



Nat Youngblood:

Painter of Pittsburgh's Past, Present, and Future

By Jaclyn M. Sternick

In 1945, when Nat Youngblood left his pre-law studies in Indiana to pursue an art career, he dreamt of beautiful landscapes and cultures that would inspire his work. At art school in New Mexico, he experimented with abstraction despite his inclination towards realism, exercised his eye for color and shades of light, and hastened his techniques in figure drawing. Little did he know that in five years, he would be a full-time artist in Pittsburgh, a city whose beauty and people were often hidden under a blanket of soot and smog.

Nestled among mountains and rivers, the overworked city reeked of industry when Youngblood arrived in 1946. It was his new job, as a staff artist at *The Pittsburgh Press*, to sell the public on a vision for a cleaner and brighter future. During an era when the public relied on local newspapers for updates on current events, Youngblood's artwork greatly influenced public perception of the city, its development, and its history. Over the course of his career, which spanned more than three decades, his art appeared almost weekly in the Sunday paper and entered homes throughout the region.



Nat Youngblood (1916–2009).
Sandy Youngblood.

Opposite Page: Youngblood's 1952 cover art for the feature story "Steam Engines in the Raw," seen here as it appeared in *American Artist* magazine in 1958.
Fort Pitt Museum collection.



Press readers grew so familiar with the artist that they wrote letters to the paper, both complimenting and critiquing his artistic choices. His whereabouts and artwork often became the subject of human interest stories, and people collected magazine covers featuring his work. Working primarily in watercolors or pen and ink drawings, his art waxed on the region's history, romanticized the Western Pennsylvania landscape, and envisioned development projects of Pittsburgh's Renaissance. Through his role as a newspaper artist, Youngblood brought his vision of Pittsburgh's past, present, and future to the forefront of local public consciousness.

Idyllic in Indiana

Nat Howard Youngblood, Jr., was born December 28, 1916. His family's home overlooked the Ohio River in Newburg, Indiana, where they kept an orchard and gardens. Youngblood's boyhood curiosities, heightened by the rural area's natural beauty, often led him on outdoor adventures. At four years old, when he wandered through his neighbor's gated entry, a woman named Lockie Humphry welcomed him into her home. She shared her knowledge of art, Greek legends, and classical music with him, cultivating his interest in the arts at an early age. Later in life, he would liken Humphry's influence to that of a second mother.¹

The idyllic setting of his youth not only shaped his formative years but also influenced him and his artwork as an adult. The theme of childhood musings ran throughout his work, and a caption to one of his illustrations in 1960 identified his personal belief in "the power of the magic that is reserved exclusively for childhood."² As the president of the Pittsburgh Watercolor Society would say of Youngblood at the height of his career, "He paints like a man going through the woods singing. He has gained a man's head and kept a boy's heart."³

When Youngblood approached the end of high school, he regarded his future with uncertainty. Conceding to his father's wishes, he enrolled in the law track at Indiana

Opposite Page: *Freedom in the Forest* from *The American Pioneer*, 1976, oil on canvas. Youngblood had a pet pony as a child, which inspired this painting. He also used his three children as models for the painting.*

Dorothy Butko, and Fort Pitt Museum, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. © Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, 2016, all rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

University, Bloomington. After an unfulfilling two years of pre-law coursework and working late nights cleaning rollers at the university press, he faced his indifference towards law and decided to redirect his studies. Influenced by a recent meeting with an Indianapolis artist, Youngblood was confident that he, too, could be an artist.⁴ This sentiment, combined with his interests in archaeology, indigenous cultures, and outdoor landscapes, led him to pursue an education at the University of New Mexico.⁵

Once in his art classes, he struggled to meet the demands of a class in abstract expressionism, a popular art movement at the time.⁶ Youngblood tried reworking his pieces to abstraction, but he still got a D in the class.⁷ Frustrated with the university's curriculum, Youngblood yearned for instruction in representational art. The art department acknowledged the student's potential by awarding him a scholarship to study in Taos at

the Harwood Foundation, a site the university had acquired a few years earlier in 1935.⁸

During his three-month sojourn in Taos, N.M., Youngblood found the artists he encountered—Barse Miller and Millard Sheets, in particular—to be a source of inspiration.⁹ While they recognized his talent, they also suggested that he continue his training. With no less determination to pursue a career in art, he moved to the American Academy of Art in Chicago, where he prevailed under the intense scrutiny of instructor William H. Mosby. After a rigorous semester of drawing and painting, Mosby told the persistent student, “You know, Youngblood, you’re coming out of the woods.”¹⁰

The diversity of his training proved crucial to his career as an artist. By the time Youngblood established a reputation in Pittsburgh, a reporter and art critic described his style as, “the rational midway point between

today’s two art extremes. These extremes are the cold technicians who have intellectualized art to sterility and the color mad abstractionists who have emotionalized painting to a formless fiasco. He has synthesized both form and color.”¹¹ The training that was shaping Youngblood’s artistic development came to an abrupt halt when he was drafted by the U.S. Army in March of 1942.

Despite his disappointment with leaving school to serve in World War II, the 25-year-old accepted the role of serving his country. He married Margaret Tatum before his division left for Europe in August of 1944.¹² During his service with the 17th Airborne Division, he was wounded in an accident and awarded a Purple Heart. He was also active in Operation Varsity, an invasion of Wessel, Germany, that was the largest airborne operation to date.

Whenever Youngblood had down time throughout his service, he recorded his

He struggled to meet the demands of a class in abstract expressionism, a popular art movement at the time.

Largest Airborne Force in History, 1945, watercolor on paper. Washington County Historical Society and Sandy Youngblood.



The Pittsburgh Press

PITTSBURGH, PA., SUNDAY, MAY 26, 1946

Features

SECTION 3

What'll I do this Week?

by the
Man-About-Town

Editor's Note—This column is a weekly feature. It is not intended to be a complete digest of entertainment, but merely a listing of some of the outstanding events explained more fully in other sections of the paper.

Memorial Day, poignant to millions of Americans because of World War II, is Thursday. Services all over the country will be touched off today by the opening of Buddy Poppy Week, a way to help disabled veterans. On the historical side, the original "Pa Pitt," William Pitt of England, will celebrate his 187th birthday anniversary Tuesday.

SPORTS

Baseball—The Pirates meet four teams at home in a week, starting with the Chicago Cubs in a double-header today. Following in rapid succession are:

Cincinnati, single game Monday afternoon and second night game Tuesday.

St. Louis Memorial Day twin bill Thursday.

Philadelphia, single game Saturday afternoon.
Auto Racing—First post-war running of the Indianapolis Speedway Classic Thursday. It will be broadcast.

THEATER

"Front Page," newspaper melodrama, extended for another week at Pittsburgh Playhouse.

ART

Carnegie Institute: "The New Spirit," exhibition of work of Le Corbusier; exhibition of arts and crafts of high school students an 1945-46 exhibition of documentary paintings from collection of Standard Oil Co. Memorial Exhibition of paintings of William H. Singer Jr. closes today.

Arts and Crafts Center: Wail colors of Pennsylvania flowers by Dr. Andrew Avinoff and second annual exhibit of junior members of the Society of Sculptors, Saturday and Sunday.

Outline Galleries, line drawing of Saul Steinberg, nightly except Monday.

LECTURES

Maude A. Miner, "Pantomime and Dance," sponsored by the Civic Ball Association, Arts and Crafts Center, 8:30 p. m. today.
Kenneth Patchen, discussion of his poetry, Outlines at 9 p. m. today.

GENERAL INTEREST



Johnstown Hit By Flood Tragedy 57 Years Ago

Next Friday Anniversary of Catastrophe Which Swept Community After Bursting of Dam

Next Friday will be the anniversary of the Johnstown Flood and The Press presents below the first prize story in the historical classification of Scholastic's National Writing Awards, written by Mary Ellen Berneski, 14-year-old Latrobe High School student. The Press, which sponsored the regional contest in the Awards, has edited and abridged the original story to some extent.

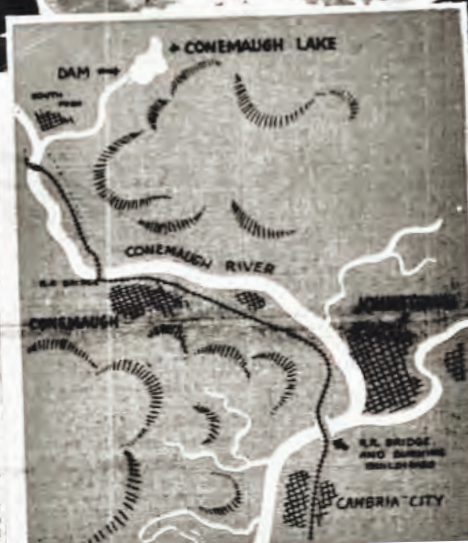
By MARY ELLEN BERNESKI

May 31, 1889, started out to be just another Friday to the people of Johnstown.

The children were restless because it was raining again and they couldn't go out to play. So they moped around their doorways or got under busy mothers' feet, only to be shooed off and told to "go and play."

It had been raining for nearly a week and the cellars of Johnstown were filled with water.

But this was by no means uncommon. He managed to persuade men and no one was disturbed, higher ground, but as he completed his route, his ears were filled with



Artist Nat Youngblood has pictured, above, his impression of the tragic flood and fire which raged in Johnstown 57 years ago next Friday. At left, a map of the flooded section.

over the town until it came to the railroad bridge. There the huge mass of debris was thrown against the bridge with such force that it formed an impenetrable dam. The flood, having no outlet, sprang back to Johnstown and created a gigantic, swirling whirlpool.

Finally the pounding waves made a hole through the debris and the flood in Johnstown began to steal silently away.

But another catastrophe hit the stricken city. Oil from wrecked cars on the bridge was ignited and eventually the whole enormous pile of debris and bodies was aflame. People who had been caught and pinned in the mass of wreckage were roasted alive! Their shrieks could be heard throughout the dreadful night.

Rows of Coffins

When the flood was finally over

Youngblood's illustration for *The Pittsburgh Press* feature story "Johnstown Hit By Flood Tragedy 57 Years Ago."

The Pittsburgh Press on Newspapers.com

experiences in sketches and watercolors.¹³ He sent them, along with handwritten letters, home to his mother. Unbeknownst to Youngblood, his war illustrations would bear significant weight in his future.¹⁴

Won't You Paint Our Renaissance?

After the war's end, Youngblood returned home to Margaret in Evansville, Indiana, where he worked for a short time as the art director of a commercial studio.¹⁵ He was eager to pursue a career in illustration so he and his mother prepared a portfolio of his wartime artwork and sent it to Scripps-Howard News Service in Pittsburgh. For a few months, the parcel got passed from one staff member to another, eventually making its way to the desk of Edward T. Leech, editor of *The Pittsburgh Press*.¹⁶ Impressed with Youngblood's work, Leech invited the artist to Pittsburgh.

Years later, Youngblood recounted his 1946 interview experience: "I arrived here on a horrible day in March. Everybody I passed on the street had sooty faces ... 'I'm not going to live here,' he thought. Then he got to Leech's office ... Leech began talking about how the city was going to be rebuilt and the air cleared ... and about how *The Press* needed an artist with vision to show people what the Renaissance would do for the city. 'I found myself saying yes when I wanted to say no.'"¹⁷ Thus, Youngblood embarked on his 35-year career with *The Pittsburgh Press*.

One of the first major pieces Youngblood created as a newspaper staff artist was a rendering of the tragic Johnstown Flood of 1889. To honor the 57th anniversary of the disaster, *The Press* published his illustration on the first page of section three on May 26, 1946.¹⁸ The scene, with a sweeping tide—carrying away victims, a bridge, and locomotives—captures the drama of the incident that cost more than 2,200 people their lives.

Over the next couple years, Youngblood's assignments for the newspaper included

illustrating a column, "Odd Fax on Pennsylvania," as well as producing a handful of the *Roto* and *Family Magazine* covers. Then, in May 1949, he made a lasting impression on *Press* readers when his *Mother's Day* painting appeared on the cover of the *Roto Magazine*.¹⁹ It inspired a wave of dialogue between *The Press* and its readers, as people wrote in to request additional copies of the sold-out paper.²⁰

The artist's endearing watercolor portrays a warm embrace between mother and son. The young boy, muddy from the outdoors, presents a bouquet of garden-picked flowers to his mother. Tracks of dirt mark the kitchen floor. His mother, kneeling next to a bucket, towel in hand, pauses from her work to hug her messy, but thoughtful, son.

Public reaction to the *Mother's Day* painting was so overwhelmingly positive that he recreated the image for another *Roto Magazine* cover nine years later. *The Press* even offered prints for \$1.²¹ In the coming years, the paper would sell 10 other prints of artwork by Youngblood.

For another of Youngblood's early assignments, he illustrated short stories by Fulton Oursler. The weekly column, "Modern Parables," appeared on the inside cover of the *Roto Magazine* for almost two years. Steeped in themes of evangelism and prayer, Oursler's narratives sometimes recounted—and no doubt embellished—the stories of actual people, such as FBI agent James Amos,²² and singer

A Mother's Day coupon from the *Sunday Roto Magazine*, 1958, for a Youngblood print.

The Pittsburgh Press on Newspapers.com

I arrived here on a horrible day in March ... 'I'm not going to live here,' he thought.



Second Guessing

You Can Get This Painting For Your Home



Nat Youngblood

ON Mother's Day in 1949 *Roto* published one of its most successful covers. It was a watercolor by Nat Youngblood, magazine art director of *The Pittsburgh Press*. All available copies of the newspaper were sold out, and requests for additional copies could not be filled as demands continued long after Mother's Day.

Because of its wide appeal, Mr. Youngblood has duplicated the 1949 painting for today's cover. Now you can obtain a reprint of this fine painting on heavy textured paper suitable for framing. The cost is \$1, including sales tax. (Use order coupon at the bottom of this page.) This is the first of a series of *Roto* cover reprints which will be made available from time to time. And like Mr. Youngblood's "Mother's Day" painting, all will be suitable for framing. So order the first one now.

Use This Coupon To Get Your Print For Framing

The Pittsburgh Press
Post Office Box 776,
Pittsburgh 30, Pa.

I enclose \$1 (including sales tax) for my copy of Nat Youngblood's Mother's Day *Roto* Cover, printed in full color on heavy textured paper suitable for framing.



Name _____

(Please Print Name And Address Plainly)

Address _____

City _____

Zone _____

State _____

Edited by John Patterson

Art Direction, Nat Youngblood

Original illustration that appeared on *The Pittsburgh Press Sunday Family Magazine* cover, September 28, 1958. The Point was undergoing a dramatic transformation: notice the old Point and Manchester Bridges as well as the new Fort Pitt Bridge, which opened in 1959.

Countryside Frame Shop & Gallery, Washington, Pa. and Sandy Youngblood.



Sarah Flower Adams.²³ Many of the illustrations that Youngblood created for feature stories in the early 1950s depicted scenes of leisure, work, and industry. On-site research greatly informed his work and led him on excursions throughout the region.

For one such assignment in 1952, he visited the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in Cumberland, Maryland, where he watched workers perform repairs on powerful steam locomotives. From that experience, he wrote and illustrated “Steam Engines in the Raw,” one of many stories he would cover on big industry.²⁴ Years later, the cover art from “Steam Engines in the Raw” would appear in *American Artist*²⁵ magazine. The article “Nat Youngblood: A Reporter-Illustrator in Watercolor,” was printed in the magazine’s November 1958 issue,

which also featured artist Andrew Wyeth and sculptor Betty Davenport Ford.²⁶

Envisioning the Point

In January 1953, the title Art Director appeared with Youngblood’s name on the inside cover of the *Family Magazine* for the first time.²⁷ Over the next six years, the artist devoted much of his work to visualizing the future of downtown Pittsburgh, most notably the Point. Plans dictated that the Point makeover would be completed by the city’s bicentennial celebration in May 1959.²⁸ The project involved a complete overhaul of Pittsburgh’s Golden Triangle, a site that, over the course of two centuries, had hosted a myriad of military, industrial, and residential structures.

To fulfill the challenge of painting Pittsburgh’s transformation before it

actually happened, Youngblood consulted with architects involved in the various development projects. After studying their plans, he employed watercolors to impress his own creative touch on the Point and its surroundings. On May 3, 1953, the *Roto* cover featured the caption “Nat Youngblood, With Paint Brush and Crystal Ball, Takes a Stroll Through Our Future Point Park.”²⁹ His watercolor rendering of the Point’s fountain—which existed only in architectural studies—planted the image of Pittsburgh’s future into the minds of *Press* readers.

Among other things, the artist envisioned how *The Press* building would look after its facelift,³⁰ how Gateway Center would rise beyond the green of Point State Park,³¹ how the Civic Arena’s roof would retract to expose the sky,³² and how Hilton Hotel patrons would



Youngblood's illustrations for the Bicentennial Issue of *The Pittsburgh Press* mused on the idea of past meets present, and even future.

Dorothy Butko.

Youngblood painted the image of
General Forbes as he may have
looked after arriving at
the Point in 1758.



*Forbes at Fort Duquesne from The
Forbes Expedition, 1968, oil on canvas.*
Fort Pitt Museum, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

overlook the Point from old Barbeau Street.³³ On May 6, 1956, Youngblood, with an imaginative spirit, proposed and illustrated ideas for the future of Mount Washington. Amidst his watercolor renderings, he wittily placed an image of Quebec's historic Chateau Frontenac, perched over the Saint Lawrence River, to demonstrate "what can be done near hilly terrain."³⁴

As the Pittsburgh Renaissance progressed, so did Youngblood's local reputation. Dean Rice, fine arts committee member of the Pittsburgh Playhouse, said of the artist: "He has a sharp eye for expressive detail, and a good sense of pictorial values."³⁵ Reporter and art critic Sam Hood recognized that Youngblood had a gift, as demonstrated in his renderings of the developing city, to "artistically dream with his feet still on the ground."³⁶

In June 1957, the artist again demonstrated his "ability to 'dip into the future, far as human eye can see.'"³⁷ His illustration on the June 9 cover of *Roto Magazine* depicts what a section of Butcher's Run, on the North Side along the Allegheny River, would look like after the completion of a new highway plan. It was in this issue that—now for the first time in the *Roto Magazine*—the title of Art Director appeared alongside Youngblood's name, establishing his directorship of both Sunday magazine sections.³⁸

1959: Celebrating The (British) Birth of Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh's 1959 bicentennial commemorated the establishment of Fort Pitt at the forks of the Ohio River. British General John Forbes and his army had captured the site of old Fort Duquesne in November 1758, and in honor of the historic event, Youngblood painted the image of General Forbes as he may have looked after arriving at the Point. The painting appeared on the cover of the *Roto Magazine* on November 23, 1958.³⁹

Ailing and confined to a litter, Forbes raises his head from his quill and paper. With an expression of satisfaction, he takes a moment to observe his surroundings and meditate the namesake of the new British post. In a letter to British Secretary of State William Pitt, Forbes names the site Pittsburgh.⁴⁰

A decade later, in 1968, the artist would revisit the subject for an exhibit display at the new Fort Pitt Museum in Point State Park. Youngblood completed a series of five oil paintings, titled *The Forbes Expedition*, at the request of the museum's lead architect and exhibit designer, Charles Morse Stotz.⁴¹ The last in the five-part series, *Forbes at Fort Duquesne* bears a striking resemblance to its 1958 predecessor.

On January 18, 1959, *The Press* ushered in the bicentennial with a special issue of the Sunday paper. Youngblood's artwork appeared in full color on the front pages of an impressive four sections. His first-page illustration of the Bicentennial Issue mused on the idea of past meets present. The viewer, positioned on the great stage of Mount Washington, is tucked back in the dense Pennsylvania forest of 1759. Ahead, near the edge of the hillside, 18th-century trader Christopher Gist appears with his arms raised in excitement. Emerging behind him is the bright modern city of Pittsburgh, its golden bridges outstretched over rivers and high rise buildings reaching up to the sky.⁴²

On the front page of section four, Youngblood looked ahead to 2159. To depict Pittsburgh's quadricentennial, the artist again chose the vantage point of Mount Washington, but with commuters in flying saucers that would "have solved 1958's mass transit problem."⁴³

Another bicentennial-themed piece graced the rare wrap-around cover of the *Roto Magazine*. The painting, inspired by an excerpt from an early American journal, depicts a family traveling west through Pennsylvania wilderness.⁴⁴ Several more of his paintings—

including a forest scene with children on a horse and a winter scene of a father and son walking to church—illustrate the feature story "The Rugged Life of Pittsburgh Pioneers."⁴⁵ The paintings depict Youngblood's beliefs about frontier life in Western Pennsylvania: settlers faced daily struggles with fortitude, they relied on their faith and one another for support, and the wilderness was at times both their playground and their demise.

Years later, the artist was captivated by stories such as Conrad Richter's 1966 novel *The Awakening Land* and revisited the subject of frontier life in 18th-century America.⁴⁶ Not unlike the case of the previously described *Forbes* paintings, the two depictions of frontier settlers share similarities in style and composition. The artist's palette, however, greatly differs from one version to the other. He would complete the latter works in 1975 and 1976, just in time for the nation's bicentennial.

While Youngblood's art for the newspaper continued to depict scenes of Western Pennsylvania and developments across the city, he also became interested in portraiture. Over the next 20 years, the artist produced numerous portraits of public figures for the

Years later, the artist was captivated by stories such as Conrad Richter's 1966 novel *The Awakening Land* and revisited the subject of frontier life in 18th-century America.

The Pittsburgh Press
Sunday ROTO

*The Pittsburgh Press
Sunday Roto Magazine
cover, printed September
25, 1960.*

Maser Galleries, Pittsburgh, Pa.

Nat Youngbl

Sunday Roto Magazine. *The Press* referred to his portraits as “the series on outstanding community leaders.”⁴⁷ From religious and industrial leaders, to presidents and sports heroes, the subjects shared one thing in common: they were men with influence, in positions of power.

In 1960, for example, to honor the Pittsburgh Pirates’ successful season, Youngblood painted a portrait of team manager Danny Murtaugh. The painting appeared on the cover of the *Roto Magazine* on September 25, and the artist even presented the original painting to Murtaugh himself.⁴⁸ The Pirates went on to win the World Series at Forbes Field a few weeks later.⁴⁹

For a portrait assignment later that fall, Youngblood accompanied President-elect John F. Kennedy on a Thanksgiving Day flight from Washington, D.C. to Palm Beach, Florida.⁵⁰ In an unexpected twist, Kennedy received a phone call announcing that his wife, Jacqueline, had gone into early labor. Suddenly, the artist’s business assignment took on a life of its own, and he was with JFK the day that John F. Kennedy, Jr., was born.⁵¹ Youngblood’s portrait of the new president appeared on the *Roto* cover on January 8, 1961.

Where new life begins, others end. In just a few years’ time, Youngblood’s portraits would eerily chronicle the beginning of Lyndon B. Johnson’s presidency after the tragic end of JFK’s. His rendering of President Johnson appeared on the *Roto* cover on December 15, 1963.⁵² Meanwhile, in remembrance of Kennedy that month, the University Office of Mellon Bank in Oakland displayed the series of sketches and paintings that Youngblood had completed three years earlier.⁵³ In keeping with his assignments that year, the artist rounded out 1963, not with a portrait, but with a holiday scene, both cheerful and nostalgic, titled *Christmas in Pittsburgh, 1825*.

Remembering the Settlers

Much in the same way that Youngblood explored the city’s history for the bicentennial in 1959, he reflected on regional history at the approach of the nation’s bicentennial in 1976. At nearly 60 years old, the artist took a leave from *The Press* and focused on a series of paintings depicting frontier life in Western Pennsylvania. He intended for them to serve an educational purpose, possibly as a traveling exhibit to local schools.⁵⁴ When *The Press* offered to commission Youngblood’s work, he accepted, and in about a year, he completed ten oil paintings that measure over four by five feet each. They comprise a series called *The American Pioneer*.

Each painting in the series depicts an aspect of frontier life, and is paired with a particular human emotion or quality, such

as courage, strength, joy, peril, sorrow, and so on. Because the paintings strive to reach the audience through an exploration of the human experience, they have a timeless quality that resonates with the viewer. The series not only manifests Youngblood’s interpretation of frontier life, but also bridges the lives of those past with those of the present.

In the article “A Tribute to Pittsylvania Pioneers,” which appeared in the *Sunday Roto Magazine* on November 9, 1975, writer Rich Gigler quoted Youngblood on his inspiration for the series: “I’d like to give people some reason to pause and contemplate their heritage ... Research tells me our early settlers were a poor, sometimes desperate people, but they were free ... They went into the wilderness with hope for a future and sometimes went down in a valley with despair.”⁵⁵ Over the course of the next year, all ten artworks appeared in the *Roto Magazine*.



***Courage on the Trail* from *The American Pioneer*, 1975, oil on canvas.**

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The Pittsburgh Press Sunday Roto Magazine wrap-around cover, printed January 18, 1958.

Dorothy Butko.

One of the feature stories in 1976, again written by Gigler, placed the 18th-century frontier experience into the broader context of American and world history.⁵⁶ Gigler emphasized some of the various land disputes in North America during the 1750s and 1760s, as well as the fact that settlers who traveled as far west as Pittsburgh were indeed squatters. However hard they worked to travel a great distance over rugged terrain, they also defied treaties and exacerbated conflicts by raising homesteads on Indian land beyond the British crown's designated territory. As is the case with all history lessons, one must consider the broader historical context when viewing the bicentennial paintings. While the works reflect Youngblood's empathy for 18th-century frontier settlers, the series portrays just one side of an immensely complex and multifaceted history.

In July 1976, *The Press* donated *The American Pioneer* series to the Fort Pitt Museum.⁵⁷ Soon thereafter, the paintings were exhibited at the Pittsburgh Arts and Crafts Center (now Pittsburgh Center for the Arts), when he was awarded the title Artist of the Year.⁵⁸ To this day, the paintings reside at the Fort Pitt Museum, where school children marvel at the artist's imagery, adults admire his artistic skill, and those who recall Youngblood's work from the newspaper instantly recognize his distinct style.

Life After *The Press*: An Artist Is An Artist

On December 28, 1980—Youngblood's 64th birthday—a *Press* article announced the artist's retirement. By this time, he had produced cover art for well over 400 *Sunday Roto* and *Family Magazines*. One of his contemporaries, William C. Libby, said of the artist: "He has

done more to raise the level of public taste and acceptance of art than any other Pittsburgh artist."⁵⁹ Youngblood's last day with *The Press* was New Year's Eve, 1980. When asked what his future held, he replied, "After all these years, I think I'll just sit back and relax for about a month and figure what I want to do."⁶⁰

Soon after Youngblood's retirement, he and his second wife Sandy moved from the Gateway Towers downtown—where they were both tenants and had met through business acquaintances—to a home in West Middletown, Pa.⁶¹ For years, the couple split time between Pennsylvania and their other home in Corrales, N.M. He established studios in both locations, and Sandy served as his business manager. While the artist devoted a full day's work to his art, five or six days a week, Sandy coordinated all framing, sales, and shipping of the artwork.⁶²



Portion of the painting, *Sorrow*, from *The American Pioneer*, 1976, oil on canvas.

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Portion of the painting, *Joy*, from *The American Pioneer*, 1976, oil on canvas. This was Youngblood's favorite of *The American Pioneer* series paintings.*

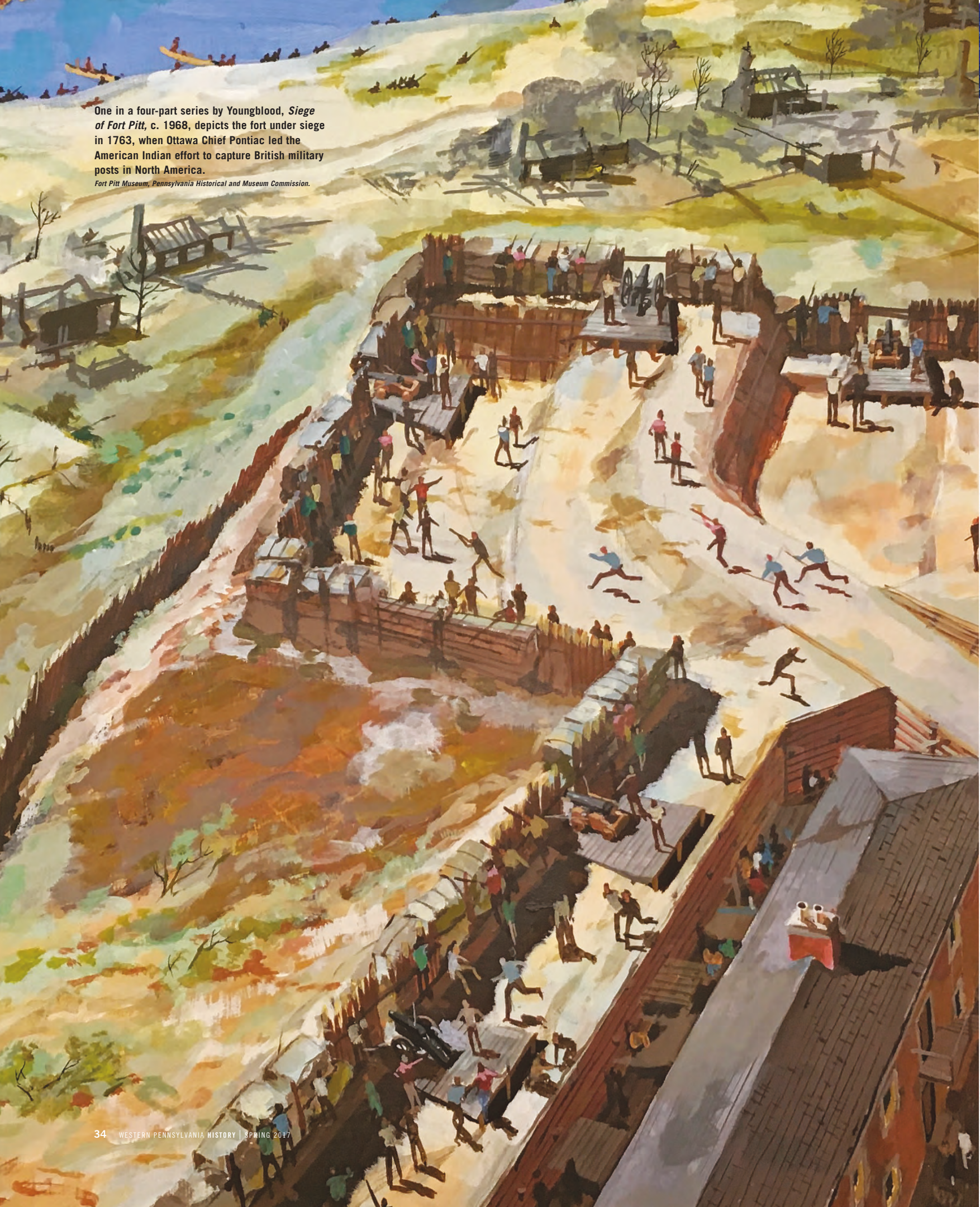
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Because the paintings strive to reach the audience through an exploration of the human experience, they have a timeless quality that resonates with the viewer.

One in a four-part series by Youngblood, *Siege of Fort Pitt*, c. 1968, depicts the fort under siege in 1763, when Ottawa Chief Pontiac led the American Indian effort to capture British military posts in North America.

Fort Pitt Museum, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.





Study for *Shooting Wagons*, undated.

Photo by Mike Burke.

Without the constant pressure of newspaper deadlines, Youngblood was afforded more time to spend on a single piece, and he shifted from the swift mode of watercolors to the more laborious medium of oils. By this time, his work focused on three areas of specialty: Western Pennsylvania scenes, western landscapes, and American Indians—the Sioux in particular.⁶³ Aside from doing commissions, he also sold paintings to private collectors and exhibited in shows such as the annual invitational “Artists of America” in Denver.

In an interview in 1992, more than a decade after retirement, Youngblood was having the time of his life: “I have the best of everything. I have a good family, and my work is so interesting that I don’t need much else in the way of recreation.”⁶⁴ He painted until the last few years of his life and

passed away in his West Middletown home on December 18, 2009, at age 92.

Over the course of a prolific art career, Youngblood recounted regional history, meditated on the Western Pennsylvania landscape, and envisioned Pittsburgh’s future. While his love of the outdoors and culture was inspired from humble beginnings in rural Indiana, it remained evident in the work he produced throughout his life. In a distinguished, 35-year career with *The Pittsburgh Press*, he approached his work with a spirit of curiosity and creativity, not only striving to understand his subjects, but also tapping into his imagination and emotions. At times, he was a comic, poking fun at life’s wonders and blunders. More often, he was a romantic, nostalgically recreating visions of Pittsburgh’s past. Then still, he was a reporter, portraying

subjects of significant cultural weight. Most of all, he was an artist. For the second half of the 20th century, Nat Youngblood’s artwork not only influenced the public, but also enriched the region’s households, establishing a legacy in Western Pennsylvania illustration that endures to this day. ✪

Jaclyn Sternick is the Fort Pitt Museum Visitor Services and Events Coordinator. Given her academic background in art history and writing, she immediately took an interest in Nat Youngblood and his artwork when she began working at the museum in 2014. She is thrilled to contribute her research and writing to the Fort Pitt Museum’s upcoming exhibit, *Nat Youngblood’s Pittsburgh*, which opens April 28, 2017 and will be on display through the summer months. Jaclyn extends special thanks to Sandy Youngblood for her support of this project.



Above: *The Pittsburgh Press Sunday Roto Magazine* cover, December 22, 1963. The former "Mansion House" had stood at the northwest corner of Wood Street and Fifth Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh.

Maser Galleries, Pittsburgh, Pa. © *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2016, all rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

Left: Original watercolor study that Youngblood presumably revisited for the 1963 *Christmas Roto* cover illustration.

Countryside Frame Shop & Gallery, Washington, Pa. and Sandy Youngblood.

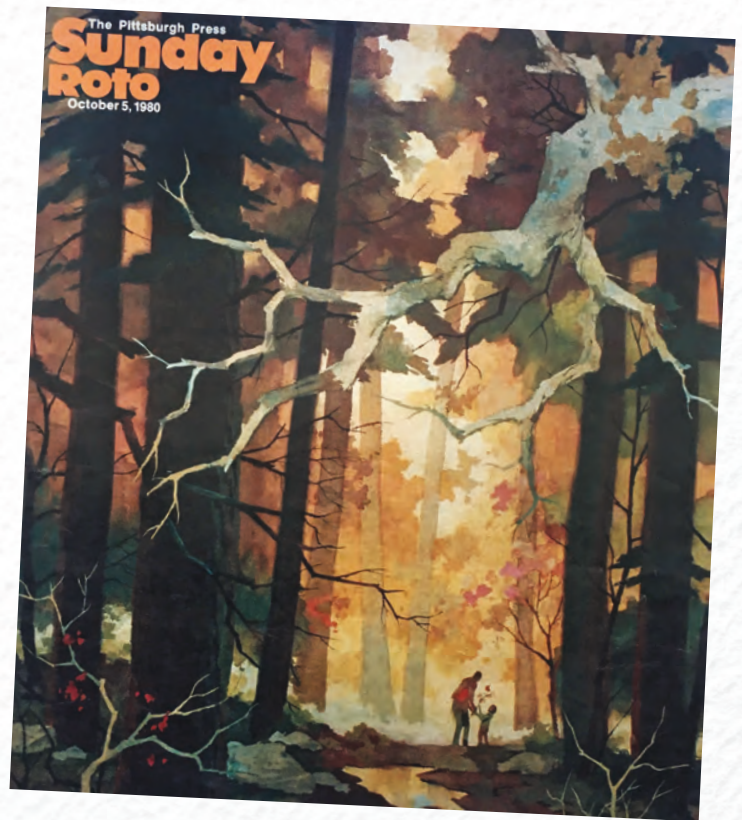


Opposite Page: *The Pittsburgh Press Sunday Roto Magazine* cover, printed October 5, 1980, was one of the last covers that Youngblood produced as Art Director of *The Pittsburgh Press*. The caption reads: "Jack Frost Isn't The Only One Who Paints Leaves In Penns Woods." Tree branches and foliage, which were often prominent in the artist's Western Pennsylvania scenes, dominate his rendering of Cook Forest.

Maser Galleries, Pittsburgh, Pa. © *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 2016, all rights reserved. Reprinted with permission.

- ¹ Youngblood, Nat. Interview with David Miller. 27 April 2000.
- ² "The Cover." *Pittsburgh Press* 29 May 1960.
- ³ Butler, Ann. "City Honors 30 Years Of Youngblood's Art." *Pittsburgh Press* 17 Oct. 1976: 81.
- ⁴ Youngblood, Nat. Interview with David Miller. 27 April 2000.
- ⁵ Butler, Ann. "City Honors 30 Years Of Youngblood's Art." *Pittsburgh Press* 17 Oct. 1976: 81.
- ⁶ Definition of abstract expressionism: an artistic movement of the mid-20th century comprising diverse styles and techniques and emphasizing especially an artist's liberty to convey attitudes and emotions through nontraditional and usually nonrepresentational means. *Merriam-Webster.com*, acc. 30 Nov. 2016.
- ⁷ Youngblood, Nat. Interview with David Miller. 27 April 2000.
- ⁸ Today, the site is still a part of the University of New Mexico, and it is known as the Harwood Museum of Art. *Harwoodmuseum.org*, acc. 30 Nov. 2016.
- ⁹ Youngblood, Nat. Interview with David Miller. 27 April 2000.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹ Hood, Sam. "Nat Youngblood's Art Show Pleases Eye And Warms Heart." *Pittsburgh Press* 12 Jan. 1958: 41. *Newspapers.com*.
- ¹² Edwards, Paul and Benjamin L. Costello, eds. *Nat Youngblood: Artist in Conflict, Selected Sketches and Watercolors from World War II* (Washington Co. Historical Soc., 1995).
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ In 1995, fifty years after Youngblood produced his wartime work, it was showcased in an exhibit at the Olin Fine Arts Center Gallery at Washington and Jefferson College. The college also presented him with an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree in 1999.
- ¹⁵ Nat and Margaret Youngblood would have three children together. They would later divorce, and he married Sandy Wilsman in 1980.
- ¹⁶ Bruner, Ronald. "A City For All Seasons." *Pittsburgh Press* 28 Oct. 1973: 240-242.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁸ "Features." *Pittsburgh Press* 26 May 1946: 19.
- ¹⁹ "Mother's Day." *Pittsburgh Press* 8 May 1949: 89.
- ²⁰ "You Can Get This Painting For Your Home." *Pittsburgh Press* 11 May 1958: 152-153.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*
- ²² Oursler, Fulton. "A President's Friend." *Pittsburgh Press* 7 Jan. 1951: 70.
- ²³ Oursler, Fulton. "The Lost Chance." *Pittsburgh Press* 27 May 1951: 78.
- ²⁴ Youngblood, Nat. "Steam Engines in the Raw." *Pittsburgh Press* 21 Sept. 1952: 96-97.
- ²⁵ "The Cover." *Pittsburgh Press* 21 Sept. 1952: 73-74.
- ²⁶ Youngblood, Nat. "Nat Youngblood: A reporter-illustrator in watercolor." *American Artist* 22.9 (1958): 46+.
- ²⁷ *Pittsburgh Press* 4 Jan. 1953: 42.
- ²⁸ "Festival Time At The Point." *Pittsburgh Press* 22 Mar. 1959: 130-131.
- ²⁹ "The Cover." *Pittsburgh Press* 3 May 1953: 115-116.
- ³⁰ "A New Look, A New Address." *Pittsburgh Press* 14 Mar. 1954: 114-115.
- ³¹ "The Cover." *Pittsburgh Press* 13 Jan. 1957: 97-98.

- ³² "The Cover." *Pittsburgh Press* 10 Mar. 1957: 115-116.
- ³³ "The Pittsburgh Hilton." *Pittsburgh Press* 30 Jun. 1957: 110-111.
- ³⁴ Patterson, John. "Mount Washington." *Pittsburgh Press* 6 May 1956: 126-127.
- ³⁵ Hood, Sam. "Nat Youngblood's Art Show Pleases Eye And Warms Heart." *Pittsburgh Press* 12 Jan. 1958: 41.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ "Park Martin's East Street Dream." *Pittsburgh Press* 9 Jun. 1957: 129-130.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*
- ³⁹ "The Cover." *Pittsburgh Press* 23 Nov. 1958: 139-140. *Newspapers.com*. Web. 30 Nov. 2016.
- ⁴⁰ Stewart, Irene, ed. "To William Pitt." *Letters of General John Forbes: Relating to the Expedition Against Fort Duquesne in 1758*, Allegheny Co. Committee, 1927. 72-74. Print. In his letter to William Pitt on November 27, 1758, Forbes actually spelled the city's name "Pittsbourgh."
- ⁴¹ Stuart, Roger. "The Many-Sided Mr. Stotz." *Pittsburgh Press* 23 Jun. 1968: 211. Youngblood also completed a watercolor portrait of Stotz for the 1968 article.
- ⁴² "First 200 Years... From Fort Pitt To Point State Park." *Pittsburgh Press* 18 Jan. 1959: 81.
- ⁴³ "Next 200 Years... Renaissance To Quadricentennial." *Pittsburgh Press* 18 Jan. 1959: 117.
- ⁴⁴ "The Cover." *Pittsburgh Press* 18 Jan. 1959: 177-178.
- ⁴⁵ "The Rugged Life Of Pittsburgh's Pioneers." *Pittsburgh Press* 18 Jan. 1959: 192-193.
- ⁴⁶ Youngblood, Nat. Interview with David Miller. 27 April 2000.
- ⁴⁷ "The Cover." *Pittsburgh Press* 12 Sept. 1965: 138.
- ⁴⁸ Kasun, Edward P. "Colorful Pirates Rate A Salute." *Pittsburgh Press* 23 Sept. 1960: 2.
- ⁴⁹ "The Cover." *Pittsburgh Press* 25 Sept. 1960: 121-122.
- ⁵⁰ "The Cover." *Pittsburgh Press* 8 Jan. 1961: 163-164.
- ⁵¹ Patterson, John. "A Small Kennedy Crisis." *Pittsburgh Press* 8 Jan. 1961: 180-181.
- ⁵² "The Cover." *Pittsburgh Press* 15 Dec. 1963: 103-104.
- ⁵³ "Press Art Director Displays Series Of Kennedy Sketches." *Pittsburgh Press* 8 Dec. 1963: 34.
- ⁵⁴ Youngblood, Nat. Interview with David Miller. 27 April 2000. Youngblood appealed to the Richard King Mellon Foundation to fund the traveling exhibit project. When the artist made his proposal to the school board, however, an African American member called attention to the absence of African American figures in the paintings. The Mellon Foundation declined funding of the project. Although Youngblood intended to portray regional heritage through his artwork, the series is not comprehensive and does not



represent the range of ethnic groups present in 18th-century Western Pennsylvania.

- ⁵⁵ Gigler, Rich. "A Tribute To Pittsylvania Pioneers." *Pittsburgh Press* 9 Nov. 1975: 290-292.
 - ⁵⁶ Gigler, Rich. "We Stood It Very Well And Worked Hard." *Pittsburgh Press* 9 May 1976: 224-227.
 - ⁵⁷ Gigler, Rich. "Youngblood, Paintings Honored." *Pittsburgh Press* 24 July 1976.
 - ⁵⁸ Butler, Ann. "City Honors 30 Years Of Youngblood's Art." *Pittsburgh Press* 17 Oct. 1976: 81.
 - ⁵⁹ Butler, Ann. "City Honors 30 Years Of Youngblood's Art." *Pittsburgh Press* 17 Oct. 1976: 81.
 - ⁶⁰ Place, John. "Artist Nat Youngblood Retiring." *Pittsburgh Press* 28 Dec. 1980: 6.
 - ⁶¹ Youngblood first encountered—and fell in love with—West Middelton while on assignment for The Press 10 years earlier. His illustrations of the town appeared in the *Sunday Roto Magazine* on July 6, 1967.
 - ⁶² Youngblood, Sandy. Interview with the author. 21 Nov. 2016.
 - ⁶³ *Ibid.*
 - ⁶⁴ Sharpe, Jerry. "Nat Youngblood paints way back to area he loves." *Pittsburgh Press* 25 Feb. 1992: 2.
 - ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*
- * Subjects and inspiration for *The American Pioneer* series are detailed in "Press Donates 10 Youngblood Paintings." *Pittsburgh Press* 30 Jun. 1976.