



Grandma Moses

The museum has an extensive collection of items pertaining to Grandma Moses, including dozens of photographs, newspaper and magazine articles, correspondence, and prints for sale. Please see the Contact Us page for the museum's hours of operation, or call for an appointment.

Anna Mary Robertson was born on September 7, 1860, on a farm in Greenwich, NY, one of a family of 10 children. At the age of 27, she married Thomas Salmon Moses, and the couple established themselves on a farm in Virginia. The Moses family spent nearly two decades in Virginia, during which time Anna Mary gave birth to 10 children, five of whom died in infancy. At this time she was called Mother Moses.

In 1905, the couple returned to New York and settled in Eagle Bridge, not far from Anna Mary's birthplace. In 1927, her husband Thomas died and Anna continued to farm with the help of her youngest son, until advancing age and bouts of arthritis forced her to reduce her commitment to everyday farm chores, although she never really retired. In 1936 she went to live in Bennington for a couple of years to take care of her daughter Anna's children after Anna died. When her son-in-law remarried she moved back to the farm in Eagle Bridge and took up pretty much where she had left off.

Often, during her younger days as a wife and mother, Moses was creative in her home. She used housepaint, for example, to decorate a fireboard – but her earliest works used embroidery, rather than paint. Her embroidered pictures were much admired by friends and relatives, so when arthritis made it painful to wield a needle, her sister suggested that it might be easier to paint. It was this pivotal suggestion that spurred Grandma Moses' painting career in her late 70s.

Grandma Moses is usually characterized as a "Primitive" artist. For Moses, her early influences were the bucolic scenes published by Currier & Ives, and items that she was able to collect, such as greeting cards, calendar illustrations and cutouts from magazines and newspapers.

Moses first gained broader recognition when an amateur art collector, Louis J. Caldor, saw her works in a Hoosick Falls, NY, drugstore window. He not only purchased all the works on display but, in 1939, convinced the Museum of Modern Art to include Moses in a members-only show of contemporary folk painting. The following year, Caldor met independent gallery-owner Otto Kallir, who agreed to mount a one-woman exhibition in New York at his Galerie St. Etienne. Moses' first show, "What a Farmwife Painted," opened on October 9, 1940, to favorable reviews. Moses was 80 years old. It was then that the "Grandma" tag was added (presumably she didn't mind, as she qualified in real life).

Charmed equally by her down-home personality, her biography and her paintings, the postwar mass-media became transfixed by the artist, and she eventually developed an enormous international following. During the next two decades, her works were publicized by Gimbel's Department Store, printed on greeting cards, calendars, etc., and she was even honored by President Truman in 1949. She was featured on the covers of TIME and LIFE magazines.

Moses became the subject of numerous "firsts" in the advent of electronic news media, such as live-remote radio and television transmissions. In 1950, a documentary film on the artist, narrated by Archibald MacLeish, was nominated for an Academy Award, and two years later Lillian Gish portrayed her in a live television dramatization. In 1955, Edward R. Murrow interviewed Grandma Moses on CBS's "See It Now," one of the few television programs at the time to use color. Even though she rarely left her farm in upstate New York, Grandma Moses was in the national and international spotlight. She continued to paint to the end. Ever the thrifty farmer, Moses never did quite reconcile herself with the sums of money people were willing to pay for her originals.

When Grandma Moses died on December 13, 1961, at the age of 101, she had been a regular news feature for more than two decades and she had completed more than 1,600 works of art. Grandma Moses is buried in the Maple Grove Cemetery in Hoosick Falls, NY.