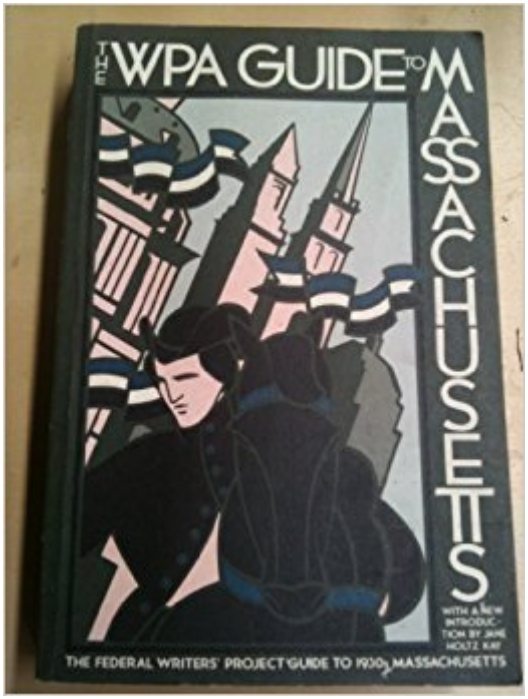
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The WPA Guide To Massachusetts: The Federal Writers' Project Guide To 1930s Massachusetts



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Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the words of its compilers, the WPA Massachusetts Guide, while "comprehensive," is "not an encyclopedia." It does, however, contain as much of the most important information about the state as could be crammed into a single 674-page volume. It opens with (1) an introductory section that includes general information on transportation, accommodations, recreation, and a calendar of important periodic events. Naturally, since the Guide describes conditions in the 1930s, it will not take the place of contemporary travel literature. (For example, it warns motorists that all automobiles must have at least one red tail light.) A (2) second section devotes 115 pages to the background of Massachusetts, from its geological beginnings, its native plants and animals, and its pre-colonial history, through such aspects of its more recent development as government, labor, architecture, literature, art and drama. A (3) third section (282 pages) is comprised of articles about 47 of the state's most important towns. These vary in length--the editors allotted 42 pages to Boston, but only 4 pages to Amherst. The (4) fourth section fills 222 pages with details of 44 possible tours around the state. These direct tourists over the appropriate roads and provide information about some of the smaller towns not treated in the previous section. The back matter (5) includes a chronology, a bibliography, and a useful 37-page index.This volume was produced by the Federal WritersÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢ Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), one of many New Deal efforts to deal with the economic crisis of the 1930s. The WPA was a relief agency that paid unemployed persons to perform various socially useful tasks. The Federal Writers' Project was one such undertaking. It produced various publications, but its guides to U.S. states and cities were its most important product. Most of the local spade work for these guides was performed by previously

unemployed workers. These local workers submitted their findings to their respective state offices; and these offices, manned by twenty or thirty professional writers and editors, compressed these submissions into the guides. Although the guides were compiled through a federal program, their actual publication was entrusted to the states. Some politicians considered the guides too liberal. (Antagonized by the Wisconsin Guide's praise of Progressive Party Governor Robert LaFollette, Republican legislators in that state refused to appropriate funds for its publication. The Wisconsin Library Association approved the manuscript, and it was eventually published by a commercial press.)Ray Allen Billington (1903-1981), a history professor, remembered for his studies of the American West, directed the Federal Writers' Project in Massachusetts. Field workers crisscrossed the state, researching local records, interviewing historians and long-time residents, and gathering information from government officials, geologists, architects, anthropologists, and travel experts. These efforts were supplemented by photographers who took pictures of noted landmarks and buildings around the state. The raw material from the local workers was directed to the Writers' Project's state office, where professional staffers boiled it down to a quantity that could be published in a single volume.Much of what has been said in this review is applicable to the guides for other states. While there are variations between them, all the guides followed the same general pattern. They are good introductions to the states they cover, and to the way things were in the 1930s (of course, much has changed since then). In addition to the state guides, there are guides to several cities. Many of the state and city guides have been republished and are currently available in print.

Excellent. Well bound, easy to handle, perfect for commuting. An interesting, well written, and still relevant view of Massachusetts. I hope the whole series becomes available in paperback; they are a good way to learn more about our nation. Read what you can find.

A real joy. It is amazing how useful (and accurate) it remains after all these years. Even the writing - despite its "workers of the world unite" overtones - has a freshness to it. Misses a few things - like Boston Harbor and the Harbor Islands - but who would have visited them in their polluted state in the 1930's?

fine

An excellent book for travelers who are interested in the roads of yesteryear. The City and Tour sections can't be beat! A must for any traveling to MASS.

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