

The Art Students League of Connecticut 1888-1965

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(Charles Noel Flagg self portrait c. 1885, private collection)

In 1868, 20 year-old Charles Noel Flagg moved to Hartford from New York City to paint portraits. Hartford was prosperous and its wealthy families were a lucrative potential market for the young well-connected painter who was a cousin of the Vanderbilts. Flagg met Horace Bushnell, one of the city's most prominent citizens, who had befriended Flagg's father Jared Bradley Flagg when he first moved to Hartford to pursue a career as a portrait painter. Bushnell encouraged Charles Noel to pursue a career as an artist by first studying in Europe, as was the custom at the time for those serious about their artistic pursuits. The United States had few quality art schools. In 1872 a group of young aspiring painters with Hartford connections left for Paris. The group included Flagg, his older brother Montague, Robert Bolling Brandegee with his new wife, and William Bailey Faxon, who had bought the first painting Flagg had ever sold. They all began studying with Jacquesson de la Chevreuse. Dwight Tryon, also from Hartford, joined them four years later.

Flagg returned to New York in 1882 and finally settled in Hartford for good in 1887. He set up a studio in Room 27 of the Cheney Tower on Main Street, now called the Richardson. The building, designed by Henry Hobson Richardson, had been completed in 1876 and contained the studios of many of Hartford's painters including William Gedney Bunce who occupied a neighboring space.



(Cheney Block c. 1880)

“Thomas Connolly, a needy young artist of this city, went to Mr. Flagg in 1888 with some drawings, which he wanted the artist to look over. Mr. Conley also said that he wanted to learn to draw, but was too poor to pay tuition to a school.” (Hartford Courant, 11/11/1916). While in Paris, Flagg often said he had been impressed by a prevailing custom of senior painters holding open house a few nights a week to give free advice to young art students. *“Mr. Flagg told him (Connolly) that, if he would get two other students and come regularly three nights a week, he would teach them free. The other members of this first class were Dr. J. (Joel) F. Wright (a dentist) and Peter Loeser (a young saloon keeper).”* The first class was held in Flagg’s studio in November of 1888. Three more students were added in 1890 and another in 1891. By the end of 1892 there were 15 students in the class, among them Hartford born James Britton who was 14. Flagg named the classes “Flagg’s Free Night School for Drawing”, (sometimes referred to as Flagg’s Night School for Men). In 1894, James Goodwin McManus joined the class when he was just 11.

In 1894, Flagg moved his studio to the Ballerstein Building (later known as the Worth) and turned over his former studio to his class, which was renamed the Connecticut League of Art Students. The students were responsible for the rent, which they were struggling with at first. Charles Dudley Warner, the owner of the *Hartford Courant* reportedly gave them \$200 to pay the rent for four months. (*Hartford Courant 11/15/1915*).

The League held its first annual meeting in June of 1894, which was noted in the *Hartford Courant*. The first elected officers were Charles Etherington, president; W. C. Carney, vice-president; P. Potter, treasurer; Thomas Brabazon, recording secretary; and Louis Potter, corresponding secretary.

In January of 1895 there were 27 boys and young men studying in the Cheney Building studio. The January 19, 1895 *Courant* described the group as, “a voluntary

association for self-improvement, which pays its own expenses and whose members are workers." The instruction followed the system of the schools in Paris where Flagg had studied. "A visit to the class room is interesting and instructive. The room is well filled with easels, the younger students in the front rank, while the older ones for the most part range in a semi-circle about them. The model, a finely formed athlete, takes a position which he holds for from half to three quarters of an hour, and during that time the class room is absolutely quiet, except for the sound of the crayon on the paper. Each student draws from his own point of view, and the result is that the model is reproduced on paper in as many phases as there are members of the class present. The instructor Charles Noel Flagg, the artist, moves quietly about among the students, giving a word of advice as it is needed and encouraging them in every way. He is enthusiastic of the class and the manly way in which the members have gone about it." Flagg was quoted as saying, "These young men have got the true idea. They do all this themselves. They pay their rent, hire their model, and have purchased all their plaster casts and studio furniture, and they are working. Many of them are sure to be heard from in the future. They have the application and the desire to study, aside from what natural gifts they possess. Already two members of the class have graduated into fine positions in the illustrative work in New York. One, Mr. Chapin, having charge of that department of 'McClures's Magazine' and the other, James J. Britton only 16 years old, having a good place with Scribner's. (He was an illustrator.) Each success helps the ambition of the others. And the fact that they have made the league self-supporting, when abundant help has been offered by those who are interested, shows that the boys have the right spirit."



(Members of the Connecticut League of Art Students as they looked in Charles Flagg's tower studio in the Cheney Building in 1895: (1) C. Lasby Ongley, (2) James G. McManus, (3) Charles Etherington, (4) George Velt, model; (5) Thomas F. Dignam, (6) John M. Rourke, (7) Eanian Esrael, (8) Wallace R. Gonif, (9) William H. Smith, (10) J. G. DeWitt Morrell, (11) Michael O'Keefe, (12) Michael T. Cooney, (13) Thomas J. Connolly, (14) Lester Adams, (15) Colin Bruce Petblado, (16), George F. Stanton, (17) William C. Carney, (18) James Britton, (19) Charles Noel Flagg, (20) model, name unknown, (21) George J. Reed, sculptor, (22) Louis Potter, (24) Harry (Henry) F. Gernhardt, (25) Thomas Brabazon, (26) skeleton model, (27) James Etherington.)

The studio contained the requisite plaster casts to be used as models. From the beginning there was also a skeleton known as Mr. Bones. Trinity College had loaned a skeleton for use in the anatomy lectures. When it was reclaimed, a local banker, Melvin Blake Copeland who was having his portrait painted by Flagg, bought another as a replacement.

Sometime in 1895 the League undertook the first of its many migrations. The space in the Cheney Building had grown too small for the expanding group. They moved to the newly built Batterson Building on the corner of Asylum and High Streets.

"When the time came to transfer to the Batterson Building, the students gathered in the Cheney Block and there an unusual event took place. The skeleton was dismembered, each person taking a piece of it (the first one carried the skull) and led by Flagg, they proceeded two by two down the street. The procession attracted much attention and, before too long, a policeman espied the skull, followed by the rest of the bones. Recognizing Mr. Flagg, he surmised that the school was only in its natural process of moving and so let them pass by. Eventually the skeleton was reassembled in its new home, along with the casts of Venus, Adonis, Diana, and the Dying Gladiator." (Perkins page 101)

The *Courant* in November 14, 1915 described the Batterson studios. *"The room was seventy-five by forty-five feet, splendidly heated and ventilated and very light. Here the league was raised into a splendid organization. Little by little the walls, which were twenty feet high were covered with mural decorations, frescos and ornament from the brushes of the students."* Classes were offered on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday evenings. The League had an agreement with Trinity College. Trinity offered courses in French, English, and History, while the League offered art instruction to the Trinity students interested in studying art. This agreement lasted until 1910. One of the Trinity students who studied at the League was Louis Potter who became a noted sculptor. James Britton recalled in 1912: *"Potter was half through his course at Trinity College when he brought his bounding vitality to the old Tower Studio of the Cheney building. There was a bubbling gayety about the man from college that was at once diverting and refreshing to our laborious circle. For our task of drawing was scarce less rigorous than the daily grind that prefaced all our classical evenings, and the terms of our instruction were exacting and repressing. So when Potter came, with his astonishing 'a-haws,' and a roaring round of dinners, the life and the antiques (classes) all gathered with pipes, in wonderment at the man who was not de-pressed...Potter was always 'Potter' and Carney (another Trinity student)*

was always 'Carney,' while the rest of us were 'Peter' and 'Tom' and 'Jimmy', for our degrees had not yet come you know of 'mastership' in the arts...Then there were discussions, 'quite' important, on Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelites whose theories and practices were much frowned upon in our school." (Hartford Courant, 10/3/1912)



James Britton, *Self Portrait at the Art Students League*, collection of Ursula and Barbara Britton
At Flagg's suggestion, James Britton went to New York City in 1895 to study at the Art Students League of New York. But, he returned to Hartford in 1896. He described the League's new quarters he encountered on his return in his unpublished autobiography.



(James Britton, sketch of a self portrait from 1895, from Britton's diaries)



James Britton, *Self Portrait*, Dated 1910, (probably a copy of a portrait originally painted in 1895)

“When I saw the tall wooden partitions (at the Connecticut League of Art Students), the brilliant arc lamps burning, and with students bending over their drawing boards in the antique room and standing at their easels in the life class, everything I had seen of art class in New York - and the National Academy and George DeForest Brush’s class in the Art Student’s League – seemed pretty small. I went back to the big city feeling sorry for it that little Hartford could surpass it in this particular,

The loft (at the Connecticut League) was exactly the kind of place artists yearn for – capacious, rough, full of shadows and shifting cross lights, a place where you could paint in perfect freedom, a floor of heavy timbers which would take immediate proper care of paint drops or spilled turpentine. The brick walls were full of juts and recesses that made roomy shelves where things could be tossed and forgotten – and later explored with surprising results. The windows in the south room were high and outside the face of the building projected so that there was a wide trough. We used to climb up and sit on the deep window sill with feet in the trough and paint sunsets that glowed over behind the granite edifice (the state capitol building) on the green hill of Bushnell’s Park.”



(The Garde Hotel, formerly the Batterson Building. The League studio would have been on the front of the hotel on the 6th floor judging from Britton's description of sitting on the window sill facing the park.)

They were to remain in the Batterson Building for ten years and it was here that the League really began to flourish. In March of 1895 they were officially incorporated as the Connecticut League of Art Students and a constitution was adopted. By 1897 there were forty students. Architectural drawing classes were added. Flagg taught Antique Cast Drawing and Life Class, which involved drawing and painting from nude or draped models. Frederick R. Honey taught perspective. C. Henry Meyn taught the new architectural and decorative ornament class. Dr. E. K. Root delivered monthly lectures on anatomy, Professor Henry Ferguson gave lectures on history, Professor Charles F. Johnson taught English literature, and Professor W. R. Martin taught elementary French. Ferguson, Johnson, and Martin were all professors at Trinity College. The students paid 50 cents for monthly lesson tickets, unless they could not afford that much. The rules eventually had to be tightened to determine need since some students were apparently abusing the exception. Thomas Brabazon, who had been with the league from the beginning, was elected president at the annual meeting in July of 1897.

In addition to art instruction there were also fencing classes, a League orchestra was formed, and there was, of course, the usual student mischief. James Britton returned from New York in 1896 and he and a couple of his friends soon got into trouble:

1895-97 "I made some more drawings for Reese the manager for Hearst but had so much difficulty in getting paid that I decided to stop. Went back to Hartford to get down to business studying. Flagg commended my efforts but insisted I needed a long training. I went into the League and got into difficulties with the authorities for mischief in which Michael Cooney and Lester Adams took part. 1897 under suspension with Cooney and Adams from the Art League Hartford. Settled down to paint in my attic bedroom..." After a period of "expulsion" Flagg softened and found a way for Britton to continue his studies. "I brought the pictures I painted at home to Carney's

studio and Flagg saw them, asked me to call on him and suggested I come back to the league as his private pupil without payment of dues and without subservience to the council. I think Cooney went to Paris this year. Before he went (he suggested) we who constituted the life class Adams and I with himself wear in the school crimson velvet painting caps and black blouses. We had them made but I seldom wore mine.” (Britton diaries Misc. Volume 2, page 68-69)



(James Britton's Art League Poster 1900, showing a painting cap and blouse)

The long-suffering Flagg obviously put up with a lot. Britton describes an “orgy” that took place at Flagg’s home, presumably while Flagg was away. *“...the orgy which was staged in Charlie Flagg’s house by Connolly and Col. Wiczorek USA. Mc (McManus) and Jackson the fiddler and Billy Smith and I were there. It was an hilarious wine party Col. W picking the wine bottles out of the cellar closet through a picket gate on the end of a cord attached to a broom handle.”* (Britton diaries, July 20, 1927, Volume 7, page 111)

However it also appears that Flagg was not above joining some of the “mischief” himself. *“Henry Ernst’s was of course our favorite bar. There we could sit till he closed and drink little or much as we chose. Charlie Flagg usually came in and always bought beer and sandwiches whether we wanted any or not.”* (Britton diaries July 1927, Volume 7, pg. 113)

The league began to organize excursions to Farmington to sketch out of doors. In his presidential address in 1897, *“Mr. Brabazon spoke on a visit to a camp of the students near Farmington, where they work, surrounded only by nature.”* (Courant 7/2/1897). Britton often mentions excursions on the Farmington Avenue trolley to call upon Brandegee and Charles Foster for advice on their works and general socializing.

“But I can see Foster now submitting to our visits, which usually took him unawares and which he could hardly avoid as in the summer time his studio door was usually open. I can see him sitting in his rocking chair across the studio floor which was highly

polished wood holding a cigarette very gently and puffing very lightly as he listened to our questions or our bits of news and often raised his head and turned it toward us with raised eyebrows to ask what it we were last saying. The idea was of course that our chatter was of such little consequence to him that he couldn't be bothered hearing it although he had put himself in a position of listener... There were times in the old days in summer when the weather was very hot that Foster used to almost entirely forget his dignity. Then as we would sit out side on the ground around his studio and smoke, Foster used to burn grass at night as a 'smudge' to keep away mosquitoes. McManus and Smith (Wm. Smith) and I used to go often to Farmington in those days on Saturdays and Sundays." (Misc. Volume 7, page 118)

Walter Griffin and Brandegee began to assist Flagg in instructing the students at the League.

In 1901, the older members of the League formed the Society of the Connecticut Art League and held the first exhibition of the Society in the Board of Trade Room featuring works by Thomas Connolly, Carl Gernhardt, Dietrichs (?), Ralph Seymour, Thomas Brabazon, William H. Smith, Gedney Bunce, and Robert Brandegee.

Flagg began to hold annual "socials" for the League in his studio. In January 1901 the *Courant* reported on the social noting that M. Cohen sang, Britton played the organ, and Jacob Spivack played violin. Mrs. Brandegee, a professional cellist, often performed at these events. Britton was an accomplished musician who played piano, composed music, and made musical transcriptions. Around this time he organized an orchestra comprised of students of the league.

July 1927, "Tom Lindsay who died last year was a member of the League and a good baritone singer. He used to sing at the League with the orchestra I formed. That orchestra had quite a history and I had some valuable experience fussing over scores and parts...Our chief orchestral performances were given at Charlie Flagg's yearly dinners to the League men in his studio. I remember at one of these we played Schubert's terrible Unfinished Symphony... McManus used to bring in his snare drum to play the tympani parts, and he used to watch me very anxiously for a cue to beat the drum as he couldn't read the drum parts. We played the 'Paukenwirbel' Symphony (Symphony No. 103 'the Drumroll') by Haydn which gave Mc a chance. He also did good service in Mozart's 'March Turk'. We struggled with Beethoven's 'Eroica' Symphony one winter and worked over the orchestra parts of Hayden's Cello Concerto which we played at the Saengerbund with Mrs. Brandegee doing the solo part. The orchestra made a trip out to Brandegee's house in Farmington and gave a concert there. ...The League orchestra, great institution, God help us. Charlie Flagg used to be very proud of the 'League orchestra'. He knew nothing about music but seemed to think he was listening to something worth while in Beethoven, Haydn, and Schubert." (Britton diaries, Volume 7, page 115-)

In April of 1902, the orchestra gave a concert at the Batterson Building, which the *Courant* reviewed:

"It is not disparagement of the entertainment to say that the chief interest in the concert given last night in the studio of the Connecticut League of Art Students was in the surroundings. There was music of excellent quality and humor that provoked laughter, but there was also an air of Bohemia in the rude loft of the Batterson building, whose only decorations were evidences of the craft which the students ply. Brick walls and wooden partitions form the sides of the studio, and in places, big pictures have been painted on the bricks by the skilled hands of the young men who are treading the thorny path of art. Around the room last night were many plaster models, and scattered about were charcoal drawings from these and from the live models who pose in the studio. Beyond a low wooden partition, which formed the rear of the room used for last night's concert could be seen a number of small pictures some of them heads done in oil. Overhead were the bare steel rafters of the roof. From these two electric lights were suspended, shedding so subdued a light through their colored paper shades that the numbers on the program could scarcely be read, if at all. But no fault was found with that, for it contributed to the illusion and the atmosphere."
(Hartford Courant 4/11/1902)

Piero Tozzi, a former League student, who returned to his native Italy to study in 1902, wrote a letter to Flagg dated May 24, 1902 in which he expressed sentiments regarding the League similar to those James Britton wrote in his autobiography. *"I will never forget the Connecticut League of Art Students and the north room of the Batterson Building which (sic) I liked so much. Our school stands alone in the world. I have seen the New York and Neapolitan schools but cannot compare with ours."*
(published in *The Farmington Magazine* October 1902.)

As can be imagined, the rehearsals and concerts of the League orchestra in a residential and office building began to draw complaints from some of the other tenants. Fortunately for the League, the Batterson Building was owned by James G. Batterson who was the founder of The Travelers Insurance Company, an accomplished sculptor, and the father of Mrs. C. C. Beach who was herself a great patron of the arts. She, *"interceded for the students and the orchestra was continued although it was agreed to use the soft pedal on the organ and the kettle drum."*
(Hartford Courant 11/28/1920)

The second annual entertainment on May 1, 1903, in Flagg's studio, included a performance by a ten piece orchestra and concluded with a performance of an English comedy titled, *"My Uncle's Will"* performed by the League members. The orchestra performed again at the annual meeting of the League in November 1904, playing movements from symphonies by Haydn and Beethoven. (Haydn was Britton's favorite composer.) *"The orchestra was fortunate in having the services of Mr. Griffin as timpanist (Walter Griffin, a teacher at the school). He surprised his friends by a remarkable display of skill with the drum sticks."* (Courant 11/11/1904) Apparently, McManus was outranked as the drummer by his teacher Griffin at this concert.

In 1905, the Batterson Building was converted into the hotel Garde necessitating another move. The League secured a place called Haley's Hall at 34 Elm Street in a

space formerly used by the Salvation Army. The Mansuy & Smith Blacksmith shop was next door at 17-20 Elm. *"The students are very enthusiastic over their new quarters and they are working hard to get them into shape. When everything is ready there will be a moving day and the students will carry all the traps from the old quarters to the new. One member owns a real horse and wagon and he will probably be entrusted with the moving of the skeleton belonging to the league...The annual celebration, known as Mr. Flagg's party, which formerly was given in Mr. Flagg's studio in the Ballerstein Building, will probably be given this year in the new studio as a housewarming...This is the one night in the year that the students cut loose, the school orchestra plays its best and the speeches are not commonplace. And like those at the Gridiron Club dinners, they are never reported."* (Courant 2/27/1905)

Their enthusiasm notwithstanding, they did not find the new quarters as suitable as their old ones. The Courant reported, *"The next studio was wholly unsatisfactory. It was located on Elm Street by the Daniels mill and was very unhealthy."* The polluted Park River ran just behind the building and the sounds and odors that emanated from the nearby establishments were not very conducive to the creative process.



(34 Elm Street from Google Earth 2015)

However, the student's mischief continued in their new studio. *"Mr. Flagg brought from Bruges Belgium, a handsome green jug for the students who wished to draw still life. The students found another use for it was taken to a nearby saloon it was filled with beer for 10 cents and it held just nine glasses. This important matter was not brought to Mr. Flagg's attention for some time and when he learned of it the fastest runner in the league was sent out with a much larger jug."* (Courant 4/2/1920)

Milton Avery joined the League in 1905.

Around this time the Pickle Club was formed. It was, "a social organization of older members of the League which gathered around the model stand on Saturday nights smoking long clay pipes, drinking beer procured by 'the rushing the growler' from a neighboring café, and munching the inevitable crackers and pickle from which the club derived its name. On these occasions, the Pickle Club settled to their own satisfaction the destiny of the universe and the future of art in an aura of oratory and good fellowship". (Courant 12/5/1938)



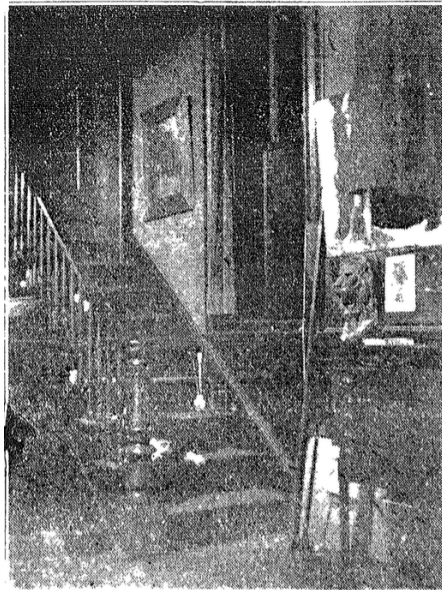
(Photo from the 3/2/1930 *Hartford Courant* of the Pickle Club with, from left to right, Walter O. Eitel, Walter C. Carney, Oscar Anderson, James Britton, Alfred J. Eaton, William Smith, Harry Schenker, Isaac Grant, Thomas Brabazon, Charles Noel Flagg, James Goodwin McManus, page E1)

"Mr. Flagg's Party" did indeed take place in the new quarters.

"ART STUDENTS MAKE MERRY": "The exercises last night began with selections by the league orchestra, James Britton wielding the baton. After his original composition of 'The Influence of the Blue Upon the Arts', the orchestra played the allegro andante and minuet movements of Hayden's G Symphony No, 22...The orchestra consisted of two flutes, two clarinets, two bassoons, six first and second violins, three violas, three cellos, two basses and a trombone....According to custom, Thomas Brabazon acted as toastmaster, and he first introduced Mr. Flagg, who spoke upon the student life in Paris and told of the life there of Robert Brandegee. Mr. Flagg spoke at length upon the object of the league and what it has accomplished. The students applauded him heartily. Mr. Brandegee told how he had brought four Plymouth Rock hens through the winter and had tried to prevent them from setting by putting an alarm clock in the nest....As the students have a celebration of this kind but once a year they do not place

any reckoning upon time and it is not known when the party broke up.” (Courant 6/9/1905)

The next few years saw several moves. In 1907 the moved from Haley’s Hall to Mueller’s Hall at 92 Pearl Street, then to a “*small and uncomfortable place on Main Street over Vogel’s delicatessen shop where it remained for a year.*” They then moved back to Pearl Street over the State Savings bank and then back to the rooms at 92 Pearl Street, “*which were also unsatisfactory although the league remained in them for a total of seven or eight years. It was in these room that the Bohemian atmosphere of the school greatly developed and still local artists remember with affection, the smokers held there after work was done, the old organ under the staircase, the great vase which at times was wont to hold malt liquor, the little earthenware mugs, the swirling blue smoke and the mighty discussions waged on art and the beautiful...These were the days of the ‘old league’ when the school was one big family, and its contents common property.*” (Courant 11/14/1915)



(Photo from 3/2/1930 Courant of studio in Mueller’s Hall)

The annual banquets continued, always reported in the *Courant*. In June of 1907, “*Thomas Brabazon acted as toastmaster and after the good things had been more or less demolished, introduced Mr. Flagg.*” (Courant 6/7/1907). Ernest Britton, James’ brother, who was not an artist, was made an honorary member of the League, presumably for his contributions to their concerts since he was a trained musician. In June of 1908, “*Robert B. Brandegee of Farmington was hailed with the strains of ‘In the Good Old Summertime’ from the orchestra (of 15 pieces). He spoke of the summer crops and his experience raising hens.*” (Courant 6/5/1908) By this time the students knew quite a lot about Brandegee’s hens.

In May of 1910, the League held the first of what was planned to be an annual exhibition in its studios. Among those participating were Brandegee, Ruel Tuttle,

Oscar Anderson, Victor Uberil, Daniel Wentworth, Harry Gernhardt, James McManus, A. J. Eaton, Louis Orr, Isaac Grant, Ralph R. Seymour, Carl Ringius, Paul Saling, W. C. Carney, Wm. H. Smith, Albertus Jones, Aage Moll, Vincent Olmstead, Alfred Miller, Piero (Peter) Tozzi, Frederick C. Bock, Harold Douglas, and everyone's favorite toastmaster, Thomas Brabazon. Oddly, Flagg does not appear to have participated as an exhibitor.

In July many of these same men participated in founding the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts for purposes of hosting an annual exhibition. The only member of the first Governing Council not associated with the League was Henry Cooke White. Its governing bodies were largely composed of League members for the next 40 years. The Academy drained some of the energy from the League. The first annual exhibition of the League proved to be the last, probably because most of its members were exhibiting with the Connecticut Academy after 1910.



The Council of Artists (Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts), 1921, by James Britton, oil on canvas, 36x48, private collection

(Painted in 1921. Depicts a scene in 1910 of the first Governing Council of the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts. From left: Charles Foster, Robert B. Brandegee, Henry C. White, Charles Noel Flagg, Daniel Wentworth, Thomas Brabazon, R. Russell Seymour, James Britton)

There was some kind of conflict between the League's members, perhaps having to do with the Academy. Britton did have his own conflict with the Academy during this time and attempted to form a rival exhibition group, the New England Academy of the Arts. James Britton, writing in the *Courant* announced the opening of an evening art school under the auspices of the New England Academy named the Evening School at the Hartford Art Institute. In addition to Britton, the teachers

were Harold Green, Alfred Eaton, Robert Brandege, and Daniel Wentworth. Constant Furyk, a former student of Flagg's, became a student at the school and was named President of the Hartford Art Association. Its only known exhibition was in 1913.

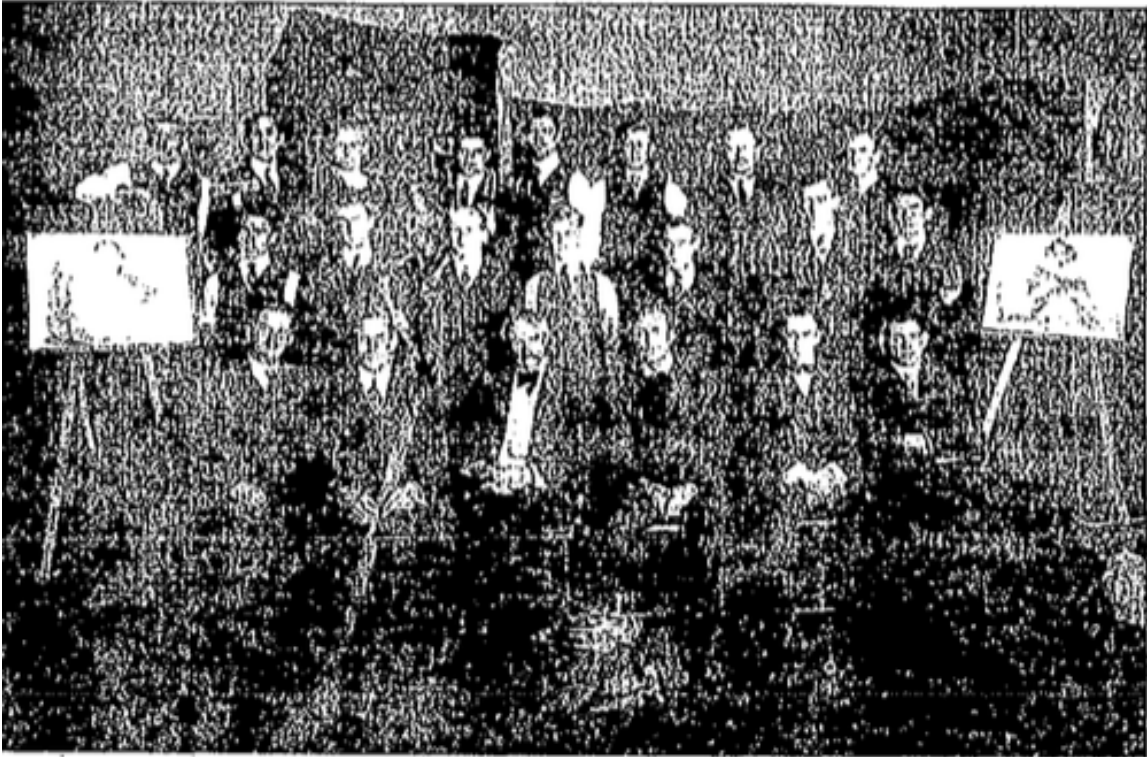
By 1912 the League school had reassumed the name *Flagg Night School for Men*. But, the annual socials continued. The *Courant* reported on the social on April 15, 1912 in Flagg's studio at the Dillon Building. When the school opened in October of 1912, for its 25th consecutive year, the *Courant* noted that the present membership of the school was the largest in its history and that two of the members of the school were sons of men who were in the class about 25 years ago. By 1913 the school was located at 39 Pearl Street and one source says that by 1915 it was located at 274 Asylum. (This might have been the address of Flagg's studio since no other reference has been found indicating that the school was ever located at this address.)

The 25th Anniversary of the opening of the school was celebrated on June 29, 1913 at the Hotel Bond. Past students returned from around the world to honor Flagg. Flagg spoke of his desire for:

"the prosperous continuation of a school this kind, one which requires no qualification for membership other than an avowed desire to study, and which asks no questions as to a man's character, race, or religion...I believe that no person should be barred this opportunity on the account of race, and as all religions preach a better life, why discriminate in a case of this kind?...I have been asked several times to affiliate my school with some other more regularly organized body, but have always declined, because I think that too much school government may be a mistake for art students, and also because I wished to be absolutely independent as to what manner of teaching I should employ, or what discipline, in the case of necessity, I should adopt. (Perhaps this refers to the conflict among the members that led to the name change in 1912)...In the history of art there have been periods when artists, singly or in small groups, desiring to avoid real hard work and achieve quick recognition, have introduced flippant expedients, in painting and sculpture, which generally speaking, are sensational, and so for a while, command the attention of a public always willing to be slightly shocked and much amused...When sifted in the sieve of time, that which is worth while remains, and the residue evaporates automatically." Flagg's comments are most likely a reference to the famous Armory Show that had taken place in New York City in February and March, just a few months before. Edward Yougk's orchestra furnished music for the occasion. (*Courant*, 6/20/1913)

In September of 1915 the *Courant* noted, *"The school has again taken its old name of the Connecticut League of Art Students, which was abandoned when there was dissension in the organization a few years ago. The old league produced many fine artists and, under the name of the Flagg Night School of Art has been continuing its work. For some time the school has maintained quarters on Pearl Street. The new rooms are located in the old Good Will Club building at 100 Pratt Street."* Flagg and Albertus Jones were the instructors. (*Courant* 9/28/1915) *"Because of its methods of*

instruction and the ideals of the man who is at its head, the Connecticut League will never become a big art school. Mr. Flagg's method is based not on a prearranged syllabus and course but upon the character and inclination of each individual student. There is no routine. Meat for one poisons another, and each student is encouraged to develop along his individual lines." (Courant 11/14/1915)



(The Connecticut League of Art Students. Seated from left to right in the first row. The four instructors of the school, Dr. William H. Andros, lecturer on anatomy, Isaac H. Grant, instructor in perspective, Charles Noel Flagg and Albertus E. Jones, instructors in drawing. *Hartford Courant* 11/14/1915)

On December 10, 1916, Charles Noel Flagg died in a Hartford hospital shortly after the deaths of his two close friends, William Gedney Bunce and Henry Ward Ranger. His pallbearers were James Goodwin McManus, William H. Smith, Albertus E. Jones, Carl Ringius, Thomas Brabazon, and Ralph R. Seymour, all alumni of the Connecticut League of Art Students.

Both McManus and Jones, who were the same age, had been assisting Flagg at the League. McManus was eventually selected to succeed Flagg and Jones chose to move to the competing Art School of the Hartford Society of the Arts, that eventually became the Hartford Art School at the University of Hartford. There was little mention of the League in the *Courant* after Flagg's death until 1920. Britton did note in his diaries on October 5, 1919 that while visiting Hartford he ran into several former League students who said, "*the school Flagg's school has gone to hell. No instructor no government - nothing - just lagging along.*" It is understandable that after 25 years of Flagg's strong leadership, there would be a period of adjustment.

However, McManus was up to the task and after a few years the League was back on track.



(James Britton's "The Man from Boheme", a portrait of James McManus, woodcut from and oil painting, private collection)

In 1920 they were on the move again, this time to quarters over Plymouth Lunch (now Capital Lunch) on Main Street, *"where the students can inhale their meals from the kitchen below them if they cannot afford to pay for them. This league of art students, always working without pay, has often been the victim of what is now known expansion or the jacking up of the rent by the landlord. Since Giotto the shepherd art students have had trouble with landlords."* There were 18 students in the class. (*Courant*, 11/28/1920)

It may have taken some time for the older members of the League to accept McManus' leadership, particularly those who had moved away. Britton mentions meeting "Ballerini", a former student, in New York. *"Says McManus is teaching the old Flagg League but only 7 or 8 student. Jones (who is teaching at the Hartford Art School) cuts them."* (Britton diaries 10/17/1921)

On January 29, 1922, the *Courant* again profiled the League. *"In Hartford there is a nomadic tribe known as the Connecticut Art Students League...Their endless quest for a shrine at which to worship art is an old story to the nomads and their 'palette parades' have become as regular as the annual spring moving day, only they are as likely to be ousted from a comfortable home in a snow storm as they are when the blue birds are singing....About a dozen of them hold the league together and only recently following close upon one of the most trying periods in its history, some of the old members have come back to stave off the landlords permanently, extend the influence*

of the organization and bring new members into the circle.” These efforts were apparently quite successful, since the report delivered at their annual meeting in 1923 noted that they had tripled their membership during the year.

In August of 1929 the peripatetic League was on the move again, this time to 183 Ann Street. During the summer the students were now participating in Guy Wiggins’ summer art school in Old Lyme where McManus had a summer home. *“Hartford has an ambitious group, all members of the Connecticut League of Art Students who come to a special class in landscape and figure painting given on Sundays for business and professional people by Mr. McManus and Mr. Wiggins.”* (Courant 8/4/1929) One member of the League at that time was Joseph Gionfriddo, a young man trained as a barber who had emigrated from Sicily in 1920. He studied with McManus at the Hartford Public High School night class and was invited by McManus to join the classes at the League. In 1928 he accompanied McManus to Lyme and was invited by Guy Wiggins to live at his home while the summer classes were in session. Just 22 years old, he won the Flagg prize of the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts for the best painting in the 1930 show. McManus was continuing the tradition of providing poor young man a path to develop their artistic talents. McManus also formed a women’s league around this time.

In 1933 the League had moved once again to 68 Temple Street, just down the street from their original home in the Cheney Tower. This was to be their final home. The Courant continued their regular coverage including memories of the old days.

In December of 1938 a dinner was held at the Garde Hotel to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the League, with a retrospective exhibit at the Wadsworth Atheneum. More than 100 people attended the dinner.

“they remembered nights upon which nickels and dimes were let down from the studio in a bucket which swinging from a string, banged against the saloon door and summoned the bartender who filled it up, and how they brought loaves of bread, using the inside to work over the drawings and eating the crusts. They relived the hilarious moments of the Pickle Club, and recalled that nearby one of their many studios had stood the blacksmith shop of “Professor William Shannon, Practical Horse Shoer.” Professor Odell Shepard of Trinity spoke. *“A half century of living for art and beauty is a long time when you consider the circumstances of a state in which acquisition is placed so far above creation. Perhaps there are two things that might be said about this phenomenon, which will take from it the sense of being a miracle. The first is its start under Charles Noel Flagg who decided that ‘art is not to be sold, but shared’ and thus neatly sidestepped the profit motive and every other aspect of business hostile to art’s life. The second is that perhaps it is not so strange as it might seem that the life has not been crushed out of you, for this rocky little state deep down cares more for things of the spirit than we usually remember. There are really two sides to Connecticut – that typified by the Yankee peddler, and the idealistic and spiritually minded side of which your history is deeply typical---In addition to rocks, Connecticut has always had its dreams.”* (Courant 12/11/1938)

"Gatherings after class at the 'Marble Pillar' since the League moved to Temple Street awaken echoes of the old Pickle Club. These impromptu meetings in the mellow atmosphere of Jacob Kraemer's old establishment marked the continuance of the spirit of good-fellowship, which has always characterized the League. Even this old landmark has now disappeared to make way for a modern structure." (Courant 12/5/1938) (The Marble Pillar moved to Central Row where it continued in business until 1993. Paintings by League members still lined its walls.)

The retrospective exhibit included work by Brandegee, Britton, Carney, Grant, Connolly (the first student), Anderson, McManus, and Avery. It was reviewed by Theodore H. Parker, who usually favored "modernism", but found much to like. *"The exhibition begins with the homespun forthrightness of the late nineteenth century, and lightens and brightens through successive reflections of Impressionism into various conservative and advanced phases of the modern art outlook. The bulk of it is fundamentally in the traditional vein, but still it is interesting to observe the play of other influences upon it...if Flagg were alive today, he would have had for both painters (Avery and Brandegee) sympathy and understanding. Probably his own preference would have been in the direction of the "Chess Player" (by Brandegee) but according to those who worked with him and knew and loved him, he had the superior intelligence which makes for real and lasting advancement of art." (Courant 12/13/1938)*

On September 5, 1958, James Goodwin McManus died at his summer home in Old Lyme. The League continued, but without a regular instructor. On October 1, 1964 they began planning for the celebration of their 75th anniversary. Appropriately, they passed a resolution honoring the *Hartford Courant*. *"We wish to take advantage of this opportunity to thank The Courant sincerely for the comprehensive and sympathetic coverage of the league's activities" (Courant 10/1/1964).* But for this faithful coverage, it is likely that much of this history would have been lost.

The 75th anniversary celebration occurred a year late in September of 1965 at the Hotel America. Malcolm Johnson of the *Courant* wrote a fitting eulogy. *"Down the drab corridor at the top of a long flight of stairs off Temple Street is a room filled with the clutter that always accumulates around working artists. Except for about six hours a week, the room is silent: plaster casts of Venus de Milo and the like, ranged about on cabinets or suspended from walls, stare blindly down on a clutch of easels, palettes, and paint rags. There are many paintings in the room, but perhaps the most striking are three huge canvases by a long dead Hartford artist (Charles Noel Flagg) who was known as one of the finest American portraitists at the turn of the century...Upon McManus' death, the league voted it would henceforth have no instructor, but that the students would all work independently to develop their own styles. But the league is still developing painters." (Courant 9/27/1965)*



(With the typical clutter that marks an art studio, members of the Connecticut League of Art Students paint from life during a typical night session, *Hartford Courant* 9/27/1964)

There was no further coverage by the *Courant* and the League appears to have quietly disappeared after reaching the venerable age of 75. Flagg, McManus, Britton, Brabazon, Jones, and the many other talented artists who taught and studied at the League are largely forgotten today, but they left a rich cultural legacy that deserves to be remembered. To quote from an August 28, 1921 article in the *Hartford Courant*, probably by James Britton; “It is hoped by many art lovers that pictures by more of Hartford’s own artists will be placed in these galleries (in the Wadsworth Atheneum) and that the time may come when a permanent exhibition or room shall be set aside to be devoted to the works of Hartford artists.”

Partial List of Early League Members
Hartford Courant 12/5/1938, with additions

Lester Adams, 1895 class
Johnny Anderson, cartoonist, Hartford CT
Oscar Anderson, marine artist, Gloucester MA
William H. Andros, instructor of anatomy
Milton Avery, artist, New York NY
Linn Ball, commercial artist, New York NY
Roy Bassett, architect, Hartford CT
Frederick C. Bock, exhibitor
Thomas Brabazon, rural landscape artist, Hartford CT
Robert Bolling Brandegee, artist, league instructor, Farmington CT
James Britton, artist and critic, Hartford CT
Frederick Brubacker, commercial artist, Des Moines IA
Harry Bryant, critic, New York NY
Willam Gedney Bunce, artist, frequent advisor to the league, Hartford NY and Venice
Colin Burr, commercial artist and designer, New York NY
William C. Carney, portrait artist, Cambridge MA
Joseph H. Chapin, art editor, Scribner's, New York NY
James Conland, artist, New Haven CT
Michael T. Cooney, artist, New Britain CT and Paris
Thomas H. Connelly, construction engineer, Pittsburgh PA
Benjamin B. Crocker, designer and illustrator, Hartford CT
Dietrichs
Thomas F. Dignam, 1895 class
Harold F. Douglas, commercial artist and set designer, Darien CT
Joseph A. Downing, antiquarian, Hartford CT
Walter O. Eitel, Hartford CT
Alfred J. Eaton, artist, Paris
Eanias Esraell, 1895 class
Charles A. Etherington, artist, Woodstock NY
James Etherington, 1895 class
Alexander Fenoglia, lithographer, Hartford CT
Charles Noel Flagg, artist and director of the League, Hartford CT
Montague Flagg, artist and guest league instructor, Hartford CT
Montague Flagg (son of Charles Noel Flagg), architect, New York NY
H. B. Freeman, commercial artist, Hartford CT
Constant Furyk, portrait artist, Hartford CT
Louis Fusari, artist, Hartford CT
Henry F. Gernhardt, landscape and marine artist, South Bend IN
Frank A. Giddings, artist, Hartford CT
Joseph Gionfriddo, artist, Hartford CT
Wallace R. Gonif, 1895 class

Raymond Goddell, teacher, Northampton MA
James L. Goodwin, architect, Hartford CT
Isaac H. Grant, artist, Hartford and Wethersfield CT
Walter Griffin, artist, league instructor, Hartford CT
Harold Green, portrait artist, Hartford CT
Walter Green, artist, Hartford CT
Morton Hanson, wood engraver, Hartford CT
Carl Heinrich, commercial artist, New York NY
Roy F. Heinrich, commercial artist, Detroit MI
Ray L. Hills, artist, VP Great American Indemnity Co., New York NY
Frederick R. Honey, league instructor, Hartford, CT
Albert H. Islieb, commercial artist, New York NY
Albertus E. Jones, artist, league instructor, Hartford CT
Clifford B. Knight, cartoonist, Hartford CT
Frederick Knowles, artist and engraver, Hartford CT
Walter O. R Korder, artist, Hartford CT
Joseph Kress, art editor, Boston Herald, Boston MA
Tom Lindsay
Peter Loeser, architect, Hartford CT
John M. Low, commercial artist
James Goodwin McManus, landscape artist and director of the League, Hartford CT
George Meyers, photographer, Hartford CT
Alfred Miller, exhibitor
Aage Moll, artist, Hartford CT
J. G. DeWitt Morell, 1895 class
Allen H. Newton, artist, VP Connecticut Trust Co., Hartford CT
Clinton O'Callahan, artist, Paris
Micahel O'Keefe, 1895 class
Vincent Olmstead, artist, exhibitor
C. Lusby Oogley, 1895 class
Louis Orr, lithographer, exhibitor, Hartford CT and Paris
William A. Patty, artist New York NY
Colin Bruce Petblano, 1895 class
William S. Porter, portrait artist, New York NY
Louis Potter, sculptor, New York NY
Sherman Potts, artist, CT
Edward G. Reed
George J. Reed sculptor
Carl Ringius, artist, Hartford CT
John M. Rourke, Brown Thompson's, Hartford CT
Paul Saling, decorator, artist, Hartford CT
Henry Saling, decorator, Hartford CT
Ralph R. Seymour, Phoenix National Bank, Hartford CT
H. Hilliard Smith, architect, Hartford CT
William H. Smith, artist, Hartford CT
Jacob Spicack
George F. Stanton, 1895 class

Peter (Piero) Tozzi, artist, New York NY and Rome
Ruel C. Tuttle, artist, Hartford CT
Victor Uberil
Nunzio Vayana, artist and photographer, Hartford CG
Daniel Wentworth, artist, exhibitor
Guy Wiggins, guest instructor, Lyme CT
Dr. Joel P. Wright, artist, Hartford CT

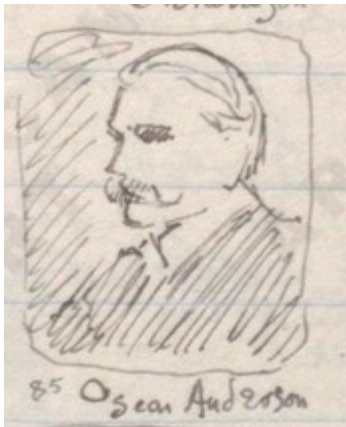
**Portrait Sketches of Connecticut Art Student's League Members
(By James Britton from his diaries)**



Charles Noel Flagg 1907



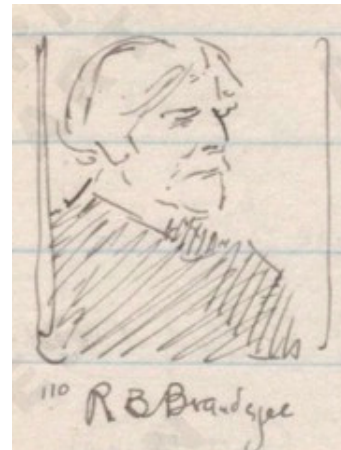
James McManus 1903



Oscar Anderson 1907



Thomas Brabazon 1906



Robert Brandegee 1908



James Britton 1902



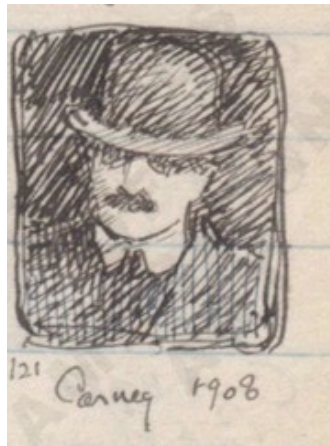
Wm Gedney Bunce 1907



Harry Bryant 1902



Collin Bunn 1924



William Carney 1908



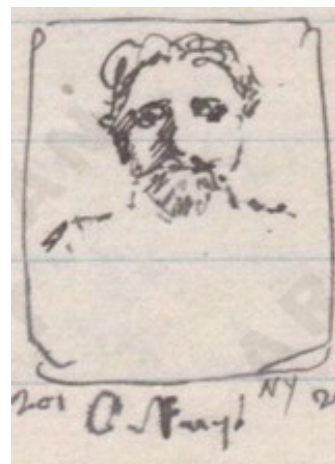
Michael Cooney 1895



Alfred J. Eaton c. 1915



Montague Flagg 1908



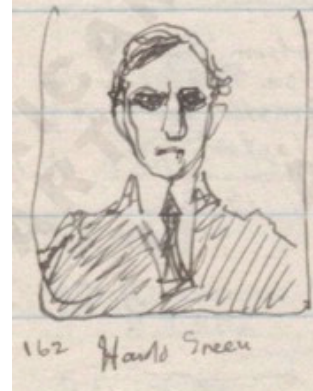
Constant Furyk c. 1918



Henry Gernhardt 1894



Isaac Grant c, 1900



Harold Green c. 1915



Ray L. Hills 1907



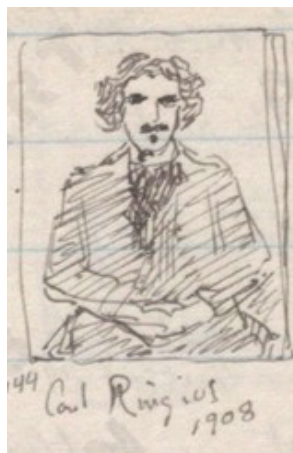
Professor F. Honey 1923



Joseph Kress 1915



Louis Potter c.1900



Carl Ringius 1908



Paul Saling 1915



Ralph R. Seymour c.1915



Peter (Piero) Tozzi c. 1915



Nunzio Vayana 1909



Captain Wiczorek 1901

Britton, James, "*James Britton Papers*", Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Museum

Geer's Hartford City Directory, 1905-1907

Hartford Courant: 1/19/1895 "Drawing from the Nude", 7/2/1897 "Art Students' League", 11/4/1898 "Art Student's League", 11/3/1899, 12/19/1900, 1/11/1901, 8/13/1901, 9/28/1901, 11/15/1901, 2/21/1902, 4/2/1902, 4/11/1902, 6/12/1902 Piero Tozzi letter, 12/4/1902, 5/1/1903, 11/11/1904, 2/27/1905, 6/9/1905, 6/7/1908, 11/16/1906, 4/26/1907, 5/17/1907, 6/7/1907, 6/5/1908, 6/6/1908, 11/8/1908, 12/4/1908, 5/8/1909, 2/14/1910, 5/25/1910, 4/15/1912, 10/3/1912, 6/20/1913, 9/28/1915, 11/14/1915 "Long and Varied Career of Connecticut Art League", 11/11/1916 "Charles Noel Flagg Died Suddenly", 11/12/1916, 4/3/1920 "Art Students Always Moving", 11/28/1920 "Amusing and Serious Experiences of Local Art Students' League", 1/29/1922 "Nomads of the Palette and Brush", 4/11/1922, 2/3/1923, 12/23/1927, 2/9/1929, 8/4/1929, 9/30/1929, 2/6/1930, 3/2/1930 "Lending a Hand to Young Genius", 2/19/1933, 12/5/1938 "Art Students League 50th Anniversary", 12/11/1938, 12/13/1938, 2/28/1944, 2/25/1945, 4/24/1945, 5/31/1947, 4/10/1948, 4/25/1948, 2/27/1950, 10/31/1951, 11/25/1951, 2/26/1952, 3/2/1954, 3/25/1954, 10.4/1955, 2/29/1956, 9/6/1958, 4/12/1959, 4/19/1964, 10/1/1964, 9/27/1965

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