

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

MARY HALLOCK FOOTE - 1847-1938

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Mary Hallock Foote was a nationally recognized illustrator and writer. Though she had achieved prominence prior to moving West, most of her most significant fiction was written during her twelve years in Boise, from 1884 to 1896. Her illustrated series, "Pictures of the Far West," with accompanying text, help us envision a unique Western perspective.

Mary Hallock was born in Milton, New York on November 19, 1847, and was raised on the Quaker family farm in the Hudson River Valley. She received a good education and quickly gained national prestige with her illustrations. She published her first drawings in 1867 in A. D. Richardson's Beyond the Mississippi. Later, in the 1870's she acquired professional recognition as an illustrator for national magazines. By the 1890's she gained the title "dean of women illustrators," and was elected to the National Academy of Women Painters and Sculptors.

She married Arthur DeWint Foote, a mining engineer, in 1867. He was part of a select group who helped shape the West and made the development of mining in the West a reality. His career took the couple to California, Colorado, and Idaho. While in Idaho, she wrote two novels. The Chosen Valley (1892), that told of the building of a dam in the Snake River Valley and Coeur d'Alene (1894) which described a struggle between miners and mine owners in northern Idaho. Income from one of her novels enabled the Foote's to build their home on the Boise River in 1885. Known as the "Stone House in the Canyon" it was located just below Lucky Peak Dam.

Though she moved to California, she remained intrigued with the children and working-class culture of Idaho. She published The Cup of Trembling (1895), The Little Fig-Tree Stories (1899), The Desert and Other Sown (1902), A Touch of Sun and Other Stories (1903), and Edith Bonham (1917), all of which are set in Idaho. She ceased writing novels after she published The Ground Swell in 1919.

In 1888 and 1889 Foote was hired by Richard Watson Gilder to do a series known as the "Pictures of the Far West" for the Century Magazine. She illustrated eleven drawings and wrote a brief sketch of each. According to William Allen Rogers, a leading western illustrator of the time, "there is a charm about her black-and-white drawings which cannot be described, but it may be accounted for by the fact that, more than any other American illustrator, she lived the pictures from day to day

which she drew so sympathetically." Mary Hallock Foote died June 25, 1938 in Hingham, Massachusetts.

Her memoirs were published posthumously in 1972 by the Huntington Library under the title A Victorian Gentlewoman in the Far West. Wallace Stegner based Angle of Repose partially on her life, and the Idaho State University Press published The Idaho Stories and Far West Illustrations of Mary Hallock Foote in 1988.

By Guila Ford and Elizabeth Jacox

(This information has not been edited.)

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