

Harding, George (1882-1959)

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Born in Philadelphia, George Harding attended the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts at night from 1899 to 1900, while he worked with the architectural firm of Frederick Mann during the day. Following the advice of his sister Charlotte, who had studied with Howard Pyle at Drexel, he went to Wilmington to study for a year and a half. He attended the summer school at Chadds Ford in 1902 and 1903.

In 1904 he went to Newfoundland and made drawings of the fishermen living there; he returned to Wilmington to study with Pyle in the fall of that year. His first illustrations appeared in Collier's and the Saturday Evening Post in 1904 and 1905. In 1907 he began his long association with Harpers Monthly and was sent to Newfoundland and Labrador where he was shipwrecked while on a seal fishing boat. He wrote an article about this harrowing adventure which appeared in the magazine in 1909, accompanied by his drawings and photographs. In addition, he wrote and illustrated a number of articles for Harper's, concerning such subjects as salvaging cargo from wrecked freighters, the first overseas airplane flight on this side of the Atlantic from Key West to Havana, and other experiences based on his travels. He accompanied writer Norman Duncan on a trip from Egypt to Australia and China, which provided the basis for a series of collaborative articles.

During World War I, Harding was selected as an official combat artist with the American Expeditionary Force in Europe. Also serving in this capacity were William Aylward, Harvey Dunn, and Harry Townsend (all of whom had studied with Pyle) and four other artists. Prior to this assignment, Harding had begun to teach in the art department at the University of Pennsylvania in 1915 and continued there following the war until 1935. As an instructor at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts from 1921 to 1958, he first taught illustration and then became head of the mural painting department. In 1915 he and N.C. Wyeth painted murals for the new Hotel Traymore in Atlantic City. He continued to paint murals throughout his career for banks, hotels, and public buildings, including the First National Bank in Philadelphia, the American Hotel in Allentown, and the Pennsylvania State building at the Sesquicentennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1926. During the 1930s he painted murals for the United States Custom House in Philadelphia, which won a national competition, and two panels for the U.S. Post Office in Washington. One of his highly praised murals was for the Legislative Hall at the New York World's Fair in 1939. During the Second World War Harding served with the U. S. Marine Corps, recording military action in the Southwest Pacific.

Harding exhibited throughout the United States, in England, and in Australia. A retrospective exhibition of his works was held at the Pennsylvania Academy in 1957.