

# The Spirit of '76 – A Little Aventure

MSCNY Article No. 72



One of the most impressive and memorable US stamp series was the *The Spirit of '76* trio shown here. Its design was based on the artwork of Brother Archibald M. Willard. An article in the MP for December 1975 (Vol. 32, No. 4) provides an excellent background for both Brother Willard and his painting. Also, the Wikipedia entry provides additional insights. I have included both in this paper, giving the reader a “little adventure” into the time and mind-sets over 100 years ago.

The painting definitely speaks to us, and goes beyond the confines of the postage stamps. We see the drummer-boy gazing intently at the aged leader, looking for direction. The leader has a look of intense determination. He is too old to take up arms, so provides his wisdom and example instead. The man with the fife is middle-aged, and is a call for able-bodied men to take up the cause. A wounded patriot in the foreground waves his hat in a gesture to continue the fight.



Bro. Willard completed this painting in 1876, nine years after receiving his Master Mason's Degree. I have to wonder if the trio in his painting is a reflection of the Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason. I am sure the thought crossed his mind. We

see the same sort of representation in Masonic art as illustrated here. Just when this sculpture was created, I have not established, but it likely predated Brother Willard; and being an artist, he likely knew of it.

I won't argue that the theme (youth, adult, senior) is as generic as it is Masonic; however, Freemasonry incorporated it into a philosophy.

The object of Bro. Willard's painting is the great determination and "spirit," as it were, of the American colonists in a revolution that many people thought was a lost cause. To go up against the world's greatest power was akin to suicide. Nevertheless, it did not work out that way. The determination we see expressed in the painting won the day. (USA #1629-31)

The article in *The Masonic Philatelist* is now presented, followed by the Wikipedia entry.



*Culture is Worship*  
*Master, Craftsmen, Apprentice*

### THE SPIRIT OF '76

On January 1, 1976 the United States Postal Service will issue a strip of three stamps reproducing the famous painting by Artist Archibald M. Willard, "Spirit of '76."

Willard is an artist remembered for a single painting, although there are some 14 versions of it. You won't find his name in most art reference works, but the patriotic fervor of his Revolutionary War life and drum trio has made it a popular favorite for nearly a century.

Willard was born Oct. 22, 1836 in Bedford, Ohio, served for four years with an Ohio regiment during the Civil War, and then returned to a job painting wagons at Tripp's carriage works in Wellington, Ohio. He also painted two mildly humorous childlike pictures which sold well as chromolithographs, earning enough money for him to take an art course in New York City in 1873, his only formal training except for a few lessons from an itinerant painter.

Back in Ohio, Willard looked about for a theme to tie in with the upcom-

ing Centennial celebration of 1876. A July 4th militia muster day at Wellington, provided the idea when he saw and sketched a high-spirited rural trio of two drummers and a fifer clowning on the green.

James F. Ryder, the Cleveland photographer and art dealer who had marketed his chromos, immediately saw the possibilities. Forget the humor, he advised. Paint it as a serious patriotic picture. Willard worked out his theme in a number of trial sketches. He kept the three figures, but this time the middle one, for which his father posed, was a tall, white-haired drummer, coatless, marching grimly into battle. A Civil War comrade, Hugh Moser, posed for the fifer, a bearded man in Continental uniform, his head bandaged. Henry Kelsey Devereaux, a cadet at a Cleveland military academy, was the model for the drummer boy, who is gazing admiringly at the old man as the three advance. The scene is a battlefield, with flag-carrying troops in the rear and a wounded soldier at lower right.

The eight-by-ten foot painting was

completed early in 1876, and displayed in Ryder's shop window. The Centennial art committee was uninterested, but the painting drew crowds, and prints of it aroused such enthusiasm that the committee wired Willard asking him to bring it to Philadelphia, Pa. There it proved by far the most popular painting in an acre and a half of canvases.

After Philadelphia triumph, Gen. John Henry Devereau, a railroad official and father of the model for the drummer boy, purchased the picture and sent it on a tour of the country. Later he presented it to the town of Marblehead, Mass., his birthplace, where it still hangs in Abbot Hall.

Archibald M. Willard was a member of Wellington Lodge No. 127, Wellington, Ohio. He was initiated March 21, 1867, passed April 30, 1867 and raised May 21, 1867. On Dec. 15, 1891 Willard demitted and never re-affiliated.

### WIKIPEDIA ENTRY

Archibald MacNeal Willard (August 22, 1836 – October 11, 1918) was an American painter who was born and raised in Bedford, Ohio. Willard joined the 86th Ohio Infantry in 1863 and fought in the American Civil War. During this time, he painted several scenes from the war and forged a friendship with photographer James F. Ryder. Willard painted *The Spirit of '76* in Wellington, Ohio after he saw a parade pass through the town square. Willard also painted three murals in the main hall of the Fayette County courthouse in Washington Court House, Ohio: *The Spirit of Electricity*, *The Spirit of Telegraphy*, and *The Spirit of the Mail*.

Willard is buried in Wellington, Ohio at the Greenwood Cemetery. There is a Willard Drive in Bedford and a Willard Avenue in nearby Garfield Heights named after him.

Willard's most famous work is *The Spirit of '76* (previously known as

*Yankee Doodle*), which was exhibited at the Centennial Exposition. The original is displayed in Abbot Hall, Marblehead, Massachusetts, with several later variations painted by Willard exhibited around the country (including in the United States Department of State). Of note, he used his father as the model for the middle character of the painting. The painting originated from a sketch done by Willard, which included 3 men dancing and singing. He also has several other works of art, *The Blue Girl*, *Pluck*, and others not as recognized.

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Brother Achibald Willard. His “determination” matches that which we see in his painting. Such was the way it was “back then.” Everything was “serious,” and truth was paramount. It’s not the same today. Although losing seriousness was a plus, the loss of truth is devastating.