

Travels with Alden Bryan

by Mickey Myers

As the young couple docked their schooner at Gloucester Harbor, Massachusetts, in the summer of 1938, who would have imagined they were launching an adventure in the arts that would last a lifetime? Alden Bryan (1913-2001) was an energetic Harvard graduate who had recently married Mary Taylor Lewis, a dedicated artist. They were making their way up the East Coast from Philadelphia, sailing with less of an agenda than the pleasure of a summer sail north bound.

If Alden had any ambition in the arts, it had been kept at bay while at Harvard. Fu-

eled by a fascination with building things as a little boy, and the allure of his new wife's single-mindedness, he discovered in Cape Ann a world that was new to him, a beehive of artistic activity. It was full of artists at their easels, along the docks and the beach, along the bluffs and the roadsides. Alden became involved immediately in an artistic momentum that was to last the rest of his life.

Born in 1913 and raised in Carthage, Missouri, Alden became familiar with New England as a child from camping trips to the Northeast Kingdom of Vermont. At Harvard, he studied economics and was on the tennis team, and upon graduation, he

worked as a tennis pro at the Eastern Yacht Club in Marblehead, Massachusetts. There he met Mary, whom he married in 1936.

Almost immediately upon arriving in Gloucester, Alden and Mary became frequent participants in the painting workshops offered by the plein air painting masters in the area, including Emile Gruppe, Aldro Hibbard and Charles Curtis Allen. It was Allen who suggested Bryan join him on a two week painting trip in Jeffersonville, Vermont, in 1939, and from that workshop onward, Vermont was the Bryans' home.

Alden and Mary settled with their young son on a dairy farm in Jefferson-





Travels with Alden is on view through September 2, 2013, at the Bryan Memorial Gallery, 180 Main Street, Jeffersonville, Vermont, 05464, 802-644-5100, www.bryangallery.org.

All illustrated works are by Alden Bryan and from the Bryan Memorial Gallery.

ABOVE: *Senegal Market*, 1979, o/c, 12 x 16.

RIGHT: *Evening Color, Farm in Jeffersonville*, 1960s, o/c, 20 x 30.

LEFT: *Stonehurst—Intimate Harbor, Nova Scotia*, 1980, o/c, 12 x 16.

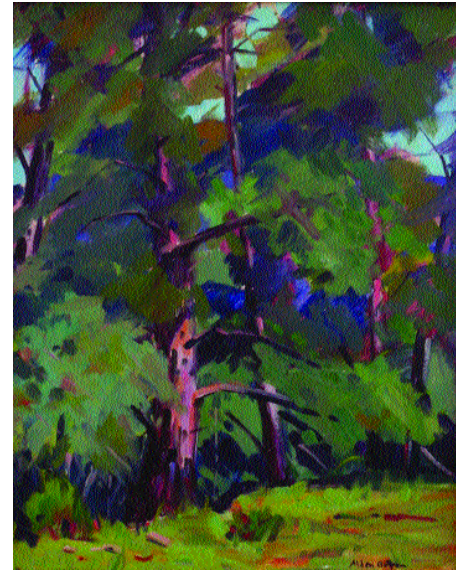
ville, where he introduced pasteurized milk to local communities in the county, ultimately maintaining the dairy into the 1970s. At the same time, he commenced to paint the local farms in plein air, in all seasons particularly winter, recording what he saw of the landscape in this predominately rural community. Painters had been coming to this particular corner of Vermont for decades because of its sweeping vistas and convivial accommodations at the



Smugglers Notch Inn. But learning the idiosyncrasies of painting in below zero temperatures was different, he noted, “Standing out there in the cold, you’ve got

to make the first strike count.”

Bryan’s aesthetic and agricultural efforts went hand in hand with his historic preservation of local buildings and enter-



ABOVE: *Woods Interiors (California)*, 1940s, o/c, 20 x 16.

LEFT: *Guadaloup*, 1992, o/c, 9 x 12.

BELOW LEFT: *Brittany*, 1965, o/c, 14 x 20.

RIGHT: *Tromaso, Norway*, 1968, o/c, 12 x 16.

BELOW RIGHT: *Panama*, 1930s, o/c, 12 x 16.

California, Arizona and New Mexico, while trips up the New England coast resulted in collections of small paintings, vital evidence of the coastal simplicity of Maine and Nova Scotia.

By the late 1940s Bryan was invited by Hibbard, who had been his instructor, to teach as an “outdoor instructor of landscape painting” at The Hibbard School of Painting on Bearskin Neck in Rockport, Massachusetts. Hibbard would give two criticism classes per week, and Bryan would give two outdoor classes per week in oil painting.

Private though the Bryans were in their personal dealings, they knew the value of standing with their fellow artists. Alden was a member of the North Shore Arts Association, the Rockport Art Association, the Silvermine Guild, the Academic Artists Association, the Salmagundi Club, the Allied Artists of America, the Guild of Boston Artists, and the Copley Society. For his most prized membership, the American Watercolor Society, he painted enough watercolors to achieve membership, but after that determined that oil painting was his medium of choice.

Bryan traveled at the same vigorous pace that characterized all his undertakings, often going abroad when his other interests

prises, such as the Windridge Farms Inn and two restaurants on Main Street in Jeffersonville. He built a tennis facility with clay courts indoors, and twenty-two additional clay courts outside, and a summer tennis camp for youth. He also designed the base lodge for Smugglers Notch Ski Resort. Bryan worked all the time, often noting that “My education never began until I got to Jeffersonville.”

Even as his success was drawing people from afar and providing incomes for the local people, shortly after World War II, Alden and Mary returned to spend sum-

mers in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Rocky Neck in Gloucester was described at the time as “a narrow little street, lined with colorful shops, studios and galleries.” It was here on Rocky Neck that the Bryans established Bryan Gallery to show their own work, in what once was an old copper paint factory.

Completing over 200 (existing) paintings of the Cape Ann area, Bryan became known for painting his environment, wherever he was. Family trips to California and the Southwest in the 1940s resulted in classic paintings by Bryan of rural



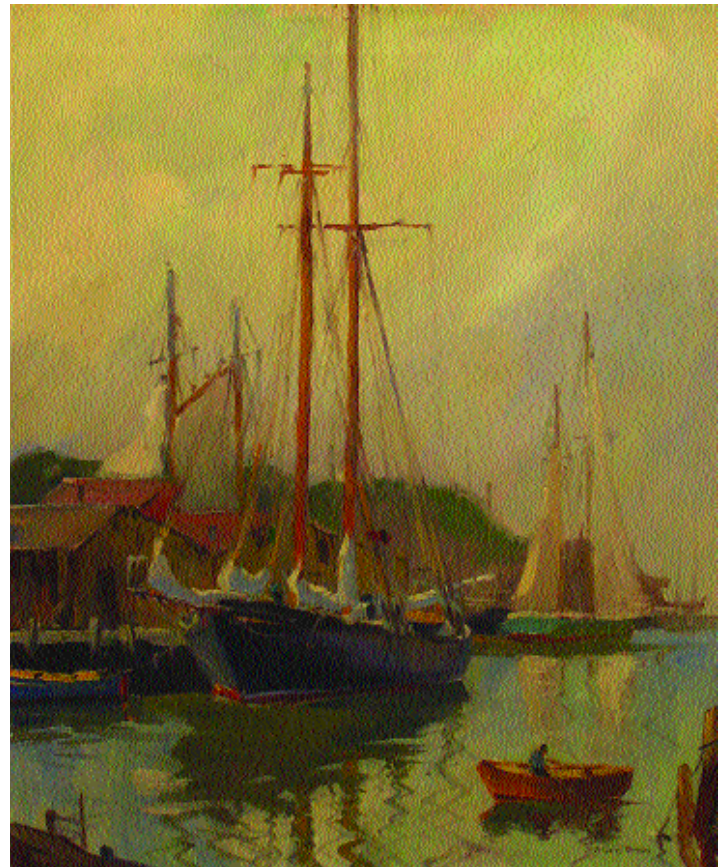
encroached on his painting at home: Cornwall, England in 1956; Alaska and British Columbia in 1957 where he captured the fridity of the terrain in small paintings with long views; Brittany in 1965 where the legendary spring warmth of France is woven into the immediacy of street and canal scenes; New Zealand and Australia in 1968 where his canvases swell with the compassion of a visiting farmer; Côte d'Azur, France, in 1972 where the long vistas are relaxed and serene. His annual painting trips in March to Quebec City fueled his conviction that Quebec City had not been adequately painted by other artists from the United States, especially when the spring break up of ice took place.

In 1978, the death of his wife, partner, and fellow painter, Mary Bryan, left Alden without his confidant. Though their expertise as painters—his in oil outdoors and hers in watercolor indoors—kept them apart in daylight hours, they came together at the end of the day to discuss their work



freely and openly. Mary's preference for working indoors gave Alden the opportunity to build studios for her over the years,

and their mutual support, private as they were, was evident to their circle of friends and fellow painters.



ABOVE: *Gloucester Harbor*, o/c, 30 x 25.
 ABOVE LEFT: *Windmill near Newport, CA*, 1941, o/c, 12 x 10.
 LEFT: *Banjul, Gambia—Palm Trees, Beach*, 1979, o/c, 12 x 16.
 RIGHT: *Joe Williamson Farm*, 1950s, o/c, 14 x 20.
 BELOW RIGHT: *Novo Okatoro (Russia)*, o/c, 12 x 16.

for building a permanent exhibition space in this northern Vermont town.

Bryan proposed that a gallery be built in Mary's memory, a building for the community. He organized, designed, and financed a center for the arts that would make Jeffersonville, Vermont, much more than a well-preserved New England town. Opening in 1984, this non-profit gallery became Bryan's project for the rest of his life, hosting exhibits and concerts, receptions and dinner parties, visiting artists and workshops. As a show place for plein air painters and Vermont landscape artists, Bryan Memorial Gallery became a cultural destination in Alden's lifetime, and continues as such today.

In his lifetime, Alden Bryan chose not to sell most of his paintings, giving instruc-

If anything, after Mary's death, Alden picked up his pace. Travel continued to Haiti in 1978, where the colorful chaos of the local marketplace delighted him as he wrote on the back of a canvas, "A great day of painting! Chickens and pigs running out from under the easel;" Casablanca, Senegal

and Gambia in 1979; Sri Lanka in 1980.

Back in Jeffersonville, Bryan had been amazed that a locally curated memorial exhibition of Thomas Curtin's paintings in 1980 had produced such a tremendous response from the community and beyond. The success of that exhibit planted the seed



tions to his gallery director, Jane George Shaw, to wait at least ten years before mounting an exhibition. A few years after the ten year mark, Bryan Memorial Gallery has chosen to observe Alden Bryan's 100th birthday with a memorial exhibition featuring 100 works from his travels, most of which have not been exhibited previously. The passage of time serves to crystallize not only the accomplishments of the artist and the man, but also his vitality and vision, with the wisdom of retrospection.

The one hundred works selected for this exhibition represent the breadth of Bryan's travel, and the depth of his response to the wide and adventuresome variety of destinations he chose for himself. Together, his works are intended to give design to his belief in the role of the artist: "In the same way that poetry dramatizes our thoughts and feelings and in which the theater and novel dramatize our lives, I believe it should be the purpose of the painter to dramatize the visual world around us. In none of these fields is mere representation of the facts the purpose of the artist,



even though to some it would seem so. Actually it is only the essence of what he observes to which the artist gives design." Now under the skylight of his wife's

memorial building and through the work of his own hand, *Travels with Alden* gives shape and form to the adventure that was Alden Bryan's life.