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MINEOLA POST OFFICE MUSEUM UNVEILS HISTORIC MURAL

By LINDSAY RANDALL, Staff Writer



'HORSE AND BUGGY' ERA: Bernard Zakheim's 1937 mural "The Horse and Buggy Give Way to Modern Methods of Mail Transportation" once again graces Mineola's former post office, now a museum. (Staff Photo By Lindsay Randall)

MINEOLA - After nearly 35 years of neglect, a historic mural was unveiled at the newly renovated Mineola Post Office Museum of Transportation and History, commemorating growth and the rise of modernity in the city, and closing a meaningful chapter in the Zakheim family's history.

In 1937, Bernard Zakheim, a Polish immigrant and professional artist, was commissioned to create a mural-sized painting for the Mineola post office, as part of a work program inspired by Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

"The painting shows a significant moment of clash between modernity and the past," said Nathan Zakheim, the original artist's son and a conservator in California.

In "The Horse and Buggy Give Way to Modern Methods of Mail Transportation," a sleek train barrels down the tracks in the painting and splits the mural in half. On the left side, two modern-day postal workers carry their sacks of mail as an airplane flies overhead. On the right, two horses, loaded with bags of letters, retreat in fright at the locomotive's approach.

"The train is scaring away the way things used to have been," Zakheim said. "My dad loved that sort of visual pun."

In the 1970s, for an unknown reason, the painting was torn down and stored in a basement, where age and the elements gradually scarred the piece beyond recognition.

But in 2000, a group of Mineola residents championed an effort to track down the artist's family and hire someone to re-create the mural as part of the renovation of the post office into a historical museum. Fortunately, the artist's family just happened to be artists themselves.

Zakheim, with the help of six of his children, three of his grandchildren, and his sister, embarked on a 1½-year project to redo his father's painting.

"We just dedicated a whole wall to his mural and worked on it and worked on it," Zakheim said. "In this case of replicating my father's work, it was thrilling. I know every brush stroke of his technique."

He decided to use a mixture of the original medium, egg tempera, and acrylic emulsion, to preserve the painting's color and quality. For easier transportation, he painted on synthetic canvas, joking that in case someone did want to rip it off, it wouldn't be as difficult as yanking a mural off the wall.

Zakheim visited Mineola with his son, Kuva, who worked alongside his father to complete his grandfather's painting.

"I just felt a certain connection again with my grandfather," Kuva said. "I've enjoyed the appreciation of people in Mineola, the history in the mural and the stories we have heard."

Bernard Zakheim's influence is still felt on the Zakheim family, and Nathan Zakheim said he considers his father a mentor, both as an artist and a family leader. Painting and restoring artwork is a family affair with the Zakheims, and Nathan said he always encouraged his kids to pursue their artistic backgrounds.

"Most of our interactions were enduring dinner while working on a painting," Kuva said, laughing.

Kuva said it was gratifying to see three generations of family work finally come to a resting place in the Mineola post office.

"When I saw it up there, I said, 'That really belongs here,'" he said. "It really fits, it makes sense."

The painting will be available for public viewing on Saturday. The museum is located at the old post office, 114 N. Pacific St.