

# POINTS WEST

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# CELEBRATE SUMMER WITH THE BUFFALO BILL HISTORICAL CENTER!



Harry Jackson (b. 1924), *Sacagawea*, 1980. Painted bronze, height 9.5 feet. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Richard J. Cashman, 5.80

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# WHEN THE WAGONS CAME TO A HALT

## SEPARATING WOMEN'S AND MEN'S ROLES ON THE OREGON FRONTIER

*by Cynthia D. Culver, Ph.D. Candidate  
University of California, Los Angeles*

*A man's  
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The promise of free land lured thousands of white Americans to travel 2,000 miles in covered wagons along the Oregon Trail between 1843 and 1860. They left family and friends behind on farms in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa and Missouri to seek financial opportunity in Oregon's 6,000-square-mile Willamette Valley. Life on the Oregon frontier was challenging. However, generous portions of free land in the Willamette Valley's fertile soil and mild climate enabled many settlers to experience living conditions superior to what they had left behind "back east." Not only did they succeed economically, but these Oregon settlers also succeeded in structuring the family in a way that more closely met their ideals than was the case before.

Nineteenth-century Americans believed in distinct social roles for women and men. For the developing middle class in cities like New York, this meant that men should go to work each day in a business or trade, and wives should remain at home, managing the domestic work and raising children. Such role distinctions, however, were not possible for urban laboring classes, nor for rural families. Even so, rural women in the East and Midwest did seek to focus their attention on domestic labor, and masculinity for rural men depended on their ability to free their wives from field labor to focus on this domestic work. But this goal of separate work roles remained a far-off dream for many farming families, particularly on the Midwestern and far Western frontiers. Nonetheless, even as women worked in the field and men helped with domestic tasks, they looked forward to a time when these gender role crossings would not be necessary.

Favorable economic conditions in the Willamette Valley enabled many rural families to gradually free women from field labor and men from domestic work. Even as husbands and wives worked together to build successful farms, their work roles became increasingly more gender defined, ultimately becoming clearly differentiated. But this ideal was achieved only with time.

Upon reaching Oregon, settlers sought to reestablish the separate gender roles they had known back east. However, during their first years there, it was a struggle to separate the work roles of men and women. The first few years of farming in the new land required intensive labor to clear, fence and plow the soil. Labor was scarce, forcing women and children to assist men with the field work. Men did the heaviest work, such as harvesting and hauling the cut wheat, but their wives and children helped to thresh and winnow the grain. In turn, men assisted their wives with strenuous domestic work such as laundry and churning butter. To protect their distinct identities as men and women, settlers referred to women's field labor and men's domestic work as "helping" their respective spouses. A man's masculinity or a woman's femininity was not questioned so long as they were only helping with tasks that were clearly not their own.

In time, male hired hands became more available, and women gradually withdrew from field labor and focused their attention on domestic work. Men and women divided their responsibilities on the farm roughly based on geography. Men were responsible for work outdoors in the barn and fields, where they plowed, planted and harvested crops such as wheat and hay. Women did work inside the house, including cooking, cleaning and providing childcare. Men produced grain crops and tended and slaughtered livestock, which their wives processed and used to feed their families. One woman who had settled in the Willamette Valley described a typical workday:

*Got up at five and got breakfast.*

*Went into the sitting-room and assisted at family prayers.*

*Prepared the little boy's dinner, washed him and made him ready for school*

*(his mother is away) on their homestead.*

*Skimmed and strained the milk.*

*Went to the henhouse to feed my setting-hens, swept and dusted the sitting-room.*

*Washed the break-fast dishes.*

*Then ironed till eleven*

*Got dinner, rested for an hour*

*Made the beds, worked at mending or some other necessary work for an hour or two,*

*then got supper, washed dishes again etc.*

*This is about a sample, with a change of sometimes instead of ironing I put in the time washing, house-cleaning, gardening etc, with many occasional stoppages and sidetracks.<sup>1</sup>*

Men often devoted full days of labor to a single, physically challenging task in the fields such as plowing. In contrast, as this journal entry reveals, women's lives were filled with a variety of small tasks in and around the home.



*Men who failed to provide for their families were subject to strong criticism, and some even faced divorce proceedings.*

Separate work spheres overlapped in and around the barnyard and garden. Within this borderland, husbands and wives cooperated, dividing the work based on the similarity of the task to the man's or woman's other work. For example, men plowed the soil for a garden, which their wives tended. Men also cared for large work animals such as horses and oxen, while their wives looked after the poultry. Within this borderland, labor was more frequently shared than in the more clearly "gendered" spaces of the fields or inside the home.

As additional male field hands freed Oregon women from field labor, the women were able to focus on domestic work, thus freeing their husbands from "women's work."

Withdrawing into the confines of their domestic space, women began to mold their daily lives to conform to the feminine ideal. But rural families could not afford to have women be merely ornamental. They believed that women should be homemakers first and foremost. As one woman explained to her daughter, "of course it is onely right that you should do your share in building up the home + makeing it a pleasant one for your husband."<sup>2</sup> Although fathers taught male work roles to their sons, mothers were primarily responsible for their children's practical and moral education. Settlers believed that women should create a comfortable home to which their husbands would eagerly return after long days of toil in the fields.

Even the most successful farmers relied on a partnership between themselves and their wives to make their farms run smoothly. Yet Oregonians expected men at least to appear to provide for their families without assistance from their wives, and they were highly critical of men who failed to do so. They expected men to support their families with their field labor, allowing their wives to focus on their domestic role. Men who failed to provide for their families were subject to strong criticism, and some even faced divorce proceedings. Over time, Willamette Valley settlers were able to live out their ideal gender roles more fully than they had done in the Midwest, men and women both contributing to the household economy within those roles.

With advancing age, however, farm couples were forced once again to redefine boundaries between men's and women's roles. Physical impairments forced those who lived past age sixty to withdraw from the more strenuous aspects of their work. Older women gradually turned from physically demanding household chores to higher-status domestic work, such as decorative needlework or attending to other's emotional and spiritual needs. And as husbands lost their ability to engage in field labor, they returned to assisting their wives with housework. Thus, while women did work that enhanced their status as proper women, elderly men did domestic tasks that challenged their masculinity. The boundaries that had been constructed to define masculine and feminine roles were again being challenged.

And so it happened, that from the time of settlement in Oregon's Willamette Valley, when men and women frequently assisted one another with whatever needed doing, to well-defined borders between male and female roles, and back again to the blurring of boundaries in old age, the working out of men's and women's roles had come full circle. Throughout their lives, settlers continued to negotiate the boundaries of men's and women's roles, adapting them to the realities of rural life in nineteenth-century Oregon.

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<sup>1</sup> Maria Locey married in Oregon City in 1860, then later moved from the Willamette Valley to eastern Oregon with her husband and children. She made this record in 1909 while living east of the Cascade Mountains, but her daily routine varied little from that of her fellow settlers who remained in the Willamette Valley. Locey Family Papers 1858-1924, Oregon Historical Society Library, Portland, MSS 2968.

<sup>2</sup> Lavinia Clingman to Ellenora Crewse, April 4, 1912, Clingman-Crewse Family Papers, Oregon Historical Society Library, Portland, MSS 2645.



DRAWN BY MARY HALLOCK FOOTE.

«A WOMAN . . . STOOD AT THE DOOR AND WATCHED HIM.»

In illustrations as well as in reality, Western women were frequently tied to the home because of domestic chores. Here, author and artist Mary Hallock Foote shows a woman at the door of her prairie dwelling. *A Woman ... Stood at the Door and Watched Him*. In "The Harshaw Bride," *The Century Magazine* 52:2 (June 1896): 229. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.



# Margaret Murie

## Sunlight Aura and Spine of Steel

by Val Hamm

Nestled in a log cabin in Grand Teton National Park, one of the environmental movement's most influential spokespersons — Margaret Murie — rests quietly in her wheelchair. At nearly 101 years of age, the woman who helped set the course of American conservation more than 70 years ago has aged and grown quiet. Her clear voice is no longer heard at congressional hearings; her pen no longer translates the beauty and purpose of nature onto paper.

Yet even in her declining years, Mardy's mere presence — and the legacy she and her husband, Olaus, created — still has force and power. "When people learn about Mardy, it inspires them to do what they can for wild places," said Nancy Shea, director of the Murie Center, a non-profit organization dedicated to the Murie family legacy of defending wilderness. "She's got the ability to move people toward action."

The "Fairy Godmother" of the conservation movement, Mardy is best known for her work to secure two major wilderness areas, Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming and Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. She also worked with other conservation leaders to bring about the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act, legislation that enabled Congress to set aside select areas — in national forests, wildlife refuges, parks and other federal lands — to be kept permanently unchanged by humans.

"She was a great influence," said Donald Murie, one of Mardy and Olaus' three children. "She has this sunlight aura that warms up the space around her. At the same time, she has a spine of steel and can nail you with her eyes."



Murie—A Youth in Alaska. The Murie Center, Moose, Wyoming; The Murie Collection.



## MARDY'S MIGRATIONS

Born in Seattle in 1902, Mardy and her family moved north to the booming gold town of Fairbanks, Alaska. This proved to be a turning point in Mardy's life. While her mother struggled to find her place in the middle of a vast wilderness, Mardy thrived on what she described as the "wild, free, clean, fragrant, untrampled" nature of the land. "I think my mother felt the unspeakable isolation more than she would ever say," Mardy wrote. "I realize now that I felt this in her, even while not feeling it myself at all. To an eager, curious child, everything was interesting."<sup>1</sup>

When Mardy was old enough to attend college, she headed south to "'The States' . . . that other world which seemed to have very little to do with us." Her family encouraged her to become a secretary, but after spending two years at Reed College in Oregon and one year at Simmons College in Boston, Mardy returned to her home state. She continued her business studies at the University of Alaska, and in 1924, became the

first woman to receive a degree from the university. "There was a beautiful, full commencement ceremony, for which notables of the Territory came and the whole town, it seemed turned out," wrote Mardy. One of those not present, however, was Olaus Murie, a pioneering Arctic field researcher — and Mardy's fiancé.

During Mardy's college years, she had expressed little serious romantic interest in any of her male companions. But when friends introduced her to Olaus in 1921, Mardy was intrigued. "She was



Olaus and Mardy Murie with son Martin, Old Crow Expedition, 1926, Alaska.  
The Murie Center, Moose, Wyoming; The Murie Collection.

quite a looker, and she was turning suitors down," explained Donald Murie. "She found my father mysterious, and it took a while for her to understand him."

"We walked home together in the rosy northern evening; all I can remember is that we agreed we didn't care to live in cities. He did not say: 'When may I see you again?' as all the rest of them did. He was not like any of the rest of them, and it took me quite a while to understand this," wrote Mardy.



Shortly after Mardy's graduation, Olaus returned from studying the caribou populations, and they married one early morning in 1924. Their marriage and the ensuing honeymoon — which included a steamer trip up the Koyukuk River and a dog sled ride through the untracked wildlands of some of the Alaskan Arctic — proved to be another turning point in Mardy's life. She transitioned from a college girl to the wife of a researcher and quickly adapted to life in the backcountry. "I did not try to put my hair into its usual Elsie Ferguson puffed and rolled style," she wrote soon after her marriage. "I parted it in the middle and combed it into two long braids to hang over my shoulders; this was the way it would have to be for the coming months."

*"We first loved Jackson Hole, the matchless valley at the foot of the Teton Mountains in Wyoming, because it was like Alaska; then we grew to love it for itself and its people."*

— Mardy Murie, in  
*Wapiti Wilderness*

Together, the two began a life dedicated to the land, people and wildlife they loved. Mardy served as Olaus' constant companion and research assistant, helping document and catalog the information and specimens he collected. "They formed a partnership that went beyond marriage," said her son, Donald. "Their work was number one in their lives. As children, we always kind of resented it. But it was something they had decided on before they married."

In 1927, the Muries moved to Wyoming to study the largest elk herd in North America, which was dying mysteriously. Soon they were settled and raising three children in a place they grew to love almost as much as Alaska. "We first loved Jackson Hole," Mardy wrote, "the matchless valley at the foot of the Teton Mountains in Wyoming, because it was like Alaska; then we grew to love it for itself and for its people."

During the summer, Mardy and the children would often accompany Olaus into the hills and sagelands. The family set up camp and lived outdoors for many months, an experience that Mardy relished and found more liberating than summer in town. "Camp life suited me; it was just naturally no trouble for me to settle into it," wrote Mardy. "Many women have asked me: 'How did you manage the children way off there in the hills?' Well, all I can say is that it was simpler there than in town. They were well fed, and because they were busy in the open air every moment, their appetites were wonderful; they grew and were brown and never had a sick moment that I can recall."

"Mardy loved being outdoors," said Shea, who has known Mardy for many years. "For her, it was freedom."

## INTO THE SPOTLIGHT

By 1937, Olaus had become a well-known and highly regarded naturalist — but he was also a disillusioned one. Tired of researching and writing reports that had little impact on the government's policy toward habitat protection, Olaus accepted a new position as director of the Wilderness Society. Soon he and Mardy were working with other key conservationists, including Howard Zahniser and Aldo Leopold, to promote environmental protection.



"We had become immersed in the conservation battle," Mardy wrote, "and enthralled and stimulated by it and by the interesting people we met in connection with it, and we both knew that life was blooming, expanding, growing because of the new work Olaus had undertaken. It demanded a great deal of us both."

*"She always spoke about what results she wanted to see and what we should be striving for."*

—Donald Murie, one of Mardy and Olaus' three children.

The Muries threw themselves into their new work. But when Olaus died in 1963, just months before the passage of the Wilderness Act, Mardy was stricken. "She was always at his side," said Donald Murie of his mother. In search of a new focus and purpose, Mardy traveled abroad to Africa and New Zealand with a friend. "After my father's death, she didn't know what she was going to do. But when she returned from her travels, she said 'I have to continue. I need to do this for Olaus.' She got more involved for him."

Thus emerged the "Fairy Godmother" in all her splendor. Mardy joined the Governing Council of the Wilderness Society, wrote articles and letters, lectured, lobbied, testified . . . and made her home a rest stop for scientists and a think tank for environmentalists passing through Wyoming. Her powerful presence and passionate vision had a dramatic impact on those she met and befriended. "I first met Mardy in the summer of 1973. I don't remember many of the details, but I do remember seeing her and knowing instantly who she was," said Bart Koehler, one of Mardy's good friends who serves as director of the Wilderness Support Center in Durango, Colorado. "She was glowing."

Mardy's presence—and her ability to articulate her goals and values—made her an influential public spokesperson. "It's hard to dismiss Mardy," says Shea. "She was very clear about what was important yet her approach was so gracious and inclusive." Part of Mardy's ability to captivate her audience lay in her unapologetic appeal to the emotions. "Mardy knew that people don't commit in the head."

In her now famous congressional testimony on behalf of the Alaska Lands Act in the late 1970s, Mardy said:

I am testifying as an emotional woman and I would like to ask you, gentlemen, what's wrong with emotion? Beauty is a resource in and of itself. Alaska must be allowed to be Alaska, that is her greatest economy. I hope the United States of America is not so rich that she can afford to let these wildernesses pass by, or so poor she cannot afford to keep them.

Mardy's vivid writing also appealed to people's emotions. Her words portrayed the potency, beauty and value of nature; at the same time, she warned against the increasingly antagonistic relationship between man and the wild. "It enlarges man's soul to know there is wilderness, whether he ever goes there, or not . . . (But) we are too many; we are increasingly frustrated and bludgeoned by the civilization we have built," wrote Mardy in the *Living Wilderness* magazine. "We increasingly flee to the wilderness, and we may kill the thing we love; we may trample it to death."

Mardy's lifelong crusade on behalf of the environment has earned her an abundance of awards. She received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Alaska, the prestigious Audubon Medal, and the 1998 Presidential Medal of Freedom. In 2002, she was also honored with the National Wildlife Federation's J.N. "Ding" Darling Conservationist of the Year award.



The organization's highest honor, the award is for a lifetime of achievement in the protection of wildlife and wild places.

Yet all of Mardy's awards and medals do not ensure a secure future for America's natural treasures. Oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, one of Mardy's favorite places, has been a thorn in her side. "Mardy likes to get things done," said Shea. "And for her, the Arctic Refuge is still not done."

With more than a century behind her, Mardy can no longer continue the fight herself. But now there are others, the younger generations she and Olaus helped inspire, to maintain the momentum of the conservation movement. "She always spoke about what results she wanted to see and what we should be striving for," said Murie. "She understood that it's a fight that never ends."

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<sup>1</sup> All quotes from Margaret Murie's writings, unless otherwise noted, are taken from either *Two in the Far North*, written by herself, or *Wapiti Wilderness*, which she co-authored with her husband Olaus Murie.

In her later years, Mardy Murie speaks at the White House. The Murie Center, Moose, Wyoming; The Murie Collection.







The first and second curators of the Buffalo Bill Museum, Mary Jester Allen leads her daughter Helen down a street in Seattle in 1909. The Buffalo Bill Historical Center owes its existence to the determination and dedication of this single mother working in a man's world. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Mary Jester Allen Collection. P.41.1



# LOG CABIN DREAMS

## Women, Domesticity and Museums in the Early Twentieth Century

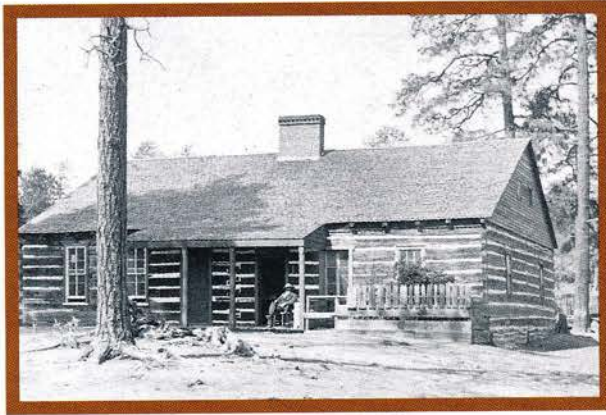
*by Juti A. Winchester, Ph.D. Ernest J. Goppert Curator  
of the Buffalo Bill Museum and Western American History*

Today's Buffalo Bill Historical Center surprises many first-time Cody visitors. A complex consisting of five large modern museums presenting a vision of the West through its historical, artistic and ethnological collections is the last thing someone would expect to find in a small, wind-swept town at the edge of the Big Horn Basin. Even more surprising is that the Center owes its beginnings to a single mother who had the vision, the energy, and the priceless social connections to get it started. While the Buffalo Bill Historical Center is unique among institutions worldwide, we must look to its origin as a historic house museum to understand how the Buffalo Bill Historical Center fits into women's history, the history of American museum-building, and history in general.

Women have  
traditionally been  
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preservers of culture.

Women have traditionally been regarded as the preservers of culture. An old adage reminds us that "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world," and history, from ancient to modern, is full of examples of women with no legal standing in their world making an impact on society by exerting their influence on husbands and sons. When the founding fathers considered what kind of government to set up in the infant United States, Abigail Adams gently reminded her husband to "remember the ladies," hoping that her sex could gain the vote, or at least some kind of legal status in the new republic. Women's hoped-for rights did not materialize, but an amused John Adams acknowledged women's hidden but very real power in his answer: "... in Practice, you know, We are the subjects. We have only the Name of Masters . . . ." Later, the idea of "republican motherhood" underscored the duty of women to become literate, because it was they who would pass on new American ideals of good citizenship to their children. Meanwhile, Native American parents, but especially Indian women, struggled to preserve and pass on to their children their language and traditions in the face of unbelievable pressure to assimilate and to forget their life-ways. Recognizing women as the bearers of culture, the assimilationist reformers sought to break Indians' links with the old ways by taking children out of their homes and placing them in boarding schools.





Henry Fleury smoking his pipe on the porch of the former Arizona Territorial Governor's Mansion in Prescott, circa 1890. Almost forty years later, this would become a museum of the pioneer experience established by Sharlot Hall. Sharlot Hall Museum Photo, Prescott, Arizona. Bu-G-554 pd

In the West, frontier schoolteachers formed the vanguard of expanding American cultural influence. While art and literature suggest that the American West was a nearly exclusively male domain, in reality these schoolteachers, so much a part of the westward movement, were almost invariably young, single, and female. Like westering men, young women found adventure and a way to make a living for themselves in the new territories, sometimes at the head of classes full of students nearly their own age. There were not many "acceptable" occupations open to

single women on the frontier, and with few exceptions they gave up their positions if they married, as housekeeping and family obligations were considered the first duty of women. Single women serving as schoolteachers helped bring a kind of civilization to the West.

Social class, disposable wealth and societal change comprised the factors that made it possible for women to make concrete contributions to cultural preservation in the United

**In the West, frontier schoolteachers formed the vanguard of expanding American cultural influence.**

States in the early twentieth century. Women have always worked, and this is especially true of women of the lower classes; thus cultural institutions have not traditionally been the province of women in any but the middle and upper classes. Suffrage and other esoteric interests became the business of women with the money and the leisure time to pursue occupations other than providing for their families; and some even envisioned themselves as culture bearers for the nation, and not just their immediate kin. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the passage of property rights laws allowed women to legally keep the fruits of their own labors or goods they inherited instead of surrendering it all to their husbands. At the same time, Andrew Carnegie publicly espoused the "Gospel of Wealth," which stated that the wealthy bore a certain responsibility to use their money for the benefit of mankind. Not believing in simple charity but

engaged with the idea of helping people to help themselves, Carnegie devoted incredible sums of money to establishing libraries, museums and universities. Women's voluntary organizations, such as local branches of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, devoted themselves to establishing and running libraries, and with "the Star-Spangled Scotsman's" aid, "Carnegie Libraries" sprang up in communities all over the United States. But though women were taking a more active role in the advancement of American culture, surprisingly, men rather than women remained firmly in control of the nation's museums. Boards of trustees, administrators and curators were all educated, powerful, and wealthy men.



Women's contributions to the museum world began slowly and under the guise of the separate domestic sphere deemed so appropriate for females. Again, as women gained wealth of their own through changes in property laws, they began to invest in art. In the late nineteenth century, however, most of even the wealthiest women confined their collections to "distaff arts" such as textiles, lace, embroidery, and domestic items rather than fine art. As collections accumulated in museum vaults, male curators had no interest in interpreting or displaying them and gladly left their care and arrangement to women volunteers. In time, female professional curators were hired to manage textile collections held by major museums in the East. Later, individuals such as Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney helped open the field of fine art collecting to women by simply flouting convention and acquiring pieces she found interesting, by financing young and struggling artists, and by supporting fine art museums, even founding one of her own.



Cody family members as well as the general public donated materials to the Buffalo Bill Museum. Here, Harvey P. Cody presents Ned Buntline's Civil War sword to Mary Jester Allen at the 1953 Cody Family Reunion. Present are, l to r, Dr. and Mrs. Frank McClanahan, Hiram S. Cody, Ernest W. Cody, Harvey P. Cody, Mary Jester Allen, and Joe Hufford (kneeling). Jack Richard Photo. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Mary Jester Allen Collection. P.41.501



Historic house museums proved to be another outlet for women to express their cultural interest. Ladies who might not otherwise become involved in the museum establishment could become comfortable with and even enthusiastic about house museums, for what sector of society would better know how to represent a domestic space than those who occupied and ran them? In the early 1920s, the Women's Roosevelt Memorial Association set out to reconstruct Theodore Roosevelt's birthplace in New York City and began a national campaign to raise funds to purchase the property, erect the building, and furnish it with appropriate furniture. Among the women moving and shaking this project was the journalist Mary Jester Allen. A New York resident, divorced with one child, and niece of William F. Cody, Mrs. Allen desired to memorialize her famous uncle in some way and the Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace effort inspired her. With the help of other members of the Cody family and residents of Cody, Wyoming, she developed her idea of founding a historic house museum resembling Buffalo Bill's TE Ranch and filling it with memorabilia and art demonstrating not only his remarkable life but the whole experience of the westward movement. Moreover, domestic space and the education of the young were still women's provinces, even if the establishment in question was a house meant to be a museum. The Buffalo Bill Museum would send all the "right" messages.



The Buffalo Bill Museum in Cody, soon after its 1927 completion. Log cabins served as icons of American energy and self reliance. F.J. Hiscock, Photographer. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Mary Jester Allen Collection. P.41.502





Mary Jester Allen went to great lengths to bring people of wealth and influence to Cody. Here, Mrs. Nicholas Longworth (nee Alice Roosevelt) and friend visit the Buffalo Bill Museum, probably in the early 1930s. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Mary Jester Allen Collection. P.41.500



Log cabins had long held the nation's imagination, and the humble dwelling had become an icon of American progress and self-reliance; two ideas that William F. Cody symbolized for many.

Mrs. Allen's choice of a log cabin to represent Buffalo Bill's legacy was not accidental. Log cabins had long held the nation's imagination, and the humble dwelling had become an icon of American progress and self-reliance, two ideas that William F. Cody symbolized for many. A log cabin set in a comparatively modern location such as the town of Cody in the 1920s would underscore the message of Buffalo Bill's contribution in the taming of the frontier, in bringing order from chaos. Mrs. Allen claimed that in her last visit with her uncle, he had suggested to her the idea of turning the TE into a ranch museum. This is unlikely, given the remote location of the property. Nevertheless, a log structure was erected in Cody that was supposed to be a copy of the original ranch house. Photographs of both

structures show that the Buffalo Bill Museum building is not a replication as much as it is an idealized construction of the place that Mrs. Allen would have had Cody call home. The museum opened to the public on July 4, 1927.

Mary Jester Allen had big plans for the memorial to her uncle. Influenced by the burgeoning Western art world, she attempted to found an art colony on the museum grounds so that artists could paint landscapes based on actual Western scenes, and she laid plans for a geological museum. She used her connections in the East to stir up interest in the tiny institution, and she found a receptive audience for her ideas and ambitions. She grabbed any celebrity traveling through the area for publicity, including President Calvin Coolidge, who ended up dedicating one of the museum's doors. Mrs. Allen and her supporters solicited collections for the museum, and she ran it herself, living in a small apartment in the building. She remained in control of the Buffalo Bill Museum until shortly before her death in August 1960.

At least one other woman founded a pioneer museum in a log cabin. A veteran of the frontier herself, Sharlot M. Hall was a poet and the first woman to hold territorial office in Arizona. Miss Hall emigrated from Kansas to Prescott, Arizona, as a child in 1881 and had the opportunity to hear the stories of old-timers in the region. Among the people she met was Henry Fleury, who had accompanied the governor's party to the territory in 1863. Fleury had known all of the early pioneers, and as personal secretary to the first governor, he had helped build the cabin that served as residence and meeting place for the territorial legislature that still stood in downtown Prescott. No one is sure what influenced Sharlot Hall to single-mindedly pursue the preservation of the old log mansion, but she did travel to Washington, D.C. and New York City in 1925 for the inauguration of Calvin Coolidge, and perhaps there she observed the efforts of the Women's Roosevelt Memorial Association. As territorial historian earlier in the century, Miss Hall had collected oral histories and memorabilia belonging to the pioneers who had come to the Southwest, and now she wanted to preserve this precious resource and present it to the public. She gained a lease for life from the city of Prescott and, inspired by Fleury's tales of early Arizona, set about restoring the historic Governor's Mansion to its earlier appearance. She filled it with her life's collections and opened it to the public on June 28, 1928.





Sharlot Hall in the new museum, about 1930. The passion and drive of women such as Miss Hall and Mrs. Allen did much to preserve culture and history in the West. Sharlot Hall Museum Photo, Prescott, Arizona. P0-142-pf



Like Mary Jester Allen, Sharlot Hall pursued collections and used her political influence to establish and expand her small monument to the pioneer experience, and like Mrs. Allen, Miss Hall remained single and lived in a small apartment on the premises until her death in 1948.

Two museums, each memorializing the pioneer experience, opening within a year of each other, each founded by a single woman in a log cabin—could this really be a coincidence? We will never know for sure, because correspondence between the two women has not been found, if it ever existed at all. However, both Sharlot Hall and Mary Jester Allen were professional writers, and they moved in some of the same social circles. They were both most active in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Each woman had a passion for history and for educating future generations about what they had seen themselves. Both also recognized the necessity of drawing the attention of the well heeled to their institutions. As for the museums, both are products of the times in which they were founded, and both reflect the changing nature of women's roles in the preservation of American history and culture. Around the nation, there are other examples of historic house museums established at roughly the same time and operated by women. Historic house museums, whether in a log cabin or in a traditional home, are not only monuments to the subjects they memorialize but also testaments to the changing status and opportunity for the traditional preservers of American culture. The West is richer for them. ■

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<sup>1</sup> The Adams' letters are quoted in Mary Beth Norton and Ruth M. Alexander, eds., *Major Problems in American Women's History* (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath and Company, 1996), p 77.

#### SUGGESTED READING

Kathleen D. McCarthy, *Women's Culture: American Philanthropy and Art, 1830–1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Richard A. Bartlett, *From Cody to the World: The First Seventy-Five Years of the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association* (Cody: The Buffalo Bill Historical Center, 1992).

Margaret F. Maxwell, *A Passion for Freedom: The Life of Sharlot Hall* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1982).





Mary Jester Allen in front of the fireplace in the Buffalo Bill Museum, 1953. Mrs. Allen actually lived in the museum from the time of its construction until her death in 1960. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Mary Jester Allen Collection. P.69.570





Rosa Bonheur (1822–1899), *Col. William F. Cody*, 1889. Oil on canvas, 18.5 x 15.25 inches.  
Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Given in memory of William R. Coe and Mai Rogers Coe. 8.66



# Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists of the West?

By Sarah E. Boehme, Ph.D.  
The John S. Bugas Curator  
Whitney Gallery of Western Art

*Why have there been no great women artists of the West?  
Or, rephrased, why is there no woman who is the equivalent of Frederic Remington  
or Charles M. Russell?*

This question can seem startling, because, as a rhetorical device, it brings unstated issues into a forum for examination. It is actually a variation on a question posed over thirty years ago by art historian Linda Nochlin. In a groundbreaking essay, Nochlin asked, "Why have there been no great women artists?"<sup>1</sup> She took the lead in boldly presenting a question, in writing, in a national art magazine, which usually only surfaced in late-night talk sessions and verbal sparring matches on gender issues. Nochlin acknowledged the efforts to research neglected women artists of the past but noted that there was no woman who could be considered the equivalent of Michelangelo, Rembrandt or Picasso.

In examining the question, Nochlin revealed assumptions that governed the study of art. She pointed out a prevailing viewpoint — that art is a form of personal expression that comes forth from a genius, and thus she confronted the assumption, lurking behind the question, that women must not be capable of artistic greatness or else some genius would have emerged. She asserted that instead of accepting the assumptions behind this question, we should examine the conditions and institutions necessary for producing art and succeeding with it, such as study and apprenticeship.

Nochlin's powerful essay influenced the way art history has been written in the subsequent decades, yet the issues raised by her have not yet been exhausted and continue to resurface.<sup>2</sup> Since some conditions that produced Western American art are different from those of the European past, it is illuminating to examine Nochlin's argument and apply it to Western art.

Nochlin drew attention to the types of education necessary for becoming an artist from the period of the Renaissance through the nineteenth century. Drawing from the nude (especially the male nude) was an essential part of artistic training but was an experience considered inappropriate for women. Therefore, women did not have the opportunity to use a model to understand human anatomy and the postures of a figure. Nochlin pointed out that art develops through a professional system, and in the social



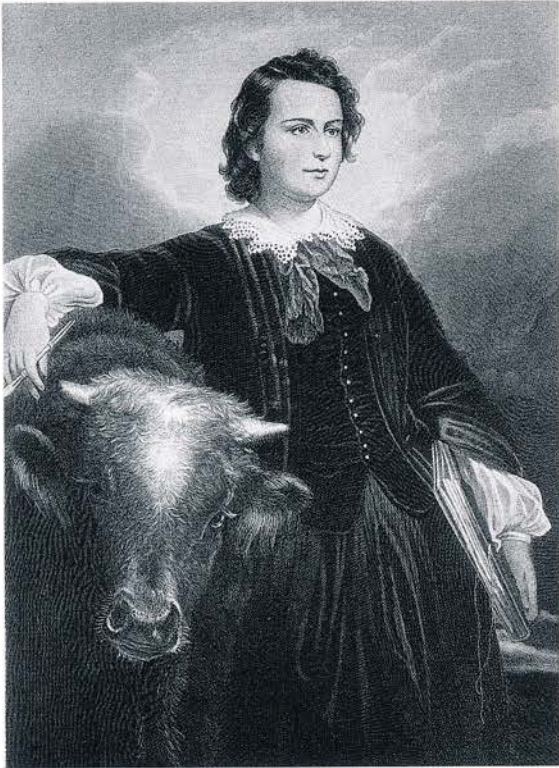
conditions of the past, women did not have professions. They were unlikely to gain admittance to the academies or be accepted into the circles of influence that brought awards and patronage.

Looking at the careers of the small number of women who did become artists reveals the importance of education and access. Almost all were daughters of artist-fathers (or, in the nineteenth century, had some close connection to an artist.) With a father who was an artist, a young woman could learn about artistic materials and processes and she would have

an opportunity to train as an apprentice without venturing outside the family. As an example, Nochlin looked at Rosa Bonheur (1822–1899), a successful and accomplished French artist of the late nineteenth century “in whom all the various conflicts, all the internal and external contradictions and struggles, typical of her sex and profession, stand out in sharp relief.”<sup>3</sup> Rosa Bonheur was the daughter of an artist, Raimond Bonheur, and sister of another artist, Isidore Bonheur. Her family situation was influential in other ways; her father was a member of the Saint-Simonian community, a socialist faction that espoused the equality of women. Rosa Bonheur chose to specialize in animal paintings; thus she concentrated on animal anatomy. Instead of drawing the male human nude, she honed her graphic skills by assiduous study in slaughterhouses and at livestock sales—unconventional settings for a woman. Bonheur obtained permission from the Parisian Prefect of Police to wear trousers, clothing which she explained did not hamper her work as traditionally female clothing did. Yet she still found it necessary to assert her femininity. Nochlin saw the conflicts in Bonheur’s psyche as factors that subverted her confidence.

Rosa Bonheur’s unconventionality brought her into contact with the American West, as exemplified by that most famous of Americans, Col. William F.

“Buffalo Bill” Cody, whose portrait she painted. Author Dore Ashton describes Bonheur as an “. . . Americanophile. She identified America with the liberation of women and with a progressive attitude that conformed to the Saint-Simonian principles of her youth.”<sup>4</sup> Entranced with American Indians as examples of the concept of the “noble savage,” Bonheur had studied the works of George Catlin, carefully copying drawings of Indian implements from his published books. When the Wild West came to Paris in 1889, Rosa Bonheur obtained permission from Buffalo Bill to sketch daily at the encampment. As Bonheur described, “I was thus able to examine their tents at my ease. I was present at family scenes.



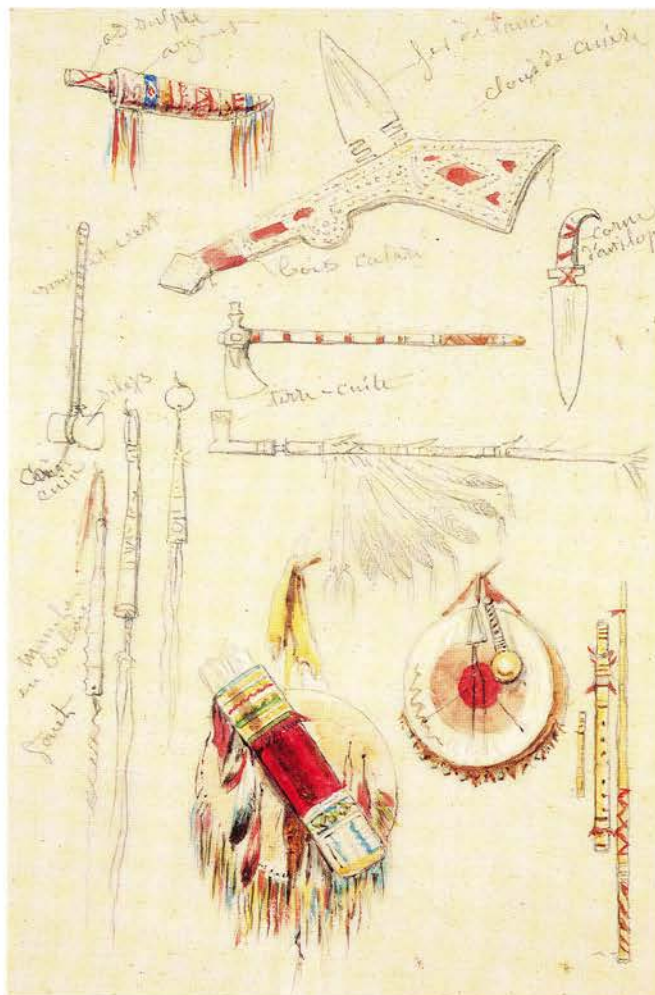
Edouard-Louis Dubufe (1820–1883), artist, and Oliver Pelton (1799–1882), engraver, *Rosa Bonheur*, after 1857. Steel engraving on paper, 6.5 x 4.5 inches. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Gift of the Jack Rosenthal family, Casper, Wyoming, 1993. 21.93. Dubufe portrayed Bonheur traditionally as an artist with sketching materials but also indicated her unconventionality with her short, cropped hair. He incorporated one of her bovine subjects as if it were the artist’s muse.



I conversed as best I could with warriors and their wives and children. made studies of the bisons, horses, and arms. I have a veritable passion, you know, for this unfortunate race and I deplore that it is disappearing before the White usurpers."<sup>5</sup> Bonheur was able to tramp among the tents of the Wild West performers, but only in her imagination could she experience the West the way her artistic model, George Catlin, had.

Travel in the West, rather than drawing from the nude or admission into academies, became a factor essential for the artists of the American West, because it supplied firsthand knowledge of the land and its people. Catlin journeyed thousands of miles, visiting over fifty Indian tribes, as he said, "alone, unaided and unadvised."<sup>6</sup> Alfred Jacob Miller was hired by Captain William Drummond Stewart to record his adventures in the Rocky Mountains as they traveled with a caravan taking supplies to trade with mountain men. Thomas Moran was able to visit the site that would become Yellowstone National Park because he joined Ferdinand Hayden's government exploring party. Frederic Remington reported on conditions in the West by traveling with the U.S. Army. Social circumstances in the nineteenth century made it highly unlikely that a woman could attempt such experiences alone or be accepted into the company of traders, explorers or the military.

The type of academic training required in Europe was not easily available in America. Although some self-taught artists, like George Catlin, could achieve success, rudimentary learning was necessary. Painter Seth Eastman, an officer in the United States Army, received his artistic training in drawing classes at the United States Military Academy at West Point. When he was stationed on the frontier at Fort Snelling, he was accompanied by his wife, Mary Henderson Eastman. She had creative aspirations but channeled those by writing, an art that can be approached without the importance of learning techniques such as perspective and mixing colors on a palette.



Rosa Bonheur (1822–1899), *Indian Artifacts, Weapons and Pipes*, after 1841. Watercolor on paper, 9.5 x 6 inches. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Whitney Purchase Fund. 14.88.1. Bonheur made copies of artifacts illustrated in George Catlin's *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs and Conditions of the North American Indians*, 2 vols., (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841).





Fra Dana, *On the Window Seat*, oil on canvas, undated, 16 x 19 inches. The Montana Museum of Art and Culture, permanent collection. 49–513

Perhaps the most anti-institutional artist, Charles M. Russell built his identity around his experiences as a cowboy, but he really only succeeded with art as a profession after he married Nancy Cooper. Her management of his career prodded the artist to go east, where he learned from other painters, obtained commissions for illustrations, and exhibited his works publicly. That encouragement and access to national exposure took Russell beyond the status of being a Montana folk artist.

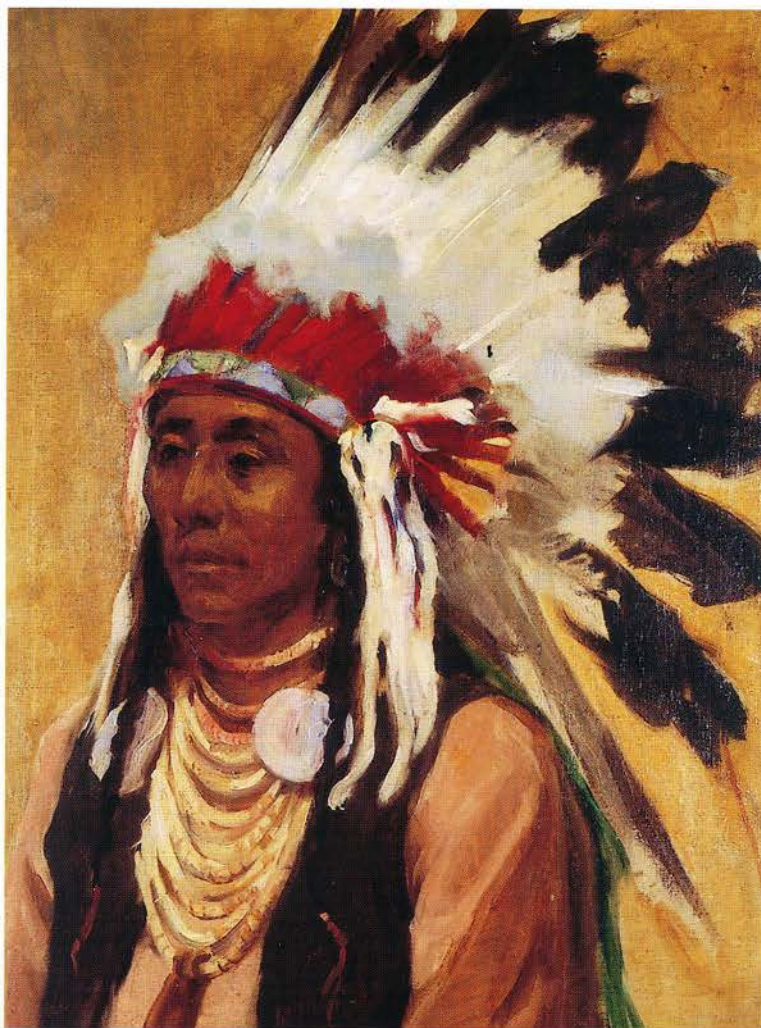
By contrast, the effects of the absence of encouragement experienced can be seen in the career of the painter Fra Dana (1874–1948), a woman who sought to reconcile her dream of being an artist with the reality of living in the West.<sup>7</sup> Fra Broadwell Dinwiddie attended art school in Cincinnati, where she met Joseph Henry Sharp, with whom she would continue to have contact throughout her life.

Even though there were women students at the Academy, they were often regarded as “fashionable” young ladies rather than serious students. The women on the faculty were given the introductory classes, not the advanced ones. When Fra Dinwiddie married Edwin L. Dana, a Wyoming rancher, she forged an agreement with him whereby she would be able to travel each year and continue her artistic studies. Fra Dana sought to balance the artist’s life with the domestic life, but in the end she did not maintain this ambitious plan.



Although she produced a small body of interesting paintings, she did not develop a career in the way that Joseph Henry Sharp did. Her marriage and the demands of ranch work became distractions from her goals, whereas Sharp's marriage to Addie Byram provided domestic comfort and promotion for his goals.

Artists like Fra Dana are being rediscovered; their art provides aesthetic enrichment and their biographies give life stories against which we can measure our own.<sup>8</sup> Even the stories of disappointments and discouragement provide instruction when seen against a backdrop not just of personal experience but also of the cultural factors that influence success and accomplishments. Linda Nochlin's seminal essay reminds us that art is not merely talent but is work that must be nurtured. The West, which can be inhospitable and harsh in climate and culture, has been an especially unpromising environment for women artists in the past. Perhaps only time will tell if, or how, the situation has changed. ■



Fra Dana, *Ah Lach Chee A Koos*, oil on canvas, undated, 31 x 24 inches, The Montana Museum of Art and Culture, permanent collection. 49-518

<sup>1</sup> Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?," first published in *Art News*, Vol. 69, No. 9, (January, 1971). Reprinted in Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1988).

<sup>2</sup> In its March 2003 issue, *Art News* published an article "Who Are the Great Women Artists" with the introduction, "Thirty years ago *Artnews* published an essay arguing that social forces had impeded women artists from becoming as great as the male masters. We asked experts if the consensus has changed — and how."

<sup>3</sup> Nochlin, *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays*, 170.

<sup>4</sup> *Rosa Bonheur: A Life and a Legend*, text by Dore Ashton, illustrations and captions by Denise Browne Hare (New York: The Viking Press, 1981), 144.

<sup>5</sup> Ashton, 155.

<sup>6</sup> George Catlin, *Catlin's Indian Collection*, (London: George Catlin, 1848), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Dennis Kern, *The Fra Dana Collection from the University of Montana Museum of Fine Arts*, (Billings: Yellowstone Art Center, 1992). Exhibition pamphlet, also published by University of Montana.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example Phil Kivinick and Marian Yoshiki-Kivinick, *An Encyclopedia of Women Artists of the American West* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998).





Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), *Red Poppy (Red Poppy VI)*, 1928. Oil on canvas, 35.5 x 29.75 inches. Private Collection.



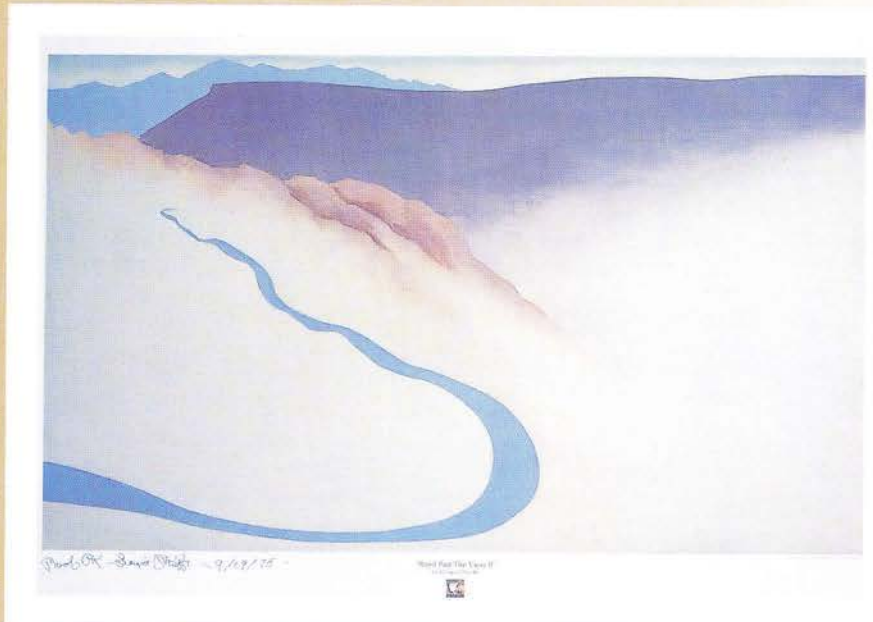
# Why are there no great women artists of the West? But, wait, there's Georgia O'Keeffe.

Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986) stands as an important figure in American art with her stunning articulations of floral patterns, bone shapes, and stark land—and cloud—scapes.<sup>1</sup> She chose to live in the West and used the West as an inspiration, but like

many artists who do not wish to be categorized, she would not have wanted to be labeled as a Western artist, or as a woman artist, or with any label that might suggest artistic limitations. Her accomplishments as an artist, her fame, and her popularity thrust her into the pantheon of Western artists as the exceptional woman, but her modernity signals the upheaval of change.

Born in Sun Prairie, Wisconsin, O'Keeffe studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, the Art Students League in New York and with artists such as Arthur Wesley Dow. She taught art in Texas and South Carolina

but formed a determination to paint rather than to teach. A portfolio of her works was shown to Alfred Stieglitz, the important photographer and founder of the modernist 291 Gallery in New York, who gave her an exhibition, an important step in establishing her career. She and Stieglitz would later marry, each pursuing an artistic career, but theirs was not a conventional domestic environment. In 1929 O'Keeffe discovered New Mexico, a place that became important for her, but not for Stieglitz, so this Western environment of desert was hers alone. She returned there for sketching trips while maintaining contacts with the New York art world and eventually settled in New Mexico, a state where, after her death, a museum was founded to honor her artistic legacy. The changes that revolutionized the artistic world in the early twentieth century affected not only the very forms of art but also the institutions that brought art, like that of O'Keeffe's, to the public eye. ■



Georgia O'Keeffe (1887–1986), *Road Past The View II*, 1975.  
Lithograph on paper, 21.5625 x 35.875 inches. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming.  
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jack O'Grady. 25.00.1

<sup>1</sup>The literature on Georgia O'Keeffe is voluminous. See, for example, Barbara Buhler Lynes, *Georgia O'Keeffe, Catalogue Raisonné* (New Haven, Washington, D.C., and Abiquiu: Yale University Press, National Gallery of Art and The Georgia O'Keeffe Foundation, 1999) and Peter H. Hassrick, ed., *The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum* (New York: Harry N. Abrams in association with the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum, 1997).



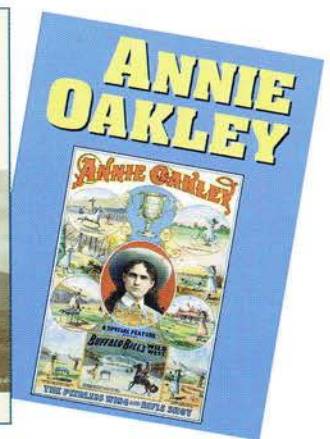
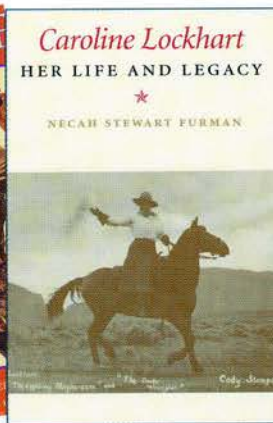
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N. C. Wyeth (1882-1945), *The Wild, Spectacular Race for Dinner*, 1904-1905. Oil on canvas, 38.125 x 26 inches. Buffalo Bill Historical Center, Cody, Wyoming. Gift of John M. Schiff, 44.83

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