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THE FEDERAL ARTS PROJECT IN WISCONSIN 1936-1939

BY

NANCY RETSON

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION--PROBLEMS AND METHOD

From 1933-1943, the Roosevelt Administration established many New Deal programs. Four federal projects were designed specifically to aid artists. The Federal Art Project (FAP) under the auspices of the Works Progress Administration was the largest, most innovative, and efficient of these experiments in public support for the arts. This unprecedented program provided jobs for muralists, easel painters, print makers, graphic designers, sculptors, and art educators.

Five regional offices were organized to implement the program on a local level under federal supervision. The Chicago region included Wisconsin, where Charlotte Russell Partridge directed the state's Federal Art Project. Her role was important because of the administrative influence she wielded in the state and the personal strength she gave to the organization.

By taking a retrospective view, I hope to illustrate the unique opportunities that this financial and moral support afforded artists. During the depression of the thirties, artists, like many Americans, were unable to find employment. It was especially difficult at that time to
find jobs in areas that would continue to develop artistic skills. The FAP hired artists to produce art for display and ornamentation in tax supported buildings. The art work became government property and some of it remains in public collections.

While working at the Memorial Union on the University of Wisconsin campus in Madison, I became familiar with the portion of the permanent collection that was produced and given to the university by the Works Progress Administration art programs. By inquiring about the people who were involved in the Wisconsin programs, I was referred to James Watrous. Mr. Watrous directed me to several other Wisconsin artists and administrators, each of whom knew something about other former WPA artists.

The results of this paper are based on published readings (see bibliography), the eleven boxes of papers that make up the Charlotte Partridge Federal Arts Project collection in the archives of the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison, and a report by Margaret Davis Clark in the Wisconsin Works Progress Administration archive collection also located in the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison. But the greatest source of information was conversations with people who were directly or indirectly involved in the Federal Arts Project in Wisconsin. They were: James Watrous, Santos Zingale, Frederick Logan, Clarice George
Logan, Dorothy Meredith, John Luedtke, Karen Sessler Stein, Lester Schwartz, Porter Butts, Elsa Ulbricht, and Miriam Frink.

The main concern of this paper is with the first years of the Wisconsin FAP, 1936-1939, and the history of its early development, examining how the local administration and artists affected and were affected by the policy and personalities of this innovative government sponsored program.
CHAPTER II

GOVERNMENT AND NEW DEAL RELIEF

The Roosevelt Administration (1933-1945) was the first in America to establish federal relief programs which included support of the fine arts. Largely through the work of a few central personalities, with the help of executive approval, the New Deal extended help to artists by providing jobs for them in their field. These jobs kept skills and morale alive during the greatest economic crisis of the 20th century. The artistic result of these projects provides an impressive visual record of the social and cultural problems of the 1930's.

As the economy improved under the spur of foreign armaments contracts in the late thirties, Congress, pressured by World War II expenditures, refused to appropriate funds for government sponsored fine arts jobs; the programs were discontinued and never revived. The unique quality of the art programs lies in the fact that during this period art, for the first time, became accessible to a new American audience. From out of the ivory tower of studio life the artist emerged to sell his ideas and work to a totally new patron--the American government.

The stock market crash of 1929 and the subsequent
depression provided the necessary motivation for the government to create relief programs in the arts, for with the fall of the stock market went the art market. Patronage which had previously come from private sources of wealth no longer existed, leaving artists unemployed and unemployable. In 1929, the existing general relief programs were locally funded and administered. They quickly buckled under the costs and pressures of the crisis situation. The cities soon turned to state and federal government for help.

The Hoover Administration (1929-1933) proved incapable of grasping the desperate consequences of the depression on the individual and therefore, unable to formulate effective remedies. Executive decisions came slowly and legislative action dragged.

While rejecting a national assistance program, Hoover did support state efforts and by 1933, there were government relief agencies operating in every state. They received funds from the Emergency Relief and Construction Act of 1932 which made $300 million in federal aid available for repayable relief advances to state and local governments. These federal loans plus state and local moneys were essentially exhausted by March 4, 1933 when Franklin D. Roosevelt assumed office.¹

During the first "hundred days" of the Roosevelt Administration all eyes turned to Washington--for many it
was the only hope left. After local and state help proved inadequate, even Nature seemed an adversary as it left its tragic mark on the dustbowls of Texas and Oklahoma. The hour had arrived and now American turned to Franklin Roosevelt. He moved swiftly to make his "hundred days" an unprecedented period of written, considered, and passed legislation. He attacked economic problems with monetary, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and relief legislation. Policy and attitude changed and with it American morale. Both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt brought to the White House a new spirit of compassion and understanding for the plight of the common man. With these energies came a confidence in a system that could easily have collapsed under lesser personalities. The legislation written and eagerly passed through Congress during the "hundred days" stemmed the tide of fear which had spread unchecked before Roosevelt's inauguration.

The hundred days established a series of experiments in economic policy. One of these, the Federal Emergency Relief Bill was approved on March 30, 1933, providing $500 million in grants-in-aid to states. Harry Hopkins was named director by Presidential appointment.

Hopkins, who was to become a prominent New Dealer, came from a modest family in Grinnell, Iowa. After graduation from Grinnell College, he took a summer job in a New
York settlement house. The squalor of New York's slums made a permanent impact on him and influenced his decision to stay in social work. Roosevelt sought him out because of his ability to make quick decisions and his compassion for the cause of the poor.  

The critical problem as seen by Hopkins was to provide monetary relief efficiently without humiliation. To a country that had never known any relief measures larger than private charitable organizations, a large scale federal program was difficult to accept. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) made grants to local agencies who controlled the funds and periodically checked into the recipient's need. Continuous unemployment and being "on the dole" bred feelings of failure and self-degradation. To alleviate these feelings, Hopkins wanted to replace direct relief with a federal paycheck in exchange for labor performed for public welfare. To accomplish this, Hopkins devised, organized, and headed the Civil Works Administration (CWA) (1933-1934) and by January, 1934, he had met his goal of employing 4,000,000 people. The CWA created an amazing variety of jobs to replace direct relief.  

The CWA was only one of several unprecedented New Deal experiments. Its main focus was manual labor, but people saw the possibility of relief jobs eventually using more complicated, even white collar skills. CWA funds were
the first to extend aid to artists because as Hopkins put it: "Hell, they've got to eat just like other people." The CWA came under considerable public criticism and was suspended by Roosevelt in 1934, who hoped to return responsibility to local and state agencies.

It again became clear that states could not support the financial pressures of the depression and that a national welfare program was necessary. On May 6, 1935, the Works Progress Administration was established by executive order. Roosevelt wanted fast re-employment and stimulus to the consumer purchasing power. Hopkins was appointed director and he quickly proceeded to initiate work relief projects. The WPA soon grew into a huge federal program touching the lives of thousands of workers of various skills and abilities. One of the programs created under the WPA was the Federal Project Number One, a four part project employing people in the arts in the Federal Music Project, the Federal Writers Project, the Federal Theater Project, and the Federal Art Project (FAP). The FAP reached out to artists who were in desperate need of financial and moral encouragement.

It is not surprising that Roosevelt was sympathetic to the needs of artists. The Roosevelt family's wealth, leisure time, and education afforded them an appreciation for the fine arts. As he supported them in his private
life, it was natural that Roosevelt's encouragement carried over into his political life.  

Artists, like most Americans, were stunned by the depression. They tried to make their situation public through demonstrations, sponsoring hunger marches, outdoor sales and exhibitions, and forming goal oriented groups that lobbied for and obtained New Deal assistance.

Roosevelt's interest in the arts plus Hopkin's commitment to dignify relief programs resulted in relief appropriations for artists. Typical of the experimental nature of the New Deal relief programs, more than one attempt was made to organize a government art program. Although they differed in philosophy and administration, their central goal was the same: they made jobs available to artists. In brief, the following were the New Deal's four major art programs.

1. The Public Works of Art Program (PWAP)
Edward Bruce organized the PWAP under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department. This department controlled the construction of all federal buildings. 1% of construction costs were for embellishments of the building. Designed to dispense this work relief to painters, muralists, and sculptors, the program proved inadequate to help all unemployed artists. However, the headway Bruce made in
convincing officials of the need for relief for artists made it an important forerunner of the larger WPA program. The PWAP lasted from December, 1933 to January, 1934 employing 193,700 artists with $1,312,000.10

2. The Section of Painting and Sculpture
The Section, also under the Treasury Department, commissioned paintings and sculpture as embellishments for federal architecture. It was not specifically a welfare program and its goals were to create the best contemporary art available by artists on or off relief. Edward Bruce was the director, Forbes Watson, advisor. The Section was created in October, 1934 and faded during World War II in 1943. 1400 contracts were issued and $2,571,000 spent.11

3. The Treasury Relief Art Project (TRAP)
TRAP was financed in July, 1935 by an allocation of relief funds from the WPA to the Treasury Department. It was administered by the Section according to the same relief rules as the Works Progress Administration. Olin Dows directed the program which lasted from 1935 to 1939. It employed 446 artists, 75% of whom were on relief roles, with $833,784.12

4. The Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project (WAP/FAP)
This was the largest of the relief programs designed to help
people in the arts. The FAP was part of a wider program called the Federal Project Number One which included drama, music, and writing. Holger Cahill was the national director of the prolific FAP that lasted from 1935 to 1943. Under his direction, thousands of murals, sculptures, easel paintings, posters, and graphic designs were produced all over the country. The FAP also operated over 100 Community Art Centers, compiled a 20,000 piece Index of American Design, and financed models and photographers.
CHAPTER III

THE FEDERAL ARTS PROJECT (FAP) IN WISCONSIN

The Works Progress Administration sponsored the Federal Arts Project in Wisconsin from 1936 until 1939. Holger Cahill, the national director in Washington, worked closely with Charlotte Partridge, who directed the federally sponsored FAP in Wisconsin during those three years. The government paid her on a per diem basis as she devoted five days a week to the FAP while concurrently retaining her position as director of the Layton Art School and the Layton Art Gallery. 14

From 1939 to 1942, the FAP became the Wisconsin WPA Art program sponsored by the state. During this time, the project was supervised by Mrs. Margaret Davis Clark and official headquarters were moved to Madison.

Milwaukee was the administrative center and the main area of artistic production of the Wisconsin FAP. Although there were activities in areas outside Milwaukee, all administrative details went through Partridge's Milwaukee office. Here was centralized the allocation of funds, correspondence with Washington, distribution of finished work for loan or permanent placement, and the hiring of artists or their removal from the project's payroll.

The main areas of focus during the project's first
three years were: a) creative painting and sculpture, b) scientific painting and modeling for the Milwaukee Public Museum, c) the Index of American Design, and d) the Milwaukee Handicraft Project. The Handicraft Project, although legally under the auspices of another WPA department, was an art unit which was closely related to the FAP and is essential to the total picture of the FAP in Wisconsin.

Much of Wisconsin's New Deal art work was produced for specific sponsors for either immediate or eventual placement. Some of the best work was sent to Washington for WPA group exhibits and later allocation in the D.C. area, the ultimate destination never recorded. The greatest bulk of the art was spread across the state to decorate tax supported buildings. Allocation records were very poorly kept in Wisconsin as in all other states. This has become a national complaint as a large portion of WPA art has been lost, relegated to attics, or transferred to unknown private homes.

The public applauded, questioned, or hated the individual pieces of art in Wisconsin, but little local public criticism was made of the FAP as a whole. This was primarily because the FAP, like all New Deal programs, took people off the dole yet the FAP spent a small amount of funds in comparison to the larger WPA construction programs. The number of artists on the payroll varied from 35 to a
high of 120. The Wisconsin program carried on the goals of the national FAP by employing artists who had been on relief and placing them in their field allowing them the opportunity to continue developing their skills and to make valid aesthetic contributions to Wisconsin public buildings.

Wisconsin's FAP was small, but "so was the artistic community." 16 Many of the people involved were well acquainted with each other both on a personal and professional level prior to their work on the FAP. Although orders handed down from Holger Cahill in Washington made their mark on the project's official policy, the greatest influences on the formation of Wisconsin's FAP were the personalities of the local FAP administration. Most of the participating artists had graduated from Layton Art School or Milwaukee State Teachers College (MSTC, later the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee), where classes were small and several art topics were taught by a few teachers. Under these conditions of close personal contact, it was not difficult for students to develop strong relations among themselves, with their teachers, and with the art community who went to the same exhibitions, museums, and openings. The administrative staff and advisory committee consisted of students, teachers, and local people who had known each other before being hired by the FAP.
The two most dynamic personalities of the Milwaukee art scene in the thirties were Charlotte Russell Partridge and Elsa Ulbricht. They were both extremely active sources of energy in the schools where they worked, Partridge at Layton School, and Ulbricht at the Milwaukee State Teachers College, the only two schools in the area offering substantial art courses at the time. Both women were assertive, bright, energetic, and devoted to their work. They each vied for position as "grande dame" of the Milwaukee art scene and were often in subtle yet bitter competition. Whatever their motives, their positions as teachers greatly influenced Milwaukee art students, many of whom worked on the Wisconsin WPA art projects.

The question of who was to be the grande dame was never resolved. Neither career spiraled consistently upwards. Ulbricht directed the Milwaukee Handicraft Project, an unusual program which hired people to learn about and to produce handcrafted items. The large majority of her workers were unskilled and merely followed the instructions and designs of the "designer-foreman", artists who directed them. Ulbricht's professional role and personal influence is discussed later in the paper. The Handicraft Project was an experimental and much talked about WPA program. Unlike Ulbricht's exceptional project, Partridge headed a program aimed at hiring artists to produce fine art. It
paralleled projects existing in all of the states and her career with the WPA directly touched more artists than any one Wisconsin personality.
CHAPTER IV

CHARLOTTE PARTRIDGE'S BACKGROUND

Charlotte Partridge was born on November 24, 1884 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The experiences of her early life made her the independently strong, yet sensitive person who was later to become the director of the Federal Arts Project in Wisconsin. As a child in Duluth, Minnesota, she was extremely attached to her parents. Although her parents shared this fondness for Charlotte, they had neither the sophisticated knowledge of education and business needed to choose a suitable school, nor the finances for the formal education that would develop the potential of their daughter. It was a wealthy uncle who finally sent Charlotte to a fashionable prep school in Wellesley, Massachusetts.¹⁸

Charlotte's father died while she was in Massachusetts; the death traumatized her because she did not learn of it until several months later, when she returned home for vacation. Her uncle took over the family until Mrs. Partridge married Henry Jackson and the new family moved to Cleveland. Both Charlotte and her sister remained devoted to their mother until her death, but Charlotte's creative and assertive personality was not a result of her charming, easy going mother who was described as "jolly
and lots of fun." Rather, these qualities were a result of her contact with a future teacher, Emma M. Church.

After attending prep school, Charlotte went to the Emma M. Church School in downtown Chicago where she studied art. She was greatly influenced by Miss Church whose broad outlook and dynamic personality Charlotte admired very much. From her, Charlotte also acquired an interest in Oriental art. Eventually Charlotte began to assist Miss Church in teaching, an experience which resulted in her being hired by Downer College in Milwaukee to teach in the art department.

One of the most important events that happened to her at Downer was the beginning of what was to be a lifelong friendship with Miriam Frink, a colleague who was teaching in the English department. Frink, who lived next door to her in a campus dormitory explained that their friendship began because, "I would rescue her from spiders, she was terribly afraid of them."20

While working at Downer, Partridge became active with the Layton Art Gallery where she saw the possibility of fulfilling her dream of starting her own school. In 1920, after the proper legal groundwork was completed, she started teaching classes in the basement of the Layton building, and founded the Layton Art School. During this time, because of rent increases and the health of Miss Church, the
Church School in Chicago was forced to close. Charlotte took out a loan and bought all the remaining art supplies and had them shipped to Milwaukee's new Layton Art School.

Frink, tired of five years of freshmen themes, ended her teaching career at Downer to join her friend at Layton where she began to teach literature and art history.

All of the WPA Layton graduates I spoke to remember these two women as a formidable team constantly innovating new curricula and enlarging class size. One artist said of Frink, "I was afraid of her, she was so stern." She has apparently mellowed considerably and was delightfully witty and gentle while reminiscing about her now-deceased life-long companion, Charlotte Partridge. These two women founded the Layton Art School, investing endless time and energy into making it a credible institution. As its reputation grew, so did that of Charlotte Partridge. Frink stepped into the background and quietly controlled many of the administrative details that served to realize the ideas of the very visible and innovative Miss Partridge.

"Charlotte was very short but she'd never tell you how short nor how old she was." During the depression, neither her physical stature nor her age seemed to interfere with her WPA responsibilities to which she was devoted. The depression in Milwaukee left many artists without work and many recently graduated art students without job
possibilities. Partridge, both as a teacher and active aesthete with Milwaukee's small art circle of the time, was very aware of the financial situation of these artists who were her friends and students. Perhaps because she had no family of her own, she developed a sensitive, almost maternal feeling of responsibility toward these artists. She was quoted as saying, "what good would they [the artists] be in a depression?" She often loaned or made personal gifts of money to artists she knew were in need.

Edward Bruce, head of the Treasury Department's Art Program, became acquainted with Partridge through correspondence with her while coordinating contracts and paychecks between Wisconsin artists and the Washington office during the early thirties. Partridge and Bruce exchanged visits during business trips and became close professional friends. When Holger Cahill was selecting state directors for the larger WPA art program, it was Bruce who suggested that Partridge be asked to serve in Wisconsin.
CHAPTER V

FAP ORGANIZATION AND PROCEDURE IN WISCONSIN

The basic procedure for Milwaukee's FAP was in principle very simple. Artists were required to work a certain number of hours for one of two possible salaries: "junior artists" were paid a stipend of $70 per month for 120 hours of work and "senior artists" were paid approximately the same for eighty hours per month.\(^\text{24}\) This salary was about the same as a first or second year teacher. Art work produced during those hours was to be submitted to the FAP office every two weeks for approval by the director and the advisory board. Subject matter for all FAP work was to be scenes from American and World history or the "American scene". Finished products were the property of the government.

These policies were simple, but putting them into action presented many problems which the national policy left to the state directors to solve. This was complicated by the fact that official policy handed down from Cahill in Washington never stabilized. It wavered for two reasons: first, because it was an unprecedented and experimental program and second, its budget was a political ball bounced by congressional and public opinion.
As policy and funds changed so did the numbers of artists allowed to be on the payroll, and Partridge was forced to add and subtract accordingly. The FAP was originally established as a relief plan. To be accepted, an artist had to qualify for relief as did all other WPA workers. This also meant that applications were rejected when an artist lived at home where there was another source of income. For example, Mr. Abstetor, a Wisconsin artist, was initially refused employment on the FAP because he lived with his widowed mother who received a "mother's pension." A Milwaukee artist, Dorothy Meredith, left the program because she lived at home. As quotas changed, Partridge explained that she could stay on only if she moved to separate housing. Meredith refused and left the program.

In addition to the quotas of artists on relief, Washington quotas also allowed the Wisconsin FAP to hire a certain percentage of non-relief workers in order to obtain skills necessary to the quality of a particular project. This percentage varied from 25% to 5% of the Milwaukee FAP, a fluctuation that caused a great deal of heartache to the Wisconsin staff. Examining Charlotte Partridge's correspondence, the question of who and how many artists were on the payroll seemed to be the number one issue and a continuing battle between Cahill and the Milwaukee office.

In the first two months of the FAP's existence in
Wisconsin, Partridge hired 35 artists and was processing applications for more when she realized that many talented and needy artists did not qualify for relief. She requested a 25% non-relief quota. Before her message arrived, Cahill informed state directors that he expected all states to double their employment figures by February, 1936. Telegrams and letters flew back and forth between Washington and Milwaukee. Assistant Administrator Baker sent the following telegram to State Administrator Immel on January 6, 1936:

CHARLOTTE PARTRIDGE STATE ART DIRECTOR FOR WISCONSIN URGENTLY NEEDS TWENTY-FIVE PER CENT NON-RELIEF PERSONNEL TO ROUND OUT HER PROJECTS.28

The increase was approved shortly afterwards.

On January 18, 1936, Cahill sent the following telegram to Partridge:

NECESSARY TO INCREASE EMPLOYMENT ALL ALONG LINE BY FEBRUARY FIFTEENTH stop IMPORTANT YOU INCREASE TO ONE HUNDRED TEN PERSONS BY FEBRUARY FIFTEENTH IF POSSIBLE.29

Partridge reached the quota but on March 5, Harry Hopkins, director of the WPA, put an end to all increased employment.

The quotas and the fight continued until the program was liquidated in 1942. Although orders for cuts and additions came from Washington, it was Partridge who bore the brunt of facing these artists and confronting them with the news, good or bad. It is the opinion of most of the people I interviewed that Partridge was unbiased in her hiring
practices. However, she received threatening phone calls in the middle of the night telling her not to cut a certain artist or to add another. Frink reports that "she [Partridge] didn't let these calls phase her a bit and through it all I don't think she ever lost her faith in people. She never became cynical." However, Partridge's professional cool was not infinite. Once when she refused to hire a young woman whom she felt was not qualified, a WPA administrator telephoned Partridge and claimed he would interfere with the processing of FAP applicants if this girl was not hired. A fury of unprecedented wrath was unbounded and a fighting mad Miss Partridge emerged in immediate correspondence to Cahill:

Dear Mr. Cahill:

The other day a requisition for a non-relief worker was sent to me to approve from the district office #4. I refused to do so because the applicant mentioned was not by any standards a professional artist. She was a young woman about 18 years old who had one semester in our art school this past year, a clever young Jewess, but in my opinion, could not even qualify as an intermediate artist. The next day I received a telephone call . . . from the supervisor of employment at the district office asking me if I would not change my opinion and requisition this young woman.

Yesterday . . . I again said it was impossible . . . He said he was going to give the federal art program a dose of its own uncooperative tactics . . . while he did not say in so many words that if I would not give his protege the position he would consider that and hold up our assignments, his whole manner and sequence of statements made it perfectly clear . . . This is the first time I have had any such difficulty and I felt it was necessary for you to know.

Charlotte Russell Partridge
Wisconsin State Director
Federal Art Project

30
31
The Wisconsin FAP was small and labor relations problems such as this which seemed daily routine to programs like the New York City FAP, were exceptions in Milwaukee to a rule of general calm and easy going pace where complaints stayed on a local and personal level.

Often questions were asked of all state FAP programs concerning local FAP statistics. In May of 1936, Cahill inquired into the question of "Negroes" involved in Partridge's project:

We are interested in securing information on the number of Negroes employed on the Federal Art Project in your state, the nature of their work and rather complete information as to their background and personal histories. I would appreciate it if you would send this on to us at the earliest possible moment.32

Partridge replied:

In answer to your letter of May 25 regarding the employment of negroes on our project.

We have no negroes on any of our projects nor have we ever had any applicants. Should we in the future have occasion to put one on who can qualify, I will gladly give you all the information you ask for about him.33

Although during an interview, both Fred Logan and Santos Zingale substantiated Partridge's claim that no Negroes applied, very little effort was apparently made to encourage their applications. In Elsa Ulbricht's Handicraft Project, hundreds of blacks appeared, unskilled, but several talented black designers climbed within the ranks. It is unusual that not one black artist existed in Milwaukee
at that time who could qualify for the FAP.

As quotas changed do did time keeping requirements. But since there was less at stake, artists and Partridge rolled through these changes with few dramatic incidents. When the project first began in 1935, artists could choose to work independently in their own studios or in the group studio on the 4th floor of the Milwaukee Courthouse. Hours were kept by the honor system and artists were accountable only to turn in finished work at two week intervals.

In 1936, policy was handed down from Washington requiring all artists to work in FAP studios where they would sign in and out. Santos Zingale recalls that he accomplished less painting during that period than at any other time he worked on the FAP. Instead, he talked with the other painters and played darts. This nine to five studio office hour arrangement was not acceptable to artists who often worked longer but more irregular hours. It was implemented by Cahill mainly as a counter to criticism that the FAP artists were boondoggling. 34

Artists working outside the Milwaukee area were always on the honor system because they were spread out thinly all over the state and it was impossible for them to be supervised. James Watrous, painting in Madison, worked alone in his Madison studio on the UW campus between classes. Eventually the honor system was reinstated state
wide and artists were required to turn in time cards and art work they produced during the time they personally allotted to government work.

Of course, not all artists were fanatic in their honesty. Fred Logan, chairman of the advisory committee to the Wisconsin FAP, saw much of the art work submitted by the FAP artists, was always surprised to see competitive art shows won by excellent paintings produced by artists who consistently turned in mediocre work to the FAP office.

The procedure of the national FAP required that all artists undergo the process of home relief certification, quota cuts, time-keepers, petty bureaucrats, and insensitivity in allocation of works of art. But the Wisconsin Project endured all this and moved from the unfurnished floor in the Milwaukee Courthouse to a summer in the Layton School of Art, to space rented by the federal government in the Pioneer Building on Milwaukee Street in 1937. The Wisconsin FAP was located here until 1939 when federal sponsorship gave way to state sponsorship. Under state sponsorship, the staff changed and headquarters were moved to Madison. Although the personalities and tone of the program differed greatly from the early years under Partridge's leadership, the procedure remained basically the same.
CHAPTER VI

RESPONSE OF THE WISCONSIN PUBLIC

The WPA art projects in Wisconsin generally had quiet, calm influences on their public. Outside Milwaukee, the "project" as an entity was essentially invisible. Instead of seeing the project, the public saw only the finished works of art. Through post office murals, sculptures in parks, and paintings on school walls which "appeared" for the mere cost of materials, much of the Wisconsin public viewed original art on their own ground for the first time.

Art was not seen outside traditional display places such as museums and private mansions. It was available in places like the Wausau Post Office and the Milwaukee Zoo.

Style of prints, paintings, and sculpture in Wisconsin was kept conservative and readable; figures and objects could be identified by the viewer. The public was comfortable with paintings depicting local historical themes in familiar settings and, unlike the New York and the San Francisco FAPs, no huge scandals were involved. The alleged communist propaganda in the murals painted in San Francisco's Coit Tower caused a widely publicized clash between artists and patrons. The murals included portrayal
of a man reading the "Western Worker", a communist weekly, books by Karl Marx, and a hammer and sickle.36 Arshile Gorky's "Aviation" mural in Newark Airport was removed because it displayed a suspiciously communistic star.37

With few exceptions, Wisconsin responded positively, but quietly. In retrospect, people describe the interest, but not excitement, with which they viewed the FAP's art in their hometowns.

The newspaper accounts of the Wisconsin FAP were predominantly factual prose reporting on new procedures, exhibitions, and locations of the project activities. The articles intimated positive feelings toward the creation of new, unique jobs, but remained removed and distant from the art itself. They never delved deeply into examination or criticism of the finished product. They either praised the work in systematic terms (good tones, interesting subject) or avoided that issue entirely, reporting instead on the logistics involved in getting such a program organized:

One noteworthy horizon is provided by the murals, the large pictures for definite wall spaces. There, the best work appears, no doubt because the subject matter is in itself always interesting. The mural usually owns a "Hail to the Chief" quality. It "celebrates" something.38

Henry Colmes and James Gehr who have contributed so much lovely sculpture to parks are represented in this show by a horse, sea lion, and bear. These are plaster figures to be cut later in stone.39

No evidence was found of any published articles or
correspondence that attacked specifically the Wisconsin FAP. However, because such large percentages of Wisconsin artists were involved in the FAP, art opinion aimed at Milwaukee artists included those working for the FAP. Although "Drive for Sanity in Art, No Tempest in a Teapot" of the Milwaukee News, is not directed exclusively at WPA art, it refers to exhibits in which many Wisconsin FAP artists participated. In present times it is difficult to judge the validity of the few articles found expressing strong negative viewpoints. Art values have changed so drastically over the years that it is strange to think that these authors were expressing widely held public opinion.

Mrs. Logan is the wealthy Chicago society matron who was shocked to discover that prizes from the trust fund she had established were going to "freak" art. She had been on the warpath ever since founding the International Society for Sanity in Art to battle against the modern trends she abhors. There have been mutterings here from time to time against so called moderns, but it is only in the last few months that the debate has become acrimonious. Some of the sanitarians have hinted in public that Moscow has seen in these modern art trends a fine opportunity to aid in unsettling and disturbing the minds of American youth. From esthetics to politics, they argue, is not such a long jump, and paranoid art, as they term it is good fertilizer for the seeds of foreign ideologies. 40

The only controversy that led to legal arenas remained in debate and never officially went to court. The art in question was a mural installed in the Milwaukee State Teachers College where both university and elementary school
students would see it.

The mural has been criticized because of its gloomy, cynical view of modern capitalism and because of the nude figure which must be observed by grade school children in the building.41

It was the national media coverage of the entire FAP that tended to seek out problems and to treat FAP controversies with emotion. Public opinion of the FAP was correlated with public opinion of President Roosevelt and the New Deal. Those who supported national relief measures generally supported the WPA and its art programs. But those who disagreed with the New Dealers used the Federal Project Number One as a target for criticism and an example of government supported "boondoggling". Critics also claimed the project was "pink" citing the registered communists who made themselves visible especially on the New York Writers and Theater Projects.42

Wisconsin artists had their leftist leanings, but because of the large percentage of apolitical co-workers, demonstrations were discussed but never materialized. The active disputes between artists, writers, actors, and musicians with Congress were between New York and Washington. New York's Federal Project Number One did provide Congress with the demonstrations and communist targets that eventually led to congressional denial of appropriations and the liquidation of the FAP. But if New York's FAP had an extraordinary touch of madness, it also was generously en-
dowed with genius. It brought America Ben Shahn, Willen de Kooning, Adolph Gottlieb, and Louise Nevelson, to name a few.

The Wisconsin program produced neither the turbulence nor the extreme genius that came out of the New York City project. The small size of the Wisconsin FAP kept communication on a personal level avoiding explosive incidents that large groups found necessary to make their demands known. Extreme group emotions were not present in Wisconsin's FAP for although Wisconsin felt the economical plunge of the depression, the suffering was not felt to the extent of many other areas in the country--this was reflected in the style of Wisconsin FAP art. The visual result of the economic situation in Wisconsin was different than in New York City, as was the response of the state wide public which with a few eccentric exceptions, was a quiet, positive acceptance of the FAP and its art.
CHAPTER VII

FOUR AREAS OF CONCENTRATION

Under Partridge's direction, the artists on the FAP were concentrated in four directions: the Milwaukee Public Museum artists, the Index of American Design, the Milwaukee Handicraft Project, and the Creative Painting, Sculpture, and Printmaking artists.

The Milwaukee Public Museum Artists

The Milwaukee Public Museum was one of the many public institutions that profited from the New Deal work program. While workers renovated the building and rearranged, recatalogued, and cleaned the exhibits, fourteen FAP painters and sculptors created murals, easel paintings, and three dimensional figures for dioramas. Their finished art work has become part of the permanent museum collection.

Mr. John Luedtke, who has been the museum's historian since 1939, recalled the WPA period as one of unexpected growth for the museum. The 380 workers sent to the museum in 1936 were divided into shifts of 200 people working on various task teams. The museum received approximately $600,000 from the federal government through FERA, WPA, National Youth Administration (NYA), and the Federal Art
Project. This quantity of man power had never before been available to the museum and made a complete renovation possible. The skill level of these workers varied from paper flower makers to electrical experts who designed and installed a new lighting system. Four of the most well trained workers were sponsored by the FAP: Dwight Logan, Takub Gielens, Albert Tiemann, and Vladkimir Shamberk.

These four men would meet with the department heads of the museum to discuss the space available and the subject of the painting or sculpture needed. The artists cooperated with the museum staff and worked in the museum's studios but the materials and their sale salaries were paid by the FAP. The staff was extremely receptive to these four artists who, unlike many of the other workers assigned to the museum, were highly experienced in their field and qualified to produce narrative art suitable to museum display.

Most of their efforts centered on narrations in the form of series of paintings. Dwight Logan painted a twelve mural series illustrating the discovery of gun powder by Bertold Schwarz around 1330. The paintings were attached to the walls of the hallway where arms and armor were displayed. Albert Tiemann, who was in his seventies when he began his FAP work, painted a four part mural depicting the "Media of Exchange", which traced the development of money
in a Greek Temple to modern times. A third series, seven portraits of personalities important to the field of music, was painted by Vladkimir Shamberk. The portraits preside over the hall dedicated to musical instruments. Yakub Gienlens was a talented painter of birds, and many of his reproductions now hang on the ground floor of the museum's new building.

The work the FAP artists produced for the Milwaukee Public Museum differed from the usual work done for the FAP by other creative painters and sculptors. The narrative nature of the museum work is expressed in realistic, scientific renderings done without abstraction or experimentation. When the museum moved across the street to its new building, all the art was transferred and is presently on display or in their archive collection.

The Index of American Design in Wisconsin

The Index of American Design Unit of the FAP was devoted to making a visual record of practical, decorative, and folk art produced in America prior to 1890. Thirty-five states had Index units within their FAP organization. Victor Volk was the supervisor of Wisconsin's Index and worked with Charlotte Partridge in Milwaukee.

Credit of the idea and initiation of the Index of American Design belongs to Ruth Reeves, a textile designer
in New York City. One day in 1935, she met an artist as he was leaving the picture collection of the New York Public Library.

He had not been able to find in the collection a picture Indian of a certain period which he needed for a mural he was executing. I suggested he try the Museum of National History but warned him that there he would as likely as not find the breeches of the costume he wanted in one case and the shirt and accessories in another, hence his chances to see how the complete costume was actually worn were probably very slim. I bewailed the fact that artists in the United States had never been given anything like the design source publications which Europe, Mexico, China, and Japan had for years put before their artists and designers and added that what we artists sorely need in this country was an American Racinet and Hothenrot.44

Cahill, a former museum curator, was aware of how rich America was in indigenous design. He also knew of the lack of resource materials available in this area. With the thought of eventual publication, he saw the long range possibilities of the Index paying for itself. Cahill quickly picked up on the idea, approved it, and appointed Ruth Reeves to be national coordinator. Early in 1936, FAP staff began to write up an official plan for the Index.45

During the first year of the national Index, very few reproductions of great value were produced. Washington asked local artists to work for "strict objectivity, accurate drawing, clarity of construction, exact proportions, and faithful rendering of material, color, and textures so that each Index drawing might stand as surrogate for the
object." Commercial artists, or those rejected from other art projects, often lacked the necessary skills and the finished products were poor. This raised the issue of photography as being a more expedient means of obtaining an accurate reproduction. However, the Index argued that photographs were not sensitive enough to the subtleties of color, relief, and to the "spark of life" of the object.  

In 1937, Reeves stepped down and Adolph Glassgold became supervisor. He dramatically overhauled the program, putting special stress on a "meticulous technique of documenting painting." The national office insisted on the highest level of professionalism, often rejecting and sending back plates for correction or redrawing. By 1938, Washington's concept of the Index and their expectations of quality were well known in all the state units. Work improved and plates of Index work were proudly displayed in national FAP exhibits.  

Once the quality was brought up to an acceptable level, the unit was easily sold to even the dubious segments of the WPA audience. The realism and comfortable subject matter of an Index program were totally unthreatening to a public that was often not convinced of the FAP's other programs. A WPA administrator in Texas welcomed the Index unit, although he regarded the FAP as "a waste of money". WPA workers concluded that the Index "fit in per-
fectly with the desires of the Texan mind because it glorifies and advertises their local cultural development."49

Wisconsin initiated an Index of American Design unit late in 1936. Coinciding conveniently with the new unit was Wisconsin's centennial celebration in 1937. The enthusiasm easily carried over into the Index. The DAR, Colonial Dames and Daughters of the Confederacy, the Camp Fire Girls, librarians, art teachers and historical societies cooperated with Volk, thus granting credibility to the Index with a wholesome Wisconsin seal of approval.50

Volk began by creating visibility for his project. He visited several cities talking to townspeople, WPA officials, and local newspapers. These newspapers wrote articles promoting the aims of the Index and the fact that the FAP wanted to borrow objects of "historical and artistic value" in order to compile a comprehensive collection of objects "typical of applied, decorative, and folk arts of Wisconsin" dating prior to 1890. These articles all include one line of a promise to "handle carefully" and to "return promptly" all relics. The response was immediate and from obscure, unexpected sources. Out of closets, attics, and barns came some heirlooms, some junk to be lent to the project.

These unusual sources provided among other things,
tools, dolls, valentines, and furniture dating back to pioneer days. A copper plate engraving from which a counterfeiter in 1861 printed $50 bank notes of which $36,000 worth were passed in Wisconsin before the culprit was apprehended; a slate on which Increase A Lapham "father" of the U.S. weather bureau made his caculations; and fourteen wooden cigar store Indians were among the many items located and examined for possible reproductions. 51

Volk, in his index report of 1939, writes that many of the objects located in Wisconsin by the Index were brought here from the East when the fur-trading, boat building, and lumbering industries were at their height. The Milwaukee Public Library Museum was the main source of these relics.

However, most of the Pioneer relics used as Index models were actually constructed in Wisconsin. Their histories and verification were made by descendants of the original owners or by the custodians of small town collections who often knew the original donors of these objects or their descendants. The geography often lent sources for certain groups of objects categories. In Rhinelander and Superior for example, objects from logging camps--cant hooks, log markers, torches, log sheds, and axes were found. In Manitowoc and Sturgeon Bay, the Index located and copied ship axes, binnacle lamps, starboard lamps, lights, and
riggings from their early boat building days. Madison's Historical Society provided furniture and utensils from pioneer log cabins of the mid-19th century.\textsuperscript{52}

Once these objects were located and lent to the Index, they were either brought to Milwaukee where artists began to illustrate copies of them or they were reproduced by an artist working in the immediate area. Volk and Partridge both were in close touch with the people who lent the objects, often driving to the donor's house to pick up or return the objects themselves.

The plates consist of heavy white cardboard sheets 14" by 11" in size. Each item is set isolated on stark white background and the artists used watercolor or pencil to reproduce the object's minute details. Index artists worked in four Wisconsin counties, from the program's inception to July 1, 1940, and managed to produce 411 plates. In Milwaukee county 354 Index plates were completed, 47 in Racine, 6 in Manitowoc, and 4 in Walworth County.\textsuperscript{53}

The plates were compiled into folios accompanied by written history and verification of authenticity. Some of these folios remain in the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison and some in the Milwaukee Public Library. The largest proportion of the plates were sent to Cahill in Washington and are now permanently on file in the National Gallery in Washington.
The Gallery opened a basement room for artists and designers who wanted to use the Index. Although some Index plates were printed in book form, the entire Index collection was never published as Cahill had originally hoped. After the WPA was liquidated in the early forties, there was a fight as to permanent allocation of the Index collection between the Metropolitan Museum, the National Gallery, and the Library of Congress. Cahill hoped someone would publish them or at least make the plates easily accessible to artists and designers.\(^5\) The folios in Madison and Milwaukee have not been worked on since WPA days and are not complete nor particularly useful. They are, however, a reminder of a good idea left incomplete. They themselves have taken on the beginnings of the antique look they attempted to record.

**The Milwaukee Handicraft Project**

The Milwaukee Handicraft Project (1933-1943) was a WPA project which operated under the auspices of the Women's and Professional Division of the Works Progress Administration. Because its purpose and philosophy differed from other Wisconsin New Deal art projects, the effects it had upon the individuals and the community it reached, are unique and important to the total picture of the WPA art programs in Wisconsin. The Handicraft Project
had three main objectives: (1) to employ women on relief in the Milwaukee area who because of lack of skills could not qualify for other WPA programs, (2) to produce handcrafted items incorporating high standards of design and craftsmanship, and (3) to influence public taste by the distribution and use of these objects in tax supported institutions. 55

Mrs. Harriet Clinton, District Director of the WPA's Milwaukee Women's Division conceived the idea of a handicraft work project while looking for a way to employ the increasing number of women who were becoming responsible for the support of families. The administrative task of realizing such a program was formidable, complicated by government regulations and red tape. As with all WPA projects, the government required that the Handicraft Project be sponsored by an authorized government agency or educational institution. This sponsor or its representative agent was responsible for a definite procedural plan and continued accountability for the work carried on. The Milwaukee State Teachers College (MSTC, now the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) was the original sponsor of the Handicraft Project. Upon Harriet Clinton's request, Elsa Ulbricht, then a teacher at MSTC, accepted the volunteer position of sponsor's agent and director of the project. Mrs. Clinton and Miss Ulbricht were involved in two months
of intensive planning assisted by Mary June Kellogg, then a senior art student at MSTC, and Ann Feldman, then a recent University of Wisconsin graduate. After several conferences with federal and state bureaucrats, the Project Proposal was written, approved, and on November 6, 1935 the project opened its doors. 56

The workers who arrived that day were a motley crew of women hard hit by the depression. Because they lacked skills, they did not qualify for other work programs and had been indiscriminately assigned to the project by the U.S. Employment Service. Most of them arrived uneasy and apprehensive because they had been told little about this project other than an address and a time to report to work. Many who had long been out of work showed visible signs of long term stress, anxious about their abilities to meet the demands of this new job. Some arrived weak from hunger and lack of medical attention. They were of all nationalities, races, ages, and degrees of intelligence and education. Their one common bond was the need for work that would give them self-respect while taking them off the dole. 57

During the first days, confusion resulted when the staff was confronted with eight hundred workers when they had planned materials and space for two hundred and fifty. For many, the Handicraft Project was a long awaited "chance". 58
Organization set in and as production began, confidence and a certain pride replaced the trepidation with which the workers had arrived. They found great satisfaction in the visual results of their efforts and their workers paycheck of fifty dollars a month. Ulbricht recalls, "Oh, they were so down and out when they first came to us that I wanted to cry. All of them were on relief and some looked as though they hadn't eaten for a long time. But the first time they got paid, most of them went out and splurged on permanents."\textsuperscript{59}

Constant turnover of employees was the most discouraging aspect of the program. Because the Handicraft Project was government sponsored, when workers acquired certain skills or as new programs were created, they were often transferred. This turnover meant a constant retraining of employees which naturally slowed down production for a time and lowered quality standards. During the project's eight years, it employed over 5,000 people, allowing them independence from the relief roles in exchange for worthwhile work.\textsuperscript{60} This was a disadvantage for the project's production goals, yet it aided the long range efforts of the WPA to employ and train as many workers as possible.

The directing staff who, unlike the workers, were not required to be on relief to be employed, consisted of young men and women with art backgrounds. Most of them had four
year MSTC degrees but largely because of the depression they had not been able to secure teaching positions. They were sympathetic and understanding toward the workers they supervised and taught. Important also, these people were young, energetic, and Ulbricht mentioned, flexible toward the experimental nature of each task as well as toward the project as a whole. Other than Mary June Kellogg and Anne Feldman, these young people were appointed by Ulbricht to be "designer-foremen" at a monthly salary of $75. They were responsible for designing models for each article produced and following Kellogg's approval, they taught the production method to the workers who worked on an assembly line basis. Each foreman designed for his own unit knowing first hand the abilities and limitations of his workers.61

Clarice George (Logan), a designer-foreman on the project, described the Weinbrenner building, where the project was housed, as being filled with people, activity, and "lots and lots of noise".62 At the block printing unit where she worked, women would pound the wooden blocks with rubber mallets creating tedious repetitions of motion and sound. However, she explained, the primitive methods were most useful to the objectives of the WPA as a whole because it necessitated a great quantity of workers and few variations of skills.

Polish and Negro were the only two ethnic groups that
stand out in her memory as being on her unit. They voluntarily segregated themselves and she was often the arbitrator of fights between the two groups. The time she spent dealing with employee relationships detracted from her original personal objectives as a design artist. She would have preferred to pursue her own interest in painting but as that was a division of Partridge's FAP domaine and because she had been a student of Ulbricht's at MSTC, she developed a strong affection for her teacher and a feeling of obligation to accept Ulbricht's request to join the Handicraft Project.63

Mary June Kellogg served as Art Director and was responsible for maintaining the project's original design policy. This policy was a simple one: "no matter how simple the article to be made or how inexpensive the materials to be used in the construction, the article would be well designed or it would not be made."64 This policy was strictly upheld by Kellogg according to her own personal aesthetic and construction standards. These standards must have been widely acceptable as the demand for the project's articles was ever-increasing.

Screen printing, doll and toy, weaving, hooked rug, costume, book binding, furniture, and applique units designed and produced thousands of items for tax supported institutions. In the early forties when the WPA cancelled
funds, Goodwill Industries considered taking over the Handicraft Project and making it into a permanent workshop for the handicapped. The plan never crystalized and the entire project was terminated in 1941.

The Milwaukee Handicraft Project received national publicity and an official visit from Eleanor Roosevelt. Many of its finely crafted products are still in existence in the Milwaukee Public Library, the Allis Art Library in Milwaukee, and in Madison in the Historical Society and on the University of Wisconsin campus in the Memorial Union, and in Elizabeth Waters Dormitory.

**Elsa Ulbricht**

When describing the Milwaukee Handicraft Project, it is difficult to decide whether to assign more recognition to the project as a whole or to its fascinating former director, Elsa Ulbricht. Ulbricht, now 92, lives in the house her father built in 1893 in Milwaukee. He was involved with lumber and the house is decorated with handcrafted panels and carvings. She claims his influence on her was twofold. One, he taught her a respect for materials and two, he never stood in her way. The second attribute was especially unusual because Elsa as a young woman was more educated and far more independent than most of her contemporaries. She studied art at the Wisconsin School
of Art, and at Pratt Institute in New York where she lived with a girl friend in Brooklyn. After graduating, she taught and directed both art and crafts classes at Milwaukee State Teachers College improvising and innovating as time and situation demanded. She used to spend summers in Saugatuck, Michigan where she was on the Board of Directors of the Summer School of Painting, the country school of Chicago's Art Institute. The organizations she participated in and the offices she held during this time goes on into a prolific list. All of her efforts had culminated in the nationally known Handicraft Project for which she was a most well equipped natural leader.

Although Charlotte Partridge and Elsa were well known rivals, Partridge asked Elsa to serve on several selection committees and just prior to setting up the Handicraft Project, Elsa was on the Public Works of Art Committee in Milwaukee. Here she chose artists on a competitive basis to receive federal contracts. She was eager to organize similar assistance to craftsmen when she was invited by the WPA to devise and direct a handicraft work program. Unlike Charlotte Partridge, Ulbricht was never paid for her WPA work. For eight years, she volunteered her services while concurrently teaching at MSTC. She feels the compensation was working with people whose lives and morale were being saved by the paycheck the Handicraft Project provided.
Harriet Clinton once asked her if she would mind having "Negroes" on the project. Ulbricht's answer: "No, I like them," (let us remember it was 1935). The first blacks came to apply after the project had begun, when Elsa asked why they had waited so long to apply, a black explained they "didn't know they were allowed." Soon after, the project was bombarded with requests for work from blacks who were experiencing even more difficulty finding depression jobs than Milwaukee's white workers. Elsa assigned a black man to head the evening workshop as foreman. This decision was unacceptable to Ann Feldman, one of her two assistants; it lead to Feldman's eventual resignation.

The spirit of this tiny woman is her most amazing attribute. Last year at the age of 91, a doctor tried to tell her to move into a home for senior citizens. "I told him, 'not in you life am I going to any old ladies home. I've lived in this house all my life and I know every door-knob in it." And so she walks slowly, leaning on furniture as she makes her way around the lower level of the house around which unfinished projects are scattered everywhere--a beginning of a permanent Milwaukee Public Museum display, boxes of articles and photographs to be sorted for the archives at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee, and letters from former students, friends, and employees to be answered.
Of all her laurels, she is most proud of the Governor's Award she received in 1966. Of her personal life, she never married. She and a beau once discussed it "but he said that women were god's gift to men and I just couldn't marry him after that. Would you have?".67

Since Charlotte Partridge passed away in 1974, Elsa is now less passionate about her position in society. But, she is the undisputed grande dame of the Milwaukee art scene and she only wished "that I could live a lot longer, there's so much I could do yet."68

Creative Painting and Sculpture

Most of the Milwaukee FAP artists were involved in creative painting, printmaking, and sculpture. These artists were responsible to Miss Partridge and the advisory committee but worked essentially on their own in their studios. From the beginning of the FAP until 1939, they produced 643 easel works, 76 fine print designs, 657 fine prints, 40 murals, and 187 sculptures.69 Many of these works are unaccounted for because of poorly kept records. The efforts for this paper were not centered on locating this art work but rather on the personalities of the people who produced it.

The University of Wisconsin Memorial Union was given a small collection of work and some of it still exists in
their permanent collection. Although it is not an extensive grouping, it is representative of some of the FAP work of the young artists who have become prominent in the Wisconsin art scene.

The themes of the prints are typical Wisconsin scenes of farms, sports, people at work, and landscapes. These lithographs and a few watercolors are the efforts of young artists and are not of strong professional quality. Santos Zingale for instance, is not proud of a print of his in the collection and has been trying for years politely to sabotage it. 70 Perhaps the most impressive part of the collection is James Watrous' Paul Bunyan Room which he has decorated with four large murals depicting the tall tales of Paul and his blue ox, Babe. Watrous painted the murals while he was a student during the depression. He had several comments about this era in Madison.

The depression of the thirties was the first national economic crisis in America in which the impact was clearly felt by a large proportion of upper and middle-class Americans. In large urban areas like Chicago and New York, and in drought stricken agricultural areas like Kansas and Oklahoma, this impact was more visible than in Wisconsin. People in Wisconsin tightened their belts but nowhere was there widespread hunger. James Watrous, who worked on the PWAP during the early thirties, describes himself during
the depression as the best dressed pauper on State Street because he painted posters for a State Street haberdashery that paid him in clothing rather than cash. Like many students at the university, he ate at the Memorial Union where credit for student union food was given to students in the form of redeemable food chits. Common during the Union chit days was tomato soup concocted by taking a cup of hot water from the tea dispenser and mixing in ketchup which was free and one each table in the Union's Rathskellar.

In 1933, Watrous was hired by the PWAP to paint a mural on campus in one of the Union's small rooms. The PSAP paid him $18.75 per week to create the Paul Bunyan Room across from the Rathskellar. Prior to this job, Watrous was spending 85¢ a day to live so his new salary was large enough to support the frequent loans he made to his friends. He explained that the job permitted him to eat as well as learn mural techniques. This training ground proved to be a long-range source of confidence as he has been generously rewarded over the years in positive feedback from alumni who have made the Paul Bunyan Room a university tradition.71
CHAPTER VIII

TEN ARTISTS

During the interviews, reading, conversation, and visual studies of art work concerning Wisconsin's Federal Art Program, a group of names emerged. They are: Forrest Flower, Richard Jansen, Alfred Sessler, Santos Zingale, Edmund Lewandowski, Fred Logan, Dorothy Meredith, Paul Clemens, Charles Thwaites, and Schomer Lichtner. They were not a formally organized group; however, their skills, backgrounds, philosophies, and lifestyles held several characteristics in common.

Most helpful in exploring these characteristics was a collection of questionnaires compiled by Porter Butts, a former art history graduate student in Madison and later, director of the Union. In 1935, in order to commemorate the Wisconsin Centennial in 1936, Mr. Butts began to research Wisconsin artists with the intention of possibly using the information in his book, "Art in Wisconsin". As part of this research, he sent questionnaires to all FAP artists. The 159 forms that were completed and returned are on file in boxes numbered three, four, and five of the WPA Federal Art Project archive collection in the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison. In these questionnaires
the artists gave autobiographical information that often revealed facts as well as something about their artistic and personal philosophies.

In 1935 when the Wisconsin FAP began, all of the above artists were between the ages of 21 and 31. All of them had studied art at either Layton Art School, or Milwaukee State Teachers College, or both and showed promise of potential success by their exhibition records. They were all long time Wisconsin residents from middle-class homes and most had European immigrant parents. They were energetic, hard-working, and earnest, demonstrating the youthful confidence and ambition needed to form an artistic and personal philosophy.

The philosophies of these artists as expressed in the written questionnaires differed greatly in tone as well as orientation. All expressed a primary interest in art and some described strong secondary interests that influenced their lives and lifestyles. When asked to list the "most common subject of your art work", both Sessler and Zingale wrote "social expression or argument." Zingale laughs today at his political activism of the thirties, but others remember him as a serious young politico highly interested in the Spanish Revolution, Leninism, and revolutionary art. In 1935, when asked how his work was influenced by the Wisconsin environment, he responded, "Because of the social
and political manifestations also because I'm on relief."

The same attitude is expressed in his autobiographical sketch, composed of short, staccato sentences. More words are used to describe his political rather than artistic activity. "I was born of a middle class tradesman. I graduated from high school and college where I played football. I taught for three years at $15 per week. I was fired from a teaching position because of a framed arrest by police for 'picketting' at the 'Gender Piashku Frey' Company--where I was charged with helping in tipping over a patrol wagon! (Black Marie)."

When a group of people with similar political leanings forms, they have the power to demand a public forum to make their issues known. This was the case with New York City's Federal Project Number One, which had several leftist members and several common ideas, some of which culminated in picket lines and publicity. In Milwaukee the FAP was smaller and had proportionately fewer people with like ideas and the desire to express them. Milwaukee was a far more conservative city than New York and the strong fears of communism and socialism were especially emotional and threatening. They conjured up a part of the world from which many Milwaukeeans had fled.

Most of Milwaukee wanted the depression problems to ameliorate quietly without help from foreign factions, real
or imaginary. The Allis-Chalmers strike in 1939 over employee lay-offs led to violence and "goon-squads". Public reaction was negative toward both sides and towards the strike in general. The reasons for the strike were secondary to its outcome: overturned streetcars and the beaten workers. 74 Most of Milwaukee was against such methods of public expression and did not tolerate them as easily as New York did. So most FAP artists, like most of Milwaukee, went on working and hoping times would improve if everyone worked hard enough.

Like Zingale, Sessler was another exception to this rule. As his autobiography explains, they both shared feelings of being victims of social injustice. Sessler described growing up in Milwaukee as a place where he had a "normal, midwestern childhood." He felt his attitude was influenced by his background which formed a "typical midwestern outlook toward life." This attitude must have been jolted when, in 1934 he lost his job as a display man at the Boston Store after four weeks of marriage. He had participated in the organization of a strike and marched in its picket line. "I was fired for union activities," was his written remark. In February, 1935 when Butts wrote the report, Sessler had not yet found a job. 75

Sessler's daughter, Karen Sessler Stein, remembers her father and Zingale as "bosom buddies" and that their
political feelings in the thirties were "lightly socialistic." Both listed themselves as members of the left-wing John Reed Club. Their feelings about art however, were not shallow; "I can honestly say that my father was one of those people who was compelled to paint." Following the end of the FAP, Sessler sold shoes, decorated windows at Walgreens, and continued painting in the kitchen.

In 1942, at the age of 33, with the encouragement of Fred Logan and Santos Zingale, he began work for a bachelors degree at MSTC. Four years later he, his wife, and their new daughter moved to Madison where he eventually completed a masters degree at the University of Wisconsin and was hired to teach in the art department. He continued to paint and teach there until his untimely death in 1963.

Working closely with Sessler, was Zingale, who had moved to Madison and following the completion of a masters degree, was also hired to work on the University Art Department faculty where he continues to teach today.

The political consciousness of these two men was not shared by all the FAP artists, most of whom remained apolitical in nature. This was evident in the choice of subject matter of their work in the thirties. When asked in 1935 to list his favorite subject matter, Zingale responded "Social expression and argument." This was being produced next to what other artists categorized as "land-
scape, genre, still life, portrait" and an occasional "ab-
straction".

The autobiographical sketches of most of the other
artists are equally sincere and serious but focus on non-
political aspects of their careers. Typical comments are:
Personally, I take life as it comes, enjoy it, and then
record my enjoyment"77 or "Turbulent as times are at present,
my work remains unopinionated in subject matter. Not until
I feel that my social beliefs can be seriously simulating
toward the creation of a picture, will my paintings be
colored with propaganda. I still think a reclining nude
or a still life can be as aesthetically significant as a
policeman beating the head of a worker."78 These were more
in keeping with the tone of most of the questionnaires and
indicative of the motivation behind much of the work
produced on the Wisconsin project.

In Wisconsin, the American Scene lacked the dramatic
aspects of other regions. Wisconsin was an agricultural
state without drought and the landscapes were green; where-
as, Chicago was characterized by lonely men lining up for
soup where Milwaukee had families pulling coaster wagons
to pick up surplus food available to people on relief.79
To a proud German Milwaukee man, the humiliation of surplus
food might have been equal to that of a hungry individual
in Chicago, but the visual aspect of the two were not.
Wisconsin artists recorded a calm scene. They did not purposely avoid the human tragedy of the depression, they merely painted the depression as they saw it in Wisconsin.
CHAPTER IX

A RETROSPECTIVE EVALUATION

When making a retrospective evaluation forty years after participation in the program, those interviewed attributed different characteristics to the Wisconsin FAP years. The artists' assessments were in terms of what the FAP did for them. Those who worked on the administration took a broader overview and remember those years much more positively than the artists they directed.

Dorothy Meredith summed it up simply with "it gave me the opportunity to paint." She did not feel she gained or learned anything from the program that she would not have acquired by herself. James Watrous said the WPA art programs fed him and gave him a practical reason to learn mural techniques. The experience proved to be a training ground that gave him self-confidence in his field. Santos Zingale felt the FAP provided him with time to explore political philosophies and artistic techniques. His attitudes have greatly mellowed and he looks back on this period as "a time of experimentation." He also concluded that the FAP "gave him an opportunity to paint" at a time when he would have been otherwise forced to take up another occupation to earn money. Clarice George's feeling
of obligation to her friend and teacher, Elsa Ulbricht, resulted in her working on the Handicraft Project when she would have preferred to continue her easel painting. Her assessment is that she wasted much of her time on problems that did not further her artistic interests.

Lester Schwartz, a Chicago FAP artist, now working in Wisconsin, thought the FAP was "fantastic, we were very free to do what we wanted." Basic requirements were minimal and they left plenty of time to non-FAP work and experimentation. 81

Fred Logan, who served on the advisory committee, saw the possibility that the FAP might have historical significance in the years to come and encouraged the FAP staff to organize allocation listings for the finished pieces of art work. He feels the FAP was a positive idea that gave jobs to young artists whose art work at that time was often not of high quality.

The artists interviewed were not proud of the art work that they produced while working for the program. In retrospect, they are amused at the earnest attempts they made but are extremely critical of themselves as young and upcoming artists.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the WPA participation of these artists is not the art work they produced while working on the project but the work they went
on to do after the project's termination. None of these artists came from wealthy family backgrounds and needed the financial benefits the WPA offered. A large majority were young, many just out of school, their careers just beginning. All of them needed the opportunity to continue to develop the art skills they had been learning as art students. A temporary construction job would have delayed or cancelled the development of their art careers. The FAP provided the opportunity for artists to be paid for their art work and allowed these people to get off the dole while doing what they liked most.

The Wisconsin FAP is remembered differently by the three women who had major administrative roles: Charlotte Partridge, Elsa Ulbricht, and Miriam Prink. They were more interested in and recall the whole project which they oversaw, in contrast to the remembrances of the artists, whose appraisals are made in terms of their individual roles.

All three of these women were older than the majority of the people they directed. Frink was 41, and Partridge and Ulbricht were in their early fifties. They were unmarried, strong, independent and professionally accomplished. They approached their WPA responsibilities seriously and became involved to the point of making both personal and professional commitments to the people they directed. For each of them the WPA was an important episode in their
long and prolific careers.

Very early in the project's existence, Charlotte Partridge took on more than just administrative responsibilities. She became closely involved with the personalities of the artists and their needs. Frink, Zingale, and Meredith all remember Partridge's personal battles with Washington to keep the numbers of people on the payroll high enough to meet the needs of Wisconsin artists. James Luedtke recalls that Partridge was not a universally admired person. She was assertive and successful, which in 1935 made her an unusual Milwaukee woman. She withstood the criticism and threats that came with being a controversial public figure. Frink mentioned that Partridge had a deeply felt sympathy for the financial situation of the artists, especially during the depression, and relished the idea of being able to "lead the cause" and enter a dimension of public and personal involvement that took her one step beyond her role of art teacher and school director. Partridge's boundless energy soon made her an essential part of the Wisconsin Federal Arts Project.

Elsa Ulbricht recalls the directorship of the Handicraft Project as an equally important step of her life and a very pleasant one as well. She was the classical example of the benevolent social worker, for her seven years of work were all on a volunteer basis. The people to whom she
offered assistance were not skilled; she took workers who were rejected from other WPA programs and taught them a skill, organized them into production lines and then found a market for the objects they produced. Her organizational genius and her openness to ideas, coupled with her willingness to take a risk, gained her and the Handicraft Project a national reputation as well as the personal satisfaction of having helped so many people.

Frink tends to portray herself as an unimportant part of the FAP. It is the opinion of Fred Logan, as well as myself, that she was an essential stabilizing force behind a sometimes erratic Miss Partridge. She also was a first class organizer of papers and would advise on as well as support local FAP policy.

It is impossible to assess how much influence these women wielded over the people they directed. More interesting, perhaps, would be to know how much influence they wielded over the people who directed them. Why did people rally round and trust these three personalities at a time of crisis? Would these three women have been remembered if there had been no "moment in history" that was in need of a "man" or woman to meet it? Though they may be remembered in a positive or negative light, Partridge, Frink, and Ulbricht are remembered clearly. They were three unique and important Wisconsin women who were essential in making
the WPA art project a workable organization that helped many Wisconsin artists and handicraft laborers through the depression.
CHAPTER X

THE TERMINATION OF THE FAP IN WISCONSIN

In August 1939, the federal sponsorship of the WPA Federal Arts Project in Wisconsin was turned over to the state legislature. The state sponsored FAP continued in Wisconsin under the directorship of Margaret Clark. Charlotte Partridge continued to direct the Layton Art School and maintained a low profile as a member of the FAP advisory committee.

On the national level, the Federal Art Project, like all the other programs under the Federal Project Number One, was put under close congressional examination from 1938 until the termination of the art project in 1943. The House Committee on Un-American Activities questioned the radicalism in the theater and writers' projects. This scrutiny seriously threatened the morale and stability of Cahill's leadership of the entire art project as well as public support of congressional appropriations. With the beginning of World War II, almost all Americans gave preference to American participation in the War and public support of the fine arts suffered a humiliating fall from popularity. This mood was felt in the House Committee on Appropriations, which was responsible for steadily cutting
financial support to the arts until Wisconsin's FAP, like all WPA programs, were completely terminated in 1943.
CHAPTER XI

1976

In 1976, forty years after the program's termination, many of the FAP people continue to produce art work, teach art, and make influential contributions to local Wisconsin art organizations.

Watrous, Sessler, Zingale, and Logan all became University faculty in Madison, and Zingale continues to teach there. Lewandowski, who taught and eventually directed the Layton Art School, now paints in his Milwaukee studio. Dorothy Meredith taught in the Milwaukee Public Schools and at the University of Wisconsin in Milwaukee. She has traveled extensively in the Orient giving art lectures. All of these teachers continue their own art, but the pressure is off. They are now the "old guard" and all seem confident about their accomplishments as teachers and artists.

Not all of the artists went on to teach; however, Lichtner and his wife, Ruth Grotenrath, both former FAP painters, have successfully freelanced in Milwaukee for many years. Richard Jansen went into commercial art and worked in Milwaukee. Forrest Flower, the man who showed incredible potential as a young artist on the FAP, died as a very young man in the early forties.
Charles Thwaites and Paul Clemens both left Wisconsin. Thwaites paints in his studio in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and Paul Clemens is a fashionable and successful Hollywood portrait painter.

Other FAP artists taught and continue to teach in Wisconsin colleges and universities. Thomas Dietrich was for many years the artist in residence at Lawrence University in Appleton. Aaron Bohrod succeeded John Stuart Curry as artist-in-residence in Madison at the University of Wisconsin. Lester Schwartz continues to head the art department at Ripon College in Ripon; both he and Bohrod were former FAP artists in Chicago.

Charlotte Partridge died in 1975, leaving to Miriam Frink the house they had built and lived in for so many years. Frink is busy organizing papers for the archives in Milwaukee and allocating the art collection that hangs in the house to private and public recipients. She is planning to serve as the major source for a book that recounts the story of the Layton Art School.

Like Frink, Elsa Ulbricht is also organizing papers for the archive collection at the Historical Society. She looks forward to writing a personal profile of her lifelong experiences in the arts. Both Miss Frink and Miss Ulbricht are active and respected personalities among artists and art lovers in the Milwaukee area.
FOOTNOTES


3 Burns and Williams, p. 22.


5 Ibid., p. 270.

6 Ibid., p. 271.

7 Ibid., p. 344.


11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

15 Ibid., pp. 20-20.

16 Interview with Frederick Logan, artist-teacher, July 13, 1976.

17 Interview with Santos Zingale, artist-teacher, July 13, 1976.

18 Interview with Miriam Frink, former FAP administrator, July 14, 1976.

19 Frink interview, July 14, 1976.

20 Frink interview, July 25, 1976.

21 Interview with Dorothy Meredith, artist-teacher, July 14, 1976.

22 Frink interview, July 14, 1976.

23 Frink interview, August 3, 1976.


26 Meredith interview.

28 Letter from Jacob Baker, assistant administrator, to E. Immel, State administrator, January 6, 1936, Partridge Papers, Box 1.

29 Telegraph from Holger Cahill, national FAP director to Charlotte Partridge, January 18, 1936, Partridge Papers, Box 1.

30 Frink interview, August 3, 1976.

31 Letter from Charlotte Partridge to Holger Cahill, Partridge Papers, May 30, 1936, Box 1.

32 Letter from Holger Cahill to Charlotte Partridge, May 2, 1936, Partridge Papers, Box 1.

33 Letter from Charlotte Partridge to Holger Cahill, May 25, 1936, Box 1.

34 Zingale interview.

35 O'Connor, Art for the Millions . . ., p. 18.

36 Newsweek, August 25, 1934.

37 McKinsie, p. 167.

38 Milwaukee Journal, October 10, 1937.

39 Milwaukee Journal, April 25, 1937.

40 Milwaukee News, July 9, 1939.


42 McKinsie, p. 154.
Milwaukee Journal, September 6, 1936.

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Interview with Elsa Ulbricht, director of the Milwaukee Handicraft Project, July 7, 1976.

62 Interview with Clarice George Logan, artist, July 13, 1976.

63 Clarice George Logan interview.

64 Rice, p. 11.

65 Ulbricht interview.

66 Jensen, p. 17.

67 Ulbricht interview.

68 Jensen, p. 17.

69 Production Report for the Art Programs, State of Wisconsin, Partridge Papers, Box 2.

70 Zingale interview.

71 Interview with James Watrous, artist-teacher, June 14, 1976.

72 Zingale questionnaire, Partridge Papers, Box 5.

73 Ibid.

74 Interview with John Luedtke, Milwaukee Public Museum Historian, August 3, 1976.

75 Alfred Sessler questionnaire, Partridge Papers, Box 5.


77 Walter Adams questionnaire, Partridge Papers, Box 3.
78 Burton Beebe questionnaire, Partridge Papers, Box 3.

79 Luedtke interview.

80 Meredith interview.

81 Interview with Lester Schwartz, artist-teacher, August 8, 1976.
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