

For immediate release
New Canaan Museum & Historical Society
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New Canaan Museum & Historical Society Adds Important Brinley Painting to its Collection

The New Canaan Museum & Historical Society is thrilled to announce the purchase of “The Italian Quarter” by Silvermine artist D. Putnam Brinley. Thanks to the incredible generosity of Ed Vollmer, Betty Branch and Susan Gunn Bromley, this historic painting is now part of the Museum’s permanent collection. Colorful and lively, the large oil depicts life in a section of New Canaan between Locust and Forest Streets (what is now largely the Locust Avenue parking lot) that was populated largely by residents of Italian descent. It shows the community of men, women, children (and even a few dogs), musicians and dancers, as well as roofers, stoneworkers, builders, artisans and craftsmen.

Born in Newport, RI in 1879, the painter D. Putnam Brinley grew up in Cos Cob. After studying at The Art Students League of New York and spending four years in Europe, he and his wife, Katherine, settled in Silvermine in 1908. With fellow residents Solon Borglum, Addison T. Millar, Richard B. Gruelle, his sons Justin and Jason, and art student Carl Schmitt, they formed the Silvermine Group of Artists or “Knockers” – so named because they met on Sunday mornings at Borglum’s studio to critique – or “knock” – each other’s work. After Borglum’s death, the remaining members founded the Silvermine Guild of Artists in 1922. The mission was “to stimulate the zeal for and advance the attainments in painting, sculpture and other fine art among the members by cooperation and exchange of ideas, and generally to encourage the appreciation of art by the public.” Brinley became President in 1923 and remained active in the Guild until his death in 1963.

The Italian Quarter was a critical part of New Canaan’s history, as described by Mario “Ben” Benedetto in his book, “The Old Neighborhood.” The historian Ed Chrostowski wrote in the introduction to that publication, “It was New Canaan’s good fortune that one of these ethnic enclaves, a sort of ‘Little Italy,’ developed in the heart of a small but rapidly growing town.” From early craftsman and laborers, gardeners and stone masons, this neighborhood “produced the policemen and firemen, the athletes and soldiers and, ultimately, the businessmen, politicians, lawyers, teachers and doctors.” The vitality of this community is captured in Brinley’s painting.

The painting will be on view in the Bishop Gallery (upstairs in the Town House at 13 Oenoke Ridge) through September 2019 after which it will be permanently installed downstairs in the Parlor.

Photo caption: Pictured L to R: Ed Vollmer, Betty Branch and Susan Gunn Bromley.