



An employee entrance of the Amoskeag Mill a year after closing down. Manchester, New Hampshire, 1936. Photo by Carl Mydans, FSA-OWI Photograph Collection, Library of Congress.

State of the Arts: 1935-1942

In 1935, the same year that Manchester's Amoskeag Mills shut down, the WPA's Federal Art Project came to New Hampshire. Omer T. Lassonde was appointed as the state supervisor for visual arts. About 20 New Hampshire artists, including Nathaniel Burwash, Alice Cosgrove, Edmund C. Tarbell, Margaret Masson, and Herbert Waters, qualified for the program. New murals and sculptures for public spaces, smaller artworks that recorded everyday New Hampshire people and scenes, free art classes, and traveling exhibits were all made possible under this program, which officially ended in 1942.

Large-scale murals and sculptures, such as the Pulaski Monument in Manchester, still can be found in New Hampshire's post offices, libraries, schools, and parks. Many of the smaller, more fragile artworks were put in public trust at New Hampshire's State Library, waiting in dark drawers for future generations to discover them.

The State Library's artworks by WPA artists Nathaniel C. Burwash and Herbert Ogden Waters show scenes from the second half of the 1930s. Because public funding paid the artists to produce them, these paintings, drawings and prints still belong to the public. The Federal Art Project helped these artists survive hard times. The artists left the citizens of New Hampshire with windows into New Hampshire's past that will remain open for generations to come.

New Hampshire's innovative Conservation License Plate Fund, supported by "moose plate" sales, helps preserve these 70-year-old artworks on paper with contemporary conservation techniques so that, for a brief time, they can leave the protection of dark storage drawers to be enjoyed by all.