

WOMEN FROM OUR PAST

since well-behaved women rarely make history...



Twenty-two and Kansas-fresh, Hope Williams came to Fort Collins to teach second grade at Plummer School in 1923. At the time, the school on East Vine was surrounded by sugar beet fields.

Two years later, she married Howard Sykes and they lived in a combination home/service station across the street from the school. Hope soaked up the culture all around her there and at Colorado Agricultural College (now CSU), which she attended. Details from conversations overheard as gasoline, penny candy and automotive parts were sold formed the foundation for what became her magnum opus, "Second Hoeing."

Published in May of 1935, the forthright look at life on the farms of northern Colorado immediately garnered national acclaim, but generated regional controversy. The stereotypes that sprouted of German-Russian immigrants forcing children into hard labor ran counter to what Hope had intended. Her vividly genuine descriptions of hard working, family-oriented and church-centric people were meant to cultivate understanding and acceptance of this marginalized segment of Fort Collins' population. A New York Times review even credited the book for causing revisions of child labor laws. These events discouraged Hope.

Although Hope was once quoted as saying she could not stay and face the community when the book was released, she managed somehow, until she and Howard Sykes eventually divorced. She moved to California in the 1940s to be with her brothers, living there until she passed away in 1973.

Despite the fact she lived much of her life in California, Hope's influence on the community is still felt. She formed a writers' critique group in 1932. "Penpointers" (www.penpointers.com) continues to meet twice a month and has preserved her original dynamic of a friendly supportive get-together that welcomes novice and published writers alike. ❖

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PAST ARTICLE BY MARYJO FAITH MORGAN ❖ JOURNEY CONTRIBUTOR

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