

## New Hampton Stage Curtain Restoration Project May 2014

*The New Hampton Historical Society and the Town of New Hampton were awarded a grant to restore two painted stage curtains found in the Grange Hall and the Town House.*

A hundred years ago, grand drapes and painted backdrops were the primary artistic feature of the cultural life of almost every village and town in Northern New England and were found in town and grange halls, theaters and opera houses.

When painted curtains went out of use, they were often rolled up and stored in an attic or the space under the stage. These historic and locally significant curtains are dirty, cracked, stained, and torn, but they can be cleaned and repaired. Vermont-based “Curtains Without Borders” and the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance are helping custodians and historical societies, such as New Hampton, restore and preserve these pieces of popular art, once familiar to everyone in town.

In October 2013 the New Hampton Historical Society held a program at the Gordon-Nash Library to kick off their Fall through Spring community project. The Director of Curtains Without Borders, Christine Hadsel, was present to explain the detailed processes involved in the restoration. Restoration was done in May of 2014.



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and the National Endowment for the Arts.*





*Covered Bridge over Pemigewasset River*

Curtain by **Arthur S. Ives (1896-1955)**

Arthur Stratton Ives was born near Scranton, Pennsylvania. He left home at an early age and seems to have lived on the road until he joined the US Marine Corps in 1916. Four years later, he returned to Scranton where he is listed as a salesman in the City Directory from 1929 to 1933. He married a North Woodstock, New Hampshire, native in the early 1930s and they settled there, opening a scenic studio in the basement of a movie theater, where there was plenty of ceiling height.

Ives was very skilled at all the aspects of the production of painted scenery. He was good at lettering, perspective, and the rendering of light and fabric. He enjoyed painting human figures and added cherubs to one curtain and winged nymphs to another. He also produced many advertising curtains featuring buildings made up of blocks of ads.

In the early 1940's, he and his family moved to Trenton, NJ, where he headed the art division of a large department store. After about 10 years of city life, the family returned to North Woodstock. By this time, livelihood as a scenic artist had disappeared.

Ives turned to designing and painting signs for restaurants and roadside resorts. These were true production numbers, beautifully painted and representative of the 1950's, when Americans took to the road for vacations. His daughter remembers, "*Dad set up shop and got work painting signage for the local resorts. He painted fast and accurately and built*

*all the signs himself. He would assemble the large ones in the shop, load them onto his little Chevy pick-up and drive to where they would be displayed. There, he would paint them. I never saw him paint sitting down - he always stood up and guided his painting hand with the other. He painted scenery for local theater productions and I remember seeing the curtain he had done for the Woodstock Grange. It got washed away in a flood in the late 1940's. He did make-up for some of those productions - something he told me he learned while on the straw hat theater circuit."*

*"He was a hard worker all summer in the hot sun beating down on him, and never taking a break. He worked in the mill in the winter when times were tough. One year, he finally built himself his own paint shop, a neat little place where he had all his life's collection of tools, paints, trains--everything. It burned to the ground in October of that year and he lost everything." Ives began to rebuild his shop, but he died in the following January.*





*Town House*

Curtain by **George A. Thompson (1905-1983)**

George Thompson was a self-taught artist and sign painter who lived for many years in Holderness, New Hampshire. He worked as a carpenter during the Depression, often walking long distances for work. He gradually gained a reputation as a sign painter and his carpentry skills were put to good use in constructing signs for stores, cabins, motels and many other businesses in New Hampshire. He is especially remembered for his work for two of the state's best-known tourist attractions: the Mount Washington Cog Railway in the White Mountains and Clark's Trading Post in Lincoln, New Hampshire. He sometimes incorporated gold-leaf in his lettering work and painted small scenes on the sides of the Cog engines, antique organs, trucks and store fronts.

In 1940, Thompson got a commission from the town of New Hampton to paint a curtain for the renovated Town House. It is likely that he was familiar with the curtain at the New Hampton Grange #123 painted by his friend Arthur Ives in 1933. The grand drape scene is an accurate rendition of the building surrounded by sponge painting and simply-painted drapery. It is the only theater curtain he ever painted.