First American Index of Design Started on Federal Art Project.

The first comprehensive effort to portray the finest examples of native American decorative and applied art from the earliest times to the present day has been begun by the Federal Art Project of the Works Progress Administration, according to announcement today by Helger Cahill, Federal Art Director.

The new project is called the Index of American Design. At present about two hundred workers formerly on the relief rolls are employed on this project. It is expected that a minimum of 500 will be employed at the peak, with scores of volunteer workers aiding the countrywide enterprise.

One of the several projects under the $3,000,000 Federal Art Program, the Index of American Design is the first effort to assemble a comprehensive graphic record of native art which will make available in one collection the authentic and basic American source material in the fields of furniture, costume, textiles, floor coverings, glassware, silver, metal work, ceramics, wood and stone carvings, household utensils, and other objects which because of excellence of design or workmanship have enriched American life in the past.

This material will be reproduced in a series of portfolios in black and white and in color, as well as in photography, for the use of designers, commercial artists, manufacturers, and other interested in the development of well-designed articles for everyday use. These portfolios will also be of great value to those interested in historical and social research, patriotic organizations, historical societies, and others who
hitherto have felt a lack of organized source material on American design. Recognizing the importance of the projected Index of American Design, manufacturers and department store owners in many parts of the country already have promised their active cooperation. Large stores in several cities are arranging to borrow from their owners and exhibit historical costumes, jewels, and household furnishings. These exhibits will simplify the problem of collecting materials from scattered areas for recording and will undoubtedly bring to light many fine objects which otherwise might have been missed.

Not only will this great source-book be of inestimable value to artists, designers, manufacturers, museums, libraries, and art schools, Mr. Cahill pointed out, but more important, the Index of Design will preserve in permanent record form priceless examples of American art which, because of their perishable nature, or for other reasons, stand in danger of being lost.

"There is today a need for a series of accurate illustrations depicting the rise and development of American design," Mr. Cahill said. "European nations have long realized the importance of gathering such material. They have published richly illustrated books on their decorative, applied, and folk arts, thus placing the full picture of the native arts of design at the disposal of their scholars, creative workers, and manufacturers. Familiarity with the roots of their design tradition has given the work of European designers a rich individuality. This quality has attracted American manufacturers to the European design market, with a consequent neglect of native American talent.

"There is no single comprehensive collection of pictorial data on American design comparable with the great European classics in the field. With a collection like that of the projected Index of American Design, typical examples of indigenous American character will be made available for study. It is certain that such a collection will stimulate the artist, designer, and manufacturers of articles of everyday use to build upon the American design traditions. Also, it will offer opportunity to
the student, teacher, research worker, and the general public to familiarize
themselves with this remarkably interesting material."

Among the things now being recorded by the Index of American
Design are costume and iron work in Maryland, Shaker crafts in New England,
Pennsylvania-German crafts, slave pottery of the Carolinas and Tennessee;
Spanish-American arts and crafts in New Mexico, Arizona, and California; a
great variety of material in New York, which has the largest project; early
rural American architecture, and painting and sculpture of the popular-
provincial type in various parts of the country.

"These things," said Mr. Cahill, "are authentic expressions
of the American spirit and American experience, and constitute an important
phase of the American culture pattern."

In architecture, the project artists will picture such
types of structure as typical Colonial homes, small houses designed by
"master-builder carpenters," schools and churches, commercial and public
buildings, and miscellaneous buildings such as mills, barns, and slave-houses.