



NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NATIONAL
NEW DEAL PRESERVATION ASSOCIATION

Lessons From the New Deal – A Blueprint for Renewing American Prosperity and Ingenuity

Fighting for a 21st Century New Deal

BY CHRISTOPHER N. BREISETH

Since mid May of 2020, a group of descendants of major New Dealers in the FDR Administration has been meeting on Wednesday evenings to encourage Joe Biden to fight for a 21st Century New Deal. This initiative responded to candidate Biden’s comparing the challenges facing the new President to those facing President Roosevelt in 1933. Inspired by a

book by David R. Riemer, *Putting Government in Its Place: The Case For A New Deal 3.0* [HenschelHAUS Publishing, 2020], Henry Scott Wallace, grandson of Henry A. Wallace, linked up with a young supporter of Scott’s run for Congress in 2018, Stephen Seufert, to put together a descendants’ group to take up Biden’s challenge and press the case for a 21st century New Deal. Stephen had

known of my work with the NNDPA and our programs featuring grandchildren of the New Dealers and both sought my assistance in contacting some grandchildren and invited me to be a participant.

The group includes, in addition to Scott Wallace and Stephen Seufert, James Roosevelt, Jr., Tomlin Perkins Coggeshall, June Hopkins and, from time to time, Harold Ickes, as well as David *continued on page 3*

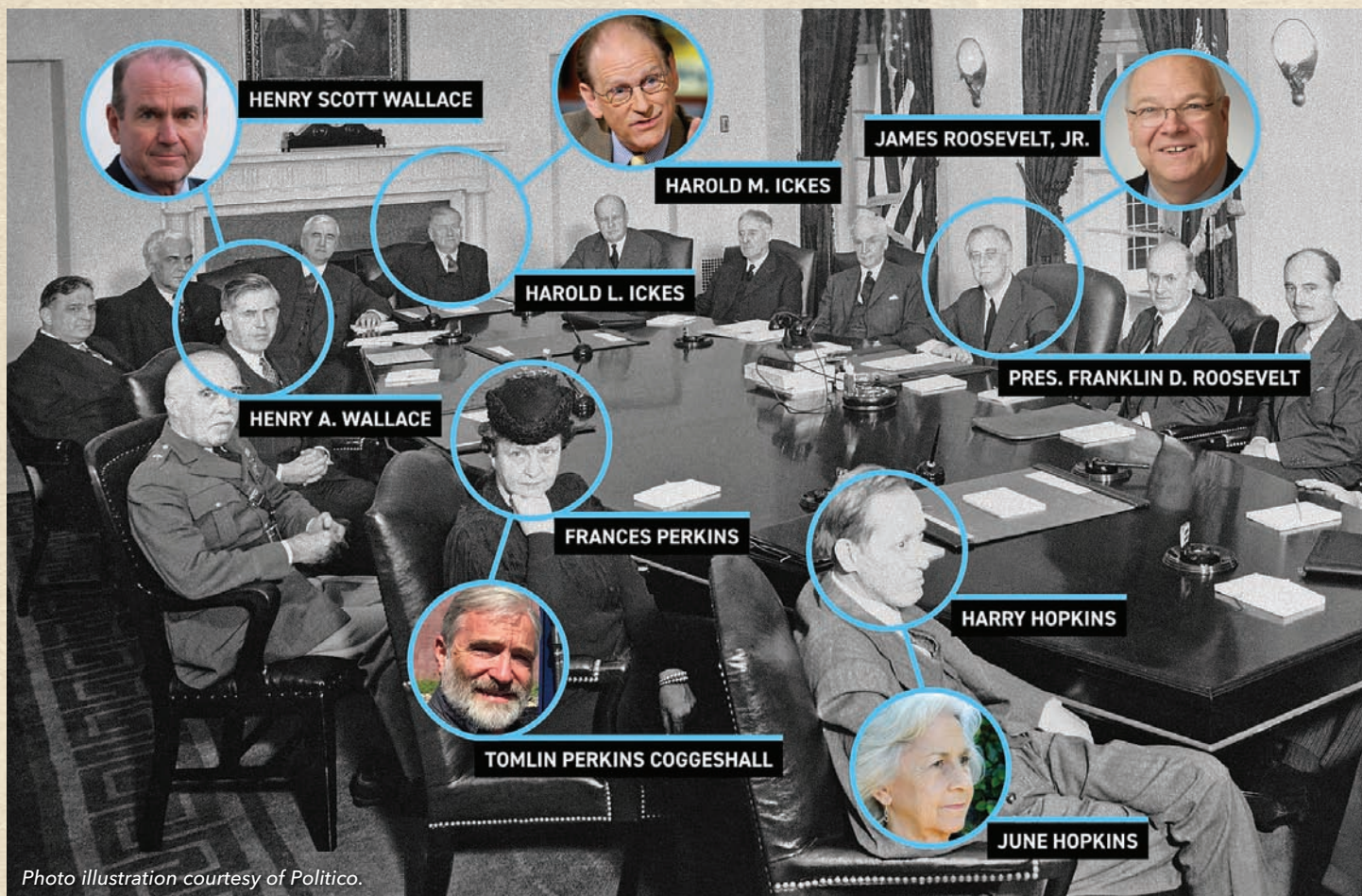


Photo illustration courtesy of Politico.



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Meetings are held on the fourth Wednesday of every month. Alternates between Full Board sessions and Executive Board sessions.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I'm happy for a number of reasons to be introducing our latest National New Deal Preservation Association (NNDPA) newsletter. We've been on hiatus largely due to the usual Covid-related disruptions that most organizations have experienced, and this newsletter represents a hopeful new beginning.

David Lembeck, longtime board member, has stepped up to edit and create an informative and beautifully formatted new edition. The lead article points to the critical way descendants of New Dealers have come forward to describe the lessons learned by their relatives and the ways New Deal objectives can be brought into current public policy.

President Biden's Build Back Better legislation has parallels with New Deal infrastructure programs. However, there's no comparison with FDR's legislative majorities that allowed New Deal policies to move through Congress. The fight goes on, and we're sure to get updates from Chris Breiseth.

Bob Leighninger's book review highlights New Deal architecture and art. Many critics decry the current state of glass and steel box architecture today. The New Deal not only produced notable structures in a variety of styles, but firmly joined architectural design with artistic embellishment.

The New Deal career of Doris Lee brings to the fore the story of one artist, and as I have almost always found, a tale of artistic struggle ameliorated by collaborative work under the Section of Fine Arts program. Lee is representative of the many women who found New Deal art jobs and would later go on to successful careers in the arts.

The final article by David Lembeck and Curtis Miner gives the the example of how the Treasury Department brought together building construction and art in post offices. Referred to by some as "the people's art gallery," over a thousand post offices offered citizens a beautiful place to do their postal business. Another contrast to today when blindingly florescent white, dropped ceiling postal buildings offer little to "lift the spirits" of postal customers.

From infrastructure policy to art and architecture, not only the practical lessons but the inspiration of the New Deal, remains relevant to our world today. The NNDPA will continue to bring that message to a broader audience. We hope you can join us in that effort.

– Harvey Smith

Kathleen Duxbury Winner of the Kathryn Flynn Annual Preservation Award 2021

Kathleen Duxbury became a member of the National New Deal Preservation Association (NNDPA) in 2012 and was elected to the National Board of Directors in 2016. Like other Board members, she brought with her valuable knowledge about a specific area of the New Deal – the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). She is now our invaluable "Go-To Person" on the CCC.

Kathleen has been intensively thorough in her research, tracking down information in all archives of the New Deal and also personally visiting with some of the CCC "boys" that were still alive when she got started in her work. Over time she became focused on



CCC members who were artists and has published books on two of those CCC artists and their artist contributions, Reima Victor Ratti and Marshall Davies.

Ratti was the creator of the bronze statue of a CCC Boy which has been a masterful way of honoring the work of all the "CCC Boys" across this nation. There are currently 77 of these bronze statues in many states. She has also done a book on The Boys of Bergen which focuses on the

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Fighting for a 21st Century New Deal

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Riemer and me. Guided by the analysis in David Riemer's book, we focused on updating the original New Deal, recognizing the changing times and also some of its shortcoming, especially with regards to African Americans.

Our first public initiative was on June 23, 2020 when we took out a full page in the Wilmington, Delaware paper, urging candidate Joe Biden to Fight for a 21st Century New Deal. We laid out a comprehensive program, based upon David Riemer's book. The bottom line emphasis was on JOBS, to be stimulated by major Infrastructure investment, plus Climate Change/environmental efforts, in the spirit of the CCC and the WPA jobs programs, as well as a shoring up of the Safety Net, particularly for the most vulnerable Americans, their children and their elders.

We watched as Joe Biden continued to reference FDR during the campaign. When he was elected, we switched gears and began interacting with people who had access to the emerging Biden Administration, including Congress people and staffers. Once Biden was in office, we had almost a full hour on one of our regular Wednesday evening Zoom sessions with the new Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh. This meeting was arranged by Tomlin

Coggeshall, grandson of Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins, who noted that Secretary Walsh very early on in office appeared with the portrait of Secretary Perkins and revealed that they shared the same birthday, April 10.

In addition to our Wednesday evening meetings, the descendants have written op eds, appeared on radio, TV and through other social media, including Jim Roosevelt and Scott Wallace appearing on "Morning Joe" after a long article on the group appeared in *POLITICO. USA Today* also published a major article on the Biden/FDR linkage which featured the group's activities.

A significant "coming out" event occurred on Friday, October 29, 2021 in a three-hour program, "The New Deal Then and Now: What is the Role of Government in Response to Great Crises?" hosted by Roosevelt House in New York. The descendants for the program included the regulars, Jim Roosevelt, Scott Wallace, Tomlin Coggeshall and June Hopkins, augmented by June's son David Giffen and Phoebe Roosevelt, both great grandchildren of the New Dealers.

In addition to a panel of the descendants, there were two panels of authors, historians and advocates for a transformational legislative agenda:

Jonathan Alter, Nancy MacLean, Michael Waldman, Adam Jentleson, with David Riemer and Scott Wallace as moderators.

THE PROGRAM OBJECTIVE WAS THE FOLLOWING:

- How did FDR's New Deal save the country, and how did promoters of limited government push back? What's at stake now? — a consideration of jobs, climate change, filibuster reform, and voting rights; and the central question: what makes this the time for a modern New Deal?
- The event was both in person in the beautiful auditorium of Roosevelt House on the Hunter College campus and virtual via Zoom. Several hundred people attended the event.
- The program was jointly sponsored by Roosevelt House, the NNDPA, the Frances Perkins Center, the Living New Deal, the Roosevelt Institute, the Wallace Global
- Fund and Social Security Works. This collaboration of like minded organizations is significant for future advocacy to sustain and expand the New Deal legacy.
- The descendants group is in the process of developing a website and intends to remain in action. The fight continues.

CCC Corner



1936 CCC Bandelier Camp Company #815 annual group photo.

Book Review

WPA Buildings: Architecture and Art of the New Deal by Joseph Maresca
Atgen, Pa: Shiller Publishing, Ltd.: 2016

REVIEWED BY BOB LEIGHNINGER

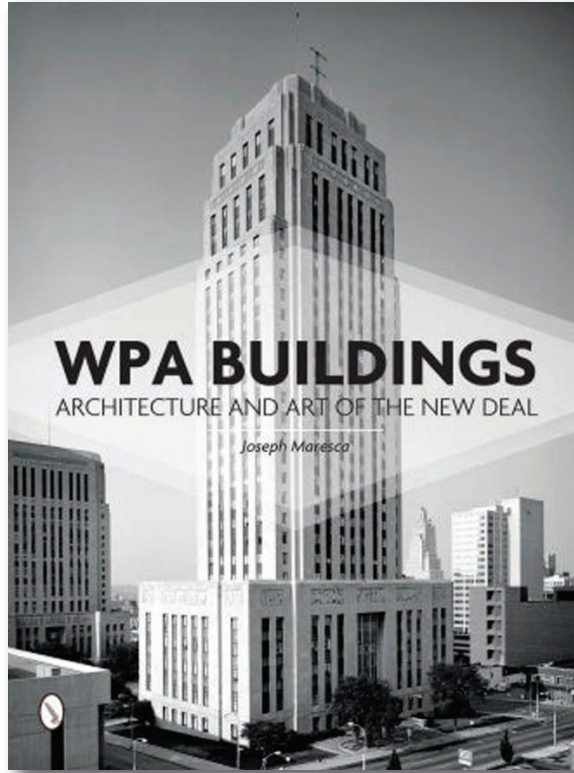
Joseph Maresca deserves our thanks for assembling a splendid collection of Depression-era buildings under the title of *WPA Buildings*. The problem is that most of them aren't.

Many were built by the Public Works Administration (PWA), a New Deal agency created two years before the WPA was born. Some pre-date the New Deal altogether. Some, like Oakland's Paramount Theater, are not even government buildings. A more accurate title for the book would be *Joe's Favorite Buildings*, but that might have been harder to market.

Maresca is aware that the WPA was not in operation until 1935, thus making it impossible to attribute most of the buildings in the book to it. He also acknowledges the existence of the PWA, to which most of them *can* be attributed. This historical mash-up doesn't seem to bother him. Three lines above the statement that the WPA was established in 1935 (9) is a picture of a building dated 1933.

He is similarly vague about the dates of the New Deal, the Depression, and the Roosevelt Administration. He thinks the Depression was over by "the mid-thirties" (30). He gives Roosevelt personal credit for "green-lighting" the new style (16-17) even though it was well established before Roosevelt was in any position to influence public building.

A person who was influential in creating the style was Paul Phillipe Cret. He gets a whole chapter and deserves it. But we learn little about his career; and the building that drew early attention to the style, the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC, is not mentioned. The chapter does not disappoint, however, because its stars are Cret's fine Federal Courthouse in Ft. Worth and Cincinnati's splendid Union Station. He admits that the latter is "not strictly a WPA building..." (68), and leaves out the fact the Cret was not the architect of record but was acting as an advisor. I was happy to see it; it's one of my favorite buildings too. If he'd



wanted a better reason to include it he could have mentioned that Col. Henry Waite, the project's chief engineer, went on to become Harold Ickes' deputy at the PWA and Roland Wank, another consultant to the project, became the chief architect of the Tennessee Valley Authority.

It would have been helpful to have a clear description of the style that Maresca is in love with, as well as a sense of its place in architecture history. He does provide some good appreciations of individual buildings, for example the discussions of federal buildings in Seattle, Detroit, and Galveston (28). Unfortunately, of the six pictures of these buildings, only two are close by (27). The rest are on pp. 32, 97, 99, and 100, making it hard to judge the quality of his critiques. This lack of proximity of text and image is common. It is perhaps inevitable given the large numbers of pictures; but Maresca and his editors might have worked a little harder to have commentary and images on the same page.

Basically, the style being lauded is an amalgam of Neo-Classicism and Art Deco. It features the base, columns, and entablature of classic Greco-Roman facades rendered in simplified form, with Art Deco embellishments of windows, doors, railings and lighting constructed of modern materials, particularly aluminum and glass. Architectural historians have called it "starved classicism," "stripped-down classicism," "American moderne," or "Greco-deco." Critic David Gebbhard called it "PWA Moderne" to call attention to its association with the New Deal. This is what Maresca is trying to do; he just picked the wrong agency. He could have gone with that (and it might have helped correct his history). He begins the book by calling it just "modern" (6), but eventually realizes the inadequacy of such a global term and settles for "federal moderne" (24). That, too, would have worked if he had laid out a definition at the outset.

The Art Deco history is just as slap-dash as the rest of the history in this book. Maresca says art deco, despite European influences, "was uniquely American." This, despite the fact that the term comes from the 1924 Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris. He could have said "some of the finest examples are American" without ignoring the fine and equally essential examples in Europe. "Unique" or not, in his descriptions of individual buildings he pays much less attention to their Deco aspects than their Classical ones.

My hopes for the book were lifted, as they were when I began the chapter on Cret, when Maresca began to appraise the disturbing similarities between federal moderne and similar work in Nazi Germany. But again, he can't hold still long enough for a disciplined analysis. He does not mention early works of Paul Troost which are quite similar, and instead focuses on the later work of Albert Speer. He is quite correct that these structures are "bullying" in their intent, but asserts that New Deal architects were "aware of where this bombastic giantism could lead" (18). But there is no evidence of this

foresight. Inclusion of Troost's House of German Art and Speer's Zeppelin Field where Leni Reifenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* was filmed would have provided the opportunity for a point-by-point comparison and contrast of democratic and Nazi architecture. Could one lead to the other?

The last chapter is filled with equally fine photographs for the murals and sculptures that were integral to these buildings. Again, Maresca is aware that they were produced by multiple organizations. Again, most of them were not WPA projects. Again, he doesn't care. He says, rather late in the game (122) that "it is important to distinguish between different programs within the New Deal." But he doesn't. At this point it's not important. All the art in this chapter was brought into being, not by the WPA, but by the Treasury Department's Section of Fine Arts.

As to the art history context of the murals, there is not a hint of Mexico. They are all, to Maresca, uniquely American.

There are other inaccuracies that undermine our faith in Maresca's detailed observations along with his blurred sense of the big picture. The Federal Reserve Building is not in the Federal Triangle; it's on Constitution Ave considerably West of the Triangle. The interior of the Maritime Museum in San Francisco was done by Hillaire Hiler, not Sergeant Johnson, who did the façade.

Can we just ignore this chuckle-headed history and bask in the glory of these fine, well-photographed buildings? (The photographs were taken by Carol Highsmith of the General Services Administration.) Does it matter that Maresca, like a lot of other people, doesn't know the difference between the WPA and the PWA, or, in his case, doesn't care? I think it does. We live in a time when we might learn a lot from the New Deal and how it worked. This book presents a totally inaccurate picture of the New Deal. It was not a monolith of "carefully implemented" (22) programs with a serene leader sowing the landscape with public buildings designed in a style that would allow "a complete recognition of his New Deal and its zeal to come through" (41). Rather, it was a hodge-podge of very creative, and rather desperate, improvisations, each with its own structure and leadership, strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures. There was no architectural vision imposed from Washington. Each community decided what it



TOP: Alfred D. Crimi, "Post Office Work Room," 1937, fresco. William Jefferson Clinton Building, (formerly Post Office Department Building.) Photographer: Carol M. Highsmith, courtesy of GSA.

ABOVE: A spread from *WPA Buildings* featuring several federal buildings.

needed and hired local architects and engineers to realize its decisions. They decided how they should look, not Franklin Roosevelt, Harold Ickes, or Harry Hopkins. And they were paying for it. A 55-70 % local match was required of communities for PWA projects. This match was often, amazingly, obtained through bond issues which the community voted for, agreeing to tax themselves to service the debt. They were not made to follow any federal guidelines.

Federal moderne buildings looked the way they did because architects read professional journals, attended conferences, and talked with each other about how public buildings in America should look. There were no federal bureaucrats looking over their drawing boards.

To repair and replace our dissolving infrastructure, to bring our divided com-

munities together, and to restore our faith that government can actually solve a few problems, we need to study carefully how it was once done. The wonderful buildings lovingly presented by Joseph Maresca deserve the admiration that he would like to inspire in us. But they were not produced by vague, magical blobs of government. What did the job were an unlikely bunch of organizations, often held together by bailing wire, duct tape, and faith in the future. They were full of real-life imperfections, but they worked. It only seems magical. We need to understand the reality behind it.

So, buy the book. It's well worth the money. Be amazed by what you see, and know that it is only a fraction of what the New Deal built. Then go find out how all this was really done. And join others who want to do it again.

Doris Lee Exhibition

Exhibition featuring New Deal painter set to travel throughout the country until 2023

Simple Pleasures: The Art of Doris Lee presents the first major critical assessment of works by the artist Doris Lee (1904–1983). Lee was one of the most recognized artists in the country during the 1930s and 40s and a leading figure in the Woodstock Artist's Colony. In response to the rise of Abstract Expressionism in the decades after World War II, Lee deftly absorbed these innovations into a continuation of her own visual style. Lee's body of work reveals a remarkable ability to merge the reduction of abstrac-

tion with the appeal of the everyday and offers a coherent visual identity that successfully bridged various artistic "camps" that arose in the post-World War II era.

Co-curated by Barbara L. Jones and Melissa Wolfe, Curator of American Art, Saint Louis Art Museum, Simple Pleasures will include over 70 works by the artist spanning from the 1930s through the 1960s from both

public and private collections and be comprised of paintings, drawings, prints, and commissioned commercial designs in fabric and pottery. There will also be a small group of ephemera, such as advertisements by companies that commis-

sioned images from Lee. A fully illustrated, full-color catalogue with four essays will accompany the exhibition, and is available for sale now in The Westmoreland's Museum Shop and online.

The Doris Lee exhibition opened at the Westmoreland Museum of Art in Greensburg, PA, on September 26, 2021 and ran through January 9, 2022. It will travel to three additional venues: Figge Art Museum, Davenport, IA (February 5–May 8, 2022), Vero Beach Museum of Art, FL (June 5–September 18, 2022), and Dixon Gallery and Gardens, Memphis, TN (October 30, 2022–January 15, 2023).

From the Westmoreland Museum of Art www.thewestmoreland.org



From the Westmoreland Museum of Art www.thewestmoreland.org

ABOVE: Doris Lee, ca 19385. (National Museum of Women in the Arts)

LEFT: Doris Lee, Thanksgiving, 1935, oil on canvas. (Collection: Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL)

Doris Lee and the Section of Fine Arts

The Section of Fine Arts assigned Doris Lee a contemporary topic for her two U.S. Post Office Department murals: "The Development of the Post in the Country." In 1890, nearly 65 percent of the American population lived in rural areas. And yet, the post only went as far as the small town post office, not to individual homes or farms. In 1896, the Post Office Department began experimenting with Rural Free Delivery, a service to deliver mail directly to rural farm families, and in 1902 the service became permanent. Thirty years later, during the New Deal era, Rural Free Delivery represented democracy itself: every farmer in

the nation had the same privileges of citizenship, including the delivery of mail, as every city dweller. Indeed, mail delivery to rural communities served as a vital conduit of information and a crucial link between urban and rural America. In her murals, Lee includes references to the news, commerce, transportation, and the law while she affectionately portrays familiar details of country life.

Until the turn of the twentieth century, the general store often functioned as a post office for rural communities. Even after the Post Office Department instituted Rural Free Delivery, the general store remained a cornerstone of the com-

munity and a hub of communication. In General Store and Post Office, Lee shows the store's behind-the-scenes workings on the left, while on the right she depicts the front of the store bustling with activity: a woman arrives at the postal window with her young daughter, who gestures towards a reward notice for the capture of a wanted criminal; behind them, a young woman waits to mail a letter; the aproned man at the counter sells various sundries; and to the right, a young farmer reads aloud to his neighbors from a newspaper sporting the headline "Farmers Organize." The open door at the far right reveals a gasoline pump, which at the

time was still a fairly recent invention, just thirty years old, and alludes to the increased mobility of rural Americans during the 1930s.

During the New Deal era, rural life was often idealized in art and the popular imagination, while in reality farmers struggled with chronically low crop prices, severe drought, and dust storms. Paintings like Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930) enshrined the farmer as a symbol of traditional American life, strong and enduring even in the face of adversities. Similarly, Lee's *Country Post* presents an idealized view of farm life, with a cheerful group of rural Americans enjoying the convenience of mail delivery. A farmer and his son (perhaps the same young man who reads the newspaper in *General Store and Post Office*) receive a shipment of tools. Behind them, the mail carrier drives an automobile. Rural mail carriers at this time supplied their own transportation, which, until around 1929, was most likely a horse and wagon. The carrier's automobile, along with the train racing toward the right edge of the painting, signify modernity, speed, and technological advancement, in contrast to the church steeple on the left, which symbolizes the endurance of faith and tradition. In the right foreground, a boy riding a horse still hitched for plowing rushes to post a letter, while a woman opens and reads hers, and even the dog and chicken appear interested in the latest news.

**Negotiating Style:
Regionalism vs. Modernism**

Lee described the Post Office mural project as "a beautiful thing to be associated with." Yet, records show that Section administrators were quite critical of her work. In her initial sketches, they worried that the heads of the figures appeared too large for their bodies, and that the faces and postures were too blatantly caricatured. Even after Lee revised the sketches, the Section continued to criticize the proportions of her figures, and recommended that she hire live models, both human and animals, before submitting full-size color designs. Finally, after Section representatives made several more suggestions and Lee complied, her designs were accepted. The extent of the changes Lee made is evident in a comparison of the original sketches to the final murals.

This was not the only time Lee's work

faced criticism for its exaggerated, folksy style. During the same period when she was revising her designs for the Post Office murals, her painting titled *Thanksgiving* was causing a sensation. Displayed at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1935 and awarded the prestigious Logan Prize, the painting was enjoyed by many viewers for its lively depiction of women bustling in the kitchen while preparing a traditional Thanksgiving meal. However, the picture was blasted by some critics for being cartoonish, "a comic valentine to U. S. farm life." Josephine Logan, sponsor of the prize, spoke out against Lee's work, describing it as "awful." In response to Lee having won the prize, Logan founded the conservative *Society for Sanity in Art*, which condemned all forms of modern art.

Lee, in both circumstances, found herself caught in the crosshairs of a struggle

between two artistic styles: regionalism and modernism. The regionalist movement – spearheaded by American mid-western painters Grant Wood, John Stuart Curry, and Thomas Hart Benton – aimed to depict American subjects in a realistic manner. Regionalists rejected the tenets of modernist art, which entered American culture from Europe and prized formal innovation and stylistic daring. In an effort to please the viewing public and to avoid controversy, Section administrators tended toward the conservative viewpoint, and discouraged modernist tendencies in their commissions. Lee, who began her art training in Europe painting in an abstract mode, switched to representational painting upon her return to the United States, combining aspects of both regionalism and modernism in her work.

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Doris Lee, "General Store and Post Office," 1938, oil on canvas. William Jefferson Clinton Building, Photographer: Carol M. Highsmith, courtesy of GSA.



Doris Lee, "Country Post," 1938, oil on canvas. William Jefferson Clinton Building, Photographer: Carol M. Highsmith, courtesy of GSA.

Pennsylvania's New Deal Post Office Art

BY DAVID LEMBECK & CURTIS MINER

In 1933, the administration of President Franklin Roosevelt announced an ambitious program to place murals and sculptures in post offices across the country. Administered by the U.S. Treasury Department through its Section of Fine Arts, the program embraced both the practical and philosophical goals of the New Deal. Artists were provided meaningful work and, in turn, original works of art were made available to ordinary Americans. The Section encouraged its artists to paint "the American Scene," an approach which emphasized depictions of everyday life. To increase public accessibility and visibility, the resulting artworks were installed in post office lobbies, then regarded as the most public of all public buildings. A small percentage of these works were also installed in federal courthouses and customs houses.

Between 1934 and 1943, Pennsylvania received ninety-four commissions, a number second only to New York. The artwork, which included both murals and sculptures, was widely distributed across the state and represented a broad cross-section of Pennsylvania communities, from rural hamlets and mining towns to urban neighborhoods in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh. Each commission aimed to

capture something intrinsically important about the community for which it was created. As a result, Pennsylvania's collection is unusually diverse in both theme and media; Pennsylvania received more sculpture than any other state, and artists created reliefs in everything from wood and plaster to Carrara glass and aluminum. Subjects depicted ranged from agriculture, local history, and Native Americans, to coal and steel, lumbering, glassmaking, and railroads.

The Treasury Department aimed to create art that embraced the populist ideals of the New Deal, but collaboration between artists and local communities was not always easy. In Pennsylvania in particular, the Treasury Department brokered an often tense negotiation between cosmopolitan, often left-leaning artists, and the more parochial interests of small town Pennsylvania. More New York trained artists were involved in Pennsylvania's commissions than those of any

other state, save for New York itself, among them Chaim Gross, Stuyvesant Van Veen, Concetta Scaravaglione, Harry Sternberg, and Moses and Raphael Soyer. Perhaps the most edifying aspect of this re-presentation of these works, as gauged by reaction from contemporary audiences, is that these artworks continue to be meaningful to ordinary Pennsylvanians.

During the 1930s, about one-third of all Pennsylvanians lived in rural communities and many of these worked the land for a living. From Pennsylvania German farms and mixed agriculture in central Pennsylvania to dairy farming in the west, agriculture remained vital to the lives and livelihoods of millions of Pennsylvanians during the Great Depression. The murals commissioned in many of these areas reflect that close relationship with and dependence on farming.

George Rickey's mural for the Selinsgrove Post Office includes several local



LEFT: Lorin Thompson, *Growth of the Road*, 1938, oil on canvas, Altoona PO. **RIGHT:** Stuyvesant Van Veen, *Pittsburgh Panorama*, 1937, oil on canvas, Federal Courthouse, Pittsburgh. Photographer: Carol M. Highsmith, courtesy of GSA. **ABOVE RIGHT:** George Rickey, *Susquehanna Trail*, 1939, tempera on canvas, Selinsgrove PO. **Note:** All photographs © Michael Mutmansky, except where noted.



LEFT: Howard Cook, *Steel Industry*, 1936, fresco, Federal Courthouse, Pittsburgh. Photographer: Carol M. Highsmith, courtesy of GSA. **RIGHT:** Chaim Gross, *Puddlers*, 1942, wood relief, Irwin PO.



LEFT: John Beauchamp, *Rachel Silverthorne's Ride*, 1938, oil on canvas, Muncy PO. **RIGHT:** Concetta Scaravaglione, *Aborigines*, 1942, wood relief, Drexel Hill PO.



LEFT: Jared French, *Mealtime with the Early Coal Miners*, 1937, oil on canvas, Plymouth PO. **RIGHT:** John Folinsbee, *Freeland*, 1938, oil on canvas, Freeland PO.

landmarks, including Shriners' Church (left, foreground) and the Mahanoy Mountains and Susquehanna River (background). But its main focus is on the labor-intensive farming practices of the 1930s, particularly hand sowing and horsedrawn plowing. Originally, Rickey had the figures of the farmers reversed, with sower on the right and the plowman on the left. But when he learned that farmers here typically furrowed to the left instead of the right, he promptly altered his composition to reflect that. "Details like that, though trivial from point of view of composition, can rankle in the minds of those who have to look at the painting every day, and I thought I might as well get my facts straight," Rickey noted.

The Great Depression put one out of every four industrial workers in Pennsylvania out of work. But heavy industry, especially coal and steel, remained integral to the lives of many. Roughly a quarter of all Treasury commissions in Pennsylvania depict aspects of one of these two activities. Coal mining stretched from the northeastern anthracite fields to bituminous mines in western Pennsylvania. Steel making was concentrated in the Pittsburgh district, but mills could also be found near Bethlehem and in sections of central and southeastern Pennsylvania.

Howard Norton Cook's impressive mural for the new federal courthouse in Pittsburgh—one of three artworks commissioned there—pays tribute to the miners

and mill workers of southwestern Pennsylvania. In the upper portion of the mural, a gang of steelworkers labor away in a blast furnace. A glare of white light from the molten steel throws the figures into sharp relief. In contrast, the two vignettes of coal miners in the bottom corners are dark and somber.

Cook studied Mexican mural art and *Steel Industry*, with clusters of figures filling the picture plane, especially recalls the works of master muralist Diego Rivera. "I've always wanted the suggestion of movement in my work," Cook wrote. He achieves this through the use of strong contrasts of dark and light, dynamic arrangements of elements, and the inter-

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Pennsylvania's Post Office Art

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play of vertical and diagonal lines. The normally restrained Section effused about Cook's mural, which it considered to be one of its finest pieces. It was later selected as the cover for the Pennsylvania volume of the WPA American Guide series.

Towns often requested artwork that focused on locally famous events and people, often from the colonial and Revolutionary War period. Town origins were another common theme. The interpretation of history varied by region. In Quaker influenced southeastern Pennsylvania, Native Americans were perceived as noble and peaceful; in the western and northern section of the state, artworks depicting Indians emphasized the violent conflict that characterized Pennsylvania's colonial frontier.

The dramatic mural in the Muncy Post Office tells the story of Rachel Silverthorne, a local figure revered for her bravery during the "Indian Wars" of the late 1700s. According to popular legend, Silverthorne risked her life on a warm summer evening in 1778 to warn settlers of an impending Indian attack. Indiana-born artist John W. Beauchamp, who studied painting with Leon Kroll, was encouraged to paint the scene after meeting with a local historian, who believed Silverthorne "deserved to rank with the other heroic women of the Revolution." Beauchamp shows Silverthorne riding a white horse, a detail that further enhanced her nearly mythical, Joan of Arc aura.

Landscapes were popular formats for post office murals since they allowed artists to explore the relationship between people and place. In cities such as Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, artists created vibrant streetscapes which aimed to capture the rhythms of urban life. In smaller towns, muralists painted landscapes that underscored the community's economic and social fabric.

The mural in Freeland was the first of two Pennsylvania post office commissions for John F. Folinsbee, a Bucks County Impressionist known for his bold and loose brushwork. Attention to detail gives this mural a strong sense of place: the colliery on the right represents Freeland's main employer, and the two churches reflect the town's Southern and Eastern

European immigrant population. Folinsbee included the white building in the center, Freeland's local brewery, at the insistence of local residents. Though both it and the colliery are gone, this colorful landscape, painted in a blaze of autumn foliage and against a dramatic gray sky, preserves Freeland. Confined to a wheelchair, Folinsbee composed his own designs and, with the help of his assistant Peter Cook, painted his own murals. Folinsbee and Cook managed to paint Freeland over a two-day session. "Duck soup for us," Folinsbee told his daughter.

At the height of the Great Depression, over one-third of Pennsylvania's workforce was unemployed. But hard times failed to undermine the Commonwealth's impressive array of home-grown industries. Railroad car building and repair; lumbering and paper products; glass, brick, and concrete manufactories; and textiles were just some of the "other industries" that anchored many Pennsylvania towns and cities during the 1930s. Their singular importance to these communities made them a popular mural subject. Harold Lehman originally intended to paint an historical mural for Renovo, but the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor forced a change in plans. "It happened that Renovo was the center of a big locomotive repair operation of the Pennsylvania Railroad," Lehman later recalled.

"The major thing they did was to repair locomotives, a very vital concern of the government during the war years." One of two imposing murals installed on opposite walls in the downtown Altoona Post Office, *Growth of the Road* commemorates the history of transportation in a city known primarily by the 1930s for its railroad shops (operated by the Pennsylvania Railroad). The Conestoga wagon and stage coach were intended to represent the earliest forms of man-made transport. The canal boat in the lower left corner likely represents the Pennsylvania Main Line Canal which traversed through Altoona on its way to Pittsburgh. After the Civil War, nearly all of these were supplanted by the railroads whose construction dominates the center of the canvas.

In celebrating the dignity of everyday life, Treasury Department murals were intended to lift the spirits of a Depression weary America. Today, these same artworks offer a common canvas of a Pennsylvania that has faded from the landscape, but not from memory.

A version of the article originally appeared in *American Art Review*, April 2009.

David Lembeck is a graphic designer in State College, PA.

Curtis Miner is Senior Curator of Popular Culture and Political History at The State Museum of Pennsylvania in Harrisburg. In 2008 he and Lembeck curated *A Common Canvas: Pennsylvania's New Deal Post Office Murals*, organized to coincide with the seventy-fifth anniversary of the New Deal.



Harold Lehman, *Locomotive Repair Operation*, 1942, oil on canvas, Renovo PO.



Lee Gatch, *Squaw's Rest*, 1938, oil on canvas, Elizabethtown PO.

Award

continued from page 2

CCC in Bergen County, New Jersey, her home state. In 2010, she researched and interviewed Frank Cassara, the last living CCC artist and also a WPA artist who died in January 2017 in his home in Michigan.

Kathleen's website "New Deal Stories" (cccstories@gmail.com) includes background on another CCC artist, Douglas Reynolds, who was part of the CCC First Responders to the 1935 Labor Day Hurricane in Florida, which killed many including a large number of veterans of the Bonus Army of WWI.

More recently Kathleen was the coordinator for the NNDPA, working with the Living New Deal and Frances Perkins Center, to compile and publish a book on the involvement of women with the New Deal. The book, *Women and the Spirit of the New Deal*, is a unique and valuable collection of biographies of 100 women across the nation. One woman was even found active in the CCC. Included in this publication are the names of women who held some program or administrative position in various New Deal programs. *Women and the Spirit of the New Deal* is for sale via NNDPA P.O. Box 602, Santa Fe, NM 87504. \$20.00 plus \$2 shipping.

We look forward to her future research and publications.

Doris Lee

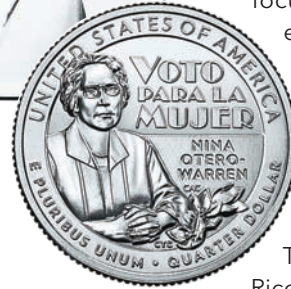
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Doris Lee (1905-1983)

The only woman artist selected for a U.S. Post Office Department mural commission, Doris Lee (née Emrick) was born in Aledo, Illinois. After graduating from Rockford College, she studied art for a year in Paris, and then at the Art Institute of Kansas City and the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. In 1931, she settled in the artists' colony of Woodstock, New York, while maintaining a studio in New York City. She learned on the same day in 1935 that she had won both the Logan Prize from the Art Institute of Chicago and had been awarded the commission for the Post Office Department murals. Lee continued working in various media—including paint, print, textile, and ceramic—and in increasingly abstract styles until the late 1960s.

Adelina Otero-Warren, 1881-1965

Adelina Otero-Warren was born to conservative parents who traced their heritage to eleventh-century Spain and as such in New Mexico, was virtually born into aristocracy from both sides of her family. She was far from being aristocrat since her life was spent helping others less fortunate. In 1912 she moved to New York City after a failed marriage to a military man and was active in a settlement house aimed to aid women in the working class. By 1917 she was a leader of the state Congressional Union later to be called the National Woman's Party focusing on women's suffrage issues. In 1920 back in NM, she was the chair of the State Board of Health and the Santa Fe Superintendent of Instruction. In 1922 she was the first Latina to run for a seat in the U.S. House of Representative as a Republican but lost and in 1923-29 she was the Inspector of Indian Schools in Santa Fe



and designated by President Roosevelt as the NM state head of the federal Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). By 1930 she was the Director of Literacy Education for the CCC in New Mexico but eleven years later she was also working with the WPA focusing on adult education as well as the CCC. This led her to become the Director of the Work Conference for Adult Teachers in Puerto Rico. Later she was responsible for creating a program for Navy sailors, Army soldiers, Airforce, and Marines in the US to familiarize them with the Spanish language. She was a powerhouse wherever she worked.

Source: Wikipedia and NNDPA.

New Deal Era Lightning Strikes Again

George Gordon Snyder was one of country's CCC Artists." Snyder was born in 1894 and at the time, his family was quite prosperous but ten years later the pendulum had swung to the other extreme financially. This pattern seemed to follow Snyder throughout his life. He and his soulmate and fellow artist were prospering well in 1920 in Chicago and then the Great Depression hit so Snyder joined the CCC in 1935 as an "artist/enrollee" at the age of 61 (eight years older than Pres. FDR.) Upon arriving in the Ozarks at a CCC camp, he found his element and was one of the most prolific of the CCC artists. Now in the 2000's, his CCC artwork has been "popping up." The above 1936 painting surfaced in the estate of a Devils Den CCC Camp Foreman in 2021. It is now in the Arkansas Historical Society Collection and in 2012 "Section of the Lodge" and "View From the Lodge" surfaced in a gallery collection of Mark Humpal in Portland, Oregon. Humpal and Kathleen Duxbury have vis-



George Gordon Snyder, *View of the Ozarks*, oil on canvas.

ited and shared stories about this artist and his work and as a result have located the above painting and another one at the Smithsonian American Art Museum and are on the lookout for more of Snyder's work. Each of our readers are encouraged to keep your eyes open for his art work that might have likewise traveled beyond its original location.

Kathleen Duxbury, is a CCC historian, author and NNDPA board member.

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