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'Autumn' Redux

Jim Stewart
Furman University

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'Autumn' Redux



With the help of the artist's family, a historic painting is restored and returned to the James B. Duke Library.

It is doubtful that Furman alumni from the late 1950s through the late 1980s were aware of Richard Andrew's presence on campus — or even his influence on their academic pursuits.

While they may not have known Andrew's name, though, many are likely to remember his contribution to university life.

For years Andrew's painting "Autumn" presided majestically over the Sidney Ernest Bradshaw Wing of the James B. Duke Library. The glassed-in section of the library, which looks out toward Paris Mountain, was where intense scholars went to focus on their work — and where their sleepy comrades found a peaceful place and comfortable couch or chair on which to enjoy a leisurely snooze.

With its serene, pastoral depiction of young people at the close of day, "Autumn" was a perfect fit for the Bradshaw Wing.

But in the late 1980s, "Autumn" was damaged and, in need of repair, removed from its perch. The university at first planned to handle the restoration in-house, but closer inspection of the painting revealed that it required more professional expertise — and expense. And so it was placed in storage to await action.

There it remained until 2005, when a student researching the papers of John L. Plyler, former Furman president, found information about the painting that helped the university determine what its options might be.

Today the restored "Autumn" once again hangs in the library, quietly inspiring new generations of students. It was dedicated November 15 during a ceremony attended by many of the artist's relatives and descendants.

Born in Northern Ireland in 1869 and raised in Boston, Richard Andrew was an artist of considerable renown during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Having studied at the Académie Julian and L'Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, he served as head of graphic arts at the Massachusetts Normal School of Art, and exhibited his work nationally and internationally.

"Autumn" hung for many years in the stairway of the Boston City Club. When the club was disbanded, the painting was returned to the artist and, upon his death in 1956, became the property of his estate.

Not long thereafter, Furman joined the "Autumn" story. Gen. Robert Dean, primary architect of the current campus, was related to Andrew by marriage and helped arrange for the artist's widow, Lucy Pew Andrew, and brother, Nathaniel, to donate the painting to the university.

In a letter to President Plyler dated May 13, 1959, Dean wrote that Andrew's "most monumental compositions are those depicting exploits of Massachusetts troops in the Civil War, Spanish-American War and World War I. These are on the walls of the great stairhall which lies behind the Hall of Flags in the State House in Boston."

"Autumn," with its bucolic feel and natural setting, shows a different side of the artist. An October 1913 commentary from the *Gloucester Daily Tribune* describes the painting as a "most certifiable achievement of decorative art" and adds that, "with its display of humble but artistically dignified fruits of the season, [it] strikes one as a work worthy of comparison with many decorations which have stood the test of time."

When, in 2005, Myra Dennis '09

discovered the mention of "Autumn" in Plyler's papers, she reported the information to Melissa May Bateman '02, then the university's collections manager. With the blessing of Furman's Decorative and Fine Arts Committee (DFAC), Bateman began to investigate the painting and the artist's background.

Noting that the return address on the back of the painting was Massachusetts Normal School of Art (now Massachusetts College of Art), she contacted the institution. The school, in turn, got in touch with Andrew Dean, son of the now deceased General Dean. Andrew Dean called Bateman and confirmed the painting's origins.

Meanwhile, the DFAC had requested an appraisal and conservation report and begun

discussing its options for the disposition of the painting. Because the cost for restoration and reframing the large work was prohibitive, the committee decided its best recourse was to remove "Autumn" from the university's collection and donate it back to the family, or sell it. But Andrew Dean asked the DFAC to delay those plans while he attempted to find donors to restore the painting — and allow it to remain at Furman.

Around this time the Mullet family, descendants of Richard Andrew, entered the picture. Marian Mullet, great-niece of the artist, had been working with her daughter Martha Winsor and niece Deborah Batt on a book called *Hall of Valor: Richard Andrew, Artist*.

When they learned where "Autumn" resided, relatives of the artist traveled to Furman to see it — and immediately began working to raise the money for the painting's restoration. Their efforts were soon rewarded, and with funding in hand, the university commissioned Craig Crawford of Columbia, S.C., to execute the repairs.

Although the library's redesign in 2004 changed the configuration of the Bradshaw Wing, the beautifully restored "Autumn" has found a new home on the opposite side of the building. Today it hangs in the Charlie Peace Wing, where it once again overlooks a quiet study nook. And for at least one current student — Hillary Mullet '11 of Roanoke, Va., granddaughter of Marian — it serves as a reminder of her family's ongoing connection to Furman.

"Autumn" has come full circle thanks to the work and support of the Furman library staff, the DFAC, and the family of Richard Andrew. As Janis Bandelin, director of the library, said at the dedication ceremony, "The return of this painting is meaningful not only to the family and friends and to the alumni who fondly remember it, but to students, staff and faculty members who will view, contemplate and enjoy this work now and into the future." |F|

Compiled by Jim Stewart from contributions by Janis Bandelin, Melissa May Bateman, James Mullet and Liz McSherry '07.