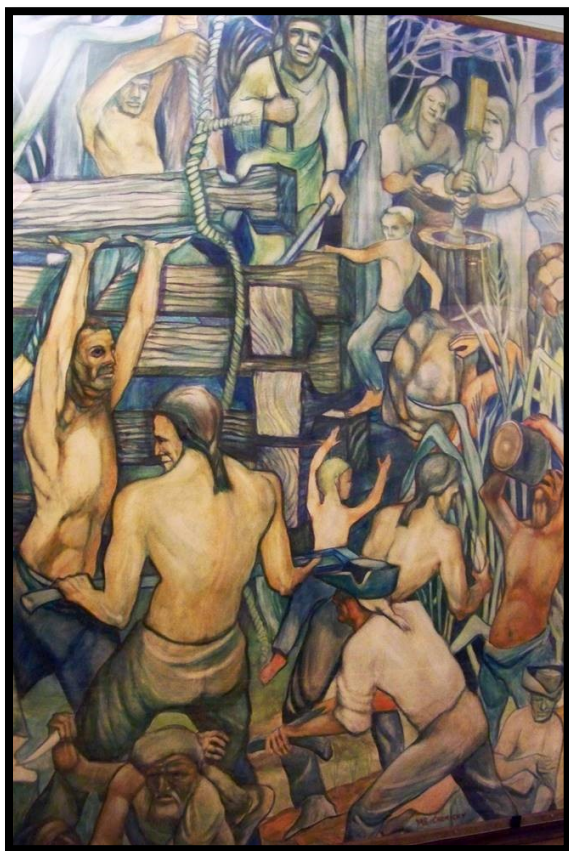


## The Chomicky Murals

Four murals painted in 1952-53 by Penn State art professor Yar G. Chomicky, are on permanent exhibit in the main hallway of Mifflin County's Historical Courthouse, located on Monument Square in Lewistown, PA.

The Chomicky murals were originally created and displayed in Burnham High School (later Burnham Elementary), Burnham PA. When the Mifflin County School District closed the school in 1989, the murals were given to the Mifflin County Historical Society and given a prominent home.



**PIONEER LIVING**— this detail is one of four mural originally hung in the old Burnham High School, Burnham PA. It shows American Indian and pioneer life as envisioned by artist Yar Chomicky and was inspired by his knowledge of the area. The other murals depict early iron making, modern steel and manufacture and community life.

### YAR CHOMICKY

(1921-1992)

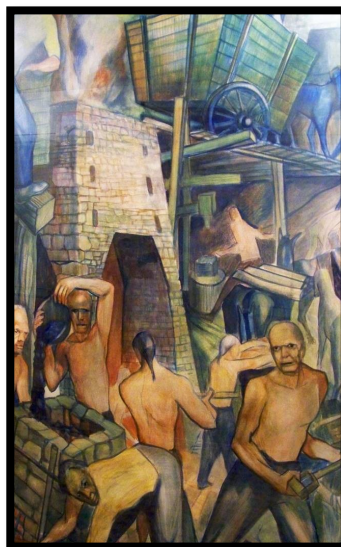
ARTIST, EDUCATOR

Born in Chicago on December 29, 1921, Yar Chomicky was the son of Rev. Gregory and Michalina Chomicky. He married Barbara Roberts and the couple had three children.

Prior to his death in August 1992, he and his family resided in a log home at Pine Grove Mills, Centre County, Pennsylvania. He was a longtime Penn State faculty member, beginning in 1949, and taught art education to both undergraduate and graduate students. He authored commentaries and textbooks on artistic techniques and served as president of the Art Alliance of Central Pennsylvania. He retired from Penn State in 1986 and enjoyed collecting art and antiques.

Earlier in life, he received a scholarship to the Academy of Fine Arts in Wilmington, Delaware and studied under noted American artists, including Frank Schoonover, Gayle Hoskins and Andrew C. Wyeth. He served four years with the U.S Army Air Corps during and after the Second World War, from 1942 to 1946. Following his discharge, he continued his art studies at Penn State, receiving his bachelor and master's degrees from that institution.

As part of his master's thesis, he completed a series of murals for the Burnham School District's high school in 1953-53. District officials contacted his mentor, Penn State professor Dr. Viktor Lowenfeld, who arranged the project, including murals depicting aspects of area history and culture. Chomicky wrote at the time, "The scale of the



**IRON MAKING**, a mural detail

problem smacked of challenge. It was accepted."

In the years that followed the Burnham project, Yar Chomicky would succeed the professor who recommended he paint the murals. He saw Penn State's art and fine arts departments combine into the school of visual arts.

Commenting on the project and the local community almost 40 years after, Chomicky remembered in 1991, "I think they had these empty places in the wall they wanted to fill. I used to teach recreation classes-painting in Lewistown. Through that, I got to know a lot about the people and the area. From doing things like that, you get a sense of the place."

"I had a sense of some genuine urges in the people of this area to be creative, to be engaged in something that had to do with aesthetics, beauty in one's life. I realized for this situation it would have to be pretty literal, realistic," he continued.

Chomicky describes the art work as an egg tempera emulsion on canvas.

At that time there was no studio space



**STEEL MAKING**, a mural detail.



**COMMUNITY LIFE**, a mural detail.



to work at Penn State. He painted the murals in a supply room in a temporary classroom on campus. When finished, the artist rolled up the canvas and delivered them to the school.

"I had the stretchers along in sections. I assembled the wooden stretchers at the site and tacked and stretched the canvas over the framing. Then my brother and I started pushing them into the spaces hoping they would fit. I was lucky; they fit right into the space."

### CHOMICKYS ART WORK

The murals— displayed in niches that measured more than seven feet by 10 feet in the then Burnham High School auditorium—depict; the American Indians and early pioneer days; aspects of iron production at Freedom Forge; more modern methods of steel production at Standard Steel Works; and community life. Under the arrangement, the school district provided the materials and Chomicky gave his time.

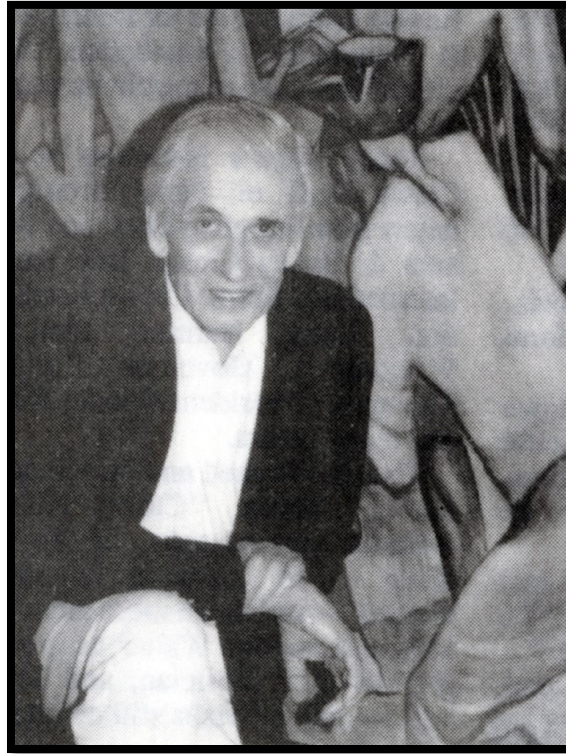
Eventually, the Burnham High School became part of the Mifflin County School District, and served as an elementary school at the time it was closed in 1989. The school district donated the murals to the Mifflin County Historical Society at that time. The late Dr. Charles Eater, then president of the society, commented, "The historical society was glad to get them. We thought they should be preserved. They are part of the history of our country. We didn't want to see them lose or destroyed. That's our job – preserving these things."

### CONSERVATION PROJECT PROTECTS MURALS

Prior to hanging in the historic courthouse in 1991, historical society member Bill Weyandt, owner of West Side Gallery at that time, carefully cleaned the canvas murals with special supplies, and used a weak solution of soapy water to wash the paintings. He repainted and touched up some areas, drawing on his expertise in art-work restoration. Plexiglas coverings were added later.

It was necessary to roll up a foot from the bottom

of each mural to accommodate the re-stretched canvasses into the historic courthouse's main hallway. To make the job complete, Yar Chomicky autographed each of his restored works as part of a special rededication ceremony on August 18, 1991.



**Yar G. Chomicky in 1991**– Dr. Chomicky poses by one of four murals he completed in the early 1950s for Burnham High School, Burnham, PA. Chomicky was commissioned at that time to design and execute the murals for the high school's auditorium. In August 1991, the artist autographed his works again at a special reception at the Historic Mifflin County Courthouse hosted by the Mifflin County Historical Society– MCHS images



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## Mifflin County's TRAIL OF HISTORY



## THE CHOMICKY MURALS

Historic Courthouse, Lewistown, PA

2018—Mifflin County Historical Society