

47 John Allan Wyeth Redux

By David Cochran

This blog continues the story of John Allan Wyeth that was reported in Blog 46, [The Little-Known Poet Buried in Blawenburg](#). If you have not read it, be sure to read Blog 46 first.



John Allan Wyeth's 33rd Division in the Argonne Offensive in WWI

In our last blog, we told the story of the little-known poet, John Allan Wyeth, who is buried in Blawenburg Cemetery. Since that blog was published, we have learned more about the personal life of John Wyeth and felt it was worth sharing.

Steve Boynton, a long-time resident of Blawenburg and subscriber to this blog, told us that he knew John Allan Wyeth and his family that he lived with at the end of his life. So, we continue the story here with some new information about John and his family.

“I knew John and his niece Jane Marion McLean when they were living in her house on Bedens Brook Road on the bad curve,” Steve said. “Julie (Steve’s late wife) and I were entertained for cocktails and dinner many an evening at the McLean home. John gave us his painting of the view, looking from Jane’s across the fields to the milking barns. It still hangs in our dining

room. Jane was a poet as well. She was kind enough to give me a copy of her book, *Brief Experience at War and Peace*. She served in WWII. I believe she was in the OSS. Both John and Jane were great readers and supported Titles Unlimited in Montgomery when I was working there. Good folks!”



View of the farm from Bedens Brook Road, an unnamed painting by John Allan Wyeth

The Poet from the Lost Generation

John Wyeth has the dubious honor of being an unknown poet. Wyeth scholar and blogger, B. J. Omanson describes him this way. "Of all the writers of the Lost Generation, there was perhaps none quite so lost as John Allan Wyeth. Until his 1928 book of war poems was reprinted by Fitzgerald scholar Matthew Bruccoli in 2008 (*This Man's Army*, Univ of SC Press), Wyeth's literary reputation was non-existent."

John was discovered 80 years after the publication of his book, but his recognition came posthumously. He wrote 55 sonnets for *This Man's Army*. An example of his work recalls a time near the end of World War I when he, like so many other soldiers at that time, was stricken with influenza. Wyeth ended up in an evacuation hospital in Souilly, a small town in northeast France near the Luxembourg/Belgium border. The pandemic was wreaking havoc on soldiers and civilians worldwide at the time. He survived and wrote his 54th sonnet about the hospital.



A WWI ambulance in Souilly, France

Souilly Hospital

By John Allan Wyeth

Fever, and crowds—and light that cuts your eyes—
Men waiting in a long slow-shuffling line
with silent private faces, white and bleak.
Long rows of lumpy stretchers on the floor.
My helmet drops—a head jerks up and cries
wide-eyed and settles in a quivering whine.
The air is rank with touching human reek.
A troop of Germans clatters through the door.
They cross our line and something in me dies.
Sullen, detached, obtuse—men into swine—
and hurt unhappy things that walk apart.
Their rancid bodies trail a languid streak
so curious that hate breaks down before
the dull and cruel laughter in my heart.

Wyeth is believed to have written *This Man's Army* in Rapallo, Italy, where he lived with his sister and brother-in-law, Florence Sims Wyeth and Alan McLean and their daughter, Jane McLean. The McLeans were poets, writers, and artists. They were considered to be among the literati of their time. Jane grew up associating with artists and poets such as Max Beerbohm, Ezra Pound, W.B. Yeats, Gerhart Hauptmann, and her uncle, John Wyeth. As John advanced in years, he needed the support of family, so John came to Montgomery Township and spent the final years with Jane on Bedens Brook Road. When she passed away, Ellie Wyeth, a local artist and Jane's first cousin once removed, inherited the house. She lived in the house on Bedens Brook Road for 32 years and moved when her children grew up and left home.

The Wyeth family is filled with artists and poets. As Ellie described it, "Not many of us got dressed up to go to work." Jane Marion McLean was a writer and poet. Here are two poems from her 1976 book, *Brief Experience at War and Peace*:

Speak Not with the Lips

Speak not with the lips
But from the heart pour forth
What truth is in you.
Then will your eyes
So called the mirror of your soul
Make plain to recognize if Truth you speak
Or tell us lies

Dirge for 1950

Let thine intellect be thy guide
Thus doth conscience make a coward of all of us.
Nationalize
Rationalize
For 'tis gravity when the sparrows fall
And no one Being watches them all.

Know that stone walls do indeed a prison make
And iron bars are cages o'er the earth.
Pride ourselves
Hide ourselves
From love and piety and mirth
In innocence...so little are they worth.

Thus, "feeling" is for fingers
Emotions stems from endocrine alone;

The heart is but a pump (it gives you oxygen)
Doctors need no Doctrines, no nor “Images of Stone”.
Yea, let thine intellect be thy guide
And Satan make a trophy of thy hide.

An Artistic Family

Ellie’s father, Marion Sims Wyeth, aka Buz, was the managing editor of the Trades Department at Harper and Row publishing house for 57 years. He had many famous clients including renowned science fiction author Ursula Le Guin. Many people wonder if this artistic family is related to the Chadds Ford Wyeths, but Ellie reports that are only distantly related with genealogical connections in the 1600s.

Ellie remembers her Uncle John well. Although she didn’t see him often, he made quite an impression when he visited. “He was quite a character, and he entertained us with songs and dancing at family parties. He was always festive with a twinkle in his eye – game for anything.” When she was growing up, it was quite common for families to entertain themselves with singing. Ellie remembers John pretending he was a waiter carrying a tray and singing “The Waiter Goes To and Fro” to the delight of the family.



The Wyeth Family

L-R. Ellie as a teenager holding Cromwell, the dachshund, John Allan Wyeth, and Buz Wyeth, Ellie’s father

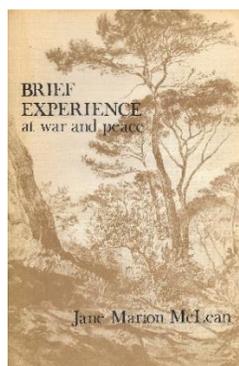
John was a man of limited means, often relying on others for support. Nevertheless, he had a rich life filled with poetry, art, and patriotic duty. He did not need a lot of recognition for his work because he wrote and painted for the love of artistic expression. In some respects, his life was richer than those who have many material goods, but find little joy in life. He lived in a different time, when life seemed simpler and entertainment had to be created. Life wasn't easier then, but people got along just fine without having minute-by-minute news and more information (and misinformation) than they could keep up with. It's obvious that all these years later, we are talking about a little-known man, who despite his anonymity, made a mark on this world. Maybe John Allan Wyeth was on to something.

Blawenburg Facts

1. The McLeans and then Ellie Wyeth lived on land that was originally part of the Van Horn Patent and later owned by the Blaw family. It was on what could have been a property line that divided early farm lands. The house was between properties owned by John Blaw Sr. and his son, Frederick Blaw.
2. *This Man's Army* by John Allan Wyeth is available at bookstores and online.



3. *Brief Experience at War and Peace* by Jane Marion McLean is not currently available. It was self-published – handset, printed on Curtis Rag, and handsewn at Windfall Press in Cambridge, MA. Copies were numbered and often hand signed.



Sources

BJ Omanson's "John Allan Wyeth: Lost Poet of the Lost Generation". The Best American Poetry. 27 May 2012. (see link below)

Email and discussion with Steve Boynton

<http://johnallanwyeth.blogspot.com/2012/03/obscurity-of-john-allan-wyeth.html>

<http://roadstothegreatwar-ww1.blogspot.com/2019/05/the-war-poetry-of-john-allan-wyeth.html>

Interview with Ellie Wyeth

McLean, Jane Marion. *Brief Experience at War and Peace*, Cambridge, MA, Windfall Press, 1976.

Wyeth, John Allan. "On to Paris," In *This Man's Army: A War in Fifty-Odd Sonnets*. 1928. Harold Vinal, Ltd., New York.

Wyeth, John Allan. "Souilly: Hospital," In *This Man's Army: A War in Fifty-Odd Sonnets*. 1928. Harold Vinal, Ltd., New York.

Pictures

[Ambulance in Souilly, France – Marie Poupon](#)

[Cover of *Brief Experience at War and Peace* – Steve Boynton](#)

Cover of *This Man's Army* - <http://johnallanwyeth.blogspot.com/p/about-john-allan-wyeth.html>

[Farm by J. A. Wyeth – Steve Boynton](#)

Wyeth's division -

<https://3.bp.blogspot.com/yAwoHhvBRh4/XMink5zVvFI/AAAAAAAAAQIA/QtagX48ih-4xjOSQMukNOIA2gUvITmCrgCLcBGAs/s1600/wyeth3.jpg>

[Wyeth family – E. Wyeth](#)

Note: In the previous blog, we spelled John Allan Wyeth's middle name Allen. On his cemetery marker and book cover, it is spelled Allan. Our apologies for the error. We have corrected it in this blog.

Copyright © 2020 by David Cochran. All rights reserved.