

# Charles Courtney Curran (1861-1942)

By Jerry Long  
c.2023



Kentucky Historical Society Historical Highway Marker is in Hartford, Kentucky, Ohio County, KY. It is on the north side of the Ohio County Historical Society Museum at 415 Mulberry Street. Marker was erected On 21 March 1974.



Charles Courtney Curran (1861-1941)



## Biography of Charles Courtney Curran – Wikipedia.org

Charles Courtney Curran (13 February 1861 – 9 November 1942) was an American painter. He is best known for his canvases depicting women in various settings.

Curran was born in Hartford, Kentucky in February, 1861, where his father taught at the school. A few months later after the beginning of the Civil War, the family left there and returned to Ohio, eventually settling in Sandusky on the shores of Lake Erie where the elder Curran served as superintendent of schools.

Charles Curran showed an early interest and aptitude for art, and in 1881 went to Cincinnati to study at the McMicken School (later the Fine Arts Academy of Cincinnati). He stayed there only a year before going to New York to study at the National Academy of Design and the Art Students League. Many of the pictures he created during this period featured young attractive working-class women engaged in a variety of tasks.

One was particularly noteworthy: *Breezy Day* (1887, collection of Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts) and won the Third Hallgarten Prize for Oils from the NAD in 1888. Shortly thereafter Curran and his young bride Grace left the United States to study in Paris, where their first child Louis was born.

After two and half years abroad, the young family returned to the United States in June, 1891. For the next ten years Curran divided his time between New York where the couple had an apartment and Curran maintained a studio, and Ohio where they had extended family and spent most summers. In 1903 the Currans visited the summer arts colony of Cragmoor for the first time. Located in the scenic Shawangunk Mountains about 100 miles northwest of New York City, the spectacular scenery and native flora inspired Curran to build a summer home there. He died in New York City in 1942.

While in Paris Curran enrolled at the Académie Julian where he began to concentrate on new subject matter and experimented with a variety of painting styles. Many of his pictures from this time were painted outdoors en plein air and features well dressed modern women enjoying a variety of leisure activities. Two pictures from this time spent in the French capital are in the Luxembourg (*Garden*) (1889, collection of Terra Foundation for American Art) and *Afternoon in the Cluny Garden*, Paris (1889, collection of The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco). Curran also showed three of his pictures at the Paris Salons.

There Curran often used family members as models when he painted on the shores of Lake Erie, experimenting with a variety of artistic styles including impressionism, symbolism, tonalism and naturalism.

After the Currans visited the summer arts colony of Cragmoor, the couple and their family would summer at Cragmoor for the next forty years, and Curran would create some of his best known paintings in the vicinity. They feature young attractive girls dressed in white or pastel colors posed in brilliant sunshine. Two examples of these pictures are *On the Heights* (1909, collection of the Brooklyn Museum) and *Hilltop Walk* (1927, collection of Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska, Lincoln). Although Curran continued to paint until shortly before his death, he never accepted or practiced newer artistic styles that emerged in the U.S. after World War I. He remained active with a number of arts organizations, especially the National Academy

of Design where he served as secretary for fifteen years. He also became a successful portrait artist after 1920. In addition, Curran and his wife were avid travelers, visiting Europe at least five times and even mainland China in 1936.

Charles Curran's work is represented in numerous museum collections, and his outdoor paintings of youthful women have remained popular with individual collectors. It has been estimated that he produced more than 1500 pictures during his career. Besides oil paintings, these include watercolors and numerous illustrations for magazines in both color and black and white. Works by the artist may be found at the Art Institute of Chicago, Brooklyn Museum of Art, Flint Institute of Arts, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Richmond Art Museum, and at the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



**Ohio County, KY 1860 federal census, town of Hartford, p.786:**

Ulysses T. Curran, school teacher, & wife, Lizzie, are listed;  
five months later their son, Charles, was born in Hartford

**SCHEDULE 1.—Free Inhabitants in** Town of Hartford **in the County of** Ohio  
**of** Kentucky **enumerated by me, on the** 24<sup>th</sup> **day of** Aug. **1860.** R. J. Bell  
**Post Office** Hartford.

dwelling house, or other place of abode, in the order of valuation.	The name of every person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1860, was in this family.	Description.			Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each person, male and female, over 15 years of age.	Value of Estate Owned.		Place of Birth, Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.	Attended School within the year.	Persons over 20 years of age who cannot read & write.
		Age.	Sex.	White, Colored, or Indian.		Value of Real Estate.	Value of Personal Estate.				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
		Charles	12	m				Ky		✓	
1406	1406	Willis G. Davis	43	m	Saddler		110	Ky			
		Mary A	32	f				Ky			
		Thomas C.	18	m	Law Student			Ky		✓	
		Anna G.	14	f				Ky			
		George	13	m				Ky		✓	
		Mary	11	f				Ky			
		M. T. Curran	25	m	School Teacher			Ohio			
		Lizzie	25	m				Ohio			



**Hartford Herald, Hartford, KY, 28 December 1904, p.3:**

**OHIO COUNTY.**

Charles C. Curran, who was born in Hartford, recently took the famous Carnegie prize in New York, on a fine painting, called "At the Piano."



**Owensboro Inquirer, Owensboro, KY, 10 October 1923, p.10:**

## Hartford Native Is Famous Artist

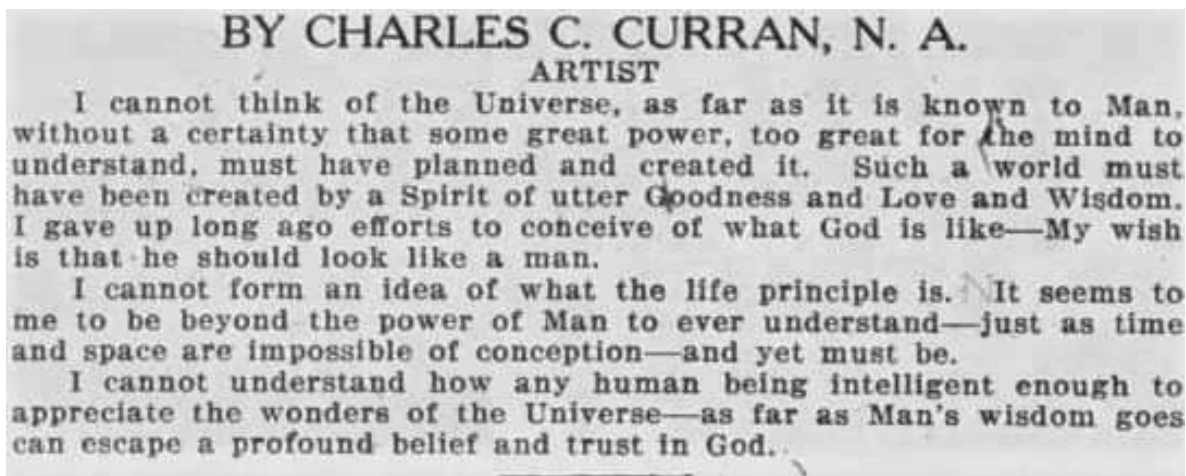
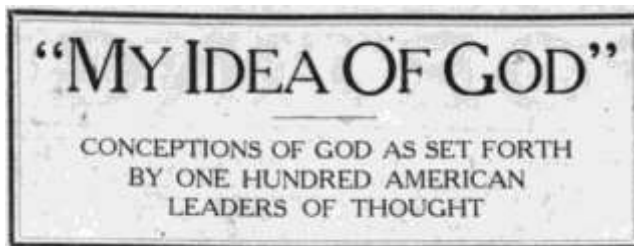
National Picture Week is being observed informally in all the city school with short talks on great artists and pictures each day and the local observance will culminate with an exhibit of selected color prints to be held by the Woman's Club at the Chamber of Commerce Friday and Saturday.

Among the artists to be represented will be Charles Courtney Curran. one of Kentucky's greatest artists, who has won for himself national and international fame.

Charles Courtney Curran was born in Hartford, Ohio county, in 1861, and at present is living in New York City. He received his art training at Cincinnati, afterwards going to Paris where in 1900 he was appointed a member of the American Arts commission at the Paris Exposition. He was assistant director of fine arts at the Pan American exposition. His "Lotus Lillies on Lake Erie" received honorable mention at the Paris Salon in 1890 and "Breezy Day," third prize at the Paris exposition in 1900. Curran is a painter of landscape, figure, genre and outdoor life, and imaginative scenes depicting fairy land.



**Lexington Leader, Lexington, KY, 11 May 1924, p.5A:**







**Ohio County News, Hartford, KY, 13 September 1929, p.1:**

## **NATIVE OF HARTFORD NOW NOTED ARTIST**

**Charles Courtney Curran's Achievements Praised by Literary Digest**

The Literary Digest of September 7, 1929, has for a front cover design a reproduction of the painting, "Wind-Driven Clouds," by Charles Courtney Curran, of Cincinnati. Mr. Curran was born in the residence opposite the Hartford high school building on Union street, which has been remodeled by John Bell and in which Mr. Bell now resides. His father was a teacher in the Hartford school when that institution was located in the brick building now known as the Guenther property and which has long been used as a residence.

The Hartford woman's club has at various times studied his paintings and Mrs. Mary Taylor Logan has had some correspondence with Mr. Curran. The city and county is justly proud of his achievements even though he left here when a mere child, and the Ohio, County News is deeply appreciative of the fact that many of its readers have sent in clippings of the Literary Digest article contained in the issue which used the painting. News subscribers in Washington, Cincinnati and Owensboro as well as others nearer Hartford have called our attention to the prominence given this native Ohio Countian.

The Literary Digest article in part is as follows:

"Days like these make one wish to get up high and look off; it is the ambition of childhood that lingers on through youth and maturity. Mr. Curran contents himself with depicting youth, leaving the soberer reactions of maturity unexpressed. Charles Courtney Curran was born in Hartford, Kentucky, in 1861, and went to Cincinnati for art study, moving from there to New York, and on- to Paris to the studios of Constant, Lefebvre, and Doucet.

"Twice he has received honorable mention in the Paris Exposition, his American prizes have been the second and third Hallgarten, the Carnegie, the Clark, the Altman, the first Corcoran, besides medals at the Chicago, Atlanta, and Buffalo Expositions. Of his work, "Perfume of the Roses" hangs in the National Gallery, Washington; "The Breezy Day," Pennsylvania Academy, Philadelphia; "The Golden Hour," Museum of Art, Columbus; "Building the Dam." Art Association, Richmond, Indiana; "The Jungfrau," and "The Swimming Pool." Toledo, Ohio.



**Courier-Journal, Louisville, KY, 11 November 1942, p.9A:**

## **Noted Artist, Native Of Kentucky, Dies**

New York, Nov. 10 (AP) – Charles Courtney Curran, 81, American artist whose works hang in museums, universities and libraries throughout the Nation and who for more than twenty years was an officer of the National Academy of Design, died yesterday. He was born in Hartford, Ky.



**Ohio County Messenger, Beaver Dam, KY, 14 December 1951, p.8:  
& Owensboro Messenger, Owensboro, KY, 9 December 1951, p.13A:**

## **Century-Old Hartford Residence, Birthplace Of Famous Sons, Is Razed**

A two-story frame building—one of the oldest in Hartford and the birthplace of two of the town's famous sons—is being razed to make way for an apartment house.

The house, built almost 100 years ago, is the old "Griffin place," located on E. Union St. Z. Wayne Griffin, top-flight director-producer for Metro Goldwyn-Mayer film studios in Hollywood, and Charles Courtney Curran, world famous American painter; were born in the rambling structure.

Present owners, of the home are Mr. and Mrs. Curtis Whobrey and the latter's sister, Miss Ora Hagerman, of Columbus, Ohio. The new apartment house will be a two story brick veneer building housing four apartments. The owners will occupy two of them.

John Brown, Hartford carpenter, is directing the razing of the building. He said the building was constructed of native hardwoods—ok and yellow poplar—and much of the wood is in good enough condition to be used in the new building.

Curran, the son of Mr. and Mrs. Taylor Ulysses T. Curran, was born there on Feb. 13, 1861. He was barely six months old when his parents left the house and moved to Indiana, then to Ohio. He studied painting in both the United States and France and later became a member of the Academy of Design. His paintings were hung in art galleries and museums all over the world. He died in Paris, France, in 1942.

Z. Wayne Griffin III, the Hollywood executive, left the house with his mother, Mrs. Beatrice (Atye) Griffin, a brother, T. Larkin and sister, Beatrice. They eventually located in California where they all live now.

Z. Wayne Griffin III, is married to the former Miss Elinor Remick Warren, a composer and concert artist, and the couple have a daughter, Elayne and two sons, James and Z. Wayne IV. They live in the Wilshire district of Los Angeles, Calif.



**Ohio County Times-News, Hartford, KY, 23 August 1973, p.13:**

## **Library Has Curran Portrait On Display**

The library has on display a portrait of Charles Courtney Curran, N. A. artist of renown who was born in Hartford, Kentucky Feb. 1861. The picture was given to the library by Mrs. Emily K. Liang of West Lebanon, N. H., daughter of Mr. Curran.

A new print has been added to the collection of pictures in the library by Mr. Curran. The print is a copy of the oil, "A breezy day", which hangs in the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Be sure to visit the library during Hartford Days, August 24, 25, 1973, and register for the drawing each day, a popular record will be given the lucky person whose name is drawn, at 5 p.m. Friday and Saturday.



**The Winchester Sun, Winchester, KY, 21 December 1972, p.5:**



Painting Is Unveiled

Winchester Artist Jack K. Hodgkin unveiled his replica of this Charles Courtney Curran painting in Hartford recently. The replica will hang in the Ohio County Library in memory of Curran, a native of Hartford.



**Fogle's Papers: A History of Ohio County, Kentucky, McDowell A. Fogle  
(Hartford, KY: Ohio County Historical Society, 1981) pp.84-85:**

Whether one prosaically regards as merely an odd coincidence or inclines to be a psychic explanation, it is a fact that Hartford's two greatest celebrities in the field of the fine arts were born in the same house, which stood on Union Streets almost opposite the high school until December, 1951, when it was razed, but these nativities were, of course, in cultural eras some half-century apart.

The first of the two embryo artists to see the light of day there was the world-famed painter, Charles Courtney Curran, the other, the home-town boy whom many of us remember as a toddler, now the Hollywood cinema and radio director and producer, Z Wayne Griffin III.

The husky boy born in this old house during the early Civil War days, was the first-born of Ulysses T Curran, who, for a term or two, was a teacher in the Hartford Seminary, successor of the Hartford Academy, which was the first state-sponsored school in Ohio county.

The young teacher and his wife, Elizabeth, resided in the old two-story homestead, which, my generation knew as "the old Griffin place", on the site of which stands today an apartment house belonging to Miss Ora Hagerman and Mrs. Georgia Whobrey.

The young Curran couple had come from their home in Chillicothe, Ohio, to this border state, at the suggestion, it is said, of Dr. Samuel O Peyton, member of Congress from this district, but, unfortunately, at the very time the passions of the sections were about to burst into national armed conflict. It is the Hartford tradition that, as a result of their Northern nativity and sentiments, frequently expressed, their stay here was none too pleasant. Anyway, young Prof. Curran on December 29, 1859 began to teach in the Hartford Seminary and son, Charles Curran, was born here some fourteen months later.

This "Historic Hartford Home" was approximately 98 years old when razed in 1951. The Griffin and Curran families had made it famous. Further details of their interesting history follow.

County clerk's office records show that Godfrey W. Taylor, whose widow, Mrs. Maria Ann Taylor, married Z Wayne Griffin I, bought the property where the vanishing homestead was located, described on the original plat of Hartford as In-lots Nos. 59 and 60, on October 28, 1853, from William J. Eidson and his wife, Lucy H., for the purchase price of \$1,136. Mr. Eidson had bought it the same year for \$60, which conclusively indicates there was no dwelling on the lots when he bought them and that the residence which came to be known as the Griffin homestead was built, sometime in 1853.

Godfrey W. Taylor died in 1860. His widow, Maria Ann, had as tenants in all or a portion of the upstairs of the home left her by Mr. Taylor, Ulysses T. Curran, teacher for nearly two years in the Hartford Academy, and his young wife. There in the afternoon of February 13, 1861, was born to the Currans, a son, Charles Courtney, "in the north room upstairs", according to a letter written a number of years ago by the elder Curran to the late Mrs., Mary Taylor Logan, the contents of which were kindly made known to the writer by Miss Mary Barnett, authority on Ohio county history, now residing in Owensboro.

Due, no doubt, to a mounting wartime tension between them and their Hartford associates, the Currans did not long reside there, leaving in August, 1861, when Charles was only some six months old. They went first to Lafayette, Indiana, then to Middletown, Ohio, where Prof. Curran taught the next year. The family then moved to Glendale, Hamilton county, a suburb of Cincinnati, where the little lad, Charles Courtney, began school life. The family later moved to Sandusky, Ohio, where the elder Curran was in charge of the school system, at which place Charles Courtney graduated from city schools. He went to Cincinnati Art School for six months where he was encouraged to go to New York to study. There he entered a private studio and soon was able to earn his living painting. He later went to Paris, where he spent two years studying drawing at Academie Julien.

So, after many years of study in this country and France, he became a world famous artist and member of the national Academy of Design, whose paintings hang in art galleries and museums the world over. He died in Paris in November, 1942.





**Ohio County Times-News, Hartford, KY, 10 October 1996, p.5A,**  
**“Rough River Ripples” column by Dorothy Gentry:**

... Charles Courtney Curran studied Art at the Cincinnati School of Design, then became a pupil of the Art Students' League and the National Academy of Design in New York; later studied with Benjamin-Constant and Doucet in Paris.

In 1900, he became a member of the American Arts' Commission at the Paris Exposition and was assistant director of fine arts at the Pan-American Exposition taught at the Pratt Institute and Art Students' League, and was a member of the Society of American Artists and other art associations.

In 1888 his picture, "A breezy day" received the third Hallgarten prize and his "Lotus lilies of Lake Erie" won honorable mention in the Paris salon of 1890.

Among his most important canvases are: "The sirens", "A deep sea fantasy", "The perfume of roses", "Catching minnows" and "The enchanted shore."

We were fortunate to get a negative from a New York Art Gallery of the painting "A breezy day" which was reproduced for the Ohio County Museum and one for the Ohio County Library.



A Breezy Day – 1887



On The Heights – 1909



Ladies on a Hill – 1914



Peonies – 1915



Conversation by the River – 1928