

"The Old Tavern" Mural

at the Silver Spring Library

By Jerry McCoy



This mural was the result of a unique government project sponsored by the United States Treasury Department's Section of Painting and Sculpture, in existence between 1934 and 1943. During this period, artwork was commissioned for over 1,100 post offices that were being constructed. The philosophy behind the project was that Americans could learn more about their culture and history through public art, and the community post office was deemed the ideal showcase for this work.

"The Old Tavern," an oil-on-canvas painting, approximately six by sixteen feet, was commissioned in 1937 for the new post office located at 8412 Georgia Avenue in Silver Spring. The mural depicts Civil War Union soldiers (circa 1864-65) reading their mail and relaxing in front of the Eagle Inn, which stood on the southwest corner of present day Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road in the village of what was then called "Sligo." Inclusion of the central figure of the young African-American soldier was intended by the artist to "symbolize the result of the Civil War -- namely the liberation of his race."

Nicolai Cikovsky (1894-1984), the artist of the mural, was a Russian immigrant who was well regarded as a muralist, painter, lithographer, and teacher (Corcoran School of Art). In addition to the Silver Spring Post Office mural, he completed commissions for the Towson, Maryland post office, as well as the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. His works can also be found in the National Museum of American Art, the Phillips Collection, the Art Institute of Chicago, and the Cleveland Museum of Art.

In 1981 the United States Postal Service vacated their building at 8412 Georgia Avenue and moved to a new and larger facility on Second Avenue in Silver Spring. The mural remained in the building until 1991 when the structure was sold. At that time the mural was removed and placed in storage because there was no room to publicly display it at the new post office.

Newly restored, the mural will be displayed at the Silver Spring Library indefinitely, and will continue its nearly six-decade old purpose of teaching the public not only American history, but the history of Silver Spring.

The Rededication of "The Old Tavern"

On July 7, 1997 "The Old Tavern" was rededicated at the Silver Spring Library. At a ceremony attended by County Executive Doug Duncan and other dignitaries, the mural was unveiled on a wall over the magazine section.

A philatelic cache of envelopes and a special pictorial postmark cancellation in honor of the rededication were developed to celebrate the rededication.

The restoration and exhibition of the mural was assisted by many donors, including the Montgomery County Government, City Place Mall, the Silver Spring Post Office, the Silver Spring Woman's Club, the Silver Spring Library Advisory Committee, Friends of the Silver Spring Library, the Silver Spring Volunteer Fire Department, Triple Five Corporation, the Woodside Park Civic Association, Jerry and Nan McCoy, Moore & Associates, the Silver Spring Lions Club (in honor of John Sanford Kemper), Richard and Kathleen Abrams, Boy Scouts of America Troop 209, Ann E. Irvine, Roger and Noram Langley, North Hills of Silver Spring Civic Association, Robert and Kay Oshel, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, James D. Sorensen (in memory of Ione Beall Sorensen), Joel D. Treese (in honor of Jerry McCoy), and the Wheaton Regional Library Advisory Committee.

While at the Silver Spring Library, note the historic pictures of Silver Spring behind the circulation desk.

