

12-30-2007: Cedar Rapids Gazette: Collecting the Past: Mary Ruth Potter Painting:

Today, Johnson County can boast a wealth of local artists many of them amateurs from sculptors, to photographers, to painters. Their art is accessible to the public through exhibits and events such as the Iowa City Gallery Walk, the Iowa Arts Festival and the Thieves' Market. But producing amateur artists isn't something new to Johnson County.

The painting pictured here was painted by one such amateur Mary Ruth (Myers) Potter who was born near North Liberty in 1909. We don't know if Potter's interest in art started as a youngster or whether her family's home was littered with some of her "early" work. But she developed an interest in painting some time before her twenties when this picture was painted. This painting was donated to the Johnson County Historical Society by Ruth Ann Colony of Central City. Colony's mother-in-law was Potter's sister. Colony said that Potter gave the painting to her brother-in-law Eugene Colony as a gift sometime in the 1930s or 1940s. According to Colony, Potter was living in Chicago by the 1930s and Colony believes that she had originally gone to Chicago to go to school, possibly to study art.

The oil on canvas painting is well-executed indicating that Potter did have some art instruction. The use of color, brush strokes, and depth illustrate the painter's knowledge of the craft. The subject of this still life is vague but intriguing. The focus is a large brown jug possibly a water jug sitting on a brown table in front of a background of dark shades of blue. Potter has added some green to the table to show depth and she shows the three-dimensional nature of the object through the painted shadow on the table and the visible opening at the top of the jug. Unfortunately we don't know whether this jug was a significant object to her or her family or whether it was something that she just picked out as a good subject. We also don't know whether she painted it as part of an assignment for a class she was taking or whether she specifically painted it as a gift for her brother-in-law.

Do you have more information on Mary Ruth (Myers) Potter or do you have something painted by her? If so we would like to hear from you. Send us a note or e-mail us at leighann@johnsoncountyhistory.org