GAIL E. EVANS

Promoting Tourism and Development at Crater Lake

The Art of Grace Russell Fountain and Mabel Russell Lowther

Paintings and photographs have played a significant role in focusing public attention on certain western landscapes in North America and, ultimately, in encouraging their conservation and use as national parks. The paintings of artists such as John James Audubon (1785–1851) and George Catlin (1796–1872) initially brought public attention to scenic landscapes of the American West during the first half of the 1800s. Historian Dwight Pitcaithley, among others, has attributed to Catlin the idea of parks for people and wildlife. During an 1832 trip to the Dakotas, as Catlin captured images and recorded his thoughts about the value of western lands, he also mused on the idea that government might create a “magnificent park . . . a nation’s park, containing man and beast in all the wild and freshness of nature’s beauty.” During the following decades, artists, photographers, and writers advanced the national park idea with images of the Yosemite Valley, both pictorial and verbal, that appeared in popular magazines and were exhibited in the East, influencing decisions to designate Yosemite and the Mariposa Grove of Giant Sequoias as a national park, managed by the State of California. Over the first half of the twentieth century, paintings, photographs, and descriptions continued to encourage the designation of national parks and raise public awareness of those places. The work of artists such as Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran, Thomas Hill, and scores of other men sparked interest in setting aside scenic landscapes in national parks to
This painting of Crater Lake, attributed to southern Oregon artist Grace Russell Fountain, probably dates from the 1890s. This painting helped raise public awareness of the beauty of this natural feature, located far from population centers, and contributed to the movement to conserve Crater Lake for future generations of visitors.

be protected and used for public enjoyment. The nationwide movement at the turn of the twentieth century to conserve and promote culturally significant scenic landscapes that relied on male artists and writers has long been recognized and described.

Recent scholarship has documented numerous ways that women contributed to the conservation movement at the turn of the twentieth century. Women campaigned to ban the killing of birds for feathers used in hats, were active members of outdoor hiking clubs, and helped organize and participate in a nationwide campaign to save Niagara Falls from destruction by hydroelectric development in the early 1900s. Much is known about the considerable influence women exerted in various conservation crusades through organizations such as the General Federation of Women’s Clubs and its Conservation Committee as well as other clubs that fought to save the Colorado cliff dwellings, preserve the palisades of the Hudson River, prevent the destruction of forests from radical harvesting, and promote

Evans, Promoting Tourism and Development at Crater Lake
the beautification of cities. Women’s clubs succeeded in setting aside scenic Franconia Notch in New Hampshire’s White Mountains and creating a reserve that encompassed Mount Katahdin in Maine. Other women worked to establish Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, to protect northern California’s sequoia and redwood trees, and to prevent the flooding and drastic alteration of the Hetch Hetchy Valley of Yosemite National Park in the early 1900s. “Propelled by a growing consciousness of the panacea of bucolic scenery and wilderness,” environmental historian Carolyn Merchant has written, “coupled with the need for reform of the squalor of the cities, women burst vividly into the public arena in the early twentieth century as a force in the progressive conservation crusade.”

Less is known about women’s contributions to the conservation movement through their artistic depictions of scenic landscapes. Little attention has been given to exploring the role of women’s artwork in conserving particular scenic places. In Oregon, although scholars have acknowledged that women had a “tremendous impact” on the early development of the state’s art community by participating in art exhibits at state fairs, giving art lessons, and leading art organizations, the influence of women’s landscape art on the conservation movement has not been explored.

Several challenges have hindered the examination of women’s artistic contributions to the conservation movement. First, simply discovering the work of women artists has been extremely difficult. Both in Great Britain and the United States, “women’s works have not always had the good fortune to survive . . . into the twentieth century. There has been little impetus for the conservation of women’s paintings, drawings and sculpture, or the acquisition of women’s art by national collections. . . . Gallery-based initiatives . . . have often been fugitive, documented by little more than a photocopied handlist or a slender catalogue.” Although in the Northwest, “women outnumbered men as artists” during this period, “little remains of the work of the impressive numbers of earlier women artists active before 1930.”

The challenge of discovering women’s landscape art has been further compounded by women’s frequent failure to promote their own work and their tendency to leave their work unsigned or signed with monograms, aliases, or their husband’s names. Also, women, perhaps more than men, donated their art to charitable causes or gave it to family members rather than sold it in galleries; thus, the provenance of women’s artwork became lost. In an early history of art and artists in Oregon, Louise Rasmussen identified written documentation of only seven women artists alongside more than forty-five men artists. A 1999 study of Oregon artists described many women who were at work in the late 1800s and early 1900s, their training,
and subjects painted, yet in-depth research on individual women landscape artists in the Northwest is limited and recent.9

Finally, assessments of the value of women landscape artists’ work have been tempered by commonly held views of women’s inability to travel to *plein air* (French for ‘open air’) painting locations and their incompetence as landscape artists. Women painters of the late-nineteenth-century Victorian era sometimes faced restrictions on traveling alone into remote wilderness areas. They also were confronted with societal assumptions that they lacked the strength, technical knowledge, and training to accurately capture expansive and dynamic western landscapes on canvas. Only men could carry a cumbersome easel, canvases, paints, and brushes to remote sites for *plein air* painting and capture on canvas scenes characterized by rugged and virile, remote, and untamed landscapes. Well into the twentieth century, judgments about women’s artwork were cast in distinctly gendered terms.10 The February 27, 1926, issue of the *Los Angeles Evening Herald*, for example, assessed the work of landscape artist Kathryn Leighton’s painting of Glacier National Park this way: “Leighton has a masculine sweep and strength to her brush and few men painters can outdo the virility of her sunbathed peaks and wind-winnowed snowfields.” As recently as 1982, an art exhibit booklet that accompanied Yosemite paintings reveals this persistent, narrow view of the value of women’s landscape paintings; only one of the twenty-four artists featured was a woman. “Constance Gordon-Cumming,” wrote catalogue author Joseph Armstrong Baird, Jr., was “that marvelous embodiment of the English Victorian woman-traveler . . . [who] represented the English genteel-amateur with professional aspirations, which was rare in the American West.”11

Despite these challenges, researchers have recently shed light on a handful of women landscape artists in the Pacific Northwest. According to art historian Barbara Matilsky, “the genre of landscape painting attracted early women artists in the Northwest. The wilderness as well as natural areas closer to home inspired artists such as Harriet Foster Beecher, Abby Williams Hill, Eliza Barchus, Anna Gellenbeck, and Margaret Camfferman, who were captivated by the coastal and mountain light.” In the early twentieth century, the work of these *plein air* landscape artists not only popularized notable western landscapes, but also influenced conservation policy makers to support measures aimed at creating, protecting, and promoting public parks. In 1934, Barchus recalled for *Oregon Daily Journal*’s Fred Lockley that she had sold “paintings of Mount Hood or of other scenic beauty spots of the West to President Theodore Roosevelt, President Woodrow Wilson,” and others who could have influenced Congressional decisions about conservation policies. Kathryn Leighton was described, in the February 27, 1926, issue
Grace and Mabel Russell grew up in Ashland, Oregon, where their parents operated the Ashland Marble Works, a marble cutting and carving business. Pictured here are Grace and Mabel with their seven sisters. Standing from left to right are Dotie, Bertha, Nellie, Hortense, and Molly. Seated from left to right are Grace, Mabel, Mattie, and Pearl.

of the Los Angeles Evening Herald, as “the first to bring to galleries here the strange, wild charm of Glacier National Park for an entire exhibit.”

The conservation movement not only engaged women landscape artists but also encouraged greater acceptance of their work. In the early twentieth century, women landscape artists challenged the Victorian-era pervasive presumption that women artists were amateurs and dilettantes who took up painting as a leisurely Sunday afternoon activity. Although the arts were seen as “proper for a girl’s cultural development,” this had been “peripheral to the essential commercial concerns of society,” such as making a living, “which were handled by men,” according to art historian Vicki Halper. This began to change, however, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, when painting styles that required capturing the authentic qualities of a light on the landscape encouraged working outdoors, on site. “In the days before the turn
of the century,” Eliza Barchus’s daughter reflected, “it was not easy being an artist. There were no automobiles to take you to the scenic spots.” Women landscape artists of the West needed to transport their easel, paints, brushes, camping gear, and other equipment into often remote locations, where they increasingly moved into men’s painting sphere.

Western railroads also offered to women landscape artists possibilities for professionalization. “Several companies seeking to publicize attractions along their routes in order to stimulate ticket sales began acquiring western landscape . . . paintings either by purchase or by offering artists passage and lodging expenses in exchange for canvases,” according to art historians Phil Kvinick and Marian Yoshiki-Kovinick. The Santa Fe Railroad, in 1903, began to collect a large number of paintings of the Grand Canyon, Pike’s Peak, the Arizona desert, and Native American homelands and portraits, many of which were displayed in railroad ticket offices and passenger stations. A decade later, the railroad owned more than thirty-five canvases by women. The Great Northern and the Northern Pacific railroads similarly acquired landscape art created by women. Washington’s Abby Williams Hill made arduous trips into the North Cascades, as well as Yellowstone, to paint en plein air for railroad brochures. Kathryn Leighton made important artistic contributions to the Northern Pacific’s promotion of Glacier National Park. In Oregon, Grace Russell Fountain provided the Southern Pacific Railroad with paintings of Crater Lake as early as the turn of the twentieth century.

Opportunities like these took women artists further into the “essential commercial concerns of the society, which were handled by men.” In addition to the rigors of plein air painting and the monetary rewards offered by railroads, the professionalization of women artists was advanced by new opportunities in art education programs, feminist activities that emerged alongside the suffrage movement before and during World War I, and the growing number of middle-class women who pursued art as a serious, self-sustaining career. Women artists continually struggled to overcome the “contentious gender politics of the art world” and a “new masculinity in criticism based on biological and Darwinian notions of creativity,” but they succeeded in becoming accepted and recognized artists and professionals.

The artwork of Grace Russell Fountain (1858–1942) and Mabel Russell Lowther (1874–1959) contributed to the promotion and protection of Crater Lake as well as the professionalization of women artists. Their numerous images of Crater Lake, painted over several decades and exhibited in Oregon, California, and Washington, D.C., broadened public appreciation for the unique scenic qualities of this shimmering sapphire blue volcanic lake. One of Fountain’s paintings of Crater Lake is said to have influenced President Theodore Roosevelt to sign legislation in 1902, establishing Crater Lake as a national park.
Lake National Park. Ten years later, a Crater Lake painting by Mabel Russell, exhibited in a U.S. congressional committee meeting encouraged Congress to provide federal funding for the development of roads and trails in the park that boosted tourism. In subtle but real ways, these sisters’ artwork of Crater Lake contributed to the early-twentieth-century conservation movement in Oregon. These two women also pushed at the edges of emerging professionalism for women landscape artists. They were among an early-twentieth-century group of women landscape artists who moved literally into men’s world of outdoor scenic painting and, through the employment of those paintings by conservation causes, figuratively into the professional world as well.

Grace Russell Fountain and Mabel Russell grew up in Ashland, Oregon, in a family of artistic parents. (This article refers to Mabel Russell without her married surname, because she accomplished the largest body of her artwork before she married in 1925.) Their father, James Howard Russell, was born in Tennessee and received instruction in stonecutting and carving in Ohio and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, before immigrating in 1849 to the California gold fields. Two years later, he migrated north to the gold-mining camp of Jacksonville in southern Oregon. In 1854, at age thirty-one, he met and married sixteen-year-old Ann Hasseltine Hill, who had emigrated from the Sweetwater Valley, Tennessee, to southern Oregon with her parents two years earlier. In pursuit of a new business venture, the young couple moved to Yreka, California. Following the failure of that enterprise, they returned to the Rogue River Valley in 1860 with a family of three children. That year, James Russell decided to return to stone carving and opened what eventually became the Ashland Marble Works, a business of cutting and carving marble gravestones, monuments, and architectural elements.

Economic necessity demanded that Ann Russell learn stone-carving skills and develop business acumen. For eighteen months between 1863 and 1865, when James left his family and the business to explore new gold-mining ventures, Ann “carried on with the marble carving” work. When James returned, he and Ann erected a water-powered mill near Ashland Creek close to the center of town. Ann perfected her skill, incising letters and carving flowers and decorative details. The greatest testament to her excellence as a stone carver came when a white-ribbon marble sculpture she completed in 1890 won acceptance for exhibition in the Women’s Building of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago. After James died in 1895, Ann carried on carving and running the family business for many years, nearly until her death in 1930 at age ninety-two. Several Russell children demonstrated artistic talent as they matured, and two daughters — Grace Russell Fountain and younger sister Mabel Russell — not only became adept landscape artists and received recognition for their work but also painted for a living.
Sixteen years apart in age, Fountain and Russell shared with their mother a determination to develop their artistic skill. They never had the resources to enroll in an art school in New York, Paris, Munich, or Dusseldorf, but many years later, Russell recalled that “her mother saw to it that most of her children got art training if they wished it.”23 Late in life, Ann reminisced about remaining committed to the family marble carving business in order to raise money for her children’s education, and the Russells’ marble works business ledger indicates that James and Ann paid for many of their daughters’ education at the Ashland Academy.24

In Ashland’s early years as an emigrant settlement, the Methodist-Episcopal (ME) Church promoted education as an important part of Christian service in the community. The church began collecting funds for a school in 1869, and in October of that year, not far from the Russells’ residence, the new two-story wood-frame Ashland Academy building opened its doors as a private school to paying students. Grace Fountain undoubtedly attended the Ashland Academy, probably from 1873 to around 1878, when she married at age twenty.25 The Ashland Academy offered some art classes, as in the fall term of 1878, when the academy curriculum included painting and
drawing classes. She may have taken this class along with other academic courses or business offerings in the academy’s Commercial College. Mabel Russell had a different educational experience. In 1878, the heavily mortgaged Ashland Academy floundered, then closed. Ashland High School opened in 1890 in the same building. Russell, then sixteen years old, entered high school around that time and graduated in 1894.26 By then, she might have been accompanying her older sister Grace on outdoor painting excursions.

Both sisters may also have taken private art lessons from resident or visiting artists. In late August 1884, for example, Mrs. M.B. Bowditch, who reportedly had “much experience in art instruction,” offered classes in landscape painting, both in oil and watercolors. Four years later, the Ashland Tidings reported the arrival of Professor J.M. Fowler, who offered instruction in crayon as well as portrait work at a residence “on Main Street near the Presbyterian Church.”27 Fountain and Russell also could have ventured
Evans, Promoting Tourism and Development at Crater Lake

to Portland, by way of the Southern Pacific Railroad, for art and painting lessons. The Rose City offered opportunities to see the work of resident and visiting artists, which were often exhibited in shop windows, and to take art lessons. A recently reported china bowl painted with broad, juicy strokes forming red and yellow flowers among intertwining green leaves is signed “Grace H. Russell” on the underside, strongly suggesting that she was painting by the age of twenty, when she married James Fountain in December 1878. Many years later, Mabel Russell recalled that “she took her first real lesson in 1894” at age twenty. According to the youngest Russell sister, Pearl Russell Potter Wiley, “both sisters were pupils of [the] well-known western artist, Mr. W.S. Parrott.” Although the precise details of the Russell sisters’ relationship with Parrott is not known, the influence of his artistic style and technique is evident in their early work, and has been observed by several art historians, including Ginny Allen, of Portland.28

After attending the San Francisco Museum of Art, William S. Parrott (1843–1915) soon became well known in the Pacific Northwest for his skillful depiction of colorful, luminous, representational landscapes painted in the style of the Hudson River School. Founded in the mid nineteenth century by Thomas Cole — and joined later by Asher Durand, Jasper Cropsey, Frederic Edwin Church, Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Moran, and Thomas Hill — artists of the Hudson River School depicted landscapes of stunning beauty along New York’s Hudson River and the Catskills, in New Hampshire’s White Mountains, and in California’s Yosemite Valley and nearby Mariposa Sequoia big trees. Certain aesthetic and philosophical principles, rather than a prescribed style, united artists of the Hudson River School: belief in natural religion; recognition of the beauty, magnificence, and spirituality of nature; and belief that a sparsely inhabited American landscape suggested national character. Hudson River School artists portrayed idealized scenes of iconic landscapes in great realistic detail. They sometimes painted pairs or a series of the same scene, each one capturing changing conditions of light, weather or season, and mood. Light, created by the fleeting effects of sun and moonlight or fire, enraptured many Hudson River School artists, often functioning as a manifestation of the divine. Luminism, a final phase of the Hudson River School, often invoked light and its effects to elevate the ordinary to the sublime.29

Parrott’s landscape paintings epitomized the work of Hudson River School artists. Throughout most of his career, Parrott rendered grand scenic Northwest landscapes in vibrant colors with bold atmospheric luminescence. Like many Hudson River School artists, he painted landscapes on location outdoors, or en plein air. He specialized in painting luminous scenes of Mount Hood. He also painted scenic landscapes in nearby southwest
Washington. Beginning in 1867, Parrott maintained a studio for twenty years in Portland. He closed his Portland studio permanently around 1887 and traveled throughout the region to paint en plein air, exhibit, and sell his artwork. Crater Lake became a favorite, much-painted subject of Parrott’s, along with Mount Rainier, Mount Adams, Mount St. Helens, Mount Shasta in northern California, Shoshone Falls on the Snake River in Idaho, and blazing, luminous forest fires. He exhibited his paintings in businesses, at several Oregon agricultural fairs, at the Portland Mechanics Fairs (first established in 1877–1878), and in other venues. Parrott and his sister Elizabeth Parrott Pond were among the first professional landscape painters in Oregon. Both made their living from selling their artwork.  

Fountain and Russell may have first encountered Parrott’s paintings of Mount Hood and other scenic landscapes in Portland. They also could have
seen his paintings of Crater Lake displayed in shop windows in Ashland, at the Ashland summer Chautauqua, or at southern Oregon agricultural fairs, where art was customarily exhibited. Parrott may have given art lessons, demonstrating his painting technique in Ashland or towns nearby. Over time, Parrott’s pupils, including Fountain, Russell, and Eliza Barchus (1857–1959) of Portland, replicated the Hudson River School style, which featured romantic landscapes bathed in luminous pink and golden atmospheric light as well as details created with small brush strokes. Fountain and Russell could have become acquainted with Parrott in the mid 1890s, when he painted Crater Lake after closing his Portland studio. Around 1894 or 1895, Grace Fountain, her husband James, and their youngest child Lysle moved to Klamath Falls, after a depressed national economy and economic woes that had plagued James’s business in Ashland motivated Grace to pursue painting as a professional self-sustaining career. According to her front-page obituary in the February 9, 1942, issue of Yreka’s Siskiyou Daily News, while in Klamath Falls, she studied “under noted landscape painter, a Mr. Parrott.” Fountain’s younger sister, Mabel Russell, probably traveled from Ashland to Klamath Falls to join her on painting excursions to Crater Lake. Many years later, Russell told a Sunday Oregonian journalist that she “took her first real [art] lesson in 1894”; given the timing, this lesson may have been with Parrott in Klamath Falls or on the south rim of Crater Lake. The sisters often painted at or near Victor Rock, projecting out over the caldera wall.

Fountain completed several paintings of Crater Lake in the 1890s, while living in Klamath Falls. In the mid 1890s, she reportedly sold her first painting, a view of Crater Lake, to San Francisco Mayor Adolph Sutro (in office from 1895 to 1897). She also undoubtedly hung paintings of Crater Lake in shops in both Klamath Falls and Ashland. Given the landscape’s proximity, she may have selected a Crater Lake painting to exhibit at the First Southern Oregon District Agricultural Fair held in 1898 near Medford.

During the late 1800s, Portland, the Pacific Northwest’s largest city with a population of 90,000, became increasingly attractive to all three artists — Parrott, Fountain, and Russell. A growing interest among Portland residents in seeing and purchasing artwork was attracting more artists, who came to teach and to exhibit and sell their work at annual agricultural fairs and at the Portland Mechanics Fairs art gallery. The city’s first art club, organized in 1885, attracted professionally trained artists from across America and Europe. Around 1899, the all-male Portland Art Club evolved into the Portland Sketch Club, which then opened its doors to women.

In 1900, Portland presented a unique opportunity to artists for another reason: the city was preparing a five-year plan for the first world’s fair on the Pacific Coast — the Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition — sched-
uled to open in June 1905. This culturally significant event, celebrating the 100-year anniversary of the expedition by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark to the region, provided a great opportunity for rendering the fair’s central theme: natural metropolis. The anticipated 1.5 million visitors offered promising opportunities for the artist sisters to exhibit scenic landscape paintings of nearby spectacles, such as Mount Hood and the Columbia River.

Parrott and Fountain moved to Portland in the late 1890s. Parrott arrived first around 1898. Grace, James, and Lysle Fountain came shortly afterwards, around 1899 or 1900. Grace immediately opened a studio and began giving art lessons in the Marquam Building, while James took a job working as a watchman for the Southern Pacific Railroad. The 1900–1901 Portland City Directory lists Grace simply as “artist.”

Mabel Russell occasionally visited her sister and shared her studio. Fountain both sought and gained attention for her work. The December 1901 issue of The Pacific Coast — Around the World, published by the Pacific Coast Floating Exposition Association, noted that “Mrs. J.D. Fountain, 722 Marquam Building, is a teacher of painting. She makes a specialty of landscape work, her most notable paintings being a [sic] beautiful canvas of Crater Lake, one of Mount Hood, and a number of Columbia River scenery. Some of the best of our younger artists are among her pupils.” In 1903, she extended her advertising to the Polk City Directory. “Mrs. J. D. Fountain, Landscape Artist, 722 Marquam Bldg,” the ad announced. In 1903, in addition to giving art lessons, she submitted artwork to a committee offering $250 for the best design of an official emblem to be used for the 1905 Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition. Fifteen contestants, including six women, submitted artwork. On March 18, 1903, the Morning Oregonian reported the outcome of the committee’s selection process:

Completed in 1891 on Morrison Street across from Pioneer Square, the Marquam Building was home to an ornate opera house, offices, and stores. Despite its imposing façade, its defective materials caused the east wall to collapse in 1912. The American Bank building replaced it the following year, less than a decade after Grace taught art classes there.
The best designs are those of Mrs. J. D. Fountain, of Portland, and Leonard Brown of Tacoma. The design of Mrs. Fountain represents a large apple, such as grows only in the Northwest, with the outlines of America traced thereon. The apple, clings to its branch, on which are the words, “Where rolls the Oregon.” Deep-green leaves give the apple a natural effect. The design is quite unique.

Despite the plaudits, the committee members decided that none of the submissions were just what they wanted.42

A few years after her arrival in Portland, Fountain began developing what would become a long-term relationship with Southern Pacific. This relationship may have begun soon after she moved to Portland around 1900. A photograph taken inside an Southern Pacific ticket office in Portland depicts a sizeable painting of Crater Lake that strongly resembles Fountain’s painting style hanging on the wall near the ticket counter. Accord-
ing to Fountain’s obituary in the *Ashland Tidings*, the railroad paid her to complete paintings of iconic western landscapes, such as Crater Lake, over several years.43

Beginning in the 1860s, railroads intent on aggressively advertising iconic places to potential tourists brought artists to those places and used their artwork to publicize and promote scenic western landscapes viewable from railroad corridors. Railroad companies became enthusiastic entrepreneurial patrons of artists who painted grand scenery, especially scenic landscapes in places that later became national parks. Art used for promoting travel and tourism in scenic western landscapes dated to the mid 1850s, when Thomas Ayres became the first known Euro-American artist to visit and draw the Yosemite Valley. His pencil sketches of pastoral scenes of Yosemite later appeared in James Mason Hutchings’s new *Hutchings’ California Magazine*, a promotional publication aimed at attracting wealthy tourists and railroad investors.44 When the Union Pacific Railroad constructed its transcontinental line near the Yosemite Valley, it provided free passage in 1863 for noted Hudson River School artist Albert Bierstadt as payment for paintings of scenery near its route. His paintings of Yosemite gave eastern audiences the first brilliantly colored views of the valley’s sublime landscape. Bierstadt’s paintings and Carleton Watkin’s stunning mammoth plates and stereo views of Yosemite were sent to a senator from California in Washington, D.C., and made an indelible impression on federal lawmakers as well as President Abraham Lincoln.45 Accounts of Yosemite National Park’s initial preservation, as a grant to the State of California, suggest that Lincoln studied Watkins’s photos before signing the bill that created the park in 1864.46

Northern Pacific Railroad financier Jay Cooke & Company brought artist Thomas Moran, photographer William Henry Jackson, and writer Nathaniel P. Langford on an 1871 government geological survey expedition to the Yellowstone country led by Ferdinand Hayden. The following year, Hayden’s report, accompanied by Moran’s paintings and Jackson’s photographs, as submitted to the U.S. Congress, and in March 1872, President Ulysses S. Grant signed legislation creating the 2.2 million acre Yellowstone National Park.47 Later, Jackson wrote that the images he and Moran created during the Hayden survey “were the most important exhibits brought before the [Congressional] Committee.’ The ‘wonderful coloring’ of Moran’s sketches made all the difference,” U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Capt. Hiram M. Chittenden, who worked on the Yellowstone River in the 1890s, observed that Moran’s paintings and Jackson’s photographs achieved an outcome that “doubtless convinced everyone who saw them that the regions where such

324  
*OHQ* vol. 116, no. 3
wonders existed should be preserved to the people forever.” According to art historian and curator Jean Stern, “without the paintings and photographs of the mid-nineteenth century, we would not have our earliest national parks.”

From an early date, then, the interests and activities of western railroads, artists, and national parks became an intricately interwoven tapestry — one to which the Russell sisters contributed. During the 1890s, a “pragmatic alliance” between western railroads and national parks became confirmed. The Southern Pacific Railroad, formed from local California railroads owned by the Union Pacific Railroad, not only promoted travel to parks near its rails but also campaigned for the designation of Sequoia and General Grant (now part of Kings Canyon) as national parks. In 1890, all those places could be reached from the Southern Pacific Railroad corridor, and the company “became one of the most vigorous sponsors of natural scenery in . . . West Coast national parks.”

Women, in particular, benefited from the promotional efforts of railroad companies to stimulate interest in travel and tourism in western parks, as railroad companies often used their art to sell travel on trains to nature parks. Tacoma artist Abby Williams Hill (1861–1943) received railroad commissions to paint wilderness scenes along several railroad routes, and in 1903, Midwestern artist Bertha Menzler Peyton (1871–1947) became the first woman to sell her painting of an Arizona landscape to the Santa Fe Railway Company. These opportunities expanded women’s possibilities for becoming self-supporting, professional artists.

Undoubtedly, Fountain’s ability to capture on canvas the mesmerizing, shimmering blue shades displayed in Crater Lake appealed to the Southern Pacific Railroad at a time when access to the lake was arduous and few artists had reached the top of the crater to paint it. Like the artwork of other railroad artists, her paintings encouraged tourist travel on the railroad and supported the designation of national parks. Fountain, and later, Russell’s many adept renderings of Crater Lake made their work of great interest to both the developing Southern Pacific and the related campaigns to establish and promote a national park embracing Crater Lake.

The creation of Crater Lake National Park experienced a long gestation period. Beginning in the mid 1880s, congressional committees considered legislation to withdraw several townships around Crater Lake for a public park. It took several more years, however, and the vision and determination of several individuals, especially mountaineer William G. Steel, to win the public park campaign. After many failed attempts, Oregon Rep. Thomas H. Tongue renewed the effort for park designation in the late 1890s. In late 1901, he introduced a bill in the U.S. House of Representatives, accompanied by
a petition signed by 4,000 individuals. Like previous bills, this one stalled in the House, until Tongue and Steel took up the matter with President Theodore Roosevelt, who supported the Crater Lake park bill.51

During discussions with Roosevelt in early 1902, either Tongue or Steel, who were among the most vigorous proponents of forming a national park at Crater Lake, may have presented the president with a large painting of Crater Lake by Grace Fountain in their effort to persuade him to approve of national park legislation. Roosevelt was known to have acquired paintings of national parks, such as one he acquired of Yosemite National Park painted by Harry Cassie Best, a contemporary and friend of Fountain. According to her obituary, Fountain’s painting of Crater Lake presented to Roosevelt “was believed to have been instrumental in his declaring the Lake a National Park.” In late April 1902, Crater Lake joined Yosemite, Yellowstone, Sequoia, General, and Mount Rainier as a U.S. National Park.52

Just two years later, the Southern Pacific’s Sunset Magazine hired Fountain to illustrate an article about Crater Lake, written by well-known writer and poet Joaquin Miller, who was also a family friend. In 1852, James Fountain and Miller had traveled west over the Oregon Trail in the same wagon train. Both families at first settled in the Willamette Valley, and over the years, the men’s lives periodically crossed and converged.53 Sunset Magazine provided
a perfect venue for merging the talents of Miller and Grace Fountain. The Southern Pacific designed *Sunset*, founded in 1898, to increase its ridership and revenue by featuring travel stories and stunning scenery from the railroad corridor. Full color images of scenes on Southern Pacific passenger routes were liberally spread throughout the magazine.54 Miller had visited Crater Lake in 1903 with Steel, the park’s long-time champion. Fountain may have been part of the so-called Steel Excursion. A woman strongly resembling her appears in a 1903 photograph taken by Fred and Oscar Kiser of the Steel Excursion dinner stop in Eagle Point, twelve miles north of Medford and on the way to Crater Lake. In the September 1904 issue of *Sunset*, Miller’s passionate description of Crater Lake in “The Sea of Silence” was illustrated with a full-page frontispiece that presented a wide aerial view of the entire lake and crater rim from Mount Scott, the highest point on the rim as well as three other views, all by Fountain.55

Fountain’s continued association with Southern Pacific was evident less than a year later, when a reproduction of one of her Crater Lake paintings, purchased either by the Southern Pacific or its general freight and passenger
agent, appeared as a frontispiece opposite the title page in the 1905 publication *The Souvenir of Western Women*. The publication acknowledged that W.E. Coman, general freight and passenger agent for the Southern Pacific’s Oregon line, had loaned the oil painting by Fountain to the publisher. Around the same time, Grace, James, and Lysle Fountain left Portland and made their way south to California, stopping to visit family in Ashland and Klamath Falls and to paint Crater Lake and Mount Shasta *en plein air*. Russell, who was actively painting by 1904, likely joined her sister on some of these painting excursions.

During these years, Russell was experiencing her own transition from an artist of local notoriety to one of wider exposure and acclaim. As early as 1905, Russell’s artistic skill received acknowledgement when one of her large, strikingly realistic forest fire paintings of “skillful coloring and shade” was exhibited in the Forestry Building at the 1905 Lewis and Clark Centennial Exposition in Portland. “The painting has been the subject of much flattering comment,” reported the *Ashland Tidings* that June. Later in life, she became well known for a five-by-six-foot painting of a forest fire that nearly denuded the rim of Crater Lake. Like her mentor William Parrott, Russell painted many forest fire scenes during her career. Russell also received high praise for some of her still life paintings. The Southern Pacific Railroad used one for a promotional lecture tour in 1914. Southern Pacific employee John Philip Clum, who gave hundreds of lecture tours around the West to promote tourism and passenger ridership, wrote to Russell about the loud applause given when a slide of her flowers was shown at a lecture he gave in San Jose, California. That same year, noted University of Oregon geologist Edwin T. Hodge, who had lectured in Ashland and seen Russell’s painting of Tokay grapes, exclaimed: “I cannot remember . . . ever seeing anything of the kind that seemed as well done — so full of translucent, glowing, bottled sunshine.” Soon, Russell’s grape cluster painting was exhibited in Allen H. Eaton’s Eugene art shop, the first book and art store opened in that city. Widely known throughout Oregon for his knowledge of arts, Eaton also curated the Oregon Art Room for the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco, where Fountain exhibited a hand-crafted beaded necklace.

Like her sister, Russell enjoyed painting scenic landscapes *en plein air*, and Crater Lake remained a favorite subject throughout her life. She made several trips to Crater Lake during most summers to paint, traveling with her mother Ann, her sister Nellie, or with other family members. Occasionally, Russell and Fountain went together to paint Crater Lake, and sold their artwork to tourists at the rim. Mabel and Nellie Russell spent much of the summer there in 1912, when a party of over fifty American and European
scientists, organized by Harvard geologist Professor William Morris Davis, traveled across the continent and rode in thirty-one automobiles to the rim.61

During the 1910s and early 1920s, Russell widely exhibited paintings, and her talent for painting Crater Lake and other landscape scenes became well known by private collectors. Numerous prominent Ashland and Rogue Valley residents purchased her paintings.62 In 1918, she sold six snow scenes of Crater Lake to Phoebe Hearst of San Francisco, wife of a U.S. Senator, mother of influential newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst, and major philanthropist and supporter of women’s education, cultural pursuits, and professionalism. Texas sheep rancher Robert Prosser, who lived in Los Altos, California, in the early 1920s, purchased one of her forest fire paintings.63

Russell’s increased artistic recognition coincided with momentous unfolding developments in travel, tourism, and national parks. Increasingly, wealthy tourists and railroad investors were replaced by a growing number of middle-class passengers interested in traveling west simply for a vacation and not for lengthy grand tours. In the early 1910s, the assembly-line mass production of automobiles made cars affordable, and independent travel possible for the expanding middle class. Although railroads could bring visitors near grand scenery in national parks, they often were unable to deliver tourists to the most compelling scenery, so they increasingly worked to blend their passenger service with automobile transport. By the early 1910s, the Southern Pacific Railroad had completed an extension north of Klamath Falls that brought travelers within six miles of the park boundary. The Southern Pacific also created illustrated brochures with detailed information about round-trip transportation to the rim in “auto stages” from that new freight and passenger depot at Kirk as well as one in Medford, on the west side of Crater Lake.64

Crater Lake National Park promoters and managers also strongly encouraged the development of the park by improving existing primitive roads and building new ones, thus making the lake itself more accessible to tourists. The park’s success relied on increased visitation, which justified appeals to Congress for development appropriations.

The emphasis on travel, recreational tourism, and transportation developments in Crater Lake National Park presented new artistic opportunities for Russell. In 1912, she sent one of her Crater Lake paintings to Oregon Rep. Willis C. Hawley to exhibit at a subcommittee hearing, when he would plead for additional congressional funding for road and bridge construction in the park. On June 14, Hawley presented arguments for amending an earlier appropriations bill then being considered in subcommittee to include funds for “the construction of a wagon road and necessary bridges through the
Crater Lake National Park.” In an effort to emphasize the importance of his request for road funding, Hawley then pointed to Russell’s painting that exhibited “the western portion of the lake, and is an excellent representation of the lake and the western rim.” Congress subsequently approved, on August 24, 1912, an appropriation of $50,000 for the “construction of a wagon road and necessary bridges through Crater Lake National Park” to build a permanent, 6.5-mile road from the eastern park boundary along Wheeler Creek and Sand Creek to Kerr Notch and also to complete the re-grading of another section of nearby existing road.46

Russell’s development as an artist gained additional momentum, just as events leading to the establishment of the National Park Service (NPS) accelerated. During the 1910s, a movement supported by private citizens and influential government leaders to manage collectively all the existing national parks, then operated independently, gained momentum. Images of existing and proposed park landscapes played a key role in promoting the establishment of a national park bureau. In 1916, as Congress contemplated national park legislation, the Department of the Interior, in an effort to promote passage of the national park bureau bill, published and distributed the National Parks Portfolio, with abundantly illustrated chapters on eight national parks. Numerous large, black-and-white images by Portland photographer Fred Kiser filled the pages of the Crater Lake chapter. In 1903, Fred Kiser and his brother Oscar opened a photographic business in Warrendale, Fred began to develop a long-term relationship with Crater Lake and its promoter William Steel. This continued for many years. In 1914, Kiser had invited Russell to paint scenes of Crater Lake for his company, and in the late summer of 1914, she spent a month painting Crater Lake, before heading south to also paint Mount Shasta for Kiser. Around the same time, Russell also took up photography, perhaps as inspiration for her painting or simply as its own art form. Russell and Kiser’s images of the landscape undoubtedly encouraged tourism at Crater Lake.47

Russell’s artwork was used to encourage tourism in a different way. When Steel came to Grants Pass in February 1916 to give a presentation on the need for park developments aimed at attracting more visitors to the lake, several of Russell’s paintings and photographs, taken when she was snowbound at the lake, were exhibited at the town’s Guild Hall.48 The national park bureau campaign was won in August 1916, when Congress passed and President Woodrow Wilson signed legislation articulating the federal agency’s fundamental purpose: “to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects” and to “provide for the enjoyment” of that scenery and those objects while leaving parks unimpaired and in their natural condition. Stephen Mather, a Chicago businessman who had joined the campaign and
This map of Crater Lake illustrated the National Park Service’s 1917 publication, General Information Regarding Crater Lake National Park, Season of 1917. The dashed line around the north and east sides of the crater indicate portions of the rim road under construction. Crater Lake Lodge provided gasoline for automobiles, a store, boats, fishing tackle, and riding horses to attract tourists.
was appointed Assistant Secretary of the Department of Interior in 1915, was appointed the bureau’s first director. Artistic images created by the Fountain and Russell continued to play a role in preserving and promoting national parks. Five months after passage of the National Park Service (NPS) legislation, Mather hosted the fourth National Parks Conference in Washington, D.C. The earlier conferences had been held at Yellowstone (1911), Yosemite (1912), and on the Berkeley campus of the University of California (1915) to address the urgent administrative needs of America’s existing national parks. The 1917 conference convened with a number of high-profile conservation-minded park supporters. Acknowledgement of the role of the visual arts was everywhere evident. One presentation, “The Painter and the National Parks,” was given by the Smithsonian’s head curator, William H. Holmes, who critiqued the impact of work by the more notable artists, particularly Thomas Moran’s paintings of Yellowstone, on setting aside portions of this “wonderful land as a national park.”

Featured at the conference was an art exhibition in the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum, which displayed forty-five paintings of various national parks by twenty-seven of the best known landscape artists in America, including Moran, Albert Bierstadt, Thomas Hill, and Sidney Lau-
rence. One of Fountain’s paintings of Crater Lake, purchased earlier by the Southern Pacific Railroad, appeared alongside them. In this “First Exhibition of National Parks Paintings” list of exhibitors, her name appeared as “J.R. Fountain,” instead of “G.R. Fountain,” as she often signed her paintings. Of the twenty-seven participants, she was the only woman.

The National Park Service continued to make periodic use of Fountain’s artwork for several more years. In the May 1924 issue of the popular World’s Work magazine, for example, an article by NPS Director Stephen Mather entitled “What I Am Trying to Do with the National Parks” included an image of Crater Lake and Wizard Island painted by Fountain. The article also included the artwork of Gunnar Widforss, Judge R.H. Tallant, and Carl Borg, who depicted other national parks.

By that time, Fountain was ensconced in the cultural enclave that had emerged in Oakland after the 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco destroyed so many artists’ studios and artwork. The Fountain family moved first to Miller’s 100 stony acres in the barren, sun-parched, and wind-swept Contra Costa hills of East Oakland, and then to a house and studio nearby. Over time, a constellation of simple rustic buildings emerged as Miller’s utopian colony of creative writers and artists, who shared his belief in divinity, the immortality of the soul, the kinship of humanity, and the love of beauty. Fountain’s studio, as well as the nearby home of inventor and plate-maker George Clark, became gathering places for several Bay Area artists, most of whom specialized in painting mountains and iconic landscapes, such as Mount Shasta, Yosemite, and the Grand Canyon. At that time, according to San Francisco art dealer Lorenz Noll: “As they were all artists, painters, and sculptors and had much in common, they fraternized, and gathered at [George] Clark’s home for drinks, after an afternoon at Grace’s studio. . . . Grace and Joaquin used to go on painting trips together. She was a noted mountain painter.”

Fountain continued to make occasional sojourns to southern Oregon and northern California to visit family members and to paint Crater Lake and Mount Shasta with her sister Mabel. Together, the two sisters also painted dramatic images of Mount Shasta from vantage points near Russell’s 160-acre ranch-homestead in Mayten, near Montague, California. For ten years (1915–1925), Russell’s property served as a seasonal studio, which Fountain occasionally visited. Late in her painting career, Fountain painted huge imaginative images of Mount Shasta and the Grand Canyon. Russell likewise painted a particularly impressive four-by-six-foot canvas of a sunrise view of Mount Shasta, for which she became well-known.

As Fountain aged, her choice of subjects vastly expanded beyond Crater Lake and her artistic style moved increasingly away from realistic
representational renderings toward more abstract paintings, created with loose, choppy brush strokes of light, bright colors characteristic of California Impressionism. The two sisters continued to share their delight and absorption with artistic expression into their seventies and early eighties. In December 1941, Russell traveled to Oakland to be with her sister, who had become ill with the flu and suffered a stroke. Russell was by her sister’s side when Grace Fountain passed away at age eighty-four in her home in Oakland on February 8, 1942.77

Mabel Russell Lowther carried on painting landscapes, and also pursuing photography, during the 1940s and 1950s. After her husband, Newton Lowther, died in 1937, Mabel moved back to the Russell family home in Ashland around 1940. In 1944, one of Russell’s many large canvases of Crater Lake was presented to the University of Oregon’s Department of Geology and Geography by its head, Warren D. Smith. According to the Eugene Register Guard, “the picture, which reproduces the real colors of the lake with unusual faithfulness, was painted by Mrs. Mabel Russell Lowther of Ashland. . . . With an artist from San Francisco, she spent many months working out the exact colors.”78 In 2015, this eight-foot-square painting, carefully restored and cleaned, still hangs in the Department of Geology, where it constantly reminds faculty, staff, students, and visitors of the unique features that are celebrated in Oregon’s only national park. The “artist from San Francisco” mentioned in the Register Guard article was most likely Fountain.
As family members aged and died, Russell sometimes traveled from Ashland to Portland to spend time with an older sister, Theodosia Russell Walters. In April 1947, when in Portland, she told an Oregonian journalist that the burned, barren rim of Crater Lake many years ago had inspired her to paint a blazing forest fire on the rim, lit from behind, and that its realism provoked the Forest Service to use it many times in fire-prevention displays. Once again, Mabel Russell contributed to the nature conservation movement. Twelve years after that interview, she died on April 20, 1959, at age eighty-four.\footnote{79}

During their lifetimes, the artwork of Grace Russell Fountain and Mabel Russell Lowther made their names almost synonymous with Crater Lake. Not only were their paintings publicly displayed throughout Oregon in homes,
shop windows, and at public events, they were also used by the Southern Pacific Railroad and the National Park Service in promotional literature that advocated travel, recreational tourism, and development. The Russell sisters’ artistry both shaped public perceptions of Crater Lake and played an important visual role in promoting the scenic beauty of Crater Lake and its designation as a national park and, early on, in adding weight to congressional arguments to fund the development of park roads and comfortable accommodations for Americans touring the West in automobiles.

At the time of the Russell sisters’ deaths, however, many of their paintings had already become forgotten or lost. Russell family members and friends, along with a small number of galleries and collectors, knew of their work, but the passage of time and limited records of their art pushed it and its significance into the dim distance. A close examination of the Russell sisters’ paintings and photographs adds to our understanding of how the artwork of women has contributed to the preservation of Crater Lake as well as its early promotion and development as a national park that needed to attract tourists. The two Russell sisters not only influenced both the protection of Crater Lake and its use by tourists one hundred years ago, but their artwork also represents the growing recognition that women artists who worked hard to perfect their skill could become imaginative, accomplished, and self-supporting professionals. The early-twentieth-century era of the progressive conservation movement offered women as well as men an opportunity not only to contribute to environmental protection in North America, but also to expand their artistic capabilities and become serious professional artists. Our exposure to the lives and work of Grace Russell Fountain and Mabel Russell Lowther contributes in a small way to our understanding of environmental history and the development of women in the arts in early-twentieth-century Oregon.

NOTES

Many people have contributed to this article in myriad ways, particularly Ashland resident, public history colleague, and long-time friend Kay Atwood, who passed away in May 2014; Grace Fountain patron Judson Parsons; Portland gallery owner Mark Humpal; and Mabel Russell art informant and supporter, University of Oregon emeritus professor of geology Dana Johnston. This article is dedicated to southern Oregon historian Kay Atwood.


8. Louise Rasmussen, “Art and Artists in Oregon, 1500–1900,” chapter 3, available at University of Oregon library, Eugene. An example of the challenges of names is documented by Rasmussen, who found that newspapers and magazines generally refer to women artists as “Mrs. Eliza R. Barchus,” “Mrs. Fountain,” “Mrs. Annabelle Hutchinson-Parrish,” “Mrs. George Small,” and “Mrs. H.H. Spaulding.”


24. Kay Atwood, email communication with Gail Evans, January 7, 2013; Atwood, “James H. Russell (JHR) and Ann Hill Russell (AHRR),” January 2013, 10.


27. These classes were offered at rooms in the “Woolen house.” Personal items, Ashland Tidings, August 29, 1884; “Art Instruction,” Ashland Tidings, November 16, 1888.


31. Barchus, Eliza R. Barchus; and Ann Sullivan, “Oregon’s Woman Artist Turns Century,” Oregonian, December 5, 1957. Mark Humpal has posited that Grace Fountain went through two stages of development as an artist before moving to California, where she developed in the third period. During the first period, up to the mid 1890s, Grace’s work strongly mirrored the work of William Parrott in its tight small brush strokes and overall realistic style. Her second period, from the late 1890s to around 1905, exhibits the influence of the Hudson River School. Humpal, interview by Gail Evans-Hatch, November 24, 2012, at Humpal Gallery, Portland, Oregon.

32. Braarud Fine Art owns a William Parrott painting of Crater Lake that places him in the area during the mid 1890s. Travel from Klamath Falls to Crater Lake in the 1890s offered the shortest of the three existing routes to the caldera. Rick Harmon, Crater Lake National Park: A History (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2002), 72–78.


36. Allen and Klevit, Oregon Painters, 158. Crater Lake paintings attributed to or signed by Fountain include: a 46" x 30" painting owned by a Salem resident; a 48" x 24" painting purchased by a Portland realtor from Humphal Fine Art Gallery in Portland; a 26" x 20" oil owned by a Medford resident, and a painting now in the Klamath County Museum in Klamath Falls. In 2013, Gail Evans assembled a list of all known artwork by Grace Russell Fountain in a report entitled "Grace Russell Fountain: Her Life and Art, 1858–1942."
40. Allen and Klevit, Oregon Painters, 158.
44. Thomas Ayres, "A Trip to the Yo-yamite Valley," Daily Alta California, August 6, 1856.

The artwork of many other painters and photographers has also contributed to the establishment of particular national parks. See, for example, Fred Beckey, Mount McKinley: Icy Crown of North America (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1993), 110–11.


57. Polk’s Portland City Directory (Portland: R.L. Polk & Company, 1904 and 1905) shows no Fountains living in Portland. Confirming this is a 1904 publication, Portrait and Biographical Record of Western Oregon, Containing Original Sketches of Many Well Known Citizens of the Past and Present . . . (Chicago, Chapman Publishing Company, 1904), 948, online at https://archive.org/details/portraitbiographwooinc-
hap (accessed April 3, 2015), which notes that Grace Fountain, the artist, was living in Portland in 1904. In 1905, James is noted as a “miner” in Shasta City, suggesting that Fountain probably left Portland by 1905 and joined her husband in Shasta City, northern California. Mount Shasta was a favorite subject for both women to paint.

58. See Portrait and Biographical Record of Western Oregon, which notes that Mabel was “an artist residing in Ashland.”

59. “Ashland Artist’s Work,” Ashland Tidings, June 29, 1905; “A Beautiful ‘Forest Fire’,” Ashland Tidings, March 6, 1905; Sullivan, “Oregon Family Interesting for Art and

Evans, Promoting Tourism and Development at Crater Lake 341
Long Living,” April 20, 1947; Ashland Tidings, February 24, 1913.


65. “Painting Will Help,” Ashland Tidings, June 17, 1912; Willis Hawley, testimony requesting an amendment for the construction of a wagon road and necessary bridges through the Crater Lake National Park, in accord with recommendations contained in the War Department report, published as House Document 328, Sixty-second Congress, second session, for $50,000, Congressional Record, House, June 14, 1912, p. 8194.


78. “Crater Lake Picture Presented to School,” Eugene Register Guard, December 2, 1944.