

## Tuscaloosa folk artist believed to be 118 years old dies

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Frank Calloway, a folk artist who lived much of his life at Bryce Hospital and was thought to be a super-centenarian — a person who is 110 or older — died Sept. 1 at Heritage Health Care Center.

He was 118, according to state records, showing he was born July 2, 1896, but a spokesman from the Gerontology Research Group said in 2008 that, based on records, Calloway was more likely born in 1915. Perhaps due to an impoverished early life, it's uncertain whether a birth certificate or baptismal record exists. The gerontologist also cited Calloway's youthful appearance as a factor.

Whatever his actual age, the fact remains that he became renowned late in his life for folk-art murals drawn on long butcher paper rolls using crayon, pens and markers. Some of the agrarian works were 60 feet long.

While a patient at the Alice M. Kidd Nursing Facility on the Bryce campus, where he'd been committed in 1952 with a diagnosis of schizophrenia, Calloway took an art class — though he said he'd been drawing since childhood — and in the 1980s began creating scenes from his childhood, rural Southern scenes with farms, homes and railroads.

Following a solo exhibit of his work at Northport's Kentuck Museum, Calloway found his work drawn into group shows at the Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts and the American Visionary Art Museum in Baltimore, Md. From the latter show, he came to be represented by the Andrew Edlin Gallery in New York City, which gave Calloway solo exhibits in 2009 and 2011.



*File | The Tuscaloosa News*

Frank Calloway, a local folk artist and longtime resident of Bryce Hospital believed to be 118 years old, died on Sept. 1.

Even in those later years, Calloway remained a large person with a warm presence, one described as “angelic” by Rebecca Hoffberger, founder and director of Baltimore’s American Visionary Art Museum.

“Most people as they get older are diminished, they get smaller, but he still felt massive to me, and I loved that. He charmed us all, so so much,” she said.

“There was such a gentleness about him. I never felt an anger. ... When people spoke to him, or appreciated his work, his eyes would light up. Frank took delight in everything.”

Hoffberger visited Calloway at Bryce and borrowed 18 of his scrolls for the group exhibit.

Calloway had an instinctive sense for the use of space, she said.

“I loved the colors for what he remembered from his youth: trains, houses, farm equipment,” she said.

Few factual details in the way of records exist from before his entrance into the state health system, but Calloway spoke of having brothers, and as a “little, bitty, little boy,” playing under tents made from his mother’s quilts. He would also talk about years of hard labor: farming, cutting timber, laying railroad tracks and working for a blacksmith.

“I was raised up on hard work,” he said, in a 2007 interview with The Tuscaloosa News. “I enjoy a heap of things. I’m enjoying all my days.

“You have to take time and do the job right.”

Private services will be held, with arrangements by Tuscaloosa Memorial Chapel Funeral Home.

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