



*Nathaniel Burwash. Photo by Sam Rothman, circa 1935. New Hampshire Artists Archives Collection.*

## Nat Burwash: 1934-1941

In 1934, Nat Burwash and his wife Ida moved from New York City to Washington, NH, where they built a camp and studio near their friend Henry Iram's "Hobo Ranch," three miles from town. Burwash transferred to the New Hampshire Federal Art Project, directed by Omer T. Lassonde.

Federal Art Project exhibitions paid rental fees to the artists and encouraged them to sell their work. Under Lassonde's direction, the first state WPA exhibition took place at the New Hampshire Historical Society. Over the next few years, over 44 group shows toured to libraries, schools and organizations throughout New Hampshire. Burwash also exhibited at the Brooklyn Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, and the New York World's Fair. In 1941 at the National Gallery of Art, 134,755 people viewed his watercolors at a WPA exhibit.

Burwash produced 100s of artworks at his studio in the woods. He portrayed local people and scenes while experimenting with different painting styles, easily meeting his quota of artworks and hours to qualify for a wage of \$20 a week. Camp living was basic - no plumbing, electricity or automobile - but Burwash later remembered these years as, "sociable, even raucous" times.

While Burwash worked at his art, his wife Ida, a city girl, contributed her social and cooking skills to help the couple become part of the community. Her lunches were a fringe benefit for local folks who modeled for her husband's paintings. Her homemade doughnuts were popular with neighboring children. The couple joined in town meetings and other community activities. Burwash helped farmers with maple sugaring, haying, and hoeing. During the 1938 hurricane, he cleared "blow-downs" to re-open roads near his home. All of these experiences became subjects for his paintings.

As required by the federal program, Burwash turned the paintings over to Lassonde for placement in public institutions. The Burwashes moved from their New Hampshire camp to Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1941. By that time, Lassonde had delivered 126 Burwash watercolors and drawings, each registered on the back with the official Federal Art Project stamp, to the New Hampshire State Library.