

# Leo Henke, Pipestone's Forgotten Artist

*Susan Hoskins, 2020*

A hidden secret in Pipestone's Masonic Lodge since 1917, twelve extraordinary murals were painted in monotone, almost identical to the publication from which they were copied. The murals were painted by Leo Henke, an Austrian immigrant artist who did not stay long, but left his mark on Pipestone, Minnesota on his way to his dream career as a visual artist. He left his mark, but not much memory of himself, in Pipestone where he lived for about five years after immigrating and before heading to the big city to pursue his trade. One hundred years later, all that was known about the artist locally was his name and the incorrect information that he was an itinerate German artist. Leo Henke was something much more interesting.

Leo Henke left Austria on the brink of war in 1914. He was 23 years old with very few possessions and did not speak English very well.<sup>1</sup> Traveling on the same ship out of Hamburg, the *Abraham Lincoln*, was Pipestone resident, Carl Anlauf.<sup>2</sup> Anlauf was a friend of Henke's father, but it is not known what the relationship between the two men was in regard to sailing to America.<sup>3</sup> Possibly Anlauf and Henke had an employment agreement, as they were in the same trade. Perhaps Anlauf was recruiting talent. In a 1926 newspaper interview, Henke gives no credit to Anlauf, merely stating that once landed at the "horrible docks" at New York City, he bought a train ticket as far away as he could get- Pipestone, Minnesota.<sup>4</sup>

Leo Henke arrived in Pipestone in May 1914, along with Carl and Bertha Anlauf and a number of other immigrants traveling with them.<sup>5</sup> Newspaper accounts name the immigrants who accompanied the Anlaufs from Europe, "four men and a girl." Leo Henke and Karl Lenhart were introduced as painters who would be working with Carl Anlauf. The other two appeared to have no connection, Franz Kaluba, a carpenter and W. Plagmann, a farm hand. The 'girl' was named as Alma Kutshker and was to reside with the Anlaufs.

By 1916 Leo Henke was advertising his own painting, decorating and sign painting business.<sup>6</sup> He was certainly involved with Carl Anlauf while in Pipestone, there are some records indicating he worked for Anlauf.<sup>7</sup> But it might have been an on/off arrangement as he was also advertising

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<sup>1</sup> "Leo Henkora Now a Portrait Artist," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 27 May 1926, p.1 c.6 p.1.

<sup>2</sup> "List or Manifest of Alien Passengers," *Ancestry* (<http://ancestry.com> : 18 July 2020) on S.S. Abraham Lincoln sailing from Hamburg, 20 April 1914; *Leo Henke*, page 6, line 18.

<sup>3</sup> "Henkora's High Rank Won by Perseverance," *Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, Minnesota) 5 January 1928.

<sup>4</sup> "Leo Henkora Now a Portrait Artist," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota), 27 May 1926, p.1 c.6 p.1.

<sup>5</sup> No title, *Pipestone County Star* newspaper, 19 May 1914, p.7 c.4 p.4. *Nothing further has been found on Karl Lenhart, Franz Kluba, W. Plagmann or Alma Kutshker.*

<sup>6</sup> Advertisement, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 9 April 1916, p.3; *Painting! Leo A. Henke.*

<sup>7</sup> WWI Draft Registration Card, *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : 18 July 2020) *Present Trade: Artist, By whom employed: Carl Anlauf.*

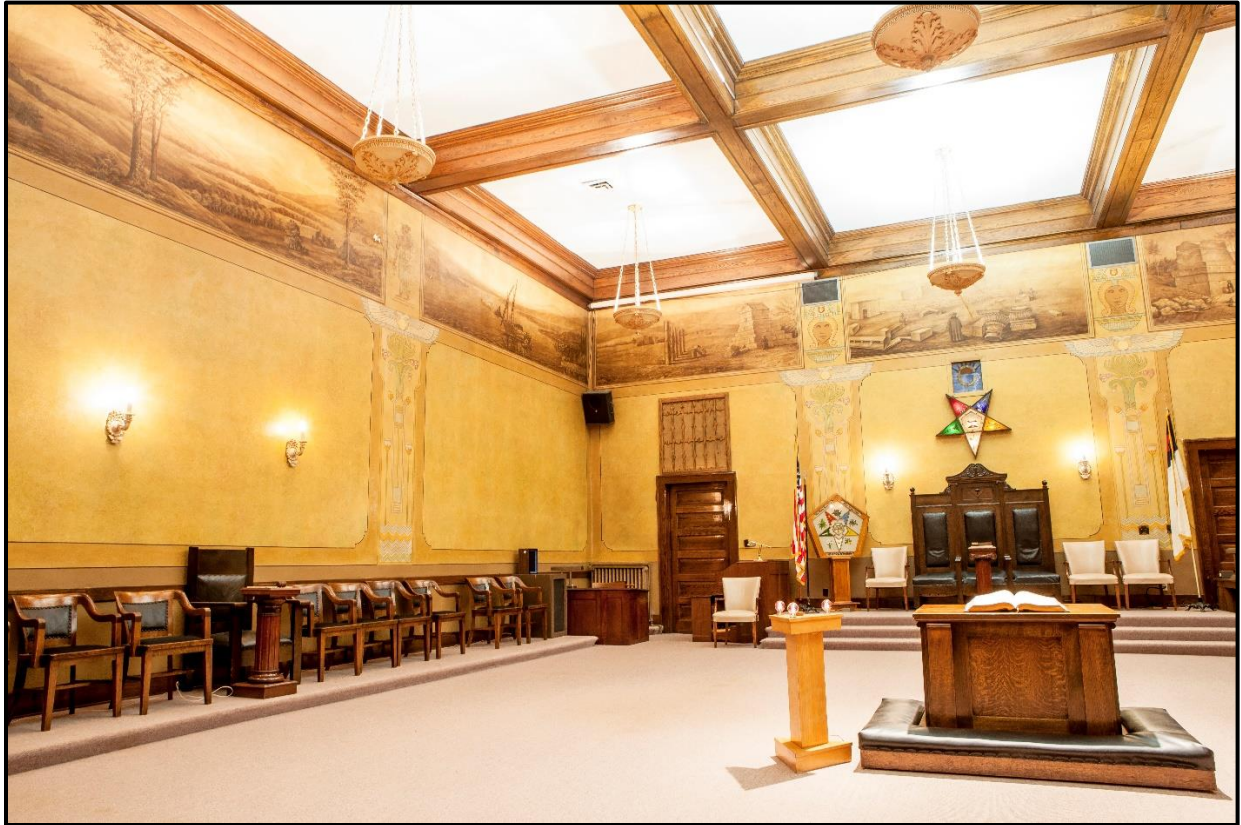
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for himself, and in October 1917 it was announced he was opening a “New Painting Firm” in partnership with Charles Meuhlenbeck.<sup>8</sup>



*Pipestone Masonic Hall, Lodge Room in the Ferris Grand Block, 206 East Main Street, Pipestone, Minnesota, photographer- Mark Thode, 2017; from the collection of the Pipestone County Historical Society.*

By that time, Henke had made his mark in Pipestone by creating several ‘scenic decorations’ in the new Masonic Hall.<sup>9</sup> The Pipestone Masons had purchased the former Ferris Grand Block in the spring of 1917 and immediately set about to remodel the second and third floors for their fraternal use. Leo Henke was hired to paint murals in the Lodge room, which were completed in October 1917. He replicated twelve images from the 1903 book “Illustrated History of Freemasonry” which contained plates illustrating allegorical stories used in masonry.<sup>10</sup> Later that same month, Henke received first place premium for Best Oil Painting at the Pipestone County Fair.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> “New Painting Firm,” *Farmers’ Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 4 October 1917, p.1 c.5 p.2.

<sup>9</sup> “New Painting Firm,” *Farmers’ Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 4 October 1917, p.1 c.5 p.2.

<sup>10</sup> Moses W. Redding, *Illustrated History of Freemasonry*, Redding & Co., New York, 1903.

<sup>11</sup> “County Fair Premium Winners,” *Pipestone Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 11 October 1917, p.3.

It may have been between October 1917 and October 1918 that Leo Henke spent several months in Chicago, where ‘the war caught me.’<sup>12</sup> He had a hard time there financially, working several odd jobs such as at a ‘chicken ranch,’ sleeping in nickel movie theaters and Lincoln Park and being under social suspicion due to his heavy Austrian accent. Eventually he found work with an Austrian artist for ‘several months’ before he gave up Chicago.



*Leo Henke portrait, Chelsey Glass Plate Negative collection, 1893-1924; from the collection of the Pipestone County Historical Society.*

The Pipestone partnership with Meuhlenbeck was short-lived, as Henke advertised solo once again in October 1918, giving his studio address as 506 West Olive Street, which may have also been his residence.<sup>13</sup> In mid-December 1918, Leo Henke was injured in a train collision near Willmar.<sup>14</sup> He was a passenger on the Great Northern enroute to St. Paul. He did not complete his trip but returned immediately to Pipestone. It is not known how severe or what exactly his injuries were.

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<sup>12</sup> “Leo Henkora Now a Portrait Artist,” *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 27 May 1926, p.1 c.6 p.1.

<sup>13</sup> Advertisement, *Farmers’ Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 17 October 1918, p. 7. *Painting! Leo A. Henke.*

<sup>14</sup> No title, *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 20 December 1918, p.5 c.5 p.5(b). No title, *Farmers’ Leader* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 19 December 1918, p.1

Leo Henke was married to Esther Newcomer on January 1, 1919.<sup>15</sup> She was 19, he was 26 years old. They chose to marry in Sioux Falls, South Dakota even though both were living in Pipestone at the time. The ceremony took place at the parsonage of the Congregational Church with only Esther's mother, Mrs. A.D. Brown, in attendance.<sup>16</sup> After a short honeymoon in Sioux Falls, the couple returned to Pipestone.

The marriage did not last long. A year later, in January 1920, they were not living together. He was boarding with a furniture salesman's family and Esther was living with her mother.<sup>17</sup> Leo Henke left Pipestone for good soon after that and was working as a commercial artist in Minneapolis by 1921.<sup>18</sup> It was also at that time he changed his name to Henkora, the surname he used for the rest of his life.

When Henkora made his way to Minneapolis, he first found work painting barns.<sup>19</sup> He began to study at art school and soon received a scholarship. He reveled in the creative freedom of America and was amazed that he could both work to support himself and study art at the same time, an opportunity he did not see available in Europe.<sup>20</sup>

The 1920s in Minneapolis was a golden time for Leo Henkora and he immersed himself in the art community.<sup>21</sup> He became a member of the Society of Independent Artists, the National Art Association, the Academy of Fine Arts, the American Artists Professional League, and the American Federation of Arts. He practiced painting, block printing, lithography, etching and illustrating. He also lectured and was an art instructor. Henkora studied under Anthony Angarola and Cameron Booth. By 1924 he was the director of the Minneapolis Sketch Club.<sup>22</sup> That same year he received first place at the Minnesota State Fair.<sup>23</sup> In 1926 Leo Henkora was an instructor at the Minneapolis School of Art.<sup>24</sup> It was then he was going into portraiture, having just finished a portrait of John S. Dalrymple and was planning one on Dr. George Eitel.

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<sup>15</sup> Record of Marriage, South Dakota Department of History, Division of Census and Vital Statistics, #66590; Ancestry (<http://www.ancestry.com> : 18 July 2020).

<sup>16</sup> "Newly Weds Return," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 7 January 1916, p.5 c.3 p.16.

<sup>17</sup> 1920 U.S. Census, Pipestone, Pipestone County, Minnesota; Leo Henke in the Max Campbell household, Dwelling #4, Family #4; Ancestry (<http://www.ancestry.com> : 18 July 2020). 1920 U.S. Census, Pipestone, Pipestone County, Minnesota; Esther Henke in the W.D. Brown household, Dwelling #336, Family #333; Ancestry (<http://www.ancestry.com> : 18 July 2020).

<sup>18</sup> 1928 Minneapolis City Directory, Ancestry (<http://ancestry.com> : 20 July 2020).

<sup>19</sup> "Leo Henkora Now a Portrait Artist," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 27 May 1926, p.1 c.6 p.1.

<sup>20</sup> "Leo Henkora Now a Portrait Artist," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 27 May 1926, p.1 c.6 p.1.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Hastings Falk, editor, *Who Was Who in American Art*, Soundview Press, 1985, p.276; compiled from the original 34 volumes of "American Art Annual: Who's Who in Art" biographies of American artists active from 1898-1947. Glenn B. Opitz, editor, *Mantle Fielding's Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers*, Apollo Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1987, p. 395.

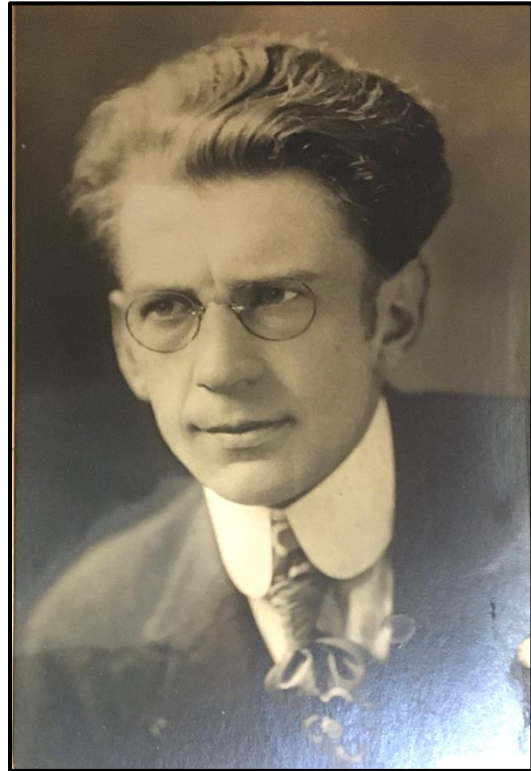
<sup>22</sup> "Henkora's High Rank Won by Perseverance," *Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, Minnesota) 5 January 1928, p.1.

<sup>23</sup> Glenn B. Opitz, editor, *Mantle Fielding's Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers*, Apollo Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1987, p. 395.

<sup>24</sup> "Leo Henkora Now a Portrait Artist," *Pipestone County Star* (Pipestone, Minnesota) 27 May 1926, p.1 c.6 p.1.

In 1927 he opened the Henkora School of Art in Minneapolis, which operated through at least 1932.<sup>25</sup> The school generally operated for a fall term and catered to fine art students as well as those entering the commercial art field.

In 1928 Henkora received second place for portraiture and for Batik decoration at the Minnesota State Fair.<sup>26</sup> He also married his second wife, Laverne Bugbee, in Minneapolis in 1928.<sup>27</sup> She had been a colorer at Buzza Company, and he continued to work as an artist.<sup>28</sup> His second marriage was as brief as his first, as Leo and Laverne were divorced by 1933 when he married his third wife, Sarah Oothoudt, age 27, in Hennepin County, MN.<sup>29</sup> Leo was 42.



*Leo Henkora portrait; from the collection of the Pipestone County Historical Society.*

During the depression, Leo Henkora may have been involved in WPA art projects. By the mid-1930s he was living in North Dakota and he is known to have done mural work at the Burleigh

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<sup>25</sup> Xxx. "Henkora Art School to Open Sixth Season," *Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, Minnesota) 8 October 1932, p. 25.

<sup>26</sup> Glenn B. Opitz, editor, *Mantle Fielding's Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers*, Apollo Books, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1987, p. 395.

<sup>27</sup> *Minnesota Official Marriage System [MOMS]* (<http://moms.mn.gov> : 10 November 2020) Leo Henkora, Hennepin County.

<sup>28</sup> 1929 Minneapolis City Directory, *Ancestry* (<http://ancestry.com> : 20 July 2020).

<sup>29</sup> *Minnesota Official Marriage System [MOMS]* (<http://moms.mn.gov> : 10 November 2020) Leo Hankora, Hennepin County.

County Courthouse in Bismarck, North Dakota.<sup>30</sup> By 1938 Leo and Sarah Henkora had made their way west to Missoula, Montana, where Leo took work as an interior designer.<sup>31</sup>

After World War II, Leo and Sarah Henkora settled in Pendleton, Oregon where Leo continued to work as an artist.<sup>32</sup> Sarah took work with the U.S. Weather Bureau and eventually became a meteorologist.<sup>33</sup>

Leo Henkora died in 1954 and was buried at Olney Cemetery in Pendleton, Oregon.<sup>34</sup> His third wife, Sarah Henkora, is also buried in Olney Cemetery, though their plots are not adjacent.<sup>35</sup>

Although he left Pipestone behind early in his career, Leo Henke/Henkora left an immense legacy to the community. Leo Henke was not itinerant, but his time in Pipestone was fairly short compared to a lifetime. The twelve murals he was commissioned to paint for the Masonic Lodge in 1917 have long been touted as one of Pipestone's hidden gems, although extraordinarily little knowledge was retained about the artist himself. After he changed his name to Henkora it was that much more difficult to connect his two lives. The community of Pipestone can now know that their murals were painted by an artist who went on to have a rich and varied career.

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<sup>30</sup> 1936 Fargo City Directory (North Dakota), *Ancestry* (<http://ancestry.com> : 20 July 2020). "Local Artist's Painting will be Hung in North Dakota Courthouse," *Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, Minnesota) 3 April 1931, p.12.

<sup>31</sup> 1938 Missoula City Directory (Montana), *Ancestry* (<http://ancestry.com> : 20 July 2020).

<sup>32</sup> 1946 Pendleton City Directory (Oregon), *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : 20 July 2020).

<sup>33</sup> 1946 Pendleton City Directory (Oregon), *Ancestry* (<http://www.ancestry.com> : 20 July 2020). Also 1948, 1953.

<sup>34</sup> "Leo Augusta Henkora" memorial, *Find-a-Grave* (<http://find-a-grave.com> : 10 October 2020) Olney Cemetery, Pendleton, Umatilla County, Oregon; Block 11, Lot FOE (Fraternal Order of Eagles.)

<sup>35</sup> "Sarah S. Henkora" memorial, *Find-a-Grave* (<http://find-a-grave.com> : 10 October 2020) Olney Cemetery, Pendleton, Umatilla County, Oregon; Block 35, Lot 18, Grave 5.

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