

Ellis Walter Ruley

American Artist

1882-1959

One of Norwich's most famous sons, Ellis Ruley was the first born to Joshua Ruley—a teenage runaway slave who arrived via the famed “freedom trail” in Norwich at the close of the Civil War—and Eudora Robinson, a nearby Narragansett Pequot Nation Tribal member. Without much schooling, Ellis honed his skills as a mason. In 1929 he was in a work related truck accident and awarded \$12,000 by the jury; which the judge later reduced to \$8,500 as “*being excessive*”—albeit a considerable sum during the Great Depression.

Ellis soon married Wilhelmina Fox, also of Norwich, who he called “*Tootsie*”. Finding himself a *man of leisure* with his newfound gains and loving wife, Ellis “*took up paintin*”, procured a new Chevy convertible coupe with a rumble seat and purchased a small bucolic 1800's two-story cabin on Hammond Road. The property is owned by the City of Norwich and will be created as a park and sanctuary by the City of Norwich Ellis Walter Ruley Committee the Ellis Ruley.

Years after his death, Ruley's paintings reside at The Smithsonian, Hartford's Wadsworth Athenaeum, Philadelphia, Rhode Island and Norwich's Slater museums, along with many important private collections. In 2015 there were 64 known works by Ruley. Elder Ruley family members who lived with Ellis and *Tootsie* in the 1940's and 50's, believe there were as many as two hundred paintings produced. To you, the reader, citizens and young people of Norwich, the works are out there, keep your eyes alert!

Text Contributor and Bust Artist: Glenn Palmedo-Smith, 1994. Glenn Palmedo-Smith and author of *Discovering Ellis Ruley*, (Crown Publishing, 1992) donated the Bust of Ellis Walter Ruley to the Slater Museum in 1995. This Bust is on loan for a year to the City of Norwich from the Slater Museum.