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Plate 1

Marsden Hartley, *Church at Head Tide, Maine*, 1938.

Oil on academy board, 28 x 22 inches. Colby College Museum of Art.

Bequest of Adelaide Moise.

Building Region into Modernism: Marsden Hartley's Church at Head Tide, Maine (1938)

By DONNA M. CASSIDY

IN 1937 THE AMERICAN painter Marsden Hartley returned to Maine, his native state, after a prolonged absence to spend the summer in Georgetown with friends. Reacquainting himself with the region and seeking out locations for a visit the following year were major concerns for him at this time: "I have for long wanted to get back to Maine and decided that this must be the year, but it will take all summer to find out where everything is, and I hope to skoot up the coast a bit, and see what I can see for next year, as I doubt if I would make it to Georgetown twice." This exploration of the state led Hartley to new sites and subjects for his art. One location that he knew from previous trips to Maine and that he rediscovered at this time was a Greek Revival church built in 1838 in the small town of Head Tide. Hartley mentioned the birthplace of the poet Edwin Arlington Robinson, also in this village, as another possible painting topic.¹

While Robinson's birthplace never appeared in Hartley's oeuvre, the Head Tide church did, with one version in the Colby College Museum of Art and another in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (Plates 1–2; left, and next page). Done shortly after Hartley's 1937 return to Maine, each pictures the building in seasons—winter and autumn, respectively—identified with the state and New England more generally. Both display the expressionist style that typified Hartley's art from his late Maine period (1937–43). In the Colby painting, varied textures, from the impasto paint and incised lines on the building's side wall to the long thick strokes around the pediment edges, mark the surface. Dark outlines and the absence of modeling flatten this white-steepled church into a sign of place as the façade, wall, roof, and steeple all hover on a single plane. This spatial awkwardness, especially the blending of the side wall into the snow, results in a picture of a rather shaky, unstable New England Congregational meeting house. Hartley gives a twist to the usual upbeat regional icon in other ways as the darkened windows and lunettes, the tombstone-like stones and benches, and the winter season itself suggest a region in decline—a vision of New England shared by many early twentieth-century artists and writers, in particular Robinson.

I would like to thank Christi Mitchell, Nicole Petit, Les Fossel, and Margory Whitehurst for their help in the research of local Maine history. Patricia Ross King, registrar at the Colby College Museum of Art, has been of great assistance with this project as well.

1. Marsden Hartley, letter to Rebecca Strand, June 18, 1937, Elizabeth McCausland Papers, reel X3, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. (hereafter AAA).

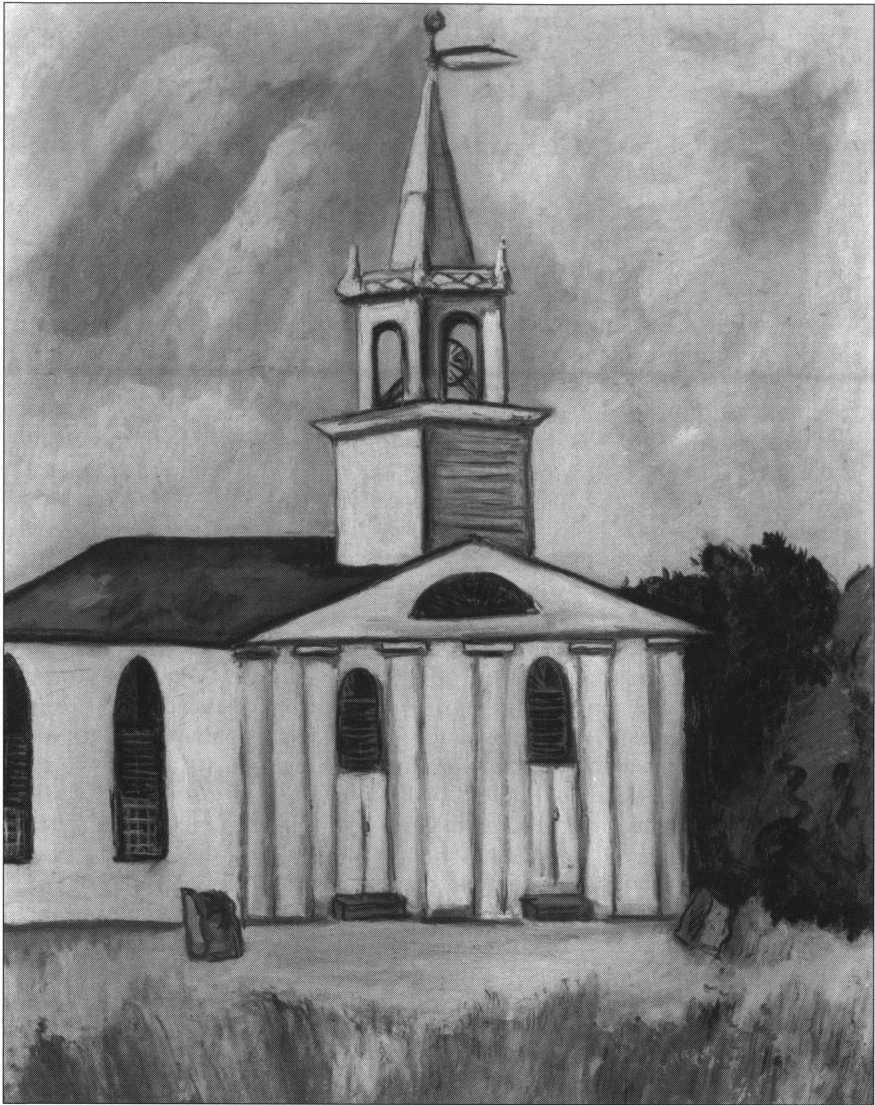


Plate 2

Marsden Hartley, *Church at Head Tide No. 2*, 1938-40.
Oil on canvas, 28 x 22 1/2 inches. Minneapolis Institute of Arts.
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. John Cowles.

This affinity for and interest in Robinson and his poetic vision of New England, along with the selection of Head Tide as a motive, reveal much about Hartley's artistic goals at this point in his career. *Church at Head Tide, Maine* proclaims his ambition to create an identity as a regional artist: it depicts a popular regional emblem (the white-steepled meeting house) and a locale associated with the New England past (Head Tide) and a well-known Maine-born writer (Robinson). It also demonstrates that Hartley, responding to the regionalist and Americanist discourse of the period, found a way to insert region into the larger modernist project—a lesson that he had learned from his engagement with Paul Cézanne's art in the 1920s and that is evident in another Hartley painting in the Colby College Museum of Art, *Aqueduct in Provence* (Plate 10).

The Regional Resurgence

A WIDESPREAD IDENTIFICATION with region emerged in the United States as part of the conservative isolation after World War I and as a way of dealing with social and cultural upheavals of the interwar decades—urbanization, industrialization, and standardized mass culture on the one hand, and the Depression and its dislocations on the other.² Like many Americans, artists of diverse aesthetic and political persuasions left the city to settle in the rural countryside and to reconnect with region. Those who have come to exemplify regionalism in the visual arts at this time are the triumvirate Thomas Hart Benton, John Steuart Curry, and Grant Wood, who painted the Midwest, advocated an antimodernist, realist style, and situated American identity outside the modern, urban East Coast and in traditional rural cultures—an agenda evident in the most well known works by these artists, such as Wood's *American Gothic* (1930; Art Institute of Chicago).

Members of the Alfred Stieglitz circle numbered among those in search of an authentic nation in regional culture during the interwar decades. Living outside the city (at least for part of the year) in rural or natural settings became common among them, and all (with the exception of Hartley) abandoned European travel by the early 1920s to ground themselves (at least metaphorically) in the American soil. Under Stieglitz's direction, Georgia O'Keeffe and John Marin successfully identified their art—and themselves—with American locales. Much like the Midwestern Regionalists, O'Keeffe advanced the idea that a modern American art could be created outside the urban Northeast by establishing ties to the American Southwest after her first trip to New Mexico in 1929 and building on both regional and national art traditions in such works as *Cow's Skull—Red, White, and Blue* (1931; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).³ Marin was associated with several places, espe-

2. On regionalism, see Robert L. Dorman, *The Revolt of the Provinces: The Regionalist Movement in America, 1920-1945* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1993) and Michael C. Steiner, "Regionalism in the Great Depression," *Geographical Review* 73 (October 1983): 430-36.

3. For discussions of regionalism, place, and O'Keeffe's art, see Celeste Connor, *Democratic Visions: Art and Theory of the Stieglitz Circle, 1924-1934* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 188-93; Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) 239-91; and Sharyn Rohlfen Udall, *Carr, O'Keeffe, Kahlo: Places of Their Own* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2000) 47-65.

cially Maine, beginning in the 1920s. Critic Paul Rosenfeld wrote of him in 1924: "There is a nervousness, a fine dash and roughness of edge in him, that is Yankee."⁴ The *Letters of John Marin*, privately published for Stieglitz's gallery An American Place in 1931, portrayed the artist as both an American and a Yankee, at home along the Maine coast. While the letters cover the full range of his career, the majority was from Maine, and, in these, he presents himself as very much the native—fishing, berry picking, clamming, and even speaking (or writing) with a down east accent. As Marin commented, Maine is a place that had grabbed him "by the nape of the neck. Once I get here I forget other places."⁵

Throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, Stieglitz, Rosenfeld, and others urged Hartley to return to his natal region and follow in the footsteps of O'Keeffe and Marin in espousing what art historian Wanda Corn has called a "soil-and-spirit" nationalism.⁶ In Rosenfeld's estimation, Hartley hadn't immersed himself deeply enough in his subjects and needed to reconnect with Maine, the place of his birth:

Some day, perhaps some day not so far distant, Hartley will have to go back to Maine. For it seems that flight from Maine is in part flight from his deep feelings. It was down east that he was born and grew and lived a great many of his years. There dwelled the people to whom he is closest akin; there is the particular landscape among which his decisive experiences were gotten; there every tree and mountain wall is reminiscent of some terrible or wonderful day. And when he has to make his peace with life, it is to this soil, so it would appear, that he must return. Here are his own people; the ones he must accept and understand and cherish. For among them only can he get the freedom of his own soul.⁷

Hartley's return to his natal region and to an American locale, however, was marked by fits and starts. Like many first-generation modernists—and many American artists through the centuries—he struggled between the lure of Europe and the seemingly contradictory mandate to build a national culture, to be American. Hartley was involved with the avant-garde in both Paris and Berlin in the early 1910s but, disillusioned with Parisian modernism after World War I, articulated a nativist aesthetic as this self-described "American discovering America" visited and painted the Southwestern landscape in 1918–19.⁸ Hartley's contact with the native landscape was brief, as he traveled across the Atlantic again in 1921 where he remained for much of the decade in both France and Germany. The growing resentment toward American artists working outside the United States nonetheless was very much in Hartley's mind by the late 1920s: "I felt the force of certain (perhaps imagining) repulsion towards me in some directions—for no other reason I can think of except that I have lived abroad."⁹ He discussed returning to the United

4. Paul Rosenfeld, *Port of New York: Essays on Fourteen American Moderns* (1924; reprint, Urbana and London: University of Illinois Press, 1966) 162.

5. *Letters of John Marin*, ed. and intro. Herbert J. Seligmann (1931; reprint, Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), September 11, 1926, n.p.

6. Corn, *The Great American Thing*.

7. Rosenfeld, *Port of New York* 99–100. Rosenfeld identifies Hartley's native Maine as coastal, down east Maine, even though Hartley in fact grew up in the inland industrial town of Lewiston.

8. Marsden Hartley, "America as Landscape," *El Palacio* (December 21, 1918): 340.

9. Hartley to Strand, n.d. (c. 1930), reel X3, AAA.

States to repatriate himself and his reputation and to publicize himself as an American artist even though the nativist climate in the New York art world made him feel like a “political prisoner.”¹⁰ At this time, he made several provisional reentries into New England—visiting Maine and New Hampshire in 1928, New Hampshire again in 1930, and Gloucester in 1931 and 1934.¹¹

Within this context, a 1932 exhibition at Edith Halpert’s Downtown Gallery, *Pictures of New England by a New Englander*, and the accompanying poem “Return of the Native” in the brochure, were used to promote Hartley as an American and a New England painter.¹² In this exhibition and others at her gallery, Halpert sought to demonstrate the nativeness of American modernists often by emphasizing their regional character,¹³ and critics recognized Hartley’s show as the homecoming of a native son. One reviewer stated that Hartley had “returned home to New England, the place of his birth, after many years of wandering abroad” and in this new phase “felt and portrayed the character of New England, its rugged outlines, harsh tones, bleak mood, using mainly for his subject matter the landscape of Dogtown [in Gloucester, Massachusetts].”¹⁴ Another critic had this to say: the Dogtown paintings “inaugurate a new era in this artist’s career. Having spent a considerable period painting in European haunts, Mr. Hartley has definitely harked back to his native land with redoubled pictorial fervor, and, according to Mrs. Halpert’s statement, he has renounced all things foreign forever.”¹⁵ This renunciation was temporary, as trips to Mexico and Germany in the early 1930s interrupted his regional rebirth.

Cultural circumstances directed Hartley back to New England yet again later in the decade. Never able to attract a consistent buying audience, he was vulnerable to the art market’s collapse during the Depression. While his Stieglitz-circle colleagues Marin and O’Keeffe succeeded in selling their art, he lamented that he could not sell a thing.¹⁶ Experiencing serious financial problems, Hartley painted on the Works Progress Administration easel project when he came back to New York from Europe in 1934 and again in the winter of 1936. In January 1935 when Stieglitz didn’t pay Hartley’s storage bills—which he had been doing for years—Hartley, unable to afford the stor-

10. Hartley to Strand, April 3, 1929, reel X3, AAA, and Hartley to Gertrude Stein, July 19, 1931, Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University (hereafter YCAL).

11. Hartley’s *Brilliant Autumn Landscape* #28 (c. 1930), also in the Colby College Museum of Art, was done during this period. For a discussion of this work, see my “Framing Region: The Modernist’s New England,” *Colby Quarterly* 39.1 (March 2003): 77–79.

12. See this poem reprinted in *Androscoggin* (Portland, Maine: Falmouth Publishing House, 1940) 3, and in *The Collected Poems of Marsden Hartley*, edited by Gail R. Scott (Santa Rosa: The Black Sparrow Press, 1987) 251. “Return of the Native” was first published in *Contact* 2 (May 1932): 28, and in *Pictures of New England by a New Englander* (New York: The Downtown Gallery, 1932) 2.

13. Carol Troyen, “After Stieglitz: Edith Gregor Halpert and the Taste for Modern Art in America,” *The Lane Collection: 20th-Century Paintings in the American Tradition*, exh. cat. (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1983) 44.

14. “Hartley, Artist-Poet, Interprets New England,” *Art Digest* 6 (May 1, 1932): 15.

15. “Marsden Hartley, Downtown Gallery,” *Art News* 30 (April 23, 1932): 9.

16. Hartley to Donald C. Greason, April 15, 1935, reel X3, AAA.

age fee, had to destroy over one hundred paintings and drawings. That winter, he lived on sixty cents a day and had one decent meal a week, which Stieglitz bought him.¹⁷

Given this dire situation, Hartley stepped up his efforts at repatriation. In his estimation, his 1936 exhibition at Stieglitz's An American Place gallery was critical to these efforts. This exhibition included paintings of New England, Dogtown Common in particular, and those from a recent stay in southern Germany—the former group receiving the higher critical praise.¹⁸ Hartley recognized that critic Henry McBride's review had helped advance his reputation as a native artist: "I needed to be put forward as a significant American and a New Englander and so Henry did it fine and I didn't know what he would do."¹⁹ He wanted to sustain the momentum of this exhibition, remarking to a friend, "I propose a 100% Yankee show next year—to cram that idea down their throats till it chokes them even."²⁰

Nineteen thirty-six proved to be a crucial year in Hartley's regional rebirth as he witnessed the flourishing vogue of Maine in the New York art world. Several artists exhibited paintings of Maine with acclaim and critical note: in November-December of 1936, Bangor artist Waldo Peirce showed his Maine work at New York's Midtown Gallery; the Whitney Museum of American Art, Knoedler's Galleries, and Macbeth Gallery marked Winslow Homer's centennial with exhibitions honoring the artist; and the Museum of Modern Art hosted a Marin retrospective from October 21 to November 22, 1936. As a "genuine" (that is, native-born) Mainer, Hartley wanted to share in the popularity of these artists and his native state. In his catalogue essay for the Marin show, he praised Marin's watercolors but carefully pointed out that this artist painted Hartley's own native region: Marin's works were "provocative of the great sources of nature and especially the sea and the shores that bound it, alas my native land of Maine which I am always being told about by one good painter, this being Marin, and a lot of bad painters."²¹ That reviewers of Marin's retrospective hailed him as a Yankee and an heir to Homer did not escape Hartley's attention either.²² He resented Marin's celebrity as a Maine painter and complained to Stieglitz that he himself did not receive the recognition he deserved as a New England artist:

My Yankeeism is best expressed by a time placed emotion that even now never leaves me—but when I passed over the iron bridge above the Androscoggin River at night on my way up here [to Nova Scotia]—above the very falls I looked at so intensely as a child—it seemed as if I were doing a wrong to myself not to get off—... Now I have the feeling everybody sees my Maine

17. Hartley to Strand, July 29, 1935, reel X3, AAA; Hartley to Adelaide Kuntz, July 5, 1932, McCausland Papers, reel X4, AAA; and Gail R. Scott, "Cleophas and His Own: The Making of a Narrative," *Marsden Hartley and Nova Scotia*, ed. Gerald Ferguson, exh. cat. (Halifax: Mount Saint Vincent University Art Gallery, 1987) 55.

18. For a discussion of this exhibition, see my "'On the Subject of Nativeness': Marsden Hartley and New England Regionalism," *Winterthur Portfolio* 29.4 (1994): 229.

19. Hartley to Norma Berger, April 20, 1936, Hartley Papers, YCAL.

20. Hartley to Kuntz, April 28, 1936, reel X4, AAA.

21. Marsden Hartley, "As to John Marin and His Ideas," *John Marin: Watercolors, Oil Paintings, Etchings*, exh. cat. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1936) 17.

22. See, for example, "John Marin," *Design* 38 (December 1936): 31.

but me—and I kind of regret it—... well I don't know yet but a strong feeling comes over me of late to go up to Lewiston and float some publicity on after all I am as far as I know the outstanding painter from Maine.²³

Hartley's 1937 American Place exhibition (even though it included no paintings of Maine but of Nova Scotia and Gloucester instead) along with the accompanying brochure essay, "On the Subject of Nativeness—a Tribute to Maine," asserted his new identity as a Maine artist. This essay recounts the qualities of Maine, of New England—its affinity to the ruggedness of Nova Scotia, its harsh landscape and geography, the rivers and lakes, loons, geese, and black bears, the pines, sea gulls, and crashing coastal waves, as well as the dangerous occupations of the natives and their directness and stateliness. Hartley allies himself with these places and people even though he had been away from the state for many years: "Whatever one's nativeness, one holds and never loses no matter how far afield the traveling may be." He continues, "My own education having begun in my native hills, going with me—these hills wherever I went, looking never more wonderful than they did to me in Paris, Berlin, or Provence. Dogtown and Nova Scotia then, being the recent hunting ground of my art endeavors, are as much my native land as if I had been born in them, for they are of the same stout substance and texture, and bear the same steely integrity." He declares at the end of this regionalist manifesto, "This quality of nativeness is coloured by heritage, birth, and environment, and it is therefore for this reason that I wish to declare myself the painter from Maine."²⁴

Following this exhibition, Hartley was determined to have "an all Maine show" the next year "for purposes of publicity," and planned to paint "only Maine and put Maine really on the art map as is my right."²⁵ From 1937 to 1943, he publicized himself as a regional painter: "I'm going local for a time now, and want to book myself as the Maine painter, which I really am you know, and there is no one to deny me it."²⁶ His letters state his intention to work toward this new public persona, as in this one from 1937: "I must close here and write the Librarian of the State Library of Maine who has now given her official state recognition both as a painter and writer of Maine—which is what I have worked on for two years and shall go then and present myself 'in person' to clinch the whole thing. I may even make them an 'anonymous' gift of a Maine landscape because it would be such valuable publicity."²⁷ This is the context, then, of Hartley's homecoming and, specifically, of his scouting the state for painting sites in 1937. What he sought were venues that would advance his reputation as a Maine artist, as a regional painter. And Head Tide, Maine, was such a locale.

23. Hartley to Alfred Stieglitz, November 11, 1936, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archive, YCAL.

24. Marsden Hartley, "On the Subject of Nativeness—a Tribute to Maine," *Marsden Hartley: Exhibition of Recent Paintings, 1936* (New York: An American Place, 1937).

25. Hartley to Berger, May 27, and August 31, 1937, YCAL.

26. Hartley to Strand, June 18, 1937, reel X3, AAA.

27. Hartley to Helen Stein, September 10, 1939, AAA.

Head Tide, Maine, as a Regional Site

UPON ARRIVING IN MAINE in 1937, Hartley explored the state, going to Eastport and Lubec along the down east coast and visiting Farmington and the Lillian Nordica Homestead in inland Maine. He wrote, "I have really taken the vows of my native country and am already trying to think out a means of living here permanently [,] that is the major portion of the year.... I can immerse myself again in the qualities of Maine."²⁸ He intended to paint the birthplace of Edwin Arlington Robinson and the nearby church at Head Tide, staking an aesthetic claim to the latter: "I am changing my mind about Santa Fe in favor of Maine—and Mme. Lachaise has wanted me to visit her for a while—and visiting that I come and do an amazing little white church which no one has done and is 'mine' really as Dogtown now is."²⁹

Hartley tried to establish himself as sole artistic author of other historical regional sites, to assert an aesthetic ownership of specific locations, as when he painted Dogtown Common, near Gloucester, Massachusetts: "Dogtown is mine and as far as I know I have put it on the map."³⁰ Dogtown served as a critical experiment in regional subject matter for Hartley and a model for his late Maine paintings like *Church at Head Tide, Maine*. Here he discovered a locale outside the standard regional scenery, particularly the picturesque tourist locations in Gloucester, and one associated with New England's antiquity. In 1931 and 1934, Hartley visited this glacial moraine, this 3000-acre tract of uninhabited, rock-strewn land on Cape Ann, a long-deserted colonial settlement, and painted it as a monument to the region's past in works like *The Last Stone Walls, Dogtown* (1935; Yale University Art Gallery) and *In the Moraine, Dogtown Common, Cape Ann* (Plate 3, right). Dogtown was one of the earliest settlements in the United States and on Cape Ann and thrived as a farming community from 1650 to 1750. In the early eighteenth century, as families began to look beyond agriculture for a livelihood, they established homes near Gloucester harbor and a new economic base in fishing and trade. The original Dogtown was gradually abandoned. Hartley wrote about the history of this place: "[Dogtown is] a weird stretch of landscape at the top of Cape Ann....It is all boulders and scrub—and it is really quite handsome. ...Dogtown was originally a village—1650–1750. Forty families who needed to escape from the pirates and indians—not a house standing—and here and there a cellar of some [?] of stone to say they once were here. Very stark—very mythical in the sense of an out of the world look."³¹ *In the Moraine* describes the boulders and stones that commemorate this early New England community and stand as historical markers as do the barbed-wired fences and rock piles of *The Last Stone Walls, Dogtown*. Hartley equated Dogtown's rocky monuments with those of other earlier cultures, with prehistoric megaliths: "Dogtown looks like a cross between Easter Island and Stonehenge—

28. Hartley to Stieglitz, July 25, 1937, YCAL.

29. Hartley to Strand, June 18, 1937, reel X3, AAA, and Hartley to Kuntz, n.d. (1937), reel X4, AAA.

30. Hartley to Strand, December 12, 1931, reel X3, AAA.

31. Hartley to Kuntz, July 16, 1931, reel X4, and to Hartley to Strand, 1931, reel X3, AAA.



Plate 3

Marsden Hartley, *In the Moraine, Dogtown Common, Cape Ann*, 1931.
Oil on academy board, 45.7 x 61 cm. Georgia Museum of Art,
University of Georgia, Athens. University purchase.

essentially druidic in appearance—it gives the feeling that an ancient race might turn up at any moment and renew an ageless rite there.”³² For Hartley, the stones of this site marked an even longer history, as they were “magnificent boulders driven and left there by glacial pressures years ago” and showed “the speechless progress of geologic structures of earth.”³³

The New England past remained a strong presence in Hartley's writings and art of the late Maine period, and this concern with regional history grew out of Hartley's interest in the writings of cultural critic Van Wyck Brooks. In earlier paintings and essays, especially those about New Mexico, Hartley had responded to a directive from Brooks's highly influential 1918 essay, “On Creating a Usable Past,” which called on writers and artists to define a national past that would be relevant to early twentieth-century America.³⁴ Brooks's later Pulitzer Prize winning *The Flowering of New England* (1936) provided Hartley with a more specific call for a usable regional past. In this book, Brooks described the burgeoning of New England's “golden age,” which began at the close of the War of 1812 and reached its pinnacle just before the Civil War with the literature of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Nathaniel Hawthorne, among others. Hartley emulated Brooks's text in his own essay, “The Six Greatest New England Painters,” published in *Yankee* magazine in 1937. In this article, Hartley proposed that John Singleton Copley, Washington Allston, William Morris Hunt, Albert Pinkham Ryder, George Fuller, and Winslow Homer constituted an artistic tradition comparable to the one that Brooks had outlined for New England literature: “With the recent publication of Van Wyck Brook's [sic] ‘The Flowering of New England,’ we are, if we yankees need to be, reminded once again of the great tradition in literature, music, and painting. What Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Emily Dickinson, and the other great yankee souls did for the fine flowering of New England spirit, there were a number of others who founded a fine tradition in the field of painting.”³⁵

In another essay, “This Country of Maine” (c. 1937–38), Hartley characterizes the antebellum shipping industry and trade along the north Atlantic seaboard as a vital and distinctive part of the region's history and culture. Living on State Street in Portland when he wrote this essay, Hartley could look out his window to see the manifestation of one regional tradition in the mansions built by those who had been involved in shipping molasses, mahogany, rum, sugar, and slaves (although this last connection is not mentioned) in New England's early days and the lumbering and shipbuilding of more recent years:

32. Hartley to Strand, February 23, 1931, reel X3, AAA.

33. Hartley to Kuntz, July 16, 1931, reel X4, AAA.

34. Van Wyck Brooks, “On Creating a Usable Past,” *Dial* 64 (April 11, 1918): 337–41.

35. Marsden Hartley, “New England Painting and Painters,” c. 1936, YCAL (reel 1369, frame 1816, AAA).

And to know what these traditions are one must turn first of all to the mansions all the way from Kittery Point to Eastport, for the shipping was at its height then, and people made fortunes and built all the homes that we now see, many of which are being lived in and kept up in the old rich manner.... All the most typical houses have turrets or flat roofs with ornate railings as since the owners were shipping people, they could go up to the turrets or flat roofs and take note of what ships were leaving for the other six seas.

These buildings stood as reminders of a past industry that is only a "ghost of itself" yet they keep up "their aristocratic appearances as if times had not changed."³⁶

"This Country of Maine" draws not only from Brooks's study of New England with its focus on the antebellum period but refers to Robert P. Tristram Coffin's *Kennebec, Cradle of Americans* (1937), a history of Maine's Kennebec River Valley.³⁷ In Coffin's estimation, like many river valleys, that of the Kennebec River represented a civilization and culture that typified America: "It was one of the first breeders of American men. It rocked pioneers for many of the future states further west. It rocked the men who were hunters, fishermen, farmers, sailors and lumbermen all in one, ... It taught Americans how to make the most of wild game and fish, the soil, the water, and lumber (4)." This river valley possessed a distinctive history: "It was a fishing station for many a European nation in the sixteenth century.... The first settlements of the English in the New World were at its mouth. The first ship built in the Western Hemisphere by Englishmen was built here.... It had flourishing villages when the rest of New England was still a savage wilderness (6)." The frontispiece for *Kennebec* pictures one such village with its steepled church, docks, and schooners gliding along the river as an apt portrayal of Coffin's description of the river valley hamlets:

Along the Kennebec, quiet now and no longer whitened by high sails, dozens of lovely little towns sleep the sleep of serenity. Fine white mansions under elms and white churches that immortalize the name of [the architect Christopher] Wren point up above blue bays and islands of sheer, evergreen lace. They once had roots deep overseas and down the underside of the world. Little towns forgotten by the busy world now, but able still to breed men and women who can take hold of the world and shape it. (9)

The village of Head Tide in the Kennebec River Valley resembles the ones that Coffin delineated in *Kennebec, Cradle of Americans*.³⁸ This hamlet, just north of the coastal town of Wiscasset, was part of an area colonized in the mid-eighteenth century by the Boston-based Plymouth Company, with Dr. Silvester Gardiner among the most prominent investors. This group developed the Kennebec River Valley to keep the French from settling it, to protect the fur trade, and to acquire lumber for shipping. Head Tide arose as a commu-

36. Marsden Hartley, "This Country of Maine," c. 1937-38, YCAL.

37. Robert P. Tristram Coffin, *Kennebec, Cradle of Americans* (New York and Toronto: Farrar and Rinehart, Inc., 1937). Coffin, p. 10, mentions the Kennebec as a source for artists and writers. Hartley knew Coffin, who was also a poet and the literary editor of *Yankee* magazine, and who wrote to Stieglitz about visiting the poet (July 25, 1937, YCAL).

38. Head Tide was described as "a tiny village, consisting of a few homes, one store, a church, and a sawmill" and lying "on both sides of the Sheepscot River." See Workers of the Federal Writers' Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of Maine, *Maine: A Guide "Down East"* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1937) 219.

nity along the banks of the Sheepscot River that provided power for saw, planing, shingle, stave, grist, carding, and fulling mills (Plate 4, right). After the Civil War, Head Tide, along with the wider Kennebec region, declined as the shipping and shipbuilding economy collapsed with the rise of industrialization and newer forms of transportation. Head Tide thus fit into Coffin's story of the Kennebec River Valley and the "golden age" of New England.

The Church of Head Tide, as seen in the postcard in Hartley's own collection (Plate 5, p. 328), stood for the area's history. Facing south on a summit of a steep hill, it overlooks a cluster of old houses, shops, and mills along the Sheepscot River. Dedicated in 1838, the church, with its combination of Federal, Greek Revival, and even Gothic Revival features, was built when the region was productive and prosperous, when Head Tide was growing as a community and Congregational Church members no longer wanted to attend the Alna Meetinghouse a few miles away. The history of this building mirrored that of Head Tide. It flourished during the town's heyday from 1838–76 but closed in the 1880s and fell into disrepair as the economy declined. The church was renovated and rededicated in 1913 and used until the early 1920s when it was abandoned again only to be restored in the 1940s.³⁹

When Hartley sketched and painted the church in the late 1930s, it was deserted and vandalized. Vacant since the early 1920s, the building showed "marks of decay" and was "falling into ruin," with its granite foundation crumbling, a leaky roof, dilapidated ceiling, missing window glass, and thin, worn paint on the exterior.⁴⁰ The village of Head Tide was desolate by this time too, with its houses and shops crumbling down or being sold to out-of-staters to be renovated as summer cottages. Coffin described churches like the one in Head Tide in his book, *New Poetry of New England* (1938): "The New England church is a place growing empty like the large houses that once sent their cohorts of children and men and women out into the midst of life. I knew many country churches whose blinds have been closed for many years, whose only congregations are the sharp wasps. Churches, I know, are not religion, but empty ones are a sign of decay in something that our grandparents knew as religion."⁴¹

This is the building in Hartley's *Church at Head Tide, Maine* (Plate 1)—unattended, abandoned, blanketed in snow, windows closed and shuttered, with granite blocks standing like gravestones to mark a time and a people from the past. By selecting the Head Tide church as a subject, Hartley was referring to a significant regional history and site, as narrated by contemporary critics like Brooks and Coffin, but also to a long-standing New England icon—the white-steepled meeting house. The village with its steepled church was celebrated by Coffin in *Kennebec* as the foundation of nation and appeared in the work of Hartley's artistic contemporaries who were working

39. Newspaper clippings on the church at Head Tide, Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta, Maine, and Frank Chouteau Brown, "The Congregational Church at Head Tide, Maine," *Old-Time New England* 30, no. 3 (January 1940): 94–100.

40. Newspaper clipping, 1942, Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

41. Robert P. Tristram Coffin, *New Poetry of New England: Frost and Robinson* (1938; reprint, New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1964) 45.

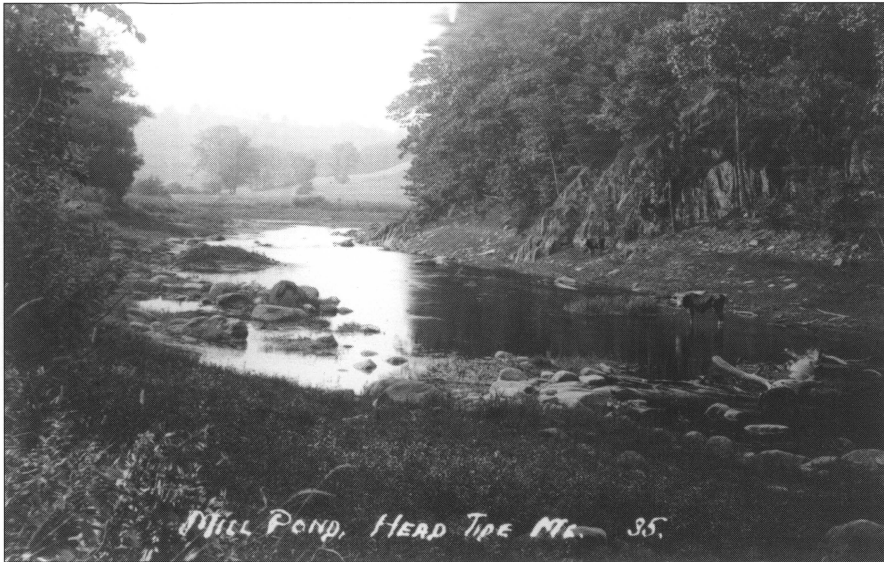


Plate 4

Mill Pond, Head Tide, Maine, c. 1935. Photograph. Marsden Hartley Collection, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.



Plate 5

View of Head Tide, postcard. Marsden Hartley Collection,
Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and
Manuscript Library, Yale University.

in Maine. John Marin in *Phippsburg, Maine* (1932; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) and Marguerite Zorach in *Maine Landscape* (Plate 6, p. 330) composed modernist visions of the pastoral, white-steepled church nestled in a valley and surrounded by verdant hills. (Both Zorach's and Marin's works depict sites not far from Head Tide.) These places stood as powerful images of a Maine (and a New England more generally) where the ways of the past, of preindustrial small towns and farms, survived.⁴²

Hartley's treatment of this subject differed somewhat from that of his contemporaries, as can be seen in his paintings and drawings of the Head Tide church and those of the church in Corea, Maine, a small lobstering village a few miles north of Bar Harbor where the artist lived from 1940–43. Like the Head Tide church, the one in Corea was abandoned (although Hartley used it as a studio), and Hartley sketched this building with overgrown grass rising around it and lobster traps strewn in disarray at its front in a drawing now in the Colby College Museum of Art (Plate 7, p. 331). Together, these works picture a declining locale, where nature is reclaiming the products of human community and industry. Hartley's New England here seems less the celebrated preindustrial "golden age" and more a Maine where past and present collide, where the past glory is quickly fading.⁴³

*Domestic Architecture, Regional Identity,
and Edwin Arlington Robinson*

DOWN THE HILL from the church at Head Tide is the birthplace of poet Edwin Arlington Robinson—a two-story, hipped roof, late Federal house, built in 1835—which Hartley had planned to paint in the late 1930s. Even though he did not end up painting this house, his intention to do so tells us much about his artistic goals at this time. His turn to Robinson and his poetry can be seen not only in his own writing but in paintings like *Church at Head Tide, Maine* and evidence Hartley's goal to construct an identity as a regional artist at this time—an identity modeled after Robinson.

Robinson was very much a part of this region along the Kennebec River. Born in Head Tide in 1869, he and his family moved to nearby Gardiner the following year, where Robinson lived until 1896 with the exception of the two years he studied at Harvard. The young poet soon set his sights on New York City where he worked in odd jobs until his poetry caught the attention of Theodore Roosevelt who arranged a sinecure for him at the New York Custom House and a contact with Scribner's publishers. With this support, Robinson's career took off. He soon found recognition for his poetry, some of which drew from his early years in Gardiner, Maine (renamed Tilbury Town in his poems), and won the Pulitzer Prize three times—for *Collected Poems* in 1921, *The Man Who Died Twice* in 1925, and *Tristram* in 1927.

42. William H. Truettner, "Small-Town America," *Picturing Old New England: Image and Memory*, ed. William H. Truettner and Roger B. Stein, exh. cat. (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, and New Haven/London: Yale U P, 1999) 111–41.

43. For a brief discussion of Hartley's treatment of the Head Tide and Corea churches, see Elizabeth Mankin Kornhauser, *Marsden Hartley*, exh. cat. (Hartford, Conn.: Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, and New Haven/London: Yale U P, 2003) 321.



Plate 6

Marguerite Zorach, *Maine Landscape*, n.d. Oil on canvas, 26 x 32 inches.
Colby College Museum of Art.

Gift of the International Business Machines Corporation, Inc.

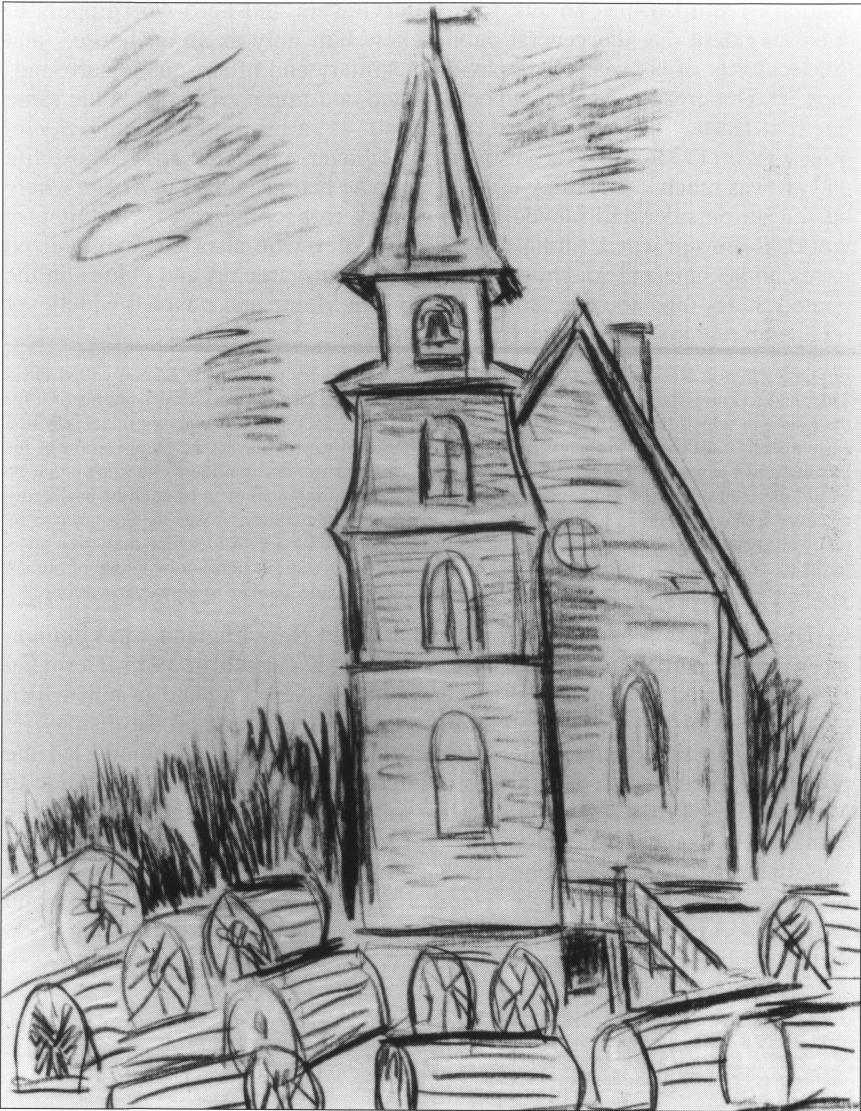


Plate 7

Marsden Hartley, *Church at Corea, Maine*, c. 1940-43. Charcoal and white chalk on brown paperboard, 28 x 21 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

Colby College Museum of Art. Museum purchase by the Board of Governors in honor and memory of Edward H. Turner, H '73.

Several aspects of Robinson as both poet and persona would have appealed to Hartley. Critics portrayed the writer as reticent and retiring. As one obituary recorded, he “shrank from interviewers and hero-worshippers to such an extent that the general public knew him only as an anchorite,” and “the majority of his years were passed in solitary and often squalid surroundings.”⁴⁴ This image of an artist/poet isolated and impoverished was the same one that Hartley had constructed of himself, as in his autobiography, *Somehow a Past* (1933–39).⁴⁵ Robinson was moreover a regional artist whose life and art was much like Hartley's. As a poet who had grown up in Maine where he felt an outsider and moved to New York to become part of the literary world, Robinson was a fitting parallel to Hartley who also felt marginalized in his home state and sought out centers of avant-garde art and culture in the United States (and abroad). Both were born in Maine and traveled widely yet retained a regional essence, as Hartley saw it:

Edwin Arlington Robinson of Gardiner, Maine, born in a very pretty little hamlet called Head Tide, and to know the origin of Robinson's aristocratic spirit one turns to his private history, for the house in which he was born is one of the small but very typical mansions of Maine of the early epoch.... Robinson probably never gave an outright expression to the picturization of his locality and his special country, though by virtue of his particular qualities, one knows that he would never have come from anywhere else, for he is more regional even (though he has hardly or never spoken of it) than Longfellow, but that is another generation, it was the era when to be really cultivated one sought European contact or European influence. And so one may even go as far as to say that in the regional essential quality, Robinson was Homeric in his grasp of human experience, though he was externally a dyed-in-the-wool Maine Yankee if there ever was one.⁴⁶

This association of Robinson with Maine and New England was common in criticism, particularly by the time of the poet's death in 1935. Hermann Hagedorn stated in a memorial address, “It was New England in him which closed the door and pulled the blinds on the jubilation and on the dismay.”⁴⁷ According to this commentator, Robinson's “New England blood” led the poet to his preoccupation with “moral questions.”⁴⁸ The 1937 WPA guide to Maine claimed that Robinson's style “was shaped to a great extent by the Yankee environment of his youth.... It was the reserved, cynical, but intensely human Yankee in Robinson that gave life to his poetic creations.”⁴⁹ In his book *New Poetry of New England: Frost and Robinson* (1938), poet and critic Robert P. Tristram Coffin extolled Robinson as one of the leading poets of the region.⁵⁰ He presented Robert Frost and Robinson as Yankee types—

44. Obituary, April 7, 1935, newspaper clipping, Maine Historic Preservation Commission. A speaker at a 1935 Robinson memorial dedication in Gardiner, Maine, commented, “He was at heart an anchorite,” and had a “lonely life.” Hermann Hagedorn, “Memorial Address,” in “On the Occasion of the Unveiling of a Tablet to the Memory of Edwin Arlington Robinson, Gardiner, October 18, 1936,” Maine State Library.

45. See, for example, Marsden Hartley, “Somehow a Past: Prologue to Imaginative Living,” in *Somehow a Past: The Autobiography of Marsden Hartley*, ed. and intro. Susan Elizabeth Ryan (Cambridge: MIT P, 1997) 48, 70–71.

46. Hartley, “This Country of Maine,” YCAL. He also wrote about Robinson in “On the Subject of Nativeness—a Tribute to Maine,” p. 3, and in his poem “Nothing but Rain and Visitors: The Going Out of Edwin Arlington Robinson,” c. 1935, YCAL (reel 1368, frames 1124–25, AAA).

47. Hagedorn, “Memorial Address.”

48. Charles Cestre, “Edwin Arlington Robinson...Maker of Myths,” *Mark Twain Quarterly* 2.3 (Spring 1938): 3.

49. *Maine: A Guide “Down East”* 99.

50. Coffin, *New Poetry of New England* 1.

both reticent, plain speaking, humorous, hesitant to talk directly about God—yet makes distinctions between the two—the former a poet of the lonely farmlands of interior northern New England, the latter of the decaying shipping towns of Maine. Robinson was the poet of “hard times:” “His geography is a geography of a gray place.”⁵¹ His Mainers, once the aristocrats of the region, were taciturn and courageous, yet dispossessed: “Their houses are like very fine tombs (32).” He moreover wove Robinson and his poetry into the Kennebec River Valley:

It was along a Kennebec river road that [Robinson] walked as a boy, on hot afternoons, near the end of summer, to be with his friends, Isaac and Archibald, two old men. These two men were near their end. Each lived alone in a big house built for a man’s host of children. There are many such big houses left along the Kennebec River. And mostly they are places kept by one old man or one old woman.... Many of their houses are not so well painted or in so good repair.... Year by year, the balsams, the wild trees that the farmers pushed into the gullies and up to the hilltops, have taken strength and are marching back, taking back the land of their ancestors. The wild is coming back. You may come upon porticoed houses falling into ruins in the perpetual shade of enveloping trees that have grown from their very floors.... Familiar old landmarks, covered over slowly, year by year. (17)

According to Coffin, Robinson tells the story of the Big-House New Englanders who were successful in trade in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: they were aristocrats, descended from middle-class English families, related to the Puritans, and in possession of a “code of gentility,” defined by charity, courage, tenderness, and loyalty to the past traditions (37). But their world was quickly fading: “The world which created the big house has fallen into decay and left the Big-House people without any life to shape to the code (36).” Robinson’s poetry depended upon the imagery of these Big-Houses and displaced New England aristocrats, as in “The House of the Hill” in which the declining region is embodied in buildings, abandoned and decaying:

They are all gone away,
 The House is shut and still,
 There is nothing more to say.

 Through broken walls and gray
 The winds blow bleak and shrill:
 They are all gone away.

 Nor is there one to-day
 To speak them good or ill:
 There is nothing more to say.

 Why is it then we stray
 Around the sunken sill?
 They are all gone away,

 And our poor fancy-play
 For them is wasted skill:
 There is nothing more to say.

51. Coffin, *New Poetry of New England* 29.

There is ruin and decay
 In the House on the Hill:
 They are all gone away,
 There is nothing more to say.⁵²

Similar imagery appears in Hartley's writing and paintings of Maine. In *Church at Head Tide, Maine* Hartley presents the building with blackened windows and in a bleak landscape that resembles the New England of Robinson's poetry. Recalling his early "dark" Maine landscapes such as *Deserted Farm* (1909; Weisman Art Museum), *Sundown by the Ruins* shows a haunted, desolate landscape, a New England on the wane represented through its ravaged architecture (Plate 8, right). Here, the remnants of a stone wall or perhaps a house foundation stand as the only indication of a past society, now long gone. That this ruin is painted at sundown evokes the passing or end of that society. Domestic architecture stood for the New England (Maine) past in several poems in Hartley's collections *Androscoggin* (1940) and *Sea Burial* (1941). "The Outcast City on the Kennebec" describes a Maine town past its prime and deserted by its inhabitants who sought new locales "where there's something doing." Hartley gives these structures voice:

And all the little houses answered in unison:
 "we have perfected our days—
 those who have loved us are gone—
 our ways are no longer their ways—
 something that is done with, and done.
 It is they who have left us, not we
 who have left them, as you can plainly see.
 The proud adventures of flesh being over
 they have turned rover.
 Something must be done for the mind—
 we cannot stay with decay and the wind."

Six houses are this outcast city
 and there's the fainting, and the pity.⁵³

Another poem, "Mansion," offers a similar picture: a cupola-crowned house "stuffed with effigies of birds," "three old men in the south parlor" where at one time there would have been "conches on either side of the door from Jamaica or Demerara" as signs of a thriving maritime trade, an old woman dressed in white in the north parlor, "fingers tapping out leftover rhythms/which could not be put into full bars/when time demanded or expected them."⁵⁴

Hartley's *Church at Head Tide, Maine* (Plate 1), then, along with his contemporary paintings and poems, intersect with representations of the region common in the late 1930s—the river valleys and coastal villages dating back

52. Edwin Arlington Robinson, "The House on the Hill," *Tilbury Town: Selected Poems of Edwin Arlington Robinson* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1953) 101.

53. Hartley, "The Outcast City on the Kennebec," *Androscoggin* 18.

54. Marsden Hartley, *Sea Burial* (Portland, Maine: Leon Tebbetts Editions, 1941) 50-51.



Plate 8

Marsden Hartley, *Sundown by the Ruins*, 1942. Oil on masonite,
22 x 28 inches. Whitney Museum of American Art.
Gift of Charles Simon.

to the “golden age” of New England, the ruined remnants of that historical moment especially as imagined in Robinson’s poetry. Layered with regional referents, this painting in the Colby College Museum of Art served Hartley’s agenda well as he returned to Maine in the late 1930s and presented himself as the “painter from Maine.”

Building Region into Modernism

HEAD TIDE WAS mentioned in another context in one of Hartley’s letters: he compared the Maine hamlet to Aix-en-Provence in southern France, where he was working in the late 1920s. Surrounded by the sites that had inspired the French post-impressionist Paul Cézanne and situated in Cézanne’s own natal region, Hartley began to understand the importance of place for art—and perhaps more specifically for modernist art. In this same 1929 letter he commented that he suspected that he would “have need once again for the spiritual succor that rise[s] out of this area of the earth [Maine] for me. ...For I never feel or have felt so downright New England as I do this very moment.”⁵⁵ Hartley’s experience in Aix in many ways can be seen as integral to his later return to Maine, as he moved from Cézanne’s natal region to his own.

The above letter was written at the end of a decade largely spent by Hartley in Europe, with southern France a central locale for him at this time. In 1925 he summered in Vence, a hilltop town in the maritime Alps not far from the Mediterranean coast, and the following June moved to Aix-en-Provence where he painted on and off for the next three years. Provence, of course, was Cézanne’s region, and Aix, one of the major sources of subjects for his art. Hartley went to this area seeking inspiration from Cézanne and followed his example of living close to nature and grounded in a locale that the artist comes to know intimately. He wrote to Stieglitz about southern France, “It is the first spot on earth I have encountered where I have felt right—in harmony—body, soul and mind.”⁵⁶ His sustained immersion in a single locale in southern France in the late 1920s is arguably among the most profound of his entire career and was not even replicated in his final years in Maine. In Aix-en-Provence, he focused on close observation of the sites that had so attracted Cézanne—the fig trees, Mont Sainte-Victoire—and even lived for a time in a five-room cottage in the Chateau Noir, Maison Maria, that had served as Cézanne’s second studio (Plate 9, right). He not only sought out motifs in Cézanne’s work but painted with the short hatch strokes and bright patches of color typical of his predecessor’s style.⁵⁷

Aqueduct in Provence (Plate 10, p. 338), which Hartley painted during this period, shows the artist emulating Cézanne and focusing on a site distinctive of the southern France region. An arcaded stone structure runs across the center of the painting as the mountains rise up behind; the arcade—whether it be

55. Hartley to Strand, November 19, 1929, reel X3, AAA.

56. Hartley to Stieglitz, July 20, 1926, quoted in Jeanne Hokin, *Pinnacles and Pyramids: The Art of Marsden Hartley* (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1993) 60.

57. For a discussion of Hartley in southern France, see Hokin, *Pinnacles and Pyramids* 53-66.



Plate 9

Photograph, Maison Maria, Aix-en-Provence, c. 1928-29.
Marsden Hartley Memorial Collection, Museum of Art, Bates College.

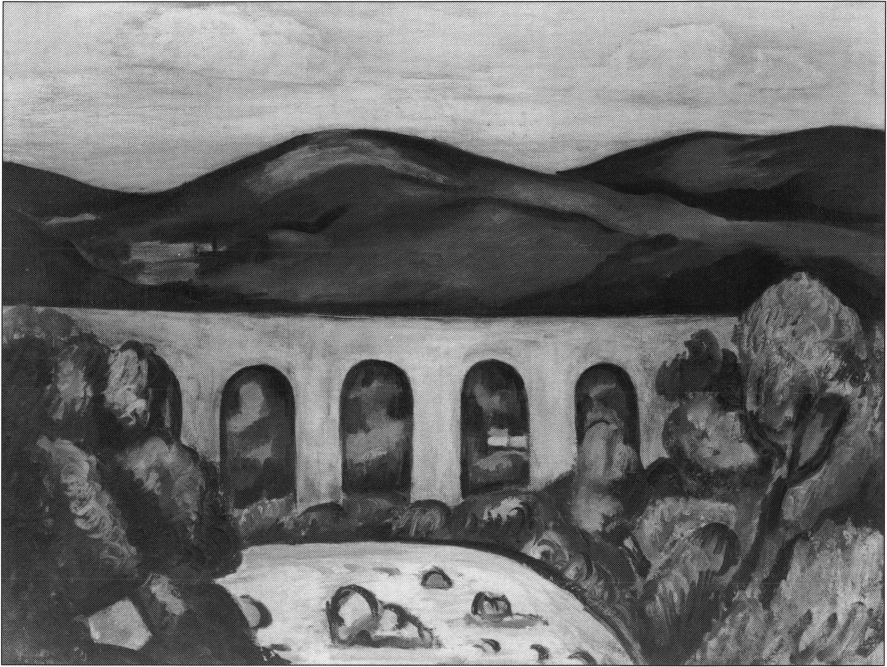


Plate 10

Marsden Hartley, *Aqueduct in Provence*, 1928. Oil on canvas,
19 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 25 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Colby College Museum of Art.
Gift of Mrs. Charles P. Kuntz.

an ancient aqueduct or modern viaduct—speaks to the history of the region, as one art historian has commented, “Many of [Provence’s] features assume the weight of its history: the train trestle transforming into an ancient aqueduct, the straight cut of the railway bed, a Roman road.”⁵⁸ The Roman aqueducts of Provence figured into a group of landscapes that Hartley painted in 1925–26. In *Aqueduct in Provence (or Alpes Maritimes, Vence)* (Plate 11, p. 340), the winding foreground path, the wedge-shaped color patches, and sculpted masses of the mountains, trees, and red-tile roofed houses produce a solid, architectonic structure that recalls the many views of Mont Sainte-Victoire that Cézanne had painted and that Hartley had studied throughout his career.

Colby’s *Aqueduct in Provence* may well be from this Vence series, but the low-lying background mountains do not suggest the deep Alpine gorges. The archway and mountain resemble instead the railway viaduct over the Arc River and Le Cengle mountain ridge—a spot painted by Cézanne in the 1880s, as in *Mont Sainte-Victoire Seen from Bellevue* (Plate 12, p. 341). Here, Cézanne looks down from Bellevue, a farm just southwest of Aix owned by his sister, and out over the Arc River valley with its viaduct and other farmhouses to the rising form of Mont Sainte-Victoire. While this area was certainly part of modernization, especially in its connection with an expanding tourist industry, it was replete with historical referents and was a sign of Provence, of regional identity, as art historian Nina Maria Athanassoglou-Kallmyer has recently argued.⁵⁹ Mont Sainte-Victoire and its surrounding countryside was the location of a Roman victory over the Teutonic and Cimbrian armies that invaded ancient Gaul as well as being an important Christian site where religious festivals were held year-round. In 1871, after the Franco-Prussian war, a cross with patriotic slogans was placed on the summit, as the mountain served as a sign of nation, of the survival of Latin civilization in the face of northern, Germanic influences. The late nineteenth century also witnessed the discovery of prehistoric sites in Provence near Mont Sainte-Victoire, thus adding to the historical import of this region.⁶⁰ Given these varied associations, Mont Sainte-Victoire was the ideal subject for Cézanne as he expressed his profound sense of attachment to his natal region, its history, people, and landscape.⁶¹ Following Cézanne’s example, Hartley painted a landscape with historical meaning and alludes to this history through architecture in *Aqueduct in Provence*—a strategy for representing the regional landscape that would remain with Hartley when he returned to his own native country and state in the late 1930s and painted works like *Church at Head Tide, Maine*.

But Cézanne and Provence instructed Hartley in other ways. He had studied the French painter’s work at Stieglitz’s Gallery 291 in New York and then

58. Joseph J. Rishel, catalog entry, in Françoise Cachin et al., *Cézanne*, exh. cat. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., and Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1996) 259.

59. Nina Maria Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence: The Painter in His Culture* (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 2003).

60. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence* 152-63.

61. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence* 11.



Plate 11

Marsden Hartley, *Aqueduct in Provence (Alpes Maritimes, Vence)*,
1925-27. Oil on canvas, 79.7 x 79.7 cm.
The Curtis Galleries, Minneapolis.

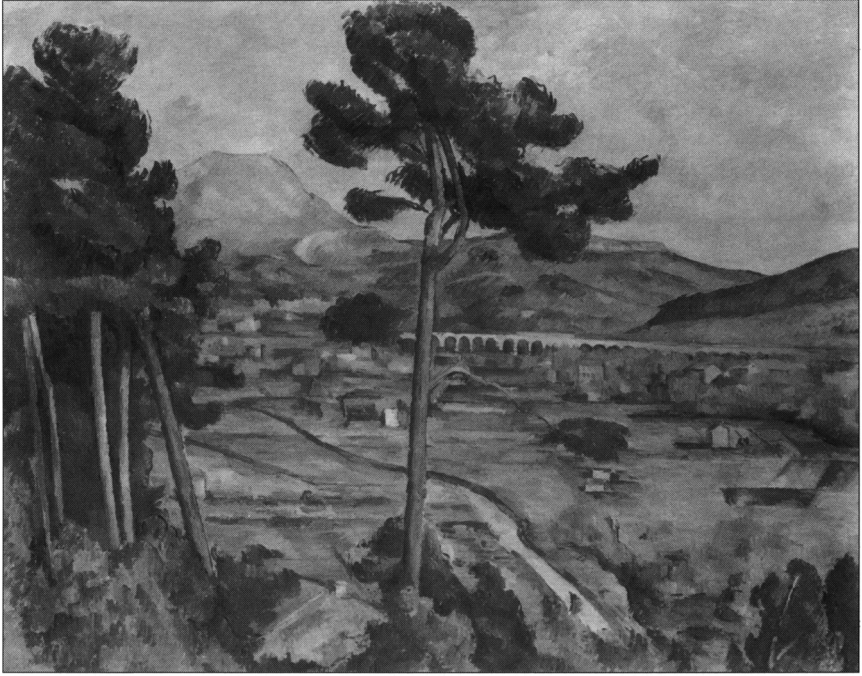


Plate 12

Paul Cézanne, *Mont Sainte-Victoire Seen from Bellevue*, 1882-85.

Oil on canvas, 25 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 32 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (65.4 x 81.6 cm).

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. H. O. Havemeyer
Collection. Bequest of Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer, 1929.

in Paris in the early 1910s, writing about him at this time as a visionary and emulating the ethereal color and dematerialized forms of Cézanne's watercolors in his cosmic cubist works like *Musical Theme (Oriental Symphony)* (1912–13; Rose Art Museum).⁶² Making a serious study of Cézanne in the late 1920s, Hartley viewed numerous paintings by him at exhibitions in Paris and in a private collection in Florence and read a collection of Cézanne's letters to Emile Bernard. At this time Hartley saw a different Cézanne as he considered the color sensations and clarity of light the paramount feature of his art. As he wrote in an essay, "No one person has given forth more of this understanding and insight into the secrets of the light of Provence than Cézanne."⁶³ Cézanne's intense absorption in his subjects (like Mont Sainte-Victoire) was something that Hartley also aspired to, as his poem "The MOUNTAIN and the RECONSTRUCTION" (1928) attests:

The sweet old man appeared in vision—
A man who had evolved some of the clearest principles
For himself, a new metaphysic—a new logic—
A new, inviolable conviction, a new law for the artist with ambitions
toward truth, a belief in real
Appearances, and a desire toward expression, without
The HYPOCRISIES...
"TO ANNIHILATE MYSELF IN THE SUBJECT
—to become ONE
with it"—this was the purpose of the sweet old man
consumed with humility and sincerity.⁶⁴

Such an immersion in subject matter (or place, in this case) produced an art expressive of that locale. As Hartley explained, Cézanne possessed a "racial integrity and racial insight," and it was "directly and solely through the qualities of Provence that Cézanne arrived at his present interior or universal significance."⁶⁵ The connectedness with place that he detected in Cézanne's work he himself felt during his time in Aix: "There is something in the light and the natural aspects of Provence that 'belong' to me in that it offers to me a quality of 'air,' and by this I mean the inherent emanation from the land itself that gives my very feet a sense of home."⁶⁶ This discovery was crucial for Hartley who was, in the late 1920s, beginning to think about returning to the United States, returning to his natal region, in the context of increasing hostility among audiences and critics to American artists working abroad and to those practicing various modes of modernism.

In the United States modernism was placed in stark contrast to region in the rhetoric of the time. By the 1930s, Midwestern Regionalists and their apologists like Thomas Craven prescribed a nativist art that celebrated an American

62. See, for example, Hartley to Stieglitz, February 1913, YCAL, and Gail R. Scott, Introduction, *On Art by Marsden Hartley* (New York: Horizon Press, 1982) 35.

63. Marsden Hartley, "Impressions of Provence: From an American's Point of View," c. 1920s, in *On Art by Marsden Hartley* 144.

64. Marsden Hartley, "The MOUNTAIN and the RECONSTRUCTION" (1928), in *On Art by Marsden Hartley* 75–77.

65. Hartley, "Impressions of Provence" 145–46.

66. Hartley, "Impressions of Provence" 146.

heritage, emphasized rural subjects, and avoided disagreeable themes; they opposed modernism and embraced realism as *the* American style. Regionalism was considered isolationist, conservative, and reactionary, both aesthetically and politically; modernism was its opposite. The legendary debates between Alfred Stieglitz and Thomas Hart Benton did much to place regionalism and modernism in rival aesthetic camps, especially when Craven's book *Modern Art: The Men, The Movements, The Meaning* (1934) denounced Stieglitz and his efforts to create an American art. But, as scholars have recently argued, regionalism and modernism were not as dissimilar as the period rhetoric would have them. Numerous artists, from Georgia O'Keeffe to Charles Sheeler, negotiated a position between these two artistic movements and created a modernism that was shaped by place, a modernism in the regions.⁶⁷

Hartley can be situated among these artists who sought to accommodate modernism to 1930s regionalism and American Scene painting. He did not espouse what he considered the Midwestern Regionalists's "prescribed story" or "reportorial painting," and wrote to a friend, "Some fearful things in the new collection at the Met. Mus. Exponents of the American Scene. Pigs—cows—windmills—silos etc. of the Kansas-Oklahoma esthetics, and that's one place I thank God I am not embalmed in."⁶⁸ At the same time, he recognized the importance of being "rooted," or connected to place—a concept that was essential to Midwestern regionalism and one that he well understood:

I feel that John Curry is the most convincing of all because he introduces nothing between himself and the origins of his experience which both Benton and Wood do—though perhaps I am wrong, I believe in that movement basically however as I believe in my own return to the salt smitten rocks and the thunder-driven forests of my native Maine—as well as those majestic rivers that come down from the North Katahdin country and empty out their impressive volumes into the sea.⁶⁹

Here, and elsewhere, we see Hartley trying to reconcile aspects of regionalism to his own goals as a modernist artist. In a 1938 essay, "Is There an American Art?" he wrote of a "private Americanism" to distinguish it from that of the "ultra-Americans":

I have done nothing else but prove my own specific localism which has been to paint my own native Maine and I do nothing else at the present moment and never expect to do anything else, and I am completely recognized as an authentic painter of Maine born in Maine, but this recognition comes I am happy to say from the state itself and the native spirit which recognizes the authenticity of my private and local emotion.

And for exactly this reason and no other I returned to my tall timbers and my granite cliffs—because in them rests the kind of integrity I believe in and from which I draw my private strength both spiritually and esthetically.

67. See, for example, James M. Dennis, *Renegade Regionalists: The Modern Independence of Grant Wood, Thomas Hart Benton, and John Steuart Curry* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), and Erika Doss, *Benton, Pollock, and the Politics of Modernism: From Regionalism to Abstract Expressionism* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

68. Hartley to H. Stein, postmarked December 31, 1934, AAA.

69. Marsden Hartley, "The Education of the American Artist," c. late 1930s, YCAL (reel 1369, frames 1249, AAA).

For anyone to deny this would be like saying that Lillian Nordica and Emma Eames lost their sacred localism because they were great exponents of European opera, or that Edwin Arlington Robinson lost his terrific Maine Yankeeism because he employed the principles of Greek tragedy.⁷⁰

By the late 1930s, Hartley came to see regionalism as essential to his art, something not lost when an artist worked in styles or manners outside a native locale. In his estimation, Rembrandt, Masaccio, and Piero della Francesca were

all regionalists expressing vital regional essences. It does no real spirit the least harm to widen its origins by searching abroad for larger concepts—the only harm that can be done is when that spirit is not true to its basic elements and one sees the artists therefore joining movements and schools. Monet is said to have remarked to the influx of Americans who were rushing into his environment—“what—have you no sunlight in America?”...Even Cézanne returned to his own province and was by all odds its best interpreter as it was the source of his basic natal and prenatal experiences.⁷¹

So, for Hartley, Cézanne was a regionalist of sorts, an artist who had created an art fixed to his native locale but one who also drew much from the world beyond. And this is the model of the modern artist that Hartley imagined for himself in the late 1930s.

In her recent book on Cézanne and Provence, Nina Maria Athanassoglou-Kallmyer argues for the importance of “the provincial, peripheral component and the textured multiplicity it introduces in the modernist narrative,” and for a reevaluation of modernism in relation to region.⁷² The two Hartley paintings in the Colby College Museum of Art tell much about the place of region in the narrative of American modernism. In the 1920s, as his contemporaries abandoned Europe in favor of American locales outside New York, Hartley continued to work in southern France where he, in a sense, rediscovered America and his own native Maine. Looking back to the art of Cézanne, he saw the critical role of place in modern art, of the artistic potential and necessity of connecting to one’s own natal region. This lesson led Hartley back to Maine as he moved from the ancient aqueducts of Provence to a Congregational meeting house in the Kennebec River Valley. Never abandoning his expressionist style, he painted sites like the church at Head Tide that were powerful signs of New England and its history. Hartley realized that a sense of place was a crucial ingredient of all great art, even modernist art—a realization that helped him build region into the last great paintings of his own career.

70. Marsden Hartley, “Is There an America Art” in *On Art by Marsden Hartley* 199.

71. Hartley, “The Education of the American Artist,” YCAL (reel 1369, frame 1252, AAA).

72. Athanassoglou-Kallmyer, *Cézanne and Provence* 11-12.