

Interview with Vinton Pickens

D. Some newcomers to the County recently asked me to tell them "all about the Loudoun Sketch Club" -- and I found ~~I found~~ / I knew very little about it before 19 , the year I joined. You're a charter member. When was the Club founded?

V. 1944, the year of the first Waterford Fair. Everybody was asked to contribute something and crafts galore piled in -- but Betty Tiffany, Evelyn Marshall and I submitted, respectively, a bronze bas relief, a watercolor and an oil painting. Astounded at finding one another, we started meeting on Tuesdays to sketch. Being Americans we soon almost automatically organized as a club, dubbed by my husband, in the slang of the moment, "The Hot Sketches". By then there were 5 members and soon we were 7 -- and received our first public recognition.

D. How? Did you have a show?

V. At the next Waterford Fair we occupied a sort of alcove in a small room. Our first real show (1946) was in the basement of the Leesburg Baptist Church (long since de-hallowed and used by the Division of Motor Vehicles). We had few members much beyond the student level

but we brashly invited Eleanor Swenson, then Curator of American Art at the Corcoran, to be guest of honor at a dinner to celebrate our opening. She came and was very polite.

D. Rather a nice idea -- dinner for a V.I.P. -- Does the custom continue?

V. Receptions on opening day replaced it. The Club had more contact with the public.

~~Loudoun picture~~. Have you seen the mural-type paintings in the Loudoun County High School auditorium and cafeteria? Sketch Club members did them for the Loudoun County Bicentennial in 1957.

Each years' high school freshmen are introduced to Loudoun's history by a tour of these works.

D. And you were still the Hot Sketches?

V. No. Newer members felt it undignified to be a Hot Sketch. We decorously became the L.S.C.

D. That is more dignified but the impression it gives is inaccurate.

Because we have optional sketching trips in summer and those members who wish work together from life models in winter people think of us as holding classes.

- V. There's no teaching in the Club. We often have teacher members but they never give instruction at Club gatherings.
- D. And people don't realize that many members have their own work programs independently of the Club. Ann Baird, for one example, has recently had a one-person show at the International Gallery in Washington. L.S.C. had nothing to do with that.
- V. Have any people asked about joining the Club?
- D. Yes -- but they've had strange ideas about it. Some thought they were too professional for it, others that they weren't professional enough.
- V. That's a laugh. The Club doesn't think so much about who is or isn't "professional" -- that's a hard word to define, by the way -- as about how seriously a person is going to work. Naturally we hope to attract serious artists but a dedicated amateur is just as welcome. We give no prizes at our annual juried show, just exhibit work done by members in the year just ending.
- D. Here's one I didn't know quite how to answer: why would artists accustomed to showing in New York or Washington show here along

with amateurs?

- V. Why should they object? If their work is really good it will stick out a mile.
- D. More of same question: and won't that discourage beginners?
- V. Again, why should it? Everyone was a beginner once. The Loudoun Sketch Club is for anyone -- any Loudoun resident, that is -- who's enough interested in art to work at it.
- D. You say "professional" is hard to define but most people mean artists who exhibit in city or regional if not necessarily national shows and sell their work reasonably often. By this definition how many professional members have we now?
- V. By this strict definition only a fourth of us, but there are also several who earn steady though moderate incomes by their work. How did we get to all this money talk anyway? Sketch Club members are of course glad to sell but sales are only incidental to the Club's objective as stated in the by-laws: to improve its members' ability in painting, graphics and related art forms. We are first and last a working group.