

**AUGUSTA
ISABELLA CORSON
METCALFE**
1881-1971



**OKLAHOMA'S
RENOWNED
SAGEBRUSH
ARTIST**

Augusta Metcalfe's paintings always told a story, usually about life on the prairie. Although her hands were rough from stringing fence and roping cattle, she was known for her fine detail and authentic and accurate paintings of Western life. Her paintings hang all over the world, recording Oklahoma's rich heritage, scenic beauty, and pioneer perseverance.

Augusta Isabella Corson was born in Vermillion, Kansas in November 1881. Her father moved the family in 1886 to Oklahoma's No Man's Land, a desolate, windy, lawless, sagebrush-covered region which bordered Kansas, Texas, New Mexico and Colorado. In 1893 they moved to a homestead on the Washita River near Durham inside the newly-opened Cheyenne and Arapaho reservation.

As a little girl, she sketched on rocks and white stones of an abandoned farmhouse. Although Augusta never attended school, her schoolteacher mother tutored her at home. By age five, she made the family aware of her artistic talent. George Davidson, her maternal uncle and a San Francisco professor, encouraged the young artist and sent her art supplies and paper. This would be the closest thing to an art lesson Augusta would ever receive.

She married Jim Metcalf in December 1905 and had a son Howard. Jim left in 1908, resulting in Augusta becoming a single mother, and caretaker of her invalid mother at a time when those labels on a young woman were nearly unheard of. She pulled herself together and added an "E" to her last name of Metcalf to show her independence. She wouldn't marry again.

Metcalf raised her son, cared for the ranch, raised horses, and sold artwork to supplement her income. She illustrated the letters and envelopes she sent to friends and neighbors, and even sent her art to well-known people, including Thomas Edison and General Douglas MacArthur. Metcalfe was before her time in knowing how to humbly self-promote her talent.

By 1911 Metcalfe was receiving recognition for her paintings. At the first Oklahoma State Fair in 1908, she won two first prizes for her paintings, repeating her first-place winnings in 1909 and 1910. She also took first-place awards in Texas. Though some critics criticized Metcalfe's paintings for having too much detail, her work was displayed at New York's Grand Central Station Art Galleries, Kansas City's Nelson-Atkins Museum, and Philbrook Museum of Art.

In 1949, Metcalfe presented a one-person exhibition at the Oklahoma Art Center. Life Magazine printed two full color pages of her work in its July 1950 issue. For the first time, art critics in Oklahoma took notice of what a natural treasure they had. By the 1960s people would travel from all over the country to Durham just to meet Oklahoma's "Sagebrush Artist".

When her son Howard returned to the farm with his wife, the trio formed a musical group, touring the area with Howard playing the fiddle and Augusta the mandolin. Metcalfe was inducted in the Oklahoma Hall of Fame in 1968. She died in May 1971 at age 89. When she was inducted into the National Cowgirl Hall of Fame in 1983, it was too late for her to see her own success.

After her mother's death in 1920, Augusta had renamed the Corson/Metcalf home Break O' Day Farm. The homestead was made into a museum after Augusta's death, to portray women's contribution to settlement life and culture on the frontier.