

# History

There are actually two histories of the League—and each has multiple renderings and interpretations. The first is the “corporate” history: its founding, its goals, its growth, its changes, its struggles, its endurance. The papers of the League reflect the evolution and work of the League in great detail. A thorough study of them would produce an in-depth look at an institution that has successfully evolved as it addresses changes in New Hampshire’s economy and population, as well as changes in the craftsman’s world. Without the strong organizational structure and the daily attention to detail by the founders, directors, and its staff, the League would not have survived and continued to flourish in today’s society.

The second history is the story of the craftsmen themselves. Often passionate, the writings and photos reveal the commitment and feelings about the League of craftsmen at all levels, their creativity in the company of each other, and their contribution to the state of crafts in our time.

There are many “stories” of the League of NH Craftsmen. Each member of the League, each craftsman, each supporter, each volunteer and employee has a personal story, a connection, a perspective. The papers remarkably and colorfully reflect them all.

The League of NH Craftsmen, founded in 1932, had its beginnings in the 1920’s in two small towns in Carroll County—Sandwich and Wolfeboro. Mary Coolidge, a summer resident of Sandwich, helped establish the first Sandwich Home Industries shop. The shop sold handcrafts already produced by the women of the town during the winters to sell at summer fairs.

In Wolfeboro, A. Cooper Ballentine, a metal-worker, had started a program of craft classes. The two joined together and formed a committee to provide educational craft programs and to help market the crafts in shops similar to the one in Sandwich.

In a broadcast from Portsmouth, November 13, 1933 which was published in the Carroll County Independent, December 1, 1933, Ballentine stated that Governor John G. Winant “in 1931 appointed a special Commission to study and to develop the educational and economic values of arts and crafts in N.H. This Commission under the wise leadership of Mrs. J. Randolph Coolidge, has evolved into the League of N.H. Arts and Crafts.” Later in his life Ballantine made a point of acknowledging the contributions of all the members of the commissioners and evidence of their work is found in this collection.

The commission recognized the traditional products made by hand in New Hampshire homes as a source of economic advancement for farmers, foresters, and other seasonal workers, and as a means of preservation of craftsmanship that was being replaced by the influx of items manufactured elsewhere. Summer tourists provided a willing market for these unique products. The League of New Hampshire Arts and Crafts was founded in February 1932.

By 1933 there were 1500 contributing members, crafts classes in 15 groups, and 22 shops under the supervision of the League. Standards of workmanship were critical.

The first craftsman's fair, held at Crawford House in Crawford Notch in 1933, was a success netting \$2,698. There were demonstrations and sales as well as entertainment. This annual event has grown to a week-long nationally recognized event featuring over 200 craft booths of state-juried members.

By 1938, master craftsmen, some from outside the state, were recruited by director David Campbell to enhance skills and artistic sensibilities of the craftsmen. Campbell's twenty-plus years at the League led to growth and development. He worked to combine both traditional and contemporary craftsmanship; he established summer craft schools and traveling exhibits, and co-sponsored the founding of the New Hampshire Art Association.

In 1968 the League formally changed its name to the League of New Hampshire Craftsmen, and for the next thirty years, the League continued to grow in membership and scope. The organization expanded its educational programs and scholarships for the training and refinement of craft skills, and instituted a state-juried system that is nationally recognized for its high standards.

In 1985, as a response to changes in tax laws which complicated the League's ability to be both an educational, non-profit organization and a source of sales for its members, the organization split into the non-profit League of NH Craftsmen Foundation and Crafts State Corporation. CSC worked with the local shops and the annual Craftsman's Fair at Sunapee. Initially the two entities functioned with one Director and separate boards, but eventually each entity had its own Director. During this period there were many changes in the way the shops related to the larger organization, their names were changed to Retail Galleries, and some chose to leave the League and go on their own, franchise, or close.

After 16 years, in 2002, the two-tiered system was dissolved, Crafts State Corporation merged with the Foundation, and the entire organization was once again known as The League of NH Craftsmen.

Throughout its history, education, marketing a product of high quality, helping craftsmen and keeping traditional crafts alive have been goals of the League.

At the time of the writing of this finding aid the "official" 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary history is in preparation. As soon as it is available it will be appended to this document.

## **Presidents of the Board of Trustees of the League of NH Craftsmen**

1932 – 1941

Mary Coolidge (Mrs. J. Randolph Coolidge)

1941 – 1946	Robert C. Strong
1946 – 1947	H. Leslie Smith
1947 – 1949	Edward Y. Blewett
1949 – 1957	A. Cooper Ballentine
1957 – 1964	Charles E. Buckley
1964 – 1972	Lawrence W. Rathbun
1972 – 1975	Robert Scarponi
1975	David Brooke (moved up from Vice President July - October)
1975 – 1978	Nancy Lyons
1978 – 1980	Anne Margolis
1980 – 1981	Elizabeth A. Steele
1981 – 1983	Ellwyn Hayslip
1983 – 1985	Edith Grodin
1985 – 1988	Susan Russell
1988 – 1989	John Armstrong
1989 – 1991	Kira Fournier
1991 – 1993	Marjorie Diehls
1993 – 1995	Paul Naktiel
1995 – 1997	Susie Gray
1997 – 1999	Adele Sanborn
1999 – 2001	Edith L. Grodin
2002 – 2004	Lawrence Elbroch
2004 – 2006	Parker Potter

## **Executive Directors of the League of NH Craftsmen**

1931 – 1936	Frank Staples
1936 – 1938	Edgar Keen
1938 – 1942	David Campbell
1942 – 1945	Alon Bement (acting Director while Campbell was in service)
1945 – 1962	David Campbell
1962 – 1969	Joseph Trippetti
1969 – 1971	La/Gardo Tackett
1972 – 1981	Merle Walker
1981 – 1984	Richard Fitzgerald
1985 – 1992	Kathleen Soldati (Foundation & Crafts State Corporation Director)
1992 – 1996	Mary White (Foundation & Crafts State Corporation Director)
1996 – 1999	Carl Richardson (Foundation)
1997 – 2001	Susie Lowe- Stockwell (Crafts State Corporation)
1999 – 2001	Martha Lovejoy (Foundation)
2001 -	Susie Lowe-Stockwell