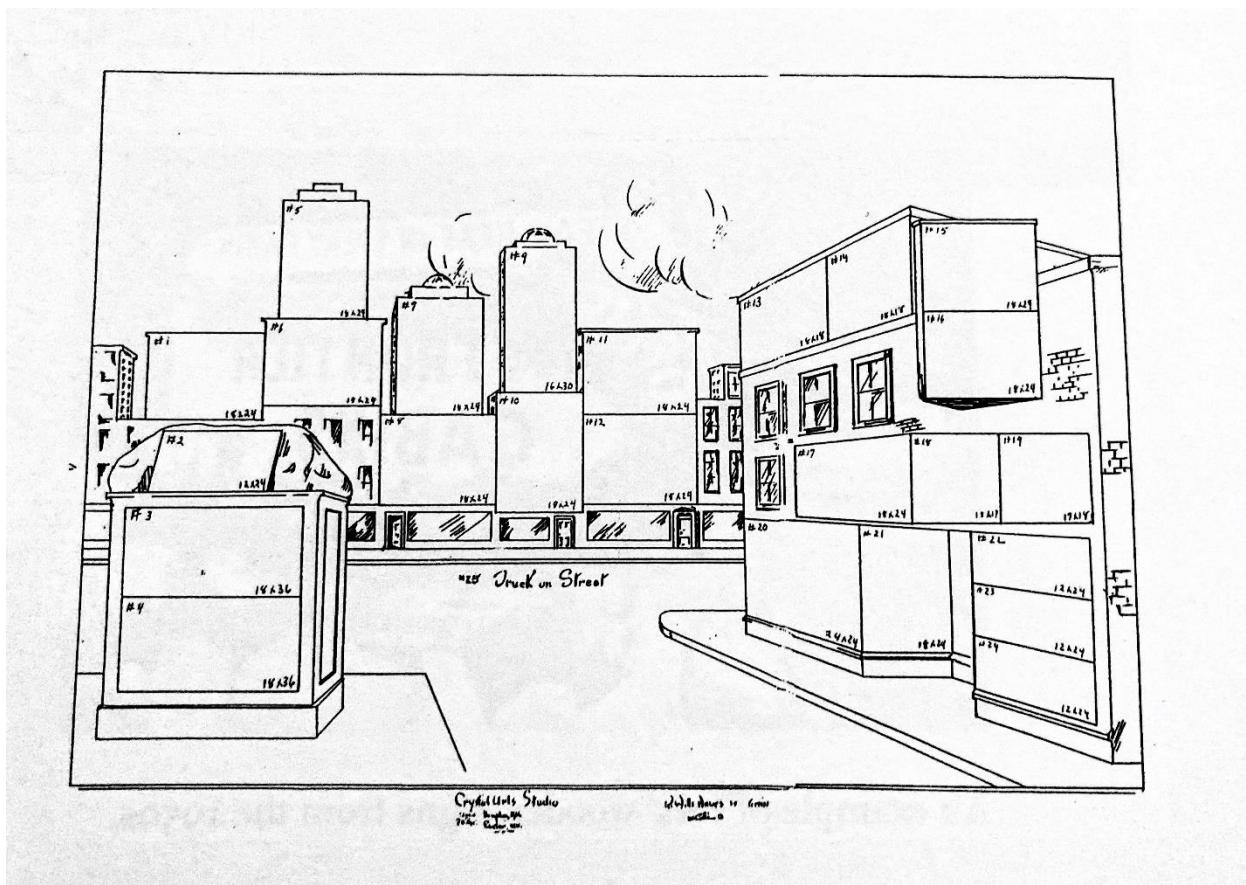


The **Whately Town Hall Curtain** (c. 1938), which is 16'9" wide x 9'6" high, was designed as a backdrop for the stage in the second-floor auditorium of Whately Town Hall. In the early 20th century, such painted murals and scenic landscapes were installed at hundreds of stages across New England. Whately's curtain was painted by Robert Naves (1916-1944) of the Crystal Arts Studio in Exeter, N.H., which made individualized curtains for theaters and auditoriums in many towns. Mr. Naves used a standard design format, the Advertising Street Scene shown below, for his curtains.

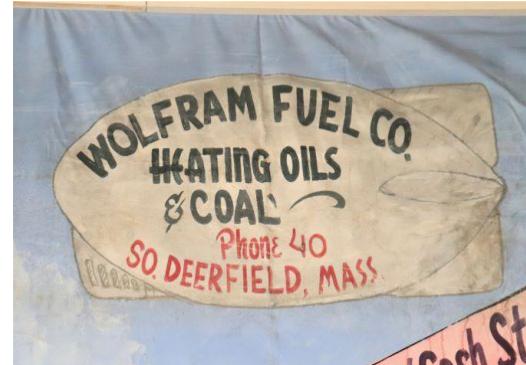


Robert Naves worked with Paul Brigham, the owner of Crystal Arts Studio; Brigham sold the advertisements, while Naves and other artists did the actual painting. The Whately Town Curtain follows the schematic design that Naves developed for the curtains closely, although it appears that Brigham was particularly successful in selling advertisements for Whately, as the four windows on the right wing of the Advertising Street Scene were replaced with ads for Howard Johnson's and the



Whately Inn. D.F. Riley, a dealer of flour, grain, and coal in North Hatfield, purchased the central spot on the curtain, labeled "Truck in Street" on Naves' design.

Naves' fanciful depiction of the Wolfram Fuels blimp to replace the schematic's generalized cloud suggests the creativity and humor he brought to his work.



Some of the 1930s advertisers, including LaSalle's Whately Gardens (later LaSalle Florists and Greenhouses), the Whately Inn and Fisher's Garage in South Deerfield, were still in operation when the curtain was restored in 2019. Whately residents must have been viewed as likely customers up and

down the west side of the Connecticut River, as businesses between Greenfield and Northampton bought space on the Town Hall Curtain.

In 1970, Fred W. Bardwell (1925-2013) rescued the Town Curtain from oblivion when it was in danger of being discarded during the bicentennial renovation of Town Hall. It remained in storage for nearly 50 years, until 2018, when, following the latest renovation of Town Hall, the Whately Historical Society proposed the reinstallation of the Curtain in its original setting. The Curtain had suffered some damage over the years, and its restoration included cleaning, mending, and repainting as necessary to remove the evidence of water stains. In addition, the roller, pulleys and hanging mechanism were replaced so that the curtain can be raised and lowered easily as originally designed. The restoration was supported by Community Preservation Act funding and carried out by Curtains Without Borders of Burlington, Vermont, a firm devoted exclusively to the restoration of New England theater curtains.

Sources:

Christine Hadsel, *Suspended Worlds: Historic Theater Scenery in Northern New England*, Boston: David R. Godine, 2015.

Barbara Rimkunas, “Exeter’s Robert Naves: Staff Sgt., artist, airman,” *Seacoastonline.com*, May 21, 2020.