Artist Edward Quigley's Romantic Vision of the West

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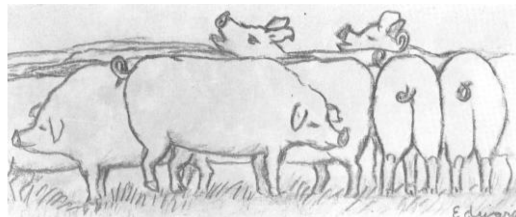
When Edward Burns Quigley was born in a small town in North Dakota in 1895, it was the beginning of a new era. Just five years earlier newspapers heralded the closing of the Western Frontier. Famous western genre artist Frederick Remington announced that he would never travel to the West again, as it was becoming too much like the East. All Native Americans had been pacified and most confined to reservations. Great numbers of Easterners moved westward to establish farms and cattle ranches or otherwise find their fortunes. In hope of greater economic opportunity, Quigley's parents brought their six children to a mill town in Harrison, Idaho. Quigley's father Michael opened a jewelry store. After a series of mill fires destroyed the small town's economy and spirit, the Quigley family continued westward by train and sternwheeler to Spokane, Washington.



Spokane Interstate Fair award winner – age 7

Like many young people at the turn of the century, Quigley was fascinated by horses. Ford's Model T had only recently been put on the market and horses were the standard means of transportation. Quigley found a job delivering newspapers by horseback. Later in his life, he would recall the excitement of racing the other paperboys after his shift. His enthusiasm for horses lasted all of his life. Eventually it became his ambition to become the most accomplished animalier [artist of horses and other animals] of the western ranch country. He was the art director for *The Tamarack*, his high school student magazine. His first commissioned piece was an ad for a Spokane men's store. He was paid in clothes.

Quigley graduated from high school in 1916. Having previously signed up with the National Guard, he was quickly sent to Europe to aid in the war effort. After two long years of WWI fighting, Quigley moved to his family's new home in Portland, Oregon. Portland's shipyards were booming and Quigley easily found a job as a riveter. A few months later he took a train to Illinois to study at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts.

Quigley found Chicago "fast, rude, and dirty" at the beginning of prohibition. He was nonetheless determined to establish himself as an artist and Chicago offered many opportunities. He studied intermittently for six years, supporting himself by working for trade magazines and as a freelancer for advertising agencies. Every year he took a four-week vacation to visit his family and dreamed of returning home permanently. At the beginning of the Depression in 1930, the magazines he had worked for came under new management. Quigley had saved a considerable amount of money and felt confident that he could support himself for a period of time without working. He bought a car and made a leisurely trip across the country to Portland, where he would live for the rest of his life.

There was little advertising work to be found in Portland as the Depression continued. Quigley kept busy by building his dream retreat. He purchased an acre of forestland at the base of Mount Hood and oversaw the construction of a modest log cabin by a stream. The artist's fascination with western ranch-themed imagery continued to grow, and he made *bas-relief* woodcarvings of animal scenes for the mantle piece and door. Concurrently, he opened a small commercial art studio, but enjoyed only minimal success finding clients. For the first time in his career, Quigley had the free time to discover what he liked to do best: painting scenes from his childhood memories of life in the country. During the Depression and into WWII, Quigley supported himself taking odd jobs and occasional freelance advertising projects. When he was not working, he could devote himself to making oil-paintings and wood-carvings of Old West themes and circus animals in his little studio on the third floor of his parent's home.

1930's Quigley Cabin near Sandy

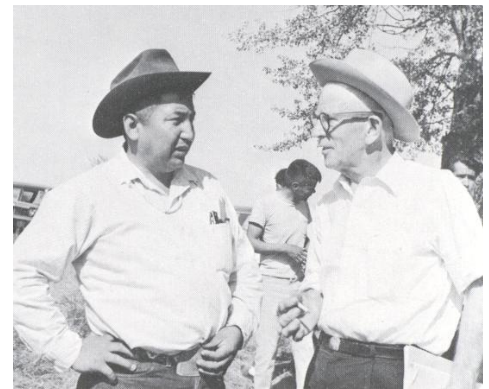
In 1936, Quigley felt fortunate to be temporarily employed by the Works Progress Administration, an employment division of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "New Deal" unemployment relief program. He was commissioned to paint "The Settling of the West," a large five-panel mural located in the foyer of the newly built Irvington Elementary School. Paid a subsistence wage of $40 dollars per month, the artist completed the project in 4 months. He worked on the paintings while school was in session, under the approving gaze of Irvington's schoolchildren, even making note of their suggestions on how he could make the scenes more realistic [see mural detail below]. Very well received by the school's administration and the school district board, the murals were a fitting tribute to Oregon's early history. Quigley's work was included in very enthusiastic reviews of the Irvington School project in both the *Sunday Oregonian* and the *Oregon Journal*.

In the late 1930s, Quigley discovered what would become a continuous source of his inspiration. Shortly after finishing the Irvington mural project, he accompanied a group of friends on a hunting trip near Toppenish, Washington. While sketching a group of cowponies, he made the acquaintance of horse trader Frank Green, who was so taken with Quigley's drawings that he invited him to his ranch. Green introduced him to the Yakama Indians, who had a long history of horse-trading. This chance encounter resulted in many lifelong friendships.

Quigley painting of a 1940s Yakama horse roundup

Quigley was enchanted with the disappearing cowboy lifestyle, and for twenty years he spent his summers driving cattle and wild horses. He prided himself that his paintings were a result of his first-hand experience working with animals. His horses are given distinct personalities. He made close study of their psychology and complex relationships with each other, as well as their relationships with people.

In 1946, Quigley put together his first one-man show at the Elfstrom Gallery in Salem, Oregon. There he discovered that he could sell his paintings for four times his previous price. Quigley finally gained the self-confidence to give up commercial work entirely and dedicate himself to cowboy genre painting and woodcarving. Over the years, Quigley made many wealthy friends in the Northwest who were also outdoorsmen and western art enthusiasts. As a result, he received numerous commissions for mural work in private homes, lodge halls, and tourist information centers. A very social man, he became an active member of the Oregon Society of Artists for which he taught classes for over 15 years. Every summer he would take a trip with the Skyline Trail Riders to find inspiration for his next project.



Yakama horseman Robert Jim (left) with his friend Ed Quigley

In 1966, Quigley married Geneva Hale Inman. For the rest of his life, they lived in a comfortable house in the Portland West Hills. He spent every day working in the studio of his house, except when he was traveling with other horse enthusiasts in Washington and Eastern Oregon.

Quigley's art was greatly influenced by illustrations found in newsmagazines such as *Harper's Weekly* from the mid-to-late 1800s. His palette, loose brushstroke, sweeping arid landscapes, masculine focus, and fascination with spirited horses are similar to the paintings that were popular fifty years earlier. However, his vision of the western hero's relationship with nature is greatly different. The heroes of famous cowboy genre artists Frederick Remington and Charles Russell struggle to achieve dominance over a hostile uncivilized world.

Quigley's vision is just the opposite. His western scenes are largely pastoral. His strong, calm cowboys are shown to be at peace with the rugged landscape; perhaps they could even be seen as an extension of environment.

Although his themes are often active and exciting, there is no suggestion of deeper conflict or mortal danger. The change in western genre art can be attributed to a new mythology of the West. Remington and Russell were Easterners who painted depictions of the Far West for an eastern audience. They were sympathetic with contemporary imperialist public policy and the popular belief in manifest destiny. Quigley was a Westerner who painted the West as many people from his generation wanted to remember it. He created an ideal past and gave a sense of history to a very new culture.

The Irvington Murals – "The Settling of the West"

Portland conservation technician Hiawatha Johnson has recently worked on restoring "The Settling of the West," a project managed by the Oregon Cultural Heritage Commission. Some 200 area citizens and businesses have made generous donations to the project.

Edward Quigley painted the Irvington School murals in 1936, very early in his career as a western genre painter. Western themes were popular in art, music, novels, and movies, and ever present in the public's imagination. Quigley's vision of the West was very likely influenced by these sources as well as careful study of the masters of Cowboy painting and sculpting – Frederick Remington and Charles Russell. The murals also show a marked similarity to illustrations found in *Harper's Weekly.*

Hiawatha Johnson (left) consults with artist George Johanson during restoration work on Ed Quigley's "The Settling of the West" at Irvington Elementary.

The spectator entering Irvington Elementary School from the north-facing main entrance is surrounded on all sides by a panorama of warm colors and exhilarating scenes of pioneers, new farmers, and a Umatilla Indian village. Directly in front, the viewer observes a pair of rugged farmers tilling their new field with a team of sturdy laboring oxen. The four oxen struggle to advance in the difficult soil. The youngest farmer, perhaps the son of the bearded man behind the plow, walks slowly beside the oxen gently guiding them with a contented smile. With his switch in hand he seems confident in his ability to tame the wilderness and generally pleased with his situation and the sunny spring day. This scene is remarkably similar to an illustration by Theodore Davis from an 1868 issue of *Harper's*. Quigley knew that the land was so dense, that more than two oxen were needed to till virgin soil.

A new log cabin and great barn are shown in the distance. The small profile of a woman in a blue chambray dress draws water from the well, accompanied by an excited little dog with a wagging tail. The skeleton of a covered wagon further reminds the viewer of the long and difficult trip the new farmers had braved on the Oregon Trail. Perhaps the most striking aspect of this scene is not what appears, but what does not. The farmers have no neighbors. No roads can be seen. These are the first settlers to arrive. They are surrounded only by gentle rolling hills of forestland and a wide-open sky; the warm sunlight of self-made opportunity shining upon them.

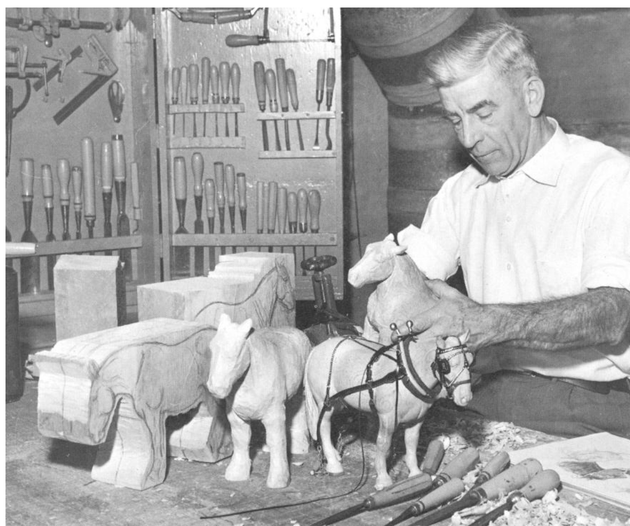
The painting to the left of the entrance depicts a large wagon train trying to find its way to an Oregon destination through wild sagebrush plains. The scene depicts a combination of busy activity, freedom of spirit, and steadfast determination on the part of both the pioneers and their animals. Armed men on horseback lead the way, keeping an eye out for dangers. Large teams of oxen strain against their heavy burdens, and swish their tails in annoyance. A school-age boy yells at them to continue, snapping his whip in the air. The horses whinny and bray, and the women sit together in the shade of the covered wagons.

To the right of the door, a band of eight Umatilla Indian scouts leave their village riding fine, energetic, spotted ponies. These bold, brawny men are dressed in formal war regalia with brightly beaded eagle feather headdresses and long spears. Their faces show concern and some hint of sadness as they set off, but they give no

appearance of fear or second thoughts. They make no backward glances to their home and families. Their Cayuses are spirited and appear prepared for action. Only one little girl at the edge of their encampment watches them go. The other women and children continue with their domestic tasks: caring for children, weaving baskets, and painting on animal hide in front of their teepees.

Detail: Umatilla village mural

Quigley would have described himself as an uncomplicated man and he painted accordingly. As would be characteristic of his future paintings, he preferred large brushes and a simple palette of only eight colors to avoid distracting details. These early pieces demonstrate Quigley's aptitude for vividly portraying America's Wild West as his generation wanted to remember it: free, exciting, and far removed from the Great Depression and the recent World War I. In creamy tones, he painted pictures of a simpler, more optimistic era. Drawing upon his own childhood experiences of horses and cowboys, he enlivened the imaginations of Irvington schoolchildren in a time before television. The factual accuracy of the paintings and their WPA-era origin provide vivid history lessons for today's Irvington students.



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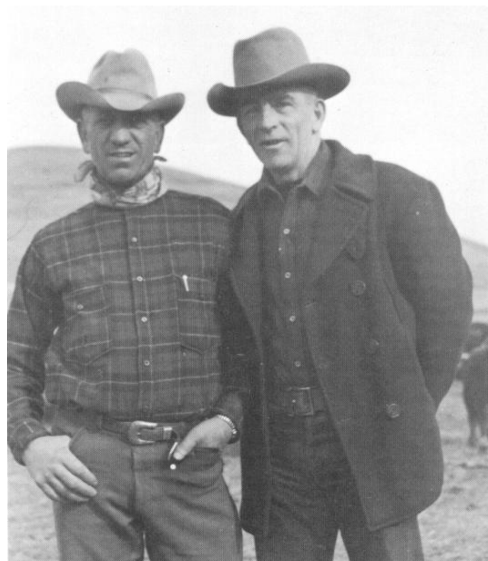
Ed Quigley (above) in his home studio added wood sculpture to his painting as a source of both income and satisfaction.

Photo at right of Eastern Oregon rancher Tony Vey (left) with his friend and fellow horseman Ed Quigley.



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