

***The First Fifty Years-Ringling School of Art and Design  
Sarasota, FL 1931-1981  
Robert E. Perkins***

*Chapter I*

**Auspicious Beginnings**

*"If any educational institution...is to progress, it must be administered intelligently.... I know of no other school in America equipped as this one to educate in art.... Here I hope a famous school of artists will rise,*

***FOR THOUGH LIFE IS SHORT, ART IS LONG."***

*John Ringling - October 2, 1931*

The story of the auspicious beginnings of the school now known as Ringling School of Art and Design, and its heroic struggles thereafter, makes for one of those inspiring tales in the best tradition of the American Dream.

The idea for a new school actually sprang from a desire on the part of Dr. Ludd M. Spivey, then President of Southern College (now called Florida Southern College of Lakeland), to garner financial support for his college from the Sarasota Circus Magnate, John Ringling. Dr. Spivey was soon to learn three important facts. First, John Ringling was not interested in giving to Southern College; second, John Ringling was at the time nearly broke; and third, John Ringling was very much interested in establishing an art school in conjunction with the museum which he had constructed in the form of an Italian villa to house his vast collection of 17th Century sculpture and paintings.

The suggestion of an art school was discussed, and after much negotiation it was finally agreed that they would open a school in Sarasota as a branch of Southern College. It would be known as THE SCHOOL OF FINE AND APPLIED ART OF THE JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING ART MUSEUM.

Verman Kimbrough, who was Chairman of the Music Department, part-time athletic coach and teacher of sociology and social psychology at Southern, was chosen by Dr. Spivey to become the Resident Director of the new school. Mr. Kimbrough had come to Florida Southern at the invitation of Dr. Spivey after the two met once again at the 82nd birthday party of Thomas Edison. They had met previously at Birmingham Southern College where Spivey was on the faculty and Verman Kimbrough was a student. The birthday party was held at the Edison residence in Fort Myers, Florida, and Kimbrough, who was a well known opera star at the time, was invited from Birmingham, Alabama, to sing at this affair. Others attending the party on this grand occasion were Herbert Hoover, Henry Ford, and Harvey S. Firestone.

Dr. Spivey, Mr. Ringling, and Mr. Kimbrough discussed the question of location for the new school. A logical spot would be on or near the grounds of the museum. Several blocks from the museum, on Thirty-third Street (now Twenty-seventh Street) the three found a vacant boomtime hotel, the former Bayhaven Hotel, and several adjacent store buildings, all empty and available.

The insurance company that owned the property was delighted to find someone to take the property over for taxes and insurance payments. The buildings were renovated at a cost of \$45,000, and John Ringling agreed to raise the necessary money to underwrite the renovation needs. The same contractor who constructed the museum and the Ringling Mansion went over the entire project installing skylights, partitions and other alterations needed in order to prepare the property for a boarding art school and junior college.

The work was completed and that Fall, on October 2, 1931, THE SCHOOL OF FINE AND APPLIED ART OF THE JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING ART MUSEUM was officially opened. Formal exercises were held in the courtyard of the Ringling Museum with an estimated 3,000 people in attendance. Businesses in the area were closed for two hours in order to allow employees to attend. At that time the population of the city was approximately 7,000 and the county 11,000. John Ringling, in a rare speaking appearance, spoke about his great enthusiasm and anticipation for the potential of the new school. It was in this speech that he used the phrase, "Though Life is Short, Art is Long." Other speakers were U.S. Senator, Duncan Fletcher and Methodist Bishop, John Moore of Texas.

The Sarasota Herald commented in an editorial, "Today is an auspicious day for Sarasota. The future looks better and brighter with the opening of the Art School and Junior College." Dr. Ludd M. Spivey, the President of Southern College, was named Chief Director of the school and Verman Kimbrough became the Resident Director.

"The School started off with quite a bang," said Mr. Kimbrough. "We had about seventy-five students in the first class, and every member of the Junior College Faculty, but one, was a Ph.D. One of our teachers was Dr. Laura Ganno-McNeill, who was the first woman in the United States to obtain a Ph.D. That must have been about 1880. She taught biology and general sciences." The first student to register was Frank Norman from Minden, Louisiana.

Seventy-five students came to the new school in Sarasota which had as its purpose to "do more than develop artistic talent and to provide intellectual training; its purpose will include the fullest development of personality ... in order to assist each student to a happy adjustment to the circumstances of the world in which he finds himself."

The first administration and faculty of the school were the following:

*Dr. Ludd Myrl Spivey Director*  
*Verman Kimbrough Resident Director*  
*Carl Syfan Cox Dean*  
*Walter Omer Ropp Bursar*  
*Edith Averyt Kimbrough Dean of Women*

### ***Faculty***

*Verman Kimbrough Instructor in Voice*  
*Howard J. Barnum Director of the Conservatory*  
*Helen Wood Barnum Instructor in Piano*  
*Oliver A. Seaver Sims Instructor in Journalism*  
*George Pearse Ennis Head of Art Faculty*

*Hilton Leech Instructor in Art*  
*Benjamin Turner Kurtz Instructor in Sculpture*  
*Laura Gana McNeill Professor of Biology*  
*Ezra Winter Instructor in Art*  
*John H. Phillips Instructor in Architecture*  
*Wayman Adams Instructor in Portrait Painting*  
*Carl Johan Nordell Instructor in Art*  
*Ben Earl Looney Instructor in Art*

The first catalogue provides a number of interesting facts and statements that give insight into something of the dreams and aspirations of the founders, and a glimpse into student life as it existed in private higher education in the early thirties.

"School founded March 31, 1931, through the generosity of John Ringling."

"Students who desire to leave town must obtain permission from the President or Dean of the College, but such permissions are granted only upon written request from parents or guardian."

"Required College Functions:

1. Daily devotional exercises in the College Chapel.
2. Boarding students must attend Sunday School and the morning preaching services of the church chosen by the student."

"Hazing is forbidden."

"Entrance Requirements:

High School graduation with a minimum of fifteen units. Each student must have within that program of study a "basic education" including satisfactory completion of the following:

English 3 years  
Algebra 1 year  
Geometry 1 year  
History 1 year  
Science 1 year  
Foreign Language 2 years

"Charges

Tuition (three terms) \$432.00  
Board (three terms) 225.00  
Room (three terms) 90.00  
Fees 21.00

All books 15.00

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Total \$783.00 per year (three terms)

"Degrees Offered:

Bachelor of Applied Arts  
Bachelor of Fine Arts.

The 1931 Catalogue listed one hundred and eleven different and specific class offerings that could be taken at the school. These by category were as follows:

Art .....	48	
Bible.....	3	
Biology.....	3	
Education and Psychology .....	10	
Sociology .....	1	
English .....	2	
Foreign Languages.....	10	Spanish and French
History.....	7	
Journalism.....	2	
Mathematics.....	4	
Music.....	10	
Religious Education .....	3	
Speech.....	8	

The nation was in the midst of the great depression, but in Sarasota on Thirty-third Street, optimism ran high anticipating a great future for the art school and junior college. How could it fail? With enthusiastic community support, a tie-in with a fine college, inspired administrative leadership, the blessing of the great John Ringling, an outstanding faculty, a beautiful setting, and a strong student body, THE SCHOOL OF FINE AND APPLIED ART OF THE JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING ART MUSEUM was off to an auspicious start.

## Chapter II

### The Struggling Thirties

*"When we opened in the Fall of 1933, we had one student in the dormitory, and thirteen day students.*

*That was after a day and a half of registration."*

*Verman Kimbrough*

The second year of operation for the school saw a continuation of the excitement and enthusiasm that was so prevalent in the beginning. A basketball team was formed in 1932 and was known as "The Painters." According to the Herald Tribune "they had a great team boasting some six footers." A review of the register of student names during that year showed an enrollment of 124 students taking art courses and 141 enrolled in the Junior College.

Then there ensued an event which changed the course of history for the school, one of those unexpected but crucial contretemps of fate. "In March of 1933," Verman Kimbrough recalled, "I got a telephone call from Dr. Spivey asking that I come to Lakeland. Dr. Spivey said that he had received a petition from the Sarasota faculty asking permission to see the books of the school. I didn't know anything about the petition. It was the first that I'd heard of it." Somehow the faculty had discovered that funds from the Sarasota school were being diverted to Southern College to pay the salaries of the faculty in Lakeland. The Sarasota faculty maintained that monies earned by the SCHOOL OF FINE AND APPLIED ART OF THE JOHN AND MABLE RINGLING ART MUSEUM should be used for their faculty salaries and not to support the Lakeland faculty. These were difficult days for educational institutions. The school had not been able to pay full salaries to the faculty and the director was not getting his full salary. The revelation that funds were being diverted to Lakeland caused major unrest among the Sarasota faculty.

On April 2, 1933, Verman Kimbrough received a long distance telephone call from John Ringling's nurse asking him to come to New York City immediately. Ringling had just suffered a stroke and was recuperating. When Kimbrough arrived at the bedside of John Ringling he was shown a petition sent to Ringling by the Sarasota faculty requesting that the school be divorced from Southern College and that Kimbrough be placed in charge of the school. At the request of John Ringling, Kimbrough worked out an arrangement whereby the school would operate on a faculty-cooperative basis.

When Mr. Ringling came back from New York he rolled up to Kimbrough's office in his chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce. Kimbrough brought the plan out to the car and Ringling said he would look it over and let him know what he thought. The next day Ringling returned and said, "I approve of the plan. Go ahead and put it into operation."

On May 14, 1933, under the name of RINGLING SCHOOL OF ART, a charter was obtained and the school became an independent, not for profit, institution. The school operated on a share-and-share alike basis, with everyone being paid in proportion to his work load. The administration of the school's affairs came under the direction of a Board of Control composed of resident members of the faculty viz., Paul Penningroth and Bern Bullard.

That year marked a low point in the school's fortunes. "When we opened in the Fall of 1933," Kimbrough recalled with a wry grin, "we had one student in the dormitory, and thirteen day students. That was after one day and a half of registration."

Kimbrough called the faculty together and laid the cards on the table. They were told of the situation, and it was suggested to them that if anyone had a place to go they were free to leave. If not, and if they wanted to stay, they were invited to move into the dormitory with their families so they would at least have a place to eat and sleep. As for money, they would share in proportion to the amounts their contracts called for. All the faculty agreed to stay on as most had no other place to go. One Spanish teacher was paid only \$2.08 per month that year.

Verman Kimbrough's administrative genius was about to go to work again. He proposed to John Ringling that the school send a telegram to every person who had inquired about the school, saying that Mr. John Ringling had authorized a scholarship which would enable the prospective student to attend RINGLING SCHOOL OF ART for that year only on payment of \$250.00 cash. This payment would include room, board, tuition and fees. It would be necessary that a reply be received not later than the next night. By Sunday night the school received fifty-five replies. On Wednesday of the following week forty-six students were in the dormitory. As for the faculty, they received very little salary that year.

THE RINGLING SCHOOL OF ART was formed as both a junior college and art school. The original prospectus listed some fifty art courses as well as a number of music courses and an embryonic school of drama. Standard academic subjects were taught in addition to the art courses. In 1934 the decision was made to do away with the junior college and the music courses and to put all of their eggs into one basket. It was felt that if the school were to have a future it would have to concentrate in one field. This was the beginning of the philosophy to teach very basic art fundamentals in order to give students a strong basis for becoming exceptionally talented professional artists. Adherence to this philosophy was soon to become the great strength of the school.

In 1933, the Ringling School of Art became a member of the Florida Association of Colleges and Universities, and has remained an active member of that organization ever since.

In 1935, Berven Johnson, Information Secretary for the school, reported that over 20,000 Florida high school and college students saw thirty-eight pieces of student art work which were being exhibited in the Ringling School of Art Travelling Student Show. The exhibit was seen in forty high schools throughout the State.

In the late thirties and the early forties, the Sarasota Herald Tribune carried a regular feature called "Ringling Art School Ramblings" and later, "Ringling Rumors." This column was written variously by Berven A. Johnson, Charlotte Townsend, Ben Bruner, Beth Athison, and George H. Kaiser, Jr.

In the year 1934-35, only five months of and in the faculty salaries were paid out of eight, following year seven months out of eight. In 1936-37, full salaries were paid, and the school has never missed paying salaries in full since then. "This was the Armageddon of pinched years," said Kimbrough, "in which it was 'do or die'."

In May of 1935, written permission was received from John Ringling to build a new school on the grounds of the Museum. (see appendix page 31) A proposed plan was presented by architect J.H. Phillips (see appendix page 32), who was the architect of record for the Museum. Lack of resources prevented the school from ever building on the Museum grounds despite the strong intent of John Ringling to have it placed there.

Although the Ringling name has meant much to the progress of the school over the years, it has also been the source of much confusion. It has not been at all uncommon for the school to receive letters mistaking the school for circus oriented activities. One such letter was received in 1935 and reads as follows:

Ringling School of Art, Sarasota, Florida

Dear Sirs:

I have a boy ten years old, named Toby who I would like to learn the fine art of riding horses. This boy has his own horses and has been riding for five years. I would like for his pony to be trained also.

When Toby was six years old he rode 200 miles to Atlanta, Georgia, on a single pony to see President Roosevelt. The following year he rode three ponies 800 miles to Washington, D.C., to take part in the last inauguration parade.

The boy is a good rider, but has no one to teach him trick riding. What would you charge to teach both Toby and his pony?

Yours truly,

Even with misunderstandings of this nature, the fact that Ringling School of Art was in Sarasota where the famed Ringling Brothers Circus winter quarters was located, enticed many students to come to this beautiful city on the Gulf of Mexico. The 1936 catalogue carried the following statement:

Nowhere in the world can a more complete study of animals be made than in Sarasota. The Ringling Brothers Circus has its winter quarters within a short distance of the School. Sketching and Painting classes will have regular days to work at the circus grounds. Students registered in the school have free access to the winter quarters at all times, where they may study practically all species of animals known to man.

In order to firmly associate the name of Ringling with the school, the catalogue further states that "On Saturday afternoons, the school bus, which Mr. Ringling has provided for the use of the students conveys the dormitory students to one of Sarasota's beaches where supper is served." It was during this time that the circus attracted many celebrities to the area, such as Igor Stravinsky (where he wrote a "Ballet for the Elephants", Deems Taylor, Greta Garbo, and cartoonist Peter Arno.

In 1936, Guy Saunders, who was to become an institution within an institution, arrived on campus where he was to live and teach until his death forty-three years later. "Pappy," as he was to become affectionately known, became the chairman of the Fashion Design Department and

later managed the Supply Store. In 1936 he spearheaded the first Annual Beaux Arts Ball which was held in the Mira Mar Auditorium.

Before coming to Ringling, Mr. Saunders was a costume and fashion designer for a number of well-known entertainers and other important personages. He designed costumes for the evangelist, Aime Semple McPherson. She asked Saunders to do a costume for her engagement at the Roxy Theater in New York City, where she was to preach between shows. She wanted something to dramatize her sermons so Saunders designed a Princess Dress with Bishop Sleeves. He also designed costumes for the famous burlesque artist Faith Bacon and later created some of the sensational and risqué costumes worn by Sally Rand. Some suggested that it was Saunders who "designed Sally Rand into jail." The -famous magician Blackstone was one of Saunders regular customers. For four weeks every summer he spent most of his time at the theater where Blackstone appeared, designing trick costumes for his acts. The crowning part of his career before coming to Ringling was the opportunity to design costumes for the 1933 World's Fair in New York City. This colorful background gave Saunders unusual preparation for the Beaux Arts Balls which he organized in Sarasota in 1936. The Ball was to become the social event of the year.

"Pappy" and his students planned and presented a great number of fashion shows featuring student designs.

In the late thirties, Zelda Fitzgerald, wife of the legendary author, F. Scott Fitzgerald, became one of Pappy's students. She attended Ringling along with her nurse a part of her therapy in a North Carolina Sanitarium.

Alumnus, Bert Dyer, sent a poem to Pappy which somehow captures the humor and spirit of the man, and the relationship that he had with his students.

*"Pop, I think you're mighty swell,  
Wriggling your tin hips fast as Hell.  
Running to bathe your fragile frame,  
Gaining more weight til it's a shame;  
You're a picture of health by now,  
Surely it wasn't Mrs. Suber's chow.  
The Beaux Arts Ball was really yours,  
Because you did such helpful chores.  
'tain't respect'ble by God', says he  
The way you shock my modesty.  
Inspiration is what you be'  
to everyone, including me."*

On November 15, 1935, the first Student Council was formed under the leadership of Tommy Wrede, Chairman, and Janet Whetlock, Treasurer.

Verman Kimbrough, who was to become extremely active in community affairs, was elected Mayor of Sarasota in 1938, an office which he held for two years. It was during his term of office that the extensive Lido Beaches were purchased for public use and, under his direction, the city constructed the Lido Casino. It was during his term that thousands of parcels of delinquent

tax properties were put back on the tax rolls, outstanding bonds were refunded, and municipal water services were extended to thousands of homeowners.

School publications continued to play on the lure of the sun as well as to emphasize the quality of education provided by the school. Advertising enticed students to come to Ringling where they could live in school dormitories and study for less money than it would cost just to live at even the cheapest of Florida hotels. "Come and study in Sarasota," says another admissions piece, "by the Gulf of Mexico, Sarasota Bay, the semi-tropical jungles, where beautiful flowers bloom the year round. Scientists have found that the sun gives off more actinic (health giving) rays in this part of Florida than in any other section of the world."

April 17, 1937, was an important occasion for Dora G. McCollister of Clarksburg, Ohio, who was the first Ringling School of Art Student to be granted a Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree.

So end the struggles and the joys of the Thirties. This was a time when so many dedicated instructors like Hilton Leech, Bern Bullard, Donald Blake, Loran Wilford, and Guy Saunders gave their all to the school and for very little financial remuneration. It was men and women like these totally dedicated instructors who made it possible for this school to begin to build and maintain the national reputation for excellence that it was rapidly achieving. Ringling School of Art was the place to go in order to receive a quality education in basic art instruction.

## Chapter III

### The Maturing Years

*"We've had literally hundreds of people who came down and decided to stay, Actually about fifty percent of the parents accompanied their children to the school for registration, and stayed about a week. Then many of them came back in the winter and stayed anywhere from two to four weeks. Some stayed all winter. "*

*Verman Kimbrough*

It was during the forties, fifties and sixties that the school grew up and took its place among other leading professional schools of art in the country. If its impact on art nationally was impressive, its financial and social impact on the City of Sarasota and the larger West Coast area was equally important. Students, parents, and relatives were to make Sarasota their home for part or all of the year. Today untold thousands of citizens on the west coast of Florida can trace their first contact with Sarasota to their initial association with Ringling School of Art. The school made a financial impact on the community when it really counted, perhaps like no other non-profit organization before or since.

The Beaux Arts Ball which had its beginning with the school in 1936 was later taken over by the Sarasota Art Association, but all through the years students and faculty played a major role in its success. Records show that the Ball continued to be the social event of the year until the early sixties. One of the most anticipated announcements each year was the naming of the ball theme. Some of the more interesting titles were *Schizo-Phrenzy, jungle Ball, Underseas Ball, Oriental Ball, Aztec Ball, Saints or Sinners, Arabian Night, Gay Nineties, Court of Montezuma, Four Dimensions, Mother Goose at the Ball, and Once Upon a Time.*

Invariably during those early years, Ringling Alumni Judy and Bill Axe received the honors for the most beautiful or most creative costume at the Ball. This was an honor they would receive again when the ball was revived in the seventies. The Sarasota Herald gave excellent coverage to the Ball, often featuring a picture story covering from two to three full pages in the weekend edition.

Times in the early forties were often difficult, as evidenced by the following letter which offered a faculty appointment to Eula Castle:

Dear Miss Castle,

We cannot do better than room and board in the dormitory and \$25.00 per month for someone to teach Interior Decoration for us next year.

My wife and I are going to live in the dormitory and are going to operate the place ... as a large family.

Sincerely,

/S/ Verman Kimbrough,  
President.

Eula Castle accepted the offer and joined the staff. Other faculty members moved into underpopulated dormitories because salaries were so low. At one point during World War II Mr. and Mrs. Kimbrough and their son Robert moved into one of the dormitories and took over the operation of the school's cafeteria. During the lean years President Kimbrough even performed some of the janitorial duties around the campus.

There were seldom more than fifty or sixty students at the school during the war years, and most of these were young women. Things did not get much better until after the war when the G.I.'s started returning to their homes and many of them wanted an education. Ringling School of Art welcomed a great number of veterans and became the first school in the State of Florida to become certified for the G.I. Bill. By 1949 the student population increased to around 250 and gradually swelled to 450 students by 1959. Enrollments since that time have remained fairly static.

One of the activities that kept the school 'afloat' in the forties was a very active summer school which always attracted nearly one hundred students at each session. In the summer of 1941 the summer school was moved to North Carolina to a rustic setting near Little Switzerland. The retreat was called Wildacres and was located on a mountain top in the heart of the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains. The summer program was specifically designed for art teachers and for college students. Students and faculty lived and studied together as they painted from nature for three months each year until the program was abandoned in 1945. Instructors for these programs were Donald Blake, Guy Saunders, Loran Wilford, Hilton Leech, Carl J. Nordell, and Frank Stanly Herring,

Verman Kimbrough continued to be involved, not only as president of the school, but also in the community as a whole. In 1945 he was elected Superintendent of Schools for Sarasota County, a position which he held until 1953. While he held this top post, four new schools were constructed; Sarasota Junior High School, Booker High School, and the Venice and Phillippi Shores Elementary schools. During this period of time he was elected president of the Florida School Superintendents' Association. Some of his other involvements included running an annual concert to raise money for the Children's Fund, soloist and choir director of the First Presbyterian Church Choir, actor and patron of the Sarasota Players, president of the Sarasota Community Concert Association, and board member and organizer of radio station WEDU.

In January of 1942 the first full Faculty Exhibition was held on campus and, according to the Herald Tribune, "brought the largest crowd ever to see an art exhibition in the history of Sarasota." The school continued to have these successful shows both in Sarasota and surrounding communities for several years. One of the most noteworthy was a special exhibition held in Orlando in 1947 which was sponsored by the Art Association of that community. It was described as "one of the finest water color exhibits ever to be staged in Orlando." The Ringling School of Art Faculty exhibiting in this show were Hilton Leech, Donald Blake, George H. Kaiser, Jr., Christopher Clark, Eula Castle and Guy Saunders. Special exhibition of Ringling Art School Faculty gave credence to the school's claim of having some of the nation's most outstanding artists serving as instructors.

Talented students found outlets for youthful expression in a number of ways. In the early fifties a special show demonstrating the musical, artistic, and dramatic talents of the students took the form of an annual extravaganza called "Abstract Scandals." These shows were open for public performances. The cast of fifty performed in a show which included a can-can chorus and musical comedy skits. A review of the stage show suggested that the "can-can" line might have come out of the Bal Tabarin in Paris. Memories of Toulouse-Lautrec were revived by impersonation of characters of a 1953 film. A top-hatted ballet and fashion show along with individual vaudeville-type performances were on the program.

In looking back on these days a 1981 student, Amy Golditch, observed that, "Artists have always been a little 'off the wall'." In her research for an article published in the Fall 1981 issue of *The Ringling Magazine*, she described how a 1956 female student proved the point. She was tired of her haircut and wanted to be recognized, so she had her head shaved into a Mohawk. A real eye catcher!

Again hoping to prove a point, some students in the class of 1956 created a "hoax" that fooled a jury in an exhibition at the Sarasota Art Association. "Number Nine," one of the seventy-seven works on view, was frankly invented as a joke by Ringling students hoping to fool the jurors. The painting entitled "Tenement" was composed of several stuck-on elements. These included grain, tobacco, fin foil from a cigarette package, a bit of newspaper, a dried leaf, a match head, expectorations, dirt, and a lot of paint applied, both thin and thick. Although this "work of art" did not win a prize, it was the cause for much comment. One of the perpetrators, Roy Nichols, earned a one-man show at the Art Association the next year.

Ringling School of Art student, Candy Tilton, was named Miss Sarasota in 1948. A year later the campus was all astir when Jane Pickens, the famed actress, visited the school to see her daughter Mary, who was a student at that time.

In 1942 Hilton Leech taught the first etching and wood block printing course which was later reintroduced into the curriculum by Fiore Custode. Leech later opened his own small art school in Sarasota along with the Hilton Leech Gallery.

The art instruction continued under highly talented and dedicated teachers. Some of the school's most successful alumni came out of this period. In 1948 the Interior Decorating Department became known as the Interior Design Department, a name that would remain until the late seventies. It is interesting to note the name changes in majors over the years. These are listed in Appendix page 29. The major Illustration, for example, was first listed as a single major in 1941

and continued to be so named until 1951. It appeared again in 1955 through 1969. After several years listed only as a course offering the major was reintroduced as a full major field of study in 1981. The academic calendar for the school year had three terms until 1953 when the present two semester system was established. In order to encourage early and advance payments of fees, students were given a ten percent reduction in the second term if full payments were made in advance.

On October 2, 1949, the first building to be constructed by the school was put into use. This addition was a twenty room dormitory for men, constructed for a total cost of \$35,000. The dormitory, called utilitarian in design, housed forty students. It was constructed with east and west wings with a combination writing and study room in the center.

Another grand social occasion took place on March 8, 1959, when Ringling School of Art sponsored an Opera Ball which was held at the Ringling Mansion. President and Mrs. Kimbrough were in their element as they attended in the costumes of their favorite opera. President Kimbrough had portrayed this same character on the operatic stage earlier in his career.

In 1959, for the first time in twenty-five years, academic courses were again introduced into the curriculum. These included Freshman English, history, psychology and foreign languages and were made available on demand to second, third and fourth year students. This experiment lasted for only a short time and, with the notable exception of English, all were dropped within a few years.

In 1964 a major change took place in the operation of the school. On that date all of the school's assets and the responsibility for its direction were turned over to a Board of Trustees. Membership on the first board included Verman Kimbrough, Edith Kimbrough and Robert Kimbrough, all of the same family. This group was organized as a transitional committee until they could secure and elect a new board. At the April 27, 1964 meeting of the above mentioned board, seven additional persons were elected to the Trustee list and Edith Kimbrough submitted her resignation. The new board was headed by John File Robertson, Sarasota attorney and former mayor. Other members included Robert Kimbrough, attorney, Secretary; John O. Binns, business executive and former mayor; General LeGrande A. Diller, (USA Retired) and former student; John J. Hamel, Jr., retired broker; John D. MacDonald, author; William Lee Sims, 11, retired industrialist; Thornton Utz, illustrator; and President Kimbrough.

Significant actions taken by the board included the creation of special money management programs; establishing a retirement program for the faculty (1965); establishing a sinking fund in the amount of \$100,000 which was supposed to pay off a \$200,000 mortgage due in 1978 on the Bay Haven Hotel (1964); and establishing a separate cash fund in the amount of \$2,000 for the purpose of cashing checks for students. The first board saw itself only as an overall policy making group, and was not in any way concerned with raising funds for the school.

With all of its problems over the years, the school was proud of the fact that it was essentially debt free. There was a mortgage on the hotel, but a sinking fund had been established that would hopefully cover this debt. Unfortunately this was not to happen. The proud status of operating in the black, without coming to the community or its other constituents for any funds to support the program of the school, remained a fact until it became necessary to raise capital funds to construct new educational buildings in the middle and late seventies.

The Board of Trustees recognized the fact that if the school was to grow, it would be necessary to purchase small bits of property as they became available near the present campus. New properties acquired during this period of time were as follows:

1959 - Brinkerhoff motel and duplex in back of the main building. These were used for dormitories.

1965 - Duplex purchased for \$14,000.

1965 - Property on the Northeast corner of U.S. Hwy. 41 and 27th Street, for \$20,000.

1966 - Large supermarket and adjoining buildings to the east now used as the auditorium and faculty lounge, \$71,212.

1967- Corner Building, southwest corner of Old Bradenton Road and 27<sup>th</sup> Street, \$26,250.

1967- House on 1150 Greensboro, \$7,500.

1968 - Duplex on Old Bradenton Road.

Early in 1968 it was decided to hire a professional food service company to handle the food preparation and dining services which had previously been managed internally. The Professional Food Service Management Company was hired to do this and at this writing still provide the food service for all boarding students.

Soon after the corner building on US Hwy. 41 and 27th Street was purchased the Interior Design Department, under the chairmanship of Mr. Charles Nelson Bradley, sponsored the opening of a student art gallery. This building, formerly a restaurant, was ideally suited for a small sales gallery. The gallery, and its accompanying out-of-doors sale, was the start of a very successful student sidewalk sale which has been an annual event since that time.

The first outdoor sale was for the benefit of the Commercial Art Department of the school. The sale was managed by the Interior Design Department but was under the direction of a special committee whose purpose it was to introduce graphic art to the public. Initially, forty percent of the sales receipts went to the student with the remaining money going to the school for special projects. In the gallery sales seventy-five percent of the sale went to the student with the remaining money going to improve the school library.

Mr. Kimbrough's health was failing toward the end of the sixties and he felt that it was time to turn the presidency over to another person. An exhaustive search was made. No decision was made until Robert E. Perkins, then Dean of Students for Sioux Falls College in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, was invited to join the institution. In the Fall of 1970 he was appointed Vice President with the understanding that he would be assigned the presidency the following year.

Ringling School of Art had come through some difficult times. When Perkins took over the presidency he inherited an institution with a national reputation for excellent instruction, a dedicated and talented faculty, and a solvent institution with a modest reserve. John Ringling's

dream to have in Sarasota a "famous school of artists" had become a reality. Ringling School of Art had matured.

## Chapter IV

### A Decade of Growth

*"Welcome to the forty-first year of Ringling School of Art. Together we serve in the great tradition which has evolved through the years. This is a tradition which has come to expect excellence in the area of professional art instruction. We now need to begin the process of self evaluation as we take a critical look at ourselves and our school to determine strengths and weaknesses. Our purpose is to develop intelligent change in such a way that our total educational program will show consistent improvement. "*

*Robert E. Perkins*

In May of 1971, after forty years of service to the school and community, Mr. Verman Kimbrough announced his retirement as President of Ringling School of Art. Vice President Robert E. Perkins was named by the Board of Trustees to succeed him as President. In a virtually unprecedented move, the Sarasota County Commission, under the chairmanship of Dan Howe, proclaimed May 21, 1971 Verman Kimbrough Day in Sarasota County, "spotlighting the impact Kimbrough's presence has had on this community since 1931." A dinner honoring Kimbrough was sponsored by the school. The internationally known artist and illustrator, Thornton Utz, was commissioned to paint a portrait of Kimbrough which now hangs in the halls of the school. The portrait depicts a likeness of Kimbrough amid numerous sketches, drawings, and newspaper clippings representing various activities in his life.

On August 12, 1972, just one year after his retirement Mr. Verman Kimbrough died near his summer home in North Carolina. The trustees, at a special meeting held on October 27, 1972, adopted the following resolution:

WHEREAS, life's Chapter on this planet ended for our Founder and First President, HONORABLE VERMAN KIMBROUGH on August 12, 1972, at Waynesville, North Carolina near his summer home, and

WHEREAS, the members of the Board of Directors of THE RINGLING SCHOOL OF ART, of which Mr. Kimbrough was the founder, are desirous of recording some of his accomplishments, including the founding of this School; his service as Superintendent of Public Instruction of Sarasota County; his service to his community, which he served as Mayor for two terms, i.e., December, 1937 to December, 1939; his service with Radio Station W.E.D.U.; his prior voice study in Italy by reason of the interest and generosity of the Kiwanis Club of Birmingham, Alabama; his subsequent move to Florida for a more favorable climate; his voice concerts here; his service with Community

Concert Series; his service with a local Presbyterian Church Choir, etc.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that this Board does take cognizance of and records his said accomplishments on the Minutes of this, THE RINGLING SCHOOL OF ART.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that a copy of this Resolution be furnished MRS. EDITH AVERYT KIMBROUGH, his Widow and mate of many years, and a copy be furnished his son, ROBERT A. KIMBROUGH, that they may be aware of the sense of loss, which we share with them.

DONE AND ORDERED on this October 27, 1972, the Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors of the RINGLING SCHOOL OF ART.

Following Kimbrough's death, the *Verman Kimbrough Scholarship-Loan Fund* was established through a generous grant made by Trustee W.L. Sims II and from funds left to the school in Mr. Kimbrough's will. The will actually established the guidelines under which the program was to be administered. It stipulated that the principal and interest were to be used to assist worthy students by using funds in a revolving loan program for qualifying Ringling students. Loans are to be repaid as soon as possible after graduation.

Even though the school had now been in operation for forty years, little or no attempt had been made to locate or contact any of its alumni. General LeGrande A. Diller, a trustee and an alumnus; Susan Duzenberry, a current student at the time; and President Perkins were responsible for getting the new organization off the ground. The Alumni Association was officially formed in May of 1971 with General Diller serving as the first President.

In order to provide a list of names from which to work, Perkins spent many evenings in the Registrars Office going through old records, transcripts, and correspondence. A list of names numbering about one thousand was compiled. Many of the addresses used were found on official records dating as far back as the early thirties. Recognizing the fact that many letters would never reach their destination because of name changes and obsolete addresses a letter and questionnaire were nevertheless sent to every name located in the above search. A note was printed on the envelopes requesting that the mail be returned with the correct address so that a master list could be updated. Hundreds of letters were returned marked addressee unknown but enough eventually found their way to alumni to identify a nucleus for an embryo organization. It immediately became obvious that there were many loyal alumni who were delighted to have the school contact them after so many years. As soon as the Alumni Association was organized, annual reunions were held, often timed to coincide with the Annual Student Side Walk Sale. In the late seventies an Alumni Exhibition was added to the weekend festivities. The reunion attracted well over one hundred people each year with some coming great distances to participate in the weekend events. The Association established its own dues structure to cover organization expenses. Its publication, THE RINGLING RECORD, was produced at least twice a year. The newsletter carried information on the school and told of the activities of former students.

The Alumni Association along with the Ringling School of Art Library Association sponsored the revival of the Beaux Arts Ball. After Guy "Pappy" Saunders death in 1978, the Saunders family gave to the Alumni Association all of his personal paintings. These were auctioned off in the school auditorium with President Perkins serving as the auctioneer. The proceeds of the sale were used to establish a scholarship fund in the name of Mr. Saunders. By 1981 the active rolls of the known alumni had risen to well over 1,500. A listing of the Association presidents is found for the record in the appendix on page 31 of this history. Many Alumni gave outstanding leadership to the organization during its formative years but special credit must go to Mrs. William (Marty) Hartman who contributed literally thousands of hours to make the Association a viable organization.

During the seventies considerable property was added to the campus, increasing the acreage of the school holdings from just under ten acres to over twenty-four acres. With the exception of the trailer park, all of the properties were purchased and fully paid for at the time of the purchase. The four and three quarter acre trailer park was purchased at a cost of \$436,100 with the school making a cash down payment of \$125,000. Payments on the mortgage have been made through income from the operation of the park creating no burden on the regular budget of the school. It is projected that the property will be free and clear of any indebtedness in the early 1990's.

Properties acquired during the seventies were as follows:

1970 - Four stores adjacent to the Presidents Office - \$35,000.

1971 - Bradenton Road Duplex - \$12,000.

1971 - Gas Station on the southeast corner of the Bradenton Road and 27th Street intersection - \$31,000.

1972 - Laundromat on 27th Street - \$10,000.

1972- Large lot and small home and garage on Bradenton Road, property which lies between Bradenton Road and the Whitaker Bayou - \$18,000.

1975 - House, 1132 Greensboro - \$8,500.

1976 - Virginia Avenue vacated by the city in favor of the school - \$5,000 for eventual moving of the water main.

1976 - City vacated numerous plotted alleys running through various parts of the main campus and around the men's dormitory.

1976 - Four lots and the Bias Home and apartments - \$50,000.

1976 - Ringling Oaks Mobile Home Park (including one Mobile Home, several small cottages, maintenance garage, Recreation Hall, small laundromat, and approximately 4% acres of land) - \$436,100., down payment \$125,000.

1978 - Home and large lot at 1274 North Riverside Drive, adjacent to the trailer park -\$30,000.

New directors selected for the Board of Trustees during the seventies were, E.F. Keen, Jr., William H. Pritchard, Homer Whitman, E. Charles Stottlemeyer, William Johnston, Dr. Robert O. Snelling, Sr., Sam Idelson, Wayland Moore, Maurice Hirsch, Grace Penner, William F. LaMee, Stanley Glen, and Robert S. Dickens. General LeGrande Diller followed John Fite Robertson as chairman of the Board of Trustees. John D. MacDonald served as chairman for one year and was followed by William H. Pritchard who continued to chair the board until

Student life saw many interesting and exciting things happen during the decade of the seventies. Numerous prizes and awards were won by students. The following represents just a few of these. In 1972 Judy Foster designed the Save-Our-Bays logo. Harry McVay was awarded a one man show at the Sarasota Art Association. Ellen Fisher was named Miss Sarasota in 1972. Four of Charles McCurry's Illustration students had their work accepted in the National Society of Illustrators Annual Show in New York City at the Societies galleries. In 1977 the third year Interior Design Students under the direction of department chairman Charles Nelson Bradley took a special tour to New York City, Paris, and London. This marked the beginning of special study tours for all of the departments. The Fine Arts students under Mr. Morris Mitchell took special education tours of galleries and museums throughout the Northeast. The Graphic Design majors under Mr. Frederic Sweney and later Mr. Len Jossel visited advertising agencies, newspapers, and design studios in major southern metropolitan cities. Special student exhibitions were held in local banks, the circus museum of the Ringling Museums, the Sarasota Art Association, and other Bradenton and Sarasota Galleries. In September of 1977 the students produced the first RINGLING MAGAZINE which has subsequently been hailed as one of the finest and most professional student magazines produced by any College, University, or Art School student group in the country.

In the middle seventies Mrs. Arthur Ferguson organized a special program which brought the students and the community together in a unique and pleasant way. The program was called "Home Hospitality." Students were invited into Sarasota homes on weekends and vacations. From this exciting home away from home program came many lasting and close friendships.

1978 was the year when two great entertainers visited the campus. The first was Red Skelton, who was in the city to perform at the Van Wezel Hall. The student body president that year called Skelton at his hotel room and invited him to visit the school. Not only did he accept the offer but he also agreed to present a full program for the students in the afternoon. After the unscheduled matinee performance in the school auditorium (presented at no cost to the school) President and Mrs. Perkins took him shopping. He needed a shirt for his performance that night. His needs were specific and difficult to satisfy. The shirt had to be 100% cotton with a 17 1/2" collar and 35" sleeve. After a whirlwind and fun two hour shopping spree the coveted shirt was located on St. Armands Key. Also visiting the campus that year was Vincent Price who was in Sarasota at the invitation of the Ringling School of Art Library Association.

Dean Robert Osborne and a number of students created an authentic booth of early art forms and methods at the 1978 and 1979 Ringling Museum Medieval Fair. He was assisted in this activity by instructors Fiore Custode, Harry Habblitz and Bruce Gregory.

One Saturday afternoon in December of 1978 President Perkins chatted with Mr. Saunders about the school and about his work in the Supply Store. Saunders seemed to be in good spirits as Perkins helped him move some freight into the store room. Early the next day "Pappy" was taken to the hospital and later that day died. In the annual President's Report to the Trustees, Perkins paid the following tribute to his friend who had meant so much to the school.

"In 1936, Mr. Guy 'Pappy' Saunders came to Ringling School of Art to teach, He moved on to the campus where he was to live until his death... To put into writing what this great man meant to Ringling School of Art would be an impossible task. Suffice it to say he has warmed the hearts of thousands with his ready wit, inspired untold numbers of students with his knowledge of fashion design and watercolor techniques, and raised the level of cultural awareness with his great insight into the interrelationship of all the arts, especially music, dance, and the visual arts.

'Pappy' was an institution within an institution and all those who knew him, and were touched by his life, are thankful for his presence among us."

One of the major concerns that Perkins had about the school when he came in 1970 was the fact that Ringling School of Art was not accredited by any of the recognized accrediting agencies. This was during a time when fewer students were being graduated from high schools; more and more Colleges and Universities were incorporating professional art courses into their curriculum; and the cost of attending Ringling, although very competitive, would need to be increased substantially. For these reasons, the recruitment of students would become increasingly more competitive. The lack of any kind of accreditation would seriously hamper the activities of the Admissions program of the school. In addition, gaining accreditation would make the school and more specifically the students, eligible for federal grants and loans. The progress toward accreditation was deliberate, slow and sure. The historical record of this successful move toward full accreditation is as follows:

December, 1972 - The President prepared a paper entitled Accreditation Procedures and Possibilities, and outlined the various accrediting options open to the school.

December and January, 1973 - The faculty studied this paper in depth and made a recommendation to the Board of Trustees, recommending that the school pursue accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and apply specifically for accreditation as a degree granting college.

January, 1973 - The Board of Trustees reviewed this recommendation and directed the President to begin the process.

June 4, 1973 - Visitation by Dr. Barry Mellinger of the Southern Association. (This visit had special significance since the school had just been informed that it was no longer eligible for tax exclusion. The law stated that in order to be eligible for tax exemption the non-profit educational institution must be eligible for accreditation. Dr. Mellinger became an expert witness and testified that the school was indeed now moving toward accreditation. The tax exemption was allowed.)

August, 1974 - After completing an extensive status report, the school was again visited by a staff member from the Southern Association to determine whether or not the school was eligible for a Candidate visit. The team was authorized, and an additional status report was completed.

April, 1974 - A of four educators visited the school and filed a report which included several suggestions which the Board of Trustees examined and authorized the President to implement.

December, 1974 - The Dean of Faculty, the Secretary of the Board of Trustees and the President attended a special meeting of the Executive Council of the Commission on Colleges. The school was granted status as a Candidate for Accreditation as a Level II Institution for a period of two years. (A Level II Institution is any College granting a Bachelors Degree as its highest level of attainment within that school.)

September 1, 1975 - Progress Report submitted.

September 1, 1976 - Progress Report submitted.

November 7, 1976 - The second Candidate team of three educators visited the campus for a site inspection.

December 15, 1976 - Candidate status renewed for two years.

October 25, 1977 - Progress report submitted.

January 10, 1978 - Candidate status renewed, visit by SACS staff.

October 6, 1978 - Progress report submitted.

April 1, 1979 - A complete Status Report was completed and an application for full accreditation submitted.

April 8, 1979 - Visitation by a full seven member accreditation team along with Dr. Grover Andrews of the Southern Association staff. In the report by this committee the school was commended for the remarkable progress made since the association made its first visit in 1973. Special mention was made of the improved Library services, strong administration at all levels, greatly improved academic program, and improvement in student services. Note was also taken of the improvement in the quality of the faculty and facilities.

December 11, 1979 - Full accreditation as a degree granting College was authorized by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

That was a happy day for the school. President Perkins called Dean Osborne from Atlanta and told him about the action taken by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The student body was brought together and informed of the good news. Classes were excused for the day as students and faculty alike celebrated. Upon his return to Sarasota Perkins was greeted at the airport by a large contingent of trustees, faculty, students, and administration all waving balloons and banners indicating their joy. "This has to be one of the greatest moments in my professional career," said Perkins, "I congratulate the Board of Trustees, Faculty and Students for the attainment of this important milestone in the history of the school."

Though it is normally taken for granted, in 1978 the Board adopted a statement which assured the faculty appropriate freedom in teaching and research. If a problem arose that required some decision and action resulting from faculty discipline, it was to be reviewed before a faculty-elected committee before it was finally subjected to handling by administration or trustees. So far no problem has arisen to call for such treatment. None may emerge for a long time to come, but if it does, there is assurance of impartial handling. Credit for this recommendation along with a definitive statement of faculty rights, privileges and responsibility must be given to Dean of Faculty Robert Osborne who spent much time in the drafting of such statements for approval by Faculty and Trustees.

The next step towards receiving proper recognition by other professional art schools was to begin the process of gaining recognition from the National Association of Schools of Art. To that end an application was made and a self study prepared by the administration. A team composed of William J. Voos, President of Atlanta College of Art; and William C. Collins, President of the Portland School of Art visited the campus in the Fall of 1981. Action by this organization is pending as of this writing.

The attainment of accreditation did not come without a great deal of hard work by many people. One of the chief requirements of the Southern Association was to develop an administrative organization which would better support the needs of students in all phases of their educational program, and to provide an admissions program that would insure that the school would continue to attract the kind of students who could best take advantage of the program offered. The Admissions Program had long been handled entirely by Mr. George R. Kaiser, Jr., who was also Registrar. In addition to these important responsibilities he taught fifteen hours a week. The contribution to the school by Mr. Kaiser in these and so many other capacities over the years must be described as extraordinary to say the least. He was a strong administrator, highly organized, and a respected teacher and artist. After leaving his administrative duties he became a full time teacher and continues to serve in this capacity at the time of this writing. Few people, other than Presidents Kimbrough and Perkins, fully realize the extent and quality of the contribution made to the school by this highly talented man. Ringling School of Art owes him a great debt of gratitude for developing and administering a highly efficient admissions program and Registrar's Office.

As the school grew and the demands of the students increased, it became necessary to develop a more extensive administrative organization. This was accomplished in the seventies. It may be of interest to note that in 1970 the administration consisted of a President (full time), a Vice

President (full time), Bookkeeper (full time) and a Dean of Students and Registrar (half time). The faculty were not given any administrative responsibilities and were generally directed in their academic activities by the President and the Registrar. By the 1981-82 school year the Administration had dramatically changed. The school was at that time administered by the following personnel:

President - Dr. Herbert Burgart

Vice President - Donald Nolt

Dean of Faculty and Instruction - Robert Osborne

Librarian - Yvonne Morse

Director of Admissions - Lisa Redling Kaplan

Admissions Counselor - Eddie Tallent

Comptroller - Joe Begin

Bookkeeper - Ann Lacertosa

Director of Financial Aids - Janie Buszek

Dean of Students - Harry Habblitz (half time)

Counselor to Women - Freida Culp

Director of Public Relations - Charlotte Caccia

Each of the school's five departments was headed by a separate chairman with a corresponding reduction in teaching load to enable them to adequately take care of their administrative responsibilities.

During the "Decade of Growth" actions were taken that substantially helped to improve the quality of the educational program. First was the inauguration of the Faculty Self Improvement Program. A limited amount of money was set aside each year to underwrite the continuing education opportunities for the faculty. The first faculty member to take advantage of the program was Morris Mitchell who took a year's leave of absence in order to attend the University of Tulsa where he completed his studies for the Master of Arts degree. The Faculty Self Improvement Program provided a partial tuition grant to assist him in that program. Other faculty members followed, and their programs of study are listed in the appendix page 29 and 30.

The second major development in the area of improving the educational quality of the school was the inauguration of a Visiting Artist Program underwritten by an initial \$10,000 budget allocation. This program over the years has brought many well known professional artists to the campus. Some of these were:

Germano - Internationally known Italian classical artist

Bernie Fuchs - One of America's top illustrators

Benno Schatz - Sculptor-In-Ordinary to the Queen of England

James Rosenquist - Internationally famous pop artist painter

Richard Gaugel - Art Director, Sports Illustrated Magazine

Bob Peak - Top Illustrator

Doug Kirkland - Internationally known artist

Mitzi Morris - New York's foremost specialist in placing art directors and

Graphic Designers

David Tannour - Art critic and instructor at the Smithsonian

Jimmy Ernst - Internationally known contemporary painter

The names listed represent just a few of the great host of artists and designers who were brought to the campus to give students a broad view of the art world. Mr. Len Jossel, chairman and the Graphic Design and Illustration Department between 1976 and 1981 was responsible for bringing to the campus a great majority of these speakers. Mr. Mitchell, head of the Fine Arts Department, also secured the services of a number of outstanding fine artists.

For many years Saturday classes as well as week day classes were required of all students. In 1973 Saturday classes were discontinued.

Any history of Ringling School of Art would not be complete without making mention of Mr. Donald Nolt who came to the school first as the business manager and was later promoted to Vice President. He organized a highly efficient business office operation, became a friend of faculty and student alike and was always a steady supporter of the goals of the Ringling School of Art.

Perhaps one of the more exciting developments of the seventies was a new awareness of the school on the part of the community. This was evidenced by increased coverage in the local newspapers and area magazines. Financial contribution started to come to the school for the first time. In a Sarasota Herald Tribune Editorial the writer suggested that "Sarasotans too little appreciate what a gem they have in their midst in the Ringling School of Art and Design."

In order to provide an organized and well thought out direction for the future of the school, General Diller, Chairman of the board of trustees appointed a long range planning committee with the directive to review the needs of the school both in terms of the physical and educational aspects of its program. This committee formed in 1973 was composed of General LeGrande Diller, chairman; Mr. E.F. Keen, trustee; Mrs. Ethelia Ptmagrian, faculty; Mr. Charles Bradley, faculty; Mr. George Kaiser, administration; Dr. Robert Perkins, President; Mr. Robert Larsen,

faculty; Col. William DeWitt, alumnus; and Mr. John Hamel, trustee. The committee worked long and hard to establish in written form the needs and priorities for the future as they saw them. The reports from this committee became the foundation for the ultimate direction that the school would take in the seventies. This committee should be credited for much of the progress that took place in these blossoming years.

An Advisory Board composed of forty-four leaders from the Community was organized in 1974 with Thornton Utz as Chairman. Many suggestions and ideas came out of these meetings and were helpful to the Administration and to the Board. The exciting thing about this group was that it pointed out very dramatically that the community was indeed interested in the development of the school. From this initial meeting came the first of many financial contributions to the Library fund of the school. The first gift was a \$500.00 challenge donation with the understanding that it be matched with two like gifts. The donation was designated for the purchase of new books for the library. This was perhaps a small gift but it becomes very significant in the history of the school for it represented a change in philosophy which had always prided itself in fully paying its own way. Now came the new recognition that if the community would get behind the school financially it could provide better services and a better education for its students.

Reports on the progress of accreditation and the related need for a strong art library started the creative mind of Advisory Board member, Mrs. Andrew Sandegren, working. She had started a Library Association at New College and she suggested to the Advisory Committee that if they really wanted to support a strong library that this was the way to go. A one time item in the President's Annual Report predicted things to come. "A group called the *Friends of the Ringling Art Library* was formed with Mrs. Andrew Sandegren assuming the chairmanship." For those who knew something about the tenacity of this talented community leader it was akin to insuring success knowing that Annamae was at the helm. The organized Advisory Board did not last very long but from it sprang the Ringling School of Art Library Association and continued community support.

Mrs. Sandegren gathered around her five other persons and together this group became known as the founding members of the Ringling School of Art Library Association. They were Mr. Harry Schall, Miss Dorothea Dawson, Dr. Robert Perkins, Mrs. George Hurlbert, Dr. Elbertta Littrel, and Mrs. Sandegren. The growth of the Library Association paralleled the dramatic growth of the Library itself. The membership of the organization quickly grew from the five founding members to over five hundred dues paying members. Fund raising efforts included sponsorship of a *Sha Na Na* concert to inviting Vincent Price to talk on art. The organization revived the old Beaux Arts Balls and established a luncheon with an annual fashion style show sponsored by Jacobson's. These activities raised money and gave much needed publicity to the school. Faculty and community artists contributed art work to make the fashion show door prizes some of the most sought after of any like affair in the community. Book sales and a Rent-a-Santa program were other creative ideas that came from the Board. As a direct result of the interest and involvement of the Library Association large personal collections of magnificent art books and rare prints were donated to the school library. The Library Association was instrumental in securing sizeable grants from the Woman's Exchange. These have been used to enhance the quality of the school library. Monthly programs have been sponsored by the Association and have showcased some of the outstanding artists on the faculty and in the community. Mrs. George Stelzer, one of the Association presidents brought to the group the idea of a Town Hall which brought to the Library Association a substantial sum of money at the end of the 1981-82 school year. Individual members of the association became involved personally as they gave

regularly of their time and resources to improve the quality of the library. The Ringling School of Art Library Association has been responsible for securing for the school a great deal of money and a tremendous amount of positive public relations. It is impossible to put a dollar amount on the value of this total contribution, but if it were possible it would certainly far exceed the financial contribution of any other organization, group, or single individual. Many things had to be done at the school in order to gain accreditation, but at the heart of the matter was the need to improve library facilities, book and slide holdings and library services. If it were not for the support of the Library Association the school would have been hard pressed to gain the accreditation as soon as it did. Not only was the Association responsible for the addition of literally thousands of books but they also purchased much of the equipment that is now used in the new library facility. The Association has had dynamic leadership over the years. The presidents are listed for the record in appendix on page 30. Community leaders, serving on the board, have often been heard to say that the men and women working on the Ringling School of Art Library Association are some of the finest and most dedicated people in Sarasota.

In order to succeed, a library needs money and public support, but it also needs good administration and acceptable facilities. Very little emphasis had been placed on library services in the first forty years and, except for a small collection of basic art books and a few other unrelated books in a small room in the woman's dormitory, the library was virtually nonexistent. A Library Committee composed of instructors was established in 1971 and they secured a few new books and weeded out those not needed in an art library. Mrs. Dulin functioned very well as a custodian of the books available. Mrs. Marjorie Dixon came to the library to help out in April of 1973. "They had never had their library catalogued," she said, "but I told them I could not do the job for pay. Classifying about 1,500 art books took a full year and most of it had to be done in the summer when the students were not using the books." This was the beginning of an organized library for Ringling School of Art and the school owes much to Mrs. Dulin and to Mrs. Dixon who together got things started. Mrs. Dixon donated over two years of her time to complete the project.

The first professional librarian to be employed was Mrs. Elsie Straight who came in 1974 and directed the development of a small two room library into the sophisticated library program that now exists in the new Verman Kimbrough Library. Mrs. Straight and her staff, along with a sympathetic administration and a hard working Library Association made a winning team, and the Library was soon to become the finest library of its kind in the Southeast. When the accrediting team spoke about the "remarkable progress of the school" they certainly were speaking, in large measure, about the progress of the library services.

Buildings and facilities do not make a school, but adequate facilities greatly enhance the ability of capable and dedicated staff members to do an effective job. As part of the recommendations made to the school by the long range planning committee it was suggested that something must be done about improving facilities. Progress toward accomplishing that goal for better facilities was remarkable during the seventies. In 1973 a new 3,200 square foot completely air conditioned "Painting" studio was completed at a cost of \$50,000. This building is now used for the instruction of sculpture, a discipline for which the studio is especially well suited because of its high ceilings and massive natural north light source. By 1977 the school had built and completely equipped a modern photography dark room and laboratory for students studying photography. The total cost of this laboratory exceeded \$40,000. A grant of \$9,500 from the Sarasota Community Foundation helped to complete this project. A master plan for the school was developed by architect Jack West in cooperation with the Long Range Planning Committee.

Unfortunately when the first building was presented for bids they came in so high that the plan had to be scrapped and a complete revision of the entire project had to be made. Architect Robert Shaw and his associate Alan Domin were retained, and using the research in large measure completed by the Committee and by West a new master plan was developed. The first building to be constructed was a Library-studio complex in June of 1980 at a total cost of \$1,250,000. Fortunately during the early and middle seventies a reserve was built up for the school. These funds along with a number of individual and foundations grants made it possible to pay off the new building in full. Parenthetically it should be noted that the reserve funds earned in the first forty years of operation of the school made it possible to purchase much of the property that has been alluded to earlier in this history and to pay off a \$200,000 mortgage on the Bay Haven Hotel. The full amount of the magnificent Library-studio complex was earned through the various sources mentioned above. The largest single gift toward the construction of this ultra modern building was a grant from the William G. Selby and Marie Selby Foundation in the amount of \$200,000. The addition of this new building not only gave the school a beautiful new library facility but also six spacious studios all air conditioned and provided with natural north light for the optimum situation for quality space for art instruction.

Other renovations and improvements that took place during this time included fully air conditioning the Interior Design Studios, equipping the Graphic Design Department with extensive teaching aids including such items as stat cameras, lucies, video equipment at a cost of nearly \$50,000. In addition new easels were purchased for the Painting Department and some limited equipment for the etching department. Lead type printing presses were installed and typography was added to the curriculum. Early in the seventies the studios adjacent to the President's office were renovated at a cost of \$12,000.00. Dormitory renovations during this decade exceeded \$100,000. in cost. The pink look of the campus that was so prevalent for many years disappeared when the entire campus received a face lift in 1977. All of the buildings were painted a light yellow with funds received through a generous gift to the school by Mrs. Grace Penner.

After a number of faculty changes in the Interior Design Department, Mr. Bernard Soep, president of a large Boston design firm bearing his name, was brought to Sarasota to head the department in the Fall of 1979. He was brought here specifically to update the educational program of this department. Under his dynamic leadership the major once again gained the prominence that it once had under the leadership of Mr. Charles Nelson Bradley. The Interior Design staff examined very carefully the curricular offerings and related them to the current needs of the Interior Designer. This was a field that had seen some major changes in the last few years. The name of the department was changed to Interior Design and Space Planning to more accurately reflect the content of the new course of study and the current needs of the profession. It was at about this same time, that the name of the school was changed to RINGLING SCHOOL OF ART AND DESIGN, again to more accurately reflect the emphasis now being placed on the various aspects of design especially in the Graphic Design and Interior Design and Space Planning Departments.

Mr. Soep was not alone in bringing contemporary and innovated ideas into the classroom. Mr. Len Jossel, a highly successful graphic designer in his own right, brought many changes to that department always with the desire to make the academic offerings more professional especially in the second and third years. Mr. Mitchell of the Painting Department, now called the Fine Arts Department, has done much to bring breadth to his students' educational experience by placing more emphasis on contemporary art, sculpture, and printmaking.

A limited summer school and night school program for regular students and other interested students from the community came into being in 1978. Once again this summer school was to move for a few weeks to the mountains of North Carolina at the same place that it was initiated in 1941. Mr. McCurry directed the program in 1980, and Dean Robert Osborne led a contingent of faculty for a highly successful second year in the summer of 1981. Serving on the summer faculty with these men was Mr. Harry Habblitz.

Early in the seventies a Fourth Year Program was reinstated, The program had as its emphasis to give a special opportunity to honor students who had completed the regular three year program. They were given an opportunity to do highly specialized independent study under the personal direction and guidance of their choice of instructors. The program remained small throughout the seventies but some exciting and worthwhile results came from its students. Highlighting the work of some of these honor students is a sculpture garden that is now on display in the center patio area of the Library-Studio Complex. All of the sculptures were completed and donated to the school by the fourth year students of Mrs. Patmagrian.

Frustration and concern shrouded the campus early in 1980 when night prowlers on the campus attacked some of the women students and an outside intruder fired a pistol at one of the women students in the dormitory. The need for tightened security became very evident and students became aware of the need to show more precaution when going out at night alone, These disturbing activities caused much concern and caused the administration to review their responsibility to provide better security for students. A very efficient plan has since been put into place.

Over the years many faculty could be singled out for excellence in their work and dedication to the school, but there simply is not room to adequately delineate their contributions in a brief history. Mr. Sweney served the school for twenty-five years. His work as a wild life illustrator was widely recognized as among the finest and most accurate of any living wild life artist. Students flocked to his classes to take advantage of studying with him. Another teacher who will long be remembered for his great talent and inspirational teaching techniques was the internationally know painter and illustrator, Loren Wilford. Mr. Fiore Custode was keenly 'interested in printmaking and etching. On his own time and with a small band of students Custode developed the present course of study offered by the school in this area. The record of often underpaid faculty, is impressive and has been the real source of strength of the school for many years.

In 1978 the building known as the Riverside Dormitory was condemned for use as a Dormitory. In 1980 the main building was condemned subject to the installation of major renovations. These actions taken by the state fire marshall pointed out the need that the school had for adequate student housing. Architect Robert Shaw was employed to design a new dormitory for women. Plans were completed and put out for bids but unfortunately came in substantially above estimates. The trustees decided to delay the construction of the new dormitory and complete the renovations necessary to bring the old Bay Haven Hotel up to code. Extensive work was done in the dormitory including the construction of two interior fire escapes, the installation of new fire defection devices, and the inclusion of all new communal bathrooms. At the same time extensive repair work was completed in the new dormitory. Although extensive and very expensive, this work may be considered only a temporary answer to the pressing need to provide suitable student housing.

During the seventies salaries for faculty were increased dramatically. By 1981 the salaries began to become competitive with other institutions of like quality in the country. As the direct result of extensive conversations between the Administration and the Faculty Association a new Faculty Salary Scale was put into effect for the 1981-82 school year. Much credit for developing the scale and negotiating a satisfactory solution to the problem must go to Mrs. Ethelia Patmagrian president of the Faculty Association in the 1980-81 school year.

At the annual meeting of the Board of Trustees in May of 1981 Dr. Robert Perkins tendered his resignation. In a statement to the trustees he indicated that he felt that his work was done and that it was now time for a new person to take over the leadership of the school. He expressed his appreciation for the opportunity to serve the school for eleven years and indicated satisfaction about the accomplishments of the school in the seventies. Trustee Robert Snelling was appointed chairman of a presidential search committee. After an extensive search Dr. Herbert J. Burgart was named President to assume his duties as of September 1, 1981. Dr. Burgart served as President of Moore College of Art in Philadelphia for five years. Prior to that he was Dean of the School of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University. He came to Ringling School of Art and Design well equipped to lead the school into its second fifty years. In the words of the student publication, *THE RINGLING RECORD*, "Under Dr. Burgart's leadership, we can look forward to even more exciting and constructive growth in the years ahead."

At a party given in honor of President and Mrs. Perkins it was learned that the major room in the library would be known as the "Robert E. Perkins Reading Room". Mrs. Perkins who contributed so much to the life of the school and to the Library Association was presented with diamond earrings. To permanently commemorate the occasion, Thornton Utz was commissioned to do a portrait of Perkins which now hangs permanently in the Library. Since leaving the school Perkins has accepted a position as Executive Director of the William G. Selby and Marie Selby Foundation in Sarasota, Florida.

Presidents come and go, students move on, buildings deteriorate, and faculty come and go but the Spirit of that which is Ringling School of Art and Design lives permanently in the hearts and minds of all who have been a part of the school. After fifty years of service the school stands strong; ready to meet the challenges of the future. Fifty years of growth, success, failure, dreams, and aspirations have come to a close. Ringling School of Art and Design now looks forward to an even more successful future because of the dreams of its present leaders and the legacy of the past. Ringling will continue to make an impact on the world in which we live by training and educating its students to design the space we live in, create the images that surround us all our lives, and teach the world to appreciate and understand the unique message of the visual artist.

President Burgart said it well when he said, "We, who are members of the Ringling family, have before us the most exciting of futures, the challenge of providing the best of programs, and the assurance of offering the finest faculty, staff and educational services with apologies to no one."

### *Appendix*

The Administration, Faculty, Staff and Students of RINGLING SCHOOL OF ART Sarasota, Florida are pleased to announce that at the December 11, 1979 Annual Meeting of the Commission on

Colleges of the SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS, Ringling School of Art was granted full accreditation and membership as a Level 11 degree granting institution.

#### RINGLING SCHOOL OF ART ADMINISTRATION

*Director*

1931-32 - Dr. Ludd Spivey

*Assistant Director*

1931-32 - Verman Kimbrough

*President*

1933-70 - Verman Kimbrough

1971-81 - Dr. Robert E. Perkins

1981- - Dr. Herbert Burgart

*Dean*

1931 - Carl Cox

*Bursar*

1931-32 - Walter Ropp 1935-36

*Dean of Women (Counselor to Women)*

1931-34 - Edith Kimbrough

1935-36 - Annie Fordham

1937-41 - Helen Rankin

1944-45 - Edith Kimbrough

1946 - Isabel McClendon

1947-48 - Joan Kaiser

1949-50 - Kathleen Borrer

1951-56 - Elizabeth Ryan

1959-72 - Renee Dulin

1973-77 - Gertrude Howlett

1978-Present - Freida Culp

*Administrator*

1933 - Paul Penningroth

1933 - Bern Bullard

*Registrar and Dean of Students*

*Registrar and Director of Admissions*

1979-Present - Lisa Redling Kaplan

*Registrar*

1935 - Mattie Rettig

1959-78 - George H. Kaiser, Jr.

*Executive Secretary*

1946

1947-58 - James McClendon -George H. Kaiser, Jr.

*Vice President*

1968-69 - William J. Kittle

1970 - Robert E. Perkins

1979-Present - Donald Nolt

#### RINGLING SCHOOL OF ART FACULTY

(Each year represents the beginning of the school year of faculty appointment)

*Business Manager*

1973

1974-78

*Dean of Faculty*

- Frank Cockran -Donald Nolt

1974-Present - Robert Osborne

*Director of Development*

1977 - Stuart Post

1980 - Glenn Mosher

*Dean of Students*

1979-Present - Harry Habblitz

George Ennis – 1931

John Koopman – 1931

Ezra Winter – 1931

Hilton Leech - 1931-1936 and 1939-1946

Ben Looney – 1931

John Phillips – 1931

Carl Nordell – 1931

Benjamin Kurtz – 1931

Max Bern Cohen - 1931-1932

Minna McLeod Beck – 1932

Harrington Betts – 1932

Bern Bullard - 1932-1934 and 1961-1963 and 1946-1959

Fredric Sweney - 1949-1960

Kraemer Kittredge - 1932-1933

Ruby Warren Newby – 1932

Charles Adrian Pillars - 1932-1935

Louise Tessin – 1932

Donald Blake - 1933-1954

Adolf Robert Shulz - 1934-1935

Francis Weatherbee – 1934

Lucile Blanch – 1935

Mary Hynes – 1935

Marie Saint-Gaudens – 1935

Morris Mitchell - 1959-Present

Loran Wilford - 1936-1943 and 1948-1969

Martha Estur - 1960

Stanley Woodward - 1936-1938

Romaine Gibson – 1936

Guy Saunders - 1936-1978

Edith Roddy - 1937-1938

Elmer Harmes - 1937-1942

Maude Loomis Dean - 1938-1942

Eula Castle - 1943-1946

Georgia Warren - 1943-1945

Christopher Clark - 1945-1946

Paul Seaney - 1945- 1946-Present

George Kaiser

Frank Herring - 1947-1949

Jack Wilson - 1947

Alma Capen - 1948-1949

James Dulin - 1948-1958

William Richter - 1948

Edward Leonard - 1948

John Gee - 1932 and 1965-1977

Andrew Sanders - 1950-1959

Richard De Eleuterio - 1951-1953

Charles Riley - 1955-1957

Richard Floethe - 1956-1967

Leonard Chapman - 1956-1971

Sid Hix - 1957-1972

Richard Oxley - 1957-1965

Bob Camblin - 1958-1959

Clarence Vollmer - 1958

Charles Bradley - 1959-1976

Loran Jones - 1960-1969

Gerald Purdy - 1960

William Chadsey - 1961-1967

Bruce Gregory - 1961-Present

Frank Rampolla - 1961-1968(Died 1971)