

LIVES REMEMBERED

Artist William Schickel ran design studio

By Jackie Demaline

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LOVELAND – William Schickel had a sacred passion. The longtime Loveland resident and father of 11 was a nationally known liturgical artist whose work spanned more than 60 years. It combined his skills as a sculptor, architectural designer, furniture designer, stained-glass artist and painter with his deep personal faith.

Mr. Schickel, 89, died Tuesday of complications from pneumonia at Loveland Health Center.

Among his early work: the Grailville Oratory in Loveland, an 1813 barn converted into a chapel of inspiring grace.

Mr. Schickel remarked on the project's link to the Nativity. "The barn at its best is an integration of splendor and humility that is ... expressive of the most fundamental Christian outlook."

Another early architectural project was at Abbey of Gethemani in Trappist, Ky., the oldest Trappist Abbey in the United States. The design of a conversion of the abbey won the American Institute of Architects' Gold Medal Award.

His life and career as an artist is chronicled in the book "Sacred Passion: The Art of William Schickel," by Gregory Wolfe. A second edition will be published this year by University of Notre Dame Press.

The new edition, said son Joseph Schickel of Loveland, will include the renovation of Bellarmine Chapel at Xavier University and the Rotunda of Creation at Mercy Centers for Health and Wellness.

"He remained productive to the very end, continuing to paint every day despite the difficulties of poor vision and arthritis," his son said.

Writing about a Schickel retrospective at the Weston Art Gallery a decade ago, Enquirer arts reporter Owen Findsen noted, "Mr. Schickel does not make art to call attention to himself. His spaces are made for meditation and for prayer. His art is designed to set a stage for a



Mr. Schickel

greater experience."

Born in Stamford, Conn., in 1919 and raised in Ithaca, N.Y., Mr. Schickel graduated in 1944 from the

University of Notre Dame, where he took up boxing as a way of taking on bullies who mocked his faith.

Notre Dame was also where Mr. Schickel met and became the apprentice of stained-glass artist Emil Frei Jr. Mr. Schickel fell in love with Frei's 16-year old daughter, Mary, and they married two years later. She died in 2007.

The Schickels moved to Loveland because of Mary Schickel's involvement in the Grail, a Catholic laywoman's movement.

Mr. Schickel established a design studio in 1948. The William Schickel Gallery continues to operate in Loveland.

In addition to his son, survivors include four other sons, Bill Schickel of Mason City, Iowa, John Schickel of Union, and Benedict Schickel and Martin Schickel, both of Loveland; six daughters, Anna Haine of Alton, Ill., Martha Dorff of Over-the-Rhine, Elizabeth Robinson and Joy France, both of Loveland, Mary Moorman of Lilburn, Ga., and Ruth Tabeling of Superior Township, Mich.; four brothers: Jerry Schickel of Bonita Springs, Fla., Jack Schickel of Phoenix, Hubert Schickel of Malone, N.Y., and Lou Schickel of Little Rock, Ark.; and one sister, Marie Schickel Rottschaefer of Lake Oswego, Ore.

Visitation will be 4-8 p.m. today at the Grailville Oratory, 932 O'Bannonville Road, Loveland. Mass of Christian Burial will be 10:30 a.m. Saturday at the Grailville Oratory, with visitation beginning one hour before the service. Interment will be in Grailville Cemetery.

Memorials can be made to Grailville, 932 O'Bannonville Road, Loveland, OH 45140.

A Homily for the Mass of Christian Burial of William Schickel,
The Oratory at Grailville, Loveland, Ohio, July 18, 2009

Proverbs 4: 1-27

Romans 8: 18-25

John 1: 1-5

It is right and proper that we gather in this sacred place to thank God for the gifts of William Schickel, for his life and love. This oratory is regarded as one of Bill's masterpieces. It is here that over the years Mary and Bill and their family have worshipped and have entered into the mystery which is at the heart of our faith. I know I speak for all of us here in expressing our sorrow for the Schickel family's loss as well as our gratitude for all their parents have meant to us and to so many others who cannot be with us this morning. They were truly a gift from God. It is hard to speak of Bill without Mary and vice versa, but the focus of our attention today is William Schickel, artist, designer, father, grandfather, great grandfather, friend.

To speak of Bill is to speak of the mystery of beauty, for it was beauty which was the center of his life and work. Christians often refer to the truth, goodness and beauty of the divine but as Hans Urs Von Balthasar reminds us in his Herrlichkeit the past four centuries have tended to overlook the last of those attributes, allowing beauty to be lost in the dim and dusty attic of infrequent theological investigation. It was Jacques Maritain, Bill's great mentor at Notre Dame, along with Etienne Gilson, who made us aware of how incomplete theology is when it overlooks the element of beauty, the beauty of God.

Bill's work celebrated the loveliness of God and that was the case whether the project was obviously sacred or secular. He had the gift of

of seeing beauty in the ordinary and the day-to-day. In this he was influenced, among other things, by the distinctive American tradition of Shaker design, in which such a plain object as a chair evokes in the beholder a sense of the sacred. His work at the Abbey of Gethsemani, which I am privileged to visit regularly, set a standard for church design. This space, a converted cattle barn turned into an oratory, possesses what eludes far more ambitious and expensive projects. There is about Bill's work what someone has called "visual silence." Using simple materials he achieved a transcendent calm in his work. It is not dependent upon elaborate imagery but a profound understanding of the way light and surface and volume can evoke in the observer a glimpse, perhaps even an awareness of the mysterium. And this was true of his paintings and the superb serigraphs which came from his workshop.

But I must speak of Bill in more than his splendid legacy in design and art. He was a husband blessed with a wife of surpassing kindness and patience. He was the father of many children, all here present, and all remembering with affection what he meant to them. He was a grandfather and a great grandfather, perhaps not always aware of who each of them belonged to (there are, after all, at last count, fifty-four of them) but nonetheless loving them as his own. Of him, the words of Proverbs may well be applied:

I have taught you the way of wisdom,
I have led you in paths of uprightness.

Bill's faith was aware of the contradictions of life. Although God's creation has come forth from the divine hand as good and true and

beautiful, there is what St. Paul calls a "groaning in travail," that the world and all that is in it is not what the Holy One intends. But Bill looked forward with eager longing for the beauty yet to be revealed.

One cannot look at his work, and his life, without beholding the beauty of the mystery. It is our confident faith which moves us to hope that William Schickel, father, grandfather, great grandfather, artist, designer, friend, has entered into that greater light where the mystery of God's beauty is at last revealed in its fullness.

Eulogy for William J. Schickel
Mass of Christian Burial
Grailville Oratory -Loveland, Ohio
Joseph Schickel
18 July 2009

On behalf of the family I would like to thank you for your presence today. It is a comfort to us and tribute to Dad. The larger world knew Dad as an artist, and not only an artist but a modern artist who did abstract art and drip paint and all that stuff. And the myth of the modern artist is that he is a wild, free, and undisciplined spirit. Well he may have been wild and free in his way but he wasn't undisciplined as us kids who grew up on a little farm a mile down the road in Pickleville certainly knew.

In order to organize the work on the farm Dad came up with a management device called the Pegboard. We kids suspected that he and Norbert cooked this idea up together. It was a 20" x 20" board that listed about sixty tasks that needed to be done on a more or less regular basis – farm things like feeding cows, hauling manure, working in the garden – household things like fixing meals, cleaning, laundry etc. Each of us kids was assigned a color and several pegs. Each day we had to check the Pegboard to see which chores we were responsible for. And my memory is that it worked pretty well. Although once one of my brothers stole in and buried it in a hole in the back yard. Fortunately one of his brother, Mr. Goodie Two Shoes Himself, me -- rescued the Pegboard and returned it to its rightful place -- and order was restored in Pickleville.

So the Pegboard was well established in family lore as a symbol of Germanic Discipline, Moral Rectitude, Orderliness, and Goodness – long before Mom died and Dad came to live with us. And there was some trepidation on the part of my three teenage sons that when Dad came to live with us the Pegboard would come with him. It did not – but in retrospect I would have to say that the Spirit of the Pegboard did. Dad liked to have things organized. He liked to have a plan. He like to know what time supper was and who was going to be there. We changed, adapted, became more orderly and disciplined in some ways.

Having Dad live with us these past two years was a great gift to our family. We had wonderful times together and learned a ton. You can't buy education like that. It will be the stuff of great family memories, stories, and jokes. The boys do amazing Grandpa impersonations.

We were fortunate to have a large support network of family and friends – this was very helpful. But I would be remiss if I did not give special thanks and recognition to four individuals who showed amazing generosity of spirit in caring for Dad over these last two years.

I am of course talking about my wife Susie and my three sons Will, Tom, and Charlie. They did an outstanding job. Thank you. Thank you.

Dad died on Tuesday afternoon. At about ten o'clock that morning as he lapsed in and out of consciousness Susie sat at his bedside and held his arm and talked with him. They were great friends and had a wonderful rapport. Dad was very quiet for quite a long time. And then the Spirit of the Pegboard summoned itself one more time. He suddenly looked directly at Susie and said very clearly, "What's the plan?" And Susie had the presence of mind to respond, "You're going to glory Dad!"

And of course he did. And he is up there now getting reacquainted with Mom, and Vince Hill, Dan & Mary Kane, Veronica Forbes, and his brother Norbert and so many others. Thank you Dad. And thanks to all of you for your presence.