

DRAFT

Pursuit of Art: Grace French, Pioneer Artist and Teacher

By Donna Fisher and Reid Riner

For The Journey Museum website on Grace French

Preface

The exhibition, **In Pursuit of Art: Grace French, Pioneer Artist and Teacher**, originated at The Journey Museum in Rapid City, South Dakota, in 2007. French. Research upon which this paper is based also provided material for the exhibition's signage, documentary DVD and web site.

"The pursuit of art is not wholly a contest of eyesight. The brain must be largely employed if one would attain even a respectable position."

Grace A. French copied this quote by C. Ashleigh Snow in Wilson's Photographic Magazine January 1896 on the front leaf of a notebook of art lectures.

Contemporaries who knew her said that Grace French was a private person. If she left personal letters, memoirs, or journals, they have been lost. Researchers can piece together bits about a childhood in New Hampshire, art school in Boston plus occasional trips for personal and educational reasons. They know very little about her emotional life and can only surmise her beliefs from her involvement in the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the little Christian Science community in Rapid City. With her sister Abbie, she lived a lifetime in "pursuit of art" in a plain white house at 31 Quincy Street in Rapid City on the edge of the Black Hills in South Dakota.

In a time when many women married and raised families, Grace and Abbie French maintained their property, art business and social networks as single independent women, bringing culture to a "cowboy" town. Grace earned her living as artist, training normal school students and aspiring artists by the strictest academic standards. Influenced by the industrial design movement, pioneering art education theory and decorative arts trends, she made art into a sustainable business. She drove her buggy over the foothills and tramped along Rapid Creek to capture the earliest images of the region's historic landscape.

Through the colors of her palette and the strokes of pencil and charcoal, Grace French left views of the Black Hills that no pioneer photographer could capture. Her "pursuit of art" gave the region a legacy that lives today in working artists, art teachers and painters of elegant china.

A Brain Largely Employed
Family Faces and Places: The New England Girl

Born in 1828, Thomas Scott French of Hopkinton, New Hampshire, apparently had a fascination for the West like so many young people of his era. Self-educated on points of law and medicine, he taught school for three years before he visited the West himself. He found a year long teaching job in Iowa, where he acquired some land, according to hand-written family history (Family archive, Knott).

When he died, one of the pieces of real estate listed in his inventory for probate was land in Corydon, Wayne County, Iowa valued at \$1600. Land Patent web site records show that Thomas S. French of Merrimack County NH got a patent on 320 acres of land in Township 67 on Oct. 10, 1856. (Knott, Bonnie)

Thomas French returned to New Hampshire and married 24 year-old Sarah Elizabeth Clark on July 7, 1857. They moved to his father's farm in Hopkinton where four children were born—Grace Anna on June 20 1858; Abbie Augusta on Dec. 3, 1859; and twin boys Edwin Jeremiah and Adams Clark on June 21, 1861 (Bishop).

Thomas was described as having “upright Christian character, scorning immorality of every kind,” but Thomas French aspired to more than being a local Justice of the Peace and a farmer. Thomas French left the farm in Hopkinton, May 28, 1874, “thinking to leave hard work of farm and give children better educational advantages.” He moved the family to the nearby manufacturing town of Franklin Falls, New Hampshire, probably to the 16-room house on Franklin Street. He went to work in a mill (Family archive, Knott).

That Grace French's father owned mining claims and land was commonly accepted in her early biographies. Nearly eighty years later, informal biographer and Grace's student James Cessna wrote: “Mining stock interested the father; he purchased many claims and invested heavily in Homestake mining stock. It was a sound investment for the family and a life-long income for the Misses Grace and Abbie French.” (Cessna, Grace A. French)

With the “discovery” of gold by the Custer Expedition in 1874, miners rushed to the Black Hills. Fred and Moses Manuel and their partner Hank Harney located their Homestake claim on April 9, 1876. A consortium of San Francisco investors, led by George Hearst, purchased Homestake Mining Company in Lead, Dakota Territory, in 1877. Ann Pier, writing for Eka Parkinson's *Rapid City Pioneers of the Nineteenth Century*, 1989, characterized Thomas as a successful investor of Homestake stock. All this sounded plausible until genealogical research uncovered a different set of facts about Thomas French.

On Mar. 19, 1875 when Grace was fifteen, her father died of pneumonia. (French family notes) Adams (A.C.) later wrote that his father had gone to work, fell through the mill pond ice, took cold and died of typhoid, probably because Adams himself contracted

typhoid and nearly died that same spring. (French, A.C.)

Thomas French's will left the homestead, furniture, personal property, \$3000 and 5 shares of Republican Press Association stock to his wife Sarah and all the rest of his estate to his four children to be equally divided between them. The land in Iowa seems to have been part of that inheritance (Bonnie Knott). He could not have owned Homestake stock or filed mining claims in the Black Hills because he died before the rush really began.

Grace's mother, Sarah E. Clark, and Bonnie Knott's great-grandfather, Samuel A. Clark, were brother and sister. Mrs. Knott's genealogy research tells little about Sarah Clark French. Her siblings lived in New England, too, and the fact that Mrs. Knott's mother mentions Sarah's children in her diary suggest that Sarah and later Grace must have maintained ties with the Clark family. Family photos reveal a strong-looking woman and her young children. However, no family letters or diaries describe how the widowed Sarah French managed her household after her husband's death, but her children's education must have continued as her central focus.

Grace and Abbie told young James Cessna about their father. Cessna says that Grace's talent was recognized very early, that her father wanted his daughters to have formal art training. (Cessna. Taped interview)

Sarah and Thomas French would have known about the free public education institutes and lectures endowed by John Lowell as well as the emerging theory that art should be taught to all children, not just those with "artistic talent." The revolutionary Massachusetts Drawing Act of 1870 made it mandatory for state schools to incorporate art as one of the required subjects taught in the classroom, for example. Those same education reforms touched New Hampshire schools, too.

When Grace and Abbie graduated from Franklin High School in June, 1878, Sarah French must have supported her daughters in their determination to seek advanced art training. Furthermore, she may have realized that such training prepared them for future employment and independence.

Academic Training and the Industrial Design Movement

As practical investors, the textile manufacturers of New England looked for ways to decrease the region's dependence on European-trained draftsmen and designers. Beginning in the early 1850s, schools of design for women were established in the eastern states to prepare female artists for employment in manufacturing and publishing. (Balliet)

"Although tuition was free for industrial pupils (those who intended to work), the classes were during the day when less financially secure working women were unable to attend. Those who could attend typically included women from the families of farmers, ministers, engravers, clerks, and merchants. Their fathers and brothers assumed that if they remained

unmarried, these sisters and daughters would need a respectable career path." (Balliet)

Nearby Boston offered a lively and progressive climate for women professionals in all disciplines. (A Studio of Her Own) Both Abbie and Grace went to Boston in fall of 1879 to study at Lowell School of Practical Design, yesterday's version of post-secondary technical schools with free tuition. For many years professors of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology gave advanced courses of lectures at the Lowell Institute. The 1880 Census lists Grace and Abbie as students.

Completing a standard three-year program in two years, they graduated in 1881. Abbie studied one more winter and then returned to Franklin, but Grace enrolled in the School of Drawing and Painting at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, taking courses there until the later spring of 1885. The flyleaf one of her academic notebooks says Grace A. French, 2 Rollins Place, Boston, Mass. Drawing Class, Winter of 1880-81. Another notebook says Grace A. French, Boston, Mass. 1884 but lists no address. According to Cessna as well as family genealogy sources, she also studied privately each winter with other Boston artists including James M. Stone.

Academic Training and the Industrial Design Movement: The Boston Years

The Boston art scene of the 1880s gave Miss Grace French three important tools for the pursuit of art by a woman in the west.

First, the academic studies from the permanent collection at Black Hills State University, her notebooks and exercises show that she mastered rigorous training in technical drawing and in fine arts that was available to women as well as male students in the School of Drawing and Painting.

"The cornerstone of an artistic education -- drawing from life -- was made available to Boston women in the 1850s and a strong community of accomplished female artists soon formed. These women were being trained at Boston's new art schools including the School of the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) and the Massachusetts College of Art, both founded in the 1870s" (A Studio of Her Own).

The basement of the Museum of Fine Arts on Copley Square housed the School of Drawing and Painting. The School of Drawing and Painting was housed in the basement of the Museum of Fine Arts on Copley Square. Every day she would have walked through galleries filled with fine art by recognized masters from all over the world. For classes in perspective, architecture, and scientific color theory, some of the professors, including Mr. Cross, came over from the Architectural Institute at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Grace took his lectures on color at MIT.

Grace's notes and portraits, particularly, show the influence of rigorous anatomy studies. Artist and sculptor William Rimmers, who also taught at the School of Drawing and Paint in the 1870s, used a scientific approach to understanding the human

form; he was dedicated to teaching amateurs these methods. His *Art Anatomy*, first published in 1877, represents the most comprehensive anatomy book issued in the United States at the time. Although he died in 1879 just before Grace came to MFA to study, Grace's anatomy notes and sketches could certainly have come from lecturers using his text on *Art Anatomy*.

Grace's notes reflect Rimmer's theories of proportion and physiognomy. Rimmer's *Art Anatomy* was unprecedented for its extensive descriptions and drawings of the anatomy of men, women, and children; she used the same principles in her classes and Normal School curriculum notes decades later.

Did the modest Miss French have life drawing classes? In 1883 the school's director, Frederic Crowninshield, taught advanced classes in portraiture and drawing from the nude. A century later, her student James Cessna would tell how Grace's younger students would take their lessons in another room if the full-sized plaster model was being used for adult classes in the living room studio.

Grace's sketchbooks contain drawings of friends, family, students, teachers and colleagues, even neighborhood pets. She painted portraits professionally, but most are scattered in family collections. Some portraits were part of the David and Betty Strain collection given to the Minnilusa Historical Association and were displayed for the first time at The Journey Museum exhibition in 2007.

"Boston artists admired beauty, elegance, and technical refinement. They favored portraits, impeccably arranged still lifes, and figure studies of women in tasteful interiors or sun-filled landscapes. Art that incorporated intense emotion, social realism, or political commentary was rare." (A Studio of Her Own)

The peaceful riparian studies of Rapid Creek show how this ideal affected a young artist plunged into a rough-edged western town.

Because Grace French later brought her rigorous academic training and studio experiences to her students in the Black Hills, they received first-class art instruction.

Secondly, Grace brought the influence of the successful women artists and professionals that she met in Boston circles. They provided a clear model of female accomplishment and demonstrated women's independence. (A Studio of Her Own) For example, the first women to graduate from the Museum School created The Copley Society, America's oldest nonprofit art association (Copley).

Art Square was the site of the imposing Museum of Fine Arts and school built in 1876 and the magnificent Trinity Church built in 1876. The School of the Museum of Fine Arts welcomed aspiring women artists (Copley). In 1883, the School of Drawing and Painting annual report says 30 men and 82 women were enrolled and women were employed as instructors.

Third, as a future teacher of art teachers, Grace French was educated at an opportune time and place to bring the most progressive methods to the new towns of the West.

Her training in high school and at Lowell reflected the theories of Walter Smith, an Englishman who had come to lead the industrial design education movement in Massachusetts. Grace and Abbie must have been profoundly influenced by the newly-developed art education movement in America. Smith's *Art Education, Scholastic and Industrial* was a reference for institutions intending to develop art education programs. Near the Museum of Fine Arts, he helped found Massachusetts Normal Art School to prepare art teachers (History of Art Education).

Smith's publisher, Louis Prang was another art education innovator. "Louis Prang believed that all children should study art, and that artistic experience and observation quickens the imagination and independence of expression.... [he] published the first American school art textbooks and even supplied art programs with Prang chalks, crayons, and paints. In 1874, Prang published the first American Christmas cards, an indication of the rise of popular culture in commercial art (History of Art Education). Grace, herself, would make Christmas cards with secular designs by the turn of the century.

Milton Bradley, another New Englander working in the 1870s, invented the color wheel and promoted the early kindergarten movement. He manufactured other educational materials, colored papers and paints including the standard colors for children's art supplies through the 20th century (History of Art Education).

By the time Grace came to study at the Museum of Fine Arts, the nearby Massachusetts Normal Art School was a well-established institution and the children's art education movement was well established in the East.

Did her rigorous academic training plus exposure to cutting-edge theory that all students could be taught to be competent artists art influence Grace's life-long determination to teach serious art to young people? Undoubtedly, it shaped the way she taught art in South Dakota normal school institutes in the 1890s. Notebooks, lessons and study questions from her notebooks show how Grace French brought the ideas and theories of Smith, Prang, Bradley and other innovators to her instruction.

West to Dakota

What enticed Grace French and her New England family to the American West in the mid 1880s? Although the immediate hysteria of the Black Hills gold rush has already passed, most likely the promise of land brought Abbie, Edwin and Adams first to Iowa where their father owned land and then to the Black Hills.

When Thomas French died in New Hampshire in 1875, one of the pieces of real estate listed for probate was land in Corydon, Wayne County, Iowa, valued at \$1600. According to the Chariton Land Office in Wayne County, Thomas S. French of Merrimack

County, NH, got a patent on 320 acres of land in Township 67 on Oct. 10, 1856. Since his will left the homestead, personal property, \$3000 and five shares of Republican Press Association stock to his wife Sarah and all the rest of his estate to his four children, it is likely that property brought three of the French siblings to Iowa. (Family archive, Knott)

Grace's younger brother Edwin came west perhaps to look after the Iowa land after his high school graduation in 1881 or 1882. Like his father, he even taught one term and attended a normal school for teacher training, not an uncommon decision for an educated young man. But Edwin left Iowa in March 1883, to tour the "Dakota Hills," apparently working as a carpenter. There was money still to be made after the gold boom, but many more failed than succeeded. Perhaps Edwin's adventuring spirit pulled the rest of the family to the Black Hills.

Adams graduated from the New Hampshire College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts before he came out to Iowa in 1883. Edwin returned for a month in September 1883 and persuaded his brother come to the Hills to take charge of a logging camp and to help establish lumberyard. They bought the land on Elk Creek in Meade County for cash from the Government Land Office and apparently lived there part of the time until they left the Hills.

Grace, Abbie, Adams, Edwin and their mother Sarah all bought unproved claims, filing in Rapid Valley in Pennington County. Sarah and her daughter also bought land in the Elk Creek area. Grace's estate at her death in 1942 listed 1200 acres.

Adams left Rapid City in January of 1888 to study for the ministry at the Chicago Theological Seminary. In an interview James Cessna repeated local stories that the French siblings had made a pact never to marry. Adams married and later divorced Luella Osbourne in Chicago and years later married Mary Ficklin in Texas. He apparently had a son and daughter by this marriage. A.C. studied homeopathic medicine and lived a good portion of his life in Texas.

Grace's collection of sketchbooks contained Adams' carefully preserved academic drawings from the New Hampshire College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts. She also kept a bound copy of his thesis called *The Homeopathic Marriage* with this penciled note from A.C.: "Keep this. I have several copies."

He wrote a book originally published as "The Conquest of Disease" by A. C. French, MD, Corpus Christi, TX; Corpus Christi Printing, 1943 (reprint in 1992 published by B. Jain Publishers (P) Ltd. New Delhi India.) He stuck by a date and killed. Genealogy records show his death date as October 27, 1945. An undated news clipped of his obituary says a daughter survived him. Her name was Grace May French. (Family archive, Knott).

Family researcher Bonnie Knott questioned the accepted date of 1945 for Adams Clark's death. "According to my grandmother's diaries when Grace died in Rapid City in July 1942, there were no more French siblings alive. Her entry of July 31, 1942 says 'the whole family is gone now, Grace, Abbie and the twin brothers, Adam(s) and Eddie. They left Franklin more than forty years ago.'" (Family archive, Knott).

Edwin, too, seems to have pushed against the expectations of the women in his family. Cessna told of an incident when Edwin came home intoxicated after local celebration in Rapid City and was nearly disowned by his teetotaling mother and sisters. (Interview.) Although Grace's sketchbooks have many sketches of A.C., we find only one profile marked E.J. and one small portrait. Ever the wanderer, Edwin supposedly traveled and worked as a builder, even in Europe, Asia and Africa, finally settling in Texas. He died in July 11, 1930 of typhoid fever, (McAllen) TX, Hidalgo Co. His death certificate lists him as single (Bishop).

The French sisters, as many people called them, spent most of their lives living and working together. In 1884 while Grace studied in Boston, Abbie came to Iowa where she taught school for a year. Then she joined her brothers in the Black Hills in July of 1885. Cessna describes her in middle age as a large woman, rather coarse in appearance. "If she put on a man's hat on and dressed the way women dressed today, you would have thought she was a man." (Interview)

Miss Abbie French brought her own share of culture to Rapid City. Trained in music as well as art, she taught needlework and played for Methodist Sunday services at Library Hall before the Methodist Episcopal Church was built on Kansas City Street. In his pamphlet on Grace French, Cessna wrote of Abbie: "The singing of a bird, a bright berry in full ripeness would delight Abbie for an entire day." (Grace A. French) Except for occasional travels by train that she strongly disliked, Abbie stayed in Rapid City and worked in partnership with her sister until she died in 1936.

"The French Sisters" were to become unique fixtures of Rapid City life for fifty years with Abbie Augusta French working beside her sister to teach and to produce art, sometimes even working on paintings together.

A Respectable Position

A Community Life—Temperance, Suffrage, Religion — and Art

Imagine Grace French at age 26. For six years she lived at part of each year in one of America's most exciting art communities, the cosmopolitan city of Boston. She walked down elegant Commonwealth Avenue, visited galleries filled with antiquities and returned home to family and friends on Lake Winnisquam in New Hampshire.

What compels a well-educated professional artist to leave New England for a little cowboy town on the edge of the Black Hills? Historians can only speculate on whether she hoped for new adventure or that family compelled her.

Sarah French sold her home in early September, and she and Grace took the train from New Hampshire. Franklin newspaper clippings said they left on Sept. 11 and arrived in Rapid City on September 19, 1885 (Family archive, Knott). Notations on a sketch of wildflowers viewed from a train window indicate that Grace was 35 miles east of Chicago on September 13, 1885. Since the first railroad didn't arrive in Rapid City until July of 1886, Sarah and Grace probably came as far as Pierre on the Chicago and Northwestern

railroad, and then took the stagecoach to Rapid City. The stage route from Sidney, Nebraska, was a possibility as well, but would have taken longer than eight days they traveled.

Rapid City, a growing foothills supply town, must have amazed these women as they compared heavy freight wagons and teams of oxen churning the dust of Main Street to the sailboats and shorelines of New England. From 202 people in the census of 1880, Rapid City would grow to 2,128 by 1890 and 10,404 by 1930.

Eva Bangs wrote that the family farmed for a short while, perhaps on the land east of Rapid City. Grace made sketches of Harney Peak viewed from the prairie in January 1886, a lumber camp 15 miles west of Rapid in 1887, and other rural scenes. However, Sarah and her daughters must have decided fairly soon that Rapid City was more attractive. Sarah bought hillside lots on the shale bank above the main part of town and Adams and Edwin helped build a simple “homesteader’s” house with a long shed attached to the back. By 1886 the sketchbook contains drawing of Hangman’s Hill viewed from First and Quincy, a scene she would render dozens of times.

“Miss Grace once said that the house was built as a temporary house in lieu of a larger house to be built later,” Cessna wrote. Although the 31 Quincy Street house was never intended to be their permanent home, the French sisters established their studio and lived out their lives there. After Grace’s death, the school district bought the French property to the west and north of where Dakota Middle School stands in 2007.

That Rapid City was a bit more “respectable” than the gold mining towns of Hill City or Deadwood was reflected in a city ordinance about “indecent or lewd dress” and a lively temperance movement fired by newspaper publisher Alice Gossage. Nobody questioned either the temperance or the modesty of the French sisters. Until Abbie’s death in 1936, they wore elegant white blouses, long full skirts and a seemingly endless supply of old-fashioned shoes, according to Cessna and the few photographs of them. As a teenager who took lessons and ran errands for them, Clara Lobdell remembered them as short, somewhat stocky women who dressed in a somewhat dowdy manner with little attention to fashion (Lobdell. Interview).

In *Rapid City Pioneers of the Nineteenth Century*, Ann Pier described the civic minded French sisters as friendly, witty, good hostesses and well-liked. Miss Abbie French was an officer of the Benevolent Organization for the First Ward. A *History of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union of Dakota* cited Miss Grace French of Rapid City as the first president of the newly organized Second District (Butte, Custer, Fall River, Pennington, Meade and Lawrence Counties) of the WCTU in 1888. That year she attended the last territorial WCTU convention in Yankton where she heard the legendary Frances Willard preach about making the new state of South Dakota a place where women could vote. (History 52-56)

According to the report, temperance work in the Black Hills was “an unusually difficult field owing to the mining and stock interests.” Grace continued to be elected president in 1889-91, helping to establish a WCTU in Custer in 1891. Sarah’s obituary,

probably written by Alice Gossage herself, describes Abbie and Grace as “among the best known Women’s Christian Temperance Union workers in the Black Hills.

Many independent women in the temperance movement wanted the vote. Grace attended the last territorial WCTU convention where she heard the legendary Frances Willard speak about making the new state of South Dakota a place where women could vote. In 1890, the South Dakota Legislature granted, and then retracted women’s suffrage although women were permitted to vote in school elections.

Her temperance work and we may assume her interest in suffrage continued after her mother’s death. At the fourth district convention in 1892 in Hot Springs, Grace “declined to serve as president.” In 1893 Abbie’s name appears as treasurer and by 1895, when Alice Gossage was elected Second District President, Grace took the office of corresponding secretary. (History 52-56)

Grace’s interest in women’s suffrage was evident long before women finally got the vote in 1920. According to voting records and recollections by Eva Bangs, the French sisters and Mrs. Gossage were three of only five women who voted in a school election in Rapid City.

Whether Grace and Abbie French did their own house repairs, invested in discounted county warrants, or established their studio and china painting business, they clearly demonstrated the legacy of those independent Boston women with whom they had studied.

The younger brothers who urged them to come to the Black Hills had moved on. A page in Grace’s sketchbook dated January 16, 1891 shows a pensive Adams, probably home for a visit, and a little portrait of Sarah resting her head against a chair back. After a few days’ illness, Sarah died Saturday, Sept 18, 1891 at age 58, suffering what her obituary called paralysis. Since Sarah was “a consistent member of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” her funeral was held Sept. 20 in the little church that Grace sketched in September 1887. Sarah was buried in Mountain View Cemetery. Neither Adams nor Edwin could return in time for her funeral.

So the French sisters settled into their community, managing their money shrewdly, establishing their careers, and driving out in their buggy pulled by their horse Gretchen to picnic and paint along Rapid Creek. Abbie reportedly taught some music, and they both began to teach art. From a distance, A.C. continued to pull them into new directions, however.

Propelled by the writings of Mary Baker Eddy in Boston in the late 1870s, Christian Science was growing rapidly. Although Grace may have heard something about Christian Science in Boston, we have no record of any early interest. Having been given calomel, an arsenic-type medicine, for typhoid as a teenager and battled its side effects for years, Adams had experienced a quick healing from a serious illness and urged them to study Christian Science. Clara Lodbell wrote that Grace and Abbie attended classes on Christian Science in Denver. A group photograph labeled “in the Rocky Mountains “ may

have been taken during such a study trip. When they returned home, they organized and held church in Library Hall.

The Rapid City Christian Science Association was formed, Sept 7, 1897. On Nov. 1897 the Christian Scientists moved to a space in the Morris Building known by the community as "the old reading room." According to church law, a letter was sent to founder Mary Baker Eddy for permission to continue. Miss Grace French was appointed to prepare by laws.

On October 1907, the congregation formally incorporated. News clippings report that on Nov. 3, 1907, "the little chapel on 6th Street was dedicated with simple ceremonies." Because there are no clergy, church leadership consists of two Readers: the First Reader, who reads the passages from Science and Health at Sunday services, and the Second Reader, who reads the passages from the Bible. Miss Grace French was First Reader for the dedication.

Their friend and neighbor Eva Bangs said that Abbie and Grace "lost their faith" when Mary Baker Eddy died in 1910. "They thought she would somehow be spared death, apparently" (Lobdell). Whatever the case, Grace's involvement in the Christian Science community continued at some level until Abbie's and Grace's own memorial services were celebrated by Christian Scientists in 1936 and 1942.

A Pioneer of Art Education

The French Sisters' Studio, Black Hills College and Normal School Art Education

In the 1890s, Hot Springs, Dakota Territory, was the cultural center of the region, drawing visitors for the spas, South Dakota's divorce laws and good rail connections. Sometime between 1891 and 1893, Grace began to teach art at Black Hills College, a private Methodist school, in Hot Springs. According to Matthew Smith's *Circuit Riders of the Middle Border*, the first classes were held in the fall of 1890 and enrollment grew to 127 students for the 1892-93 school year.

James Cessna and others claimed she had a studio at the college but did not teach. Grace is not pictured in an 1891 faculty photo, but she made a sketch of a dugout near Hot Springs dated August 1890 and the Chautauqua grounds there Aug 29, 1890 so she had been to the area. The entry on Grace French in *An Encyclopedia of Women Artists of the American West* states that she was employed at Black Hills College from 1888 until 1893 when the college closed. Research from Smith's history of Dakota Methodism and from Dakotas Conference archives at Dakota Wesleyan University indicate that those often-quoted dates are inaccurate.

A hand-written letter dated Feb. 23, 1893 and signed by President J. W. Hancher informs Miss Grace A. French that she has been elected Chair of Fine Arts at a salary of \$600 per year. A Black Hills Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church reported that Black Hills College trustees elected in 1894 included Miss Grace A. French of Rapid City. Notes about a grade for a student from Buffalo Gap are dated 1895 and sketches of

Fairburn dated 1895 indicate that she was in the southern Black Hills.

In an interview about Grace French's place in women's art history in the West, art historian Lynda Clark said, "A young woman who could move around and had a college degree could find herself work even in the arts at the land grant universities. There weren't enough men to fill these jobs so women got the jobs, something women would never have gotten to do if they had stayed in the East" (Interview). The same hiring practices were true for small private schools like Black Hills College that were being founded in the West.

Whatever her term of service at the college, the name Grace A. French appears under the Faculty heading on undated college letterhead with the phrase "Superior Normal Department and Summer School." A scrap of that same letterhead, glued into her small notebook on drawing lessons, contains notes titled "Questions on Drawing for Teachers in Public Schools of So. Dak. 1894." Another set of questions is labeled "Drawing Questions 1895." Probably Grace taught not only classic drawing and painting, but also art for teachers in the three-year normal school program.

Normal school lessons in the notebook indicate that Grace was teaching public school teachers the classic art disciplines of perspective, color and design that she had learned at Lowell and the Museum of Fine Arts. Furthermore, her ideas reflect some of the progressive practices and theories of art education from the Massachusetts Normal Art School.

Records do not indicate how long Grace taught at Black Hills College. Staggered by the financial panic of 1893, the college struggled on, finally closing its doors after the spring term of 1897 (Smith).

The small notebook contains printed questions from exam books for labeled Teachers Questions for Drawing 1896 and 1897. In another notebook, lessons obviously for children and labeled "Drawing for Public Schools, Spearfish Normal" suggest that Miss French not only taught art for teachers in the Black Hills College Normal School but also had connections with the State Normal School at Spearfish.

In 1892, Spearfish's President Fayette L. Cook married a woman who had been trained at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. She was the first teacher of art at the normal school from 1895 to 1904 (Coursey). According to James Cessna, Wenonah (Winona) Culbertson Cook either had been or soon became of friend of Grace French. He said Mrs. Cook asked Grace to come to Spearfish Normal and Grace wanted to do so, but Abbie objected to the move so Grace stayed in Rapid City.

Lillian B. Forde became art instructor at Spearfish in 1909. According to MarGretta Cocking, art education instructor at Spearfish from 1935 to 1959, Miss Forde and Grace apparently struck up an acquaintance, too, so Grace's interest in public school art education could well have continued. When Grace died in 1942, a collection of academic studies, including three by Abbie, was donated to the Spearfish college.

Records do not show when the living room of the 31 Quincy Street house officially

became the French sisters' studio, as they offered lessons in watercolors, pastels, charcoal drawing, sketching for sculpture as well as china painting. One of Grace's sketchbooks shows a student at an easel, dated December 1891. Grace's ledger records fees for lessons and art materials as early as 1900.

Amid what he called "the studied clutter of a very drab house" Cessna describes an Arabian Night feeling: "The front parlor, the studio, and the hall—every wall space—even the edges of the floors contained paintings....attractive ornate furniture crowded one upon the other, yet with room for sitting, and observing. The studio contained a row of nine chairs, often reduced to five with easels, one in back of the other. Tables with still life arrangements, [plaster] casts of Apollo, Venus, Diana, and fruit and ships were hanging in the studio" (Cessna, Rosebud). Clara Bangs Lobdell said the whole lower story was the studio with paintings hung from floor to ceiling and art materials stack everywhere (Interview).

As a neighbor, young Cessna ran errands for the sisters, probably hauling things in and out of the studio. For adult drawing classes, there was a full -length nude plaster model, but on Saturdays when children came for classes, they met in another room if the casts were out in view, Cessna remembered.

Art students made museum visits or used study prints to develop appreciation for and to make copies of fine art. With museums far away, the French sisters collected over 350 prints after they moved west, bringing some from the Columbia Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and some from the opening of Boston's Isabella Stuart Gardner Gallery in Boston in 1903. They also ordered study prints from Perry Magazine.

Eugene Ashton and Ella Perry published the *Perry Magazine for School and Home* from 1898 to 1906, an outgrowth of the picture study movement. The magazine promoted the use of small, inexpensive reproductions of fine art, influencing the introduction of art appreciation into the public school curriculum. Before the publication of the Perry Magazine, only the elite had access to fine art (History of Art Education Time Line).

Before long, the French sisters were educating artistic tastes in many Rapid City homes. While their serious students followed strict academic regimens, most probably just wanted a few pictures for their new homes. To get a reproduction of a classic painting, someone had to paint a copy, so Grace's study prints were copied again and again. Frequently, Abbie's paintings were carefully noted copies of fine art.

"I don't think a painting was put up in Rapid City in the early days if the Frenches didn't think it was up to par; they weren't narrow in their tastes and they knew what was going on in the East," Cessna said (Cessna interview).

Abbie and Grace gave lessons to Rapid City's social leaders like founder John Brennan's daughter Ruth; Alma Behrens, daughter of furniture store owner and undertaker Henry Behrens, hardware man Tom Sweeney's wife Mary; Fanny Chase whose father Isaac Chase owned Chase's clothing store; Peter Duhamel's daughter Anna; and Lottie and Sarah Halley, children of banker James Halley.

Even rural farm families like Stella Mae Matson's [Buell] found ways to give their children these opportunities.

Rhonda Buell Schier, Education Specialist at Mt. Rushmore National Memorial, discovered that her own mother Stella Matson [James] Schier must have taken lessons from Grace French when she saw the similarities between a painting of poppies done by her mother and Grace's studies of poppies. "I marveled at the similarity between the tone, and mood and color of her paintings and mom's paintings, and realized that, undoubtedly, Grace mixed the paints herself for her students' work, and the paint on Mom's canvas was probably created by Grace's hands, so of course the color and tone is the same" (Rhonda Schier email). June 25, 2007)

Grace's ledger contains a record of Stella Mae Matson's lessons. "My mother used to tell me stories about her life as an art student and tell me stories about her teacher, a woman who taught art in her home; how she was thrilled to go to her art teacher's home... Imagine what it was like for her to learn from a master artist how to recreate flowers and landscapes" (Schier interview).

Although there was a charge for lessons [from 15 cents to \$1], no one was turned away, often paying with yard work or errand running as James Cessna, Clara Lodbell and many others did. Remembering the free training they had received at the Lowell School and practicing the theory that art should be taught to all children, not just those with artistic talent, Grace and Abbie French were determined that not only people of means but all students should be able to afford art training with access to the best materials. The revolutionary Massachusetts Drawing Act of 1870 under which they themselves had been educated took new life in Hay Camp two decades later.

Many young people who wanted to study art took preliminary training from Grace French, leaving Rapid City with a fat portfolio that met the requirements of the Chicago Art Institute or the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Evaluating Grace's paintings, Lynda Clark concludes that Grace's students would have received excellent training. "It's very evident that Grace French was classically trained because of the foundation sketches in preparation for paintings, the way she composes carefully, her execution getting everything she can from each subject by going back and dealing with it again using a different palette of colors, a slightly different composition, a different time of day" (Clark interview).

According to Cessna, her students were never rejected by eastern schools for having been poorly prepared. "She was a master of her craft, and no one left her studio with careless work or careless methods..." (Cessna, Rosebud).

Some students like Etta Jay Anderson took years of lessons, becoming accomplished painters and mentors for the Rapid City art community themselves. Another student, Lucille Patterson Marsh, established a successful career in advertising with illustrations for *Ladies' Home Journal*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Pictorial Review* and *Cosmopolitan* in the 1930s and 1940s.

Grace's legacy, not only as a creator but also a teacher of art, had significant influence in the growing Black Hills communities. Educator Rhonda Schier assesses that impact: "Anything that reflected the fine arts and the performing arts was a real plus because [some people] were trying to bring culture to the frontier town, to Hay Camp. Rapid City was extremely lucky to have someone who was passionate about an art form and was passionate about passing on what she knew about art to the young people of the community" (Schier interview)

A Contest of Eyesight

Capturer of the Land and the Times

According to David Strain, author of *Black Hills Hay Camp; Images and Perspectives of Early Rapid City*, the informal sketches and paintings offer evidence that Grace French here very early in Rapid City's history. From her vantage point on Quincy Street, she sketched Reservoir Hill, the Gap looking west and the pasture where somebody kept a milk cow within sight of downtown. Several paintings show the wooden steeples of the Episcopal and Methodist Churches before 1890.

MarGretta Cocking came to Rapid City in 1917 to teach art in the schools, becoming art supervisor for Rapid City Public Schools from 1921-24. "On several occasions I had seen Miss Grace in a long artist's smock sitting on street corners, painting local scenes, while small group of curious ones gawked over her shoulders" (Cocking). Probably Grace and Abbie scrambling up Reservoir Hills or driving out to paint were such familiar sights, long-time residents hardly noticed.

As an artist, she loved the Rapid Creek and Canyon Lake area. Those sketches and paintings date from shortly after she arrived in the fall of 1885. By the 1890s Upper Rapid City Company, with Dr. Valentine McGillicuddy and others, planned to develop the area into a resort with a hotel, a railroad from downtown through a park of cottonwoods and a private residential area. Some of the Lombardy poplars they planted still stand. Their venture failed, but Grace continued drive her horse Gretchen out to picnic and paint along the creek even after the flood of 1907. According to her battered ledger, she sold dozens of watercolor and oil paintings of Canyon Lake and Rapid Creek.

According to Ruth Brennan, former director of The Dahl Arts Center, Abbie seemed to be the financial manager of the art business. "Abbie was the frugal one; she ordered elaborate frames probably in bulk from Boston and then they painted paintings to fit the frames. "One painting [in The Dahl collection] was a little larger than linen canvas she had so she nailed a coarser canvas and attached a lath to make the canvas larger and finished the painting to fit the frame" (Interview).

Around the country, women artists like Grace French were finding places to exhibit their art, including works with Western landscapes and themes. "The first one of real significance to those who worked with western themes was the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893" (Clark, *Breaking New Ground*). Grace exhibited an oil

painting there; the receipt to Miss Grace French of Hot Springs, dated May 29, 1893, guarantees its return but doesn't give its title or subject.

Grace was an observer during the riotous Stockman's Days beginning in 1894 when the three-day Wild West show involved nearly 3000 Indians from reservations. Informal watercolors and sketchbook drawings caught pieces of life in growing community east of the Gap beneath Hangman's Hill—a Cheyenne encampment, tents at Spring Valley Camp Meeting, a claim shanty, a 10-mule team pulling freight wagons, a pioneer child perched on a fence rail. In her sketchbooks we see buildings long gone like the Methodist Episcopal Church in Hill City or Pennington County's first courthouse.

By train or buggy, Grace and Abbie traveled to see the sights of the Hills. They framed and sold dozens of paintings that captured the Black Hills landscape. A new road winds through the Needles in one painting. People cross Rapid Creek on a Crouch Line railroad trestle in another. Grace made dozens of small paintings and sold them for "the Christmas trade", sent them to friends in the East or gave them to neighbors and member of her church. Because she was both prolific and generous, cataloguing her complete works seems impossible.

"Having a classically trained artist in a cowboy town, someone who lived her life as an artist, was a great example, especially for young people who were interested in the arts. Prior to her residence here, they really didn't have a way to learn what that meant to be an artist, how to go about it," says art historian Lynda Clark. "Look at the composition, the way she prepared for a painting, multiple sketches, going back to the same subject many times, recomposing, trying to find everything there is to find in a particular landscape" (Clark, interview).

Clark thinks the Impressionists influenced Grace in her use of color and light. "Light was an important component of her work. Her brush work is very loose in her later paintings which would indicate an exposure to Impressionism and perhaps even Expressionism" (Clark, interview).

As early as 1900, Grace continued her studies, including work in Denver at the Colorado Academy of Fine Arts with Alexis Comperet [also spelled his name Compera] and later in Omaha. Compera was characterized as a tonalist, a group of landscape painters whose "pictorial effects [are] to be found in the interaction of sky, water, and landscape."

Grace's notes on her lessons with Compera reflect the tonalist's view: "a low-key color harmony along with diffused and diminished lighting effects " and a general color scheme "of a dominant hue (or key) with each subordinate hue in the composition harmonized by mixing it with a tinge of the dominant hue." Whether consciously or not, Grace seems to have been influenced by such tonalist ideas (Jones).

Longing for Home and Love of Things Growing

What a contrast the dusty streets of "Hay Camp" must have been to strolling on Copley

Square or watching sailboats on the Charles River in Boston. Paintings of ocean shores and beechnut trees hint at another side of Grace French – memories of beloved places and a certain homesickness for New England. The landscapes of her youth remained a popular subject for Grace French all of her life. The Roseland and Strain Collections and the paintings listed in her ledger document that fact.

Although they were not great gardeners, Grace and Abbie, too, must have loved flowers. The lush bouquet of lilacs shows Grace's mastery of formal flower painting while watercolor sketches of penstemon and brown-eyed Susan of the western roadside show the eye of a botanist.

According to Cessna, spring violets grew in abundance on the hill behind the Quincy Street house and the sisters must have painted violets on dozens of porcelain hatpin holders and chocolate sets. Foothills prickly pear cactus in blossom became the subject of a blue ribbon painting, but the nuts and berries of New England kept appearing on Christmas notes and tea plates.

The Pursuit of Art

Decorative Arts Trends

Women like Grace and Abbie French, with technical training in the arts, played an integral role in the Arts and Crafts movement from 1860 to 1920. "Craft was given new status as art, and even simple, handmade items were considered superior to poorly designed, machine-made goods.... Women who provided an artistic home for their families were credited with improving their spiritual and moral character" (A Studio of Her Own).

"More than one voice expressed the view that a woman's artistic skills might 'keep a household together, while they also purify the taste and exalt the minds of its members.'" (Brandimarte 210) Every room should overflow with such ornamentation so the china craze spread from East to West. A member of the National Council on Public History, Cynthia Brandimarte, in a paper on the American China Painter and her work, 1870-1920, argues that this decorative art, particularly with its subject matter of flowers and fruits, was seen both as noncompetitive with men "where women could both express themselves artistically and earn money" (206).

"[The study of the movement] can illuminate for cultural historians the larger issues of domesticity, leisure, and work for many American women between 1870 and 1920." (203-204) Women could excel in this field, male art critics argued, because "female china decorators embodied the virtues that this artwork required, especially patience and cleanliness, the very virtues that the practice of china painting was said to inspire." (205)

With talk of Rapid City as the new Denver, the housewives of West Boulevard wanted their homes to reflect the Arts and Crafts Movement so they not only sought hand-painted porcelain, but also wanted to create some themselves. Furthermore, middle

and upper class women whose husbands could provide for them and who had domestic help had the quantity of leisure necessary to learn about the then to produce painted china (Brandemarte 211). Probably Grace and Abbie saw china painting and teaching as a way to enhance income.

Taking advantage of a trend may better explain how two Rapid City women turned their technical art training plus Grace's facility for botanicals into a 30-year business in china painting, the decorative art for which they were well-known. Grace, along with Abbie, was superbly prepared to teach this decorative art throughout its era of popularity.

Brandimarte points out that women were often urged to confine their efforts to decorative painting rather than landscape on canvas. One social conservative argued that this "lower form is within the compass of their talents, while the greater work [landscape] seems so far away and beyond their grasp." (206) Male artists undertook historically significant subjects. "It became an axiom of American art that men created fine art and most women artists dabbled in handicrafts and decorative arts" (205).

Clearly Grace's egalitarian academic training in Boston led her to reject this narrow view in her teaching and practice. Her landscapes and portraits testify that she believed women as well as men were capable all subjects and all mediums. That she chose to study with the most prestigious male and female teachers in the county suggests that she was determined to carry her artistic standards into her teaching of china painting.

China painting as a High Art and a Woman's Career

China painting experienced a revival and a real revolution when two Germans, George Leykauf and Franz B. Aulich, came to the United States. F. B. Aulich was one of the greatest masters of porcelain art who has emerged over the last two centuries. As artist and professor, he traveled throughout the United States and Europe teaching his craft and maintained a famous porcelain art school in the Auditorium Building in Chicago (French, Grace).

China painting schools sprang up all over the country, and truly ambitious teachers of china painting traveled to study with these masters. By 1892, Brandimarte wrote that china painting engaged more than 25,000 American women.

"The leaders of the movement in the United States were primarily those individuals who had trained in Europe, most of whom were men. Among these were Edward Lycett, Domick Campana and Aulich, all of whom operated studios, offered lessons, marketed supplies and published design studies (Brandimarte 204). Grace appears to have modeled her practice on such experts, selling supplies and providing series of lessons from her Quincy street studio.

The French sisters also studied with the most skilled porcelain artists of the period. We know from extensive lecture notes and receipts that Grace and probably Abbie, too, studied with a group of noted teachers at the Aulich's prestigious Auditorium School in May and June of 1900.

Judging from her hand-written notes, Grace must have given a talk somewhere about the history and revival of decorative arts. She explains the origins of porcelain in China and Japan, the painters of Renaissance pottery and the influence of Haviland and Limoge in Europe. Understanding the chemistry of paints and mediums and the processes of glazing and firing represented a highly technical art. These teaching notes show her ability to explain the materials and processes in understandable terms and stand in contrast to the technical nature of her own student notes. (French, Grace)

Copying the design of a master painter by learning every step of glazing and firing was and still is the method of teaching classic porcelain painting. Marshall Fry, Jeanne M. Stewart, Mable Dibble, Mrs. Shipman, Anna Armstrong Greene and Mrs. A. A. Frazee were nationally known painters whose work fetches high prices from today's collectors. Grace studied with them all in Chicago, noting not only palette, mediums and firing methods but also how they paced their classes and what they charged in their studios.

She wrote in her notebook from the Chicago auditorium school:

"Mrs. Greene gives instruction 15 minutes, painting with the student during that time. I then painted on the same piece, practicing, for the three hours. Mrs. G came a second time and worked more to the plaque was ready for the first fire, and the end of the first lesson (Notes, June 16, 1900). "Miss Stewart charges a dollar a lesson, or \$10 for 12 lessons. She gives lessons to each pupil in turn (a few minutes as is necessary) and allow them to work three hours." (Notes May 14 A.M.)

Modern day porcelain artists revere Franz Aulich as a master of the porcelain art form. In her notes Grace lists his famous palette, notes brush types and sizes and describes copying his famous American Beauty rose vase. Like most master, Aulich ground and created his own signature colors. Grace follows every technical detail:

"Mr. Aulich puts on Rosa and Crimson Purple (his own make) in the first fire and the Rosa stands the three fires as well as many colors. While I was there, Mr. Aulich made his "American Beauty"- a warmer red than the Crimson Purple, which he used on the "American Beauty" vase. I bought the first bottle sold."

Master china painters mixed and marketed their own powdered paints in tiny vials. According to Brandimarte, "Independent professionals were more likely to use powder colors, to venture landscapes and figures, to embrace conventional design, and to experiment with under glaze work" (206). All of these characterize Grace French's china painting practices. Paints by Stewart, Fry and several other including the famous "American Beauty" by Aulich himself were found in Grace's paint box.

Grace copied Aulich's famous Chrysanthemums on a table top, painted a rose tray and asters. "Paid for thirteen lessons, twenty-six dollars.... three or four dollars for extra materials.... Besides painting the two plates by myself, I painted a rose price – double roses – and a wild rose piece and a part of a study of grapes from Mr. Aulich's watercolor studies..." she writes.

Grace's experience studying under Aulich and copying his works in 1900 becomes more significant after nearly all of Aulich's work of art on porcelain was destroyed in the Great San Francisco Earthquake of 1906. Only a few Aulich originals survived that catastrophe and some sources say he never painted again.

A booklet Grace purchased for 25 cents called "China Painting as a Business by One Who Has Succeeded suggests that Grace and Abbie French were serious about china painting as a business as well as a fine art form." Its author scolded:

"We are all professors, and we run a go-as-you-please affairs, and naturally there is no respect for the art in the public mind.... We must make our market, we must make our traditions, we must force the buying public to recognize us.... Lack of thorough training is at the root of the whole evil.... Persons undertaking such work should have intelligence and self control enough to train themselves " (China Painting 2-3).

Hundreds of students learned to copy the famous studies of Franz B. Aulich or Jean Stewart. Grace's ledger details records of lessons, supplies and some of the china sales. Although china painters earned far less than the popular little booklet promised, skilled teachers like Grace and Abby could make a modest living at the trade.

Every prominent family probably owned a chocolate set or a tray decorated with grapes or beechnuts or her luminous poppies. Alice Gossage gave her niece hand-painted china as a wedding gift. But the popularity of hand-painted fine china declined for several reasons. During World War I and particularly during the Great Depression, almost no china bisque was being shipped from Europe so china painting as a decorative art died out in America until it was revived in the 1950s.

"Women in American history tend to be forgotten and their roles secondary to their male counterparts. In the early 1900s there were hundreds of unnamed and unknown fine female china painters and artists who lapsed into obscurity because no one felt their lives needed documentation. Allowed creative occupations and hobbies, they were never allowed to achieve professional status like their male counterparts" (Dubay). Grace French was one of those decorative artists.

Evolving Tastes and Changing Circumstances

Well into the 1920s, the French sisters sold china and other decorative and commercial pieces. Grace made Christmas cards and small paintings for the occasional shows at their studio and for what Grace called "the Christmas trade." Grace's ledger records sales of paintings and supplies as well as lessons as late as 1938.

During the Great Depression and particularly after World War II, no china was being shipped from Europe so china painting as a decorative art died out in America until

it was revived in the 1950s. Boxes of china paints, brushes and patterns were boxed up for estate sales. Brandimarte says most of the decorative art of 1870-1920 is probably relegated to attics boxes and china closets. Like the creations of many gifted artists of the period, we believe that china painted by Abbie and Grace French is waiting to be rediscovered and exhibited again. Says Brandimarte, "It is a legitimacy long overdue."

China painting has experienced resurgence in the United States beginning in the late 1970s. Museums like the Metropolitan Museum in New York and the Museum of fine Arts in Boston have mounted major exhibits about the artisans of 1875-1920.

Today two major organizations promote the art of painting on porcelain: International Porcelain Artists and Teachers, Inc., widely known as IPAT Inc., and the World Organization of China Painters (WOCP) and thousands of artisans recognize decorative painting as fine art. Through their efforts, Black Hills area china painting teachers have helped the museum understand the artifacts, processes and craftsmanship of the region's pioneer master in china painting, Grace French.

Some people who knew Grace, like James Cessna and Clara Lobdell, have speculated that she was somewhat dominated by the more forceful Abbie. Cessna said she traveled less frequently than she wanted to because Abbie hated the long train trips necessary to get to the art centers of Boston, Chicago and Denver. No record tells whether she felt the powerful influences of art in the West from such artists as Rosa Bonheur or artists of Santa Fe and Taos like Georgia O'Keefe. She was too old to benefit from the surge of support for women artists from the Writers and Artists Projects of the New Deal.

The sisters never bought a car and the well-used buggy was put up in the barn until Grace's estate was settled after 1942. Dependent on others for getting around even to go to social gatherings or to paint, Grace must have found traveling to keep up with art trends and techniques impossible. But by the 1930s, a whole network of painters in Rapid City and a "modern" art department lead by MarGretta Cocking at Black Hills Teachers College in Spearfish were establishing new tastes. However, neighbors involved in the local arts community like Etta Jay Anderson may have shared news of community arts happenings with Grace.

After Abbie died in 1936, Grace became a bit social, admitting to getting a permanent and shopping with delight at the local J. C. Penny Store. She continued to paint, teach and even exhibit occasionally. Margretta Cocking records that she sent paintings to Black Hills Teachers College's annual shows of area artists. The ledger records Trout Paradise and The Flume loaned in 1936, Chicadee Canyon and Scott's Dam in 1937, Cleghorn Canyon in 1938 when Grace was 80 and a Still Life with Fruit sent in 1939.

The last notation for a lesson was 1940. Etta Jay Anderson, Peggy Nelson and former students like James Cessna used the classic techniques she had taught them in their own work or in private teaching so some of the French teaching legacy continued until their careers ended.

Her obituary in the Rapid City Journal says: Grace A. French, elderly artist and a resident of Rapid City for 57 years, died at her home at 31 Quincy Street Friday afternoon, July 31, 1942. On her death certificate Dr. Jackson wrote: "She was a Christian Scientist I believe and evidently made it work as she was not to my knowledge seriously ill during the 40 years I knew her. So without a doubt she finally passed as a result of the inevitable process of disintegration."

Delia Miser read her Christian Science service. Grace Anna French lies buried beneath a simple stone near her mother and sister at Mountain View Cemetery in Rapid City, South Dakota.

Preserving the Legacy

Throughout her life, Grace gave paintings to members of the Rapid City Christian Science community and to other friends and neighbors. Because she was both prolific and generous, cataloguing her complete works seems impossible since families and private collectors may own many of her significant paintings.

A fellow Christian Scientist and family friend, Judge Walter G. Miser (a young lawyer when engaged by Grace to manage properties) assumed responsibility for her paintings after her death. Possibly at her direction, some paintings may have been sent to an unknown destination in Boston. Judge Miser had the remaining paintings left in her house crated in specially designed wood crates and stored at Northwest Moving and Storage, paying the annual storage fee.

Grace apparently gave many paintings to members of the Rapid City Christian Science community and probably to other friends and neighbors. A fellow Christian Scientist and family friend, Judge Walter G. Miser (a young lawyer when engaged by Grace to manage properties) assumed responsibility for the paintings. According to the records of the local Christian Science Church, a large part of Grace's estate (possibly including some paintings) at her passing went to The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Boston, Massachusetts (Olson). After her death, Judge Miser had the paintings left in her house moved to specially designed wood crates and stored at Northwest Moving and Storage.

The Judge paid the crate storage until his two daughters took over that responsibility, probably at Judge Miser's death. They continued to pay the storage expense until they heard that the Dahl Fine Arts Center was opening. According to Ruth Brennan, the first director of The Dahl Fine Arts Center, Ann Pier, a member of the Rapid City Arts Council, was probably instrumental in securing the French paintings for The Dahl and in securing the works context information from Etta Jay Anderson.

Without announcement, one day in late 1974 or early 1975, thirteen crated paintings were delivered by truck at The Dahl. "Judge Miser did a wonderful job having someone construct these crates. They kept the paintings in place by screwing into back of

crate and into the frame. When they came, that's where we kept [the paintings] because we didn't have cabinets when they came," Brennan said. The Miser daughters had specified that the paintings were gifts to the City, to be housed and cared for by The Dahl Fine Arts Center under the contracted administration of the Rapid City Arts Council. After several years, the City transferred ownership of the paintings to the Rapid City Arts Council. (Interview).

"Bernard Thomas, The Dahl's cyclorama artist, was in building when French paintings came and he was as delighted as we were," Brennan. A noted artist with wide experience, Thomas helped the Dahl price them for insurance purposes (Interview).

About this time, local historian and collector David Strain had begun looking for Grace French works and noticed an estate sale. He bought some sketches, paintings at auction and a box of sketchbooks, paints and brushes that had come into the possession of former student and local painter Etta Anderson. Strain featured some of the sketches and paintings in a four-color section about Grace in his 1989 book *Hay Camp*. In 2005 Dave and Betty Strain gave this collection to The Journey Museum. It provided not only significant individual paintings, but also primary sources materials about Grace's education and teaching.

A year later a regional art collector Patrick Roseland, then president of Rapid City's Historic Preservation Committee, found, purchased and donated an additional collection of French's sketches and watercolors. They had been stored under a bed in an old leather suitcase for years (Roseland).

Preserving the Legacy

Collecting, preserving and interpreting the art of pioneer artist Grace French is important and challenging.

"South Dakota was home to three women artists from this era who received national recognition: Grace French, Ada Caldwell and Myra Morton Miller. As different as their lives were from one another, they shared a love of beauty and the will to make art in an environment that did not sufficiently recognize their abilities or achievements," says art historian Lynda Clark (Breaking New Ground 3)

"The Grace French legacy of Rapid City and Hills scenery remains, today, as the first and best historical art work of the past century in the Black Hills" wrote historian and collector David Strain in 1989 (Strain 83). In a recent interview, Strain offered an additional reflection: "Grace French was the first painter in the region to add figures in the corners of her scenery; they're caught between realism and abstraction. To me those figures add something more important than the scene—the human element and the human spirit" (Interview)

Former Historic Preservation Committee president Pat Roseland calls Grace French Rapid City's visual historian. "I can compare where she was a hundred years ago

and where we are now; her work tells the story of Rapid City before the [early photographers'] post cards. I can see what she saw with her eyes and compare it to what is there today." (Interview)

Roseland said the greatest challenge for an artist in the early 1900s was being accepted. "Rapid City was a cowboy town. She might have fought an uphill battle trying to get other people interested in art, so she got people interested in art by teaching them to paint." Grace and Abby French brought a cultural climate to the men, women and children of Rapid City by expanding a level of artistic understanding and appreciation with Grace's work and the work of her students. "It would have been a major loss to Rapid City if Grace and Abby French had not come because of their ability to make art and teach art here." (Interview)

Although Grace French was limited by circumstance and place, she found ways to pursue art as a lifelong passion. Rhonda Schier wondered how things might have been different for Grace if she had chosen to live elsewhere:

"I don't know how she had a chance to exhibit her work. If she had been an artist in today's society, she would have had art shows, she would have had media coverage; she would have had artist receptions – more people would have known about her and had a chance to experience what she was painting. In early day Rapid City, it was a quiet calm personal experience to be an artist and to share what she could with the small number of students that came into her home through the years and touch them on an individual basis." (Interview)

As a former museum director at the South Dakota Art Museum and The Journey Museum, Lynda Clark emphasized the important preservation and continuing interpretation for historical understanding. "If the Grace French paintings are not preserved, we don't just lose a vital part of art history, we also lose the lens through which we see Rapid City in its formative years " (Interview).

In notes from a drawing class at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the student Grace French copied this unattributed quote called "Seeing the Beautiful."

Without knowing you have gift
Which the wealth of the world could not buy
Some the soul of man to lift
From the sordid earth and to make him see
How beautiful common things may be
How heaven may be glimpsed through a wayside tree –
The gift of an artistic eye.

Through her lifelong pursuit of art, mostly lived out on the edge of South Dakota's Black Hills, pioneer artist Grace French left a legacy of instruction and painting those common things that captured our history and still teaches us to see the beautiful.

Afterward

Before the Grace French legacy exhibit, most of the public information about Grace French and her sister Abigail, pioneer artists and teachers in the Black Hills, came from oral history recollections and informal publications by James Cessna, Ann Pier, Eva Bangs and her daughter Clara Bangs Lobdell.

With access to sketchbooks and artifacts purchased from the estate of Etta Anderson, collector and regional historian David Strain put together the first major publication (“Grace French 1858-1942; Capturing Rapid City and the Black Hills’ Image on Canvas.” Black Hills Hay Camp; Images and Perspectives of Early Rapid City, 1989) that included reproductions and a brief history about Miss French.

Dr. Arthur Huseboe wrote briefly about her and included a color illustration of Autumn Blue and Gold owned by the South Dakota Art Museum in An Illustrated History of the Arts in South Dakota published by The Center for Western Studies in 1989.

Funded in part by a South Dakota Humanities Council research grant, research for this project began in two directions. Ellen Bishop did the genealogy research, locating Bonnie Knott, a cousin in New Hampshire. Grace's mother, Sarah E. Clark, and Ms. Knott’s great-grandfather, Samuel A. Clark, were brother and sister. Bonnie provided photos, hand-written family histories, clippings and other invaluable documentation.

The Dahl Arts Center periodically shows Grace and Abigail French works in its permanent collection. The Journey Museum has a small permanent display about French. Collections from David and Betty Strain and from Patrick Roseland expanded The Journey’s French holdings. With cooperation from The Dahl Arts Center, Black Hills State University, the South Dakota Art Museum and many private collectors, The Journey Museum presented “Pursuit of Art: Grace French, Pioneer Artist and Teacher” in the Stanford Adelstein Gallery from Sept. 23-Dec. 31, 2007. No comprehensive exhibit of Grace French works including works from other museums and private collectors has ever been mounted before.

The South Dakota Humanities Council grant plus additional support from the Mary Chilton DAR Foundation, enabled The Journey Museum, to conduct research and produce a 32-page illustrated booklet, DVD by Linn Productions and a website that will become a virtual museum on Grace French.

Grace French Ephemera
David and Betty Strain Collection. Minnilusa Historical Association.

Grace French ledger 1900-1940, a record of Grace's business transactions including lessons, materials sold, and artwork sold.

Grace French Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, MA notebook 1882-1883 notes concerning her instruction at that institution .

Green "Compositions" notebook - notes by Grace concerning china painting and other art lessons around 1900 History and Bios of important china painters

"History of China Painting." Handwritten manuscript by Grace French.

Red "Giant Composition" notebook -handwritten notes and copied passages on spiritual/religious matters mostly, and many concerning Christian Science. 1909-1926

Green "memorandum" notebook "Drawing, Grace A. French, Rapid City, SD" notes by Grace on drawing, including teaching drawing.

Black no writing on cover. Inside Cover "Grace A. French, #2 Rollins Place, Boston, MA notebook by grace on her drawing class "winter of 1880-81" includes addition of curriculum notes for instruction in drawing - BHC and Spearfish Normal (questions)

Sketchbooks

Sketchbook 1890-1897 "Sketches" brown cloth cover

Sketchbook 1889-1898 "Sketches" brown cloth cover

Sketchbook 1883-1884 no writing on black cloth cover, 1883-1884 "Boston, MA"

Sources Cited

- A Studio of Her Own: Boston Women Artists, 1870 – 1940. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston in *Resource Library Magazine*. <<http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/2aa/2aa492.htm>>
- Balliet, Barbara J. □ "Let Them Study as Men and Work as Women: Georgina Davis, New Women, and Illustrated Papers." <<http://www.common-place.org/vol-07/no-03/>>
- Bangs, Eva. "The French Sisters." A talk to the Black Hills Corral of Westerners on women's influence in the early Black Hills in the early 1960s. Her daughter Clara Lobdell gathered these notes for the Minnilusa Historical Society.
- Bishop, Ellen. Email on census records and genealogy searches. March 30, 2007.
- Brandimarte, Cynthia A. "Somebody's Aunt and Nobody's Mother: The American China Painter and Her Work, 1870-1920." Winterthur Portfolio 23 (Winter 1988): 203-224.
- Cessna, James E. "Grace A. French; a Rosebud Among the Prairie Grasses."
- Cessna, James E. Notes from an interview about the French sisters taped October 1983.
- China Painting as a Business by One Who Has Succeeded. New York: Montague Marks. No date.
- Clark, Lynda K. "Breaking New Ground: Women Artists in the American West, 1843-1943. A paper written for The Journey Museum, 2007.
- Cocking, MarGretta. My Story of Art in the Black Hills. Self-published, 1965.
- Copley Square: The Art World's Hub of the Hub. Women Artists in the Back Bay; a Walking Tour. <<http://www.bwht.org/stop7and8.html>>
- Coursey, O.W. Who's Who in South Dakota; Volume 1. Pg. 106-109 <http://www.usgennet.org/usa/sd/state/whos_who/cook.html>
- DuBay , Debby. "Hand Painted Porcelain: Women Played a Major Role." Journal of Antiques and Collectibles, Feb. 2003 <<http://www.journalofantiques.com/Feb03/featurefeb03.htm>>
- French family hand-written notes. Photocopy found among Grace's notebooks.
- French, A.C. The Conquest of Disease. 1943 New Delhi, India: B. Jain Publishers Ltd. Hughes, 1992.

History of Art Education Time Line; Decades of Art Education History in Contexts of Schooling and Artworlds. Pennsylvania State University.
<<http://www.personal.psu.edu/faculty/m/a/mas53/timelint.html>>

History of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Dakota compiled by Miss Emma L. Swartz. Rapid city, SD , Daily Journal Steam Printing House, 1900.

Huseboe, Arthur R. An Illustrated History of the Arts in South Dakota. Sioux Falls, SD, Center for Western Studies, 1989.

Jones, Harvey L. "Twilight and Reverie: California Tonalist Painting 1890-1930," from catalog for exhibit at Oakland Museum of California, Feb 11-May 14, 1995.
<<http://www.tfaoi.com/aa/2aa/2aa594.htm>>

Knott, Bonnie. Emails and photocopied clippings and documents. Grace's mother, Sarah E. Clark, and Ms. Knott's great-grandfather, Samuel A. Clark, were brother and sister.

Lobdell, Clara Bangs. Letter to Minnilusa Historical Society, January 19, 2006.

Lobdell, Clara Bangs. Interview, Sept. 2007.

Olson, Karen Gunderson. Email August 20, 2007.

Pier, Ann. "Grace and Abbie French; The French Sisters" 106-107 Rapid City Pioneers of the Nineteenth Century, Ed. Eka Parkinson. Rapid City, SD: Rapid City Society for Genealogical Research, 1989.

Schier, Rhonda Buell. Taped interview. Email June 25, 2007.

Smith, Mathew W. ed. Circuit Riders of the Middle Border, a history of Methodism in South Dakota. Sioux Falls: Midwest Beach, 1965.

Strain, David. "Grace French 1858-1942; Capturing Rapid City and the Black Hills' Image on Canvas." Black Hills Hay Camp; Images and Perspectives of Early Rapid City. Rapid City: Fenske Printing, 1989.

Strain, David. Interview. September 7, 2007.

Sources Consulted

Art Across America: Two Centuries of Regional Painting, 115-117; illus. p.116.

Blaszcyk, Regina Lee. The Aesthetic Moment: China Decorators, Consumer Demand and Technological Change in the American Pottery Industry, 1865-1900 Winterthur

Portfolio. 29 No. 2/3 Summer Autumn 1994 pp.121-153.

Bolin, Paul E. "The Massachusetts Drawing Act of 1870: Industrial Mandate or Democratic Maneuver?" in *Framing the Past: Essays on Art Education*. Soucy, Donald, and Mary Ann Stankiewicz. Reston, Virginia: National Art Education Association 1990. <<http://www.noteaccess.com/APPROACHES/ArtEd/History/MADrawingAct.htm>>

Bostwick Davis, Elliott. *Life Drawing from Ape to Human: Charles Darwin's Theories of Evolution and William Rimmer's Art Anatomy*. Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide; a Journal of Nineteenth-century Visual Culture. Volume 2, Issue 2 Spring 2003. <http://www.19thc-artworldwide.org/spring_03/articles/davi.shtml>

Kovinick, Phil. "Grace French." An Encyclopedia of American Women Artists of the American West. Ed. Phil Kovinick and Marian Yoshiki-Kovinick. Austin: University of Texas Press, c1998.

Robertson, Sarah. "How I made Money at Painting China by a Self Made Girl" New York: A.C. Baker, 1899.