THE SHRIVER HALL MURALS COMPLETING THE PICTURE

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In 1939, Johns Hopkins alumnus Alfred Jenkins Shriver died, leaving $800,000 to the university. In his will, Shriver stipulated that the funds be used to construct a new lecture hall on the Homewood campus. He provided a lengthy list of conditions to be met if the university were to accept the money. These conditions included the creation of murals depicting the Original Board of Trustees of Johns Hopkins University, Original Board of Trustees of Johns Hopkins Hospital, Original Faculty of Philosophy, Original Faculty of the School of Medicine, Six Generations [of the Shriver family], Baltimore Clipper Ships, Class of 1891, Philanthropists of Baltimore, and Famous Beauties of Baltimore.

In the 1950s, the university began construction of the building and commissioned artist Leon Kroll to paint the entrance murals. (The remainder of the murals are located elsewhere in the building and were painted by other artists.) With the help of Johns Hopkins registrar Irene Davis, Kroll collected physical descriptions, photographs, and costumes to accurately portray the individuals named by Shriver. In 1956, the lobby murals made their debut.

In 2015, a series of articles in the Times Higher Education called attention to controversial monuments on college campuses. One article focused on sexism in the Shriver Hall murals, questioning the suitability of the paintings for display at a modern university.* The article prompted students in Elizabeth Rodini’s course Introduction to the Museum: Issues and Ideas to search the Hopkins archives for more context. Each student wrote two short texts: one providing background information on the murals and one featuring a comparative image of their choosing and interpretation. The following passages are their way of completing the picture presented by Shriver Hall.
American universities are currently enmeshed in complicated, sometimes highly charged debates about how to remember and talk about their own histories. Negotiating the past in the present can be tricky business. Following a 2015 article challenging the suitability of the Johns Hopkins Shriver Hall murals within a modern institution of higher learning, I invited current students to lend their voices to a conversation around history and memory.

The themes that emerge in their brief texts provide a window not only onto the history of the university and the murals, but onto Johns Hopkins students themselves, including the issues they care about and campus life as they experience it. It is my hope that, through this applied exercise, the student authors have a fuller sense of the entangled narrative strands that make up any historical interpretation.

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Many people contributed to the Shriver Hall signage project, most importantly the students whose names appear throughout this booklet. Special thanks are due to Professor Stuart W. (“Bill”) Leslie and University Archivist James Stimpert for historical guidance and support; Curator of Cultural Properties Jacqueline M. O’Regan for implementation; Dr. Elizabeth Rodini; Victoria Kaak for graphic design services; and project intern Samantha Smart, KSAS ‘18.

ALFRED JENKINS SHRIVER
(1867–1939)

ALFRED JENKINS SHRIVER graduated from Johns Hopkins University in 1891. He was a founding member of the Johns Hopkins Club and later President of the University Club of Baltimore. Shriver became a successful lawyer, specializing in wills and estates. He was a lifelong bachelor who cherished old-fashioned values and loved hosting dinner parties. In 1937, before undergoing surgery at the Johns Hopkins Hospital, Shriver wrote a detailed will, leaving the majority of his money to Johns Hopkins University for the construction of a lecture hall.
By the time LEON KROLL was asked to paint murals for Shriver Hall’s lobby, he had already established himself as a renowned American painter. He had studied at esteemed institutions, including the Art Students League and National Academy of Design in New York and the Académie Julian in Paris. Although he was most famous for his female nudes, Kroll also painted murals for the U.S. Department of Justice Building and the Worcester Memorial Auditorium in Massachusetts.
IRENE DAVIS (1901–1994)

IRENE DAVIS joined Johns Hopkins University as assistant registrar in 1924, and served as registrar from 1946 to 1968. In this position, Davis’s duties generally revolved around registration, transcripts, and course scheduling. However, Davis played a central role in collecting the information, photographs, and costumes needed to create the Shriver murals. She oversaw the development of the murals from their initial proposal in Alfred Shriver’s will through their eventual installation.
DR. ALAN M. CHESNEY
(1888–1964)

DR. ALAN M. CHESNEY served as Dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine from 1929 to 1953, later becoming the school's unofficial historian. Chesney was asked to help determine which men would be pictured in the Original Faculty of Medicine mural. He later objected to the mural's content, repeatedly questioning its accuracy.
Alfred Shriver’s will stipulated that one of the commissioned murals should feature ten philanthropists: Johns Hopkins, James Cardinal Gibbons, Arthur B. Kinsolving, Theodore Marburg, George Peabody, Enoch Pratt, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Moses Sheppard, Robert H. Jenkins, and William H. Welch. They had all died by the time the mural was begun in 1954 and so, to portray these philanthropists accurately, artist Leon Kroll requested as much biographical and physical information as possible. The job of collecting this information fell to Irene Davis, the university registrar. She sent out letters contacting the families, coworkers, and friends of the philanthropists, hoping to gain insight into their lives. Many replied with long letters, biographical sketches, and photographs of the men. Davis’s final descriptions featured such details as the men’s weight, height, hair color, eye color, “tint of skin,” physicality, and any “eccentricity.”

—Gillian Waldo, KSAS ‘18
Reverend Arthur B. Kinsolving stands centered behind a table, gazing straight ahead. According to his niece, he was an extroverted man with many interests. In her descriptions of her uncle to Irene Davis, the Hopkins registrar, she included little physical detail—a tall man in clericals, dark eyes—and instead elaborated on personal tastes and interests. He loved poetry, painting, and opera, and had been fond of outdoor athletics throughout his life. She even went so far as to hypothesize at length about the origins of his last name, Kinsolving, and decided that the family was of Spanish, not Scandinavian descent. In all of this, one wonders: to what extent could all of this personal, non-physical detail come to light in a face painted on a canvas?

—Molly Young, KSAS ’18
Johns Hopkins University and Johns Hopkins Hospital and Medical School were founded thanks to generous acts of philanthropy. This tradition of giving back to the community continued at these institutions long after their founder’s death. Here a group of Baltimore children pose with a car from the Johns Hopkins Social Services Department. The car was used to transport patients who were not considered “ambulance cases.” The Social Services Department was founded by Dr. William Osler, who strongly believed that medical professionals had a duty to care for the social needs of their patients. He asked his medical residents to become members of the Charity Organization Society and in 1907 the hospital created its own Department of Social Services. It provided patients with whatever they needed to recover, be it glasses and medication or spiritual guidance from clergy members.

—Gillian Waldo, KSAS ’18
The philanthropists depicted by Leon Kroll likely had many ideas of the kinds of educational pursuits their money would support. This image, however, depicts a single female student’s quiet moment in academia, doing intricate work that requires deep focus and is rarely seen by outside eyes, let alone the eyes of the philanthropists. She is accompanied by nothing more than a skeletal model and a cadaver—a sharp contrast to the company of the philanthropists on the wall, and to the very concept of the Shriver murals: works of public art with myriad onlookers. One cannot help but wonder how many more solitary intellectual moments like this were made possible by the philanthropists' gifts to the university.

—Molly Young, KSAS ’18
This photograph was taken in 1959, the same time period as the murals’ unveiling in Shriver Hall, and captures a student moment at the School of Hygiene and Public Heath. The photo resembles the mural of a medical examination room, although that painting depicts the Original Faculty of Medicine from the late nineteenth century. Both show, through their group focus on models and microscopes, that a willingness to collaborate and share knowledge in the field of medicine remains consistent over the years. Unlike the mural, however, the photograph illustrates a scene of greater diversity, with a woman and Sikh man involved in study, showing the progress of the school towards greater inclusion of a multifaceted student body.

—Anna Silk, KSAS ‘18
In his will, Alfred Shriver demanded that Shriver Hall feature a mural of the original faculty of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. To the many pre-medical and medical students at Johns Hopkins today, the mural likely seems strange, outdated, and completely unlike their experience as medical students. What may surprise viewers of the mural is that it evoked a similar response in Dr. Alan M. Chesney, dean of the school from 1929 to 1953. In 1954, Chesney wrote a strongly worded letter to the university, arguing that the scene developed by the artist was completely implausible. He noted that the men portrayed would never have been in the same room together, nor would so many physicians stand and observe a single patient. Chesney also loathed the image of the naked woman on the table, asserting that it was ridiculous for a woman to be examined naked in a room that was clearly not an operating room.

—Samantha Smart, KSAS ‘18
Controversies surrounding the Shriver Hall murals already existed at the time of their creation. After painter Leon Kroll was chosen for the project and exposed his plans for the murals, the scene he had selected to represent the faculty of medicine triggered disapproving reactions within the Hopkins community. In July 1954, Dr. Alan M. Chesney, dean of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine until 1953, expressed his displeasure in a letter addressed to the registrar Irene Davis, who was in charge of collecting information and advice with regards to the murals. He deplored the “totally unrealistic” scene Kroll proposed. According to Chesney, an operation would never be the object of such a large gathering of physicians. Yet his opinion remained unheard by the artist, who decided to follow his own initial inspiration.

—Alice Decuypur, Visiting International Student, 2015–16
An article published by John Kaag in August of 2015 drew attention to the controversies surrounding the murals adorning Shriver Hall. However, Kaag was not the first person to criticize the murals. When they were still in planning in 1954, Dr. Alan M. Chesney—at that time writing a history of the Johns Hopkins Medical School—criticized the *Original Faculty of Medicine* mural for its inaccuracy. He said that there was never an instance when a group casually gathered to examine a naked woman on a table, and that this was an inaccurate portrayal of a medical examination on the part of the artist. Moreover, he said these men would have never gathered in the same room under any circumstances. The entire scene was of the muralist’s own invention.

—Madelena Brancati, KSAS ‘18
This photograph shows Dr. William Stewart Halsted performing surgery in Johns Hopkins’ newly opened operating theater. The photograph was taken in 1904, not long after the period represented in the *Original Faculty of Medicine* mural. The contrast between these two images is significant. The photo takes place in an operating theater, the physicians and nurses are completely garbed in scrubs and uniforms, and an audience of doctors and medical students watch attentively from their seats. Artist Leon Kroll’s intention was clearly not to create a factual representation of late nineteenth-century surgery. According to a 1954 document, Kroll wanted the mural to be “a symbol of the medical profession in consultation and concern with the health of humanity” rather than an accurate portrayal of medical procedure.

— Samantha Smart, KSAS ‘18
This recent photograph offers an interesting perspective on the Original Faculty of Medicine mural. In the foreground of the photo are contemporary members of the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, while the background features The Four Doctors, painted in 1906 by John Singer Sargent to represent the original medical faculty. All of these images reveal a process of creative selection. Sargent chose to focus on four members of the faculty gathered around books; Shriver Hall muralist Leon Kroll decided to represent a larger group of physicians performing an examination; and the author of this photograph gives priority to racial and gender diversity in the contemporary school. This comparison sheds light on how artists shape our perceptions of people and places.

—Alice Decuyper, Visiting International Student, 2015-16
In his will, Alfred Shriver detailed which murals were to be painted and the consequences facing the university if any of his demands were not met. Despite this insistence, the university overlooked his request in the case of the *Six Generations* mural. It was to depict five couples from the Shriver family and one of the youngest couple’s children. But several (unidentified) individuals who were to be painted strongly objected to the mural, and in the end it was never created. University officials recorded their intention to obtain letters detailing the individuals’ objections in case the issue went to court. The location of these letters is unknown, and in later correspondence the controversy appears to have been forgotten.

—Samantha Lindgren, KSAS ‘17
As part of the planning of the Shriver Hall murals, the registrar of the university, Irene Davis, did extensive research for the artist, Leon Kroll. She gathered information on every person portrayed in the murals, including details not only about their physical appearance but about their demeanor and attitude as well. Using this information, Kroll created extremely accurate portraits that captured the essence of the Famous Beauties, original faculties, Class of 1891, and ten Philanthropists. However, not everything in these murals is completely accurate. The content of the mural is depicted in a fashion dictated by Shriver’s will, but these people would have never met in this way and their time at Hopkins did not overlap. Thus one must ask: why spend so much time striving for accuracy when the murals’ subject matter is flawed to begin with?

—Jordan Poston, KSAS ‘19
When Alfred Shriver died, he bequeathed a large amount of his wealth to Johns Hopkins in order to build this hall and furnish it with oddly specific murals. The will stipulated who should be included in the murals, where the murals should be placed, and what materials should be used. These demands made the process of creating the murals tedious, requiring artists and administrators to ask minute questions, such as “must each group occupy a separate panel?” Shriver gave little indication of specific painting styles and did not stipulate that the artists bear any connection to Baltimore, nor that the same artist paint all murals. Ultimately, Leon Kroll was tasked with painting the murals in the lobby, while James Owen Maloney and Deane Keller were made responsible for murals elsewhere in the building.

—Julia Zimmerman, KSAS ‘19
This photo shows the first doctoral student of the Johns Hopkins Maternal and Child Health Program, Sushila Nayar, in 1950. She later led health care development in India for more than 40 years. If Johns Hopkins’ School of Hygiene and Public Health had had its way, a minority student like Nayar would have appeared among the ubiquitously white and predominantly male group of figures in the Shriver Hall murals. Leon Kroll had asked each school of the university to nominate a student model to represent the school in the paintings. Public Health selected a female Indian physician. However, Kroll eventually abandoned her as the model and painted a generic white female figure instead; she is the seated woman in black to the right of the doorway.

—Silin Chen, KSAS ’16
Johns Hopkins University has seen many changes since the graduation of Alfred Shriver's class of 1891. The class of 2019, graduating 128 years after Shriver, looks very different. Shriver's class mural depicts a small, homogenous student body of white men. Women were not admitted to the university until 1970, and the class of 2018 has over 1,300 students, half of which are female. Only 9% of the students are African-American, however. This percentage is strikingly low, especially given that Johns Hopkins is located in Baltimore City where over 60% of the population is African-American. Where will we be in 128 years with the Class of 2147? Where do we want to be?

—Allison Cox, KSAS ‘16
The small mural of Johns Hopkins University’s class of 1891—perched above the doorway to the right of the auditorium—is a quiet reminder of a gap in Hopkins’ history. This portrait-within-a-portrait reveals several dozen bright young men, all undergraduates at Hopkins. Yet a comparison with the photo of the Peabody Conservatory’s class of 1927 reminds us that Hopkins did not admit women as undergraduate students until 1970 (the Peabody Conservatory joined with Johns Hopkins University in 1985). In fact, in 1923 Johns Hopkins undergraduate students overwhelming voted against “the female intrusion into the undergraduate body.”

—Andrea White, KSAS ‘19
Pictured here are African-American students on the steps of Shriver Hall in the 1970s. Ironically, just feet from where they sit are murals that do not include a single person of color. This is largely a result of painter Leon Kroll’s decision to adhere to a historical narrative that focused on the majority of the Hopkins community (i.e. white men). Though an African-American presence was not strong until the 1960s at Hopkins, African Americans were nevertheless active and integral members of Homewood and the medical campuses. Notable figures such as Kelly Miller, the first African-American student to be admitted to the university (1887), Vivien Thomas, surgical technician in the first successful “blue baby” surgery (1944), and Frederick Scott, the first African-American undergraduate in the class of 1950, attest to African-American involvement at the university prior to the completion of the murals.

—Casey Haughin, KSAS ‘19
Notice the painting of a young man and woman studying a book. The man is explaining something from the book to the female student, a visitor to the Homewood campus and representative of the School of Education (women were not admitted to the undergraduate school until 1970). To modern eyes this image painted in the 1950s might seem sexist, especially considering the potentially provocative position of the man’s hand.

Compare this modern photo with the mural. In the photo, the students are studying together, dressed casually, laughing, and engaging informally to further their own knowledge. Clearly student life has changed, in terms of the relationship between the sexes and most obviously in that about half of today’s undergraduates are women.

—Samantha Lindgren, KSAS ’17
The murals in Shriver Hall were designed to reflect the history of Johns Hopkins University as well as life at Hopkins. These murals, however, leave out an important part of life at the university. Student life is barely represented and the few students that are shown are only painted in academic settings, either reading or studying. While the primary goal of the university is education, it has many other outlets that students can explore and enjoy. Students have the freedom to express themselves through a variety of extracurricular activities, like sports or music. Hopkins’ students not only achieve academic excellence, but they are well versed in a multitude of subjects. As we can see from this photo from 1888 of the football team, Hopkins has always been a place that promotes its students to be well-rounded in all aspects of life.

—Jordan Poston, KSAS ‘19
These murals depict a version of Hopkins where the students almost do not exist. Instead, artist Leon Kroll’s murals show faculty and trustees nearly exclusively, with the token student placed on the sides. By leaving out the students, the murals suggest that student life is secondary at Hopkins. Although academics are a large part of the Hopkins experience, students do not spend their entire lives focused on schoolwork. This photograph shows friends in a casual “jam session” in a Hopkins dorm room in 1952. The candid nature of the photograph reminds the viewer of the joy that comes from friendships formed outside the classroom. To these students, and many students before and after them, student life was anything but secondary.

—Julia Zimmerman, KSAS ’19
Basil Gildersleeve stands in the center of the *Original Faculty of Philosophy*. An accomplished philologist and one of the original faculty members of the university, Gildersleeve’s portrait can be seen in other locations around Homewood campus. Despite these other representations, Leon Kroll aimed to go beyond the existing portraiture to create the most accurate depictions possible. This ambition led to a series of correspondences between the registrar and individuals who knew Gildersleeve’s physical appearance. The resulting letters recount his height as 5 feet, 11 inches, his weight as heavy, the length at which he usually kept his beard, and how he leaned on his walking stick. These details gave Kroll the information necessary to create a depiction of Gildersleeve that likely mirrors his appearance while at Hopkins.

—Casey Haughin, KSAS ‘19
Although not apparent at first glance, women played an important role both in the creation and aesthetic appeal of the Shriver Hall murals. Hidden within the face and costume of each figure is the work of Irene Davis and the women of the Baltimore Historical Society. Were it not for their research in archives and family collections, artist Leon Kroll would have lacked the photographic evidence and examples of attire to depict each figure accurately. In addition, these women informed Kroll of each subject’s quirks—a love of golf, a late-in-life mustache, a spendthrift nature—and thus helped create faithful portraits that still allowed the painter some artistic creativity.

—Andrea White, KSAS ‘19
Written in 1937, Alfred Shriver’s will required the execution of a mural featuring ten women whom he designated as the most beautiful in Baltimore, each to be portrayed at the “height of her beauty.” When the project concluded in 1956, abundant newspaper articles criticized this particular mural for reasons that ranged from Shriver’s “enshrin[ing] his personal memory” in a university to his subjective definition of beauty. However the contrast between the portrait of beautiful women at a tea party and that of an all-male group of intellectual scholars nearby went unnoticed at the time. Recently, this juxtaposition has caused a substantial controversy about stereotyping gender roles.

—Silin Chen, KSAS ‘16
Alfred Shriver’s will requested a mural panel of the *Famous Beauties of Baltimore*. Shriver named ten women he wanted depicted, and stipulated that each be painted “at the time of the height of her beauty.” Shriver did not cite his reasoning for wanting the mural, or what he defined as the “height of beauty,” leaving artist Leon Kroll to fit them into the mural scheme creatively. In a 1956 *Evening Sun* article, Kroll claimed that he depicted the ten women as “patronesses” to balance the mural of male philanthropists across the room. Although their history as patrons is uncertain, Kroll maintained that he needed to give the women a reason for their presence among the “fifty-five eminent men” seen in the murals. In a letter of 1954, Kroll defended his decision on the basis that the women had “surely inspired philanthropy,” that they had “a good design reason for being there,” and that their presence would “enhance the aesthetic aspect of the work.”

—Allison Cox, KSAS ‘16
Although artist Leon Kroll was in correspondence with the university's registrar regarding the exact appearance of each and every character included in the murals, he did not take the same care in rendering the campus itself. The Famous Beauties of Baltimore appear to be set in a lush garden, until one notices the Carroll house (Homewood) in the background and realizes they are located on what is now “The Beach” off of Charles Street. This photograph, taken in the early 1920s, confirms that such whimsical landscaping never existed. In addition, the ten “Belles” would not have gathered like this at all. The women were all of different ages, and each was painted at a different time in her life according to Alfred Shriver's specifications. Since at least three of them were deceased before Shriver's death in 1939, there is no way they could have posed for or given their consent for the mural.

— Madelena Brancati, KSAS ‘18
The Friends of the Library held a tea and private showing of the Shriver Hall lobby murals with painter Leon Kroll present on November 9, 1956. According to an Evening Sun article published that day, Kroll said it took “seven thousand painting hours” to create the murals, including 63 life-sized figures in total on 90 linear feet of wall space. Family members of those related to the murals’ figures, as well as those affiliated with the university, were invited to this first public display of the paintings. The Saturday morning edition of the paper quoted Mrs. DeCourcy Wright Thom, depicted as a one of the Famous Beauties of Baltimore, as saying that, “Mr. Shriver… would have approved the murals.” With the murals having survived 60 years in Shriver Hall, perhaps he indeed would have been pleased.

—Anna Silk, KSAS ‘18
Front and back covers: Details of *Original Faculty of Medicine, Original Faculty of Philosophy, Philanthropists of Baltimore*, and *Famous Beauties of Baltimore*, Leon Kroll, 1956. Oil on canvas, 259 cm. x 644 cm. Will Kirk/Homewood Photography.

Page 4: Thomas Cromwell Corner, *Alfred Jenkins Shriver*, 1936. Oil on canvas, 106.7 cm. x 84.4 cm. Johns Hopkins University Collections, presented to the University by the University Club; JH1992.357.


Page 7: *Alan Mason Chesney*, 1953. #178864, Courtesy of The Alan Mason Chesney Medical Archives, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions. Photograph by Robert Mottar.

Page 10: *Johns Hopkins Hospital Social Services Department Automobile*, c. 1910. #146068, Courtesy of The Alan Mason Chesney Medical Archives, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions.

Page 11: *Medical Student Dissecting in Anatomy Laboratory*, c. 1950. #113619, Courtesy of The Alan Mason Chesney Medical Archives, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions. Photograph by Robert Mottar.

Page 12: *Epidemiology and Basic Science Classes, School of Hygiene*, c. 1959. #185037, Courtesy of The Alan Mason Chesney Medical Archives, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions. Photograph by Richard C. Thompson.

Page 16: *William Halsted and Others Operating in Surgical Amphitheater*, 1904. #159122, Courtesy of The Alan Mason Chesney Medical Archives, Johns Hopkins Medical Institutions. Photograph by Clinton Brush.


Page 26: *Group Photograph of Football Team in Uniform*, 1888. #05076, Ferdinand Hamburger University Archives, Sheridan Libraries, Johns Hopkins University.


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