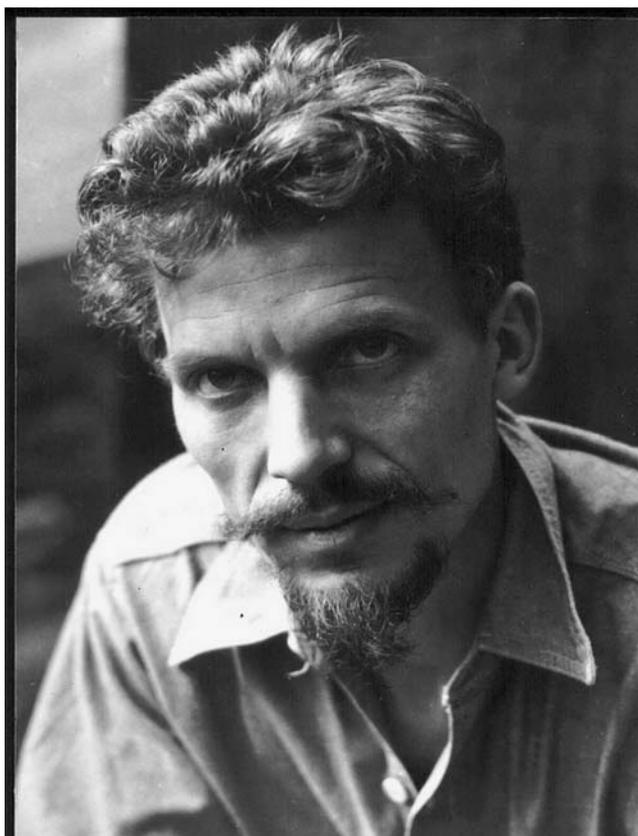


New Hampshire State Library



**Nathaniel C. Burwash (1906-2000):
NHSL W.P.A. collection**



Call#: ARC and DF 759.13 B9749n

Finding Aid

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Nathaniel Burwash - ARC and DF 759.13 B9749n - Finding Aid

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Scope and Content: The collection consists of 126 watercolors and 18 pencil drawings done in the 1930's and early 1940's by WPA artist Nathaniel C. Burwash (1906-2000), who was part of the New Deal Federal Artists Project in New Hampshire from 1931-1941. Also included are appraisal and accession information, background on the NH Artists Archives, and exhibit photos and captions.

Biographical background: Nathaniel C. Burwash (February 6, 1906 - January 10, 2000) was born in Los Angeles and moved to Hudson Falls, N.Y. when he was ten. Probably learning disabled, he did not do well at school except in art classes. After failing his first college semester as an engineering student, he began an apprenticeship as a wood pattern-maker and took art classes at night. In 1931 he traveled in Europe and produced water colors and pencil sketches which he sold in New Orleans upon his return. Moving to New York, he continued to study art and paint, and met his future wife, Ida Brass, while he was selling his artwork on the sidewalk in 1932. Their marriage lasted 52 years.

When the Works Progress Administration was established during the New Deal of F.D.R., Burwash signed on. He and Ida bought land in Washington, N.H. where he worked as a W.P.A. artist for the New Hampshire Arts Project from 1934 until 1941, earning \$20 per week and living in a small uninsulated cabin. Nat also augmented their income by working for local farmers.

The subject matter of the WPA paintings includes landscapes and landmarks of the area surrounding Washington, and captures several local figures who are identified by iconic titles such as "Farmer", "Young worker", "Woods-man", or "Young girl". Burwash used his subsidy from the WPA to experiment with a variety of styles, from "the chunky realism usually associated with WPA art, the traditional Chinese practice of fine, black outlining of objects in a landscape, Matisse-like flattened perspective, cubism, caricature, abstraction and a combination of realism and abstraction in loose brushwork" (quote from Gail Kelley article in *Boston Globe*, 1/12/1997 - see Box 1, folder 16). He was so prolific that his WPA supervisor, Omer T. Lassonde, advised him to slow down, both to encourage him to focus more on the artistic process and to save the program money in materials.

While living in the woods near Washington, NH, the Burwashes became friends with their neighbor Henry Iram, a communist who owned a camp on the same road, and Jimmy Dowling, a local "character" whom Burwash paid .50 an hour to pose for him. Their friends from New York, Sam and Jean Rothman, purchased land adjacent to the Burwash camp. These and other associations sustained both Nat and the more urbane Ida through their years in Washington and were always a source of fond memory.

At the beginning of World War II, when the WPA program ended, the Burwashes moved to Cambridge, Mass. where he returned to industrial wood pattern-making for machine parts and began to sculpt in wood. From that time forward, he was known as a sculptor and designer, and produced no more painting.

Burwash paintings from the WPA period have had several exhibits in New Hampshire, New York, and Chicago. His sculptures have appeared in exhibitions in Boston, the De Cordova

Museum, the University of New Hampshire, and other venues. His work is owned by various fine art galleries, and university art collections.

Nathaniel Burwash died in January of 2000, at the age of 93.

Provenance: Nine pencil drawings and two watercolors (accession nos. 2005.1 - 2005.11) were given to the New Hampshire State Library on October 12, 2004 by Margaret Gibson and David McKain, the executors of the Burwash estate.

The other 124 watercolor paintings and remaining 8 pencil drawings were probably transferred into the possession of the state upon completion by the artist, who was paid by the New Hampshire Arts Project. The paintings were delivered by Burwash to Omer T. Lassonde, the Project director, who placed them in the NHSL during the WPA era. These were formally accessioned between 2000 and 2001.

The remainder of the papers in the Burwash estate will reside with the New Hampshire Arts Council (2008) until they have been scanned and returned to the Burwash family. The plan is for all the records and papers to come to NHSL at which point they will be added to this collection.

Accession information, deeds of gift, news clippings, exhibit information, inventories and other materials were all generated or compiled by New Hampshire State Library staff through the years. Copies of accession sheets, deed of gift, and appraisal estimates are included in the collection; originals remain in the NHSL administrative offices.

Span dates: 1931-1941, and undated.

Significance of the collection: "The New Hampshire State Library's Nathaniel Burwash Collection contains the visual record of a New Hampshire artist's prolific submissions to the 1930's New Hampshire Arts Project. The majority of the Burwash artworks are in watercolor and measure between 11" x 14" and 16" x 20". The pencil on paper drawings measure between 4" x 4½" and 8" x 10" and record the artist's 1931 trips to Albania, New Orleans and other locations. The [1931] pencil drawings were made prior to the startup of the New Hampshire Arts Project and show the artist's mastery of small format and rapid sketching technique" --Excerpt from information sent to conservator, August 11, 2006.

Exhibits: In 1996 the NH Dept. of Cultural Affairs (now the NH Arts Council) mounted an exhibit of works by Burwash entitled "Finding Light in Dark Times" which ran from May 15 through July 31.

Seventeen paintings and pencil drawings were selected to be the core of a traveling exhibit accompanied by photographs of Burwash, his wife Ida, several friends, and their home and studio in Washington, NH. Caption cards were prepared to identify and interpret the paintings and provide background on Burwash's life as a WPA artist. This exhibit traveled to several NH locations, including the library in the town of Washington.

In 2003, the NHSL gave an exhibition of the WPA works of Burwash and fellow NH artist Herbert Waters, as part of its Hidden Treasures series. Titled "Artists at work 1935-1942: New Hampshire remembered", it ran from March 19-June 4.

In 2005, the exhibit traveled to Rivier College, in Nashua NH and ran from Sept. 19-Oct. 21, titled "Hard Times and New Horizons".

Collection size: the collection consists of 2 letter size archival boxes, 1 flat box, and 9 large folios.

Copyright and Access: The Burwash artwork is the property of the New Hampshire State Library. The collection can be viewed by the public at the library during normal working hours.

Names, People, Subjects:

Artists	Watercolors
Federal Artists Project	Washington, N.H.
New Hampshire	Works Progress Administration
New Hampshire artists	Ida Brass Burwash
New Hampshire Artists Archives	Nathaniel C. Burwash
New Hampshire Arts Council	Jimmy Dowling
New Hampshire Arts Project	Henry Iram
New Hampshire State Library	Omer T. Lassonde
New Deal	Sam and Jean Rothman
Pencil drawing	

Arrangement and Description: The framed exhibit items were removed from their frames and mattes. The paintings were sorted by medium, year of creation, and artist number. A database was created which allowed sorting by various criteria; this proved useful in cross-checking. All the pencil drawings were interleaved with archival tissue and placed in four-flap folders which were housed in a flat archival box. The watercolors were interleaved with tissue or archival paper and stored in large archival folders, with no more than 20 per folder.

Fortunately, the artist had signed, dated, and numbered almost all the artwork. Where a title was missing, a descriptive caption was supplied. Fourteen of the watercolors have a second painting or sketch on the reverse side, often incomplete or crossed out. These are not titled, dated, or numbered and were not included in the total count, although they are listed in the inventories, with a descriptive caption in lieu of a title.

Accession and appraisal materials, copies of news clippings, correspondence and other papers, as well as exhibit photos and captions, were placed in folders and stored in Hollinger boxes.

The collection is arranged into three series:

Series I: Acquisition and appraisal information

Series II: Exhibit information

Series III: Artwork

Subseries A: Pencil drawings (17)

Subseries B: Watercolors (126)

Container list

Series I	Acquisition, appraisal, and related information			# Items	Date
Box	Folder				
1	1	Burwash's WPA correspondence		3	1933-37
	2	Deed of gift and appraisal information		7 (and dupes)	2004, n.d.
	3	Accession sheets 2001.19 - 2001.37		20	2001
	4	Accession sheets 2001.38 - 2001.57		20	2001
	5	Accession sheets 2001.58 - 2001.77		20	2001
	6	Accession sheets 2001.78 - 2001.98		20	2001
	7	Accession sheets 2001.109 - 2001.128		20	2001
	8	Accession sheets 2001.129 - 2001.148		20	2001
	9	Accession sheets 2001.149 - 2001.159		11	2001
	10	Accession sheets 2003.20 - 2003.22		3	2003
	11	Accession sheets 2004.6 - 2004.7, 9		3	2004
	12	Accession sheets 2005.1 - 2005.11		11	2005
	13	List of photos of NHSL Burwash artwork		10	2001-03
	14	Conservation treatment request, proposals		6 (and dupes)	2005-07
	15	NH Artist Archives information		4	1998-2001, n.d.
	16	Boston Globe articles		3	1997-2000
Series II Exhibits					
1	17	Inquiry to St. Lawrence University		5	2005
	18	1996 exhibit "Finding light in dark times"		1	1996
	19	Traveling exhibit		5	1998, n.d.
	20	Burwash / Waters exhibit 2003		4	2003
	21	Rivier College exhibit, 2005		4	2005
2	Exhibit captions and photos (in 13 clear sleeves)			36	n.d.
Series III Artwork					
3	22	Pencil drawings	Acc. #	9	1940, 1941
		Study in pencil	2001.68		1941 #20
		Sun bathers	2001.69		1941 #18
		Head study 1	2001.70		1940 #2
		Girl reading	2001.71		1941 #15
		Sun bath	2001.72		1941 #16
		Young girl	2001.74		1941 #14
		Girl in arm chair	2001.86		1940 #50
		Lumber camp	2001.95		1940 #48
	Two women	2001.125		1940 #33	

3	23	Pencil drawings [Girl dancing] 2005.1 [Vieux Carre, New Orleans] 2005.2 [Palm tree, mosque] 2005.3 [2-mast junk] 2005.4 [Asian banners, rickshaw] 2005.5 [Man pulling 2-wheeled cart] 2005.6 [Asian woman with head cover] 2005.7 [Argyrokastro, Albania] 2005.8 [Summer 1931 -Albania?] 2005.9	9	[1931]
	Folio 1931/n.d	Watercolors Buildings 2001.36 French countryside 2005.1	2	1931, n.d. [none] [1931]
	Folio 1937	Watercolors Haying #2 2001.38 [Plants on windowsill] - 2001.39 Mt. Lowell 2001.55 Morning 2001.59 Apple tree 2001.77 Old homestead # 2 2001.79 Old Ford 2001.89 Old buildings 2001.117 In the park 2001.127 Blanchard's farm 2001.128 Blue and gold 2001.135 The wall 2001.145 Milking time 2001.151 [View of their summer place] - 2005.11	14	1937
	Folio 1938a	Watercolors Long Pond 2001.92 Rout[e] 9 2001.53 Crab apple tree 2001.158 Two barns 2001.136 Gray barn 2001.138 Color study 2001.44 Abandon road 2001.31 Spring landscape 2001.42 Construction 2001.152 Windy day 2001.148 Little camp 2001.115 Haying # 3 2001.78 Two apple trees 2001.35 Tree comp. I 2001.34	17	1938 1938 #10 1938 #16 1938 #25 1938 #26 1938 #27 1938 #30 1938 #33 1938 #34 1938 #36 1938 #39 1938 #41 1938 #44 1938 #48 1938 #51

	Stone bridge	2001.116	1938 #52
	Bridge and falls	2001.82	1938 #54
	Village	2001.93	1938 #55
Folio 1938b	Watercolors	17	1938
	Group of houses	2004.9	1938 #56
	Wood interior	2001.118	1938 #57
	Still life	2001.65	1938 #58
	The two hills	2001.126	1938 #61
	Rain	2001.98	1938 #65
	1938 flood, color study #11	2001.66	1938 #69
	Village #2	2001.91	1938 #74
	River at Tamworth	2001.84	1938 #76
	Mt. Chocorua	2001.80	1938 #77
	Grazing	2001.137	1938 #79
	Girl in blue	2001.75	1938 #80
	Hurricane	2001.76	1938 #82
	Pluto	2001.159	1938 #85
	Red ladder	2003.20	1938 #86
	Apple tree in meadow	2001.153	1938 #89
	Sunset	2001.155	1938 #90
	[Forest scene]	2004.7	1938 #92
Folio 1939a	Watercolors	16	1939
	Cloud forms	2001.112	1939 #1
	Wasteland	2001.143	1939 #3
	Head #3	2001.60	1939 #5
	Head #4	2001.31	1939 #7
	Figure #2	2001.149	1939 #11
	Study of Figure #1	2000.52	1939 #12
	Woodsman #2	2001.154	1939 #13
	Head #6	2001.58	1939 #14
	Head -A-	2001.49	1939 #16
	Gossip	2001.29	1939 #17
	Arrangement	2001.43	1939 #18
	Head #5	2001.57	1939 #20
	Portrait study	2001.46	1939 #21
	Figure study #3	2001.6	1939 #22
	3 trees	2001.48	1939 #26
	Mother and child	2001.25	1939 #27
Folio 1939b	Watercolors	16	1939
	Fantasy	2001.37	1939 #28
	Going home	2001.110	1939 #29
	Old man	2001.85	1939 #30
	Trout stream	2001.64	1939 #32

	Sewing	2001.51	1939 #34
	Edge of the woods	2001.111	1939 #36
	Road to Long Pond	2001.63	1939 #38
	Bailey Road	2001.62	1939 #39
	Woods & pasture	2001.45	1939 #41
	Clouds and trees	2001.67	1939 #49
	Sunday morning	2001.122	1939 #54
	Stone bridge	2001.33	1939 #55
	Storm clouds	2001.142	1939 #57
	Head #2	2001.156	1939 #59
	Study in grays	2001.141	1939 #61
	The white birch	2001.140	1939 #62
Folio 1940a	Watercolors	17	1940
	Fatigue	2001.26	1940 #5
	Girl in white	2001.20	1940 #14
	Two mothers	2001.30	1940 #15
	Fruit	2001.41	1940 #16
	Head study	2001.147	1940 #18
	Little white house	2001.50	1940 #21
	Brook	2001.23	1940 #25
	Waterfall	2001.131	1940 #28
	Paro's place	2001.83	1940 #30
	The gorge	2001.19	1940 #32
	Jean	2001.9	1940 #34
	Red dump cart	2001.96	1940 #37
	Deering countryside	2001.32	1940 #38
	Girl reading	2001.132	1940 #39
	Rocks in pasture	2001.27	1940 #41
	Hemlock trees	2001.22	1940 #42
	Lumber camp	2001.134	1940 #45
Folio 1940b	Watercolors	17	1940
	Yellow brook	2001.133	1940 #47
	Chatting	2001.56	1940 #49
	Landscape	2001.139	1940 #54
	Sorting blueberries	2001.97	1940 #56
	Lake Massasecum	2001.113	1940 #57
	Pond	2001.40	1940 #59
	Leaches boat house	2001.146	1940 #60
	Combined lake	2001.24	1940 #61
	Flower garden	2001.150	1940 #65
	Trees and meddow[sic]	2001.129	1940 #68
	Leading horses	2001.119	1940 #73
	Pond and mountains	2001.130	1940 #74
	Near Upper Village	2001.157	1940 #75

Man reading the news	2001.94	1940 #76
Long Pond in November	2001.114	1940 #78
Young girl	2001.54	1940 #80
Girl with dog	2001.21	1940 #84

Folio 1941	Watercolors	10	1941
	Bowl of fruit	2001.123	1941 #2
	Woods-man	2001.61	1941 #5
	Farmer	2001.88	1941 #6
	Young worker	2001.28	1941 #7
	Snow on ledge	2001.124	1941 #9
	Woman mixing cake	2001.87	1941 #10
	Girl with flowers	2001.121	1941 #11
	Housecleaning	2001.120	1941 #13
	Woman with chopping bowl	2001.73	1941 #17
	Sun bath	2001.47	1941 #20

Other resources at NHSL

DeCordova Museum. By the people, for the people: New England, September 25 - November 27, 1977, DeCordova Museum, Lincoln, Massachusetts. Lincoln, Mass.: The Museum, 1977.
Call #: 709.74 D2967

[Grover, Kathryn]. New Hampshire in the 1930's : the Great Depression and the New Deal. Concord, N.H.: New Hampshire Historical Society, [1982].
Call #: 974.2 N532g

WPA artwork in non-Federal repositories. U.S. General Services Administration, Public Buildings Service, Historic Buildings and the Arts Center of Expertise, Fine Arts Program. Washington, D.C., 1999.
Call #: R 759.13 W938

Inventories and indexes

- Inventory: year of creation and artist number
- Inventory: accession year and number
- Inventory: medium (pencil or watercolor)
- Index of titles
- Index of untitled artwork by date and description