

Joseph Wallace King was born on the 11 of May 1911 at Leatherwood Plantation in Horsepasture, Virginia. He was the eleventh of thirteen children born to Annie Gordon Staples and Joseph Wallace King. Mr. King had a whiskey distillery and a plug tobacco company and was responsible for the management of his wife's family plantation. Life was pretty easy and happy until the whole thing went up in smoke one Christmas Eve. Older family members remembered three year old Joe standing under a tree as the family home burned to the ground screaming "where's the baby, where's the baby". The baby was sister Madeline who was only a few months old and Joe had already laid claim to her as his. Someone laid baby Madeline at his feet and at least one person was happy that day.

Much was lost in the fire including the family bible in which the births, deaths and marriages had been recorded. In rural Virginia this was often times the only way dates were noted. Although his date of birth often appears as 1912 due to a well meaning older sister, Margaret, who shaved off a year for him when he had to register for a social security number, his actual date of birth was 1911.

The family moved to North Carolina shortly after the fire. First to Stoneville and then to Bennett before settling in Greensboro. At age sixteen Joe moved to nearby Winston-Salem to live with a sister who had married a local Winston-Salem boy. He began attending Reynolds High School and the wonderful art classes there. This was just what he had been looking for, a place to study art.

Due to an accident and medical negligence Joe lost his left arm at the tender age of 11. With his dreams of being a tightrope walker vanquished, he began to pursue another great interest, drawing and painting. He was hired by Carolina Theatre in Winston-Salem and was making \$22.00 a week. That was pretty good money in 1929. He remembered that his teachers at Reynolds were making \$20.00 a week. These were depression years and times were hard for everybody.

It was during these years that Joe married his high school sweetheart and model, Earline Heath. She too, was an art student. They moved to Washington, D.C. where they felt there would be more opportunities for them. Here Joe worked as a window dresser for Hecht and Kann's Department stores. After some years he opened a small shop of his own and was hired back by both these stores to do freelance work. While living in Washington he was able to attend Catholic University and The Corcoran Institute. Paying the bills meant that his studies were put on hold several times according to him.

He was a restless soul and kept trying to find his niche in this world. Aside from the day jobs of window dressing and commercial art work he entertained in clubs and theatres at night as a ventriloquist with his little dummy "Brandywine". An Audition with Paul Whiteman gave him courage to pursue his love of the stage. He was hired by Whiteman and began traveling as an act between performances of the Paul Whiteman Orchestra.

Occasionally, he would get a commission to paint a portrait which would help out a bit and eventually, it was his portrait painting which brought him back to Winston-Salem where he had received several commissions and figured that it was time to leave Washington.

Returning to Winston–Salem was the right choice. Soon he was making a living as a portrait painter and through his connections was able to travel abroad and work on developing a style of painting all his own. He had his eye on the blacksmith shop on the Reynolds Estate and managed to convince Charlie Babcock that it would make a better artist's studio than blacksmith shop. He remembered that they were still shoeing horses on Saturdays when he took over the **blacksmith** shop and began to transform it into a studio.

Charles Babcock was married to Mary Reynolds, the daughter of tobacco tycoon R.J. Reynolds and they lived in the Reynolds home called Reynolda. Charlie took a special interest in Joe and his career and made certain that he met the right people. Charlie also financed a trip to Italy under the guise of chaperone for his daughter, Betsy.

Joe was able to see first hand the paintings of the great masters and he began working feverishly to develop his own style.

Through Charlie, Joe also met Victor Hammer, director of **Hammer Galleries** in New York. Victor guided Joe to the right galleries in Europe. Joe was anxious to exhibit his new Vinciata style of painting but Victor kept turning down gallery after gallery until finally the Bernheim–Jeune Dauberville offered him a one man show in **Paris**. The exhibition was a great success and **Vinciata** was launched. The following year an exhibition was arranged at the Hammer Galleries in New York and for the next twenty years Joe exhibited exclusively for Hammer. His last exhibition was in 1977.

Joe's first marriage had ended in divorce and in 1981 he married his "model, secretary, roommate and translator", **Deborah Coleman**. The couple spent most of their time in Italy but returned to the states for the last few years of Joe's life. Having never learned a single word of Italian language he felt that he did not want someone, even his wife, translating for him with his doctors. They were married until his death in 1996.

From 1977 until his death in 1996 he painted for his own pleasure. Although that is not entirely true it was his story and he stuck to it. For years he would say that when he retired he was going to take up painting as a hobby. While crating a portrait of a little girl from Texas he suffered a fatal heart attack and died on the 16 of January 1996 at the age of 84.

He left a bequest of 98 pieces of his work to **Elon University** in North Carolina. His widow, Deborah, has created a repository there of memorabilia and a photographic archive of paintings of both Vinciata and Joseph Wallace King.

From rural Virginia to Paris, Rome, Florence and New York he pursued his one great love, painting.