

**FINAL REPORT**

to the Newton Community Preservation Committee  
on the Restoration of the WPA Mural,  
*Citizenship*, by Maurice Compris,  
at Newton North High School, 2015-2017

**Jennifer Huntington** (Newton North High School Principal Emeritus, Chair of the Research and Interpretation Committee)

**Jonathan Bassett** (Newton North High School Chair of the History and Social Studies Department)

**Shannon Slattery** (Newton North High School, Faculty Member, Fine & Performing Arts Department)

The good news is that, thanks to the support of the City of Newton's Community Preservation Program, the three-part mural *Citizenship*, painted by WPA artist Maurice Compris in 1936, is now installed at Newton North High School! The bad news is that, after much searching, there was not sufficient wall space for all three panels to hang together. You may recall that just the middle panel hung in the old school's cafeteria, and the two side panels were only discovered in a final walk-through of that building before it was torn down. Sadly, there was no accommodation for a 40' long mural in the design of the new school.

The central panel, *Education*, now hangs in the main corridor between the Main Office and the Cafeteria. The two side panels were installed on the brick wall outside the auditorium and adjacent to the Career and Technical Education Department, which is appropriate as these two panels, are *Commerce* and *Industry*.

From the time when the CPC and the City Council voted the funds to restore the murals on December 21, 2015 to the rededication ceremony on November 9, 2017 a lot happened! Newton Public Schools Purchasing Manager Cindy Brown (no relation to Stafford Leighton Brown) expertly oversaw the bidding, contracting and payment process from start to finish. The project was put out to bid as soon as the funds were appropriated. The job was awarded to John Hartmann Fine Arts Conservation Services, based in Carlisle, PA. The mural panels were kept on their storage rollers for transport to Pennsylvania in April 2016.

After careful measurement, it became clear that the restored panels could not fit through some of the doorways between the loading dock and their final display locations. So the difficult decision was made to divide each original panel into several sections. Cleaning, restoring and mounting each section on new, honeycomb aluminum backing took until Spring 2017. The new, rigid backing protected the mural as it was transported back to Newton, and will "future proof" it against accidental damage if it must ever be moved again.

In late June 2017, John Hartmann and two assistants arrived at NN to install the murals. It took them the better part of three days to install braces on the walls, raise each section up carefully, settle it onto the braces, and then carefully align the sections to make the joints between them almost invisible.

On November 9, 2017, Jon Basset presided over the moving rededication ceremony, which was held in the school's auditorium. Mayor-elect Ruthanne Fuller, Dr. David Fleishman (Newton Public Schools Superintendent), and Dr. Henry Turner (Newton North High School Principal) all attended. The ceremony, which included students from the *Leadership Class*, (a special class of seniors chosen for their

leadership roles at the school) who read each of the 75 names of the men, and one woman, from Newton who died in World War I. The name of Stafford Leighton Brown, to whom the mural was originally dedicated, was among those read. The *Veterans of Post 440* were present, and rang their memorial bell between the reading of each name. Newton North's *Family Singers* sang selections of Newton High Schools Hymns from the 1920's at the beginning of the ceremony, and *America the Beautiful* at the end. Interpretive plaques explaining the background of the murals, unveiled by Drs. Fleishman and Turner, and paid for by the PTSO, now hang at each of the mural sites.

There was some concern, when the mural was first seen by students and faculty, that all the figures portrayed were white. That certainly does not represent the student/faculty body now, although in the 1930's, when it was painted, that was more accurate. A suggestion was made that the school's motto "Learning Sustains the Human Spirit" be painted on the wall below the *Education* panel in all the languages currently spoken at NNHS – all 37 of them including American Sign Language! Shannon Slattery, art teacher at Newton North, has undertaken this project with her students, and it looks wonderful! In addition, the students painted the *Athenian Oath* under the mural *Education*. This oath, which had been inscribed under the original mural, reads: "We will strive unceasingly to quicken the public sense of civic duty that we may transmit our city not less, but greater, better, and more beautiful than it was transmitted to us."

From the beginning we have been saying that the mural represents a story, a history and a mystery. The story is about one painting dedicated to one student. Stafford Leighton Brown, who died in World War I. His story is documented in the dedication and in the local newspapers of the time. The story is also about Maurice Compris, the WPA artist who painted the mural. The story lives on because Mrs. Brown endowed a scholarship in her son's name, which is still awarded each year. The history brings us face to face with the death toll of 75 Newton men in the bloody conflict that was supposed to be the 'war to end all wars'. That history includes Stafford Leighton Brown's own story. That WPA artists were commissioned to paint murals on post offices and other public buildings during the Depression is also history. The mystery, and there are several of them, includes the subject matter and the artist. Why, for example are all the figures in the mural white, when there was a thriving black community in Newton living around Myrtle Street? Why does the mural depict images of 'commerce' and 'industry' that were not representative of Newton? Why was Maurice Compris chosen for this project?

It is the hope of the Research and Interpretation Committee that the mural will inspire students, and members of the community, to pause and think about the men who died, about the artist, and perhaps be inspired to do some more research about the mural's story, history and mysteries!

We, the community of Newton, and especially the students, faculty, parents and friends of Newton North High School are very grateful to the CPC, and most especially for Alice Ingerson's guiding hand and good advice during the whole process, and to the City of Newton, that this historic artifact has been restored and rehung so that generations still to come can admire it, and from which we hope they will also learn!

<b>WPA Mural Restoration (Newton North High School)</b>	<b>Proposal Budget 28 September 2015</b>	<b>Actual December 2017</b>
<b>Budget in Proposal to CPC</b>		
senior restoration contractor	\$24,000	
restoration contractors	\$58,200	
project & administrative support	\$15,600	
installation materials	\$8,300	
installation subcontractor	\$8,800	
<b>Total budget = CPA funds appropriated</b>	<b>\$114,900</b>	
<b>Actual Conservator Services</b>		
cleaning		\$21,134
restoration, including inpainting and installation		\$46,188
transport between Newton and restoration studio in Carlisle, PA		\$7,572
backing panels (aluminum)		\$20,506
additional installation costs for side panels (curved wall)		\$4,000
<b>Total conservator services cost</b>		<b>\$99,400</b>
<b>Unspent CPA funds returned</b>		<b>\$15,500</b>
<b>Contributed Services &amp; Donations (actual = minimal estimates)</b>		
time from volunteers and Newton Public Schools staff	\$1,000	\$2,500
interpretive plaques & re-dedication refreshments donated by Newton PTSO	\$0	\$500
<b>Total value of other costs &amp; services</b>	<b>\$1,000</b>	<b>\$3,000</b>
<b>Total Project Cost</b>	<b>\$115,900</b>	<b>\$102,400</b>

### Research & Interpretation Group

In association with the mural restoration project, the volunteers and staff of the Newton Public Schools and the City of Newton listed below conducted research on the citizens of Newton who served in World War I and on the genesis of the *Citizenship* mural. Many of their findings are online courtesy of the Jackson Homestead, the City's history museum, which partners with the Newton Historical Society as Historic Newton. From their main website, [www.historicnewton.org/](http://www.historicnewton.org/), go to

- Education
  - Online Exhibits
    - WPA Mural

Though the group failed to find any specific local instructions that Maurice Compris may have been given for painting *Citizenship*, they hope future researchers will pick up where they left off!

- Jennifer Huntington (chair)
- Susan Abele, Archivist Emeritus, Historic Newton
- Rebecca Arango, Historic Newton student intern, summer 2016
- Dr. Jonathan Bassett, Newton North High School, History and Social Sciences Chair
- Sara Goldberg, Archivist, Historic Newton
- Katy Hax Holmes, Chief Preservation Planner, City of Newton
- Dr. Alice Ingerson, Community Preservation Program Manager

- Rosalind Kreizenbeck, Education Coordinator, Historic Newton
- Shannon Slattery, Newton North High School, Fine & Performing Arts Faculty
- Claudia Wu, Co-director and Co-Founder, Newton North High School Center for Civic Engagement and Service

## Sources Consulted

### about Newton residents who served in World War I

*Boston Evening Transcript, Boston Globe, Boston Herald, Newton Graphic*: Obituaries for Stafford Leighton Brown (published 9-20 October 1918) and for his mother, Eugenie Stafford Brown (published 13-17 May 1940).

*Memorial Volume of the American Field Service in France, Friends of France, 1914-1917*, by James William Davenport Seymour. Boston, American Field Service, 1921.

Newton North High School: Founding documents for the Stafford Leighton Brown Scholarship trust.

Newton Free Library, Veterans Service Card File

Compiled in the 1930s by workers employed, like the artist who painted *Citizenship*, through the federal WPA. All cards for World War I veterans were scanned and are available electronically.

Newton High School Yearbooks for

- Newton Classical High School
- Newton Technical High School
- Newton Vocational School

Newton City Directories

Information about the neighborhoods and occupations represented by Newton residents who served in World War I. Directories are online through the City Clerk's office:

[www.newtonma.gov/gov/clerk/archives/city\\_directories.asp](http://www.newtonma.gov/gov/clerk/archives/city_directories.asp)

*New England Aviators, 1914-1918: Their Portraits and Their Records*, by Caroline Ticknor. 1919.

University of Vermont and Dartmouth University: Records of Stafford Leighton Brown's enrollment at each university, between graduating from Newton High School and volunteering for the American Field Service in France..

### about New Deal Art programs

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, 750 9th Street NW, Suite 2200, Washington, DC 20001. They were unable to locate any records for the Compris mural in Newton.

*Art for the Millions; Essays from the 1930s by Artists and Administrators of the WPA Federal Art Project*, edited and with an introduction by Francis V. O'Connor. New York Graphic Society, 1973.

*Art for the People: The Rediscovery and Preservation of Progressive and WPA-Era Murals in the Chicago Public Schools, 1904-1943*, by Heather Becker. Chronicle Books, 2002.

Art in Architecture and Fine Arts (PCAC) Program, U.S. General Services Administration, 1800 F Street NW, Suite 5400, Washington, DC 20405.

New Deal artwork inventory project: <https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/design-construction/art-in-architecture-fine-arts/fine-arts/new-deal-artwork-gsas-inventory-project>

They had no record of the Compris mural in Newton and were glad to hear of it.

*Federal Art in New England, 1933—1937*, Arranged by the Officers of the Federal Art Projects in New England, in Cooperation with New England Museums, with a “History of the Art Projects in New England,” by Richard C. Morrison, Assistant to the National Director of the Federal Art Project, Works Progress Administration.

[https://archive.org/stream/federalartinnewe00fede/federalartinnewe00fede\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/federalartinnewe00fede/federalartinnewe00fede_djvu.txt)

This exhibit catalog lists the Compris mural in Newton in an appendix.

National Archives and Records Administration, Northeast Region, 380 Trapelo Road, Waltham, MA 02452. Files on WPA projects in Newton.

National Archives, A New Deal for the Arts

[http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/new\\_deal\\_for\\_the\\_arts/index.html](http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/new_deal_for_the_arts/index.html)

*The New Deal Art Projects: An Anthology of Memoirs*, edited by Francis V. O'Connor. Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972.

*New Horizons in American Art*; with an introduction by Holger Cahill. Museum of Modern Art (New York, N.Y.), 1936. Exhibition of work done under the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration.

Roosevelt University, New Deal Art:

<https://www.roosevelt.edu/centers/new-deal-studies/history-fair/new-deal-art>

Includes curriculum guides and a mural analysis worksheet for classroom use.