



## Starting Over: Home at Last

In February and March, 2006, Chicago artist Beth Shadur directed the creation of a large participatory mural with fifth grade students at Lincoln Academy of Integrated Arts on the theme of immigration. The project involved all fifth graders in the planning, design, and creation of a mural on panels that measure approximately 8' x 36'.



### Mural Making

Shadur met with staff at the school to plan and schedule the project. She did a large amount of research on the theme of immigration in the Quad City area. She visited the Swedish American Museum Center, Chicago; the German American Heritage Center, Davenport; the Richardson-Sloane Special Collections of the Davenport Library; the Swenson Swedish Immigration Research Center at Augustana College, Rock Island; the Center for Belgian Culture, Moline; and the Putnam Museum archives, Davenport.

### The Question

Kathleen Lawless Cox

I  
My friend has a penchant  
For photographing me from the rear.  
Here I am in a pale green raincoat  
And denim cap  
Dragging my wheelie bag  
Through St. Patrick's Cemetery  
In the drizzling rain.  
I'm on a mission to see the grave  
Of Nan and the Old man.

II  
I remind my Nan  
That this is me, the 'Golla.'  
A quite-old woman, now  
Living in America  
On the eighth floor of an elderly High Rise  
With a balcony  
A magnificent view of the Mississippi  
A black Irish pussycat  
And a set of Blue Willow delft  
Upon the shelf

III  
There is more I'd like to say to Nan:  
That I am blessed with friends;  
I've developed an allergy  
To potatoes, of all things!  
That I lean toward Buddhism  
The big question penetrates  
The green sod like a tine:  
Has she met God yet?  
And what does He have to say for Himself?



## Gonzales

Kathleen Lawless Cox

Here comes Jesus down the path,  
straw hat tipped forward on his forehead.  
A wiry man with lizard-wrinkled face  
and hands - - strong hands for growing things:  
the sun-gold child who waits  
would rather be with him  
than play.  
(perhaps, the seeds they planted  
yesterday had grown...)

They leave together  
to inspect the newness of the day:  
the hummingbirds eat nervously  
while blue jays screech obscenities at Willie  
(Jessie's cat) coming closer on his rounds.  
Wait! Over there, against the wall  
crinkle-tipped carnations  
breathing new fragrance  
on the morning air.  
They pass the pomegranate tree  
and, taking turns with shovel, spade and hoe,  
they mould the earth.  
The morning drifts away  
into a sunny afternoon  
with time for lemonade and rest  
beneath the tree with spiky leaves  
where they can lie and watch  
the Santa Ana wind chase  
clouds across the sky.



## Research

Shadur worked with various individuals at all of these locations to find authentic pictures of immigrants, their jobs, historical buildings associated with the theme, and other related material. Text from various translated immigrant letters was also compiled. Photographs of immigrant objects and belongings were taken at the German American Heritage Center and the Swedish American Museum Center. This material was brought to the Lincoln Academy in the beginning days of the residency.

## Student Artists

Shadur met with a core group of nine students chosen through a job application process and began the design for the mural. These students were asked to consider what would be appropriate for the mural's installation site in the auditorium, and what could be used to tie together the elements that needed to be included. The children each drew the details that were put into the mural. A scale design was created in the first three days of the residency.



A team of students was responsible for the larger design concept, which included the separation of the imagery by ribbons of flags from countries whose immigrants were to be included. The students, after completing the drawn-to-scale design, transferred the design on a larger scale to the panels, using rulers and math concepts. This was done in conte pencil, which is easily erasable. The core group then traced the drawing with a fine paint brush and a small amount of paint to “set” the design to the panels. The mural was then ready for painting.

### Painting

Over the next five weeks, all of the fifth grade students painted. Each student was part of a team, based on whichever immigrant group he or she was studying. During the residency, students studied not only concepts related to immigration, but also the diverse ethnic groups who came to the Quad Cities during the various waves of immigration.



# Poetry

Brought to you by:

**Kathleen Lawless Cox**

During the residency, Kathleen Lawless Cox, Quad City Poet Laureate 2005-2007, gave two poetry workshops for the fourth grade classes. Her workshops included poetry writing and performance. Ms. Cox read from her own work as well as poetry of other well known poets. She used examples that helped the children understand what it might feel like or what it might mean to be an immigrant in this country. Two of her own poems on the subject are included on the following pages. The fourth grade students completed poems of their own and many of them had the chance to read them on stage at the unveiling of the mural.





from Lagomarcino’s candy store founded by Italian immigrants and still run by the family, the earliest logo of John Deere Tractor company with its first hand held tractor, a picture of the floating logs of Weyerhaeuser and Denkmann Lumber company, and a picture of potato farmers, Henry and Edward Willamuth. Farming was an important draw for early immigrants, so a wheat plant is depicted as well.

Finally, Colonel George Davenport and his house, one of the earliest built in the Quad Cities in 1833, are shown. Davenport was an early immigrant for whom the city is named. Additional text includes a letter from an early immigrant in 1861: “I am going far away from home and friends;” a letter from young Birgitta Hedman telling about her experience of Ellis Island, “I hung onto my mother and my mother hung onto me, so that we wouldn’t lose each other in all the hubbub of people and suitcases...;” and the common, “First, I must tell you that we are all alive and well up until this moment that I am writing.” Letters served as an important bridge from the immigrant’s new world to their old one, even though they sometimes took months to reach their intended audience.



Students wrote research papers on the different groups. Arts integration was used to richly cover the subject of immigration. Copies of some of the research papers will be used in an arts integrated unit that the resident artist is developing.

## A Key to the Mural: Background Information

Shadur introduced students to the imagery of Works Progress Administration (WPA) mural artists, and showed them how many auditoriums are decorated with WPA murals on panels. It was decided that the panels would be used following this historic method.

To the left of the main mural, two panels depict the transportation that was used for early immigration. The invention of the steam engine during the earliest years of immigration was crucial in encouraging many people to come to the United States.

Early immigrants came to the United States by steamship from Europe. They traveled through the United States by steam-powered trains and conestoga wagons, and went up the Mississippi River on steam-powered paddle boats. On the railroads there were special immigrant cars, essentially box cars, where immigrants could rent straw on which to sleep, cook their meals on a small stove, and ride with very few comforts to their destination.

The panels of the mural show all of these modes of transportation for early immigrants with historical accuracy. These were designed in the tradition of WPA murals, with slanting angles leading into the main mural panels.



## Mural Imagery

The panels to the right of the main mural show recent immigrants coming to the Quad Cities and their modes of transportation. These immigrants are shown entering a security screening, common to contemporary immigration. The figures depicted are a man from Rwanda and a woman from Viet Nam. Above them are a jet airplane and a dangerously overcrowded boat some Vietnamese people used to make their way to the United States.

The main mural begins on the left with two early Swedish immigrants entering through a doorway. The couple is holding hands and the woman holds a baby dressed in authentic clothes from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. They are greeted with a sign reading “welcome to America” and a porthole window from which they can view the Statue of Liberty.

The section above them shows a picture of Ellis Island; many of the papers related to early immigration, including a passport, a ship’s register from the Belgenland, a Swedish immigrant steamer (with actual names found at the Center for Belgian Culture), and a Tourist ad book sent out to Europe in the late 1900s, “Amerikanske Tolken Spaklara” (from a book at the Swedish American Museum Center).



Also depicted are the Hispanics, shown by a Mexican dancer; the Holy City flats, an early settlement for Mexican lumber workers; and Our Lady of Guadalupe, a church made from two railroad box cars by railroad workers who came to work on the railroads in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The mural shows a landscape of the Mississippi River and its valley and the first railroad bridge to cross the Mississippi, opening the way for westward expansion of the United States.

Also included in the mural are industries that were founded by immigrants or were important to bringing immigrants to the Quad Cities area. Shown are a sign



## Belgian Immigrants

To the right of the German area is Belgian immigration, another large ethnic group that came to the Quad Cities. The ribbon of yellow, red and black represents the Belgian flag, and included in this section are the large Belgian horse bred both in Belgium and here; rolle bolle, a popular sport; a well known pigeon racer in the area, indicating the popularity in the Belgian community of pigeon racing; an ad for the Red Star Line, showing the Europeans that the immigrant steamers made travel desirable; and a saying from a plaque found at the Center for Belgian Culture.

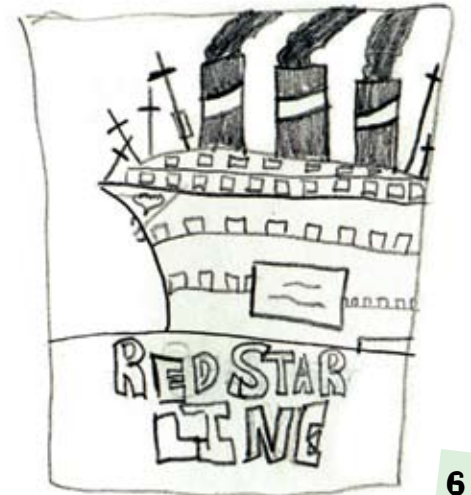
## Other Immigrant Groups

Other immigrant groups important to the development of the Quad Cities, but less numerous, are included in the mural. The Quad Cities was affected by the great migration of African Americans, who came up the Mississippi from the south. Depicted is a daguerreotype of an actual citizen, John Henry.

Also depicted are images related to Jewish immigration which took place in the mid to late 1800s and again in pre-World War II. This is represented by the inclusion of a grocery cart of Geifman's Food Stores, a company founded in 1921 by Sam Geifman. He came to this country from Russia, and sold brooms from his horse and cart. On a hot day, he discovered that people wanted ice cream, and then found as time went on, that people wanted other groceries as well. This was the beginning of Geifman's Food Stores. He had a blind horse because as an early immigrant, he did not have much money, and it cost less to buy a blind horse. (This is taken from an account from Beth Shadur's aunt's cousin, a grandson of Sam Geifman.)



On the lower half of the left section, there are some personal objects that would have been brought with the immigrants, including a steamer trunk with a Hungarian cloth tumbling out (from the German American Heritage Center), a locket, and an Irish Cladagh ring that is surrounded by shamrocks.



## Swedish Immigrants

Throughout the mural there is text taken from real quotes and letters. On the left section, there is the quote from Emma Lazarus' poem on the Statue of Liberty that says, "Give me your tired, your poor..." Ribbons indicating the American flag's red, white, and blue unify the whole design.

The left section is also divided by the Swedish flag's cerulean blue and yellow, and includes images important to Swedish immigrants who were among the most numerous settlers in early Quad City history. Shown is a dalahorse, a decorative wooden horse; a woman in Swedish native costume; a psalmitrion, an early one-stringed instrument called the "poor man's organ" made by Swedish immigrants who were too poor to have any other instrument; Bishop Hill, an early Methodist settlement near the Quad Cities; and a portrait of Dr. T. N. Hasselquist, long term Swedish president of Augustana College.



## German Immigrants

The German section portrays one of the other larger groups of immigrants who came to the Quad Cities. The German flag of black, red, and gold is indicated by a ribbon containing German images. These include a zither, an instrument often used by immigrants in their musical societies; Turnhalle, the first building used to house the Turner gymnast movement and its many activities; Turner gymnasts in their original costumes for the girls of white shirts and bloomers with their "pins;" an autograph book indicated by the word "album" which were used before the days of photography to bring signatures of loved ones to the new country; and a portrait of Suzanne Denkmann Hauberg, the founder of the West End Settlement, a settlement society providing services and education for early immigrants in the area.