



Newell Convers Wyeth or N.C. Wyeth (1882-1945) is considered one of the greatest American illustrators during the "Golden Age of Illustration."

Born in Needham, Massachusetts in 1882, N.C. loved to draw as a child. His mother supported his interest in art and urged his father to send him to the Mechanic Arts School in Boston. There, he was encouraged by an instructor to study illustration at the Eric Pope School of Art in Boston. From there, N.C. applied to Howard Pyle's new Brandywine School of Art.

Howard Pyle (1853-1911) was one of the most successful illustrators of his time. He began an art school to carry on the tradition of classic illustration. Each year, Pyle chose only 20 students by portfolio examples and private interviews. There were no entrance fees or tuition, and the costs of materials and studio rental were minimal. Pyle looked for imagination, artistic ability, a sense of color, and a willingness to work hard in his perspective students. Nineteen-year-old N.C. flourished under Pyle's tutelage. He had his first commission for a work one-year after being admitted to the school. He received \$50 for a cover illustration for the *Saturday Evening Post* magazine, which was printed on Feb. 21, 1903.

Wyeth felt one of the strengths in his artistry came from his youth. He had to do many chores at home, including saddling a horse, scything a field and splitting logs. He knew how muscles worked, how men moved when doing work, and how weight shifted during activity. He thought this information was essential for creating an effective image. He studied and researched all the time periods and costumes prior to working on any illustration. Twice during the early years, N.C. journeyed west to live and work with the cowboys and the western Indian tribes, illustrating many stories about the "Old West" for Scribner's Publishers during the early 1900's.

N.C. married and purchased a farm in Chadd's Ford, Pennsylvania, where he spent most of his adult life. N.C. and Carolyn had five children: Henriette, Carolyn, Nathaniel, Ann, and Andrew. He found inspiration in the countryside and was happiest in his hillside studio away from the metropolitan areas. Although most illustrations during this time were printed size 8" x 10" or less, Wyeth painted his illustrations in oil painting on 32" x 40" boards with broad brushstrokes and occasionally a palette knife. He worked quickly, backing away from the panel to study the composition, and then swiftly making the necessary changes and additions. He often completed an illustration in one day. He felt that the action of the scene was secondary to the dramatic emotion of the moment.

During his forty three-year career, he created over 2,000 illustrations. His best-known works are in the Classic series from 1911 to the late-1920's for the publisher Charles Scribner and Sons. These included *Treasure Island*, *Kidnapped*, *Black Arrow*, *King Author*, *Mysterious Island*, and *The Last of the Mohicans*. These illustrated works may still be purchased today in many languages.

Later in his career, N.C. was increasingly irritated by the art public's view that an "illustrator" was less of an artist than one who simply paints or who is deemed a "fine artist." He began spending some of his time painting landscapes of the area and the Maine coast where the family spent their summers. He had a few shows of his paintings, although his illustrations continued to be the most popular and lucrative part of his portfolio of work.

N.C. was a big man in stature, over 6 ft. tall and 240 pounds. He was a man sure of his beliefs and his utter devotion to his family, closely nurturing and challenging his five children. The family was very firmly under the influence of N.C. in that he was always at the center of most activities and events in and around the home.

The arts were also an integral part of daily life in the Wyeth home. He instructed each child in drawing at a very young age. Henriette, the oldest, is a well-known painter of portraits and still lifes. She worked in New Mexico with husband and fellow artist Peter Hurd, who was a student of N.C.'s at Chadd's Ford. Carolyn was a painter of places and objects that related to her family. Nathaniel was an engineer and inventor. Ann married another of N.C.'s students, John McCoy. She is the musician and composer of the family. Andrew, the youngest of N.C.'s children, is perhaps the most well known artist of the family. Each child grew up with a feeling for the mystery of nature, and each one expressed that love in a highly personal way.

N.C. Wyeth died in 1945. His energy and love of art continued to permeate the ground of Chadd's Ford and his legacy lives on with his children and grandchildren.

References:

There are many books and catalogs about N.C. Wyeth, the Wyeth family, and the Golden Age of Illustration.

Duff, J. *An American Vision. Three Generations of Wyeth Art.* Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1987.

Allen, D. and D. Allen. *N.C. Wyeth, The Collected Paintings, Illustrations, and Murals.* New York: Bonanza Books, 1972.

Meyer, Susan. *America's Great Illustrators.* New York: Abrams, 1978.

Dell, J.E., ed. *Visions of Adventure, N.C. Wyeth and the Brandywine Artists.* New York: Watson-Guptill, 2000.