

150 Years of Wisconsin Printmaking

The earliest images of Wisconsin's landscape were made to supply the demand in Europe and the eastern United States for images of the frontier. Very soon after statehood in 1848, Wisconsin printers were making images of the new state that celebrated the growth of its cities and its architectural achievements. These images were often made by the immigrant German printers who had been trained as lithographers and set up presses in Milwaukee. These presses supplied all kinds of commercial needs, printing labels and handbills and even elaborate posters as well as city views. Around the turn of the century, artists explored the more picturesque aspects of their cities. By the beginning of the twentieth century, the views of Wisconsin towns served more as an opportunity for the artist to exercise personal style than a closely detailed description of the newest architecture.

By the 1930s and the Great Depression, Wisconsin printmakers' interest in picturesque landscape had changed into concern over social issues and images of people. The prints often celebrate the worker and ennoble the sufferings of the poor, rather than portraying the famous. Images of people also provide opportunities for experimentations with style, and artists' individual approaches to depicting the human form range from the carefully exact to the highly expressive.