



Presbyterian Heritage Center
at Montreat

Independent. Innovative. Interactive.

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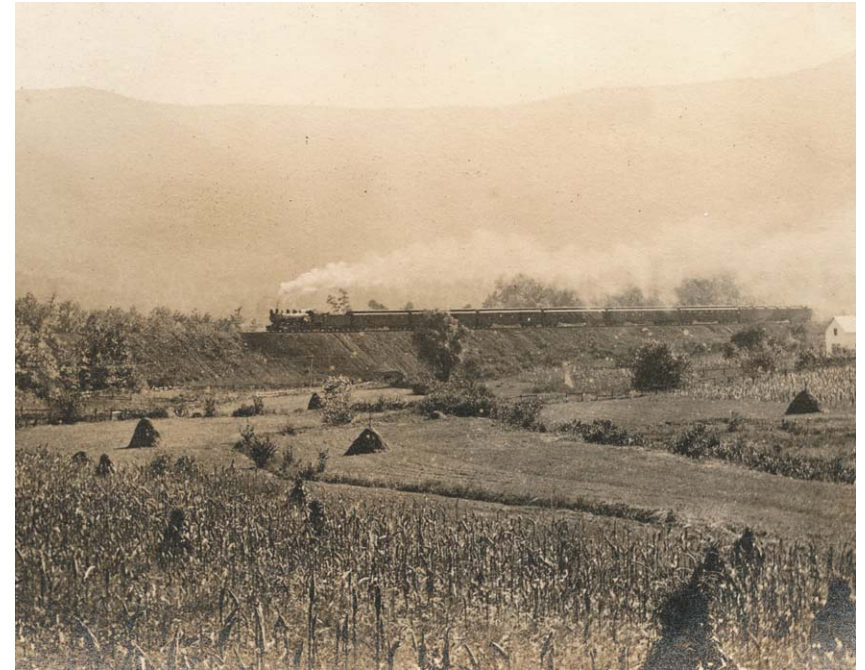
Alliance of American Museums

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North Carolina Museums Council



2019



Train Approaching Black Mountain, 1908
Alice Margaret Dickinson

Alice Margaret Dickinson

Pioneering Woman Professional Photographer
in the Swannanoa Valley
1906 — 1929



Heritage Series publication of an exhibit
at the Presbyterian Heritage Center
at Montreat

The Exhibit

The North Carolina Archives has scant information on Alice Margaret Dickinson. In their book about the first century of NC Photographers, all it says about her is “active 1908, in unidentified location.” Both the Library of Congress and the UNC Chapel Hill Library & Archives have a single image each.

This PHC exhibit fills in the story of Alice Margaret Dickinson and her work as the first woman professional photographer in the Swannanoa Valley. Displayed are about 60 authenticated photos taken by her in this region from 1906 - 1929, including 19 Dickinson photos in this booklet.

Acknowledgments

This exhibit is the result of many people. We especially would like to thank —

Joseph Standaert, curator and researcher;
Ron Vinson, co-curator;
Lisa Harrold, PHC registrar & researcher;
Mary Standaert, post card collector & historian;
Ron Nalley, post card collector;
Betsy Hester, post card collector;
Nancy Midgett, researcher of North Carolina photographers;
Diana Sanderson, exhibit preparation; and
Aspen Reynolds, PHC Grier Fellow.

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The Presbyterian Heritage Center

The Presbyterian Heritage Center at Montreat offers innovative exhibits, multi-media kiosks, online internet resources and a web site that changes weekly. It highlights the history of Montreat & the Swannanoa Valley, as well as the heritage of the Presbyterian and Reformed Church and its worldwide missions.

All the exhibits are researched, designed and implemented in-house. For exhibits, artifacts and archival material from the PHC Collection are used, as well as items borrowed from private collectors and institutions, such as Yale University, Princeton and others.

The PHC also offers a variety of live presentations & special events — including lectures, national symposiums, live performances, costumed re-enactors and storytelling. In addition, the Center maintains a research library on Presbyterians and their institutions, as well as online computer access to rare documents.

Thank you to all who financially support the Presbyterian Heritage Center. It is funded solely by individuals, foundations and groups that help make it possible for the operations of the Presbyterian Heritage Center at Montreat.

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Selected Photos by Alice Margaret Dickinson

Montreat Auditorium,
1921
Montreat, NC

Under construction,
the building is now
known as Anderson
Auditorium.

PHC Collection



Montreat Auditorium,
1922
Montreat, NC

The completed build-
ing now known as
Anderson Auditorium.

PHC Collection



From Rainbow
Terrace, circa 1909
Montreat, NC

This hand-colored
lithographed photo by
Alice Margaret
Dickinson was printed
by the Presbyterian
Committee on
Publications.
Standaert Collection



Alice Margaret Dickinson Photography

Alice Margaret Dickinson was most active in Montreat and the Swannanoa Valley in the years 1906 to 1929. Self-described as an artistic photographer, her subject matter included general scenic views of Montreat, the Swannanoa Valley and its features, as well as homes and people. Most of the images were produced and sold as post card, copyrighted images.

Miss Dickinson was the first woman professional photographer in the Swannanoa Valley. Many of the iconic early historical photos of Montreat were taken by Alice Margaret Dickinson.

In the 1910 census in Black Mountain (which included Montreat), she was listed as a Gallery Photographer, but her business was conducted from a tent in Montreat. Several of her images were included in the annual Montreat Conference Center and Montreat Normal School/College marketing brochures.

Quite a few of her images were of individual cottages, probably with the marketing intent to sell to family members. Among her portrait images was the 1908 image of Montreat's first marshal, Lewis Patton of Black Mountain.

Alice was active in national photographic circles in 1909 and 1910. She won an honorable mention award in 1909 in the *American Photography Magazine's* "cloud competition" with an image of Lookout Mountain. In 1910, she also won an honorable mention from the *Photo-Era Magazine* in the "Home-Scenes" category.

An interesting possible national history connection occurred in 1911. For years, environmentalists tried to get Congress to authorize purchase of mainly cutover lands for establishing eastern seaboard National Forests. This was finally done in March 1911 with the passage of the Weeks Act. The first tract officially acquired was the 8,000 acre Curtis Creek Tract in Old Fort in 1912. Miss Dickinson sent a copy of her 1908 "Rhododendron Series" photo brochure to Stephen B. Weeks, Secretary of the Interior in September 1911. Presumably this was to entice the Secretary to include local lands in the Weeks Act purchases. The brochure was called "Views of Montreat: Where the Rhododendron Grows."

About Alice Margaret Dickinson (1877-1963)

Pioneering Female Commercial Photographer

An overlooked pioneering female commercial photographer in North Carolina, Alice Margaret Dickinson was the earliest known commercial photographer in Montreat and the Swannanoa Valley. She published her photographs, postcards, and illustrations in Conference Center brochures from around 1907 up until 1929. She operated a tent during the conference seasons circa 1907 - 1910, according to Foreman family journals. In addition to her souvenir photos of scenics, she also took portraits and family house pictures. According to 1910 census records, she was listed as a "Gallery Photographer" in Montreat/Black Mountain and an "Artistic Photographer" in Melrose, Massachusetts. In the early 1900s, she divided her time between Montreat and Massachusetts.

Alice Margaret Dickinson was born on Aug. 31, 1877 in Lowell, Massachusetts. She and her two siblings, Francis and Helen, were descended from Dickinsons who settled in New England by 1637. They were first cousins (once removed) of poet Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) from Amherst, Massachusetts. Their great grandfather, Deacon Samuel Dickinson, founded Amherst College.

Alice's older brother, Francis Richardson Dickinson was the start of the family's Montreat connection. As Congregationalists from New England, Francis bought an early share and a leased lot in Montreat in 1898 (Lot #249, 131 Virginia Road, present day "Christmas Cottage").

In 1907, Alice and her sister Helen purchased Lot #91 and built a home in Montreat at 111 Virginia Road, currently "Hearth Haven." In 1919, the sisters sold that property and in 1924 inherited the original lot of brother Francis at 131 Virginia Road and owned it until 1933. At the time of their deaths in 1958 (Helen) and 1963 (Alice), the sisters lived in Asheville and are buried at Riverside Cemetery.

Alice worked as a commercial photographer in her early career, but later became a secretary and nurse at Montreat Normal School (1923-1925) and later worked as secretary in a church school (1930).



Montreat Post Office, 1907
Betsy Hester Collection



Little Falls in Swannanoa,
1908. PHC Collection

Dr. Cotton's Residence
circa 1908
Black Mountain, NC



Nalley Collection

The Pines
circa 1908
Black Mountain, NC



Dr. Cotton's sanitarium
for tuberculosis.

Standaert Collection

Doris Ulmann (1882-1934)

Doris Ulmann was best known for her dignified portraits of the people of Appalachia, particularly craftsmen and musicians. She began her photography career around 1918. She practiced Pictorialism and was a member of the Pictorial Photographers of America. Ulmann documented the rural people of the South, particularly the mountain peoples of Appalachia and the Gullahs of the Sea Islands, with a profound respect for her sitters and an ethnographer's eye for culture.



Old Woman, c. 1930
by Doris Ulmann
Library of Congress

Edith Winifred Tait (1901-1991)

A skilled Pictorialist photographer and author/illustrator of three books, Edith Tate attended a photography school and art school in New York City and operated a photographic studio in Montreat, NC, from the 1930s through 1950s. She was the author of a travel book and a collection of devotional poems. She also illustrated the book, *Days in a Doll's Life* (1948) by Mrs. Crosby Adams. She took many portrait photographs and many of her scenic photographs appeared in the Montreat College *Sundial*. She has two award winning photographs in the Library of Congress: *Study of a Hand* (1926) and *Hull of a Ship with Anchor* (1926).

The Presbyterian Heritage Center maintains a Tait Collection that will be the subject of a future exhibit.



Nazi Parade, c. 1938
by Edith Tait
PHC Collection

Alice Margaret Dickinson then worked in Asheville as an Assistant Manager at the Sunnyside Inn (1937) and as a housekeeper in a private home on Sunset Mountain (1940).

As a single woman, in the days of the Depression and before social security was available, she apparently worked at several professions.

Her sister, Helen, stayed in Montreat most of her life and also stayed with the Montreat Normal School/Montreat College as a librarian for her whole career.

Selected Photos by Alice Margaret Dickinson

Baseball at Montreat
circa 1908
Montreat, NC



PHC Collection

Point Lookout surveys
a world of ice, 1921
Montreat, NC



PHC Collection

Selected Photos by Alice Margaret Dickinson

The Craggies. 1909

This mountain vista is typical of the landscapes photographed by Alice Margaret Dickinson.



Nalley Collection

Cane Creek Snow Covered, 1910
North Fork Valley, NC

Cane Creek mountains were renamed the Swannanoa mountains in 1920s.



PHC Collection

Sunrise from Mt. Mitchell, circa 1908

PHC Collection



Mary Bayard Morgan Wootten (1875-1959)

A pioneering woman photographer, North Carolina's Bayard Wootten overcame economic hardship, gender discrimination and the obscurity of a small-town upbringing to become a significant early female professional photographer.

After designing the first trademark for Caleb Bradham's Pepsi-Cola, she transitioned from artwork to photography around 1904. She gained experience at Camp Glenn, the National Guard installation in Morehead City, where she was hired as photographer and director of publicity.

Wootten worked in photography's pictorial tradition, emphasizing artistic effect in her images at a time when realistic and documentary photography increasingly dominated the medium.

Some of Wootten's most notable images were the portraits she crafted of black and white Americans from the lower reaches of society, working people whom other photographers often ignored.

Bayard Wootten was the daughter of the accomplished "stereoview" photographer of the late 19th Century, Rufus Morgan (1846-1880).



A Baptism, c. 1907
by Bayard Wootten, Library of Congress

Margaret Warner Morley (1858-1923)

In the 1890s, New Englander Margaret Morley visited western North Carolina's mountains and adored the land and its people. The visit so inspired her that she moved to Tryon, south of Asheville, around 1900. The well-known biologist, writer, illustrator and educator spent the next 12 years exploring and photographing the region. In 1913, Houghton Mifflin published her impressions in *The Carolina Mountains*.

Photography of Margaret Morley, 1913.



by Margaret Warner Morley, c.1906

Early Women Professional Photographers In Western North Carolina

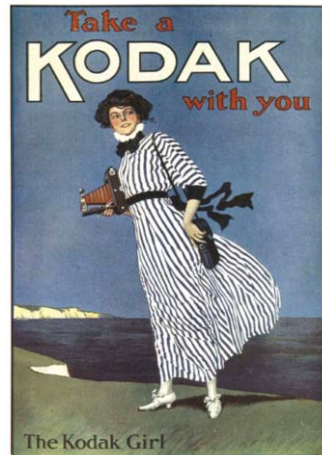
Alice Margaret Dickinson was the 6th earliest woman professional photographer in all of Western North Carolina and among the top 30 female photographers statewide to operate a studio. There also were other women photographers working in North Carolina during the early 1900s.

The 1890s and early 1900s saw a boom in professional female photographers. From fewer than three hundred women photographers nationally in the late 1890s, nearly 5,000 women commercial photographers were active in the U.S. by 1920.

As Dalia Linssen at the Rhode Island School of Design observed: “By the end of the 19th century, evolving social structures in the domestic sphere led more women to pursue higher education and eventually to establish professional lives.

“Concurrently, simplified photographic processes, including dry-plate printing and smaller mechanisms like the George Eastman Company’s 1888 Kodak camera, eliminated the need for cumbersome equipment and darkroom processing.

“Through its signature ‘Kodak Girl,’ the Eastman Company encouraged thousands of women to take up photography between 1890 and 1900, thereby laying the groundwork for a legacy of talented women in art photography and photojournalism.... Technical developments, including the half-tone process, helped expand photography to magazine and book illustration and fostered new opportunities for women.”



Selected Photos by Alice Margaret Dickinson

Cragmont Sanatorium
1908
Black Mountain, NC



Standaert Collection

Big Piney, 1910



PHC Collection

Assembly Inn &
Bookstore, 1929
Montreat, NC



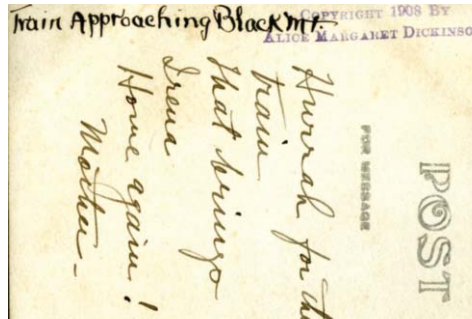
PHC Collection

Identifying A. M. Dickinson Post Cards

There are several methods that can help identify early (1907 - 1915) postcards by Alice Margaret Dickinson.

Copyright notice

As a commercial photographer, Dickinson often copyrighted some of her scenic pictures. She would include the copyright either printed, stamped or hand-written on many postcards, but not all of them.



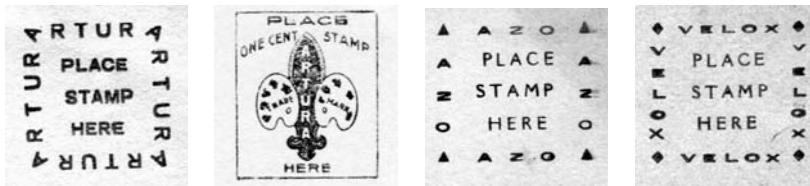
Her Handwriting of Picture Titles

Dickinson had a distinctive handwriting and printing that she would use on her post cards entitling the image.

Special Photo Paper & Stamp Boxes

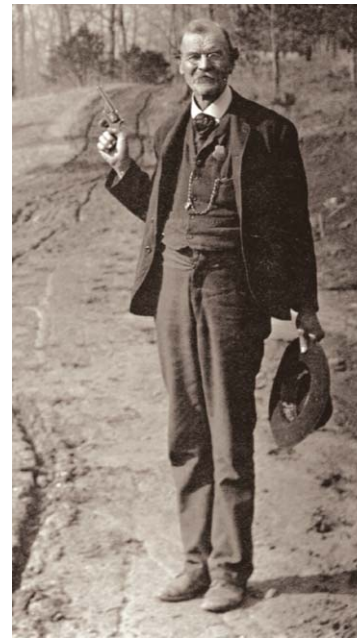
To make it easier to prepare post cards, photo manufacturers in 1907 prepared cards that could be contact printed on one size and already have the prepared divided back with a stamp box on the other. The photographer could print the post cards in a darkroom or send the negative to the manufacturer or photo supply business to print hundreds of copies.

These prepared cards came in different brands — Artura, Azo, Velox and many others.



Colorized Early Montreat Post Cards

Beginning in 1909, the Presbyterian Committee on Publication arranged to use Dickinson photos without credit and print color lithographic post cards made in Germany.



Lewis E. Patton
Mountain Guide, c. 1908

A Black Mountain resident, Patton also was the first Montreat marshal, shown here with his badge and pistol.

Standaert Collection

First Montreat Gate,
c. 1908
Montreat, NC

Standaert Collection



Irena Foreman, c. 1907
Montreat, NC

Miss Dickinson took many portraits of the Foreman family and friends. Montreat, NC

PHC Collection

