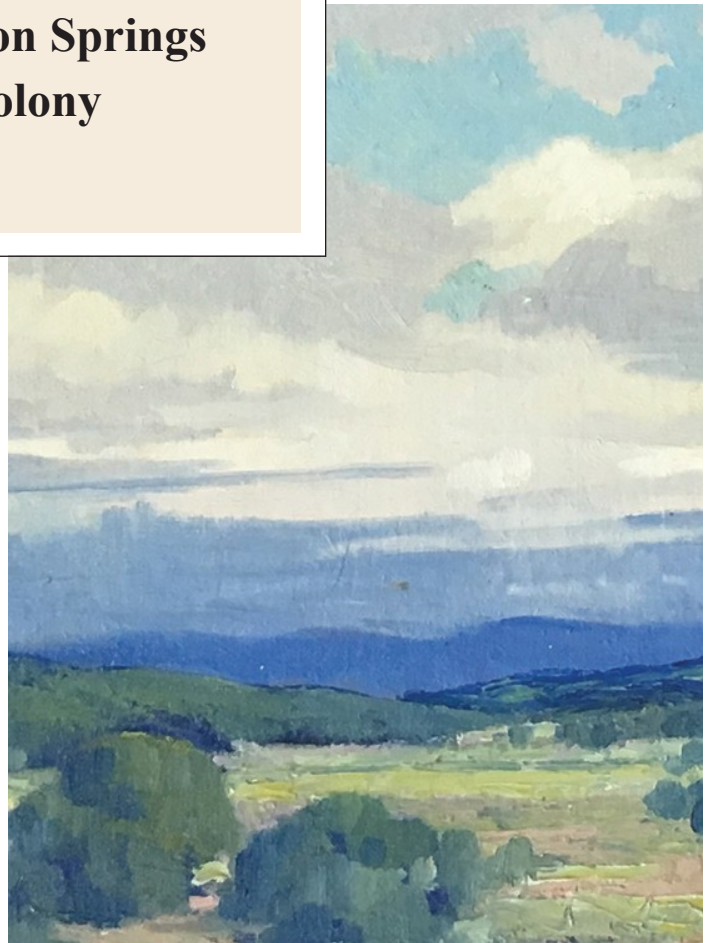
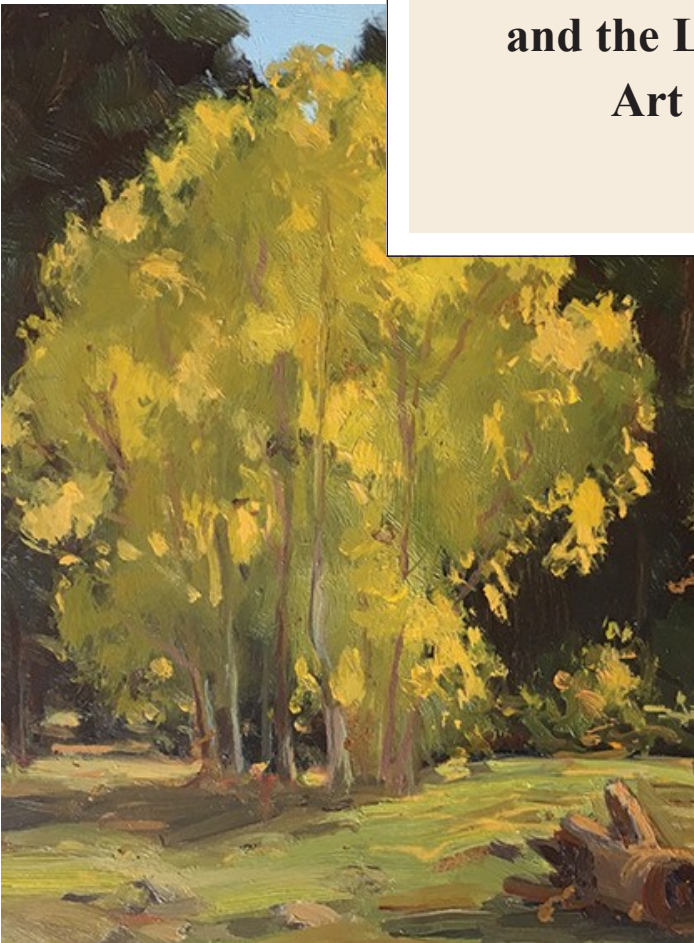




Loving the Land:
**The Legacy of
Early Texas Artist
Harold A. Roney
and the Leon Springs
Art Colony**



Cover features four paintings by
Harold A. Roney, clockwise:

Untitled (detail)

The Old Homestead (detail)

Distant Rain (detail)

Autumn (detail)

**The Center for the Advancement and Study of Early Texas Art
Nancy and Ted Paup Research Initiative Award**



Yucca Blooms. Harold A. Roney. n.d. Oil on masonite. 16 x 12 inches. Currin Family Estate.

*For my three amazing grandsons growing up in Leon Springs
and to their generation – for whom the story matters most*

Rebecca J. Martin

2020

Loving the Land: The Legacy of Early Texas Artist Harold A. Roney and the Leon Springs Art Colony

Abstract

Highlights of Harold Arthur Roney's (1899–1986) biography which are pertinent to his evolution as a painter who spent half of his life settled in the Leon Springs vicinity are presented in this paper. Roney's story is ripe to explore and savor as he had a significant place in the early Texas art movement and his affiliation with the Leon Springs Art Colony between 1929–1931 contributes to understanding his commitment to *en plein air* practice. A notable landscape artist, he utilized this ideal approach in teaching while he remained dedicated to a classical tradition in rendering original scenes of beauty from nature.

Of particular interest at the site of the former Leon Springs Art Colony are three late nineteenth-century buildings which remain intact while other historic buildings used as studios by well-known early Texas artists have been destroyed. This once remote area is undergoing rapid development and a focused description on its significance as an art community may further validate an appeal to designate the site for posterity. For current and future generations, preservation of this place impacts our understanding of the past, inspires a love for landscape, and impresses us with the need to pass on this vital legacy as part of our artistic cultural history.

Untitled (detail). Harold A. Roney. n.d.
Oil on canvas.



Acknowledgements

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All of my family and friends have been immensely supportive during this project. Steven G. Martin, former Leon Springs resident, first brought its significant history to my attention.

Author Marlene Richardson, and, her friend, Jeanne Dixon (1921–2011) documented the Leon Springs Art Colony in their publication, *The Settlement of Leon Springs: From Prussia to Persia* (2008). Mrs. Richardson earnestly hoped for CASETA to become aware of the art colony's history in support of its preservation.

Tom Shelton, Senior Curator, University of Texas San Antonio Special Collections, introduced by Dean Hendrix, Dean of UTSA Libraries, offered important insights and made available bound copies of original newspaper articles on the Leon Springs Art Colony.

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***If one advances
confidently in the direction
of his dreams,
and endeavors to live
the life which he
has imagined,
he will meet with
a success unexpected
in common hours.***

Henry David Thoreau

The idea for this project was conceived in 2018 based on conversations with Blair Currin who had been introduced to *en plein air* landscape painting by his step-grandfather, Harold A. Roney. I was intrigued to understand Roney's successful career as an early Texas artist. This story was informed by interviews with the Currin family and review of the Roney Archives in the Currin Family Estate, including paintings, letters and numerous newspaper articles.

Further information on Harold A. Roney and the Leon Springs Art Colony emerged upon reading *The Settlement of Leon Springs: From Prussia to Persia*. I met co-author Marlene Richardson in March 2019 when she spoke about the history of Leon Springs and she shared research files about the artists. Viewing the few original buildings at the art colony site from a distance led to additional questions.

To see this site triggers curiosity about the past. This property is significant as it evokes imagination about the beauty of the land and the people who formerly lived there. Fortunately, a chain of owners of the property, including music legend George Strait, respected the open fields surrounding the antique buildings. As development brings inevitable change, our cultural and artistic legacy is important to preserve for future generations. This paper examines why the site where the Leon Springs Art Colony once flourished is important to preserve, how classically trained artist Harold Roney became part of the group, and why his life changed because of that experience.

The Old Homestead. Harold A. Roney.
c. 1938. Oil on canvas. 25 x 30 inches.
Donated in 1965 to the Panhandle-Plains
Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas, in
memory of Nettie A. Roney.



Direction of His Dreams: Early Years

The first official photograph of Harold Arthur Roney is one of angelic innocence, a baby boy with clear eyes of intense focus, dressed in a white christening gown as was popularly admired at the close of the Gilded Era. He was well-guarded by caring parents through a record setting winter snowfall that season.¹ Harold was born on November 7, 1899, in Sullivan, Illinois, descendant of a loyal, industrious family who settled in this prairie township four generations prior.² The blanket of land extending north from the heavily timbered river basin along Asa Creek, which borders the east side of Sullivan, would have been inviting space for Roney to roam as he inherited a pioneer's love for open terrain beyond city perimeters.

Photo of Harold A. Roney in christening gown, 1900. H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate.



Harold first picked up a paint brush at age six, strengthening a bond between tradesman painter father and second son. Painting became an essential interest for Harold as he discovered positive effects of creative activity following the untimely death of his only younger sibling in 1907. Harold was granted use of a wood shed in the backyard of the family's home, which he later recalled as his studio. The idea of an artistic career was kindled by the time he was twelve when Harold discretely ordered an introductory art correspondence course.³ He dared to envision possibilities beyond his ancestral home but would never forget its influence. His dream, seeded at a young age grew into a desire of pursuing art throughout the rest of his life.

Local public schooling provided him with a rigorous education although art classes were not offered in high school. Of athletic build, Roney participated in track relay races, and, financially minded, he served as Treasurer in class office. He learned to play the French horn, a lifelong pleasure, and donned the playful nickname "Tango" for mimicking the somewhat risqué dance. His excellent manners were a stellar feature

1. United States, Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Weather Service, "This Day in Weather History: February 28th," *National Weather Service*, https://www.weather.gov/abr/This_Day_in_Weather_History_Feb_28. "1900: A massive storm spread record snows from Kansas to New York State. Thirty-six inches of snow at Astoria, Illinois, set a new state 24-hour snowfall record."

2. [Roney Family Gravesites], 2019, Photograph, Greenhill Cemetery (Moultrie County, Illinois, H.A. Roney Archives, Currin Family Estate. Roney family gravesites are documented at Greenhill Cemetery, Sullivan, Illinois, and in H.A. Roney Archives, Currin Family Estate, 2019. Harold was third of four children born to Hugh and Josephine Roney.

3. "Sullivan Native Exhibits Paintings During Visit," *News Gazette* (Champaign, IL), August 16, 1959, H.A. Roney Archives, Currin Family Estate.

celebrated in the 1916 *Retrospect* yearbook beside Ralph Waldo Emerson's statement: "Life is not so short but that there is always time for courtesy." In a state of progressive educational standards, graduation "guaranteed admission to any college or university of the Middle West without any conditions being attached."⁴ "Tango," a reserved and sensitive young man, had a confident outlook on life.

Photograph of Harold A. Roney in military uniform, 1918. H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate.



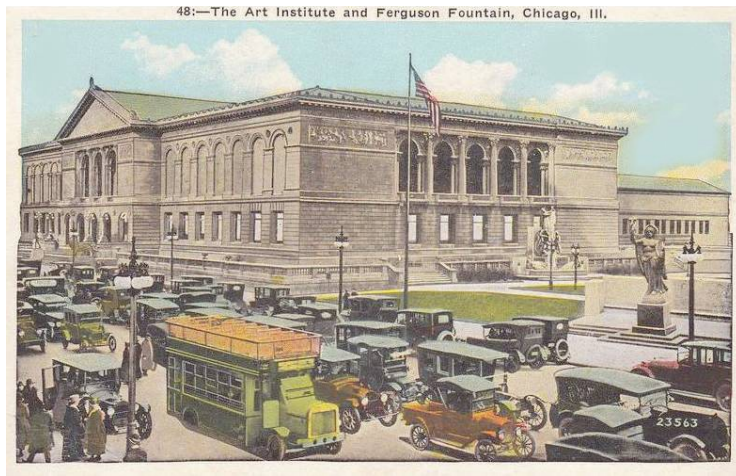
Roney worked as a postal clerk after graduation, then, in October 1918 he enrolled in the U.S. Army according to the Selective Services requirement. Harold was a strikingly handsome and courageous figure posed in his private's uniform. Fortuitously, Armistice Day was official a month later and his release from war duty a few weeks prior to the Christmas holiday presented an opportunity to follow a peaceful life pursuit. While the international flu pandemic soared, Harold dutifully and safely studied business in Quincy, Illinois for ten months in honor of his father's wishes. It was considered a possible preface to law school; however, art remained prominent in Harold's imagination and he set sights on "The Windy City," a contemporary hub of challenge and change in the postwar period.

Streetcars at State and Madison, late 1920s. Chicago. CTA photograph. WBEZ-NPR Chicago [online].



4. Sullivan Township High School, *Retrospect*, vol. 1, (Sullivan, Illinois: 1915-1917)

The Art Institute of Chicago.
Postcard. c. 1920.
chuckmanchicago.wordpress.com



Prohibition era Chicago was a radical switch from small town life and Harold kept grounded as a streetcar driver, learning on the job how to navigate the city. A steady income enabled him to enroll in the esteemed Art Institute of Chicago (AIC) where more than 4,500 male and female students attended. At the time, it was “the largest art school in the world.”⁵ Their studies were primarily in academic drawing and painting. Artworks from avant-garde art movements had been displayed at the AIC in the traveling *International Exhibition of Modern Art (The Armory Show)* in 1913 and, along with the reactionary response of many viewers, would have been discussed even a decade later. However, standard principles of European and American appreciation

International Exhibition of Modern Art. The Cubist Room.
Art Institute of Chicago. 1913.



of Realism became Roney’s favored style. Following a prescribed three year study, he continued to enroll in art classes and began to teach. In 1924, he married good natured Nettie Ann Taylor (1899–1965), who later quipped, “...I started out to be an artist, too, and went off to the Chicago Art Institute to study. Most girls bring home a touch of art, but I did better than that – I came home with the instructor.”⁶ Nettie’s artistic knowledge and management skills contributed to an equitable match. Their marriage was based on mutual values and although they did not have children, they developed a strong partnership committed to artistic pursuits.

5. “Quick Facts,” *School of the Art Institute at Chicago*, <https://www.saic.edu/about/history-and-quick-facts/timeline>.

6. Nettie Roney, [News Article Interview], c. 1948, H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate. Harold was enrolled for one year at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts following graduation from AIC.

During that year, Harold also traveled fifty miles roundtrip for lessons on Sunday afternoons at the Glenwood School of Landscape Art. Glenwood was then a small village near the southern tip of Lake Michigan noted for its forest preserves. He began to examine landscape painting through study under director Harry Anthony De Young (1893–1956). A highly accomplished artist, De Young soon after moved and settled in San Antonio where he garnished an Honorable Mention at the nationally acclaimed *Texas Wildflower Competitive Exhibitions* in Spring 1929.⁷

The Roneys next resided in South Bend, Indiana as Harold taught public school art and freelanced in advertising art. He studied painting with local artist George Ames Aldrich (1871–1941), sharing interest in nostalgic subjects; however, Harold sought a deeper, more meaningful connection in his painterly interpretations. 1927–1928 were critical years as Harold and Nettie moved to Texas both to meet her family in Port Arthur and to explore the Houston-Galveston area. Immersed in an extremely different demographic, Harold decided that neither teaching in public school nor working in advertising art were his artistic aspirations.

In Galveston, Harold met and studied with Paul Schumann (1876–1946), best known as a seascape painter who survived the devastating 1900 hurricane. Schumann expressed dramatic aspects of nature based on interactive experiences that he interpreted with bold, expressive brush strokes. Schumann's lifestyle of national travel to exhibit his work must have seemed a desirable model to follow. From this brief training with Schumann, Roney comprehended that a direct experience of nature is what he wished to deliver in his artwork. He also ascertained that coastal life was not his muse.

7. William E. Reaves, Jr., *Texas Art and a Wildcatter's Dream: Edgar B. Davis and the San Antonio Art League* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 51. *The Texas Wildflower Competitive Exhibitions* was an annual nationwide attraction, 1927–1929.

The Life He Imagined: The Lure of Leon Springs

The First Inhabitant. Sculpture by
Waldine Tauch. 1914. Commerce
Street Bridge, San Antonio, TX.
Photograph by Public Art San Antonio.



San Antonio, described as a city where thousands of people enjoyed art displayed during the *Texas Wildflower Competitive Exhibitions*, was an artistic beacon by 1929.⁸ The Roneys would plan to see the current exhibit, congratulate De Young on his success, and make new acquaintances after arriving on the San Antonio–Galveston train at the Southern Pacific Sunset Station. ‘The Crown Jewel’ building of pink stucco walls glowed brilliantly from electric light that illuminated the stained glass rose window, providing romantic ambiance upon entry to this city of historic charm.⁹ Centuries old landmarks like the Spanish Missions stood often in decay, stalwart sentinels along the winding waterway before the famous Riverwalk was yet realized.¹⁰

A walk across the significant Commerce Street Bridge provided a perfect spot to pause and admire the San Antonio River flowing below. Midway across the bridge, an elegant carved relief of a seven-foot high Indian figure held forward two water fountain bowls offering refreshment to the passing pedestrian. *The First Inhabitant*, Waldine Tauch’s premiere public sculpture, made a favorable statement on the city’s support of art.¹¹ Downtown architectural wonders, like the Majestic building – the first air-conditioned theatre in the state opened that year – promised great entertainment.¹² San Antonio was a prosperous place. This seemed a city on the rise, brim with development, even after Edgar B. Davis, the generous sponsor of the three-year long *Texas Wildflower Competitive Exhibitions*, abruptly announced in March 1929 that the illustrious competition would be discontinued.¹³

It was the outlying vicinity northwest of town which beckoned to Harold and Nettie. Open valleys had provided a natural passage in that direction for conquistadores, pioneers, settlers and adventurers throughout time. Originally native territory, one tribe was respectfully commemorated in the name *Comanche Springs* for the home of John Meusebach (1812–1897), founder of Fredericksburg. It is the gift of seasonal change that awakens stunning color throughout the Texas hill country, and the ceaseless surprise of clear spring water emerging from deep within the aquifer of the Balcones Fault zone, though treacherous at times, beckons both wildlife and wanderer to such

8. Marie Seacord Lilly, “The Texas Wildflower Painting Competition,” *American Magazine of Art* XX, no.6 (June 1929), 342-347.

9. “San Antonio, TX (SAS),” The Great American Stations, *Amtrack*, <https://www.greatamericanstations.com/stations/san-antonio-tx-sas/>.

10. Louise Lomax, *San Antonio’s River* (San Antonio, TX: Naylor, 1948), 66-70.

11. Alice Hutson, *From Chalk to Bronze: A Biography of Waldine Tauch* (Austin, TX: Shoal Creek Publishers, 1978), 51-52. *The First Inhabitant* was commissioned by *San Antonio Express News* and unveiled June 1914.

12. Ann T. Smith, “Majestic Theatre (San Antonio),” *Handbook of Texas Online*, <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/majestic-theatre-san-antonio>.

13. Reaves, Jr, *Texas Art and a Wildcatter’s Dream: Edgar B. Davis and the San Antonio Art League*, 53.

an oasis. Views of the vicinity appealed to artists. Hermann Lungkwitz (1813 -1891) documented many scenes, including the Commerce Street Bridge (1854) and Altgelt's Perseverance Mill, Comfort, Texas (circa 1855).¹⁴ Captain Seth Eastman (1808–1875) sketched near Meusebach's home, and Julian Onderdonk (1882–1922) traversed the region, establishing appreciation of Texas natural beauty in his outstanding renditions of the countryside.¹⁵

Located twenty miles from San Antonio and renowned as the site where the Academy Award Best Picture, *Wings*, was filmed in 1927, Leon Springs Military Reservation had remained active as a military outpost since the early nineteenth hundreds.¹⁶ Train and single lane gravel roads provided transportation options for those who dared pursue a less frequently travelled path to the outskirts of urban development.¹⁷ The Roneys followed this trail. Harold's prior military service favored his employment in Civil Service at Camp Stanley, part of the government compound. His ultimate goal was simultaneously achieved as he established residence with a group of landscape painters at this remote site which would become his artistic touchstone.

George Altgelt, proprietor of Leon Springs Art Colony property, built complex bird houses based on the pioneer buildings. Bess Carroll, "Birds Flock to 'Apartment House.'" *San Antonio Light*. 24 Sep. 1929. University of Texas San Antonio Special Collections. Photograph: R.J. Martin

14. Texas Historical marker, 1971. James Patrick McGuire, introduction to *Hermann Lungkwitz: Romantic Landscapist on the Texas Frontier* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press for Texas/Institute of Texan Cultures, 1984). Also, see: Mike Stewart and Anne Stewart, afterword to *Perseverance: The Mill on Cypress Creek, Comfort, Texas*. 2018. [Private publication]

15. Dixon and Richardson, *The Settlement of Leon Springs, Texas: From Prussia to Persia*, 5; 116. Also, see Ron Tyler, "The Art of Early Texas," in *The Art of Texas: 250 Years*, ed. Ron Tyler (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 2019), 26. William Rudolph. *Julian Onderdonk: American Impressionist*. (New Haven/London: Yale Univ. Press, 2018), 133. Julian Onderdonk's oil on canvas, 20 x 30 inches painting, dated a year before his death in 1921, *Redbud Trees in Bloom at Leon Springs* [Private collection, Dallas], is a fine example of his success in this area.

16. Dixon and Richardson, *The Settlement of Leon Springs, Texas: From Prussia to Persia*, 161; 141. The movie *Wings* (1927), a silent classic, included the construction of a French village at the Leon Springs Military site.

17. "San Antonio Transportation History," *Texas Transportation Museum*, <https://classic.txtransportationmuseum.org/history-sa-transportation.php>.

18. Dixon and Richardson, *The Settlement of Leon Springs, Texas: From Prussia to Persia*, 67-79; 117-119; 181-184. Ernst Altgelt (1832–1878) founded Comfort and King William district in San Antonio. His son, lawyer George Conrad Altgelt (1859–1924) purchased large tracts of property in Leon Springs. The properties were willed to his family descendants, 183.



A mile west of the original Leon Springs Ave Station train stop, along Boerne Stage Road and a few hundred yards from one of Leon Creek's main wellsprings, is a meadow wherein stands the rare remains of three mid-nineteenth century buildings constructed circa 1850 by Captain George von Plehwe. What had begun there as an agrarian estate was later expanded with additional buildings to accommodate overnight stage coach travelers. This property, part of an 1800-acre plot, came under the ownership of George A. Altgelt (1889–1954) in the mid-twenties.¹⁸ George enjoyed the company of intelligent minds and communicated about the local art scene with his notable artist neighbors, Hugo David Pohl (1876–1960) and Minette Teichmueller (1871–1970), who became acquaintances of Harold and Nettie. The Roneys were welcomed into good company at the Leon Springs Art Colony. An educated, generous-minded proprietor, George provided artists who were eager to work and paint on the scenic grounds a chance to repurpose the old buildings into housing and studio space.

Von Plehwe structures, part of the Leon Springs Art Colony site. Sophie von Plehwe house on left. Kitchen House in center. Captain George von Plehwe house on right. Photograph: Marlene Richardson.



Roney's cozy quarters, with a massive stone fireplace, were located in the "former roadside kitchen where stagecoach travelers were fed...roofed with hand-hewn cedar logs."¹⁹ Based in such a rustic abode, the beauty of the surrounding environment struck a deep chord in Harold as he realized a meaningful connection to the land and actualized daily practice painting *en plein air*. He was known to return from work each day and paint. This ardent discipline would become part of his lifetime commitment going forward.

Roney rarely dated his paintings. However, one signed on the lower front right corner with the date "1929" is notable as the year of official recognition of the Leon Springs Art Colony and the year he first became listed in *Who's Who in American Art*. It is labeled "Altgelt" in Harold's distinctive script on the backside stretcher bar. The painting depicts a curvature outline of verdant hillside in a smooth calligraphic stroke, tentative to the point of abstraction, enhanced by a blend of unique greens. It is a compelling visual statement that serves as definition of place harbored by a dominant hillside and reveals the determination of the artist to interpret his feeling for this unique landscape. To the discerning eye, it is both a portrayal of sky and land in spring and a metaphorical reference to the emergence of self within this artistic group. The painting appears to have been designated as a gift to the family who so graciously offered their resources to the artists.²⁰

Photograph of Leon Springs Art Colony members. c. 1929. Harold A. Roney, seated, far left. H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate.



19. "Art Colony Thrives at Old Ranch on Boerne Stage Road," *San Antonio Light*, 20 Sep. 1929.

20. Harold A. Roney, *1929, 1929*, Oil on Canvas, Paul Buehler Fine Art Gallery, San Antonio, TX. Harold A. Roney painting viewed October 2019 in the Buehler Fine Art Gallery, in conversation with Lila and Blair Currin.

Leon Springs Art Colony served as a place for artists to meet and mingle with ten residents and twenty-two members at its peak count, a crossroads that cultivated camaraderie among colleagues. Whether self-trained or college educated, the artists each explored individual techniques even as they learned from one another. There must have been challenges as they sought to define their expression, each aspiring to be outstanding in execution. The urge to actualize a unique experience was dominant. As Susie Kalil notes in reference to landscape artists, “[T]he content of the art, springing from extremely human desires, is rooted in a discovery of what we are and how we fit into the world.”²¹

Leon Springs. [George von Plehwe house]. Rolla Taylor. c. 1928 - 1932. 14 x 16 inches. Oil on board. James A. Ruff Collection.



Old Stage Stand, Leon Springs. Rolla Taylor. 1920s. Oil on canvas. 14 x 16 inches. Nancy and Ted Paup Collection.



Rolla Sims Taylor (1872–1970), a *Texas Wildflower Competitive Exhibitions* award winner and Leon Springs Art Colony artist-in-residence, became a lifelong friend of Roney. Known for his portrayal of specific historic places, Taylor painted at least two buildings on the art colony site. One, labeled *Leon Springs* in the lower left corner, is a textural impasto that depicts the George von Plehwe house.²² Another painting, *Old Stage Stand, Leon Springs*, is a calmer rendering of a distinctive two-story limestone rock structure. With a wooden staircase to the second level and chimneys on each end, it appears to be Taylor’s art colony studio, described as having a “handmade log stairway” to the second floor.²³ That building, now demolished, was originally constructed as a stage coach guest house.²⁴ Taylor, as Roney, ever dedicated to identifiable subject matter, was later quoted to say, “I believe that real art, like nature, is based on truth. It must reflect the subject and also the artist.”²⁵

21. Susi Kalil, “The Texas Landscape,” in *The Art of Texas: 250 Years*, ed. Tyler, 26.

22. Taylor, *Leon Springs*, [George von Plehwe House], c. 1928-1932. James A. Ruff Collection.

23. Taylor, *Old Stage Coach Stand, Leon Springs*, c. 1920s, Nancy and Ted Paup Collection.

24. Dixon and Richardson, *The Settlement of Leon Springs, Texas: From Prussia to Persia*, 72. Painting of *Stage Coach Stand, Leon Springs*, compared to von Plehwe complex photograph of 1915.

25. Dan R. Goddard, “Retrospective honors S.A.’s Taylor,” *San Antonio Express-News*, 26 Mar. 1989. Article from Currin Family Estate.

Sunshine and Shadow. Peter L. Hohnstedt. 1929. Oil on canvas. 29 x 35 inches. San Antonio Art League.



Peter Lanz Hohnstedt (1871–1957), who was also lauded in the *Texas Wildflower Competitive Exhibitions*, lived on site and “maintained a house and two chickens.” His serene image *Sunshine and Shadow* (1929), with a central focus of golden light emanating over an open area just beyond a small field bristling with bluebonnets, is reminiscent of local terrain.²⁶ One can imagine fervent excitement in the exchange of ideas between the artists when the group was featured in a major newspaper article as a preface to their first exhibit planned for the last week of October.²⁷ Large photographs of the younger Roney, standing, and Hohnstedt, an ever erect figure, sitting, highlighted both men busy at their easels. Painting as a passionate pursuit was rarely a source of financial fortune for most of these artists, but determination and dedication were an underlying requirement to achieve that outcome. Hohnstedt, who eventually settled in Comfort, Texas, would modestly note: “an artist never stops learning...success is ninety-five percent hard work and five percent gift.”²⁸

“Art Colony Thrives At Old Ranch on Boerne Stage Road.” *San Antonio Light*, 20 September 1929, p.19. Newspaper image of Harold A. Roney; stagecoach stop house (now demolished); and, Peter L. Hohnstedt. University of Texas San Antonio Special Collections. Photographs: R.J. Martin

26. Reaves, Jr, *Texas Art and a Wildcatter's Dream: Edgar B. Davis and the San Antonio Art League*. Illustration no. 27. P.L. Hohnstedt's painting, *Sunshine and Shadow*, won *Texas Wildflower Competitive Exhibitions* Second Prize, Group 4: Texas Wildflowers (Texas division), 1929.

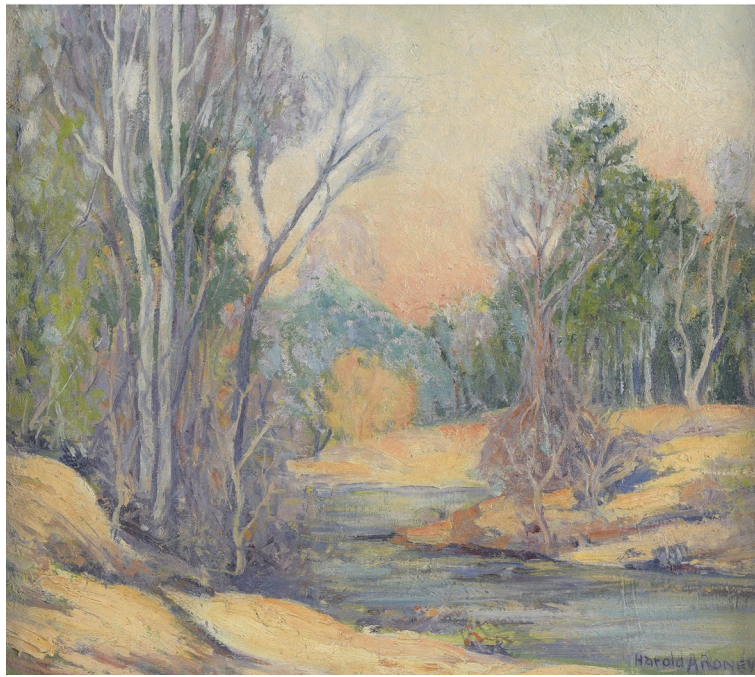
27. “Art Colony Thrives at Old Ranch on Boerne Stage Road,” *San Antonio Light*, 20 Sept. 1929.

28. Margaret Keidel, “Peter L. Hohnstedt, Famed Artist, Catches Beauty of Texas Hills-Streams,” *Comfort News* (Comfort, TX), 14 Jun. 1954.



New York Stock Exchange business was at that point as distant in effect as in miles. Undaunted by the unexpected monies market downward slide on Black Friday, the group stayed committed to their goal. “Art Exhibit Creates Stir” in the *San Antonio Light*, November 17, 1929 announced – in addition to the three artists listed above – E.E. McFadden, Cecile Weimer, A.J. Bell, J.T. Smith, Mary Cooney, Rena Maverick Green, Jamie Savage, Rosanna Cosgrove, Gilbert Neumann, James Farberer, G.W. Holloman, Jr., and Clara Caffrey Pancoast as exhibitors.²⁹ This reflects that a number of talented artists found the location a compelling one. The Leon Springs Art Colony maintained their ambitions to hold a show for a second year in 1930 with Robert Wood, Margaret Tupper, I.D. Schepler, and, again, Gilbert Neumann added to the roster. Carl Hoppe (1887–1981), another notable landscape artist exhibited that year as well, and became a loyal friend of Harold Roney.³⁰

Texas Landscape. Harold A. Roney. n.d. Oil on canvas. 30 x 36 inches. Nancy and Ted Paup Collection.



No records indicate the date when the Leon Springs Art Colony officially ended and it is likely that the realities of difficult economic times combined with distance to travel contributed to a slow dissolution. Local residents remained while transients moved on to find their way forward. Many artists proceeded to paint great artworks in years ahead. The Roneys stayed in the vicinity until 1933 as Harold continued to work, study with local artists, and produce paintings for exhibit in other venues. The Altgelt family moved by the end of the decade and their Leon Springs property was sold.

What, then, is the legacy of the Leon Springs Art Colony? It is worthwhile to recognize that the group had philanthropic support from the Altgelt family to sustain artistic aspirations to paint and exhibit independently, without jury selection and prize awards in the aftermath closing of the Davis Texas Wildflower competition. The artists sacrificed familiar domestic comforts as they tested their ideals in rough conditions. Imagine on one hand responding to extreme differences of weather conditions, not so distant coyote howls, a family of fox stealthily on the prowl, raccoon and armadillo

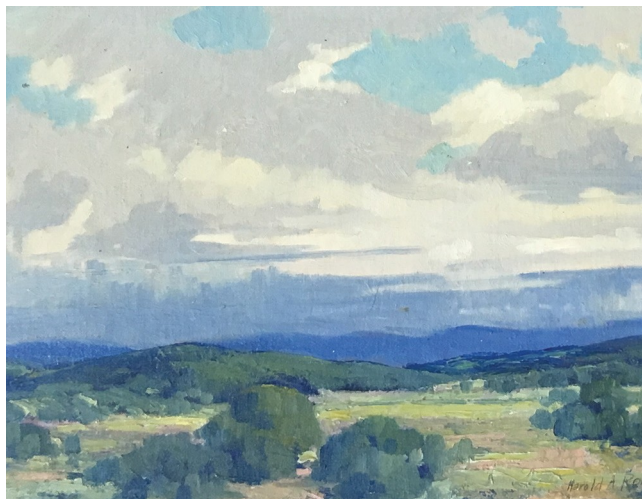
29. “Art Colony Thrives at Old Ranch on Boerne Stage Road,” *San Antonio Light*, 20 Sept. 1929.

30. Clifton Tupper, “Art Colony to Hold Exhibit in Picturesque Leon Springs,” *San Antonio Evening News*, 21 Nov. 1930. Robert Wood, a member of the LSAC, was “America’s most popular artist...the largest selling painter in history.” His reproductions appear “in more homes in America than any other artist.” Newspaper clipping quote by Godfrey Gaston, director of Morseburg Gallery, Los Angeles. Obituary. BISHOP [UPI]. 16 Feb. 1979. H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate.

sightings en route to the spring or the sudden swoop and screech of a barn owl overhead at twilight. On the other hand, an abundance of spiders, wasps, mosquitoes, scorpions, snakes, field mice, ants, and overgrown grasses could taunt one's daily routines. It would take time and organization to travel for supplies and needs. Ironically, paintings often characterize a bucolic view of the countryside. In actuality, living there required a hardy disposition. Still, the art colony provided a chance for the artists to experience awe at nature's daily display as they admired changes of light from dawn to dusk and sought to find an incredible scene in the landscape. They distanced themselves from the magnetic glitz and glamour which beckoned many during the twenties. This was a group who favored a focus on nature over city conveniences. Although wealth did not immediately follow for most, they had been granted a chance to explore their aspirations in an ideal setting.

They also relished the historic edifices of the stagecoach era and von Plehwe estate. Their generation contributed another chapter of unique events to an already significant past. This site provided a place for meaningful time well spent and they were aware how artists who preceded them made this area immortal though depicting the landscape. The Leon Springs Art Colony offered a central location from which to see spectacular views of organic, wild scenery. Living there provided frequent access to an environment which also inspired art collectors. As both seasons and urban development bring notable changes, the landscape is inevitably altered, while unique moments and remarkable memories are preserved within art. The Leon Springs Art Colony was an important historical group that relates to the existent buildings and is keenly recalled through artworks that celebrate the beauty of the region.

Distant Rain. Harold A. Roney. n.d. Oil on canvas. 12 x 16 inches. Currin Family Estate.



Most importantly, participation in the Leon Springs Art Colony offered each person opportunity to perform among a group of peers without the lead of a single master of the studio. A variety of knowledge about technique existed within each artist as some were more experienced than others. They would learn through social exchange with one another, which must have been exciting at best yet exasperating at times. The most ardent artists were year round devotees whose reliance on nature kept them a heartbeat closer to instinct as their guide, incorporating new lessons in painting as part of their

growth process. Perhaps a sense of freedom from societal restraints prevailed, an aspect of the Roaring Twenties outlook, as these artists disassociated themselves from authoritarian expectations with youthful abandon, embracing for a time the sentiment crafted in Cole Porter's 1934 lyrics, *Don't Fence Me In*:

Oh, give me land, lots of land under starry skies above

Don't fence me in

Let me ride through the wide open country that I love

Don't fence me in.

Let me be by myself in the evenin' breeze

And listen to the murmur of the cottonwood trees

Send me off forever, but I ask you please

Don't fence me in.

Although no manifestos emerged from this group who followed classical tastes in subject with a range of experimentation in rendering, Roney discovered a personal artistic touchstone which had a threefold effect. For one, Leon Springs Art Colony provided him a spiritual awakening as he was deeply moved by the views afforded there, and, being able to work daily *en plein air*, actualized his preference to paint in this way. He would always favor producing an original painting over reproductions. Secondly, the exchange with other artists helped him develop a new network of friendships. He was one of the few classically trained artists in the group as well as one of the youngest members, yet he was always open to discuss his methods and consider new ideas with other artists. Most importantly, Harold enacted an earlier dream wherein he imagined becoming an artist who would paint daily and he discovered how to manage that lifestyle in the Leon Springs Art Colony. He and Nettie would later return to build a permanent home and studio in the vicinity. For the time being, so positively affected, he desired further exposure to an art colony lifestyle that would immerse him in his love of painting the land.

Merrill Doyle and Harold Roney.
River Art Show, San Antonio, TX.
July 1949. Photograph. H.A. Roney
Archives. Currin Family Estate.



Success Unexpected In Common Hours: Because of Leon Springs Art Colony

Where the Bluebonnets Grow. Harold A. Roney. 1948. Oil on canvas. 30 x 36 inches. Nancy and Ted Paup Collection.



Roney's focus in painting by the early thirties flourished with skyscapes. Shapes of clouds that shift throughout the day in the play of light offered an endless array of change. This expansive stage and play of light and shadow set for all time fascinated Harold Roney and, at this point in his career, earned him the handle "Painter of the Texas Skies." In light of troubled times on a national level, his works were contemplative, a relief from stress and uncertainty in daily life during the Depression era. Roney's employment at Camp Stanley as an Explosives Operator was a secretive and stressful operation by necessity. His commitment to paint daily in an environment diametrically opposite from the demands of his work provided him with mental and emotional balance. He privately confided that "he felt the presence of God as he was painting."³¹ Spiritual perception is unique to each person. An aesthetic outlook of being captivated by beauty in nature can refresh and temporarily transport our attention from visceral realities to focus on a mystic or divine presence. Roney's painting, *Where the Bluebonnets Grow*, engages the viewer in this way. The darkened trees stretch heavenward and through the gentle gothic pointed opening of branches we see stacks of rain laden cumulus clouds that seem to have sprouted a river of electrifying blue below. We simultaneously identify this as the nascent appearance of beloved flowers across a barely visible field of shadowed green. The painting breathes the essence of a temporal yet eternal moment in time.³²

Harold developed an amiable relationship with the Dawson-Watson family while in San Antonio and credited private lessons with Dawson Dawson-Watson (1864–1939), an instructor with whom conversations must have ranged from technical application of medium to composition and subject selection. The topic of group dynamics, explored as Harold reflected on his experience in the Leon Springs Art Colony, compared to

31. Aline Roney, "Roney, landscape painter, teacher," [Obituary], 27 Jan. 1986. H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate.

32. *Where the Bluebonnets Grow*, Harold A. Roney, n.d., Oil on canvas, Nancy and Ted Paup Collection.

Dawson-Watson's reminiscence of his early days spent at the American Impressionist art colony at Giverny in 1888, must have been insightful.³³ The senior Dawson-Watson would mentor Roney's sense of purpose, aware that colleague exchange had a powerful influence on aspiring young artists. Dawson-Watson would have supported an introduction of Roney to Henry B. Snell (1838–1943) based on his student's developing skill with, and ambition toward, *en plein air* painting.

Snell was a fellow English-American landscape painter who served as one of the three judges in the first *Texas Wildflower Competitive Exhibitions*, 1927.³⁴ He hailed from the historic New Hope borough in Bucks County, thirty miles north of Philadelphia, where a significant hub of artists resided who favored Impressionistic style and outdoor painting. Certainly, knowledge of this group dedicated to study landscape became attractive to Roney after a taste of that lifestyle in the Leon Springs Art Colony. Moving to New Hope, with its coincidental yet timely and appropriately optimistic name, would support Harold's artistic goals. He would again continue to work full time at the Frankford Arsenal in Philadelphia to earn necessary income and to fulfill his artistic interests. This was considered a temporary move as the Roneys maintained a permanent address in San Antonio during this phase indicating their intention to return to the area.³⁵

Snowy Afternoon. Harold A. Roney.
c. 1935. Oil on canvas. 14 x 16 inches.
Private Collection.



Snell's colleague John F. Folinsbee (1892–1972), a founder of the New Hope artistic center located in the eighteenth-century building, Phillips Mill, became a private instructor to Roney. John, in mid-career, was inspired by Paul Cézanne and consequently began closer observation of underlying geometric forms in his compositions. Folinsbee's energetic brushstrokes and contrasting tones were painted with an enthusiastic lean. A technical takeaway for Roney was how forms define shadows. Folinsbee always encouraged originality over imitation and Roney would similarly favor sketches over photographs as his reference. Folinsbee felt the purpose of art ultimately was "communication of feeling" in response to *en plein air* subjects. This dovetailed Roney's desire that a unique message be revealed to his viewer.³⁶

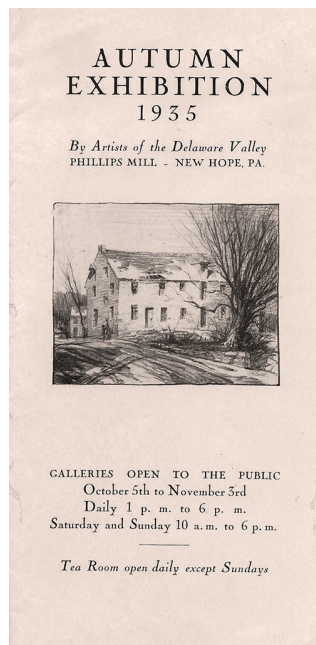
33. Rebecca Lawton, "Texas Impressionism," in *The Art of Texas: 250 Years*, ed. Tyler, 182. Roney would later collaboratively exhibit on tour with Edwin Dawson-Watson.

34. Reaves, Jr., *Texas Art and a Wildcatter's Dream: Edgar B. Davis and the San Antonio Art League*, 17.

35. Esse Forrester O'Brien, *Art and Artists of Texas* (Dallas, TX: Tardy Publishing Company, 1935), 186.

36. Brian H. Peterson, "The Painterly Voice," in *Pennsylvania Impressionism*, ed. Brian H. Peterson (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 47-49.

Autumn Exhibition 1935. Catalogue.
New Hope, PA. H.A. Roney Archives.
Currin Family Estate.



Another important influence in New Hope was Folinsbee's longtime friend, Harry "Tony" Leith-Ross (1886–1973). Roney exhibited six of his artworks alongside these two gentlemen, plus H.B. Snell and other top area artists in the autumn of 1935.³⁷

Continuing private studies with Leith-Ross, Roney would have directed his "efforts on expressing a mood of nature and not on impressing the viewer by clever technique." This perspective would permeate Roney's outlook as he interpreted surroundings in new settings to reveal an authentic response. Roney would also incorporate rearrangement of forms within his compositions to result in visual harmony.³⁸

One of Roney's paintings from this period, *Bottom of Greenhill, Lumberville*, reveals his softly blended brushstrokes, glowing summer hues and attention to

contrasting shadows. This is a complexly painted surface of thoughtfully formed shapes depicting a hillside descending to the Delaware River. Trees glow in afternoon light, framing the center of the painting. Emphasis is on a small sandbar that peeks above the surface of the water surrounded by a myriad of reflective cool colors engaging the viewer to imagine sitting on that island. The mood of the artwork is calm and inviting to enter an enchanting yet very real world.³⁹

Bottom of Greenhill, Lumberville.
Harold A. Roney. c. 1934. Image online
at Mutual Art.



37. New Hope Colony, Phillips Mill, *Autumn Exhibition* (New Hope, PA: Phillips Mill Community Association, 1935), Exhibition Catalogue.

38. Brian H. Peterson, "The Painterly Voice," in *Pennsylvania Impressionism*, ed. Brian H. Peterson (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 158.

39. Roney, *Bottom of Greenhill, Lumberville*, c. 1934.

The fulfillment of working near a historic place, in nature, among a group of artists dedicated to *en plein air* painting as practiced in the Leon Springs Art Colony, had verified artistic aspirations of the lifestyle he sought to continue. In addition, Roney learned how to offer instruction while observing nature as a gratifying way to educate students when painting landscape. Harold's art matured while he continued painting year-round, depicting the colors and moods of each season. One painting of this time, *Snowy Afternoon*, evokes the breathtaking chill of a grey day following heavy snowfall. A sluggish stream of icy water rendered in light and dark strokes carves an intermittent path out of the cerulean-blue mountains on the distant horizon. The waterway dodges past evergreens beside a large open field of brilliant white that glimmers atop subtle blends of softer livid tints to offer a feeling of distilled quietude.⁴⁰

Pochades, left to right clockwise:
Texas Bluebonnets. Harold A. Roney. n.d. Oil on canvas. 8 x 10 inches. Currin Family Estate.

Summer. Harold A. Roney. n.d. Oil on masonite. 12 x 16 inches. Currin Family Estate.

Winter. Harold A. Roney. n.d. Oil on canvas. 8 x 10 inches. Currin Family Estate.

Autumn. Harold A. Roney. n.d. Oil on masonite. 8 x 10 inches. Currin Family Estate.



During the New Hope Colony years, Roney's artwork was appreciated by a wider audience and included showings at Del Gado Museum in New Orleans, The Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts, and The Gulf Building, New York City. He displayed in a private exhibition at the Newman Art Galleries, Philadelphia and at the Corcoran Art Galleries in Washington, D.C. Roney was a member of Delaware Valley Artists, American Artists Professional League, Southern States Art League, Texas Fine Arts Association, and other arts organizations. He would depart from New Hope not only richer in artistic experience but with a series of additional credits and connections.⁴¹ Roney had secured recognition as a Texas regionalist and American artist of note.

As the effects of the Great Depression eased, years of frugal living prepared the Roneys well. They drove a car upon return to Texas, enthusiastic to visit Kerrville, again drawn to an outbound region, forty miles beyond Leon Springs. Following an initial visit during the summer of 1937, Roney determined to settle in the area "...impressed with the beauty of this country."⁴² Harold first established a downtown studio and gallery

40. Harold A. Roney, *Snowy Afternoon*, c. 1935, Oil on canvas, 14 x 16 inches. Private Collection.

41. [News Article describing Exhibitions], c. 1938, H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate.

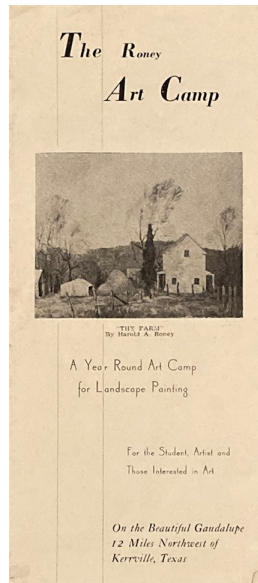
42. "Philadelphia Artist To Move Here, Lured By Landscape Beauty." *Kerrville Mountain Sun* (Kerrville, TX), 15 Jul. 1937. The two-story Wolfmueller building where Roney had his studio and gallery in 1937, stands today restored across from the Kerr Arts and Cultural Center.

Second floor of Wolfmueller Building, built c. 1900. 209 Earl Garrett St., Kerrville, TX. Harold A. Roney studio and gallery were located upstairs in 1937. Photograph: R.J. Martin.



on the second floor of the Wolfmueller Building. His work at that time was described as capturing “the drowsy, hazy atmosphere, the subtle richness of color, the best and calm stillness of the country.”⁴³ The couple planned an exhibition schedule of his newest paintings throughout the state for winter through early spring. In turn, this would allow time for art instruction during summer and autumn.

The Roney Art Camp brochure featuring *The Old Homestead* (originally titled *The Farm*). Harold A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate. Painting at Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, TX.



They next invested in establishing the Roney Art Camp along the Guadalupe River, located beyond Ingram close to Hunt, and planned year round instruction. This jade waterway and enigmatic woodlands with great vistas welcomed artists and students with a chance to experience *en plein air* painting as first envisioned at the Leon Springs Art Colony. Roney’s artwork titled *The Farm* (circa 1938) was later dubbed *The Old Homestead*. It depicts a cluster of storage buildings and a haystack in profile with a main focus on the limestone Texas pioneer house featuring porches with overhanging eaves. The composition has a nostalgic sensibility paying tribute to the endurance of early settlers and it was featured on the Roney Art Camp brochures, indicating the site was near their property.

This was a fulfilling time for the Roneys working as partners active in the planning process and Harold was now self-employed full time.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, and certainly with dismay to abandon their venture when at a peak point, World War II brought an unexpected change of plans. The Roneys faced the need to make a major shift in their living situation. They sold their property and Harold served a short term in the Army in support of the U.S. war effort. He received an honorable discharge and resumed a position with Civil Service working the next decade as Foreman of the Camp Stanley Paint Shop. Money was tight and would remain so as they struggled in the years ahead, yet they always managed to complete payments and maintain close connections with their families. Not one to surrender to pessimism, landscape painting would remain Roney’s emotional outlet looking toward a brighter future in life after the war years.

43. “Paintings By Two Texas Artists To Be Exhibited Here,” [News Article], c. 1937, H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate. Roney co-exhibited at several Texas venues with Edward Dawson-Watson.

44. Harold A. Roney, *The Old Homestead*, c. 1938, Painting, Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum, Canyon, Texas. *The Roney Art Camp*, c. 1938-1939. Brochure. H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate: Blair Currin notes that the site for the painting was near the Pedernales River whose headwaters are north of where the Roney Art Camp was located.

The Red Barn Studio, Leon Springs.
Harold A. Roney. c. 1963. Oil on masonite. 12 x 16 inches. The studio was razed after 2.6 acres were sold in 1964 to the state of Texas to build the access road for Interstate 10 West. Currin Family Estate.



Harold and Nettie had foresight in 1944 to make a loan and purchase fifty acres in Leon Springs, three miles south of the former Art Colony site, on Fredericksburg Road. This place suited them perfectly with a special feature being nestled under a canopy of cedar, live oak and Spanish oak trees. An existent building could readily serve as his workspace. In recognition of it, “Red Barn Studio” became the name of their domicile. Most importantly, Harold rediscovered his connectivity to the local landscape with assurance, often saying that no countryside anywhere was more paintable than within a 10-mile radius of Leon Springs.⁴⁵

Original *The Red Barn Studio* sign. Hand lettered on board. Harold A. Roney. 1944. Currin Family Estate.



It would be three years before the couple completed a solidly constructed concrete brick house. Although post-war materials were scarce, demanding clever use of recycled materials, the ten by fifty-four foot open front porch along the east façade stretched the length of the building. This added a conscious element of the Texas pioneer architecture they had admired in the Kerrville region.⁴⁶ The open air space provided many hours for contemplative reflection and a chance to enjoy cheerful weekend exchange among

Newspaper photo of Roney Texas pioneer style home in Leon Springs. “House With A View.” *San Antonio Express Magazine*. 27 Jan. 1949. Currin Family Estate.



45. June Kilstofte, “House With A View,” *San Antonio Express-News Magazine*, 27 Jan. 1949. The surrounding acreage is one of only a few properties bordering Interstate 10 which remains semi-wilderness, listed For Sale as of December 2020, located northwest of Camp Bullis Road on IH-10. Blair and Lila Currin walked the property in October 2019 and found traces of the steps near the former foundation of the Roney home.

46. *Ibid.*

numerous visitors who sought instruction under Roney, a revered art teacher once the war ended. At this less remote yet clearly scenic setting, he provided his followers a relaxed place to experience nature where he would promulgate *en plein air* approach in teaching others how to perceive a view and prepare an oil painting.

Active in the community, the Roneys were early members of the San Antonio River Art Group helping to organize exhibits held corresponding to annual Fiesta events. Harold also joined the Academy of Fine Arts (renamed the Coppini Academy of Fine Arts in 1953), founded by prominent sculptors, Pompeo Coppini and Waldine Tauch. He worked closely with them, serving as President for the organization in 1951 and again in 1963–1966. The group met frequently and “worked diligently at exhibiting their collective works in museums and art galleries throughout Texas.”⁴⁷ Early members, including Hugo David Pohl, Rolla Taylor, and Porfirio Salinas (1910–1973), actively supported the promotion of classical fine arts and steered away from abstract and contemporary styles although each developed their own style of Romantic-Realistic painting. The well-known Salinas befriended Harold and became a frequent visitor to The Red Barn Studio. Salinas, a natural talent and largely self-taught, credited working in the studio of José Arpa as a teen and is distinctively remembered as having complimented Harold for providing Salinas his first *en plein air* instruction.⁴⁸

Big Bend. (Pochade). Harold A. Roney.
n.d. Oil on masonite. 8 x 10 inches.
Currin Family Estate.



One of Roney’s favorite daily exercises was to execute small color scenery studies. These pochades could later be developed into a larger painting or serve as a reference sketch. His lithe brushwork and range of values capture an impressionistic feeling for place in response to the view. He noted that most painters would get one successful larger painting out of twenty sketches. Those which didn’t work out, Harold called “turkeys.” When Harold retired from Civil Service in 1958 after a total of thirty years of service, he furthered his time with *en plein air* study by expanding his activities to include teaching during the summers at the Ramon Froman School of Art in Cloudcroft, New Mexico. For the next two decades, the challenge of relocation and intensity of offering lessons were balanced by the opportunity to paint more consistently. A broadened array of

47. Alice Hutson, *From Chalk to Bronze: A Biography of Waldine Tauch*, 113.

48. Ruth Goddard, *Porfirio Salinas*, (Austin, TX: Rock House Press, 1975). Aline’s comment by P. Salinas as recalled by Blair Currin.

landscape scenes were produced during this period. Paintings of views in West Texas, White Sands, the Socorro and Sacramento Mountains entered Roney's repertoire. The rewards reaped were of simple pleasures in life. His postcard sent to Renwicke Cary, columnist of "Around the Plaza," was published in the *San Antonio News*, 1959: "*We are having a nice cool summer here. Fire in the fireplace every night and delightful days. Makes teaching art outdoors a pleasure.*"

In 1963, the Roneys sold a major portion of the property surrounding The Red Barn Studio home and invested in three lots with a spectacular westward view in High Rolls, New Mexico, about ten miles from Cloudcroft. This allowed them to remodel a cottage to live in during their three month escapade. However, in November of that year, Nettie, who had long suffered bouts of undulant fever, died unexpectedly of a heart attack while tenderly held in Harold's arms at their pioneer home built twenty years earlier in Leon Springs. He sincerely grieved her death. Harold ceremoniously dedicated Nettie's favorite painting, *The Old Homestead*, (see page 4) to the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum in Canyon, Texas after it had been displayed in New York City, part of the juried exhibition of the *American Artists Professional League Grand National Show* in 1966.⁴⁹ Painter Aline Bailey, a close family friend and former student had also been tragically widowed the year prior. Harold and Aline met again and recognized they cared deeply for and could readily support one another at this point in their lives. Aline had a stalwart outlook, a joyful demeanor, and was poised to rhythmically join in Roney's lifestyle. Happily for each, their marriage flourished.

Preparing to paint *en plein air*. Harold (pipe in hand), left and Aline Roney, right. 1970s. Photograph. H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate.



This second marriage ushered in a new chapter of warm family relationships. Harold – who understood how creative endeavor helped heal the pain from loss of a family member at a young age – began to teach painting in Leon Springs and Cloudcroft to his grandsons recovering from the death of their first grandfather. Blair took special interest in art and continued academic studies to become an excellent landscape painter embracing many ideals learned from Roney. Blair fondly remembers the aroma of a pipe which Harold smoked and held constantly clipped between his lips. Though rarely talkative, when Harold spoke it was worth recall.

49. Letters of correspondence between Harold Roney and Director, Boone McClure, unpublished, H.A. Roney Archives, Currin Family Estate. McClure and Olive Vandruff Bugbee were active in support of exhibitions at the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum between 1960–1975. See Michael Grauer, "The Texas Panhandle's Gallery: 75 Years of Collecting Art," *Panhandle-Plains Historical Review* LXIX (1996), 95.

Waldine Tauch's 90th birthday celebration. Aline Roney, left; Waldine Tauch, center; Harold A. Roney, right. Photograph. 1982. H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate.



Harold Roney was known not only for a compassionate and patient personality reflected in his dignified manners but also for thoughtful delivery in teaching others to adopt an artistic viewpoint. “He had an absolute simplicity about himself, always calm, quiet and unassuming.” He promoted confidence in creative perspective to his students. In turn, they benefitted from working in natural settings with Roney as they developed *en plein air* practice. He was democratic in outlook, willing to share his achievements in paintings by charging a minimal price, believing that “[E]veryone who loves paintings, not only wealthy people, should be able to buy them.” Roney was diligent in his efforts to support the community, serving as a leader, so he was frequently in demand and never turned down requests to conduct a workshop or judge a show. He met many challenges with courage and faith throughout his life – difficult instances of death, moving into new settings, extreme economic hardship, military work demands, and the stress of world wars. His ultimate desire to paint was paramount in his mind, “all he ever wanted to do.” In contrast to the swirl of twentieth-century modern views and styles of art, he remained constant to *en plein air* landscape painting based on his early classical training and Leon Springs Art Colony experience as a touchstone. Aline summarized that “[H]e saw beauty in everything and imparted this to others.”⁵⁰ Living near historic places, painting directly from nature, and cultivating a spirit of camaraderie among artists with whom he worked and taught became his guideline for a successful artistic lifestyle. The fulfillment of his childhood dream to become an artist is best seen through over fifty years of paintings which remain his visual legacy.

Following a long illness in the eighth decade of his life, attended by loving family, Harold A. Roney passed away in the depth of winter on January 24, 1986, the longest living prominent member of the original Leon Springs Art Colony. Harold's painting, *The Old Timer*, which was shown in 1963 at the Smithsonian American Art Museum as part of the *American Artists Professional League Exhibition*, set on an easel beside his casket at his funeral. In that painting, the prominently lit, taller tree is the centerpiece and seems in dialog with its offspring, a younger tree on the right side. Sustenance for each is drawn both from sunlight and water as a vital life source. The water flows across the background of the image and may be interpreted as a constant river or a surging storm water flood in recession as is common in the hill country following bouts of occasional heavy downpours. The trees stand secure and sturdy, linked to one another and to their surroundings, depicting a vibrant duet of graceful support.

50. Aline Roney, “Roney, landscape painter, teacher,” [Obituary], 27 Jan. 1986. H.A. Roney Archives. Currin Family Estate.

The Old Timer. Harold A. Roney.
n.d. Oil on masonite. 20 x 30 inches.
Currin Family Estate.



Roney's paintings reflect his underlying philosophy of life that an honest perception of nature is never constantly the same but for the sensitive viewer, always reveals surprise. *The Old Timer* recalls a magnificent tree which once stood about a thousand feet from the main spring near where the Leon Springs Art Colony artists lived and worked. "There was a very old pecan tree about 1000 ft. from the Leon Spring, fed by that spring. It reached 97 feet in height and had a diameter of 14 feet at the base. It was thought to be nearly 400 years old and was so well-known that folks from all around came to see it."⁵¹

Although the pecan tree no longer exists there today, Roney paintings and the traces of the Leon Springs Art Colony remain. Both this site and the paintings of the area continue to enthrall. Harold A. Roney landscape paintings may be appreciated for a variety of moods and scenes captured, from his delight in an everyday view or in his reverence celebrating divine presence in nature. Harold had often conceived a dream to become an artist at a young age and realized the life he had imagined over time, particularly when a member of the Leon Springs Art Colony. He launched that dream toward new opportunities and he eventually returned and settled in Leon Springs for the last half of his life. He found unexpected success in common hours and willingly shared his expertise with others, educating the next generation in understanding a classical approach to landscape painting. Roney's contribution to the Early Texas Art regionalist movement is remarkable. J. W. Young of Chicago, wrote in 1940: "...[Roney] interprets the beauty around him in a manner which certainly will win him an enviable place among present day artists."⁵²

The impact of the Leon Springs area as a historic place still inspires us to preserve what he and others experienced in the remnant of buildings and on the property which provided artists an idyllic place to paint. It was a significant chapter in the cultural history of the state, an actual site with a legacy to be remembered. The paintings by artists who worked there illustrate landscapes of great beauty to be enjoyed.

Both the Leon Springs Art Colony site and paintings by early Texas artists are worth preservation, particularly as current and future generations contemplate why creativity and a love of the land truly matter when we imagine and articulate plans for the future.

51. Dixon and Richardson, *The Settlement of Leon Springs, Texas: From Prussia to Persia*, 119. Quote by George Allen Altgelt.

52. "Roney Exhibition in San Angelo," *Kerrville Mountain Sun* (Kerrville, TX), 7 Nov. 1940.

Appendix:
**Comments by
Blair Currin on
Harold A. Roney's
mature painting
style**

Roney was known as the "Painter of the Texas Skies." *Untitled*. Harold A. Roney. n.d. Oil on masonite. 16 x 20 inches. Currin Family Estate.

Walking to the site, he was already observing the light conditions, the direction of the light, color temperature, color schemes and so on. He often went into the field with no preconceived motif. He let the light conditions, local color, time of day/year dictate his motif. Maybe the way the warm setting sun played on a grouping of rocks, or maybe dappled morning light danced on bare winter tree trunks, or maybe how a peach colored skyscape influenced the color of the land beneath it. Never one to use gimmicks...his paintings employed a variety of brush methods. He used the brush over 90 something percent of the time, reserving the palette knife for razor thin highlights or when a thick impasto was called for. He would gesso larger canvases or buy the canvas pre-gessoed but not when he painted on Masonite. The latter being a worthy support and affordable as well. In a few instances he varnished his paintings but usually he didn't.



After he studied the landscape before him, and after he did his rough sketch, he would proceed to the canvas. He then "drew" his composition directly onto the canvas. He did large canvases in the same way. His favorite brand of brush was Signet by Robert Simmons. He used primarily flats and filberts in even sizes from 2 to 12. Using a well-worn no. 2 flat he thinned down Ultramarine Blue and made a very simplified drawing on the canvas. This was to place the big shapes of the landscape. Why blue? He was taught that on a clear sunny day, the blue from the sky, the source of the light, permeated and surrounded all the landscape elements. He never used a pencil to draw on the canvas. Why? Because the sharp point of a pencil encouraged too much detail too early in the process. Start out loose and only tighten up at the very end of the painting but even then, detail only if necessary. He believed an over-stroked painting was a messy, muddled painting. He thought fewer well-placed strokes made for a cleaner, more authoritative painting. He did blend selective areas but kept those to a minimum. For example, where a light value, say the sky, met a darker value, say a tree line, he would blend the edge where they met. He would say, "when a dark meets a light, you darken the light and lighten the dark". This keeps that edge soft because in nature there are few hard edges.

*A good example of Roney's style is seen in the painting 'Summer Landscape' in the collection of Bob and Linda Rork. Harold's painting is documented in the 1999 publication **Dictionary of Texas Artists, 1800–1945** written by Paula and Michael Grauer. It is featured as a black-and-white photograph on the frontispiece with a color version of the same painting on page 141.*

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