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Painting Called Too Violent for Children Won't Return

By MATTHEW J. MALONE

GREENWICH, Conn., Sept. 28 — The skirmish is over and all sides are claiming victory, but a large painting deemed too violent for elementary school children will not return home.

The painting, by James Daugherty and commissioned in 1935 by the Works Progress Administration, had hung at the Hamilton Avenue School for 60 years, until about 8 years ago, when the painting — blackened by age — was removed from a wall in the gymnasium for restoration. After it was restored, the painting was hung in the town library while officials considered renovating the entire school.

Trouble broke out when officials considered a request from a school committee for the return of the painting, which measures 20 feet by 9 feet and depicts in striking detail Gen. Israel Putnam, a [Connecticut](#) resident who helped plan and then fight in the Battle of Bunker Hill. The committee wanted the painting for the school's new lobby, scheduled for completion next year.

But scrubbed of dirt, the painting became a richly colored scene of snarling animals, tomahawk-wielding American Indians and a half-naked General Putnam strapped to a burning stake.

“We run a very tight ship in terms of behavior,” said Damaris Rau, the principal of the Hamilton Avenue school. “How can I then have a mural that depicts guns and knives, when I don't accept that from my own children?”

Ms. Rau also said the school, which has the highest minority population in a predominantly white district, could not endorse a painting that cast Indians in a negative light.

While many parents agreed with the principal, other residents felt that historic value should trump efforts to protect the children.

“This is part of our history,” said Jill Chessman, who stopped Thursday to look at the painting with her 3-year-old son, Jimmy. “I don't think we should shield it from our children.”

Members of the Chickahominy Neighborhood Association in this relatively low-income section of town where the Hamilton Avenue School and the town dump are situated, were also reluctant to part with it.

Mike Harris, a trustee of the Ruth W. Brown Foundation, which paid for the restoration, said the painting was probably worth \$150,000 to \$250,000.

Sylvester Pecora Sr., who has lived in the neighborhood for 46 years and is head of the neighborhood association, said Chickahominy has long been a forgotten, relatively powerless part of town.

“We want what’s ours,” Mr. Pecora said. “With the mural, they thought they were going to take it. We made sure that they promised to give it back.”

On Wednesday night, about 20 residents unanimously agreed that the painting was too violent for the school. So it will remain in the library, in the reference section, where few children are likely to see it.

The neighborhood association agreed to drop its objection with the understanding that a new painting, depicting local history, would replace it.

No muskets allowed.

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