

DRAWING YOUR OWN CONCLUSIONS

GOVERNMENT AND THE ARTS: NEW HAMPSHIRE'S STORY



by Rebecca Lawrence

with an introduction by Donald Hall

New Hampshire State Council on the Arts

1965~1995

Celebrating 30 Years of Public Support for the Arts



The NH State Council on the Arts helps bring professional artists to audiences in some of New Hampshire's smallest communities through its touring program, which began in the late '70s. This photo, showing Will Cabell and Susan Ackley of Two-Headed Cow Puppet Theatre with "Max," is from the Council's 1983 roster book.

My father, who was involved in both state and national politics, was very conservative and did not believe in subsidy for almost anything...except the arts. He believed that unless there was public support for the arts this country would never attain the true greatness and creativity that is within us. He died in 1961, four years before the founding of the National Endowment for the Arts and of the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts. I know he would be pleased with what has happened in his home state of New Hampshire.

For the past 20 years I have been back in my native New Hampshire and involved in the arts community. I have experienced first hand the difference the State Arts Council has made in the landscape of New Hampshire. From Nashua to Pittsburg and from Westmoreland to Portsmouth, the lives of our citizens and even our communities have changed because of the work of artists and arts organizations. The cultural community is a major player in creating the quality of life that is New Hampshire, at the core of what attracts people to live, to work, and to visit our state.

New Hampshire is on the edge of a renaissance. We see it in places where the arts define the uniqueness of a local community which, in turn, leads to prosperity for that community. Whenever a community's renewed vigor begins with pride in its cultural facilities and organizations, the infusion of New Hampshire artists, the integration of the arts in education, or with the discovery of a community's traditional arts — you can be certain that the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts has been the catalyst.

I am extremely proud to be part of the arts community in New Hampshire and of the progress the arts have made over the last 30 years. I am also proud of the Division of the Arts staff, volunteer Arts Councilors, and far-sighted members of the executive and legislative branches who, together with their private partners, have supported, nurtured, and raised the quality of the arts here. The New Hampshire State Council on the Arts is recognized nationally as one of the best; I think they are *the* best. I am looking forward to the work the Council can accomplish with the next 30 years of public support for the arts...it makes a difference.

Van McLeod
Commissioner of the Department of Cultural Affairs

A large, Tahitian-colored painting by Paul Gauguin, hanging in Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, poses three universal questions: D'où venons-nous? Que sommes-nous? Où allons-nous? (Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?). As the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts rounds out its 30th year, we decided to tackle the first two questions in the hope that what we discovered about our agency would help us with the third. This publication is part of that process.

To reconstruct our history, we delved into State Archives, Senate Journals, Commission minutes, newsletters, and other state records. We also conducted oral histories with former staff, advisory committee members, commissioners, and legislators. We collected photographs from our own files and those of New Hampshire artists and arts organizations. We went from having a trickle of information to a flood of facts, opinions, and pictures. Even so, there are still some elusive facts, some missing images, more that could be researched and more that could be said about this small state agency with the enormous mission of "encouraging, supporting, and promoting excellence in the arts for all of the people in New Hampshire."

Our 30th year began on June 28, 1995, the anniversary of the signing of our enabling legislation. On June 28, 1996, in a climate of severe budget cuts and "culture wars," we will enter a future as uncharted, yet more clouded, as our first year of existence. What we have tried to present here is a story about government, politics, and the arts as it played out in New Hampshire from 1965 through 1995. Whenever possible we let the key players of the time speak out in their own words. We hope that everyone who reads this story will draw their own conclusions about its meaning, and take part in writing the next chapters with their own words and actions. We, of course, hope there are many more chapters to come.

We would like to thank everyone who contributed to this publication. As editor, I would like to recognize especially the people who made my task easier by unearthing decades-old documents and photographs or selecting gems of information from stacks of paperwork: Maureen Dugan and Jeffrey Saletnik who, as volunteers, broke ground on the publication in 1994 with extensive archival research and the collection of oral histories; Audrey V. Sylvester who has played detective in tracking down obscure references to flesh out facts with verbatim accounts; Grace Casey,

former Arts Commissioner and Director of the NH Art Association, who shared her amazing photo collection from the '60s and '70s with us; former Director John Coe who dug out documents and slides from his 11-year tenure in New Hampshire; and colleagues in other state agencies — Frank Mevers of the State Archives, Jim Garvin and Linda Wilson at the Division of Historical Resources and all of the wonderfully helpful staff at the State Library — who have been generous with their time and expertise.

We are also very grateful to Commissioner Van McLeod and New Hampshire Poet Laureate Donald Hall for contributing their cheering words to our 30th anniversary celebration. Special thanks also go to the current members of the Arts Council and Director Susan Bonaiuto for allowing us the time and support we needed to produce this history.

Most importantly, we would like to thank the private and public funders who joined together to make this publication happen: Hale and Dorr, Monadnock Paper Mills, Inc., and the National Endowment for the Arts. It's the New Hampshire way.

Rebecca L. Lawrence
Assistant Director, Division of the Arts



Marguerite Mathews with staging elements for Pontine Movement Theatre's 1994 original adaptation of the play *Our Town*, which Thornton Wilder originally wrote in the 1930's during a stay at Peterborough's MacDowell Colony. Pontine's version, cast with only two human actors working with Banraku style puppets and masks, played in granges and town halls from Bradford to Littleton.

Growing up in the forties, surviving into the nineties, I am dazzled by the increased public presence of art in America. Where we used to find one orchestra, one gallery, one playhouse, or one small publisher, now we find dozens — and we find them in places when such amenities never before existed. Support for individual artists has grown along with support for institutions: When I was a student, determined to write poems the rest of my life, I could think of only one grant that would provide me a year without worry about the rent: a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1995 a young artist can daydream about multiple fellowships and prizes, from sources both public and private, to allow the exercise of an art not immediately remunerative.

What a difference, in the fifty years that I can remember. Of course there's much to improve on. Let us celebrate the desire for more art, more public and private support — but let us pause to enjoy present success, as the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts does, on its 30th anniversary.

Half a century ago, if you wanted to see a picture, listen to a quartet, or observe a dance, you went to New York or Boston, to Chicago or San Francisco. No longer. In our small state, of New Hampshire, in the wonderful old Newport Opera House, Jane and I have watched the Boston Ballet perform selections from its repertoire. Just north of us in Canaan, every summer, we occupy a handsome eighteenth century meeting house to hear novelists and poets read to New Hampshire neighbors — with summer people sprinkled in, even a few Vermonters.

Elsewhere in New Hampshire, since we returned to stay in 1975, we have watched the Frost Place in Franconia turn into a literary center, not only for New Hampshire but for the country at large. Started as a local project by Franconia citizens, the Frost Place houses a younger poet in Frost's beautiful old house every summer; and it offers readings and workshops, providing the locus for a working celebration of our great poet.

We have heard piano recitals in the Bradford town hall, and the New Hampshire Symphony at Colby-Sawyer College in New London. Down the road from our house, we have enjoyed the Art Association of the small town of Andover, providing shows of painting and literary readings as part of Andover's stupendous Independence Day.

Over the past few years, Concord's First Night has featured the performance and display of

art. We have observed the success of the New Hampshire Writers' and Publishers' Project, supporting literary endeavor. We have applauded the Artists in Residence program for New Hampshire's public schools. Although summer theater started a long time ago in our state, our theaters have increased in number and quality. At our state universities we have seen growth in all the arts, in variety of audiences and events — and in artistic participation. Readings at the University of New Hampshire in Manchester have played to capacity — live performance of literature in our largest city.

Some of these projects are privately funded. Many receive public support. It is beyond question that public support, federal and state, has underwritten the growth of American arts. Locally the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts, and nationally the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), have provided a catalyst to artistic enlargement. A few years ago I was appointed to the National Council on the Arts, the group that oversees the NEA, and was gratified to discover how hugely our minuscule federal funding has sponsored the artistic enhancement that brightens the lives of millions of Americans.

Despite attacks that take venom from covert antipathy to art and artists, public support for the arts has grown in my lifetime from a Blackwater to a Merrimack — and private support has followed. New Hampshire corporations, led by the New Hampshire Business Committee for the Arts, have been exemplary — famous among the fifty states — in support of art by commerce.

Remote places no longer feel cut off from the city of art. Public support and private generosity have brought theater, music, dance, painting, and literature to neighborhoods, to city, and to countryside — through schools and libraries, newspapers and radio, small magazines and theater, concert halls and parish houses. In its breadth and range, American artistic participation has become an American glory.

Let it be prelude to a greater glory.

*Eagle Pond Farm
Danbury, New Hampshire
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