

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

CAROL RYRIE BRINK - 1895-1981

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Carol Ryrie Brink wrote a comprehensive body of fiction that captured the natural setting and personal challenges of life in Idaho. In addition to her Idaho works, she wrote an impressive twenty-seven books for adults and children over a lifetime of eighty-five years. She is known to be one of the most prolific and enduring of all Idaho authors.

Ryrie was born on December 28, 1895, the daughter of Alex Ryrie and Henrietta Watkins Ryrie; however, tragedy marked her early years. Her father died of consumption in 1900. The 1901 murder of Henrietta's father, Dr. W. W. Watkins, contributed to her mother's suicide in 1904 after a failed second marriage. Carol was raised by a grandmother, Caroline Woodhouse Watkins, who shared her love of storytelling with her. During her childhood, Carol spent her time reading books and writing her own stories. Her best childhood friend was Tommy, her Iceland pony on whose back Carol rode through the streets of Moscow and the Idaho countryside.

After a lonely, but not unhappy childhood with her grandmother, Carol Ryrie attended the University of Idaho where she became a popular figure. She wrote for the Argonaut as the society page editor, and wrote several student plays. However, Carol found Moscow too small and transferred to the University of California-Berkeley where she received her B.A. Degree in 1918. Shortly after her graduation, she married longtime friend and University of Idaho math professor Raymond Brink. They lived for forty years in Minnesota and had one son and a daughter. Her family was a priority, but she managed to write "sometimes at the kitchen sink, on the end of the ironing board, or when the children were in bed."

Carol Brink won the Newbery Medal in 1936 for her second book Caddie Woodlawn, a children's book based on her grandmother's stories. Seven of her books deal with life in Idaho; three of which are children's books entitled All Over Town (1939), Louly (1974), and Two Are Better Than One (1968). Three remaining books are an Idaho trilogy. The first, Buffalo Coat (1944) is based on Carol's family and Moscow history. Strangers in the Forest (1959) followed, and was based on her Aunt Elsie Watkin's experiences on a timber homestead in northern Idaho. The last of the trilogy was perhaps the most difficult to write. Snow in the River (1964) is an autobiographical novel about the three Scottish Ryrie brothers, in which she also writes of her mother's death. The fourth book, Four Girls on a Homestead (1977) is a work of non-fiction, also illustrated by Carol Brink, and is based on her experiences with three friends who backpacked into her Aunt Elsie's isolated cabin.

Besides winning the Newbery Medal, Carol Brink received a number of honors. She was awarded an honorary Doctorate of Literature from the University of Idaho in 1965, the Friends

of American Writers Award in 1956, the McKnight Family Literary Medal in 1965, the Southern Council for Children's Literature Award in 1966, and the National League of American Pen Women's Prize in 1966. Both Brink Hall and the children's room in the Moscow/Latah County Library system are named for her.

Brink died in Wesley Palms, California on August 15, 1981. According to her biographer, Mary Reed, Carol Brink "strove to live in a way that would not harm others, to never waste a day, and to make the most of her life."

By Guila Ford and Elizabeth Jacox

(This information has not been edited.)

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