Burchfield's Salem

By Dick Wootten

In 1921, artist Charles Burchfield, a 28-year-old graduate of the Cleveland School of Art who had exhibited his watercolors in New York City the year before, decided that several old buildings in downtown Salem were interesting enough to be subjects of a painting.

The following year he was married and the young couple moved to Buffalo, N.Y., where Charles designed wallpaper until 1929, when he and his family began living off the sale of his paintings.

In 1941, he returned to that early painting of Salem buildings and enlarged it, making it appear that the structures were on the edge of some vast space. Of course, most of Burchfield's paintings carry with them a good dose of his creative imagination. It is fun to see in his art where the realism ended and imagination began.

In Salem you can still see much of Burchfield's Salem by walking around town. Those downtown buildings Burchfield painted are still here. So too are the houses in his neighborhood on East Fourth Street. The forests and fields that he roamed still surround Salem.

With the Burchfield maps of Salem on the next three pages you can compare his painting sites with his paintings. Thirty-one artworks are located on the maps.

Each painting has a number that corresponds to the circled number on the map. These circles attempt to show where Burchfield was standing when he painted his picture and the arrows show the direction in which he was looking. The maps were created by local artist Linda Sutter.

Charles Burchfield lived from 1893 until 1967. He resided in Salem from 1898 to 1921.

With his paintings in the Smithsonian Institution, Museum of Modern Art, and other great collections, Burchfield's name is firmly established in the history of American art. And Salem, Ohio (a place that inspired him long after he left it) continues to keep his memory alive.

"The Edge of Town" 1921 - 1941

Scene number 1 on map as it appears in 2023.
Southwest corner of State Street and Broadway Avenue

Layout and text adapted from
The Salem News, April 23, 1987

#2 "Rising Smoke" 1917
Scene different now

#3 "Noon Whistle in January" 1929
Building today at Southeast corner of
Franklin Avenue and South Ellsworth.

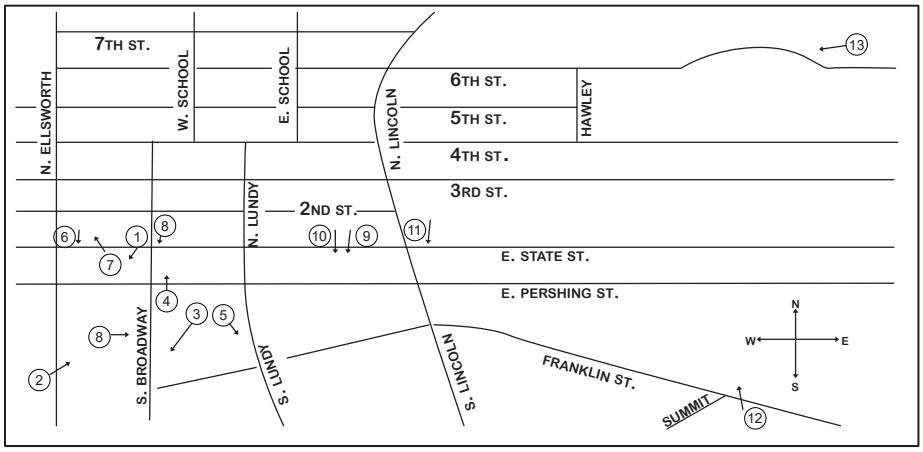
#4 "The Interurban Line" 1920
Buildings on left are still identifiable.

#5 "Circus Poster 999" 1917
Buildings gone. Steeple same.

#6 "February Thaw" 1920
Fantasy versions of buildings rearranged on State Street.

#12 "Gothic House" 1920
Except for missing center gable, structure remains.

#13 "The Three Trees" 1931-46
Scene changed - now site of Salem High School.



#7 "Main Street Winter Day" 1917 - Reworked years later.
Artist's private joke "1893" on building is his birth year.

#11 "Church Bells Ringing
Rainy Winter Night" 1917
Baptist Church SE corner
State and Lincoln (now gone)

#10 "Back Alley No 2" 1920
Stairway on right is gone. Building
at end alley is possibly old Penn Grill.

#9 "Three Days of Rain" 1918

#8 "Backyard in Spring" 1917-46
Building on left was Broadway Hotel, razed in 1920's.
Two buildings adjacent to the hotel still exist.

#14 "Trees and Roofs" 1915

#15 "The Night Wind" 1918
Fantasy version of house across the alley.

#16 "The Christmas Chimney"

#17 "Night of the Equinox" 1917-1955
His boyhood home on the left is currently
the Burchfield Homestead Museum.
On right with tall chimney is "Night Wind House"

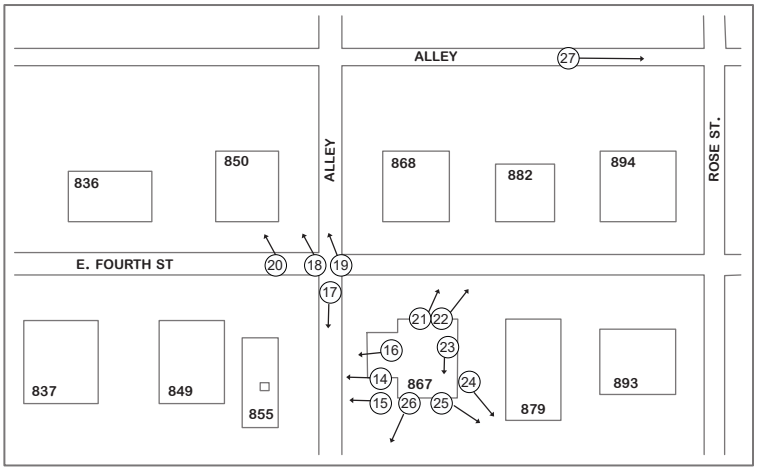
#25 "Gentle Snow Fall" 1920

#26 "Power Lines and Snow" 1916

#27 "Village Lane, Morning Sunlight" 1916

#18 "Sunlight Before The Storm" 1915

#24 "Flower Pot in Window" 1919



#19 "Wet Winter Dusk" 1916

#23 "In the Bedroom Studio" 1917

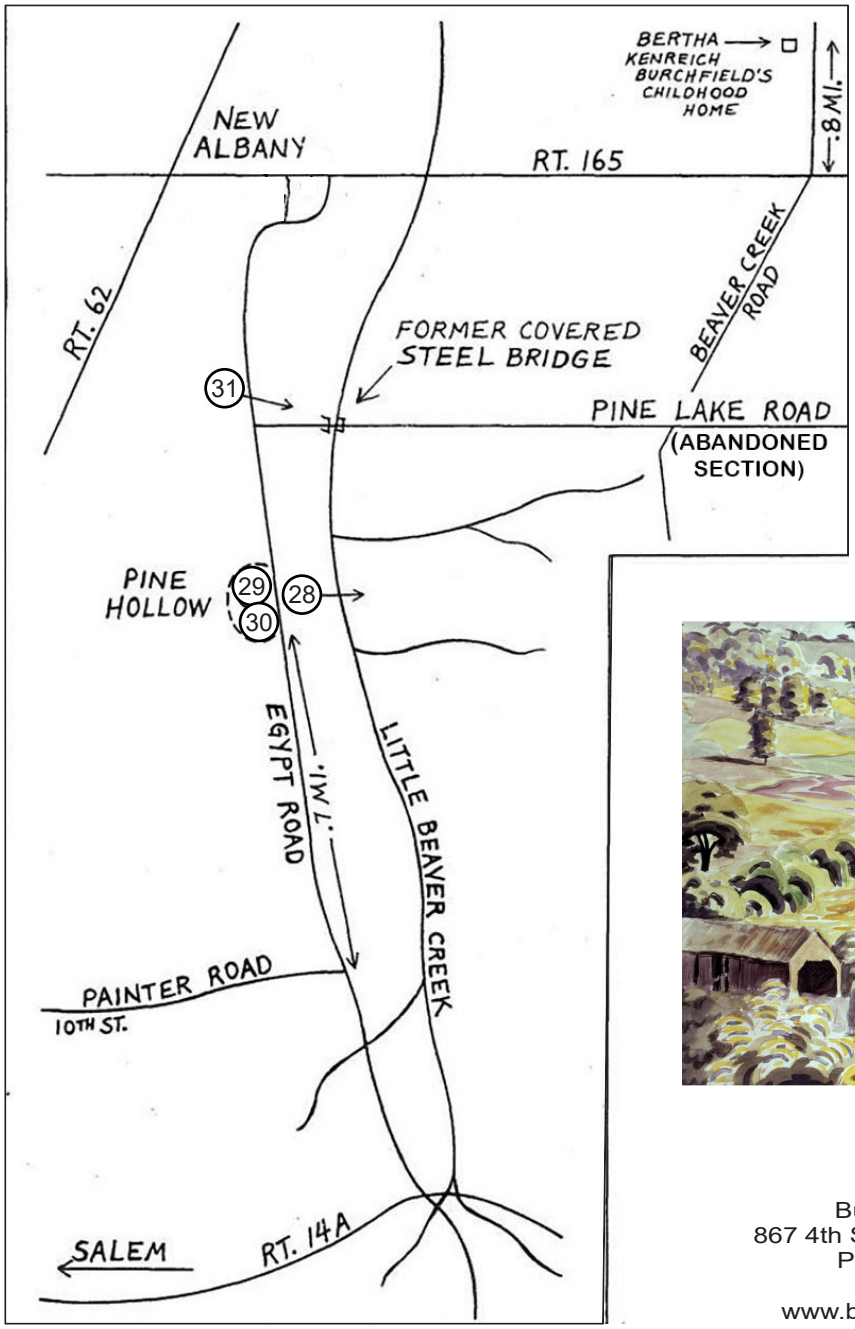
#22 "Noon Sunlight in Winter" 1917

#21 "Storm" 1917

#20 "The Song of the Katydids
on an August Morning" 1917

#28 "View Near Salem, Ohio" 1917
View is similar today.

#29 "Pine Hollow in Spring" 1917



#30 "White Violets and Coal Mine" 1918

#31 "Little Beaver Valley" 1917

Burchfield Homestead
867 4th Street / Salem, Ohio 44460
Phone: 330-717-0092

www.burchfieldhomestead.com