

Remembering Jack Darling



Jack Darling was born on August 17, 1911, in McLean, Virginia to John Hogg and Alice Newnham Darling. At the age of five the family moved to the Naval proving grounds at Dahlgren. Those roots were to be made permanent, as while Jack traveled throughout his life for school and for pleasure, he always returned to King George County.

Jack's childhood in the county was joyful.

"I drew and dreamed and listened to stories and made up stories. I fished and crabbed and sailed. I explored the woods and the river, and I mixed it up with the Dahlgren boys when I was a youngster."

He was an energetic and curious child. Childhood scraps convinced his parents that Jack needed the discipline of a boys' school, so off he was sent to Christ Church School, near Urbanna, and experience he savored for the remainder of his life.

"At the school, I read and drew and painted, and got up before dawn to sneak out of the dorm and take a small boat we'd hidden in the bushes growing out over the river. I'd go crabbing and fishing, and sell what I caught to earn my spending money."

In the summer breaks, Jack would spend warm idyllic months studying art in Provincetown, Rhode Island.

There, in the now-legendary summer art schools near the ocean, he was a student of Charles W. Hawthorne, who was a student of Robert Henri, and with Henry Hensche. Nearby, another summer art enclave was taught by Hans Hoffman.

At the Philadelphia college art school (Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Arts), Darling was taught by Thornton Oakley. Oakley, in turn, was taught by N. C. Wyeth (with whom he was a lifelong friend). Their mutual instructor in the very select class was Howard Pyle.

Now, while these art giants may not be household names in this era, their towering importance in American art is indisputable.

Howard Pyle enjoyed national admiration and recognition for his narrative and illustrative oils: huge canvasses that depicted swashbuckling adventures such as shipwrecks and pirates, as well as classic literary figures. His paintings, often topical, were reproduced widely as illustrative of the social and historical events of the times (reproduced in lithographs in publications such as Harper's Weekly). Pyle taught and later painted alongside N. C. Wyeth, who carried on the tradition.

Hans Hoffman is widely recognized as the father of modern art. He had immigrated from pre-war Germany to New York, and imported not only his immense talent but also the spirit of the Bauhaus movement and the avant-garde. The cutting-edge aesthetic that imbued his art school enabled America to burst through centuries of tradition, over which Europe—especially Paris—reigned as the unrivalled center for international art. With Hoffman's students, abstract expressionism slashed through all those encumbering traditions and layers of well-defined oil brush work, and broke through afresh, after World War II, with a totally new approach to visual art.

Jack Darling's best friends in the Provincetown summers were William Franklin Draper and Alan Ingalls Palmer, and the three maintained their friendships throughout their lives.

Draper became a leading American portraitist, counting among his subjects John F. Kennedy, the Shah of Iran, Paul Mellon, Walter Annenberg, and Richard Nixon.

Palmer gained national recognition as an illustrator, landscape artist, and portraitist whose work was published widely in national magazines, held in private collections, and bought by major museums.

"We were best, best friends," Darling recalls.

After the Provincetown summers, Jack, along with his brother Tom, was sent to live with his Uncle Steve and Aunt Nell who made their home near Philadelphia, so that they could attend the Philadelphia Museum School of Industrial Art.

"My parents were worried about me. They knew I loved to draw but couldn't imagine what on earth I could do to earn a living with it."



But earn a living he did. He returned to King George County, married Mary Berry, and lived at North Windsor—the venerable old home near Owens. Darling started his Civil Service appointment in 1941 testing the great Naval guns instrumental in winning the Pacific battles of World War II. He also pursued painting, worked with computers in Terminal Ballistics and as a technical artist for the Navy’s surface War facility K Lab. So, he was able to earn a living, keep a hand in art, and keep his feet in touch with the soil of the riverside and countryside that he knew and loved so well.

Life was good there at North Windsor, with lots of friends who maintained their boyish impishness well into adulthood, right alongside Jack. Fishing, hunting, huge Sunday afternoon picnics, drawing, and loving life filled the years with the Northern Neck’s slow spinning of times and tide.

But then, a sadness. Mary passed away in 1975. With no children and no Mary, Jack found himself at crossroads.

Enter Jane Woodworth, the organizational force behind the North Windsor Artists, who started a fledgling art school in an old garage in Dahlgren. Jack, redirected his energies and his life through his love of art. He began to attend the garage workshop as did others in the King George region. Jack soon became the “guru” of the group; with Jane as the “den mother,” able organizer and catalyst for the artists’ workshops. Thus began the bond of talent and the tradition of North Windsor artists. Later, Jack built a sunny studio on the back of North Windsor, and the group of regional artists have met faithfully there for five decades.



Jack continued to make his home at the noble tin-roofed farmhouse until his death in 2007, shortly after his 96th birthday. He breathed and dreamed of art until the end.

Jack's loving, patient nature, his fondness for kind aphorisms, and most of all, his astonishing inner eye for art have become the stuff of regional legend, and he himself a local treasure.



"It's been all about art ever since I was born. I've been drawing and thinking about art and watching light and shadows as long as I can remember. It was always art. Always art."