

## ISTHMUS | The Daily Page

### Aaron Bohrod's Madison Public Library mural is preserved; UW studio faces demolition

Saved, lost

by Jay Rath

on Thursday 06/13/2013

The good news is that [Aaron Bohrod's mural](#) in the [Madison Public Library](#) is saved, restored as a centerpiece of the remodeled central facility, slated to reopen Sept. 21.

The bad news is that University of Wisconsin-Madison is poised to demolish Bohrod's historic studio, "Farm Place." It's one of the oldest buildings on campus.

In 1936 the UW College of Agriculture began a unique program of sponsoring artists. Ag dean Chris Christensen believed that a rural arts program was necessary for well-rounded citizenry. John Steuart Curry served from 1936 until his death in 1946. He was the first artist in residence at any university in the world. Bohrod replaced him in 1948, retiring in 1973. Both painted, lectured and worked with students and farmers throughout Wisconsin.

In 1965 Bohrod created a mural of 17 animals for Madison's Central Library, spanning the width of the children's section. To protect it during remodeling, a small building with its own climate control was essentially built around the painting, similar to what the Minneapolis-based [Midwest Art Conservation Center](#) created to protect Curry murals in the UW's recently remodeled biochemistry building. The firm also preserved and restored the Bohrod mural. Work concluded the week of May 13.

"First we documented it in high-resolution photography," says Joan Gorman, the center's senior paintings conservator. Custom-made cotton swabs were created for cleansing. Grime accumulated since the 1960s has been removed.

Lighting has been improved, and the floor has been raised 15 inches, allowing patrons a better view in a new gathering area. Gorman suspects that patrons who never noticed the mural before will be amazed.

Bohrod's modest Farm Place studio, next to the [Stock Pavilion](#), was built in 1868 and, with the nearby horse barn, is the last survivor of an early cluster of wood-frame buildings on the agriculture campus, including the nation's first dairy school. The studio is slated for demolition as early as 2014, for expansion of adjacent Babcock Hall, built in 1951.

"At this point we have no plans to relocate the old house," says Gary Brown, UW director of campus planning.

"This is kind of sad," says daughter Georgi Bohrod Gordon, of San Diego. Madison son Neil Bohrod calls himself stoic, resigned to others' progress.

Some say Farm Place is worthy of preservation for its long history alone.

"This house has been a small but vibrant fixture of the university for 145 years," says Anne Katz, executive director of [Arts Wisconsin](#), a nonprofit advocacy group. "It's served so many different facets of the Wisconsin Idea, from agriculture to arts to environment. I hope the university's leaders will find a way to honor and preserve the building's history as part of the UW's legacy for the future."

Farm Place was the last design of architect August Kutzbock, primary designer of Madison's second Capitol and the [Gates of Heaven](#) synagogue preserved in James Madison Park. He committed suicide during Farm Place's construction; his ghost is said to haunt Picnic Point, where he drowned himself.

