, Kentucky. (this was a 3rd move within Kentucky in 18 months. In quick succession after this, another child, a girl named Florence Edith, followed by still another change of churches necessitating another move, this time to Harrisburg, Kentucky. Pollitt says, (his mounting anger is palpable) that George spent the month of December 1898 in Hudson and Chicago, apparently sans mother and her new family. He says, "George went to a play, the Lincoln Park Zoo several times, and ice skating. George wrote to Daisy after Christmas thanking his mother 'for the dime you sent me' and 'I am going to try to improve myself this new year.'"

Now a family of six, they moved again in early 1899 to Harrodsburg. Daisy again became pregnant. She wrote to her mother that she was considering placing the two Carlock boys in a school in Danville, Kentucky. In that letter she described George as "fat and well and my 'right hand man' now." A month later, on September 25, 1899, Daisy had her third Pollitt baby whom she named William. However, Daisy contracted an infection, "Puerperal septicemia" or "childbed fever." Within two months both baby and mother died. Daisy was only 37; George was 15 and had already lost both his parents and a baby half-brother. George's other half brother, Basil, according to Pollitt, remembered seeing George drawing on a sketch pad during his mother's funeral.

The step-father/minister Pollitt, soon after Daisy's death, sent George to live with his maternal grandparents, the Hubbards, in Illinois. His brother, Frank, went to live with his aunt and uncle, Frank and John Larkin, in Buffalo. Barely masking his frustration on behalf of George, Dan Pollitt summed up George's life. In 15 years George had lost both parents, and in the previous ten years he had moved from town to town four times. After 1899, George rarely saw his step-father and his half-siblings again. And Pollitt points out that it does not appear that he had any contact with his own father's extended Carlock family either.

The good thing was that he was with Daisy's parents, the Hubbards. We know from a number of previous articles that they were good, caring, fun loving people. Though another move was soon in the offing, it was a healthy one. The Hubbards had decided to move back to the Buffalo area, to East Aurora, where their son, Elbert, had established a religious/cultural community, Roycroft, and where he would be close to Buffalo where his brother, Frank, was now living with the wealthy John Larkin family, which, of course, included JDL's wife and George's aunt, Frances ("Frank"). The year was 1900.

It was at this time that Aunt Frank's interest in art began blooming. D L, in his biography of JDL, describes two events that occurred in 1902 that "greatly intensified Frank's already considerable interest in art." (pp. 142-3). An artist, Lars Sellstedt, had begun work on a portrait of JDL. At age 83, he was still a wonderful portrait and landscape artist. He was one of the founders, along with John Albright, of the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy that became known as the Albright Art Gallery. Frank enjoyed talking to Sellstedt and listening to the tales of the travels he had taken and the fascinating people he had met in the course of his career as an artist. It was during the same time that George, age 18, had come to live with the Hubbards in East Aurora.

He likely was inspired by his uncle, Elbert Hubbard, and of course, George was then in the midst of all the creative energy of the Roycroft campus. Dan Larkin says that George visited his aunt Frank and Uncle John in early February 1902 and "expressed enthusiasm for a career in art." D L suggests that Frank's love of her sister, Daisy and awareness of the loss of George's father years before, made her

“heart go out to the two brothers.” The Larkins had already not only taken in George’s brother, Frank, but also had sent him to an exclusive private school along with their son, Harry, in 1898. D.L. says, “She and John determined to look after the schooling of the younger boy and help him with his ambition to be an artist. Arrangements were made for George to attend Mr. Wheeler’s Heathcote School and a ‘life’ class.” A footnote cited Aunt Frank’s diary entry for March 31, 1902 indicating that the life class was likely under the auspices of the Buffalo Fine Arts Academy. She also wrote in her diary that day, “Maybe he will be one of the coming XX Century artists.” Dan Pollitt mentions, in his paper, that George also studied art with an artist named Edward Thompson in Buffalo. It is not clear if that was separate or a part of the Fine Arts Academy program.

George lived with the Larkins while he attended school, and it is known that he spent time with the family also at their Canadian property, Glencairn, overlooking the Niagara gorge. He was at the Larkin’s home along with his grandparents, who sought comfort from them on Christmas Eve, 1902 when they had just learned of Elbert Hubbard’s (Frank Larkin’s brother) deceitful behavior over his affair with Alice Moore, devastating his wife, Bertha, who also had sought refuge at the Larkins. that night.

George was at the Larkin home again that New Year’s Eve where, according to D. L., quoting Frank’s diary, “I’ve had a long talk with him. He and his Uncle John sat up until after the New Year and talked.” Dan then notes, “This would certainly suggest that serious plans were afoot for the boy’s future.” (p. 143)

Dan Pollitt, in his paper, says that when George had turned 18 in October 1902, he tried unsuccessfully to persuade Aunt Frank to subsidize his going to New York City to attend an art school. But based on her diary as discussed by D. L., that conversation may be the New Year’s Eve conversation with JDL. D. L. tells us, at p. 143, that there were no records (at least to which he had access) of George’s activities in 1903, but that by the spring of 1904, “George was writing to his grandmother and Aunt Frank from the National Arts Club in New York City. It appears Dan Pollitt had information otherwise. He says that though George and Aunt Frank argued about going to New York and her giving him an allowance, she apparently relented. (Alexandra Stocker tells me that Aunt Frank and JDL were charter members of the National Arts Club, founded in 1898).

According to Pollitt, George moved to NYC early in 1903 where he “painted, drew and worked on his art. However, he did not make much money and relied on Aunt Frank’s allowance.” He lived at 260 West 54th or 64th Street and studied for one semester at the “influential art school called the Art Students’ League of New York.” Pollitt says that school is still in existence and is a very creative place for young artists.

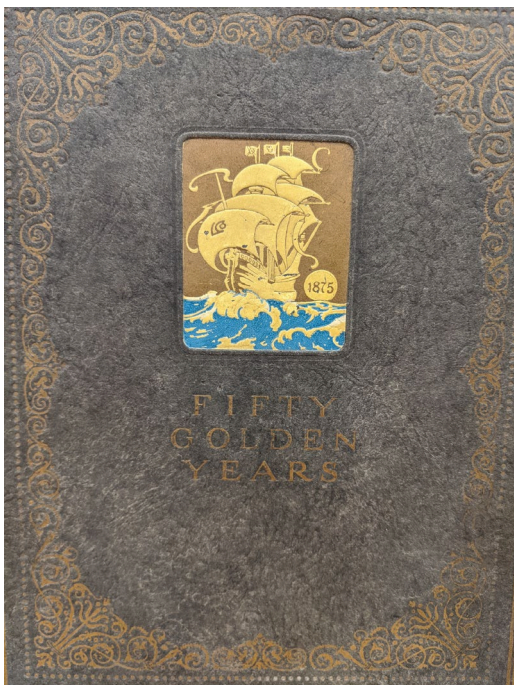
He also says that George was a member of a very exclusive private art club, the National Arts Club,” for which Aunt Frank must have paid the dues.” D. L. Does confirm George’s membership at this club by Spring, 1904

By that summer both authors agree that George, now 19 years of age, was in Lyme, Conn. D. L. adds that not only was George studying, he was spending his time sailing and painting at Hamburg Village near Lyme. He actually rented a studio for \$2.00 per month and “hoped to do several large pictures for annual exhibitions in New York.” (p. 143) Pollitt says he painted a landscape of Hamburg

Cove, a wide tributary of the Connecticut River near its mouth into Long Island Sound. Pollitt says that probably with Aunt Frank's help, the painting was exhibited and sold at the Albright Art Gallery in 1906. However, with the intercession of a friend and board member of the Albright-Knox, Helen Cappuccino, Cathleen Chaffee of the Gallery's Archives Dept., did some research in the otherwise closed Gallery and found no record of George's ever having had a painting of his in the Albright's collection. She opined, however, that he may have participated in a special one-time exhibit. Given the time period, she thought that possibly he had been included in "The First Annual Exhibition of Selected Paintings by American Artists", which ran from May 31, 1906 till September 2, 1906. Chaffee, via Helen, provided a copy of the cover of the exhibit's booklet, but she did not have access to the actual booklet to determine what artists participated in the show. Artwork in the show had likely been for sale.

He may have also have, according to Pollitt, studied at the Albright Art School at this time. That suggests the possibility that students taking a course at the Gallery might have had a show and sale of their work.

But looking back at 1904, that class or another might have occurred at a time described by both authors where George was at Glencairn in October 1904 and signed Larkin son, Harry's, guestbook. (You may recall from a previous article that the mansion known as Glencairn was actually part of what became a compound of houses for the Larkin children, as well.) D. L. says that at that time, Aunt Frank was cataloging her library. She commissioned George to design a bookplate for her. After much ado agreeing on a design, the resulting image was of a "Viking ship with King Hubba's raven emblazoned on its sail approaching land." It also had an elaborate border above Aunt Frank's name. D. L. speculates that the engraving was likely printed by the LSC art department. The bookplate was, indeed, used on Frank's extensive book collection. (Alert – the Larkin Gallery would love to have one of these books for its collection!):About this design, Pollitt says that it was a mythical Hubbard family scene of an ancient sailing ship with a big white sail and the name 'Hubba' sailing the ocean with accompanying ravens flying overhead."

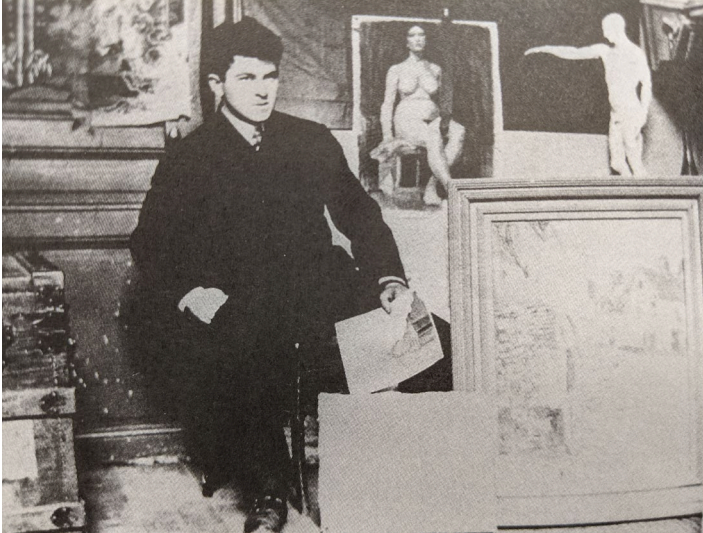


Interestingly, 1925 saw the grand celebration of the LSC being in business for fifty years. The emblem signifying the anniversary was of a Viking ship on a turbulent sea with sails unfurled and blowing with the wind. No raven appears on either the sail or flying in the sky. LSC Art Director, Alex Levy, has always been credited with the design since he had designed the anniversary celebratory book as well as the catalog cover for that year, both of which bear the Viking ship symbol. Might this be, however, based on Carlock's design and is it a symbol of the family, at least the Hubbard side of the family? I always wondered why it signified the fiftieth anniversary.

D. L. acknowledges that George attended a composition class at the Art Students League of New York on 57th St. At that time George wrote, "I will try hard for another year as we said last spring and will study illustrating and composition...copying landscapes at the museums and then if I cannot get enough to do I think I will get into some commercial branch."(p.144) D. L.

interprets the situation as the Larkins hoping George would soon be able to make a living with his art, perhaps as a portrait, landscape or commercial artist. At that point, D. L. opines, “Little did they know that here was a chip off the old Hubbard block – a stubbornly dedicated soul whose vision of his own integrity as a man and as an artist would tie him to ten more years of hard work and study.” Clearly Dan Larkin refers to Elbert Hubbard. I would just note that at least George did not hurt anyone else except for costing the ever patient Larkins a lot of money.

By 1906 apparently George had tired of not only Buffalo, but also of New York City and Connecticut. He now set his heart on Paris. Still, he had no job, no significant sales of his work no assets. Again he turned to Aunt Frank. She resisted at first, but finally relented and agreed to subsidize him. He left for Paris early in 1907 at age 22.



George found an inexpensive apartment/studio where he lived throughout his Paris years. It was located on a Left Bank street dating back to the 1500's, near the Sorbonne and the Luxembourg Gardens. He did, indeed, enroll in art classes given by the founder of an art movement called Synchronism, founded by Ernest Percyval Tudor-Hart. Pollitt says that he worked at a famous sketching studio called Academie Colarossi. There were no instructors but there were nude models. He hung out with other American art students at gatherings in “the Quarter” at Gertrude Stein’s Left Bank salon

and at Café Dome.

Aunt Frank and a couple of others travelled to France in 1907, visiting with George many times during the trip, according to D. L. He quotes Frank as saying, “We talked, discussed and argued art with George all day.” George, at that time’ was studying at the Academie Julian and had continued his practice of studying and copying the old masters in the Louvre....In the next few years he would become a prominent, though not always popular figure, in the group of American art students in Paris, according to D.L. Aunt Frank was apparently enough impressed with George’s effort that she agreed to continue his allowance for another three years.

Pollitt opines that George also impressed some other Americans. For instance, he became friends with an American sculptor, Arthur Lee, and his wife, Fredericka. George did a painting of Fredericka which they took with them back to the U.S. in 1917. At that time the Lees began acting as agent in the U.S. for George. It is not known how successful that endeavor was, however. Lee did praise George’s ‘simple outline drawing’, and wrote: “Carlock was the most gifted painter and draftsman among the Americans in Paris from 1906 to 1918 (the year in which George died). He achieved unique rhythmic quality in his drawings and designs where he did most with least and we all admired his designs. He was a touchstone for all of us.”

He became close friends with American artist, Thomas Hart Benton. They often painted beside each other. George had been around Paris longer. At this point, Benton was the novice, seeking to learn from George. He said at one point that George was reputed among young American artists in Paris before World War I to be a 'very knowing old Paris hand' who 'consulted at the Louvre.' Benton further wrote, "We became very friendly. I saw him daily... Sometimes Carlock would walk home with me after Colarossi classes were ended and sit in my studio and talk. Thompson would join us and we'd have one of those artistic bull sessions so common in Parisian student circles. We'd eat salt fish and bread and cheese, drink cheap wine, and gab until late at night."

Pollitt adds that Benton thought that George was often lonely and had no really close friends. Benton wrote quite a bit about George as his own career matured, seeming to respect George as a mentor. In his autobiography, Benton says: "Carlock was too much of a mentor for real companionship. He was willing to reveal his 'genius' but not to have any of its tenets questioned."

Benton's biographer, Henry Adams, noted that Benton felt that "Carlock possessed a knowledge of art history and an intuition about the principles of modern art far beyond that of the average artist. He was a consultant for the Louvre's department of old master drawings and a devoted advocate of Cezanne."

D. L. analyzed George as follows: "George was a loner and a perfectionist who never ceased to struggle with his craft. He was extremely secretive about his work, rarely allowing any of his fellow artists to see what he was doing. Unlike his celebrated uncle in East Aurora, words did not come easy to George. His aloofness and air of superiority were a bulwark sheltering his basic insecurity from the world. His aunt would have been sensitive to this and sympathetic. However, as his progress in art became more unconventional, more modern, even Frank became impatient. She had refused a request from George to pay for him to go on a trip to Italy at which time she also threatened to cut off his allowance. It was JDL, who visited George a little later in Paris in 1910, who actually liked George's work, being less conventional and perhaps more interesting than a lot of work of that period. pp.144-146.

But George continued to have little to show for his effort and Aunt Frank continued to dislike his work. Aunt Frank must have threatened to cut off, the pipeline of funds at some point, just about the same time as a salon had rejected his work for an exhibit because George wrote to her that it was just as well since he would now have to work harder and concentrate all the more. In January, 1911 George thanked Aunt Frank for continuing to send the allowance. He noted some recent successes, then complained that that he did not have her respect.

By mid 1911, says Pollitt, George stopped writing to Aunt Frank. The next year he came to the U.S. to see family, but there is no mention of seeing Aunt Frank. He was back in Paris when World War I broke out. He left Europe soon thereafter. On his entry papers, he listed the Larkin's address as his own and then proceeded to stage a number of exhibits of his drawings in Washington, D.C. and New York City. One show included about 20 years of his work and was quite favorably reviewed, asserting that George was a 'pupil of Matisse' and "one of the few people who understood Cezanne. The critic asserted that Carlock's aim was to draw in a simple, pure, humble way... The lines of his figures are impersonations of truth" There is no mention of how successful financially these exhibits were. It should

be noted that his U.S. agent, Lee, continued to market drawings of nudes because sales were good in the U.S.

He returned to Europe on April 20, 1915 on an ocean liner, only 17 days before his uncle, Elbert Hubbard, and his second wife, Alice, were killed when the Germans torpedoed the Lusitania on May 7, 1915. Another major source of influence had been torn from George's life.

Back in Paris, George had two good things happen. He began to sell portraits in Paris and he got what seems to be his first girl friend, Marie Novak. In 1918 he got a job with the American Red Cross in Paris to supplement his income. He worked as a freight clerk and as an interpreter. Then he had a bad thing happen. Even as his uncle John Larkin was striving to make those working in industry safer from catching the Spanish flu, George was stricken by that pandemic disease, "the Spanish flu." The "Atlantic Division of the American Red Cross Newsletter" of April 7, 1919 published his obituary. Entitled, "Buffalo Man Buried With Military Honors in France," it read: "A Photograph of the flower decked grave of George Read Carlock, of 107 Lincoln Parkway, Buffalo, N.Y. (the Larkin's address), has reached Atlantic Division headquarters from Red Cross photographers in France.

"Mr. Carlock, who was an artist, had lived in Paris for about seven years prior to the outbreak of the war when he volunteered his services to the American Red Cross. Early last October he contracted pneumonia and died October 22 at the age of thirty- three in the American hospital at Neuilly.

He was buried with full military honors in the American Red Cross section of the cemetery at Suresnes. As the flag-draped coffin was lowered into the grave a squad of U.S. Infantry sounded taps."

Pollitt's paper also cites a painting, a still life of fruit, as being owned by Robert Rust of East Aurora. My partner in the Gallery, Jerome Puma, was able to contact him in Colorado where Rust now lives, and he immediately photographed and sent a copy to us. The painting (which was not a still life of fruit, but of a bucolic farm scene.) and is signed by George. We should note also, that just recently Mr. Rust donated to the Gallery an original piece of artwork by Charles Rohrbach who succeeded Alexander Levy as Art Director of the LSC. The painting was used to create a catalog cover for the LSC. We are very grateful to Mr. Rust for that donation as well as the photograph of the Carlock piece.

The very fact that the LSC took such extraordinary care not only in its manufacturing of products, but in the beauty of their containers and of their marketing materials, such as the catalogs, is further evidence of the appreciation of art developed in both Aunt Frank and John Larkin.

So going back to the original question of who influenced who, it is clear that both John and Frank Larkin were a major influence on George. George's very early passion for being an artist and as a result, influencing John and Frank to seek out opportunities to see art in Europe, and pursue support for such art institutes as the Albright Gallery, indicates that that they influenced each other to ever more serious involvement in art culture.

I feel compelled, however, in concluding this article, to address the question of just how successful was George as an artist. Even though in his years in Paris he lived among the Impressionist artists, and as has been mentioned, he developed a friendship with another "American in Paris" artist,

Thomas Benton, and even though the Impressionists for the most part, were not appreciated till after their deaths, obviously George never did acquire the recognition that the others achieved. My sense of it from what I learned from D. L. and Levitt, is that perhaps the reason was that George was perpetually the student, working at different styles.

How aggressive were the Lees in promoting him? Might this be a problem as well. In the end it appears that like his life, he never achieved a strong sense of identity. Clearly he had talent, but his own rather difficult personality pushed art critics and art buyers away from him. There must be examples of his work around, both in France and in the U.S., but unlike some artists, his work did not pop out at you as clearly a "Carlock"

I believe it would be, though difficult, a major achievement to be able to accumulate a collection of his work, so that side by side, one could better appreciate who he was as well as what his legacy is as an artist. George was clearly a talented, though troubled man whose work deserves attention.

And the effort and love the Larkins put in to enabling George to pursue his dreams as an artist, deserves recognition as well.