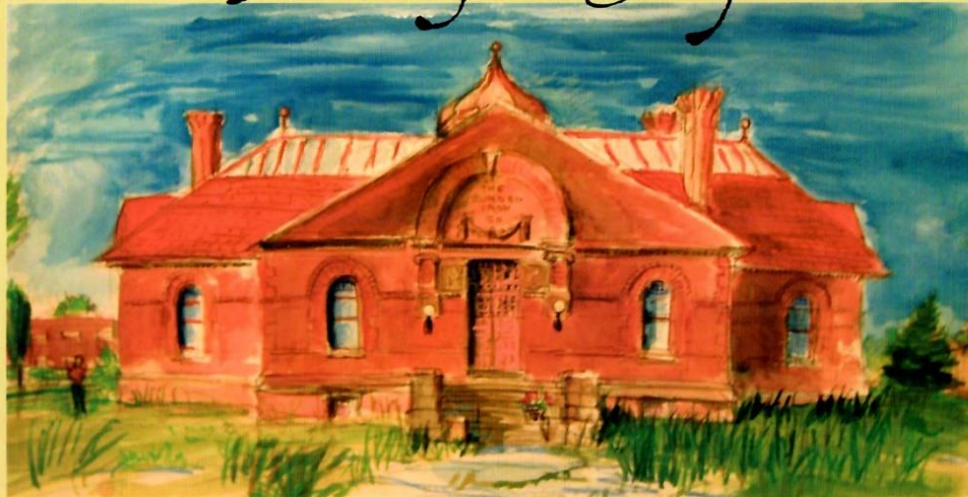


These watercolors were painted by John Emmett Connors and published in a beautiful booklet entitled "Artist from Troy." I framed and arranged sixteen of them on a wall to remember my past. John and I graduated in 1968 from Lansingburgh High School. Our senior class presented the musical "Guys and Dolls." I was stage manager. John created the sets.

## John Emmett Connors

### *Artist from Troy*



JOHN EMMETT CONNORS with VITO F. GRASSO

The watercolor on the title page of John's book shows the office of the Burden Iron Co in South Troy. Built in 1881, today it is a museum displaying objects manufactured in Troy in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The iron works housed the most powerful water wheel in history, the inspiration for the Ferris Wheel, whose inventor observed it while an engineering student at RPI nearby.





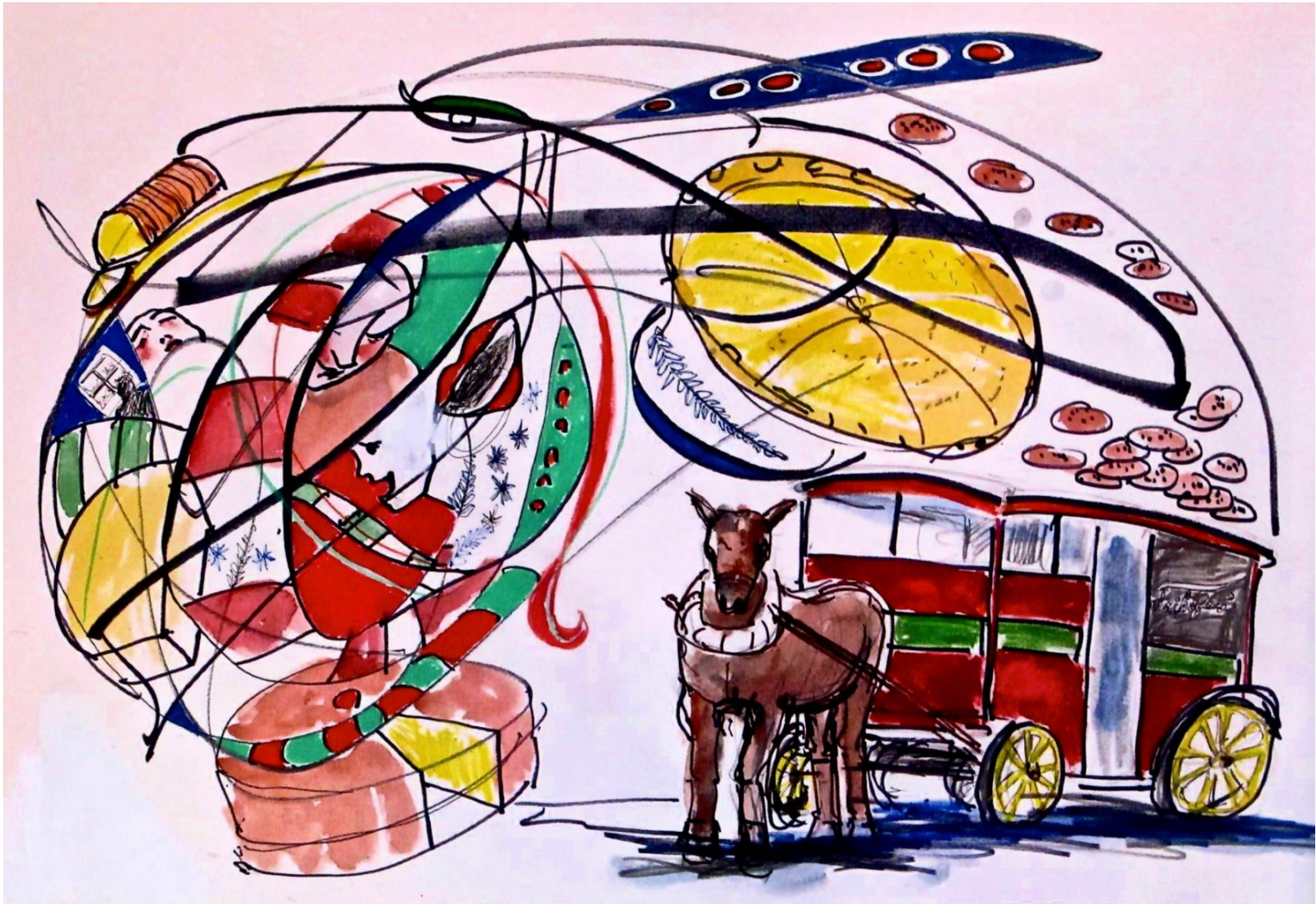
Lansingburgh Academy was built in 1820 on what is now 4<sup>th</sup> Ave and 114th St. The inventor of the dollar sign was the first principal. Herman Melville and Chester Alan Arthur graduated from the school. In 1939, the Troy Public Library opened a Lansingburgh branch in the building and that is where I borrowed my earliest reading material.





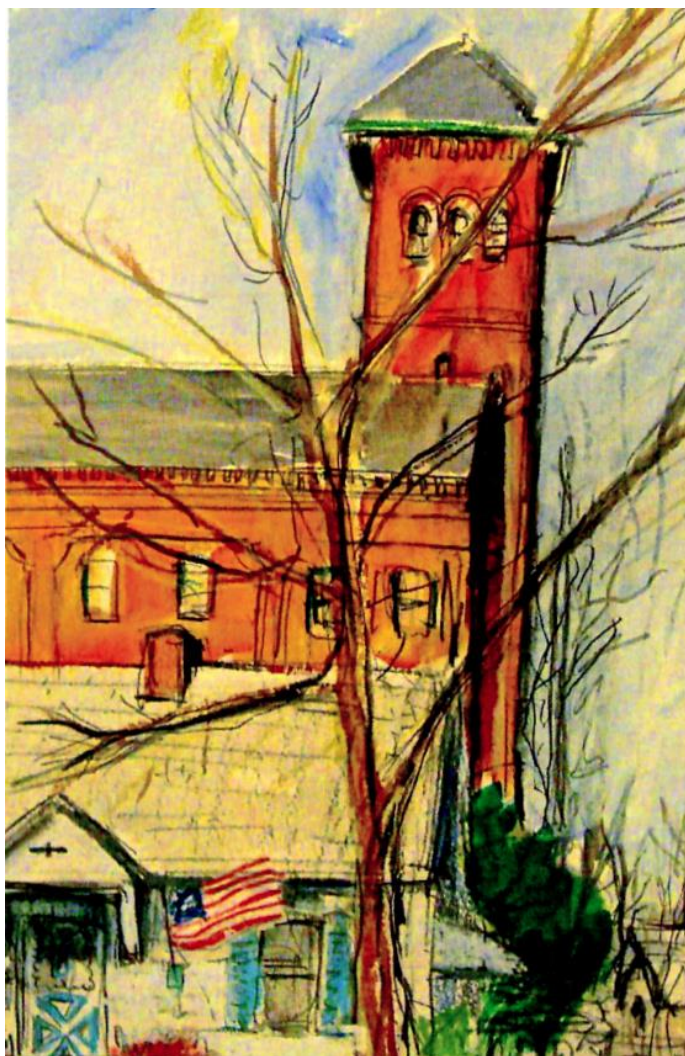
The Troy Gaslight Company built this gasholder building in 1873 on 5th Ave and Jefferson St in South Troy. Coal gas was stored in the telescoping tank inside and the weight of the 100 ft diameter iron top forced the gas to the streetlamps throughout the city. I marveled at it as we drove past it when my father took me to work with him on Saturdays.





Freihofer Baking Co. on 126<sup>th</sup> St and 2<sup>nd</sup> Ave in Lansingburgh delivered fresh bread, cookies and pies by horse-drawn wagon from 1913 to 1962. It is said that the horses memorized the bread routes. The bakery sponsored a TV show called Freddie Freihofer's Breadtime Stories after school, on which an audience of children got to make a squiggle and Uncle Jim Fisk completed the drawing.





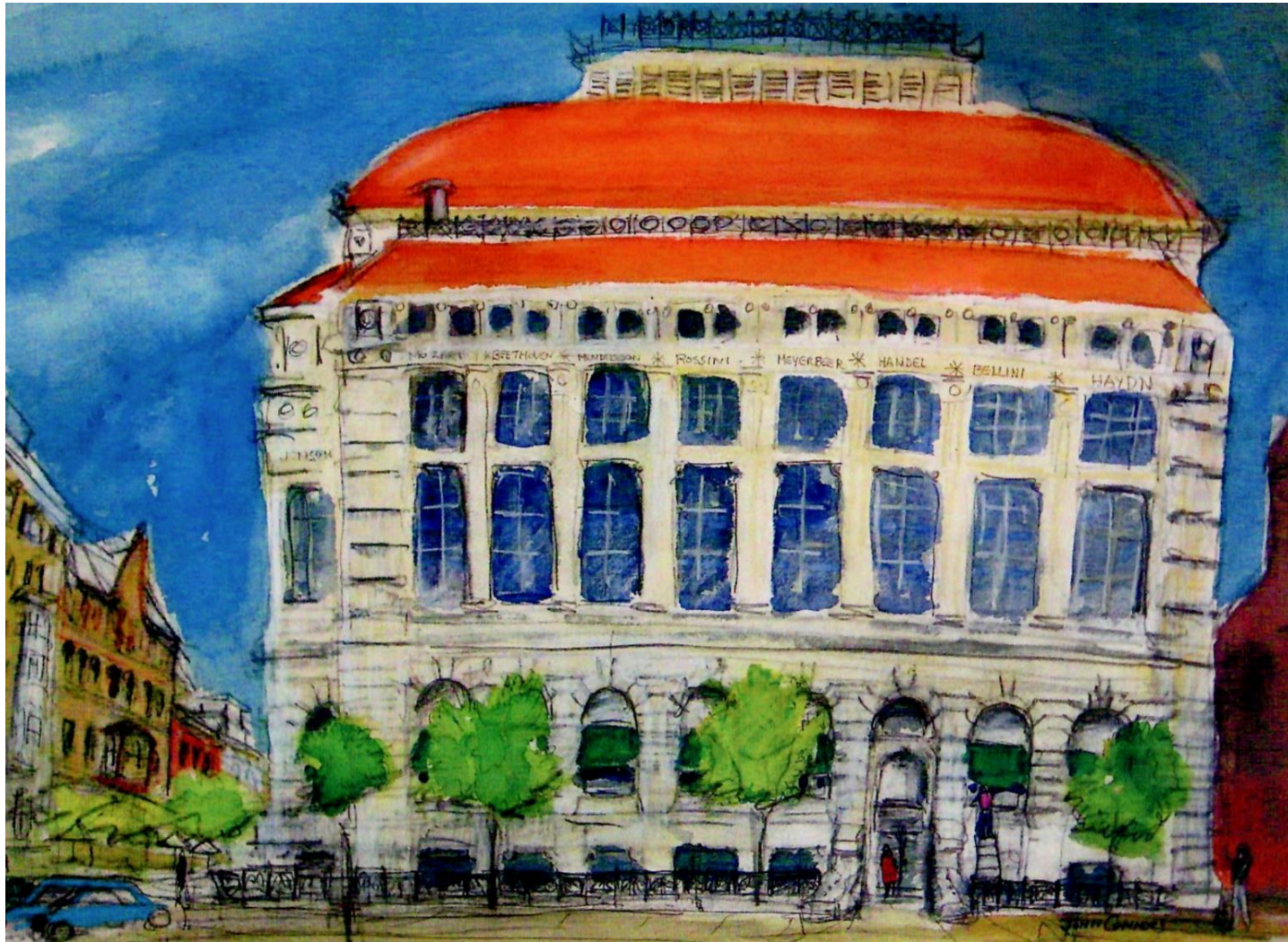
My mother went to work at Ready-Jell Fund Raising in the old Powers Oilcloth building in Lansingburgh when I started first grade. Oilcloth, which is tightly woven cotton duck coated with boiled linseed oil, was important in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. I grew up on Oil Mill Hill. This brick structure had many uses and is now a condominium. The house in front in the painting belonged to Earl Durocher, who was related to Leo the Lip. My parents are godparents to Earl and Marge's son and my friend Steven.





I attended 6<sup>th</sup> grade at Knickerbacker Elementary School (1st floor), 7<sup>th</sup>, through 9<sup>th</sup> grades at Knickerbacker Jr High School (2<sup>nd</sup> and 3rd floors) and 12<sup>th</sup> grade at newly constructed Lansingburgh High School visible in the back right of the picture (1967-8). Due to the Depression, federal money was available in 1937 for construction of the edifice on land donated by the Knickerbacker family. Oakwood Cemetery, where Uncle Sam Wilson is buried, is on the hill.





The Troy Music Hall at State and 2<sup>nd</sup> Sts was constructed in 1875 above Troy Savings Bank, where I opened an account when I got a paper route in Jr High. Sergei Rachmaninoff, Vladimir Horowitz, Yehudi Menuhin and Artur Schnabel performed there, but it went dark following World War II. In 1980 the hall was refurbished and in 2006 the pipe organ was restored. It seats 1253 on the main floor, two rear balconies and sidewall box seats, and has remarkably sensitive acoustics, ideal for recording sessions.





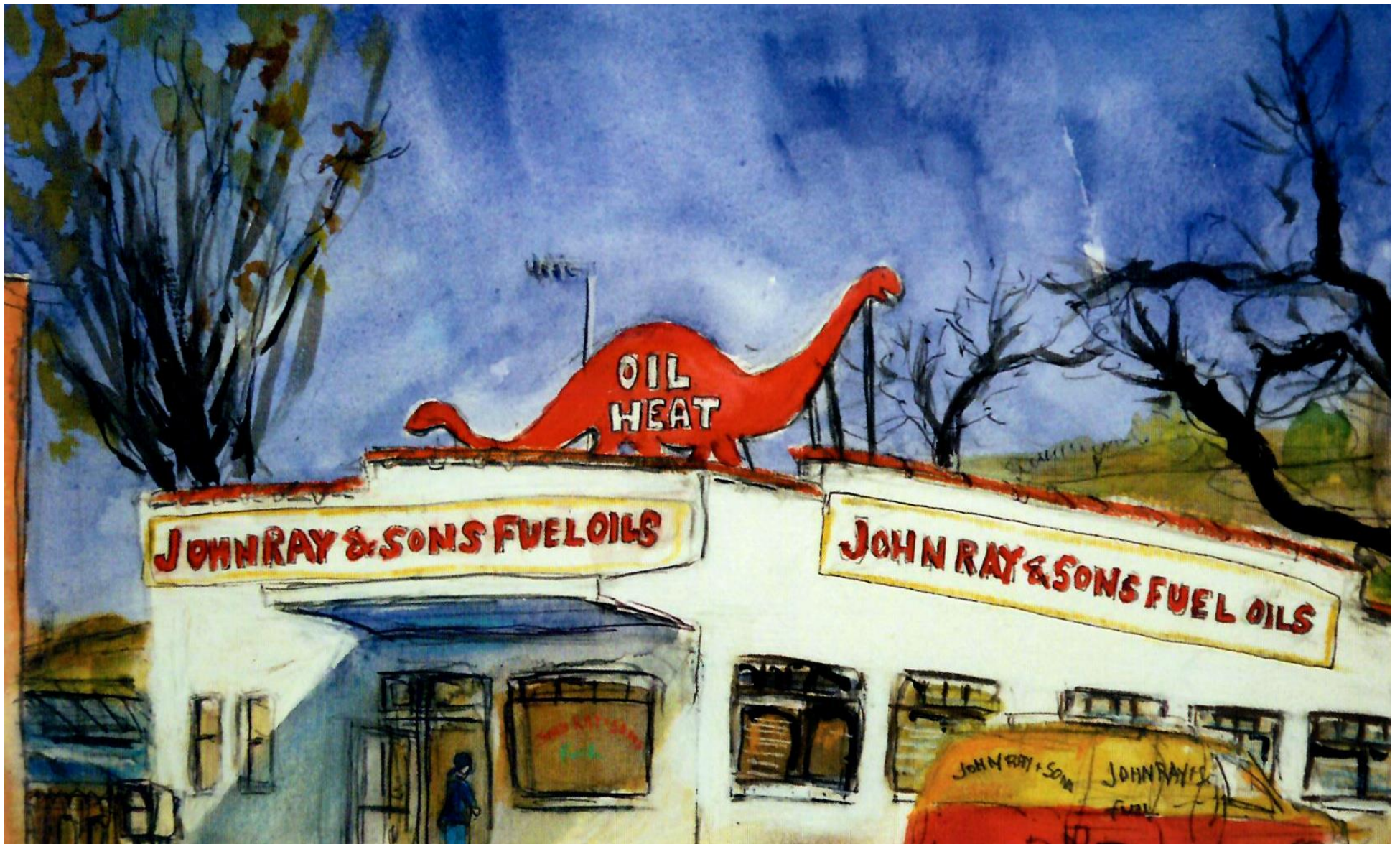
In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Frear's Troy Cash Bazaar was downtown Troy's most prominent retail center. It had a four-story atrium with a large skylight and an ornate cast iron double stairway. After I got my paper route, I took the bus to downtown Troy every Saturday to pay for my newspapers. I knew all the stores and went to Frear's to buy Christmas gifts for my parents. I got my mother the veg-O-Matic in 1963, the first year it was offered by Ronco.





The W & LE Gurley Building was built by two brothers who studied engineering at RPI. They manufactured precision instruments such as transits and compasses, still for sale on eBay, including military products for the Civil War. My childhood next door neighbor and friend Ken Santerre's father worked there and gave me little gizmos I still have. Later my friend Mike Weber was the night watchman. The company was bought by Teledyne in 1968. It now houses RPI's Lighting Research Center.





John Ray Fuel Oil is still in business at 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Middleburgh Street and still has a brontosaurus shaped sign on the roof. The sign is reminiscent of Sinclair Oil's trademarked mascot Dino, made famous at the New York World's Fair and Macy's Parade. Dino promoted carbon fuel thought to be refined from dead dinosaurs.





Federal Square in downtown Troy was the entrance to the Green Island Bridge, which collapsed into the Hudson River in 1977. The street veering to the right is King Street, home to Dawber's Used Books and George's Music. I bought a 4 pickup solid body guitar from George's and practiced in our basement with various bandmates including Steve Douglass and Mike Weber. I frequented the musty used book store when I went downtown for my weekly guitar lesson in the equally musty cellar of Miller's Music.





Across from Miller's Music on 4<sup>th</sup> St in Downtown Troy, Proctor's Theater was built in 1914 for vaudeville. It is hidden behind a five story row of offices, but is quite massive with two balconies and an orchestra floor. It was converted to motion pictures in the 1920's and closed in the late 1970's. I saw many first run double features there, most memorably Bonnie and Clyde with girlfriend Teri Hansen in 1967. After forty years of changing hands and plans, it has been restored as modern office space behind the preserved façade.





Gus's Hot Dogs in Watervliet (formerly West Troy) serves delicious mini hot dogs, made in Troy by Helmbold's from beef and pork in a natural snappy casing. They were a local tradition, also offered at Charlie's and Famous Lunch nearby, and typically served with "the works," mustard, onions and Greek meat sauce. As of 2018, Gus's challenge record is 55 mini dogs in one hour.





Hot Dog Charlie's, like Gus's Hot Dogs and Famous Lunch, have been serving small hot dogs for up to a century. This one was on Second Ave in Lansingburgh, but unlike the others, Charlie's grew to a small local chain of outlets. My friend Kevin Mulcahy worked there. People joked about how the cooks would line a dozen hot dogs in rolls on their hairy arms and apply the toppings.





Walking into Tony Manupella's Hardware Store (closed in 2009) on Second Avenue near 117<sup>th</sup> St in Lansingburgh, I felt like the floor was going to give way under foot. Tony's two sons were a few years older than me. Pete was in a bike gang called the Breed and Dave led a hazing operation preying on me and others when I entered High School. Later, we became friends.





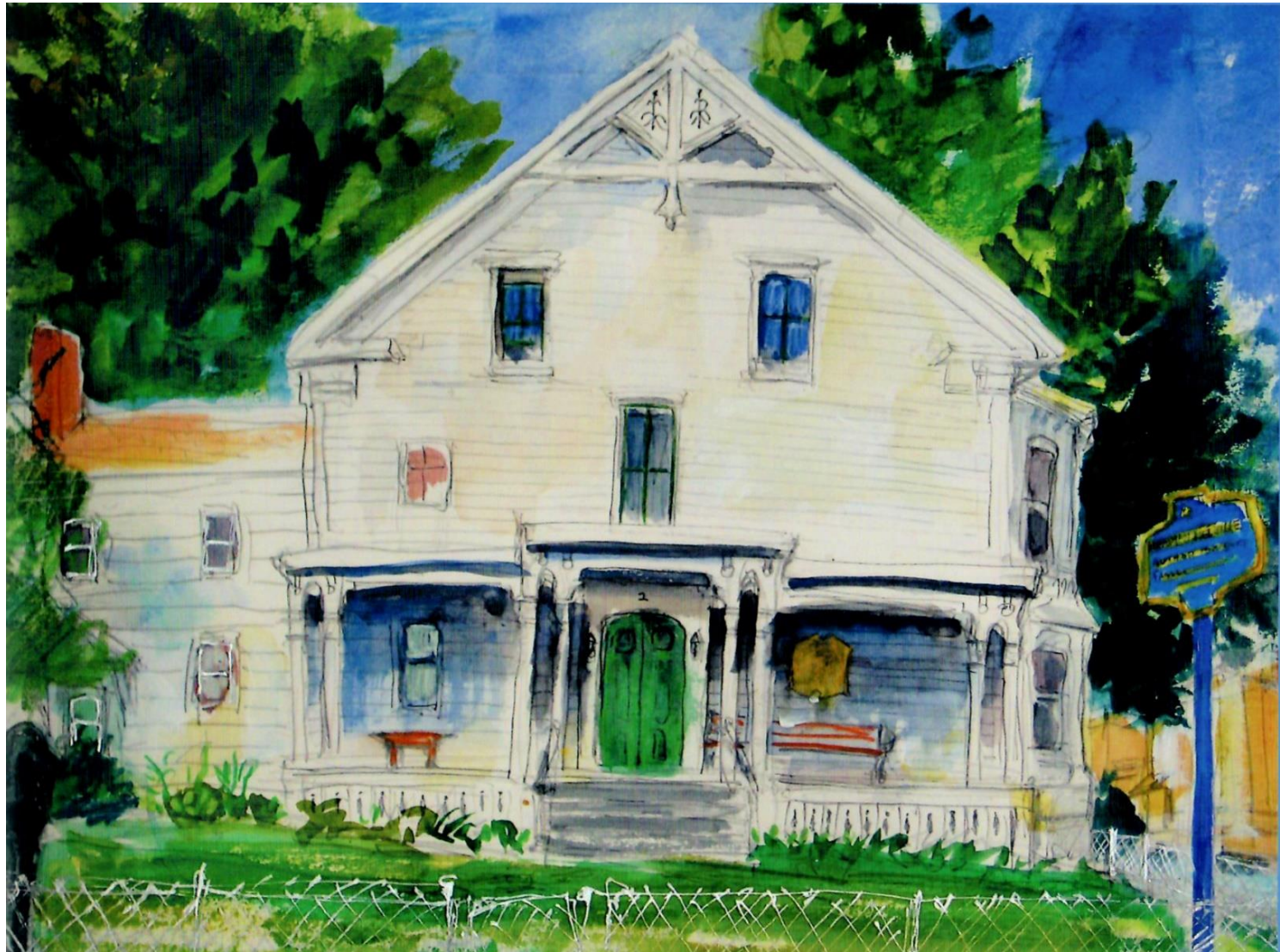
This spectacular church was the First Presbyterian of Lansingburgh the one time I was in it, but has since been re-denominated. That one time was for the impromptu wedding of Dave Manupella and Debby McMerney. Bobby Etoll was on hand to play "Maybe I'm Amazed" on the church's pipe organ. It produced such a magnificent sound that he played several verses until the minister told him to stop so he could proceed with the brief ceremony for the couple and their son Christian.





My parents, Kate and Henry Jensen, attended the old Lansingburgh High School, graduating in 1927 and 1929. Their courtship years were during the Depression and Prohibition. They married in 1933. My father was Joke Editor of his high school yearbook, the 1929 Odyssey. I was a Sophomore and Junior in this same building and was photographer for the 1968 Odyssey. My friends and I would spend our lunch hour roaming the streets or hanging out with others, sitting on "the wall."





The Herman Melville House is at the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> Ave and 114<sup>th</sup> St in Lansingburgh. It was built in 1786 and Herman lived there from 1838 to 1847 with his impoverished mother and brother. He wrote his first two novels *Typee* and *Omoo* there. My girlfriend Harriet Strunk lived a few blocks away but I never noticed the house at the time (1968) because the Lansingburgh Historical Society had not yet acquired it and established a museum there.





The Castle, on Second St in Downtown Troy, has appeared in Martin Scorsese's "Age of Innocence" and will be in Julian Fellowes' "The Gilded Age." It was built for John Paine in 1893 and was used by an RPI fraternity when I grew up. I played in a band with Steve Douglass at frat parties but not at this house. The father of Leo Goyette, my godfather, was once the chauffeur for the Paine family. Paine's wealth came from the Troy Malleable Iron Company, where my mother once worked as a switchboard operator.





The 93-foot tall Soldiers and Sailors Monument (1891), on a triangle between Broadway, River and 2<sup>nd</sup> Sts, was dedicated to veterans of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812 and Civil War. The Cannon Building (1835) is prominent in the painting, but the Hendrick Hudson Hotel (1932), whose namesake sailed the Halfmoon up the Hudson to Troy in 1609, is its vantage point. I was a busboy there on a work pass from high school, after I had been accepted at Albany State University.





I was a freshman at Albany State in 1968, the year Martin Luther King and Robert F Kennedy were assassinated. In October, I saw Gov George Wallace, running for president against Richard Nixon and Hubert Humphrey, speak at the State Capitol (built 1867-1899). The modern South Mall project was being built adjacent to it, on 100 acres of Albany's "Gut" of flophouses, dive bars and brothels, acquired by eminent domain. The Egg in the painting was the last building completed, in 1978. My friend Ted Etoll's "Step Up Presents" has put on concerts in the venue.





Manory's Restaurant on Congress St in Downtown Troy was established in 1913 and has not changed much. I once spent the night at my friend Paul Kearns' apartment upstairs. Stories abound of cheapskates who beat the check by climbing out the bathroom window to the alley. Known for all-day breakfast and ice cream, but a liquor license has been applied for.





Rita's Snappy Cheese Store on 3rd Ave near 105<sup>th</sup> St in Lansingburgh had a distinctive pungent odor. It was tiny but had enough room for a beer cooler and was a convenient source for 6-packs near to my friends Mike FitzPatrick and Pete Marcoulis. It overlooked Van Schaick Island, one of many islands in Cohoes where the Mohawk River fed into the Hudson.





Why John painted the empty lot next to Jimmy's Pizza I do not know. I spent a lot of time in the late 60's standing on the corner of 112<sup>th</sup> St and 5<sup>th</sup> Ave, the center of Lansingburgh. I would join my friends there contemplating a way to spend the evening. The lot was vacant since Dania Hall, the center of the Danish community surrounding it, burned to the ground in 1959. My father's friend Happy Fane bought the land, which included Frank Hope's bar, which survived the fire but not the derelicts.





The Ale House is at the corner of River and North Sts in Troy NY. I went there frequently with my bosses and co-workers after twelve-hour shifts driving a Mister Softee ice cream truck all over South Troy. Like many bars and restaurants in Troy, it is in two adjacent buildings with a section of the walls removed and ramped floors between them. The corner building appears to be in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Italianate style common in Troy, with fringed cornices and oriel windows.





Since opened by Tom Tully in 1953, The Snowman, on the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> Ave and 114<sup>th</sup> St in Lansingburgh, closes for a few months every winter and it is sorely missed. Their homemade soft and hard ice cream, sundaes and shakes are extremely popular and there are always waiting lines. I used to observe them from Chuck Dormandy's upstairs apartment across the street.





The South End Tavern on Burden Ave in Troy was owned and operated by three generations of Marty Burke's since opening in 1934. It had a Ladies Entrance into the dining room, where inexpensive meals like corned beef and cabbage were served with piles of Prediger's rye bread. It closed in 2013, but their neon signs are in Troy's historical museum.





The Ruck on 3<sup>rd</sup> St near Congress St in downtown Troy is adjacent to the Rensselaer County Courthouse where Legs Diamond was acquitted in 1931. I used to frequent the place in the early 70's when it was called Sutter's Mill and Mining Co. I remember Jack the bartender expertly preparing me excellent in-and-out martinis served straight up with Bombay Gin.





Nipper came to be perched atop a dilapidated warehouse when it was renovated in 1958. The RCA mascot is 28 feet tall and made of fiberglass and steel. RTA Distributors warehoused RCA appliances in the structure below it. Nipper, who became one of the most successful trademarks in merchandising, was based on "His Master's Voice," a painting by Francis Barraud, with his head cocked listening to a gramophone. He overlooks Broadway in Menands, a street I lived on with my roommate John Mahoney.





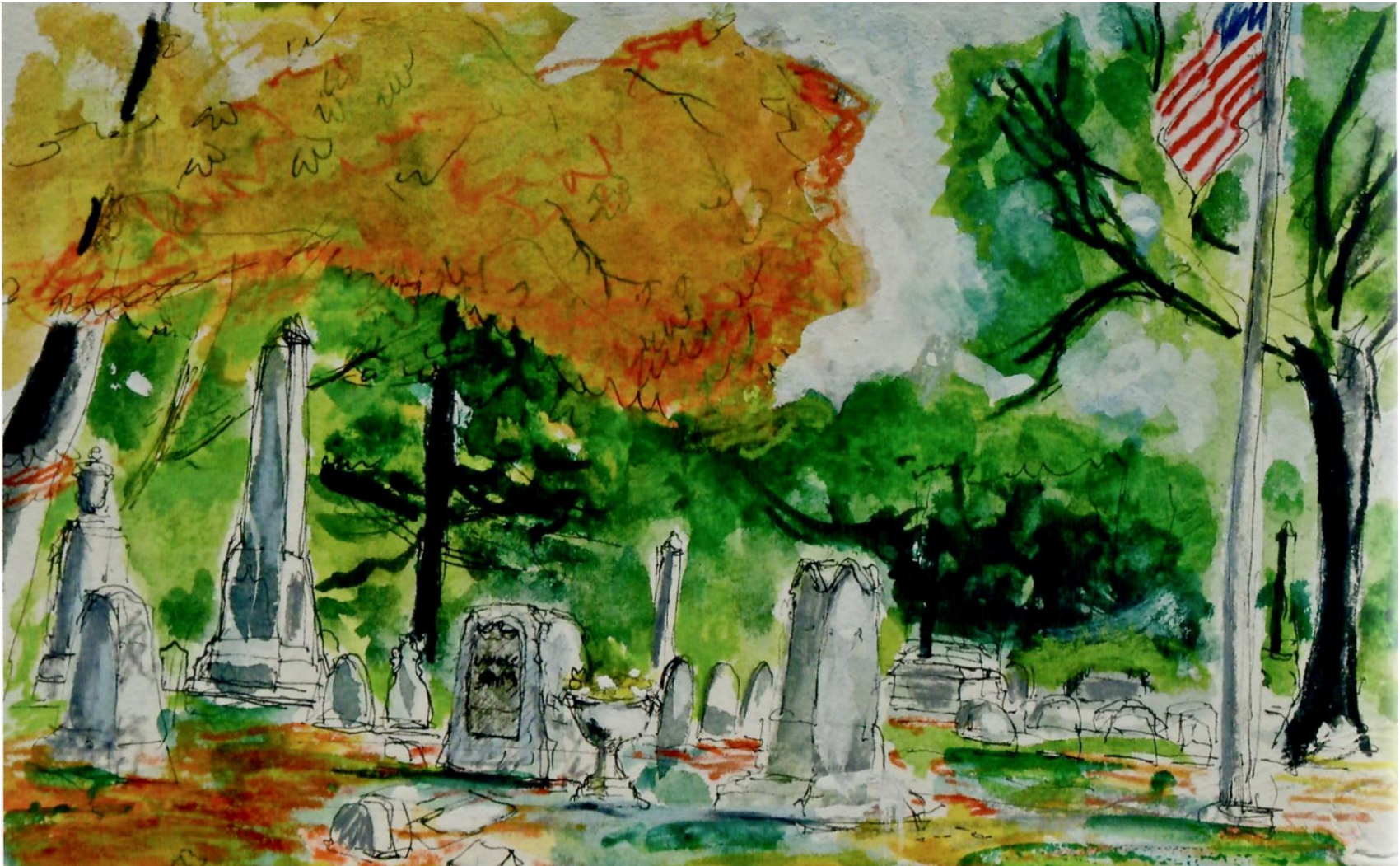
Daisy Baker's was a popular bar in downtown Troy in the 1970's. The elegant architecture from 1892 conflicted with the disco music playing until 4am and the bats flying high overhead in the massive lounge. I remember celebrating with friends there right after I took my last exam at RPI before getting my MBA degree. A year later, I ran into my friend Jim Browne here and he agreed to help move my stuff to the Washington DC area the next day to start my government career.





Oakwood Cemetery is on Route 40, as was the house where I grew up. In the late 1880's, the Earl Crematorium at the left was constructed using rare materials and top artisans by the wealthy parents of a child who died tragically young. The caretakers house is to the right and together they are an impressive sight as you drive by. The cemetery claims a 100 mile panorama of the Hudson River and Mohawk River valleys and the Erie Canal. And of course, Lansingburgh. All of my grandparents are buried there.





Samuel Wilson's grave in Troy's Oakwood Cemetery is modest considering his legacy. In 1793, he opened a slaughterhouse and built a dock on the Hudson River at the foot of Ferry St in Troy. This was ideal for securing government contracts for barrels of meat to feed soldiers during the War of 1812. The "US" markings on the barrels were associated with "Uncle Sam" as the soldiers from Troy knew him. Over time, his name and bearded appearance became the personification of the United States Government.