

Practical In Her Art: Kansas Women Artists of the 1930s

**Birger Sandzén
Memorial Gallery
Lindsborg, Kansas**

**August 3 through
October 19, 2025**

Despite the challenges of the Great Depression, the decade of the 1930s was a dynamic time for art making in Kansas. Right along with the men, women artists worked tirelessly to keep the visual arts alive during those challenging times—teaching, traveling for professional development, and blazing trails for new endeavors including art therapy programs and artists' unions. The long-running Prairie Print Makers exhibition society was launched in Lindsborg in December of 1930. The Kansas State Federation of Art was established in 1932 to share packaged art exhibitions—including the Prairie Print Makers—for underserved



Self Portrait by Mary Huntoon, ca. 1935, oil on canvas, 20" x 16", ed. 20, Courtesy of the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library: Gift of Willis MacEntarfer

communities and kept its annual academic year schedules going until the early 1980s. The Topeka Print Makers association was organized by six women in 1934. American artists spent time in Mexico City during the 1930s observing muralists such as Diego Rivera (1886–1957) paint government-sponsored masterpieces on public walls, which inspired the US to follow suit with federal art programs. "New Deal" policies were initiated in 1934



Girl with Sand Painting by Mary Huntoon, 1937, KS FAP/WPA, aquatint & etching, 6¾" x 7⅞", ed.100, private collection

with the Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) to provide equal opportunities for artists across the country to create lasting contributions to national collections. In the decades following the 1930s and WWII, women became organizers and activists in art education professional associations and unions such as the national Artists Equity Association.

Curators around the state have been collaborating on this exhibition for several years, determined to highlight the careers of key Kansas women artists and the progress they made enlarging the field. Before the 1930s American art schools' instructors were, by a large majority, men, including faculty at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago; the Art Students League; Bethany College and the Broadmoor Art Academy; and the Royal College of Art, Central School of Arts and Crafts, and Cockerell Bindery where Kansas women went to study. All the artists featured in this exhibition became art teachers during their careers. Bassett Hall and her spouse founded a summer art school in their Alcalde, New Mexico, home.

During a 1938 radio show "Meet the Artists," Kansas City art gallery director Chester J. Staton (1903–1950) brought up an argument about women artists and whether it was possible for them to produce high quality paintings, fine enough to be competitive with male art done for its own sake. Bringing up quilts and basketry as examples, the host offered the provoking statement: "The women have been practical

in their art whereas the art of the men has been purely decorative and ornamental."¹ Staton shared a transcript of the heated argument that ensued in a letter to Mary Huntoon in which he confessed he had been inspired by her classic defense of women painters only to spark debate and draw more traffic into his gallery. The broadcast served to highlight the fact that by the latter 1930s, more American women were in the art world and leveling the opportunities to exhibit their art, earn commissions, and teach the next generations.

Mary Huntoon (1896–1970)

by Kara Heitz, Kansas City Art Institute

Mary Huntoon was a Kansas-born artist, arts administrator, and pioneering art therapist whose work left a lasting mark on the cultural landscape of the state. Best known for her contributions to printmaking and her leadership of the Kansas Federal Art Project during the

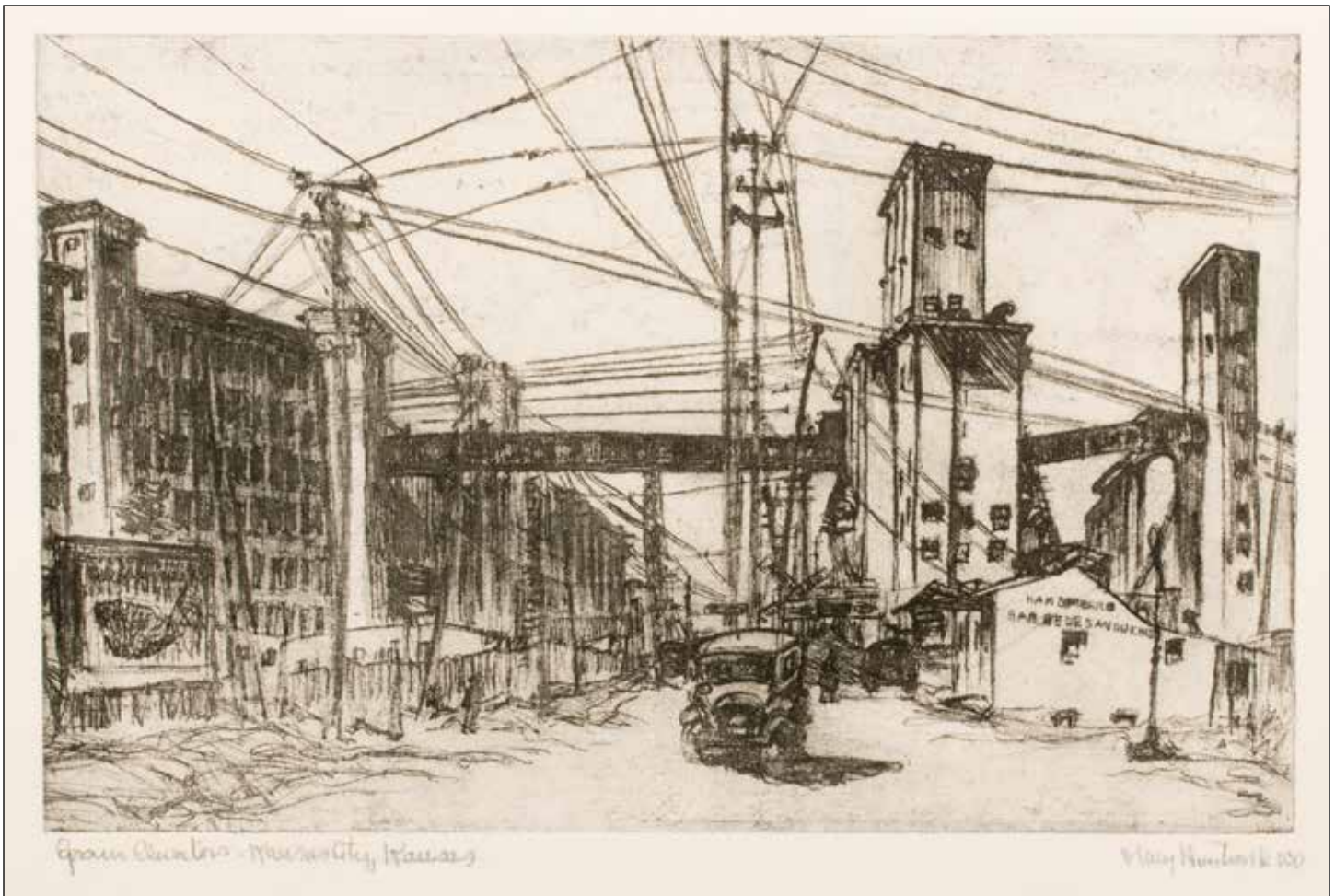
1930s, Huntoon helped shape the arts and arts education in Kansas through teaching, artistic practice, and therapeutic service. Though she studied and exhibited in major cultural centers like New York and Paris, it was in Kansas that her work had the deepest and most enduring impact.²

Born on November 29, 1896, in Topeka, Huntoon graduated from Topeka High School in 1915, where she was active as a writer and illustrator. She furthered her arts education at Washburn College in Topeka while also studying independently with George Stone (1858–1931). After graduating in 1920, Huntoon moved to New York to study at the Art Students League, where she trained under Joseph Pennell (1857–1926), Robert Henri (1865–1929), and George Bridgman (1864–1943). These years in New York marked her first serious engagement with printmaking, and under Pennell's guidance, she began developing her own approach to etching, drypoint, and aquatint.

With Pennell's support, Huntoon traveled to France in 1926 to complete a commission for a newspaper syndicate, tasked with creating a series of etchings capturing scenes of Parisian street life. What was meant to be a brief trip turned into



Mary Huntoon, circa 1930



Grain Elevators, Kansas City, Kansas by Mary Huntoon 1936, KS FAP/WPA, soft ground etching, 7" x 10 $\frac{7}{8}$ ", ed. 100, Courtesy of the Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library

a five-year period of work and study in Paris, as well as traveling elsewhere in Europe. She took classes at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière and maintained a studio apartment in the Latin Quarter. Her first solo exhibition, held at Le Sacre du Printemps gallery in 1928, received strong reviews from the French press, which praised the clarity and structure of her work. An overly sexist review of the exhibition—possibly authored by her husband as a publicity stunt—sparked controversy, but the critical response overall was overwhelmingly positive. The exhibit was also well-covered in the Midwest regional press, noting favorably the success of a female artist from Kansas in an art center like Paris.

During her time in Paris, Huntoon studied with Joseph Hecht (1891–1951), a key figure in 20th-century printmaking. Hecht was also a mentor to Stanley William Hayter (1901–1998), who would later found the influential printmaking studio Atelier 17. Hayter credited Huntoon with introducing him to aquatint methods that became important to his own artistic technique. While her contributions are often overlooked in broader histories of twentieth-century printmaking, her technical knowledge

placed her at the center of key developments in printmaking.

Huntoon returned to Topeka in 1930 and quickly became a central figure in the local and regional art community. She taught printmaking and watercolor at Washburn College and maintained an active studio practice. In the early 1930s, she helped establish the Topeka Print Makers, a group that included many of her female students and colleagues: Avis Chitwood (1893–1994), Fern Cooper (1912–1975), Fredda Wright (1904–1972), Marguerite Nellis (1906–1969), and Margaret Whittemore (1897–1983). Many of them worked for New Deal arts programs under Huntoon in the 1930s, as both creators and teachers of art. Though smaller in population, Kansas had one of the more active and sustained New Deal arts programs in the Midwest. The Museum Extension Project (MEP), a lesser-known New Deal program, also had a strong presence in Kansas. The MEP produced print series, dioramas, historical costume plates, architectural models, and other educational materials intended to support classroom instruction.

Huntoon began working as an artist for the

New Deal in Kansas in 1934, as an administrator in 1936, and was appointed state director of the Kansas Federal Art Project (FAP) in 1937. Succeeding John Helm (1900–1972) on the faculty of Kansas State University, she oversaw a growing portfolio of projects across the state, from public exhibitions to school art programs. Huntoon helped organize art shows in conjunction with women's clubs and educational organizations, and also worked to place art in public schools, libraries, and government buildings. Under Huntoon's leadership, the Kansas FAP produced over 1,500 works of art, including paintings, watercolors, and prints.

As a working artist under the FAP herself, Huntoon created at least eleven prints depicting Kansas architecture and landscapes. She prioritized printmaking as a democratic art form—affordable, reproducible, and easily distributed. Many of her prints and those by colleagues like William Dickerson (1904–1972) of Wichita were created in editions of 100, with at least half earmarked for placement in schools.

Huntoon's mentoring of female artists was a crucial—if often unrecognized—part of her legacy. Huntoon provided technical instruction and administrative support for all Kansas FAP artists, but especially helped female artists access professional opportunities and gain visibility at a time when women's work was often dismissed. Avis Chitwood, known for her depictions of wildflowers and rustic buildings, taught etching at Washburn, ran adult education classes in Topeka, and produced work for the MEP, often in collaboration with Margaret Whittemore. Fern Cooper and Marguerite Nellis both studied under Huntoon at Washburn, and both continued their education at the Art Institute of Chicago. Cooper and Nellis also worked under Huntoon at the FAP in Kansas—Cooper created oils and watercolors while Nellis followed in Huntoon's footsteps as a printmaker. Wright, a painter and sculptor, was also a student of Huntoon's at Washburn, taught classes at the FAP's art center in Topeka, designed woodblock illustrations for FAP publications, and painted WPA murals at Kansas schools. All of these women actively participated in FAP exhibitions, exposing Kansans in all corners of the state to their artworks. Huntoon helped foster a sense of community among women artists in Topeka, with her studio and the FAP's Topeka Art Center acting as hubs for artistic collaboration and instruction.

Later in life, Huntoon's career underwent a significant shift, becoming a pioneer in the field of art therapy. In 1946, Dr. Karl Menninger

(1893–1990) appointed Huntoon as the inaugural director of the Department of Art, Physical Medicine, and Rehabilitation at Winter Veterans Administration Hospital in Topeka. Drawing on her background as both a teacher and artist, Huntoon developed programs that used creative activity as a therapeutic tool for veterans recovering from physical and psychological trauma. She collaborated with the Menninger Clinic and published several articles that helped establish art therapy as a formal discipline. Huntoon was among the first in the country to advocate for art's role in clinical settings, and her work had a lasting influence on both veterans' care and the growing field of expressive therapies.

Although her administrative and therapeutic work increasingly took precedence, Huntoon continued to make and exhibit art throughout the 1940s and 1950s. She often reworked earlier plates, adding aquatint and reinterpreting old compositions with new meaning. Her work from this period is more introspective, drawing on symbolic forms and darker emotional registers. She remained active in Topeka's art community well into the 1960s, briefly serving as director of Studio Gallery, Inc., and continuing to mentor younger artists. Huntoon passed away in 1970, but her impact can be seen not only in her own prints and paintings but in the legacy of her students and in the cultural infrastructure she helped build in Kansas. Her work as an educator, printmaker, Kansas FAP director, and art therapist exemplifies a lifelong belief in the power of the arts to educate, heal, and serve the public good.

Margaret Whittemore (1897–1983)

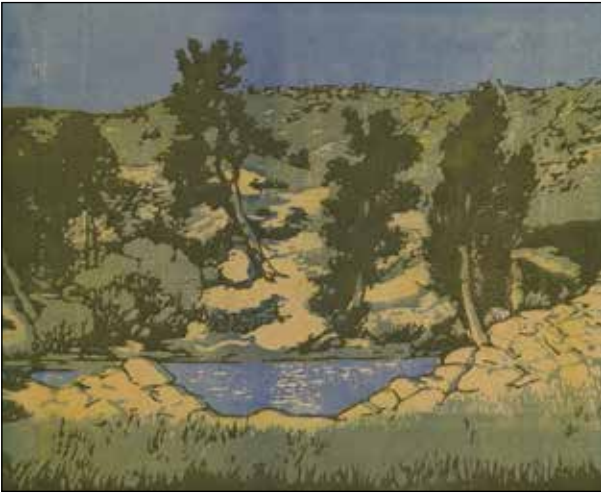
by Mike Brotherton, Labette Community College

Margaret Whittemore is best known for the color block prints she produced in the 1930s. During her 86 years, Whittemore evolved into an accomplished historian, illustrator, and author. But, first and foremost, Margaret Whittemore was an artist, and art was at the epicenter of all her endeavors. Whittemore used her art to document historic sites throughout the state.

Whittemore was born in Topeka's College Hill district, to two Washburn University educators who were instrumental in establishing the Mulvane Art



Margaret Whittemore, 1960



Jacob's Well by Margaret Whittemore, ca.1937-43, Kansas Landmarks Series, MEP/WPA, color linocut, 8 x 10", Gift of Randal Lundberg: Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery



On the Lake (aka WPA Lake Atchison) by Margaret Whittemore, ca.1940, color linocut, 7¾ x 9", Gift of Maybelle M. Scheetz: Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery



Twin Buttes-Barber County, Kansas by Margaret Whittemore, ca.1940s, color screenprint, 8" x 10", Gift of James & Virginia Moffett: Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

Museum at the school. By the time Margaret graduated from Topeka High School in June 1915, even her fellow classmates recognized her talent: "It's lucky for our class we have so artistic a one."³

Whittemore continued her education at Washburn University and then spent three years in Chicago studying at the Art Institute. During her time there, she was one of three students—the only woman—recommended to spend summer of 1922 at the artists' colony in Taos, New Mexico. Whittemore was able to stay with the family of etcher Ralph Pearson (1883–1958) while she learned further printmaking techniques. She returned to Topeka and her parent's home to begin the task of establishing herself as a working woman artist in Kansas. The three-story house provided ample space for both her printmaking studio and for the art lessons that she taught privately and continued throughout her life. However, as was the case of many women artists in the 1930s, it was difficult—if not impossible—to earn a living by art alone. For a time, Whittemore found employment as a draftsman for the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad, and in 1927, she taught art classes in the Topeka public school system and at Bethany College under Birger Sandzén in Lindsborg, with whom she had studied with over summers in Colorado Springs at the Broadmoor Art Academy.⁴

Like many artists during the Great Depression, Whittemore became one of numerous Kansas artists partially supported by New Deal government programs. Her involvement in the Kansas Museum Extension Project (MEP) under the Professional and Service Division of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), resulted in her most memorable art—the *Kansas Landmarks Series* (1937–1941). In addition to her association with the WPA, Whittemore actively exhibited her work. In 1936, her print, *Old Oak Tree*, was awarded "Best Print by a Kansas Artist" by the Kansas State Federation of Art at the 9th *American Block Prints Annual* in Wichita. A little more than a decade later, three of her block prints were included in the prestigious *Arts and Crafts of Kansas* exhibit in Lawrence.⁵

On several print editions, Whittemore worked closely with fellow Topeka artist Avis Chitwood. Some of these collaborative efforts are signed by Whittemore alone; others bear both artists' signatures. The two were traveling companions as well. In fact, Whittemore noted that Chitwood along with various other artist friends, "added zest to the search for landmarks."⁶

Whether by necessity or preference, Whittemore seemed to enjoy working with other authors and artists. *Trees* (1935, with Edna Becker) and *Bird Notes* (1948, with Harry L. Rhodes) represent two very successful collaborations. Her two best known volumes were solo efforts: *Sketchbook of Kansas Landmarks* (1936) and *Historic Kansas: A Centenary Sketchbook* (1954). She also supplied the artwork (and cover designs) for both the 1948 and 1952 editions of a Kansas geography textbook.

Whittemore's career as a writer and illustrator was as ambitious as her art career. As early as 1928, she was published in *The Kansas Teacher* and in *Western School Journal*. That same year, the *Trees in Kansas* publication featured her essay, "Kansas and Her Historic Trees." Whittemore also contributed to dozens of magazines, and from 1928 until 1935, she edited *The Palette*, the national publication for the honorary art fraternity Delta Phi Delta, of which Kansans Anna Keener and Clara Hatton also were members. Today, Whittemore would be described as a freelance artist and author. She was also a historian, although it is doubtful she would have recognized herself as such. Much of her work—as artist, author, and illustrator—was designed to capture the feel of early Kansas and to chronicle the long and colorful history of the state she loved. *Sketchbook of Kansas Landmarks* is essential reading for anyone who wants to know Kansas and the people who helped shape its future. *Historic Kansas* (1954) was published during the state's Territorial Centennial Celebration. As the entire state focused on its past, Whittemore must have felt some pride, knowing that she had captured much of the state's history in a unique way.

Avis Chitwood (1893–1994)

by Kara Heitz, Kansas City Art Institute

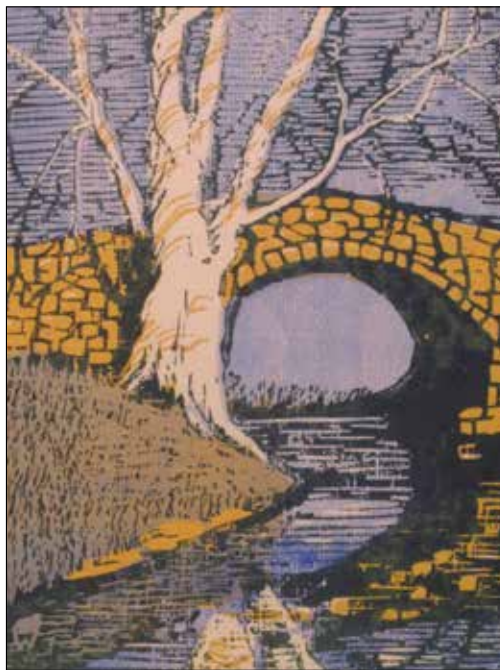
Avis Chitwood was a Kansas-born printmaker, illustrator, and educator whose long career reflected a deep commitment to regional craft and publicly accessible art. Born in Mound City and based in Topeka for most of her life, Chitwood was known for her depictions of wildflowers, birds, and historic structures—themes that reflect her Kansas roots and sense of place.

Chitwood studied watercolor and etching with Mary Huntoon at Washburn University and design with Clara Hatton at the University of Kansas. Her versatility as an



Avis Chitwood, circa 1980

artist extended to ceramics, metal engraving, and multiple printing techniques, including color silkscreen. In the early 1920s, she managed a crafts shop and created displays for the Kansas Free



Stone Bridge-Shawnee County, Kansas by Margaret Whittemore, ca 1937-43, *Kansas Landmarks Series*, MEP/WPA, color linocut, 8 $\frac{7}{8}$ " x 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ ", Gift of James & Virginia Moffett: Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery



Young Robins by Margaret Whittemore, ca 1937-43, *Portfolio of Kansas Birds*, MEP/WPA, color linocut, 7 $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 5", Gift of Maybelle M. Scheetz: Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

the retirement community where she resided. She died in Topeka at the age of 100, leaving a quietly influential legacy in Kansas art and education.

Sue Jean Covacevich (1905–1998)

Elizabeth Seaton, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art

Sue Jean Covacevich established herself as

Fair. In the 1930s, Chitwood became active in the Topeka Art Guild and was a founding member of the Topeka Print Makers.

Teaching was central to Chitwood's career in the arts. She taught etching at Washburn from 1931 to 1936 and led night classes in arts and crafts at Topeka High School, helping to foster talent and creativity among adults and young people alike. In the 1930s, Chitwood also worked for the Kansas WPA's Museum Extension project, creating vibrant prints of Kansas wildflowers and birds

to be used as educational aids in schools. She often worked with and exhibited alongside her close friend and collaborator Margaret Whittemore, with whom she shared a deep interest in printmaking and Kansas subject matter. Their artistic partnership contributed to an active printmaking scene in the region.

Her artistic talents extended into more "practical" work as well. In the 1940s, she began a position as a draftsman for the Kansas State Highway Commission, work she continued until her retirement in 1974. Still creating into her 90s, Chitwood designed notecards for

a dynamic artist and influential educator in south-central Kansas during the twentieth century. Born in Wellington, Kansas, she explored cultures far beyond her hometown—from Lindsborg to Leningrad—seeking inspiration and broadening her artistic horizons. Travel, she often said, deepened her appreciation for beauty in all forms, especially in her native Kansas.⁷

Covacevich began her formal art training at Bethany College in Lindsborg (1925–1927), studying under Swedish-born artist Birger Sandzén. His mentorship left a lasting impact. He introduced students to global art and artifacts at his home and studio, which inspired Covacevich to create a similarly welcoming, art-filled space for her own students. Like Sandzén, she supported young artists both personally and professionally.

While at Bethany, she also earned a teaching certificate. After teaching elementary art in Marion and Wellington, she took a position in Winfield in 1929, where she taught art and penmanship at both elementary and high school levels. She developed exhibitions that included Sandzén's and other regional artists' work, and helped establish an art collection for the Winfield schools.

In 1931, Covacevich surprised her family and colleagues by announcing she would travel to Mexico. Inspired by Sandzén and her own curiosity, she wanted to experience firsthand the artistic and cultural transformations occurring there. Her daughter, Teresa Covacevich Grana, noted her mother's fascination with Mexico stemmed from childhood library visits and her desire "to grow as an artist and see more of the world."⁸ That summer, Covacevich explored Mexico City, rural communities, archaeological sites, and natural landmarks, translating these experiences into a print portfolio titled *Impressions of Mexico*.

While in Mexico, she met and married businessman Nicolas Salazar Covacevich. They lived in Mexico



Humming Bird, by Avis Chitwood & Margaret Whittemore, ca. 1937-1943, *Portfolio of Kansas Birds*, MEP/WPA, color screenprint, 7 $\frac{5}{8}$ " x 4", Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art:
Gift of Jim and Virginia Moffett

City for ten years and had two daughters. Covacevich taught at the American School from 1935 to 1939 and co-founded a charitable organization providing food and clean water in the nearby village of Axotla. She saw herself as a cultural ambassador, inviting Kansas friends (including Sandzén) to visit, and later lectured throughout Kansas about Mexican culture and art.

Following the dissolution of her marriage in the early 1940s, Covacevich returned to Winfield and immersed herself in teaching. She founded the art department at Southwestern College, started an art therapy program at the Winfield State Hospital and Training Center, and in 1962 established the Winfield Art Center. As a single mother, she found encouragement and camaraderie through the Winfield Soroptimist Club, which she helped found.

Despite balancing teaching, motherhood, and continued education, Covacevich remained devoted to her art. Her daughter recalled waking up to find her mother already painting in her smock. In a 1945

journal entry, Covacevich wrote, "I need time—when I divide my days with housekeeping, teaching, training the children, all that—and then painting and reading, which is so important. I need three lives."⁹

By 1949, she held her first major solo exhibition at Southwestern College, followed by many others throughout Kansas and abroad.

To reinvigorate her teaching and artwork, Covacevich traveled widely—visiting Egypt, Syria, and Israel, among other countries. Her travels left a visible mark on her work. A 1974 *Wichita Eagle and Beacon* headline fittingly described her as "Woman of Winfield and the World."¹⁰

Her exposure to Mexican murals also shaped her interest in public art. In Mexico, she had observed Diego Rivera painting at the National Palace and even invited him to critique fresco murals she initiated with her students at the American School. Back



Sue Jean Covacevich, at right, with Diego Rivera, circa 1935



Chalchiuhtlicue, Goddess of Water by Sue Jean Covacevich, ca.1931, *Impressions of Mexico* portfolio, linocut, 6" x 5½", Collection of Winfield Public Schools, USD 465 Foundation

in Kansas, she created a large mural for a Winfield bank in 1952–53 and introduced mural-making with mosaic tile while chairing the Derby High School art department in the 1960s. In the 1970s, she received several public commissions, including stained-glass installations for four churches and a monumental sculpture for Winfield's Island Park.

Covacevich's vibrant spirit and distinctive vision often set her apart in conservative Kansas. Writer Jani Sherrard once asked her, "Did you ever feel lonely knowing that people didn't understand what you were singing about?" Covacevich answered: "Oh, yes, of course, I've felt lonely, but that's part of the struggle. Without that you would never plumb the depths of life and find out what it's all about."¹¹

Clara Hatton (1901–1991)

by Bill North, Clara Hatton Center

Clara Anna Hatton's story begins and ends in Kansas. The oldest of six children, Hatton was born in a modest wood-frame house and raised on a farmstead in Russell County, Kansas, near Bunker Hill. She died in Salina, Kansas, where she spent the last



Clara Hatton, 1934

two decades of her life after retiring from Colorado State University in Fort Collins. In between, Hatton taught in a Kansan one-room school for three years (1920–22); studied (1922–33) and taught (1925–36) at the University of Kansas for fourteen years; spent a year in Europe (1935–36), worked with direct descendants of some of the most consequential figures associated with the British Arts and Crafts movement; earned an MFA in design and the graphic arts from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan (1944–45); and created and built what is now the Department of Art and Art History at Colorado State University in Fort Collins (1936–66).

Culture and education were high priorities in the Hatton family household. The children were provided tickets to the Lyceum, music lessons, and art supplies and all of the Hatton children graduated from high school. Clara excelled at her studies, graduating as valedictorian of the Bunker Hill High School class of 1919. Following graduation, she attended a teacher certification program at Fort Hays Kansas State Normal School (now Fort Hays State University) during the summers of 1920 and 1921, teaching at the one-room country school in Success, Kansas, and at the elementary school in Bunker Hill.

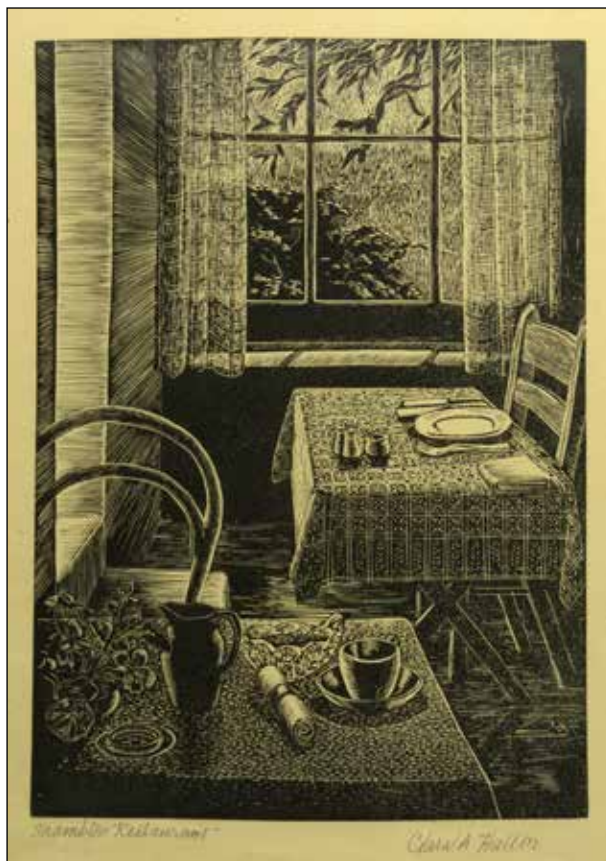
In 1922 she began her studies at the University of Kansas (KU) in Lawrence, enrolling in the art department of the university's School of Fine Arts, where she earned a BA in design (1926), then a BFA in painting (1933), and was an instructor in the art department from 1925 to 1936. Hatton's mentor at KU was Rosemary Ketcham (1882–1940), an Ohio-born artist hired in 1920 to teach design. Ketcham was an early adherent of Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922), the enormously influential American painter, printmaker, and art educator.

During the 1935–36 academic year, Hatton took a leave of absence without pay from her teaching job at KU to travel abroad to the United Kingdom and throughout Europe. While in London she studied book binding, calligraphy, copper plate engraving, and wood engraving at the Central School of Arts and Crafts and at the Royal College of Art. On her return to Kansas in 1936, the Division of Home Economics at Colorado State College of Agriculture & Mechanic Arts (now Colorado State University, CSU) in Fort Collins hired Hatton to teach art. A gifted professor and administrator at the school for three decades, Hatton built and transformed the art offerings of the Division of Home Economics into an independent, degree-granting art department within the university's College of Science & Arts, which is now CSU's Department of Art and Art History.

A lifelong learner, Hatton used her 1944–45

Colorado State sabbatical to earn an MFA in design and the graphic arts at the storied Cranbrook Academy of Art in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, the fountainhead of mid-century design in America. Her MFA thesis, *Design and the Graphic Arts*, presents a history of printmaking and the graphic arts and features examples of Hatton's printmaking, typography, and design. In retirement, during her final years in Salina (1970–91), Hatton continued to selflessly share her vast store of knowledge and skills by presenting lectures, workshops, and courses at numerous local art, educational, and social organizations. She also remained active as a practicing and exhibiting artist, locally and nationally. Her bookbinding excellence was also recognized. In 1981

Hatton's work was included in the seventy-fifth anniversary exhibition of the Guild of Book Workers. The organization honored Hatton posthumously with the inclusion of her master work, *The Book of Ruth*, in the group's centennial exhibition in 2006. On June 27, 1991, Clara Hatton passed away after suffering a heart attack at home in Salina while tending to her garden.



Shambles Restaurant by Clara Hatton, 1935, wood engraving, 6 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 4 $\frac{7}{8}$ ", Ora Hatton Shay Collection

and Crafts emphasis in the Institute's galleries, along with its rotating exhibitions of Japanese prints. Bassett met fellow student Arthur William Hall (1889–1981) at the school and after Arthur's military service in WWI and Norma's teaching stint in small private schools and public high schools, the two married in 1922. The first printmaking Bassett Hall is known to have done was on the honeymoon trip, when the couple collaborated on a series of block prints of scenes along the Oregon coast.

Bassett Hall's printmaking career began in earnest in 1925 when the couple traveled to Scotland to study Japanese printmaking methods from Mabel Royds (1874–1941) and etching from Ernest Lumsden (1883–1948). The color woodcut

prints Hall produced after Royds' instruction were done using traditional Japanese methods of block cutting and registering the multiple blocks with a simple corner system, and employed water-based pigments mixed with rice flour on handmade paper. The artist used a bamboo pad (*baren*) to press and rub the back of the paper onto each of five

Norma Bassett Hall (1889–1957)

Cori Sherman North, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

Norma Bassett was born and raised in Halsey, Oregon, and from 1909 through 1914 attended the newly opened School of the Portland Art Association (now the Pacific Northwest College of Art), studying with Harry F. Wentz (1875–1965) and Kate Cameron



Norma Bassett Hall, 1943

Simmons (1880–1978), who had herself studied under Arthur Wesley Dow (1857–1922). Bassett then went to study at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago 1915–18, where she enjoyed the Arts



Aspen and Spruce by Norma Bassett Hall, 1949, color screenprint, 11 x 13", Gift of James & Virginia Moffett: Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery



La Gaude – France by Norma Bassett Hall, 1943, Prairie Print Maker gift print #13, color woodcut, 7 x 9½", Gift of James & Virginia Moffett: Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery



Haying in Vermont by Norma Bassett Hall, 1936, color woodcut, 9 x 12", Gift of James & Virginia Moffett: Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

to seven color blocks to produce her harmonious compositions.¹²

At that time, Norma Hall was also absorbing the teachings of American artist and popular interpreter of Asian design, Arthur Wesley Dow, whose principles her first teacher in Portland had promoted.

After their European tour learning printmaking techniques, in 1927 the Halls settled in the Flint Hills of Central Kansas. In the Wichita area they found a dynamic community of artists, and together, eleven of them were charter members of the Prairie Print Makers, formed in December of 1930 at the Lindsborg home studio of Birger Sandzén. The new society's intended mission was to "further the interest of both artists and laymen in printmaking and collecting." Bassett Hall designed the Prairie Print Maker logo, of a sunflower enclosing the

"PPM" monogram. The society continued as a thriving national organization until 1966, and both Halls participated in the group's exhibitions for many years, and contributed several of the annual gift prints. Bassett Hall also was an exhibiting member of the Print Makers Society of California (est. 1914) and the Northwest Printmakers (est. 1928).

Although they kept up their personal and artistic ties to Kansas, the Halls did not remain in the state. They visited family in Vermont the summer of 1935, and the rural East Coast drew the artists back in 1942, when they built a cabin in the woods of the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia on acreage purchased in 1936. However, the couple made the decision to relocate to sunny New Mexico in 1944, buying a home in Santa Fe. Although Hall continued to create prints, by the early '40s quality Japanese paper became impossible to obtain so she explored possibilities in screenprinting, another color-driven method of printmaking based on simple stencil methods of blocking out areas of applied pigment.

In 1950 the Halls bought a studio home near the village of Alcalde, in the Rio Grande Valley of New Mexico. There, the artists founded the Rancho del Rio Summer School of Art, which was successful enough that the artists did not have to worry about employment during the winter months. The lifestyle they created was described by friends as, "... an artist's dream of something any artist would covet."¹³

Anna Keener (1895–1982)

Cori Sherman North, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

Anna Elizabeth Keener left a remarkable legacy, touching the lives of uncountable art students during her decades as a teacher in Kansas, Arizona, Texas, Michigan, Indiana, and New Mexico. Her dedication to art education was profound, and through her zeal she established new curricula and art organizations in every one of the states in which she taught. Keener donated her personal records



Anna Keener, 1957, photo by Laura Gilpin

and memorabilia to the Southwest Collection of the Special Collections Library at Texas Tech University where folders dedicated to the many professional affiliations Keener maintained—and chaired—are astonishing in number and include art fraternities, state art associations and educational boards, and national organizations such as the American Association

of University Women, the American Artists Professional League, and notably, the Artists Equity Association that she worked so hard to initiate and

promote.

Keener gained a strong educational foundation from Bethany College through observing Swedish American Birger Sandzén's (1871–1954) methods of teaching, his practice of constant exhibition planning, and his encouragement for establishing new art collections in the schools and libraries he visited. After finishing her bachelor's degree at Bethany the spring of 1918, Keener joined the US Navy to do her part in winning World War I. In



Barn on the Hill by Anna Keener, 1922, Woodcut (nailcut), 6½ x 8¼", Gift of the Family of Anna E. Keener, Mike & Tsenre Deveraux, Trustees: Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

August the new yeomanette was assigned to cost inspection duties at the Ford Motor Company in Detroit, where she remained working on military accounts until she was discharged the following year. The young artist had spent her off-duty evening and weekend hours honing her craft by attending the Detroit School of Design and studying etching techniques.

Keener's teaching credentials are extensive. She began by choosing the public schools of Globe, Arizona, for her first post-college job in the academic year 1920–21. She explored the desert environment, and began collecting Native arts including basketry and ceramics. When her parents objected to the isolated location, Keener agreed to move back to Kansas, and take over art direction for the Kansas City, Kansas High School. While teaching in the Kansas City school system, she published a 31-page book, *Spontaneity in Design*, which was adopted almost immediately for art education curriculum around the region and used for decades.¹⁴ Her instructional text presented a method of teaching creative drawing exercises using student "scribbles" as the basis of original, non-repeatable designs. During the years 1925–27, Keener accepted an associate professorship in Alpine, Texas, at the Sul Ross State Teachers College. She kept her students busy with organizing exhibitions and lectures of their work, with weekend sketching trips out into the wilderness, as well as solving design problems such as creating batik draperies for the Dean's office.

Keener settled in New Mexico permanently in 1934. She began teaching

elementary grades in rural, underserved schools around the state, beginning with Red River at an annual salary of \$605. She moved to Ojo Caliente for the 1935–36 academic year, to Las Vegas for 1936–37, and then taught in Socorro over 1937–38. Anna legally divorced 1938 in order to take over complete financial support of her twin girls and to work in mainstream Gallup school districts. Until World War II changed the country's workforce demands, in most states women could not teach if they were married.

The artist never remarried, but maintained an active social life through her professional associations.

To further her education, the art teacher went back to school for a master's degree at the University of New Mexico and, working under Kenneth Adams (1897–1966), wrote her thesis, *Zuni Pottery Making*, while at the same time designing a New Deal era mural, *The Zuni Potters*, for the McKinley County Courthouse in Gallup, which she completed in 1942 painting on site during weekends. Keener's next move was to Portales to teach at Eastern New Mexico College (now University) the fall of 1942. She quickly became the head of the



Wyoming Hills by Anna Keener, 1919, oil on canvas, 22 x 24", Gift in memory of Percy & Hattie Shogren by the family in 1995, Bethany College Collection: Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery



Collocation by Anna Keener, 1960s, collagraph, ed.10, 17 x 12³/₄", Gift of the estate of Anna E. Keener, Mike & Tsenre Deveraux: Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery

art department, introducing new programs and inspiring students until 1953, when she retired to Santa Fe and set up a home studio for painting and printmaking.

Keener spent a good deal of her time focused on bettering conditions for working artists. She advocated for a national artists union, the Artists Equity Association, organizing and representing New Mexico's chapter.

She also helped found the teachers' professional organization, the New Mexico Education Association, along with the New Mexico Arts Commission to promote public art programs in the state and further the "art for all" principles Keener had absorbed as a student, herself. To recognize Keener's longtime service in the arts, in 1970 New Mexico's governor purchased Keener's landscape oil *Questa* as the 500th work entered in the "Governor's Committee on Paintings" loan program organized by the Arts Commission.¹⁵ The program aimed to promote artists in the state by loaning artworks for display around New Mexico that were also available for purchase. Keener died on June 22, 1982, and was buried in the Santa Fe National Cemetery, a privilege accorded to all resident military veterans.

Notes:

1. Chester J. Staton, script of radio program shared in letter to Huntoon Aug 1938, Mary Huntoon Papers, Kansas Collection, RH MS 209, Kenneth Spencer Research Library, University of Kansas.
2. Kate Meyer and Sadie Arft, *The Prints of Mary Huntoon*, Spencer Museum of Art, 2021 online: <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/572b8695-50ed-4d08-8a9e-154d290b575b/content>
3. *The Sunflower*. class of 1915, Topeka High School, Topeka, Kansas, np.
4. Henry, David C., "Margaret Whittemore" in *Kansas Printmakers*, 63.
5. *Catalog. Arts and Crafts of Kansas* World Printing Co. Lawrence, 1948, 50.
6. Whittemore, Margaret. *Historic Kansas: A Centenary Sketchbook*, Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Press, Preface.
7. This essay is drawn from Elizabeth G. Seaton, et al., *Following the Sun: The Art of Sue Jean Covacevich, 1905–1998* (Manhattan, Kans.: Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, Kansas State University, 2010.)
8. Teresa Covacevich Grana, "Painting Winfield's Story," *Celebrate Winfield History*, January 31, 2009 (Winfield, Kans.: Cowley County Historical Society, 2009), 2.
9. November 1945 journal entry, "Note book no. 6," 1944–49 small, black binder, Sue Jean Covacevich papers, collection of Theresa Covacevich Grana.
10. Dorothy Wood, "Woman of Winfield and the World, Her Words Paint Artist," *The Wichita Eagle*, May 12, 1974.
11. Jani N. Sherrard, "Conversations/Close Up" in *The Kansas Art Reader*, ed. Jonathan Wesley Bell (Lawrence: The University of Kansas, 1976), 426.
12. Joby Patterson, *Norma Bassett Hall: Catalogue Raisonné of the Block Prints and Serigraphs* (Portland, OR: Pomegranate, 2014), 156.
13. Patterson, 98.
14. Anna E. Keener, *Spontaneity in Design* (Kansas City, MO: Missouri Valley Press, 1923).
15. "Arts Commission Paintings Program," *Santa Fe New Mexican*, 19 July 1970.

The Sandzén Gallery gratefully acknowledges the efforts of the following Curator Researchers: Mike Brotherton, Labette Community College; Kara Heitz, Kansas City Art Institute; Bill North, Clara Hatton Center; Elizabeth Seaton, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art; Cori Sherman North, Birger Sandzén Memorial Gallery; and Katelyn Botz, Kansas Wesleyan University intern for the Sandzén Gallery

Deep appreciation is also extended to Lenders for the Exhibition: the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art, Kansas State University; Alice C. Sabatini Art Gallery, Topeka and Shawnee County Public Library; Clara Hatton Center, Lindsborg; Winfield Public Schools, USD 465 Foundation; Labette Community College, Parsons; and Private Collections



401 N. First Street
Lindsborg, KS 67456
www.sandzen.org



Exhibition sponsored in part by *Radio Kansas*
radiokansas.com
90.1 Wichita - Hutchinson, 89.5 Salina - Manhattan,
& 90.9 Great Bend - Hays

Cover image: *The Three Artists* by Mary Huntoon, 1934, engraving, 6 1/2 x 8 inches, Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art at Kansas State University, G.E. Johnson Art Acquisition Fund