

Charlotte L. Evarts Memorial Archives, Inc.
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Number 14

Post Office Mural



The mural is located high up on the wall to the left as you enter the Post Office

Next time you are standing in line at the Post Office chatting with your friends and neighbors look up and enjoy the mural on the west wall of the lobby. The mural depicts colonial farmers harvesting seaweed during a storm.

The artist, William Abbot Cheever, was chosen to submit a design for a mural to be included in the new Madison Post Office to be built in 1939. He was selected because of an anonymous submission for a competition sponsored by the Section of Fine Arts unit of the Federal Works Agency. The design was to be based on a subject he thought suitable for the Madison.

Cheever chose the activity of farmers gathering seaweed tossed on the beach by a storm. The design was based on sketches made in England where seaweed gathering was still an active occupation. The artist commented on his design saying: "The work must be done after a storm. It is hard, wet work and I saw only younger men toiling at it."

A news article written at the time of the completion of the mural in 1940 described it in these words: " The aftermath of the storm evident in the sky and waters, the youthful vigor of the farmers as they load their two-wheel carts with

the dark glistening weed, and the stark, windblown trees in the background all contribute to the excitement and drama of this picture of Colonial life. Though representing only one phase of their lives, it seems to typify the hardships which these early settlers were willing to endure to establish their homes in a free land."

The artist, born in Andover, Massachusetts in 1907, attended the Boston Museum School of Fine Arts where his work earned him numerous prizes and scholarships and helped him to obtain commissions for magazine illustrations and portraits. In 1936, he was awarded the Paige Traveling Scholarship that allowed him to spend a year and a half in England. Mr. Cheever was well known for portraits of New England personalities.

Mr. Cheever's mural has survived its sixty years rather well although there are signs of deterioration evident in the lower right corner. Several years ago when the future of the post office building was in doubt, inquiries were made to determine the cost of restoring and preserving the mural. A specialist in the restoration of depression era murals suggested that the process would be expensive. No further steps were taken at the time.

Pause next time you stop to pick up the mail or send a package and enjoy Mr. Cheever's gift to Madison. Take a moment to reflect on our town and its special qualities.

Directions The Post Office stands on the corner of Wall Street and the Boston Post Road next to the Madison Cinema and across Wall Street from the Scranton Library.