



---

# RALPH BURTON (1905-1983)

## BIOGRAPHY

Ralph Wallace Burton was a well known Ottawa Valley artist who was a student of, regular painting companion and friend to A.Y. Jackson from the Group of Seven.

His many paintings and sketches, now housed at the City of Ottawa archives, Ottawa City Hall, small galleries and private collections, celebrate the rough beauty of Canadian landscapes, and the tenacity of man-made structures set in rugged natural and urban environments, particularly in the Ottawa Valley region.

Burton produced numerous sketches and paintings over his lifetime, with many of his finest executed in oil on birch plywood panels. He studied art professionally in Ottawa (1923–24) and was a student under A.Y. Jackson at the Banff School of Fine Arts (1947).

He later became a friend and painting companion to A.Y. Jackson, who greatly influenced his work. Over a period spanning more than 20 years, they travelled the lengths of Eastern Ontario and Quebec, as well as Alberta, Alaska and the Yukon territory together, depicting the environs, physical structures and, less frequently, the people of the regions they visited.

Burton was also widely regarded in the Ottawa region as a skilled art teacher, with one student remarking on Burton's 'love of colour,' 'assured draughtsmanship' and 'powerful observation' evident in his works. Another student and art historian observes that Burton's works are 'very rhythmical...straight lines were rare, things are always flowing and moving through his brush strokes and the variation in colours.'

Despite his successful art career, Burton often had to juggle full- and part-time work to support his family. As one biographical sketch recounts, 'Ralph began using his art as a bartering tool to acquire food, fuel, make car repairs — everything necessary for survival.' He also occasionally took on commissions for calendars and Christmas cards. During World War II, Burton enlisted in the RCAF and worked in Ottawa as an administrative war art officer.