

Columbia City Arts Commission Meeting Minutes

October 7, 2025

I. Call to order

Commission Chair Jennifer Romano called to order the regular meeting of the Columbia City Arts Commission (CCAC) at 5:02 p.m. on Tuesday, October 7, 2025, in the Common Council Chambers of Columbia City Hall, Columbia City, Indiana.

II. Roll call

The following people were present: Jennifer Romano (Chair), Greg Hockemeyer (member), Mike Thomas (member), Connie Boggs (member), April Frazier (member), Taylor Ford (new member), and Chip Hill (staff). Doug Egolf was absent but notified in advance. Gina DeRocha and Rachel Hartman attended as guests.

III. Approval of minutes from the last meetings

Connie Boggs moved to approve the September 2, 2025, meeting minutes as presented, seconded by Mike Thomas, and the motion was approved by voice vote, with Taylor Ford abstaining.

IV. Open issues

- *Welcome of New Member*
 - Taylor Ford introduced herself as a Columbia City native, music educator, and arts advocate.
- *Artists' Studio Tour Recap:*
 - Attendance was lower than in previous years, with 67 visitors at the museum and fewer than 20 at other stops.
 - Members discussed confusion caused by scheduling the tour the day after First Friday and suggested moving the date or coordinating better with First Friday events.
 - The group praised the musicians and sound technician, despite low turnout.
 - Scott Frazier was thanked for creatively assembling flag structures using fishing poles due to missing parts. The vendor later corrected the issue
- *September First Friday:*
 - Members confirmed participation in the event in various capacities.
 - April Frazier offered autumn-themed objects to be colored and, together with Connie Boggs, manned the Commission booth.
- *Calendar Project*
 - The calendar features historical local artists and includes sketches and collages. Members discussed adding stickers for event dates to allow flexible printing.
 - The calendar will include artists such as Gertrude Meredith, Kate Clugston, Vern Coleman, and Dr. Otto Lemberg.
 - Goal to finish calendar before the year's end.
- *Promotions*
 - Bones Theater Videos – Nothing new.

- WJHS Underwriting – Nothing new.
- *Holiday Event(s)*
 - By acclamation, the Commissioners opted to abandon plans for a holiday market because there is not enough time to plan out and other similar community events are planned.
- *America 250 Collaboration*
 - Rachel Hartman presented a mural project for the 250th anniversary of the U.S., proposing three canvases themed “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness,” respectively.
 - The Commission expressed interest in collaborating, helping with artist outreach, and possibly contributing financially.
- *Public Art Garden Proposal*
 - Gina DeRocha proposed a public arts garden with meditative spaces, rotating art installations, and community engagement.
 - Members discussed potential locations, including Eagle Park and Baker Park, and agreed to help connect Gina with city officials.
- *Arts Pantry*
 - Members discussed launching an arts supply cabinet for community use.
 - Donations have already been received, and the goal is to have it ready by year-end.

V. Other Business

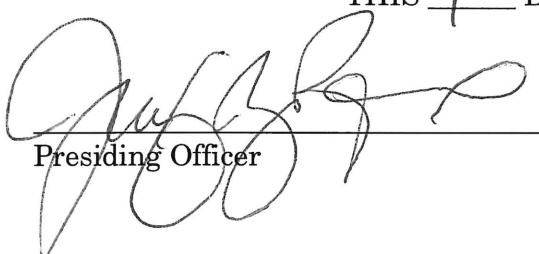
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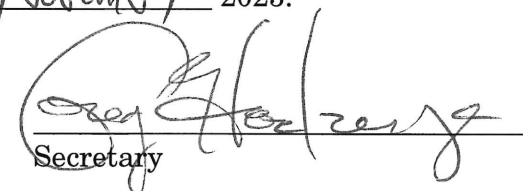
VI. Adjournment

Mike Thomas moved to adjourn the meeting, seconded by April Frazier, and passed by voice vote. The meeting adjourned at approximately 6:20 p.m.

October 7, 2025, MEETING MINUTES APPROVED BY THE MEMBERSHIP

THIS 4th DAY OF November 2025.


Presiding Officer


Secretary



Gertrude Meredith

1882-1957

WRITER & EDITOR

Born July 1, 1884, in Richland Township, Whitley County, to Josiah and Ida (Cullison) Meredith, Gertrude spent nearly her entire life in Columbia City. A graduate of Columbia City High School, she began her career at Myers Creamery before joining The Commercial-Mail newspaper on October 15, 1905 — the start of more than 50 years in local journalism.

Over the decades, Gertrude served as bookkeeper, circulation manager, reporter, and eventually society editor. Her lively and detailed accounts of weddings, club meetings, and community events captured the social life of Whitley County for generations. It was estimated that she wrote about more than 5,000 weddings — often chronicling multiple generations of the same families.

Beyond her work, Gertrude was deeply involved in civic life. She was a charter member of the Business and Professional Women's Club, a past Worthy Matron of the Order of the Eastern Star, and active in the Baptist Church's missionary society and other local organizations.

Despite a quiet nature, she described the celebration of her 50th work anniversary in 1955 as one of the most thrilling moments of her life. Even after fracturing her hip in 1956, she continued editing the society page from her bed until the day before her death on March 20, 1957, at age 72.

Gertrude Meredith remains remembered as one of Indiana's longest-serving and most dedicated society editors — a woman who "lived other people's lives" through her words and celebrated the stories of her community.



JANUARY 2026

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Elmer Stewart

1886-1962

WRITER & EDITOR

Born October 17, 1886, in Van Wert, Ohio, Elmer Clifton Stewart came into the world alongside his twin brother, Albert — two boys whose shared gift for art would soon become their defining bond. The sons of George and Mary (Keil) Stewart, Elmer and Albert grew up surrounded by creativity; their father was a photographer, and artistry seemed to run in the family's very blood.

In his youth, Elmer was not only talented with a brush but also a championship swimmer — disciplined, precise, and full of quiet determination. Together, he and Albert became well known for their extraordinary ability to work side by side, sometimes on the same canvas, their styles so in tune that few could tell where one hand ended and the other began. While Albert went on to become a lithographer and their older brother Harry an architect, Elmer pursued life as a professional artist. The brothers' collaboration was tragically cut short when Albert died in 1914 at just 27, leaving Elmer without his lifelong artistic partner.

Elmer's own career flourished. Working primarily in oils, he became known for his luminous landscapes and reverent religious scenes, many commissioned by churches and institutions throughout the region. His paintings — rich in color, emotion, and quiet devotion — earned him wide recognition and numerous awards.

For many years, Elmer maintained a studio at 405 East Wayne Street in Fort Wayne before settling at Blue Lake near Churubusco. There, neighbors remembered the sight of him at his easel, sunlight streaming through the windows as he brought his visions to life — an artist forever connected to his faith, his family, and the natural world he painted so beautifully.

FEBRUARY 2026

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Verne Coolman

1924-1998

PHOTOGRAPHER & GRAPHIC ARTIST

Born September 4, 1924, in Columbia City to Glenn and Clela (Eve) Coolman, Verne grew up surrounded by creativity and enterprise – his father ran a tire shop, while Verne immersed himself in the arts.

At Columbia City High School, he was a standout in speech, drama, writing, and leadership, serving as senior class vice president and editor of the school paper before graduating in 1942.

A Coast Guard veteran of World War II, Verne later attended Butler University, Hobart College and Northwestern University, where he studied dramatic art on scholarship. Returning home, he combined his business sense with his artistic eye, transforming his father's tire shop into a hub for photography services and supplies – bringing modern photo developing to Columbia City.

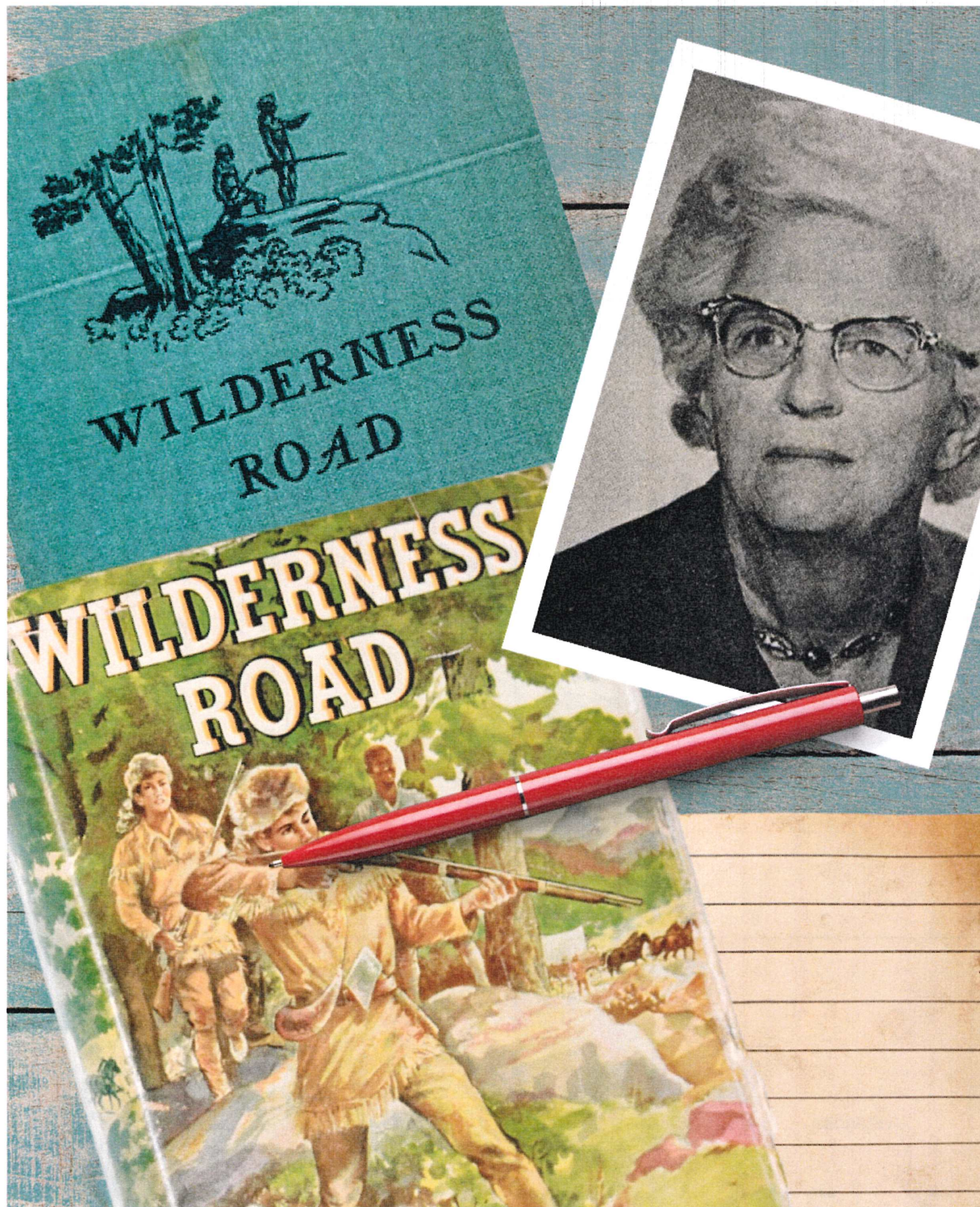
His talent behind the lens led to a career in communications, first with Blue Cross Blue Shield and later with the American Legion, where he served as editor of the American Legion News Service and graphic artist for the national headquarters until his retirement in 1990.

Verne was a lifelong member of Columbia City United Methodist Church and American Legion Post 98.

He passed away April 5, 1998, in Mooresville, Indiana, leaving behind a legacy of creativity, service, and community spirit.

MARCH 2026

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Kate Clugston

1892-1985

PLAYWRIGHT & THEATRE INNOVATOR

Born in 1892 in Whitley County, Indiana, Katharine "Kate" Thatcher Clugston emerged as a trailblazing playwright, educator, and theater innovator. After graduating from high school in Indiana, she earned her bachelor's degree from Wells College in 1914 and went on to study at Radcliffe College and the Yale School of Drama under the legendary George Pierce Baker.

Clugston's early work captured attention: her play *Finished* received glowing reviews in New Haven, and its New York production, retitled *These Days*, marked the Broadway debut of Katharine Hepburn in a supporting role in 1928. The play later inspired the 1934 film *Finishing School*. Another of her works, *The Head of the Family*, was adapted into the 1934 film *The Last Gentleman*, starring George Arliss and Charlotte Henry. Some of her books included *Wilderness Road* and *Murder in the House*.

A Guggenheim Fellowship in 1931-1932 enabled Clugston to study abroad, expanding her artistic vision. She later served as head of the Play Bureau in the Federal Theatre Project, producing influential reports such as *Reorganization of the Play Bureau* in 1936.

In addition to her theater accomplishments, Clugston was a pioneering educator. She founded Wells College's Department of Public Relations and served as its director from 1944 to 1947, while teaching English until her retirement.

She spent her later years on Chebeague Island, Maine, where she continued to inspire through her work and intellect until her passing in 1985.

APRIL 2026

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Carolyn Beard

1937-2025

PAINTER & MULTI-MEDIA ARTIST

Carolyn Jean Keppler Beard was born May 3, 1937, in Whitley County, Indiana, the daughter of Howard Meredith and Margaret E. (Lawrence) Keppler. Growing up in Columbia City, she graduated from Columbia City High School in 1955.

On October 14, 1956, she married James Eugene Beard, and together they raised three children, making their home at Tri-Lakes for 63 wonderful years. As her family grew, Carolyn pursued her own passions, working for 15 years in the dietary department at Whitley County Memorial Hospital, followed by nearly a decade in the activities departments at Miller's Merry Manor and The Oaks, bringing care, warmth, and energy to all she served.

Carolyn's creativity extended beyond her professional life — she was a talented artist who explored a variety of mediums with enthusiasm and skill. She also delighted in cooking, sharing her love of food with family and friends. Living by the lake, she embraced the outdoors, enjoying swimming, boating, and hosting lively gatherings. In the spring, she eagerly hunted for mushrooms, and she cherished family trips camping and canoeing, with her favorite retreat being the family cottage in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

Carolyn passed away peacefully on February 27, 2025, at the age of 87 in Columbia City. She was laid to rest at South Whitley Cemetery, leaving behind a legacy of creativity, adventure, and a life beautifully lived.

MAY 2026

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Pat Reed

1928-2017

ARTIST & EDUCATOR

Lora N. "Pat" Schlemmer Reed was born on November 28, 1928, in Wabash, Indiana, the daughter of Howard and Marjorie (McClintock) Schlemmer.

She spent her early years in Wabash, graduating from Wabash High School in 1946. After attending Purdue University, she went on to earn a Bachelor of Science degree from Manchester College in 1951 and later a master's degree from St. Francis College.

On November 24, 1949, she married Ronald W. Reed. The couple made their home in Wabash before settling in Columbia City in 1957, where they built a life rooted in community and education.

Pat began her teaching career in Somerset, Indiana, and returned to the classroom in 1968 as an art teacher at Marshall Middle School and Mary Raber Elementary. For nearly a quarter century, she inspired countless students to see the world through the eyes of an artist — to notice beauty, color, and possibility. She retired in 1992 after a long and fulfilling career. Even after retirement, she continued to nurture the creativity of others.

Pat passed away on August 5, 2017, at the age of 88 in Whitley County. She was laid to rest in South Park Cemetery, remembered fondly for her warmth, creativity, and the artistic spark she nurtured in generations of students.

JUNE 2026

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Shinzo Ohki

1883-1967

PAINTER & CULINARY ARTIST

Shinzo Ohki was a Japanese-born entrepreneur, artist, and beloved Columbia City resident whose dream brought soy sauce to American kitchens and put the Midwest on the culinary map.

After graduating from Columbia City High School in 1907, Ohki started the Oriental Show-You Company — one of the first fermented soy sauce companies in the U.S. — with his wife, Taka. At a time when soy sauce was virtually unknown in American homes, he promoted it through community meals and free cookbooks, eventually selling nearly 30,000 gallons a year. Beyond his business success, Ohki was a civic-minded leader and artist. During WWII, when Japanese Americans faced internment, the Whitley County community rallied in support of the Ohki family, sparing them imprisonment. After the war, he helped returning soldiers by offering jobs and even led an effort to return sacred Samurai swords to Japanese families. He sold his company in the 1960s and spent his later years painting and enjoying life with family. Ohki's artistic work was often in watercolor or oil and typically landscapes or still life images.

Today, his legacy lives on through the Ohki Scholarship and Ohki Alley in downtown Columbia City.

OCTOBER 2026

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Rob McNaghy

1884-1974

AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

Rob R. McNaghy was born February 2, 1884, in the same home at 301 East Jefferson Street where he lived for most of his life. He was the son of William and Effie Jane (Wunderlich) McNaghy.

Following in the steps of his father, who was the law partner of Thomas R. Marshall, Rob McNaghy became a lawyer as well. He attended Columbia City High School, Culver Military Academy, Wabash College and the Art Institute of Chicago. During his more than 40 year legal career, he served as circuit court judge, Industrial Board of Indiana judge and local lawyer.

He married Helen Vera Kirkpatrick. Their children included a daughter, Marilyn, a son, Kirk, and a son, Rob Reed McNaghy Jr., who died in WWII.

Artistically, McNaghy developed his own unique style. In 1928, he wrote and illustrated a children's book, "Noah's Nightmare" and sold more than 25 stories to publications. For more than 50 years, he illustrated the annual postcards for the Old Settlers Days Association. His illustrations also appear on the pages of the Columbia City High School yearbooks as well. He was an accomplished artist in several areas including ink, chalk, watercolor and oil paints.

Rob R. McNaghy died the morning of April 13, 1974, at the age of 90 and was buried in Greenhill Cemetery.

NOVEMBER 2026

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Dr. Otto Lehmborg

1886-1984

PAINTER & PHOTOGRAPHER

Born March 12, 1886, in Cecil, Ohio, to Rev. H. Christoph W. and A. Maria W. (Bohling) Lehmborg, Dr. Otto Lehmborg devoted his life to both science and art.

After completing his studies at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, he established a respected medical practice in Whitley County, where he served as a physician, county health officer for more than 35 years, and former county coroner.

Beyond his long and dedicated medical career, Dr. Lehmborg was a man of wide-ranging creativity.

A skilled painter and gifted photographer, he was known for hand-tinting his photographs with such subtlety and precision that they resembled fine oil paintings. His eye for color and composition reflected the same care and insight he brought to his work as a physician — both grounded in observation, patience, and empathy.

He married Grace J. Pressler on April 26, 1928, in Noble County. Together, they shared a love of travel and artistic pursuits. Dr. Lehmborg is remembered not only for his professional excellence but also for his warmth, humor, and enduring friendship to many.

He passed away on February 1, 1984, in Columbia City at the age of 85 and was laid to rest in South Park Cemetery.