

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

MARGARET COBB AILSHIE  
(Advertiser Column By Judith Austin)

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The merger of the Idaho Statesman's parent corporation, Federated Publications, with the Gannett newspapers has sent us back to the earlier records of the paper and its previous, private owners. A look at the Cobb-Ailshie manuscript collection in the Idaho State Historical Society's files tells us some things not only about the family which owned and ran the paper for seventy years, but also about what can be learned from the papers and other memorabilia of almost any family--at any time, in any community, in any economic or social position.

Calvin Cobb came to Idaho from Chicago in 1887, and two years later he made two major investments: he purchased the Idaho Daily Statesman from its long-time editor Milton Kelly, and he built his family a house. That house, on the block between Second and Third, Idaho and Bannock is now occupied by the Imperial Plaza. The Cobb family lived there until 1959.

A photograph in the Idaho State Historical Society's Collection shows Calvin Cobb and his family. Cobb's wife, Fanny Lyon, died in 1917; his son, Lyon (who was in the lumber business, working in one of the ancestors of the Boise Cascade Corporation) died in 1921. And it was his daughter, Margaret, who carried on his interests in the city of Boise, the state of Idaho, and the newspaper business.

Margaret Cobb was born in Chicago in 1883 and educated in Boise and at Miss Porter's School in Farmington, Connecticut. As best as we can tell from bits and pieces of correspondence which have been preserved, she led an active social life as a young

woman in Boise and also made trips east to her relatives in Chicago and elsewhere. Letters written to her and her father at the time of Lyon's death show that their circle of friends was large and scattered literally all over the world.

Margaret herself widened and somewhat changed that circle. After her mother's death and before the end of World War I, she joined the American Red Cross and was sent first to New York (where she helped cope with the great influenza epidemic of 1918) and then to France, to run a canteen for servicemen. She remained in France for a year--from late summer, 1918, to August of 1919--serving meals, attending dances for servicemen, at one point visiting the grave of a young officer from Boise who had been killed in France. The various "business" papers from the year in France are included in the collection, with lists of canteen property, prices of food, dance programs, travel orders, and the like. But also in the collection are letters--postcards from troop embarkation points, letters reporting safe arrival in the states or the conditions of new posts--from many of the young men whom Margaret befriended at the canteen. There are even some letters from many years later, and most of them note that she has kept in touch with the soldiers by letters herself.

After the deaths of Lyon and Calvin Cobb, the files in our collection peter out. Margaret Cobb became publisher of the Statesman in 1928, on the death of her father, and when she died she left the paper to its general manager for many years, James Brown. Most of her life during those thirty-one years was devoted to the Statesman, and her influence can be read in its pages. But her life and influence as a bright and friendly young woman of varied interests is to be found in the everyday letters and papers she left to us.

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