

FROM THE COLLECTIONS  
*BATH IRON WORKS*, BY CARROLL THAYER BERRY

One of the most appealing paintings in the MHS permanent collection is an oil by Carroll Thayer Berry titled *Bath Iron Works*. A standout in the 1995 MHS exhibition, "Victory on the Homefront: Maine During World War II," it is also one of the few mid- to late-twentieth-century paintings in the Society's holdings.

The oil shows the construction of destroyers at the BIW yard on the Kennebec River. Detailed coverage of shipyard activity between 1939 and 1945 is included in Ralph Linwood Snow's comprehensive study, *Bath Iron Works: The First Hundred Years* (Bath: Maine Maritime Museum, 1987). In those heady years, the number of employees ballooned from 1,850 to 12,042, and the company delivered eighty-three destroyers, four cargo vessels, and a yacht. At its peak, BIW completed a battle-ready destroyer every seventeen days – a record never equaled.

Although the scene in Berry's painting is recognizable, his use of broken color and elements of modern design infuse the work with strength and energy. Indeed, future researchers might compare Berry's style with that of Mildred Giddings Burrage (1890-1983), who produced powerful tempera-pastel images of liberty ships at the South Portland yards in the same year.

Berry was born in New Gloucester, Maine, but his family moved to Portland, where he attended high school and became a member of the Brushians (Brush'uns) sketch club that flourished from 1860 to 1933. He later graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in marine engineering. Finding work in Boston, he attended art school before returning to Maine to work in the architectural office of John Calvin Stevens. Berry then went to Panama as a canal inspector, worked on murals for the Administration Building, did a stint as a commercial artist in New York, and had an unhappy first marriage before seeing active service in the First World War.

During the 1920s Berry worked in Chicago designing interiors and installations for offices. It was there that he met and married illustrator and artist Janet Laura Scott (1888-1969).



Carroll Thayer Berry (American, 1886-1978), *Bath Iron Works*, c. 1943. Oil on canvas, 33 inches X 37 inches. Gift of Robert G. Albion and Roger Ray, 1972.

During the Depression, the couple returned to Maine to pursue careers as artists. They settled in Wiscasset from 1932 to 1945 and moved on to Rockport in later years.

Although little has been written about Berry's work as a painter, his work as popular wood engraver has been thoroughly explored. Elwyn Deerborn's *The Down East Printmaker: Carroll Thayer Berry* (Camden: Down East Books, 1983) is one of the few catalog raisonnés accorded to a twentieth-century Maine artist without a national reputation. This excellent biography sets a strong foundation for further study. Among Berry's 179 prints can be found several that relate in style and subject to the MHS painting.

Other works by Berry can be seen in the collections of Rockland's William A. Farnsworth Museum and at the University of Maine. The MHS oil was the gift of two longtime Society trustees: Roger Ray and the late Dr. Robert Greenhalgh Albion, Gardner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs at Harvard University.

William David Barry