We Must Grow Our Own Artists: Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Northern Arizona's Early Art Educator

William James Burns
Georgia State University

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The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student’s Department Chair, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty. The Dean of the College of Education concurs.

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ABSTRACT

WE MUST GROW OUR OWN ARTISTS: MARY-RUSSELL FERRELL COLTON, NORTHERN ARIZONA’S EARLY ART EDUCATOR
by
W. James Burns

What were Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton’s contributions to the progressive education movement and the Indian arts and crafts movement in the Southwestern United States at a time when the region was still very remote? Artist, author, amateur ethnographer, educator, and curator; these were but a few of the talents of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, co-founder of the Museum of Northern Arizona and early art advocate on the Colorado Plateau. This study investigates how Colton contributed to the progressive education movement and the Indian arts and crafts movement through the work that she did at the museum. There, she labored to increase public awareness of the importance of art education and to revive Native American arts on the Colorado Plateau. Using an extensive collection of archival material in the Colton Collection at the Museum of Northern Arizona, as well as oral history interviews, this historical study provides a nuanced analysis of Colton’s life as an educator. Colton’s influence is not well known today, but her professional contributions merit recognition, giving her a place in the history of American education. This study reveals how Colton’s efforts fit within the context of the work of her contemporaries in Santa Fe and Taos, and within the
progressive education movement, from the then relatively remote outpost of Flagstaff. Much can be learned from Colton’s work that is relevant to the field of education today. Her ideals and writings about art education will resonate with opponents of No Child Left Behind. Colton’s work as one of northern Arizona’s earliest art educators contributed to a better understanding of the culture of the various peoples of the Colorado Plateau and to the preservation of Navajo and Hopi traditions through education. Colton made notable contributions to the Indian arts and crafts movement, museum education, and the progressive education movement. A woman of firm convictions and ideals, Colton was strong-willed, and complex, a multi-faceted person with a broad range of interests which she pursued with passion and commitment. This study crosses the boundaries of several disciplines, including educational history, museum studies, women’s studies, educational biography, Native American studies, and art education.
WE MUST GROW OUR OWN ARTISTS: MARY-RUSSELL FERRELL COLTON, NORTHERN ARIZONA’S EARLY ART EDUCATOR AND ADVOCATE

by

W. James Burns

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
Degree of
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in
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in
the Department of Educational Policy Studies
in
the College of Education
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2010
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The assistance of the archivists and curators at the Laboratory of Anthropology and the School of Advanced Research in Santa Fe, the Center for Southwest Research at the University of New Mexico in Santa Fe, Special Collections at Cline Library, Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, Arizona Collection, Hayden Library at Arizona State University in Tempe, and the Billie Jean Baguley Library at the Heard Museum in Phoenix is very much appreciated.

I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Sheryl Gowen, Dr. Barbara Kawulich, Dr. Robert Breunig, Dr. Ann Kruger, and Dr. Chara Bohan, for their assistance in shaping and organizing this study. Each of them brought a wealth of knowledge and a special interest to the study: Dr. Breunig a fascination with Colton and the Museum having worked there for many years, Dr. Kruger a love of art education, Dr. Bohan, interests in women’s history, feminist history, and educational biography, and Dr. Kawulich, interests in Native American Education and ethnography. Thank you to Dr. Gowen for agreeing to chair this committee after two previous committees left the University; had she not done so it would not have been possible for me to complete this study. I wish to offer a special thanks to Barbara Kawulich for being a dear friend and mentor; she has played many roles in my life. Of all the professors I have studied under in the course of completing three degrees she has most reinforced my love for higher
education, my belief in the power of ethnography, and my conviction in the value of lifelong learning. I am grateful that my path crossed through her classroom.

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<td>AFA</td>
<td>American Federation for the Arts</td>
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<td>BIA</td>
<td>Bureau of Indian Affairs</td>
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<td>CCFA</td>
<td>Coconino Center for the Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>FALA</td>
<td>Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAF</td>
<td>Indian Arts Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MNA</td>
<td>Museum of Northern Arizona</td>
</tr>
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<td>NASSA</td>
<td>Northern Arizona Society of Science and Art</td>
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<td>NAU</td>
<td>Northern Arizona University</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCLB</td>
<td>No Child Left Behind</td>
</tr>
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<td>NMAIA</td>
<td>New Mexico Association for Indian Affairs</td>
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<td>PEA</td>
<td>Progressive Education Association</td>
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<td>PSDW</td>
<td>Philadelphia School of Design for Women</td>
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Why should we study history, and what is the use of doing so? Marc Bloch attempts to answer these perennial questions in his classic monograph, *The Historian’s Craft*.¹ He poses a number of possible answers to these questions, including: for pleasure, to help mankind live better, to satisfy a curiosity, or to explain linkages between phenomena. Regarding the utility of history, Bloch opines: “It is impossible to decide in advance whether even the most abstract speculations may not eventually prove extraordinarily helpful in practice.”² Thus, a historical study that might appear on the surface to be esoteric could ultimately prove to have pragmatic value and implications for the future. Studying history “furthers our understanding of the world around us and so helps guide our actions.”³ Moreover, knowledge of the past can also affect actions taken to shape the future.⁴

Rury observes that: “One of the great values in studying history . . . is to better appreciate the dynamic qualities of one’s own times, by examining the challenges faced


by those who lived in earlier periods. And, everyone has something to learn from seeing how people responded to a rapidly changing social milieu in the past.” Historians create portraits of the past in an effort to understand the lives of the people who lived at a particular time, their social setting, the institutions they were involved with, and their understanding of the world. In doing so, “the historian aims to reconstruct history as it occurred, while offering explanations that help one understand the past in terms familiar today.”

Donato & Lazerson (2000) found “many provocative contemporary educational issues that have deep historical roots, and that educational historians can and should engage in these issues in order to make important contributions to current policy and practice.” Similarly, Tyack (1967) observed that: “Inquiry into educational history can assist teachers to interpret and generalize their experiences and to free themselves from unexamined routine.” Thus, the study of educational history has potential implications for the present and the future of the field of education.

Gall, Borg, and Lietke (1989) posit that: “Even when a history of an educator, institution, or movement exists, researchers need to determine whether it adequately explains the events in which they are interested. In fact, gaps in knowledge of the past

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6 Ibid., 20.


often provide the basis for a historical study.” Further, Gall, Gall and Borg (2003) contend that: “Without continually updated historical reviews of the research literature, scientific progress would be impossible.” Research within any given field needs to be summarized periodically to provide the most current overview of the data available, both new and longstanding. Further, such updates have the potential to create linkages between fields as research advances are made. One of the opportunities for learning across disciplinary boundaries is between the fields of education and museum studies.

Museums are important places of learning, educational institutions in their own right, yet they are seldom acknowledged as such in educational literature. A search of the literature pertaining to lifelong learning, experiential learning, out-of-school education, implicit learning, spontaneous learning, and informal learning reveals no more than a slight reference to museums. To gain a perspective on the value of museums as

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educational institutions the research published by museum professionals must be examined.\textsuperscript{12} Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) note that: “Historical study of an educational idea or institution can do much to help us understand how our present educational system has come about and this kind of understanding can in turn help to establish a sound basis for further change or progress.”\textsuperscript{13}

Little has been written about the history of museum education; a search of American Association of Museums, American Association for State and Local History, Smithsonian Institution, National Art Education Association, and Institute for Learning Innovation publications reveals few sources, with the exception of Berry and Mayer’s 

*Museum Education: History, Theory, and Practice.*\textsuperscript{14} These organizations are the


primary sources of research about art education history and museology in the United States. Monographs about the lives of individual museum educators are even scarcer, based on a thorough search of several databases.\textsuperscript{15}

The academy suffers from a dearth of monographs about art educators, particularly those who worked in museums. The existing literature favors the metropolitan areas of the Northeast and the West coast with little in between. When the Southwest is mentioned, the focus is typically on Santa Fe and Taos, with the rest of the region viewed as a cultural backwater. Yet, art educators and advocates from throughout the region have made important contributions to the field. The academy lacks a critical analysis of the work of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, an important figure in art education, a little-studied area within the field of education.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} The footnoted databases (twenty one) were searched between September and November 2008 using the following keyword searches: art study teaching, museum education, informal learning, art education history, women art educators, art education Arizona, art education Southwest, progressive education movement, art museums southwest, Museum Northern Arizona, and art Colorado Plateau. Databases included Academic Search Complete, Accessible Archives, America: History and Life, Archives USA, Art Abstracts, ArticleFirst, Arts of the United States, Bibliography of the History of Art, Dissertations & Theses A&I, EBSCOhost Databases, Education Abstracts, ERIC, FirstSearch Databases, Historical Abstracts, Humanities International Index, JSTOR, MasterFile Premier, Oxford Art online, ProQuest Databases, Women’s Studies Encyclopedia, WorldCat. The only recent monograph about a museum educator (and she never actually held the title, but was a museum librarian and director) is Louise Anderson Allen, \textit{A Bluestocking in Charleston: The Life and Career of Laura Bragg} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001). Bragg served first as librarian, and later as director, of The Charleston Museum in Charleston, South Carolina from 1919 - 1931. The Charleston Museum was the first American museum, founded in 1773 prior to the creation of the United States. Relevant information from these databases was defined as that which was directly related to the topic of this study – an educational biography of a progressive era female art educator and museum professional working in the American Southwest. Sources relating to women involved with art museums, as art educators, or as curators in the American Southwest were classified as relevant. Works relating to individuals working outside the Southwest were also included when the experiences, influences, goals, or accomplishments of the subject of the monograph were unquestionably similar to Colton’s. Educational biographies of male art educators or curators were generally excluded. Progressive era women reformers, including Jane Addams, Lillian Wald, and many more, have been acknowledged extensively in the professional literature. However, the focus here is on progressive era women educators, not reformers or women in general during that era. See Jane Addams and Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, \textit{Jane Addams on Education}, Classis in Education, no. 51 (New York: Teachers College Press, 1985).

\textsuperscript{16} Colton has been included in some art history publications about women artists of the American West, but those publications do not highlight her role as an educator.
Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton
and the Progressive Education Movement

What were Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton’s contributions to the progressive education movement and the Indian arts and crafts movement in the Southwestern United States at a time when the region was still very remote? The field of education will benefit from a more nuanced, critical analysis of Colton’s accomplishments and shortcomings as an educator. Colton’s contributions are not widely known; nor has her work been placed in the social or intellectual context of her time. The existing literature about Colton includes a popular biography by Mangum and Mangum (1997), but it fails to fully analyze and synthesize Colton’s professional relationships or critique her work as an educator.¹⁷

Studying Colton’s ideals about art education, particularly in her 1934 publication *Art for the Schools of the Southwest: An Outline for the Public and Indian Schools* (Flagstaff, AZ: Museum of Northern Arizona, 1934), may help art educators today in advocating for the necessity of art education.¹⁸ Further, a study of Colton will enhance the existing research base relating to the contributions of women in art education.¹⁹ Colton’s work can be clarified and explained in a broader context, particularly by examining her role at the Museum of Northern Arizona. Further,


Colton’s relationship with the educational system and her place within the progressive education movement can be analyzed by focusing on her ideals and her contributions to the Museum of Northern Arizona and the peoples of the Colorado Plateau.

The success of a historical study depends on the availability and accessibility of documents and artifacts related to the subject. A wealth of material exists relating to Colton’s life, including annual reports, exhibition catalogs, decades of Museum News and Plateau (both Museum of Northern Arizona publications), oral histories with some of Colton’s family and colleagues, photographs, personal objects, paintings, newspaper articles, her husband’s autobiography, and Colton’s own published and unpublished writings.

For someone who made so many contributions during her life, Colton’s influence has not well been well documented, despite the publication of One Woman’s West: The Life of Mary Russell Ferrell Colton. Her professional accomplishments far exceed her shortcomings, meriting recognition and giving her a place in the history of American education. Colton’s pioneering roles included fostering traditional Native American arts, encouraging local artists, and bringing outside art influences to the Colorado Plateau.20 (See Figure 1) She worked both with children and adults, although more with the latter.

Biographies and autobiographies have been published about many of Colton’s contemporaries in Santa Fe and Taos, including Alice Corbin Henderson, Mary Austin,

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20 The Colorado Plateau is geological area roughly focused on the Four Corners region of the southwestern United States covering western Colorado, southern and eastern Utah, northwestern New Mexico, and northern Arizona. It is a very arid, high desert plateau, ranging from 5,000 to over 11,000 feet. The Plateau is home to the Grand Canyon, the Red Rocks country, and the largest concentration of national parks in the nation. Flagstaff sits on the southern edge of the Plateau, and until recently was its most populated city.
Figure 1 Map of the Colorado Plateau by Dorothy A. House, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona.
Mabel Dodge Luhan, Amelia Elizabeth White, Dorothy Brett, Frieda Lawrence, and Alice Fletcher.21 As a long-time curator of a museum specializing in art of the American West, I became familiar with the work of Colton’s contemporaries throughout the Southwest, particularly those in Santa Fe and Taos. Yet, Colton’s contributions were always missing in the literature. I could see how Colton’s efforts fit within the context of the work of her contemporaries in Santa Fe and Taos, and within the progressive education movement from the then relatively remote outpost of Flagstaff, but the story had not yet been written.

In this study, Colton’s work is viewed through a different lens than previous analyses, such as Mangum and Mangum’s biography. The aforementioned book is a literary biography; the lens I use for this study is that of educational biography. Lagemann (1979) explains that: “educational biography is different from literary

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biography in that it emphasizes only one aspect of a life: education.”  

This lens allows the historian to examine various educational experiences and institutions and their effects on a person’s life. Further, Lagemann observes that:

Biography is a sensible approach to the educational history of progressive women . . . it allows one to examine education as a broad process, to map the variety of settings in which education can take place, to analyze the personal and social factors that define the educative meaning of a wide range of experiences, and to trace the effects of these experiences over time.

Cremin, Lagemann’s mentor, argued that:

The history of education must also concern itself with the ways in which different individuals have interacted with given configurations and with the diverse outcomes of those interactions. The initial key to such insights is the educational biography, a portrayal of an individual life focusing on the experience of education – the experience resulting from the deliberate, systematic, and sustained efforts of others to transmit or evoke knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities, as well as the experience involved in the subject’s own deliberate, systematic and sustained efforts to acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and sensibilities. An educational biography will generally begin with the efforts of others (parents, kin, peers, clergymen, schoolteachers) to nurture certain attitudes and behaviors and to teach certain knowledge and values, and with the subject’s response to those efforts, which leads on the one hand to certain selective accommodations and patterns of believing, knowing, and doing, and on the other hand to an inevitable impact on those undertaking the nurturing and teaching.

This study investigates Colton’s work as an educator in a critical manner to provide an in-depth, nuanced appraisal of her efforts and achievements. Working as an advocate, curator, amateur ethnographer, author, artist, and philanthropist, Colton sought to educate the peoples of, and visitors to, the Colorado Plateau about the cultural heritage

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23 Ibid.

of the region. Colton’s efforts are still in evidence today through the work of the institution she co-founded, the Museum of Northern Arizona. The Museum factors prominently in this study because it is so integrally linked with Colton’s educational goals. Lagemann found the same was true in *A Generation of Women*, noting that: “The educative significance of each woman’s career could not have become clear without some understanding of the organizations and movements in which each participated.”

The Museum provided both a framework and a venue to share her ideas, but it has eclipsed Colton herself, who played an integral role in early twentieth century cultural life on the Colorado Plateau for which she was recognized by the Arizona Women’s Hall of Fame in its inaugural year, 1981. Colton sought to establish Flagstaff as a cultural hub of the region, not unlike the artists’ and writers’ colonies at Santa Fe and Taos. She networked nationally to offer the peoples of the region educational opportunities they might not otherwise have had. Further, she promoted the artistic talents of residents on the Plateau. Previous studies of Colton have not evaluated her work in context; nor have they provided a detailed examination and analysis of her work. An intriguing historical figure, Colton was both complex and sophisticated, a maverick of sorts.

As objective as historians try to be, they can never completely escape the influence of their background and experience. Novick (1988) contends that his “way of thinking about anything in the past is primarily shaped by [his] understanding of its role within a particular historical context, and in the stream of history.”

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curator, historian, and graduate student, my perspective about Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton’s role in the history of art education in the Southwest is inevitably informed by my own background.

My research has focused on the social and cultural history of the twentieth century American West with an emphasis on the Southwest, beginning with an institutional history of the Museum of Northern Arizona. While writing *Gateway to the Colorado Plateau: A Portrait of the Museum of Northern Arizona* I became interested in Colton, and continued to research her life. Educated at a time when New Western History was coming to the forefront, I was, and am, very much influenced by the writings of Revisionist historians such as Patricia Nelson Limerick, who led the crusade to incorporate women and minorities into the history of the American West. This study expands my research and brings it full circle, adding to the growing body of knowledge about the historical contributions of women in the American West, which is of potential interest to scholars in the fields of women’s studies, history, and education.

Much can be learned from Colton’s work that is still relevant to the field of education today. Her ideas and writings about art education will resonate with today’s opponents of No Child Left Behind. Colton warrants the recognition enjoyed by her contemporaries such as Mabel Dodge Luhan, Alice Corbin Henderson, Mary Austin,

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Dorothy Dunn, Frieda Lawrence, and many other individuals who advocated for Native American arts in Santa Fe and Taos.

Historical Criticism / Evaluation of Data Sources

Unlike most academic disciplines, the field of history is not reliant upon theoretical underpinnings, setting historical research apart from other scholarly projects. Stanford (1986) observes that: “History, as its critics often remark, lacks the formal theoretical structure of most academic disciplines;”29 indeed historians tend to eschew theory. History is as much an art as a science; historians select, arrange, describe and narrate materials. In his classic monograph, Understanding History: A Primer of Historical Method, Gottschalk remarks that historians are “frequently required to imagine things that must have happened . . . [and] things that might reasonably have happened.”30

The lack of theoretical underpinnings does not exempt historical researchers from exercising rigor in their research. Historians must be cognizant of the sources of their data and the potential for criticism.31 A historian’s work involves making informed judgments about the relative truth of statements. For example, in this study, Colton’s research and writings must be evaluated in light of her social position to determine if she

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was shaped by the social environment of her time, and if she was influenced to conform to the mores of her socioeconomic class.

This study includes extensive document analysis and interpretation and the use of oral history. Colton’s work is analyzed to increase the reader’s understanding of it. In the process, her work is summarized and interpreted to assess its overall value in terms of strengths and weaknesses. Further, Colton’s work is evaluated for worth, utility, and validity. Through explication of Colton’s writings, paying as much attention to the voids as the symbolic expressions, a clearer understanding of the meaning emerges.

Internal Criticism

A potential threat to validity exists when a researcher or institution receives funding for a study from an outside agency, whether federal, state, municipal, or private. The Coltons’ independent wealth sheltered their research studies from outside influences. Although they resisted the notion that the Museum was theirs, in point of fact, the Coltons funded the institution in full for the first thirty years of its existence from 1928 – 1958; the timeframe that this study focuses on falls within those dates. Dr. and Mrs. Colton enjoyed the luxury of pursuing studies that they were interested in without having to be concerned about utilitarian purposes for their work or without a funding agency with an agenda encouraging them to push a certain set of values.

The Colton Collection at the Museum of Northern Arizona is a relatively untapped resource of original archival materials and photographs as well as a few objects. Prior to 1996, the collection was only roughly organized and was still housed

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32 The three-dimensional object collection at the Museum contains Colton’s paints, brushes, palette, paint box, and easel. The fine art collection contains several dozen of her paintings and sketches.
as it was when the Coltons passed away in the early 1970s. As the Curator of Photographs, I re-housed the collection and expanded the finding guide in 1996 to provide increased access. The full potential of the collection has yet to be realized.

Colton’s personal papers survived; her privileged socioeconomic position undoubtedly contributed to the preservation of her life’s work, as did her career in museums, organizations that are dedicated to education and preservation. She was a participant and an observer of events at the Museum, offering a mix of both perspectives in her writings.

Mrs. Colton received a B.F.A. from the prestigious Philadelphia School of Design for Women, where she also completed a year of post-graduate work. Her husband, Dr. Colton, held a Ph.D. in Zoology from the University of Pennsylvania. The Coltons traveled and studied the art, cultures, and natural history of the Colorado Plateau from their first visit together to the region on their honeymoon in 1912 until their deaths in the early 1970s. They were well respected by their peers and colleagues as consummate scholars. Mrs. Colton’s writings demonstrate a passion for her work, certainly a factor to be considered in evaluating them.

External Criticism

The Colton Collection is a superb source of data. It has been authenticated; most of the materials are originals, often signed and dated by the Coltons. The collection has never left the Museum’s premises. The portion relating to the Coltons’ professional lives was found in various research facilities at the Museum, where the documents were created. The personal papers were likely brought to the research library from the Colton
home, Coyote Range, also on the Museum’s property, and Mrs. Colton’s art studio near her home.

The collection includes official minutes and annual reports, files, letters, memos, bulletins, budgets and research reports. Three-dimensional collections include artwork and buildings. There are also photographs, newspaper articles, and periodicals as well as an unpublished biography of Mrs. Colton written by Dr. Colton. Dr. and Mrs. Colton created these documents throughout their lives. Both were scholars and published extensively. Dr. Colton published more than fifty books in his lifetime on a variety of subjects ranging from archaeology to geology to history. Mrs. Colton published eight works relating to Native American arts in the Southwest, art education, and archaeology. Dr. and Mrs. Colton’s intended audience and purpose for these publications varied from museum members, to staff, to other scholars, and sometimes the general public.

The motive for the Coltons’ writings was untainted, purely scholarly. Admittedly, Mrs. Colton’s state of mind can be called into question for documents created later in life. She suffered from what was then diagnosed as atherosclerosis of the brain. Colton’s productivity (her research, writing, and art) gradually declined after her resignation as Curator of Art and Ethnology in 1948. However, nearly all of the materials in the collection created by her pre-date 1948, and those works are the focus of this study.

Having personally re-cataloged the entire collection (photographs and archival materials), I had the opportunity to examine the documents closely, including writing style, spelling, signatures, handwriting, and consistency. I can attest with certainty that there are no forgeries or fakes in the collection, nor have the documents been altered.
CHAPTER 2
EAST MEETS WEST

Early Life

Born on the cusp of the Progressive Era on March 25, 1889, Mary-Russell Ferrell was a Southerner by birth, was raised in the North, and ultimately chose the West as her home. Mary-Russell Ferrell was born in Louisville, Kentucky, in the home of her grandparents, Judge Russell Houston and Griselda Polk Houston. Her mother, Elise Houston, was the youngest of four children. Mary-Russell’s father, Joseph Lybrant Ferrell, came from a Pennsylvania farming family, but chose engineering as his profession.

The Houstons were well-heeled Southerners. Judge Houston served as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Tennessee and subsequently assumed the position of president of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad; he was the first cousin of famed Texan Sam Houston.\(^1\) Griselda Polk Houston was a Tennessee native, descended from the wealthy Polk family that produced several influential politicians, including President James K. Polk. The Houstons married in 1844 and had three daughters and a son between 1845 and 1858.

\(^1\) Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns, July 24, 2009, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives, Flagstaff, AZ (uncatalogued).
Joseph Ferrell met Elise Houston through Houston’s father; Ferrell was hired to engineer bridges for the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. They established a home in Philadelphia after marrying in 1883 and had two daughters, Griselda, named after her grandmother, and Mary-Russell, named after one of Elise’s sisters. Griselda died of diphtheria at the age of two.

While the Ferrell’s did not lead the lifestyle Elise was likely accustomed to, they did not want for anything; Griselda and Mary-Russell had a governess. Mary-Russell, preferring solitude even as a child, had few companions, and “avoided confrontation by withdrawing.”

She exhibited artistic talent early in life and was encouraged to pursue both the visual and performing arts. Home-schooled until age eight, Mary-Russell entered the Pelham Academy, a private girl’s school.

Early Education

Mary-Russell’s early education was largely informal, but she “enjoyed education. She had a great ability to learn and a lively, inquiring mind, and these traits enabled her to absorb a great deal from reading, conversations, and other sources.”

By the time she entered adolescence, Mary-Russell knew she wanted to become an artist. Her dream was nearly dashed when Mary-Russell suffered a great tragedy at age 15; her father passed away unexpectedly.

Joseph Ferrell provided a comfortable living for his family, first as an engineer, then as a developer of Broadwater Island off the Virginia Coast, a retreat for wealthy

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2 Mangum & Mangum, *One Woman’s West: The Life of Mary Russell Ferrell Colton*, 2.
3 Ibid., 4.
Philadelphians, and finally as an inventor. Yet, at the time of his death Joseph Ferrell’s fortunes had waned and his wife and daughter were left in dire financial straits. Elise Ferrell sold many family assets and possessions to meet their living expenses, but there was no money to pay for Mary-Russell’s education. A family friend stepped in and provided financial assistance, quite possibly altering the course of young Mary-Russell’s life.

Mrs. Anne E. Walbridge offered to pay the tuition for Mary-Russell to attend the Philadelphia School of Design for Women. Mary-Russell applied for admission in October 1904, just a few months after her father’s passing. She was admitted on November 1 of that year, an honor given the rigorous qualifications for admission to the highly respected art school.

Philadelphia School of Design for Women

Founded in 1848, the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (PSDW) prepared women for careers in newly created industries that sprang up as a result of the Industrial Revolution. Initially, “. . . the school began as a charity aimed not at the poorest women, but at ‘respectable’ women required to support themselves.” In some regards Mary-Russell fit this description. She came from a highly respected family that

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4 F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns, August 2009 – December 2009 via email, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives, Flagstaff, AZ (uncatalogued). Denise remembered that Mary-Russell’s “father, Joseph L. Ferrell, was a good friend of Grover Cleveland, and he entertained the President on Broadwater Island several times.”


had wealth until her father passed away. When Mary-Russell entered the PSDW her mother had not yet remarried and the family’s finances were depleted. With Anne Walbridge’s assistance, Mary-Russell was able to attend the PSDW, perhaps in the hope of finding paid employment whether in commercial design or the fine arts. Mary-Russell attended the PSDW at a time when “wealthy patrons and courses in ‘fine arts’ established for the School of Design a prestigious place within Philadelphia’s hierarchy of private art schools, just below the venerable Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.”  

The PSDW was the first women’s art and design college in the nation. One of the School’s goals was to prepare young women for careers that would provide them with financial independence. For many decades, the PSDW set the standard of excellence with regard to educating women for careers in art and design. The name of the School was subsequently changed to the Philadelphia School of Art and Design for Women and later to Moore College of Art and Design. Today, Moore is the only women’s art and design college in the nation.

In an article for the History of Education Society, Nina de Angeli Walls summarized:

. . . The Philadelphia School of Design for Women, a pioneer in the American design school movement, survived as a single-sex commercial art school from its founding in 1848 into the twentieth century. By 1932, when a merger with another women’s school brought a name change that symbolized the end of an era, the School of Design had enrolled more than four thousand students. Familiar to Philadelphians today as Moore College of Art and Design, the school remains committed to its original mission of educating women for careers in the arts.  

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7 Ibid., 332.
8 Ibid., 329.
Mary-Russell attended the PSDW during a period when the fine arts were emphasized more than design arts. The early part of the twentieth century was also a period of declining admissions at the PSDW, and after Mary-Russell graduated a transformation took place resulting in more of an emphasis on the commercial as opposed to the fine arts in the generation of students that followed her.

Student Life

Students at the PSDW were trained for a career in the arts, one that would allow them to be economically self-sufficient. When Mary-Russell first entered the PSDW, the prospect of a career in art probably appealed to her, as the family’s fortunes had waned and she was likely considering employment options. In choosing a degree from the PSDW, Mary-Russell found “. . . a way to evade the confines of domesticity while retaining the appearance of gentility.”

Mary-Russell enjoyed school and excelled, “but she led a sheltered and private life. She seemed to have little interest in dances, games, and parties.” She did, however, take advantage of the cultural offerings of Philadelphia, attending symphonies, operas, and plays. A dedicated and disciplined student, Mary-Russell was well liked by her peers, many of whom became life-long friends. (See Figure 2)

Dedicated to her studies and fine art as a profession, Mary-Russell had little time for anything else, including emotional relationships. She maintained close ties with

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9 Ibid., 330.

10 Mangum & Mangum, One Woman’s West: The Life of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, 7.
Figure 2 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, back row right, with fellow students at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women, undated. Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona MS207-210-73.
family members, but showed little interest in dating. Mary-Russell sustained this focus on her calling as an educator and an artist throughout her life, forming close relationships with few outside of her immediate family. When asked about their memories of Mary-Russell, the most common response that people who knew her had was that she was very pleasant but kept to herself and had few close friends.\textsuperscript{11}

While at the PSDW, Mary-Russell had the opportunity to study under some renowned artists of that time period, such as Henry Snell and Elliott Daingerfield, both of whom she cited later in life as inspiration for her own artwork.\textsuperscript{12} Daingerfield painted landscapes for the Santa Fe Railway to be used as advertisements to lure people to the American West, and Snell produced many works for world expositions.\textsuperscript{13} Moreover, the headmistress at the PSDW was Emily Sartain, eldest daughter of famed painter John Sartain.

Mary-Russell’s alumni file illuminates her academic life at the PSDW. She studied at the PSDW from 1904 – 1909. Her 1904 – 1905 curriculum consisted of Antique Life and Modeling; 1905 – 1906 consisted of Antique Life and Illustrating


\textsuperscript{12} Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton’s granddaughter, Denise Colton recalls her grandmother traveling to France with a group from the School and that she was greatly influenced by the work of artist Mary Cassatt, who studied at the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts. On the trip to France she visited Paris, Giverny, and Auvers, where she found her element. F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns. No other sources cite this, but Denise vividly recalls her grandmother talking about Cassatt.

Modeling; 1906 – 1907 consisted of Antique Life, Modeling Still Life and Water Color; 1907 – 1908 consisted of Antique Life and Modeling Water Color.\textsuperscript{14}

Just prior to completing her undergraduate studies in 1908, Mary-Russell’s mother Elise remarried; this was a complete surprise. Elise Ferrell married Theodore Presser, owner of the Presser Music Publishing House and publisher of \textit{Etude} magazine. Presser’s publishing house fortune provided Elise and Mary-Russell with financial security for life, but Mary-Russell’s relationship with her stepfather was uneasy at best. Shortly after Elise and Theodore were married, Mary-Russell received her undergraduate degree and was awarded a fellowship for a year of post-graduate studies.\textsuperscript{15}

Post Graduation

Following her year of graduate studies Mary-Russell established a small art studio with two of her classmates from the PDSW. She lived in the Presser home, although her relationship with her stepfather was strained. Mary-Russell supplemented her income by performing restoration work for museums and private individuals and by working on community art projects. Mary-Russell also joined several professional associations, including the National Association of Women Artists, the Philadelphia Water Color Club, the Philadelphia Art Alliance, Aquarealists, the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, the New York Water Color Club, the American Water Color Society, the Washington Water Color Club, and the American Federation of Arts.

\textsuperscript{14} “The specialty of the School of Design’s painting program was considered to be landscapes, although still life and portraits were emphasized; at exhibitions of The Philadelphia Ten, landscapes always predominated.” Page Talbott and Patricia Tanis Sydney, \textit{The Philadelphia Ten: A women’s Artist Group 1917-1945} (Philadelphia: Galleries at Moore & American Art Review Press, 1998), 11.

\textsuperscript{15} Alumni file, Mary-Russell Ferrell, Moore College of Art and Design. Mary-Russell received the John Sartain Post-Graduate scholarship allowing her to study for a fifth year.
Western Sojourns and a Fateful Meeting

The tension between Mary-Russell and her stepfather persisted, and Elise Presser sought a remedy for the situation. Through family connections, Mary-Russell was accepted as a member of an expedition to the Selkirk Mountains of British Columbia in the summer of 1909, led by Dr. Charles Shaw, a botanist at the University of Pennsylvania. This journey was Mary-Russell’s first trip into the wilderness, and her first trip without her family. Yet, she took to it immediately. Each member of the expedition soon had a nickname: Mary-Russell’s was “Fairy,” a name that stuck with her for decades. After an eventful summer of adventures, Mary-Russell returned to Philadelphia in the fall of 1909 with “a new love in her life: the American West.”

Full of new inspiration for her artwork and a freshly discovered adventurous spirit, Mary-Russell returned to her studio in the fall of 1909. Her journals reveal little about her activities during that fall and winter, but in the spring of 1910 Mary-Russell became excited when Dr. Shaw organized another trip to the Selkirk Mountains. At the first planning meeting she met Dr. Harold Sellers Colton, a zoology instructor at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Colton was convinced by a close friend at the university to join the expedition. Having been on the 1909 expedition, Dr. Shaw asked Mary-Russell to assess Dr. Colton’s suitability as a member of the 1910 expedition. Mary-Russell was not particularly impressed by Colton, although she determined him to be

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16 Robin Colton, interview with W. James Burns. Robin recalled: “...my grandmother, you might have called her bohemian in her day...” Those bohemian tendencies would seem to run counter to Colton’s upper-middle class upbringing in the East. She was an avid camper and loved the outdoors.

17 Mangum & Mangum, *One Woman’s West: The Life of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton*, 11.

18 Ibid., 12.
acceptable as a member of their party. Similarly, Mary-Russell did not strike Colton upon their first meeting; indeed he thought she was not very fashionable or refined.\textsuperscript{19}

The 1910 trip was even more rigorous than the 1909 expedition had been, and following Dr. Shaw’s recommendation several of the participants planned a leisurely trip through the American West before returning to Philadelphia. The party convened on the Fourth of July at Rogers Pass. Dr. Colton only stayed with the group until July 29 when he went on to California to conduct some research. Mary-Russell stayed with the expedition. (See Figure 3) Sadly, the journey ended in tragedy. After transporting Dr. Colton and Ben Jacobs to civilization on July 30, 1910, Dr. Shaw was drowned when his canoe overturned on his way back to the party.\textsuperscript{20}

Mary-Russell Ferrell’s biographers remarked: “The events of the summer changed Mary-Russell’s life, maturing her, making her self-reliant, giving her an abiding love for the Southwest, and introducing her to the man she would marry.”\textsuperscript{21} At the end of August Mary-Russell and the rest of the party reached Los Angeles, California, where Dr. Colton rejoined them. They boarded the Santa Fe Railroad for the East. Although they were not yet a couple, Mary-Russell Ferrell and Harold Colton experienced the Colorado Plateau for the first time together.\textsuperscript{22} They camped on the south rim of the Grand Canyon

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 13.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 15-17.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 18.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Today the Colorado Plateau includes counties in four states: in Arizona, Navajo, Apache, Mojave and Coconino counties, in New Mexico, San Juan, McKinley and Cibola counties, in Utah, Kane, Washington, Parks, Wayne, Paiute, Sevier, Sorcege, Duchesne, Carbon, Emory, Grand, Uintah and San Juan counties, and in Colorado, Rio Blogo, Garfield, Mesa, Delta, Montrose, San Miguel, Dolores, Montezuma, La Plata, and Archuleta counties. Towns/cities of notable size include Flagstaff, Winslow, Holbrook and Page in Arizona, Gallup, Farmington, and several of the Rio Grande Pueblos in New Mexico, Mexican Hat, Kanab, and Moab in Utah, and Durango, Grand Junction, and Cortez in Colorado.
\end{itemize}
Figure 3 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton camping in the Selkirk Mountains of British Columbia, ca. 1910, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, MS-207-202-12A.
and hiked down to the Colorado River. Following their sojourn in the Canyon, Mary-
Russell, Harold, and the remainder of the party headed east, stopping at Adamana, the
jumping-off point for the Petrified Forest. Dr. Colton stayed on the train while Mary-
Russell and the rest of the party explored.23

Upon returning to Philadelphia Dr. Colton and Mary-Russell corresponded
regularly. Dr. Colton sought to court Mary-Russell, who was more interested in a
friendship. And court her he did, taking Mary-Russell for drives, to the theatre, to dinner,
and to the opera. The pair saw one another weekly beginning in the fall of 1910, and they
increasingly spent more time together as the months progressed. The following spring, on
May 13, 1911, the couple became engaged.

**Marriage and Travels**

On May 23, 1912 Mary-Russell Ferrell and Harold Sellers Colton married. Dr.
Colton was a biologist and zoologist at the University of Pennsylvania, but that provided
him with little income. Colton was independently wealthy, thanks to shrewd investing
and family money. His wealth, combined with Mary-Russell’s (inherited later in life),
afforded them many opportunities. They had the luxury of being able to work without
pay and enough discretionary wealth to be able to support the organizations and causes
they championed. Further, they were able to travel and pursue their interests at will.24

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23 Mangum & Mangum, *One Woman’s West: The Life of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton*, 18.

24 Harold Colton was also the descendant of a famous American artist. F. Denise Colton,
interview by W. James Burns. Denise Colton wondered: “Did Mary-Russell know that she would
eventually marry a great-grandson of Charles Willson Peale, ‘the Portraitist of the American Revolution’? Surely Not!”
Those interests led them to northern Arizona, home to the Colorado Plateau, a geological area roughly focused on the Four Corners region of the southwestern United States covering western Colorado, southern and eastern Utah, northwestern New Mexico, and northern Arizona. It is a very arid, high desert plateau, home to the Grand Canyon, the Red Rocks country, and the largest concentration of national parks in the nation. Flagstaff sits on the southern edge of the Plateau, and is its most populated city.25

After marrying in Germantown, Pennsylvania on May 23, 1912 at Mary-Russell Ferrell’s parents’ home, the newlyweds left on a honeymoon tour of the Southwest. They took the Santa Fe Railroad to Glorieta, New Mexico, camped on the Valle Ranch near Pecos, visited Santa Fe and Albuquerque, and enjoyed the region’s archaeological ruins and the villages of the Rio Grande Pueblos, including Laguna and Acoma. From there they traveled on to Gallup and then into northern Arizona, stopping at the Petrified Forest before journeying on to Flagstaff. (See Figure 4) There, the Coltons climbed the San Francisco Peaks to the northwest of town, where they camped and recorded their thoughts about “what a nice place it would be to make a home.”26 The Coltons then visited the Grand Canyon and the lower Colorado River Valley before proceeding to California where they visited San Diego, San Francisco and Yosemite before heading north to


Figure 4 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton and Harold Sellers Colton on their honeymoon, 1912, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, MS-207-310-13-17.
Portland, Seattle and the Selkirk Mountains, ending with a stop in Yellowstone on their way back East.

The importance of this first extended visit to the Plateau cannot be overstated in terms of the direction it provided for the rest of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton’s life. For Mary-Russell this was a glimpse into a new world, one that would become her permanent home from 1926 – 1971. (See Figure 5) The Coltons returned to the Plateau in the summer of 1913 on an expedition with family and friends.

Inspired by a lecture given by Dr. Frederick Munson at the University of Pennsylvania about the Navajo and Hopi, the Coltons planned another trip to the Southwest. Dr. Colton contacted the Museum of the American Indian’s Heye Foundation in New York City for more information about the Navajo and Hopi, and through the museum, he began corresponding with Don Lorenzo Hubbell, a trader on the Navajo Reservation who ran a post at Ganado near Window Rock. Hubbell assisted the Coltons by outfitting them for a tour of the Zuni, Navajo and Hopi Reservations.

The 1913 trip began in Glorieta, New Mexico; the Coltons again visited Santa Fe, and this time Taos. While technically just outside the boundaries of the Plateau, Santa Fe and Taos, with their now-famed artists’ and writers’ colonies, must have held much interest for the Coltons, Mary-Russell in particular. As an artist, Colton would certainly have been aware of the presence of her peers in the area.

This trip also afforded the Coltons their first contact with Pueblo Indians, perhaps their initial encounter with any Native American tribe. Later, while camping at Hubbell Trading Post at Ganado, they undoubtedly became acquainted with some of the “artists, writers, politicians and Indian leaders such as Chee Dodge who then dominated the
Figure 5 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton sitting on a doorstep in Arizona, ca. 1912, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, MS207-211-5-7-7.
Navajo scene,” all personal acquaintances of Hubbell. Former United States President Theodore Roosevelt and Arizona Governor George W. P. Hunt stayed with Hubbell at Ganado while the Colton party was camped there.

That summer, the Coltons visited the majority of the villages on all three Hopi mesas, including Walpi, founded on First Mesa shortly after the Pueblo Rebellion of 1680. (See Figure 6) There, the Coltons viewed the sacred Snake Dance, shortly before it was closed off to Anglos. Sitting just below them was Theodore Roosevelt and his companions. Following the Snake Dance the Coltons visited Canyon de Chelly on the western Navajo Reservation before touring the California coast and then returning to Philadelphia.

Harold and Mary-Russell Colton spent the summers of 1910, 1912, and 1913 traversing the American West and British Columbia, encountering many unforgettable landscapes, and to them, exotic peoples. But, the Colorado Plateau left the most indelible impression on their memories. For the next twelve years they divided their summers between the Maine Coast and northern Arizona, but their thoughts seldom strayed from their newfound delight, the Colorado Plateau.

The summers of 1914 and 1915 passed without a return to the Plateau due to the birth of the Coltons’ first child, Ferrell, and a trip to Maine. But, by the summer of 1916 they were long overdue for a sojourn to Flagstaff. Arriving in June, the Coltons established a residence on the Greenlaw ranch just northwest of town. This served as their jumping-off point all summer for adventures across the Plateau.

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28 The Snake Dance is a sacred ceremony that involves the handling of live rattlesnakes. It is a variety of a Rain Dance, intended to bring the summer rains to the Hopi Mesas.
Figure 6 Walpi, First Mesa, ca. 1912, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, MS207-125-367B, photograph by Major Lionel F. Brady.
One of the places they visited was Oak Creek Canyon, which lies between Flagstaff and Sedona, a mere thirty miles to the south but nearly 2,700 feet lower in elevation, and in Arizona elevation makes a big difference in the climate. Oak Creek Canyon, one of the few natural riparian habitats in the state, visually transports visitors to the East. The Coltons traveled through Oak Creek Canyon and explored archaeological sites throughout the Verde Valley just to its south.

Following their Verde Valley trip the Coltons set out for the Navajo and Hopi reservations, an arduous journey at that time requiring traveling in a mule-drawn wagon. Their route took them from Flagstaff to Tuba City, on to Old Oraibi, and back to Flagstaff, a distance of some 240 miles. At Old Oraibi they attended the Snake Dance and met famed archaeologist and founder of the Arizona State Museum, Dr. Byron Cummings. Despite ornery mules, equipment breakdowns, and the tempestuous Little Colorado River that was in flood, the Coltons became more mesmerized than ever by the Plateau.

A seemingly ordinary family picnic that summer resulted in a study lasting nearly fifty years. An inquisitive child, Ferrell Colton found a potsherd and showed it to his father who soon realized after scanning the area that the family was picnicking on a prehistoric archaeological site. Dr. Colton was so intrigued that he took his family to Los Angeles where he conducted research in the library at the Southwest Museum. An outgrowth of that research was a systematic archaeological survey of Flagstaff and its environs that lasted for decades: one that Mrs. Colton contributed to as well.

Early in the fall of 1916 Dr. Colton returned to his teaching duties at the University of Pennsylvania, but Mrs. Colton stayed behind in Flagstaff with their young
son Ferrell due to an outbreak of polio in Philadelphia. While out horseback riding alone one day early that fall Colton discovered a large, and significant, archaeological site just to the east of Flagstaff. Later named Elden Pueblo, this site provided important clues about the lives of the Sinagua, prehistoric peoples who inhabited the Flagstaff area. With this discovery, Mary-Russell Colton was hooked on the anthropology of the region, although never to the extent that she was interested in its art.

Art and Anthropology in the Southwest

The emerging field of anthropology was very much linked to that of art, particularly in the Southwest. Perhaps this was due in part to the nearly unbroken human history dating back for many centuries linking the prehistoric and contemporary peoples of the region, and their artistic traditions. Prehistoric peoples of the Colorado Plateau, primarily the Anasazi and the Sinagua, created artwork in the form of pictographs and petroglyphs; they also created some decorated utilitarian objects. Contemporary native peoples on the Plateau, descendants of the Anasazi and Sinagua according to oral traditions, produce art in many forms; silverwork, pottery, basketry, paintings, carvings, weavings, and sculptures.

Art has been an important component of most cultures throughout human history as evidenced by the remains of ancient civilizations throughout the world. A means of recording a culture’s existence, artwork includes purely decorative objects, but also utilitarian items. Given the subsistence nature of many Native American cultures, the amount of time they dedicated to art-related activities is remarkable. Art was an integral

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part of many Native American cultures, and each had their own unique art forms passed down via oral traditions from one generation to the next.

Many Native American tribes inhabit the Colorado Plateau, including the Navajo, Hopi, Zuni, Havasupai, Ute, Hualapi, Southern Paiute, and Paiute. Colton was primarily interested in the Hopi and Navajo. Inhabiting an exceedingly arid region, one of their primary concerns was the availability of water. Thus, much of their artwork contains symbols relating to water or appeals to sacred beings for rain.

Many of the objects decorated by the Navajo, Hopi, and other Southwestern Native American tribes were functional, including basketry, pottery, apparel, and similar objects deemed crafts, unworthy of being considered art. These items are what intrigued Colton, and she recognized such handcrafted pieces as works of art. Colton, however, was on the forefront of the movement that brought Native American art into the mainstream of modern art.

A cadre of museums founded in the Southwest during the 1920s and 1930s by wealthy Easterners collected both art and anthropological objects, including the Heard Museum, the Amerind Foundation, Gila Pueblo, the Southwest Museum, the Laboratory of Anthropology, the School of American Research, and the Wheelwright Museum. Further, artists and archaeologists at that time moved in the same circles and often championed the same causes, particularly in Santa Fe and Taos.

Mary-Russell, an artist, and Harold, a scientist, often collaborated on projects, like many of their peers in other museums in the region. The Coltons co-authored an article in 1918 titled “The Little Known Small House Ruins in the Coconino Forest.” Over the next five decades Dr. Colton published dozens of articles about Southwestern
archaeology; Mrs. Colton maintained an avid interest in his work and the dissemination of knowledge about the prehistoric peoples of the Plateau. But, she was more interested in the contemporary peoples of the Plateau and conducted several ethnographic studies.

In the 1910s and 1920s when Dr. and Mrs. Colton were establishing themselves in the Southwest, the fields of anthropology, archaeology and ethnography were in their infancy. All were more of an avocation than a vocation, among the pursuits of the independently wealthy, often but not always gentlemen; many lacked academic training. Glaser and Zenetou observed: “Ethnology, anthropology, paleontology, archaeology – these were museum fields in which women were becoming more prevalent during the twenties and thirties.”

With a Ph.D. in Zoology, Dr. Colton had the academic background and research skills in addition to his wealth. Mrs. Colton had a college degree at a time when many women were not afforded that opportunity.

World War I and Early 1920s Tragedies

World War I interrupted the Coltons’ pattern of alternating summers between Maine and Flagstaff. Dr. Colton served in the Military Intelligence Division in Washington D.C. Following the war, the Coltons returned to Flagstaff in the summer of 1919. Accompanied by longtime family friends, they visited some of their favorite places on the Plateau and hiked into the Grand Canyon to camp for several days near the Havasupai Indian village. The Coltons continued the archaeological survey they conducted every summer that they spent in Flagstaff.


The Coltons left their hearts in Flagstaff at the end of each summer when they returned to their families and responsibilities in Philadelphia. In the fall of 1922, the first in a series of losses occurred: Mrs. Colton’s mother, Elise Presser, passed away while visiting the Coltons. To help ease Mrs. Colton’s pain from this unexpected loss, Dr. Colton took a sabbatical from the university and rented a ranch in Tucson during the winter of 1923. The Coltons spent a pleasant winter and spring there with their sons Ferrell and Sabin, not knowing that the decision would ultimately lead to another tragedy. (See Figure 7)

In May of 1923, the Coltons traveled to Flagstaff where they again set up camp for the summer. The archaeological survey continued and the Coltons also collected Hopi art objects for an upcoming exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Guild of Philadelphia.\(^\text{32}\) This was probably the beginning of Mrs. Colton’s fascination with Hopi arts, an interest that lasted the rest of her life.

Colton’s research interests were probably the furthest from her mind as she returned to Philadelphia with her family in the fall of 1923; her youngest son Sabin, age 6, had fallen ill. He was diagnosed with Valley Fever, contracted in Tucson the previous winter.\(^\text{33}\) Sabin’s condition worsened during the winter of 1924 and into the spring. The experience of watching her youngest child suffer and linger must have been excruciating.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 75.

\(^{33}\) Ibid. Valley Fever is a fungal disease endemic to the United States Southwest and Northwestern Mexico. The fungus lies dormant in the desert soil until the rains come at which time the fungus develops into airborne spores that become infectious when inhaled.
Figure 7 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton with her sons Sabin and Ferrell Colton, 1923, Tucson, Arizona, MS207-211-5-17-7, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona.
for Colton. Despite the length of his illness, Sabin’s death on May 3, 1924, was unexpected, a jolt to Mrs. Colton’s system from which she never quite recovered.\(^{34}\)

In an attempt to relieve the devastation felt over the loss of Sabin, the Coltons took an extended trip through the Midwest to the Pacific Northwest, and on to Flagstaff where they spent the end of the summer of 1924. Dr. Colton’s biographer, Jimmy Miller, posits that the Coltons’ “roots in the Colorado Plateau, with its majestic beauty and the attraction of Indians, both pre-historic and historic, were obviously growing steadily deeper.”\(^{35}\) A third family tragedy proved to be the impetus that resulted in a permanent move to Flagstaff.

Dr. Colton’s father, Sabin Woolworth Colton, Jr. died on January 29, 1925. The following summer the Coltons again returned to Flagstaff rather than going to Maine. They made a couple of purchases that summer, part of an inexorable march toward a life change. The Coltons purchased property that they had been camping on for several summers and also an adjacent parcel of land and home. This home was suitable as a year round residence. Yet, at the end of the summer of 1925, the Coltons returned to Philadelphia, as was their custom.

Making the Move

During the summer of 1926 they determined the time had come to make a permanent move to Flagstaff. The significance of this decision cannot be overstated.

\(^{34}\) Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns; F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns; Richard Wilson, interview by W. James Burns; Mangum & Mangum, One Woman’s West: The Life of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton; Miller, The Life of Harold Sellers Colton: A Philadelphia Brahmin In Flagstaff.

\(^{35}\) Miller, The Life of Harold Sellers Colton: A Philadelphia Brahmin In Flagstaff, 76.
The Coltons had lived most of their lives in the Philadelphia area, with the exception of summers in Maine and Flagstaff. They had deep roots in Philadelphia, extending back generations on Dr. Colton’s side. Mrs. Colton had a thriving career as an artist, regularly exhibiting with the Philadelphia Ten, and Dr. Colton had just been promoted to full professor at the University of Pennsylvania. These circumstances make the Colton’s decision weightier.

Ostensibly, the final decision was made because Mrs. Colton has sinus troubles and her son Ferrell had asthma. (See Figure 8) Yet, tests later proved that Ferrell was most allergic to sagebrush, which grew prolifically on the Colorado Plateau. Just as plausible is the theory that a series of family tragedies proved so unsettling to the Coltons, particularly Mary-Russell, that they needed a fresh start in life, and that they chose to do so by changing their geographical location. Relocating to Flagstaff provided them with physical and emotional distance from the sorrows of their last years in Philadelphia.

Barely out of the territorial phase, Arizona offered the Coltons a new beginning. Few Anglos had been in Flagstaff for more than 50 years when the Coltons settled there permanently in 1926. Although they were transplants from the East, few citizens of Flagstaff were native-born in the 1920s. The town only had a population of less than 3,500 when the Coltons established a permanent residence there.

The Coltons were attracted to the Colorado Plateau because of its cultural heritage, but also because of the region’s natural beauty. Both were avid amateur naturalists who appreciated the relatively untouched beauty of the Plateau. Within a short

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36 J. Ferrell Colton, interview by Richard Mangum, undated (Museum of Northern Arizona Archives, Flagstaff, AZ, uncatalogued).
Figure 8 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Harold Sellers Colton with their son Ferrell Colton, northern Arizona, ca. 1926, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, MS207-211-3-51-5.
distance from Flagstaff, even given 1920s travel conditions, the Coltons could experience alpine meadows, plateaus, mesas, cliffs, canyons, and deserts. These were nothing like the landscapes they were accustomed to in the East.

The Colorado Plateau

The quality of the air, the scents and hues, the vistas, and the peoples of the region were vastly different from what the Coltons knew in the East. The spaces were palpable, the skies big, the vegetation sparse, and the air had a special dry clarity. That clarity was a result of the region’s aridity. Much of the Colorado Plateau lies in a rain shadow between mountain ranges that prevent moisture from making its way into the region. Flagstaff actually receives more precipitation than most places in the region, and it is by no means moist, averaging twenty-two to twenty-three inches of precipitation annually.

Flagstaff is surrounded by the most arid places on the North American continent. To the south lies the Sonoran Desert, to the west, the Mohave Desert, to the east, the Rio Grande Pueblos of New Mexico, and to the north, the Canyonlands of Utah. The approach to the Plateau is perhaps most pronounced from the South. Traveling from Tucson in 1923, the Coltons would have had a two or three-day journey that now takes less than five hours. Nevertheless, the path is the same, from a low elevation of about 1,200 feet above sea level in Phoenix to nearly 7,000 feet in Flagstaff, in just 160 miles. The bulk of the elevation gain takes place climbing out of the Verde River Valley up the Mogollon Rim. (See Figure 9)
Figure 9 Map of the Colorado Plateau, Courtesy of Special Collections, Cline Library, Northern Arizona University.
The Mogollon Rim is an escarpment that rises nearly 2,000 feet in some places, and, has the ability to create its own weather, particularly in the summer.\textsuperscript{37} It extends nearly 200 miles from west to east, across much of Arizona, ending near the border with New Mexico. The slopes of the rim and the plateau above are covered primarily with Ponderosa Pine, the largest contiguous forest of its kind in the world.\textsuperscript{38}

In its own way the Colorado Plateau has acquired a mystical, almost magical presence. Spanning 130,000 square miles, the Plateau ranges in elevation from 5,000 feet to 14,000 feet above seal level. The Colorado River creates a rift splitting the Plateau roughly in half, bridged at only a few locations that are more than hundreds of miles apart.

Ascending the Plateau, particularly from the south, is a dramatic experience even in the early twenty-first century, let alone in Colton’s lifetime. The nearest metropolitan area to the Plateau is Phoenix, Arizona, roughly 120 miles south of the Mogollon Rim (the southern edge of the Plateau through much of Arizona) and 160 miles south of Flagstaff. To get there, travelers climb out of the Sonoran Desert over mountain ranges before descending into the Verde River Valley, at approximately 3,150 feet above sea level. Within thirty miles to the north the terrain climbs to almost 7,000 feet.

Up on the Plateau the scent of Ponderosa pine permeates the air; the area around Flagstaff is one of the most heavily forested on the Plateau. The air is clear and sharp

\textsuperscript{37} During the summer thunderstorm season, commonly known in Arizona as monsoon season, warm moist air from the Gulf of Mexico flows northward until it encounters mountain ranges, called “sky islands” in southern Arizona, and the Mogollon Rim in central/northern Arizona. When that warm, moist air bumps up against the mountains it rises to form towering thunderclouds that eventually produce rain. Those storms descend along the spines of the mountains into the Sonoran Desert below, frequently producing violent thunderstorms. Thus, the Mogollon Rim literally creates its own weather.

\textsuperscript{38} Northern Arizona University,\\ \url{http://www.fordev.nau.edu/CentennialForest/content/view/535/735/}, accessed January 3, 2010.
and the colors in the landscape are vivid. Within a short distance from Flagstaff the forest fades into semi-arid grasslands where the horizons are distant; the sky is big and the vegetation sparse, but the smells and colors are no less distinct.

Ecologically, the Colorado Plateau is exceptionally diverse; within one hundred miles of Flagstaff it is possible to experience six life zones from alpine tundra to low Sonoran desert, and 10,000 years of human history. There are few other places in the world where this is possible. The Plateau lies in the rain shadow between the coastal mountains and the Great Basin to the west and the Rocky Mountains to the east. Several different life zones are present on the Plateau due to the broad range in elevation. The higher elevations are alpine tundra; as the elevation gets lower forests of conifers, aspens, and Ponderosa pines appear. Even lower, there are chaparral, pinyon and juniper habitats as well as grasslands and some riparian areas. This is the land that Colton loved and the land that she dedicated much of her life to sharing with others.

To Easterners like Colton, accustomed to plentiful moisture and verdant landscapes, the West can be a polarizing place because of its arid climate. Author Wallace Stegner explained: “Aridity, more than anything else, gives the western landscape its character.” Further, he suggested that there is a:

process of westernization of the perceptions that has to happen before the West is beautiful to us. You have to get over the color green; you have to quit associating beauty with gardens and lawns; you have to get used to an inhuman scale; you have to understand geological time.40


40 Ibid., 54.
If Colton went through that process, she left no written record of it. On the contrary, Colton expressed a love for the region through her writings and artwork, as if she and the Colorado Plateau were kindred spirits.

Stegner further explained the process newcomers go through in adapting to the American West, at least those who do so successfully:

Our first and hardest adaptation was to learn all over again how to see. Our second was to learn to like the new forms and colors and light and scale when we had learned to see them. Our third was to develop new techniques, a new palette, to communicate them. And our fourth, unfortunately out of our control, was to train an audience that would respond to what we wrote or painted.41

As an artist, Colton was captivated by the quality of light, scale, forms and colors of the West. Colton communicated those through her artwork, which audiences around the country have enjoyed for generations.

Educational Focus

The focus of Colton’s efforts as an educator was the Colorado Plateau. She sought to educate residents of the Plateau about the natural environment and cultural heritage of the region. Further, Colton endeavored to preserve the region’s natural and cultural heritage by educating visitors about the wonders of the Plateau. Colton’s love for the Plateau shows in her paintings, her writings and the programs and exhibitions she created at the Museum of Northern Arizona.

Long before the term was en vogue, Colton focused on educating the public about sense of place, a way of conceptualizing one’s place in the world. What made the Colorado Plateau distinct and unique, and how could she convey that to residents,

41 Ibid., 52.
visitors, and armchair travelers? To Colton, this phrase encompassed the characteristics of the peoples, flora, fauna, and landscapes that comprised the region, and the relationships between them. In particular, she was interested in the relationship between people and their environment, and the artwork that sometimes resulted from such interactions.

The Colorado Plateau became as much a part of Colton’s soul as any of the native inhabitants of the region. Connected to the landscapes and the cultures of the region, Colton’s writings exude an intimate feeling of familiarity, connection, and attachment to the Plateau. While not a native, Colton’s soul definitely belonged there.

Without one of Colton’s ancestors, the Colorado Plateau might not have become part of the United States. Colton was descended on her mother’s side from President James K. Polk. Deeply committed to the belief in manifest destiny, he was responsible for the second-largest expansion of the United States’ territory. Polk secured the Oregon Territory, and much of the Southwest through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848, which ended the Mexican-American War. The Treaty included all of the Colorado Plateau, the land destined to become Colton’s home for the majority of her life.

Colton’s love affair with the Plateau began in May 1912, just months after Arizona achieved statehood, and it lasted until her death in 1971. To understand Colton’s work and her accomplishments requires a thorough knowledge of the place that she so loved. Without that understanding, the depths of her passion are difficult to comprehend. Colton’s love of the landscapes and peoples of the Plateau was surpassed only by her love for her family. Colton’s granddaughter, Robin, reminisced: “I just think she was a

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42 President Thomas Jefferson was responsible for the largest expansion of United States’ territory with the negotiation of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803.
vibrant, many-colored person, and somebody that I would always admire more than anybody I’ve met in my life. . . . she was just so multi-faceted in her interests, and her interests were very broad.

How did Colton, born to a prominent Southern family and raised in a well-heeled Philadelphia household, come to be so enchanted by the Colorado Plateau? By any measure it was far less verdant than her native Philadelphia. The Plateau’s most prominent feature is rock, which dominates its landscapes. It comes in many different formations and colors. Yet, Colton was inexplicably drawn to this high, arid plateau, its landscapes and peoples.

The Coltons lamented the loss of northern Arizona’s archaeological treasures even before they became permanent residents, watching museums from the East carry away trainloads of artifacts every summer. In response, the Coltons determined to establish a museum in Flagstaff to preserve the heritage of the region. The loss of cultural treasures and devastation wrought upon wilderness areas in the American West sparked the National Parks movement in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The movement gained momentum during the first decades of the twentieth century. The Coltons were undoubtedly aware of the movement, as their first sojourns in Arizona included the Petrified Forest and the Grand Canyon. They likely considered what role they could play in preserving the cultural heritage of the Colorado Plateau by collecting, and the natural environment through education.

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43 Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
CHAPTER 3
THE MUSEUM OF NORTHERN ARIZONA

Museum of Northern Arizona

The Museum of Northern Arizona possesses a rich history, including groundbreaking research, unparalleled collections, and an impressive list of staff and research associates who have achieved great success in a variety of fields. The Coltons are so inextricably linked to the Museum that it is inconceivable to write about the institution without writing about them, or to write about either of them and not write about the Museum. Thus, much information about Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton can be gleaned from publications that chronicle various aspects of the Museum’s history: *The Museum of Northern Arizona*, *The Story of the Museum of Northern Arizona*, *Our Most Cherished Ideals: The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition as a Manifestation of American Culture*, *Gateway to the Colorado Plateau: A Portrait of the Museum of Northern Arizona*, and *Telling the Story: The Museum of Northern Arizona*.¹

While these books and articles contain useful biographical information about Colton, none of these publications about the Museum examines Colton’s life work as an
educator. Roat’s and Smith’s volumes are pamphlet-sized works published by the Museum, outlining the important events in the Museum of Northern Arizona’s history. They contain little information about Colton besides accounts of her activities as Curator of Art. Westheimer focuses specifically on the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition. Inseparable from the exhibition, Colton’s role as co-founder is outlined in detail. Gateway to the Colorado Plateau is an institutional history of the Museum of Northern Arizona divided chronologically into different phases of the museum’s development. Colton features prominently in a chapter discussing the formative years of the Museum of Northern Arizona, but only as her life relates to the museum. Olberding’s history of the Museum was written for popular audiences, much like One Woman’s West, Mangum & Mangum’s literary biography of Colton.

In One Woman’s West, Mangum and Mangum provide a thoroughly researched chronicle of Colton’s life. The book, focusing primarily on Colton’s life as an artist and philanthropist, is well grounded in primary source materials. Her accomplishments as Curator of Art and Ethnology are also detailed, but the framework for the book is essentially as a chronology.

Mangum and Mangum succeed in producing a mainstream biography of Colton. From an academic perspective, this volume is largely celebratory and lacks analysis of Colton’s contributions to the field of education. Concentrating on Colton’s involvement with the Museum, One Woman’s West portrays her as a demigod; the book is long on praise and short on critique.

The Mangums’ biography of Mrs. Colton contrasts sharply with Jimmy Miller’s 1991 biography of Dr. Colton The Life of Harold Sellers Colton: A Philadelphia Brahmin
in Flagstaff. Miller paints a refined portrait of Dr. Colton, one that reveals the complexities of his personality, and his relationship to the Museum and the town of Flagstaff. He situates Dr. Colton among his peers within the Southwest archaeology community, providing an excellent model for a study of Mary-Russell Colton’s work. This volume is replete with citations and footnotes. In comparison, Mangum and Mangum’s book lacks citations and footnotes and provides a minimal bibliography.

Founding the Museum

When the Coltons began visiting Flagstaff in the 1910s, it was still a community trying to define its identity. The first settlers arrived in the Flagstaff area in 1876, and a railroad camp was established there in the winter of 1880-1881; the railroad arrived during the summer of 1882. Like many towns in the American West at that time, Flagstaff was at first a blue-collar settlement. The primary sources of employment included the timber and ranching industries and the Atlantic & Pacific (later Santa Fe) Railroad. Yet, as historian Platt Cline has argued, the first generation of settlers in Flagstaff also valued education and promoted scientific, cultural and educational institutions. Cline cites the founding of Lowell Observatory in 1894, the Arizona State Teachers’ College (ASC) in 1899, and the Museum of Northern Arizona in 1928 as examples.

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2 Miller, *The Life of Harold Sellers Colton: A Philadelphia Brahmin In Flagstaff.*


4 Ibid. Cline also discusses ASC becoming Northern Arizona University (NAU), 28, 59-61, 71, 258, 327.
Concerns about preserving the region's cultural heritage arose in Flagstaff as early as 1922; although they were not yet permanent residents, the Coltons voiced their opinions along with a group of local citizens. An article appeared in the *Coconino Sun* on September 15, 1922 exhorting residents of Flagstaff to create a museum to house the region's treasures:

> While museums all over the world are being enriched by tons of marvelously interesting relics of the ancient peoples who lived in the country around Flagstaff -- the most ancient and most interesting relics to be found anywhere in America and in many respects more unique than can be gathered in any other place in the world -- why don't we people of Flagstaff get busy and have a museum of our own? Shall we let all of these antiquities go elsewhere? Others realize their immense scientific, intrinsic and sentimental value. Are we of all the people in America the only ones who do not care for them?\(^5\)

The artifacts that were collected by citizens were often lost, broken, or given away. Few locals seemed to realize the many values of the region's cultural heritage.

Museums and private collectors, however, had become aware of the historical treasures to be found on the Colorado Plateau, and they descended upon the region every summer. The:

> Smithsonian Institute and other great museums every year send experts into this country to search for these reminders of an ancient people. Many carloads have been taken away to enrich these institutions and many other carloads by private individuals for their own collections.\(^6\)

F. S. Breen, editor of the *Coconino Sun* authored an article suggesting that a museum be formed in Flagstaff "that would enhance in interest and value each year and ultimately would become famous all over this country, if not, indeed, throughout the entire world."\(^7\)

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\(^5\) *Coconino Sun*, September 15, 1922, 1.

\(^6\) Ibid.

\(^7\) Ibid.
Further, Breen suggested that the Woman's Club should pursue this project adding to the value of their work and ensuring their continued existence.

The *Coconino Sun* article resulted from a letter that Dr. Colton sent to J. C. Clarke, an acquaintance in Flagstaff. Dr. Colton proposed the formation of an antiquary society to collect and preserve local artifacts, and he offered to provide assistance. A week later, on September 22, 1922, Breen wrote another article, echoing the tone of the first. Breen suggested that the Flagstaff Woman's Club should include space for a museum into the design of their proposed new clubhouse. These editorials raised public awareness of the problem.

Over the next couple of years concern grew among Flagstaff's citizens about the loss of their cultural heritage and interest in a museum gained momentum. In his unpublished autobiography, Dr. Colton recalled that:

> The people of Flagstaff had seen members of expeditions arriving almost every year at the Santa Fe Railway station and driving away into the relatively unknown back country. Later in the season they saw these members, now dusty and bearded, return, accompanied by boxes of specimens which were shipped away to Eastern centers. It seemed to Mr. Clarke and other citizens that some provision should be made to keep some of the material in Flagstaff.\(^8\)

Dr. Colton agreed to donate funds for artifact display cases if the Flagstaff Woman's Club would provide space in their new clubhouse. With the assistance of a group of local citizens, such an arrangement was worked out in 1924.

The objects on display came largely from private collections in Flagstaff and the interpretation was minimal. These first displays reflected Dr. Colton's interests more than Mrs. Colton's interests, focusing primarily on archaeological collections rather than

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Further, there were no staff members, educational programs, or research studies to complement the artifacts. The displays did, however, help raise awareness about the importance of preserving local cultural heritage.

In the summer 1926 when Dr. Jesse Walter Fewkes of the Smithsonian Institution excavated Elden Pueblo (discovered by Mrs. Colton in 1916), a Sinagua Indian ruin east of town, and hauled off the resulting artifacts, the public reacted. Fewkes' action galvanized public support for a local museum, and thus contributed in some measure to the founding of the Museum of Northern Arizona. When Flagstaff citizens realized that Fewkes had taken the highly-publicized Elden Pueblo artifacts back to the Smithsonian Institution for permanent storage, they were outraged.9

That same summer, the Coltons relocated permanently to Flagstaff and began to pursue their respective interests in the sciences and arts of the region. Mrs. Colton continued to paint and to display her work through exhibitions with The Philadelphia Ten while Dr. Colton became active in the developing field of Southwest archaeology. Meanwhile, the displays at the Woman's Club had long since filled the available space.

Wealthy Easterners and Southwestern Cultural Institutions

The Coltons were part of a much broader movement on the part of wealthy Easterners who relocated to the West and founded museums and research centers in the early part of the twentieth century. Among these institutions were the Museum of Northern Arizona, the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, the Amerind Foundation in Dragoon, Arizona, Gila Pueblo Archaeological Foundation in Globe, Arizona, the Museum of New Mexico, the Laboratory of Anthropology, the School of American

Research, the Wheelright Museum of the American Indian, and the Museum of International Folk Art, all in Santa Fe. Prior to the establishment of these institutions, most of the archaeological and ethnographic work conducted in the Southwest was sponsored by Eastern museums, universities, and research centers. Archaeologists, artists, and authors took a keen interest in the Southwest, which remained a scarcely populated area in the early twentieth century. The region held a fascination for many Easterners because of its rich prehistory, vibrant cultures, and breathtaking landscapes. Drawn from Eastern urban centers, these women and men settled in the new artists’ colonies in Taos and Santa Fe and the growing towns of Arizona and California, establishing new lives in the Southwest.

Several of the founders of Southwestern cultural organizations in the 1920s and 1930s were women, sometimes working in partnership as the Coltons did, and other times on their own. Winifred Jones MacCurdy and Harold Gladwin, founders of Gila Pueblo Archaeological Foundation in Globe, Arizona were one example. Gladwin discovered a prehistoric ruin in Six Shooter Canyon in 1928, purchased the ruin and excavated it, and then rebuilt the pueblo with MacCurdy’s financial backing. The two were later married. Similarly, William Shirley Fulton and Rose Hayden Fulton founded the Amerind Foundation in Dragoon, Arizona, in 1931 on the Double F Ranch in Texas Canyon. The Fultons conceived the idea for a private research center that would focus on art, ethnography and archaeology of the Southwest.

Much like the Gladwins and the Fultons, Dwight Heard and Maie Bartlett Heard worked together to found the Heard Museum. Maie Heard amassed an extensive Native
American art collection, “prompted by the desire to have aesthetically appealing objects as decorative accents in the Heard’s home, Casa Blanca,” located near downtown Phoenix. The collection soon outgrew Casa Blanca, and the Heards determined to build a museum to house the collection, where it would be available to the general public as an educational resource. Just months prior to the museum opening in 1929, Dwight Heard died of a heart attack; Maie proceeded with the opening and continued to support the institution until her death in 1951. Like the Museum of Northern Arizona, the Heard combines both art and anthropology.

Maie Heard’s sister, Florence Dibble Bartlett, was as committed to fostering cultural life in Santa Fe as Maie was in Phoenix. Florence founded the Museum of International Folk Art in 1953, a year before her death. A graduate of Smith College (1904), Bartlett and her sister “... made notable and lasting contributions to the cultural life of the Southwest.” Bartlett was drawn to the landscapes and peoples of northern New Mexico. She began to collect folk art in earnest during the late 1920s, “... fascinated by the universality of the creative impulse that compelled ordinary people to fashion functional objects that were decorative as well as useful.” When the museum was completed Bartlett donated it and the collection to the State of New Mexico.


12 Ibid., 91.

13 Ibid., 92.
The Coltons recognized the need for a permanent museum in Flagstaff and began to think more seriously about that during the summer of 1927. That July, Dr. Colton went horseback riding with Dr. Francis Lockwood from the University of Arizona and the two men discussed the formation of a museum in Flagstaff. At the time, Arizona had few museums, so both men were surely familiar with the Arizona State Museum, founded as the Arizona Territorial Museum in 1893 at the University of Arizona. This conversation proved to be the first in a series of events that ultimately resulted in the creation of the Museum of Northern Arizona.

Lockwood spoke to the Flagstaff Chamber of Commerce that summer about the need for a museum in Flagstaff; that same day a museum study committee was appointed. Dr. Colton was one of the original members of that committee; Mrs. Colton was added shortly thereafter. On August 2, 1927, Grady Gammage, then President of the Arizona State Teachers’ College, and a member of the museum study committee, wrote to other committee members posing the following questions to be addressed at the next meeting: “Should Flagstaff attempt the establishment of a museum? If so, where should it be located? Who should have control of it? What is the best procedure to follow in the beginning?”¹⁴ The committee subsequently debated these topics beginning on August 8, 1927 in a meeting at the College.

Dr. Gammage raised the questions of whether the city or the college should house the museum and how it should be governed. Gammage wanted the museum affiliated with the college so that it would have an academic setting and an educational focus. Another member of the committee, Dr. Byron Cummings, President of the University of

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Arizona and former director of the Arizona State Museum in Tucson, supported Gammage's position. The Coltons, however, wanted the museum to be a cultural attraction for the town in addition to being an educational institution.

Dr. Colton maintained that the museum should contain exhibitions about the archaeology, geology, and biology of the region. Mrs. Colton was insistent that the museum should also promote and exhibit Native American art and encourage modern art in Flagstaff. As aforementioned, this combination of art and archaeology in the Southwest was common at that time. The Coltons had visited Taos, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and Tucson, and certainly were aware of other museums that could serve as models.\(^{15}\)

The need for a museum in Flagstaff was discussed at committee meetings throughout the summer and fall of 1927. Reasons for establishing a museum were recorded in notes from those early meetings, including “a) preservation of priceless antiquities b) preservation of geological treasures c) exhibit the flora and fauna to illustrate.”\(^{16}\) Those initial reasons did not include any mention of art at all, either Native American or Anglo. Mrs. Colton must have been a passionate and persuasive speaker to advance her cause to the point that by the time the constitution and bylaws were drafted for the new museum in December 1927, art was included alongside science. The majority of the original museum committee members were businessmen from Flagstaff who were not necessarily strong advocates for the arts. Watson Smith, a scholar and

\(^{15}\) These included the Heard Museum and the Arizona Museum in Phoenix, the Arizona State Museum in Tucson, Gila Pueblo in Globe, Arizona, the Amerind Foundation in Dragoon, Arizona, the Southwest Museum in Los Angeles, the Laboratory of Anthropology, the School of American Research, the Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art, and the Museum of New Mexico in Santa Fe.

\(^{16}\) File, Museum History Pictures & Symbols, (MS207-2-2, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona).
long-time supporter of the Museum, remembered that Mrs. Colton “felt very strongly that the institution should concern itself, not only with scientific matters, but also with art – Art with a big ‘A’.”\textsuperscript{17}

The Coltons were interested in promoting the arts and sciences in Flagstaff and the surrounding region, a loftier goal that went beyond creating a museum. The proposed museum served as a vehicle to accomplish that larger goal. For that reason they championed the creation of a non-profit corporation to be run by a board of concerned citizens interested in promoting art and science. The Coltons may have feared that the museum would not have as much freedom if it were established at the College, a state-run institution. But, the Coltons stood alone in their opposition to the rest of the committee who sought to establish the museum at the College.

In a letter to the \textit{Coconino Sun} on August 12, 1927 Colton outlined her views about the proposed museum. The letter provides insight not only into the debate about where to situate the museum, but also Colton’s personality. She was never one to mince words, and possessed strong convictions about the importance of art in everyone’s life and the significance of traditional Native American arts and crafts as folk art. The letter evokes her vision for the museum quite well:

\begin{quote}
It has always been an understood thing that science and art are impractical, and yet business has not been able to do without the scientist, and where would the advertising man be today without the artist?

And with this comforting thought I venture to put into words our thoughts on the museum matter.

Flagstaff has at last an opportunity to show the effete east that she has taste and vision.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{17} Watson Smith, \textit{One Man’s Archaeology} (\textit{Kiva} 57, no. 2, 1992), 66.
The establishment of a museum of science and art, as a cultural and educational center should go far toward the development of our little city.

This is our ‘psychological moment.’ Will we look far enough ahead to envision the museum as a living, growing fact in the community, not only as a place for the storage and exhibition of modern and Indian art, so closely linked to the ancient, and as a unique setting for the exhibition of modern paintings, whose inspiration has been drawn from the deserts and canyons and picturesque native peoples of northern Arizona?

Surely a museum serving this threefold purpose would wield a far more extensive educational and cultural influence than a dead storage place for valuable material.

The desirability of the establishment of a museum for the care of our geological, zoological and archaeological treasures is acknowledged by all; but has the great educational value of a continuity between the ancient and modern native arts been thoroughly considered?

Our opportunity for this dual development is exceptional here, located as we are close to the Hopi and Navajo Indians whose people have instituted the very arts which we are about to go to so much pains to preserve today.

Those peoples will soon have forgotten the secrets of their crafts, and when they vanish our country will have lost its only true Native American art.

This is our chance to lend them a hand, as the Santa Fe museum has done for the Indians of the Rio Grande.

Encourage our Indians to produce only the best, using the beautiful old designs available in the museum, where they would bring their finest examples of modern Indian craftsmanship for exhibition and sale, side by side with the work of the ancient peoples.

Now this museum should be built, unit by unit, of native malpais rock and roofed with stout spruce timbers, somewhat after the pueblo style of architecture and placed high upon a mesa top overlooking the city and facing the great Peaks; surely this would be appropriate to our magnificent setting here, and a tribute to the vision of our people.

This would be something to build up to, as the intellectual apex of the town.

I see nothing in such a placement to hinder its use and inspiration to the young people of our college and our schools.
I hereby propose that we make our museum a unique asset to the town, its college and schools, and not merely a department of our normal college, which in itself is something to be proud of and can be expected to lead in all matters of intellectual good taste.\footnote{Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton “Believes Museum Should Not Be A Department of College,” \textit{(Coconino Sun, August 12, 1927)}, 1.}

This impassioned letter reveals much about Colton’s views and beliefs regarding art, education, and native peoples.

Colton argued for the inclusion of native arts in the Museum, but she did so from a stance of preserving a “vanishing race.”\footnote{The vanishing race was a concept prevalent between the 1890s and 1930s, promulgated by historians, artists, and photographers such as Edward S. Curtis and many others. This concept reinforced popular notions and stereotypes of the times. In actuality, not all Native American tribes were doomed to the fate that the vanishing race concept suggests. Indeed, the majority continue to exist today. Around the turn of the twentieth century many native peoples began to adapt to western society (not by choice as much as out of necessity). The concept of the vanishing race actually distracted society from seeing the true plight of many Native American tribes who lived in deplorable conditions on the reservations to which they had been relegated. Susan Brown McGreevy explained that: “The critical political and social dilemma posed by American settlement of the West precipitated intensive study of the history and culture of the indigenous peoples whose traditional lifeways were increasingly threatened by the inexorable velocity of Manifest Destiny.” McGreevy, “Daughters of Affluence: Wealth, Collecting, and Southwestern Institutions,” 77.} Further, her reference to “our Indians,” presumably “our” meaning the tribes located in northern Arizona, (Hopi, Navajo, Havasupai and Hualapai) could be construed in today’s society as condescending. At the very least, it is an early sign of the patriarchal role Colton later played in her interactions with the Hopi and Navajo. A product of her times in some regards, Colton had the preservation of Native American arts at the forefront of her mind, ultimately a noble goal. While not the only person to observe the continuity between prehistoric and contemporary Native American arts, Colton put that comparison to best use to advocate for the inclusion of art in the Museum.
Ever true to her upbringing, Colton was concerned that the museum be established in a good part of town, where it could be an asset to the entire city. She had a clear vision regarding the architecture and location of the proposed museum. Colton considered the Teachers’ College to be part of the unseemly side of town. Passionate as she was about education and art, Colton could not completely escape her socioeconomic background. She maintained that:

The town would be placing itself in a position of ridicule and lose a wonderful advertising opportunity should it place its long dreamed of museum in a situation overlooking the unsightly outskirts of its town while it ignored the natural commanding situation on Knob Hill with its unobstructed view of San Francisco Peaks.\(^{20}\)

Ultimately, the Coltons prevailed; the museum was established independently from the Teachers’ College. While other committee members such as Gammage played an important role, “it was the ideas and quiet perseverance of Harold and Mary-Russell Colton that shaped the philosophy of the Northern Arizona Society of Science and Art (NASSA) and the establishment of the Museum.”\(^{21}\) Although the Coltons resisted the suggestion that the museum was their creation, Gammage and other museum supporters later gave the Coltons credit for the establishment and growth of the museum.

The museum committee did not act in a vacuum; they corresponded with museum professionals throughout the nation to determine the procedures for establishing a museum. On September 12, 1927, Harry Diehl, Treasurer of the newly founded (1926) Arizona Museum wrote to Gammage: “In a recent issue of your local paper I noticed that Flagstaff was about to organize a museum. . . . I want to congratulate you on this good

\(^{20}\) Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “Believes Museum Should Not Be a Department of College,” 1.

work.” Gammage and the Coltons wrote back requesting information about the founding of the Arizona Museum.

The committee also corresponded with Dr. H. C. Bumpus, former director of the American Museum of Natural History, who was trying to establish a museum at the Grand Canyon. Dr. Colton invited Bumpus to meet with the museum committee following a trip he had planned to the Grand Canyon. The primary topics of concern appeared to be the scope, ownership, location, building, and maintenance of the museum, as per a letter Dr. Colton sent to Bumpus on September 6, 1927.

Gammage also contacted Dr. Lawrence Vail Coleman, who was then Executive Secretary and Treasurer of the American Association of Museums, asking for suggestions about forming a new museum. In his autobiography, Dr. Colton mentioned consulting Coleman’s book, titled *The Small Museum*, many times for guidance as the Museum was in its infancy. A seminal work for start-up museums during the early twentieth century, *The Small Museum* has been revised and is still used by museum professionals. The Coltons were not working in isolation; indeed they were very much aware of national trends in the museum profession.

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23 The Arizona Museum subsequently became the Phoenix Museum of History, which closed its doors in the summer of 2009.


25 The American Association of Museums (AAM) was founded in 1906 to represent museums and museum professionals across the nation. AAM establishes standards and best practices and provides advocacy on a range of issues that concern the museum profession.

Dr. Bumpus accepted Dr. Colton’s invitation, and after visiting the Grand Canyon he toured the region around Flagstaff for four days. At the end of his visit Bumpus urged the committee to move forward with their plan to found a museum. The museum committee considered the feedback received from Bumpus and other sources and ultimately determined that a community-based museum should be established.

On December 16, 1927 a constitution and by-laws were adopted for the Northern Arizona Society of Science and Art. A non-profit corporation, NASSA served as a governing board for the museum. The following spring, on May 15, 1928, the museum study committee met to elect a Board of Trustees. Dr. Colton was elected president, and also as director of the museum. Dr. Colton received no compensation, as the museum had no funding sources. The Society’s mission was:

To increase and diffuse knowledge; encourage the appreciation of Science and Art; to maintain in the City of Flagstaff, Arizona, or elsewhere, a museum or museums; to collect and preserve objects of scientific and artistic interest; to protect historic and prehistoric sites, works of art, scenic places and wildlife from needless destruction; to provide facilities for research and to offer opportunities for aesthetic enjoyment.

Following the creation of NASSA, the Coltons made preparations for the establishment of a more permanent museum.

The existing exhibitions at the Woman’s Club building were improved. Local residents, including the Coltons, loaned their private collections for display, now including art objects as well archaeological artifacts. On September 2, 1928, NASSA

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27 This is an arrangement that would rarely take place in the present day. As per professional ethics codes, a separation must exist between the governing body and the chief executive officer. Mrs. Colton was one of twelve original board members, and one of three women.

28 File, Northern Arizona Society of Science and Art, Constitution and By-Laws, (MS 207-2-1, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives).
opened the Museum of Northern Arizona to the public with a lecture by Dr. Byron Cummings. (See Figure 10)

The Museum operated only during the summer months at first due to a lack of resources; the staff and collections were small. But, both grew steadily with guidance and assistance from the Coltons. Attendance totaled approximately 3,000 during 1929, equal to the population of Flagstaff at that time. That summer the Museum leased the whole clubhouse from the Woman’s Club.

As the Museum’s space expanded, so did the staff. Of particular note was the addition of Katharine Bartlett in the summer of 1930. Bartlett became not only a colleague, but also a close personal friend to the Coltons until their death, roughly forty years from the time they met.\(^\text{29}\) Hired as the Curator of Anthropology, Bartlett eventually advanced to Curator of History and Librarian.

Dr. Colton’s annual reports as director of MNA made the museum’s growth and the need for more space evident. Published every year in *Museum Notes*, the annual reports between 1929 and 1935 underscored the need for a permanent museum facility where its collecting, research and educational activities could take place in addition to the exhibitions.\(^\text{30}\) The Museum rented space in 1932 in a storefront at the new Monte Vista Hotel in downtown Flagstaff to provide additional exhibition space. The storefront housed collections that the Woman’s Club building could no longer accommodate.

\(^\text{29}\) Not long after she began working at the Museum, the Coltons invited Bartlett to live with them at Coyote Range. She continued to live there until the 1950s when Mrs. Colton’s advancing illness became too stressful, at which point Bartlett moved to a home of her own.

\(^\text{30}\) The Coltons started *Museum Notes* in 1929 and it was published until 1939 when the name was changed to *Plateau* and the scope was expanded.
Figure 10 Women's Club building when the Museum of Northern Arizona was located there, Hopi Craftsman Show, 1932, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona.
Attendance rose to 5,500 at the Museum that year, greater than the population of Flagstaff.\(^\text{31}\)

On May 1, 1933 the Northern Arizona Society of Science and Art was incorporated, giving it the right to own property. The following year, the Monte Vista Hotel leased the storefront and the Museum was forced to address the need for additional space.\(^\text{32}\) The need for a permanent location for the Museum and additional space, was filled by Mrs. Colton, who donated twenty-nine acres of land on Fort Valley Road three miles north of downtown Flagstaff to be used for the purposes of constructing a museum building for the NASSA. Mrs. Colton purchased the land several years before and donated it in memory of her late son, Sabin. Dr. Colton designed and paid for construction of the Museum, which was initially intended to house the collections, but included exhibition galleries by the time it opened. In the winter of 1936 the exhibitions were moved to the new building, and on May 2 of that year, the Museum opened its new building to the public. (See Figure 11)

This endeavor was no small feat in the midst of the Great Depression, and the Coltons’ generosity played an important role in the growth of the Museum. Over the years, the Museum has been greatly expanded, sometimes at the expense of the Coltons and sometimes not, but the physical structure of the museum remains true to the original architecture and the intent of the Society.

Over the years, Mrs. Colton donated land and buildings and Dr. Colton donated funds providing the means to instrumentally shape the Museum. They also had a great

\(^{31}\) Harold Sellers Colton, “1932 At The Museum” (Museum Notes 5, February 1933), 40.

\(^{32}\) File, Museum History Pictures & Symbols, (MS207-2-2, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona).
Figure 11 Museum of Northern Arizona exhibits building with San Francisco Peaks in the background, undated, N-15B.MAIN.5, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, photograph by Frank Snider.
deal of influence over its framework, philosophy, and goals. Throughout the years, the Coltons:

Applied their expertise, their interests, and their personal financial resources to building an institution that encompassed natural science, anthropology, and art. While the preservation of regional artifacts was the immediate incentive for founding the Museum, the Coltons and their colleagues had a broader vision. They believed that a museum should be a center of learning, a vital institution that not only collects and preserves, but also vigorously pursues research, educates the public, and stimulates aesthetic appreciation and a desire to learn more.\(^{33}\)

The Colton’s preferred to avoid the public eye, instead working quietly and steadily to grow the Museum and further the goals of NASSA.

While claiming little control over the Museum, the Coltons actually exerted significant influence over its philosophy. They sought to distinguish MNA by concentrating on educational development, placing it at the forefront of a movement that resulted in museums focusing more on education. The Coltons did much to preserve northern Arizona’s cultural heritage, but they also sought to educate the public, insisting that all material not on exhibition be available for research. Although the Colton’s were modest about their contributions to NASSA and MNA:

The assumption that the Museum was ‘the Coltons’ was probably accurate in the early years and to a lesser degree after Harold Colton retired as Director in 1958. This, however, caused no great consternation among Colton’s associates. In their mind Harold and Mary-Russell Colton had been the driving force behind the creation of the Museum and the N.A.S.S.A., and the Coltons financial support was their prime source of sustenance through the era of World War Two.\(^{34}\)


\(^{34}\) Miller, *The Life of Harold Sellers Colton: A Philadelphia Brahmin In Flagstaff*, 125.
The Coltons’ reluctance to have the Museum identified as theirs lends insight into their personalities. Neither Harold nor Mary-Russell sought the spotlight. Further, they did not seek praise, public recognition, or any type of reward for their efforts. The Coltons involved themselves in the work that they did out of a sense of obligation to give back to others because of the station to which they were born in life, but also out of passion.\textsuperscript{35}

At the time that the MNA was founded, the museum profession was undergoing a shift toward emphasizing education as much or more than collecting and preserving artifacts. The Coltons endeavored to dispel the misconception that all museums were places where old curios were gathered and displayed. They hung a sign by the front door of the Museum that read: “This museum displays ideas not things.”\textsuperscript{36} That sign hung by the front door for many decades, was removed for a few years resulting in no small controversy, and now hangs by the front door again.

The Colton’s interests, Mary-Russell’s in art, and Harold’s in science, created a synergy at the Museum that made great achievements possible. Others have noted the connection between artists and anthropologists in the Southwest. Art historians Charles Eldridge, Julie Schimmel and William Truettner explain that: "Historians, scientists, and artists were deeply affected by anthropological discoveries made during the latter half of the nineteenth century.”\textsuperscript{37} Interest increased in Native American cultures and

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} File, Museum History Pictures & Symbols, (MS207-2-2, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona); Harold S. Colton, “The Museum of Northern Arizona” (Museum Notes 6, August 1933), 12.

there was "a desire to atone for two centuries of neglect and misunderstanding."\textsuperscript{38} That interest spread across the country as popular journals and expositions included news about archaeological discoveries, particularly in the Southwest. The railroads and tourist organizations used Native American heritage to promote themselves and the American West. In particular, romanticized images of the Pueblo tribes of northern New Mexico, and the Hopi and Navajo, were used to present a picturesque view of the region. Interest grew in studying and collecting the arts and crafts of Southwest tribes, which led to modifications that some, Mrs. Colton among them, considered detrimental.\textsuperscript{39}

Although Dr. Colton’s influence on the Museum is more often noted than Mrs. Colton’s, she made many important contributions, particularly in the areas of art and ethnography. In \textit{Hidden Scholars: Women Anthropologists and the Native American Southwest}, Mrs. Colton is described as: “More than a helpmate; in fact, she played a key role in the development of several significant programs that endure today as an integral part of the museum’s identity.”\textsuperscript{40} When Mrs. Colton accepted the position of Curator of Art with the Museum in 1928 she established three goals. First, Colton hoped to end what was in her opinion northern Arizona’s cultural isolation by introducing outside art influences. Next, she wanted to champion local art and artists. Finally, she sought to stimulate Native American arts in the region.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid: 24

\textsuperscript{39} For a much lengthier discussion about the transformations taking place particularly with Hopi and Navajo arts, and Colton's efforts to resist those changes see chapter six.

\textsuperscript{40} Susan McGreevy. “Daughters of Affluence: Wealth, Collecting, and Southwestern Institutions.”

\textsuperscript{41} Robert Breunig, “Museum Interpretation” (\textit{Plateau} 50, April 1978), 8.
Colton worked for the rest of her life to accomplish the aforementioned goals, not only as a curator, but also as an educator, artist, author, and philanthropist. Those goals, her efforts to achieve them, and the results of those efforts, are the subject of the remainder of this study. The story is arranged thematically rather than chronologically, first by analyzing Colton’s ideals about art education, next by detailing her work toward achieving her goals at the Museum, then by making meaning of her own artwork, and finally by examining the manifestations of her work still in evidence today.

Not only was NASSA founded largely through the efforts of the Coltons, they also provided the vision and funding for the Museum for its first three decades and beyond. Initially appointed Curator of Art, Colton was soon promoted to Curator of Art and Ethnology, a position from which she championed the arts until 1948 when she resigned due to declining health.

After the Museum was created, Colton quickly set in motion plans to achieve her goals for the art department. Thus began the most productive period in her life, both as an artist and an educator, between 1928 and the early 1940s; this period in Colton’s life is the primary focus of this study. When the Museum was founded: “Flagstaff was still very much a frontier town and its citizens had little opportunity to experience art in its many forms. Their lives were taken up in the difficult business of earning a living and art was generally regarded as a luxury few could afford.”\(^\text{42}\) In such an environment, Colton had a daunting task ahead of her as she endeavored to raise awareness of and instill an appreciation for art on the Colorado Plateau.

\(^{42}\) Dorothy House, Nomination form for Arizona Women’s Hall of Fame, 1980 (MS 207-309-21, File, Arizona Women’s Hall of Fame Nomination, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives).
Although the Plateau was remote, Colton did not work in isolation. She was part of a larger movement, both regionally and nationally. Within the Southwest, particularly in the artists’ and writers’ colonies in Santa Fe and Taos, there were other women interested in art education and Native American arts. Moreover, Colton’s work was performed at the height of the progressive education movement, of which she was very much a part. A brief overview of art and museums within the progressive education movement, and the work of women art educators in the twentieth century provide a context for Colton’s work and her ideals about art education.

Art and Museums as a Component of the Progressive Education Movement

The progressive reform movement and the progressive education movement, while overlapping, were distinctly different. Gutek (1970) observes that: “historians disagree on the precise chronology of the movement and its broad meaning in American history . . . [and that] an analysis of progressivism’s impact on American education is

even more complicated."

Some historians posit that progressivism began with the depression of the 1890s and extended into the 1930s, while others argue the movement only lasted from 1900 until 1920. Yet, most agree that: “Progressivism in education, while paralleling the larger national movement chronologically, extended into the early 1950s and still exercises an impact today.”

During the mid-1950s the movement began to wane as evidenced by the demise of the Progressive Education Association (1919 - 1955).

A broad, complex movement, progressivism affected social, educational, economic and political institutions. During the progressive era the world experienced rapid changes, new social developments, immigration, urbanization and industrialization.

Lagemann notes that: “The distinguishing feature of the progressive generation was a compelling interest in finding solutions to the social problems of their day.” Reshaping the nation’s educational system was one of those pressing social problems.

Definitions of progressive education are abundant, numbering at least as many as the authors who have written about the movement. Gutek sums up the movement best, observing that:

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45 Ibid.


Progressive education was really an umbrella movement that united a number of individuals who were opposed to traditionalism, but were unable to develop a comprehensive and coherent educational philosophy. Nevertheless, progressive education produced profound changes in American educational institutions and processes. Cremin further explained that: “Throughout its history progressive education meant different things to different people, and these differences were only compounded by the remarkable diversity of American education.” For the purposes of this study, I am defining progressive education as a form of education focused on life-long learning from real-world experiences and activities that are relevant to students’ lives, also called experiential or non-traditional learning.

The professional literature relating to progressive education and educators is voluminous. While more has been written about male than female educators, recent monographs about progressive women educators are beginning to right the balance.

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49 Gutek, *An Historical Introduction to American Education*, 207. Norris also proffered an explanation of progressive education: “For some, progressive education is simply the rejection of any traditionally held notions of what school is, is about, or is supposed to do, or the rejection of anything related to the concept of the common school (Nadler 1998). For some, however, the idea manifests itself through a collection of ideas, or pieces of a philosophy, that are interpreted through modes of instructional delivery. For some, progressive education is ‘a multi-faceted movement aimed at changing school practices’ (England 2000, 306). For some it is simply an idea that is open to interpretation in a number of ways. None of these ideas are inherently correct or incorrect.” Norris, *The Promise and Failure of Progressive Education*, 9-10.


The progressive era was a time of expanding opportunities for women politically, educationally, socially and professionally. Sadovnik and Semel assert that: “There are significant . . . lessons to be learned from women educational leaders of the progressive era.”\(^{52}\) While several excellent monographs about progressive era women exist, much work remains to be done.\(^{53}\)

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\(^{52}\) Alan R. Sadovnick and Susan F. Semel, *Founding Mothers and Others: Women Educational Leaders During the Progressive Era*, 3.

The progressive education movement
	ranscended a narrow focus on schools alone and extended its reach into community and other educative institutions, including urban school systems, museums, teacher union, and universities . . . to include educators and educative institutions in their widest sense.54

The movement encompassed institutions and processes that reach far beyond the boundaries of traditional schooling, to include museums, libraries, religious and youth groups, and more.55 Cremin (1988) remarked upon “the transformation of libraries, museums, and other cultural agencies from essentially custodial institutions with ancillary educative functions into primarily educational institutions.”56 Similarly, Hayes (2006) observed that: “It was not only professional educators who were calling for changes in schools. Progressives in fields other than education also highlighted in their writing and in their work the importance of education.”57 Colton was one of those individuals, yet, as previously noted only a few works have been written about the history of museum education as it relates to the progressive movement.58

54 Sadovnick & Semel, Founding Mothers and Others: Women Educational Leaders During the Progressive Era, 2.


56 Cremin, American Education, the Metropolitan Experience, 1876-1980, x.


Kliebard (1987) questions the very existence of a progressive education movement, observing that it was not unified or a movement and that at least four interest groups with varying agendas were working at the same time. He went so far as to call the term meaningless, vacuous, and mischievous, suggesting that there might have actually been multiple reform movements.\textsuperscript{59} Kliebard also argues that Dewey does not fit within any of those groups.

The writings of Dewey, and other participants in the progressive education movement, which was at its height during Colton’s most productive years, may have influenced her ideals about art education, although no direct references to Dewey or other progressive educators can be found in Colton’s writings. The parallels between her writings regarding education, and those of her peers from the 1920s to the 1940s, bear enough similarities to warrant a review of the literature pertaining to art and museums in the progressive education movement.

Dewey wrote much of the literature about the progressive education movement as it relates to art and museums; additional literature about this topic critiques Dewey’s work and ideals. Not until late in his career did Dewey publish a full-length volume about his aesthetic philosophy of art; \textit{Art as Experience} was completed in 1934. That volume also included Dewey’s thoughts about museums, particularly art museums. Beardsley (1966) cited \textit{Art as Experience} as being “by widespread agreement the most

\footnotesize{for State and Local History, 1983); Allen, \textit{A Bluestocking in Charleston: The Life and Career of Laura Bragg}.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{59} Herbert M Kliebard, \textit{The Struggle for the American Curriculum, 1893-1958} (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), x, xv.}
valuable work on aesthetics written in English (and perhaps in any language) so far in our century.”

Dewey did remark upon art education earlier in his career when editing and contributing to a volume of essays published in 1929 with the Barnes Foundation titled *Art and Education: A Collection of Essays*. And, in 1925 he delivered the dedication address for the Barnes Foundation, proclaiming that “art is not something apart, not something for the few, but something which should give the final touch of meaning, of consummation, to all the activities of life.”

Similarly, Albert Barnes (1929) declared that art is “a source of insight into the world, for which there is and can be no substitute, and in which all persons who have the necessary insight might share.”

Convinced that art and everyday life experiences should be combined, Dewey argued for dissolving the divide between fine and applied, or useful, arts. He objected to “the tradition of removing the arts from the realm of everyday experience and placing them in the rarefied environments of theatres, galleries, and museums.” Dewey believed art should be an ordinary part of everyone’s daily life, not surprising given his commitment to democracy in education. He theorized that art is “immersed in experience and is a combination of process and product.”

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64 Ibid., 402.
Dewey postulated that:

The arts do more than provide us with fleeting moments of elation and delight. They expand our horizons. They contribute meaning and value to future experience. They modify our ways of perceiving the world, thus leaving us and the world itself irrevocably changed.  

Yet, art education was only attainable for the wealthy that could afford to send their children to private schools, because it had almost disappeared from public schools by the 1930s when Dewey wrote *Art as Experience*. Today, as budgets are slashed and the emphasis on testing increases, art continues to be scarce in many public school systems.

Museums took on increased responsibility for making the arts widely available to the general populace beginning in the 1930s. The field of museum education was beginning to develop, and museums played a greater role in education. Dewey criticized art museums for the “separation of art from the objects and scenes of ordinary experience.” He regarded museums as sanctuaries or hallowed repositories, status symbols of wealthy Americans. Further, Dewey criticized museum professionals for contributing to the separation of the arts from everyday life.

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69 Ibid., 9. Further, Dewey argued that: “. . . art museums are primarily the product of the capitalist urge to show off wealth, with the result that the fine arts have been separated from the rest of life and cloistered in selected inaccessible places. The problem is once again a destructive dualism: the separation of fine arts from practical arts, of art and its appreciation from other life activities, and the gap between museum exhibitions and popular education.” Colton’s inclusion of Native American crafts along with fine art as part of the Museum of Northern Arizona’s educational programming indicates that her ideals might have been influenced by Dewey’s writings. Similarly, John Cotton Dana of The Newark Museum “. . . decried the elitist nature of current museums. He had little appreciation for the ‘temples’ devoted to the visual arts and proposed branch museums for every school. . .” George Hein, “John Dewey
His criticisms of museums notwithstanding, Dewey perceived their capacity as educational institutions for people from all walks of life, remarking that: “It has become generally recognized that they [museums] occupy as necessary a place in popular education as do public libraries.” 71 When characterizing the exemplary school in his mind, Dewey imagined it including a library and a museum, thus providing a more direct link between schools and institutions where informal learning takes place. As early as 1900, he produced drawings for the ideal school, with a museum and a library at the heart of the building. 72 Curator George Hein concluded that Dewey believed that “. . . museums should be an integral part of any educational setting, and the most desirable museums are those that are used for educational purposes and are associated with life activities outside the museum.” 73 Dewey championed museums that grew from the communities that they were located in, incorporating everyday life experiences. Museums such as this, Dewy observed, provided opportunities to reflect upon life. He viewed museums as an important element of everyone’s education, particularly children, advised regular museum visits as part of the curriculum rather than a once-a-year field trip.

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70 Costantino, "Training Aesthetic Perception," 399.

71 John Dewey and Jo Ann Boydston, John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953, 520.


73 Ibid., 419.
Dewey espoused some very pointed views about the functions of art; for him art was an experience, and experiences were not to be taken lightly, as that was how learning took place.\(^74\) He also contended that:

The arts do more than provide us with fleeting moments of elation and delight. They expand our horizons. They contribute meaning and value to future experience. They modify our ways of perceiving the world, thus leaving us and the world itself irrevocably changed.\(^75\)

While Dewey was writing about his ideals regarding art education and museums, Mary-Russell Colton and other museum professionals across the nation were embracing progressive education and the educational role of museums.\(^76\) Costantino found that:

In the early twentieth century . . . the educational mission of museums began to move away from an exclusive emphasis on the cultivation of taste and became increasingly motivated by the desire to effect social reform. . . . The social reform philosophy emphasized that art and aesthetic appreciation provide a means for all people, regardless of class, to attain a better quality of life.\(^77\)

\(^74\) Costantino, “Training Aesthetic Perception: John Dewey on the Educational Role of Art Museums,” 402-403. Remarking on Dewey’s philosophy about art, Costantino observed that: “Art is not a physical object, but an activity. . . . art is an experience that is characterized by growth and consummation and is necessarily instrumental. . . . For Dewey, even the fine arts are instrumental, as they are a means for enriching everyday experience through the development of heightened modes of perception.”

\(^75\) Phillip Jackson, John Dewey and the Lessons of Art: 33.


A new generation of women played an important role in the museum education movement just prior to World War II. Glaser and Zenetou explained that: “Because the emphasis of America’s early museums was educational, and because women were associated with education and had long survived as elementary school teachers, they naturally gravitated toward museum education programs.”  Colton was an educator, but she was also a curator, a rarity as: “in the museum field, during the first half of the twentieth century, curatorial and directorial positions usually went to men with advanced degrees and specialized training.”  Yet, she often stood in Dr. Colton’s shadow; he possessed a higher degree and was the Museum’s director. Like many women museum professionals of her time, Colton “played the same role as most women in the domestic sphere: supporters of male counterparts.”

Characterizing Mary-Russell Colton as anything less than a professional, albeit trained in an informal manner, does her a great disservice. Glaser and Zenetou revealed that:

Because women often lacked the necessary credentials, they were also viewed as generalists and amateurs – enthusiastic in their endeavors but not truly professionals. In museums, professionalism meant having highly specialized training, and before 1960 only a small percentage of women had that.

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78 Glaser & Zenetou, Gender Perspectives: Essays on Women in Museum, 12.

79 Ibid. Mary-Russell Colton was an enigma; she possessed a bohemian spirit, strong opinions, and a desire to have a career, all nonconformist aspirations for a woman in the early twentieth century. Yet, at the same time she married, had a family, and conformed to some aspects of the traditional female role at the time.

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.
Evaluating Colton’s work through the lens of the social context within which she worked provides a fresh perspective on her achievements. She attained a level of professional respect that few women of her time were able to secure.

Of equal note is the fact that Colton achieved this level of professional success in Arizona, barely a state at the time she began her work, and definitely outside the mainstream of the art world. During that time period, (and even today) the American Southwest was seen as a backwater as compared to the cultural centers of the East. Whether true or not, little mention can be found about art education in Arizona in the professional literature.

Progressive Era Women Art Educators


A biography of Colton’s husband titled

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The Life of Harold Sellers Colton: A Philadelphia Brahmin in Flagstaff was listed.\(^83\)

Mangum and Mangum’s biography of Mrs. Colton was not, possibly because she is little-known and largely overshadowed by her husband.

The National Art Education Association (NAEA) has published five volumes about women art educators: *Women Art Educators I, Women Art Educators II, Women Art Educators III, Women Art Educators IV: Herstories, Ourstories, Future Stories,* and *Women Art Educators V: Conversations Across Time: Remembering, Revisioning, Reconsidering.*\(^84\) Each volume interprets the lives of several women art educators in detail; Colton has not yet been included in the series. Nor was she mentioned in a recent NAEA publication, *Remembering Others: Making Invisible Histories of Art Education Visible,*\(^85\) which included a section on community arts and museums.

The single most written about art educator in the Southwest was one of Colton’s contemporaries, Dorothy Dunn, founder of The Art Studio at the Santa Fe Indian School.

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\(^83\) Miller, *The Life of Harold Sellers Colton: A Philadelphia Brahmin In Flagstaff.*


Eldridge (2001) furthered the discussion about the history of art education in the Southwest by examining “Dunn’s art education theories [and practices] in light of their effect upon Native American authenticity and ethnic identity.” Offering a thorough and balanced analysis of Dunn’s involvement in art education for Native American students, Eldridge provides a workable model for interpreting the contributions of other art educators, such as Colton.

Dr. and Mrs. Colton used their influence to preserve the cultural heritage and natural environment of the Colorado Plateau at a time when it was threatened by both external and internal forces. Relying upon her socioeconomic status and her fledgling professional network, Colton created a foundation for her work in the field of arts education in the Southwest. In doing so, she placed herself at the forefront of a small but notable group of women educators in the Southwest who played a role in the progressive education movement.

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CHAPTER 4

EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY AND IDEALS

Art for the Schools of the Southwest

Mary-Russell Colton shared her ideals about art education through several means: writing, programming at the Museum, and occasional speaking engagements. *Art for the Schools of the Southwest – An Outline for the Public and Indian Schools* includes a majority of her thoughts about art education. Published in 1934 as part of the Museum’s still ongoing bulletin series, this outline remains relevant to art educators today. In the foreword, Dr. Colton explained that:

The present paper received its initial impetus from a request by an official in the Indian Service, for suggestions on teaching arts and crafts that could be passed on to teachers of the Indian Day Schools. Following this, requests poured in from teachers of rural county schools, for aid in organizing their work in the arts and crafts. It is hoped that this effort will be of some assistance to these isolated teachers and give them suggestions and encouragement in carrying out their work.¹

*Art for the Schools of the Southwest* provided “an outline of the general aims of art expounded upon the value of art education, the challenges faced by ill-equipped teachers, the importance of arts (graphic arts) and crafts (handicrafts), and the principles of art

¹ Harold Sellers Colton, “Foreword,” in *Art for the Schools of the Southwest – An Outline for the Public and Indian Schools*, Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, (Flagstaff, AZ: Museum of Northern Arizona, 1934), 2
education as well as suggesting techniques and lesson outlines. Further, Colton presented
special problems faced by Indian schools and suggested methods for teaching art to
Native American children as well as ideas to preserve traditional Native American arts
and crafts.

Ever an advocate for the arts, Colton began *Art for the Schools of the Southwest*
with a summary of the value of art education:

A thorough art education, starting when we are very young, is of the
greatest benefit to every human being. We do not have to wait to see
whether our child has talent – that is not at all the point. It does not matter
what career he, or she, may adopt in later life; training in art appreciation
means an increased ability to see beauty in the world about you and a
facility for creating things with your hands; these things are a great asset
and add immensely to our joy in life. Even if we do not take up art in any
form as a career, after our school training, we unconsciously carry our
acquired knowledge of form, color and composition into our every day
day lives. Our homes will be more liveable, [sic] and in better taste, for even
the most lowly household objects such as pots and pans, linoleum, and the
kitchen curtains, if thoughtfully chosen and no matter how cheap they are,
may form a delightful color scheme, which will lighten our daily domestic
labors.

This training will manifest itself in the care of our home and our
surroundings, both inside and out. Cleanliness and neatness are a form of
beauty; the desire to keep our house painted, to grow flowers and feel a
pride in our home and the things that we can make for it with our hands –
all these things follow logically in the wake of an early and consistent art
training. They produce a sense of satisfaction that only creative work can
bring us.

Therefore, we feel that proper art education is a basic necessity, not a mere
cultural frill; we do not believe that art is for the very few, somewhere far
beyond the understanding of the majority; it is for every one of us, in
varying degrees of course, and does not consist merely in the painting of
pictures, or the making of statues, but may be well applied to all the
practical processes of our daily lives, making them more interesting and
more worth while.²

² Ibid., 3-4.
Unable to conceive of art not being an integral part of everyone’s life, Colton illustrated the utility of art education in everyday life. She considered art education as much of a necessity as instruction in core subjects such as math, science, social studies or English.

Colton’s assertion that art could be understood by “the majority” was reminiscent of the widely held belief among progressive era educators that education was for all. When Colton published *Art for the Schools of the Southwest* the United States was in the depths of the Great Depression. Considered a frill, art education was one of the first things to be slashed from public school budgets. In remote northern Arizona, beleaguered teachers needed practical guidance regarding art education and that is exactly what Colton provided. Teachers lacked time, funding for materials, and textbooks from which to glean ideas.³ Some teachers contacted the Museum seeking assistance with pragmatic ideas.

Listing important types of art that could be “best adapted to develop imagination, creative ability, and pride of craftsmanship in the child,”⁴ Colton differentiated between graphic arts and handicrafts. Graphic arts included imaginative work, work from nature, portrait and figure drawing, still life, copy work, lettering, perspective drawings, furniture design, interior decoration, house planning, garden planning, and costume design whereas handicrafts included original design (paper), sculpture, block print, batik, tie and dye work, stick or block printing, stencil work, woodwork, decorative wood carving, art leather work, metal work, wrought iron work, art embroidery, lace work, original costume dolls and effigies, rugs or woven textiles, hooked rugs, jewelry, basketry, and

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³ Ibid., 4.
⁴ Ibid., 5.
cement tile and pottery work. She did not explain the logic behind the categories. At first glance they seem to represent highbrow or fine art versus lowbrow art or crafts. But, upon closer examination, sculpture (long considered a fine art) was included as a handicraft and interior decoration was categorized as a graphic art. Generally speaking the graphic arts appear to be two-dimensional whereas the handicrafts are three-dimensional, but there are some anomalies, such as block prints in handicrafts and furniture design in graphic arts. Whether intentional or not, most of the handicrafts listed are traditionally created by native peoples. This distinction has the effect of setting Native American art aside in its own category as if it is somehow less than Anglo art. Colton may or may not have intended to do so; what can definitively be said is that she made a distinction between arts and crafts in her writings.

In describing the conditions in schools throughout the Southwest, Colton revealed that she was a product of the times in which she lived. Anticipating that teachers might be concerned about some of the handicrafts on the list being too advanced for elementary school students, Colton explained her experiences with organizing an annual children’s art exhibition at the Museum:

The children of several Indian tribes contribute to this exhibition, from our Indian schools, and it is well known that these children are precocious in the handicrafts. A large proportion of our contributors are Mexican children – they also, are beyond the average in artistic ability. From the mining sections we have many southern Europeans, as well as Chinese and Negroes. Many of these children excel in certain ‘peasant arts,’ a heritage of their ‘old world’ environment. Lace work and peasant embroideries are of particular note.6

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5 The debate over what is considered fine art versus craft has been waged for decades.

6 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Art for the Schools of the Southwest, 6.
The terminology she choose to describe various cultures was consistent with that used in the 1930s. Colton’s observations about Native American children and art were the equivalent of a backhanded compliment; she found them to be advanced, but only in the realm of handicrafts, not fine arts.

Even while at times ‘othering’ the native peoples of the Colorado Plateau, Colton acknowledged that: “All of these native arts are rich contributions toward our mutual culture and every possible encouragement should be given children able to produce any of the beautiful ‘folk arts.’”7 She advocated an art education system that was simple and flexible, one that could easily be adapted to a variety of cultures. Colton understood the realities of teaching art in the multicultural Southwest, observing that “the suggestions offered in this little paper are not to be used too literally, but are only intended to form a framework upon which the teacher may build.”8 She understood that if they were to remain pure, the arts of various cultures needed to utilize their own designs and methods. At the same time she conceded that even if using Anglo methods and materials they could:

Substitute their own designs and do everything to make them feel a pride in their native crafts. This is most important, as many Indians and foreign children have been so handled as to produce a decided inferiority complex.9

Colton wrote with the best of intentions; she certainly saw the quality and value in Native American art even if her tone may seem patriarchal today.

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 7.
9 Ibid.
In the next section of the book Colton concentrated on the principles in art training and she explained a broad range of art related topics.\textsuperscript{10} Regardless of the culture of origin, Colton observed that students’ imagination could be stimulated: “by the reading and telling of stories.”\textsuperscript{11} Students could then illustrate the stories in a variety of different mediums.

Regarding form, Colton observed that every object has its own unique form. She cautioned teachers to begin by encouraging students to capture simple shapes in their artwork and to get the proportions correct before proceeding with any detail. Similarly, Colton urged teachers to encourage children to observe color combinations, beginning with the basics. She reminded teachers that as students learn more: “There are many beautiful grays and half-tones in nature, which the child must recognize in color . . .”\textsuperscript{12}

Having addressed form and color, Colton continued her discussion of art principles with remarks about composition and design, which she viewed as: “Essentially the same. Composition is a pleasant arrangement of forms within a given space. . . . The term design is employed to designate a formal arrangement of objects and color masses, treated as a flat surface within a given space.”\textsuperscript{13} She suggested that students be taught about design by using simple forms combined and arranged to form interesting patterns.

\textsuperscript{10} These topics include the use of tools and stimulating the imagination, form, action and character lines in drawing, the study of color, colors and their equivalent in black and white, simplified action drawing of the figure, composition, design, the relation of design to the crafts, the place of copy work in the art courses, lettering, perspective, modeling, soap and wood sculpture, interior decoration, and house and garden planning.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 8-9.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 9.
The ability to understand the concept of design was, from Colton’s viewpoint, a prerequisite to creating “handicrafts.”\textsuperscript{14}

Knowledge of the principles of art was not sufficient without understanding the proper techniques for working with a variety of different mediums, stressed Colton. She offered teachers guidelines for instructing students in the use of pencil, charcoal, colored crayons or pencils, watercolor, opaque water color, and ink. Colton also included an outline of proposed lessons by grade and semester for grades one through eight.\textsuperscript{15} In the appendix, she listed recommended books and magazines for teaching arts and crafts and sources for art supplies and paper.

The second half of \textit{Art for the Schools of the Southwest} was dedicated specifically to Native American art. Colton identified special challenges faced in the Indian school system, discussed the nature of Native American art, proposed some sample plans for teaching art to Native Americans, and suggested ways to maintain traditional materials and designs. This section of the book bears careful analysis, as Native American education was one of Colton’s passions.

While not a supporter of the Indian Bureau or United States federal government policy towards Native Americans in general during the early part of the twentieth century, Colton observed a change in the 1930s:

\begin{quote}
In the last few years Indian policies have completely changed. Thoughtful and enlightened men are endeavoring to undo the mistakes of their
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 10.
\textsuperscript{15} That outline was created by Pedro J. Lemos, Director of the Museum of Fine Arts at Stanford University and Colton used it with his permission. Once again, she demonstrated an awareness of national trends in art education. Colton was not working in isolation.
\end{flushright}
predecessors, and very slowly, the clumsy and antiquated machine that has been the Indian Bureau, is being overhauled and brought up to date.”

Some of the federal boarding schools for Native Americans began to encourage indigenous art forms. Yet, Colton found those “efforts sporadic and unorganized and therefore rather ineffectual, and occasionally extremely harmful. The personnel in most cases, is not well equipped to handle such work, as they lack the esthetic and especially the ethnologic background necessary for intelligent teaching.” Insistent that traditional methods materials and designs be used in Native American art, Colton was expressing concern that the Anglo teachers in the Indian boarding school system lacked the necessary training.

By this time a seasoned ethnographer, Colton contended that: “All Indian teachers should have a background course in the history and customs of the people with whom they are to work. These teachers are making a brave effort to meet new conditions, but they are in serious need of an organized department back of them.” Those classes would have to be developed though; Colton proposed a new governmental agency as a sub-department of the Educational Department of the Indian Bureau to accomplish this task. This “. . . department of Indian Arts and Crafts . . . [would be] jointly controlled by a trained ethnologist and an experienced worker in the applied arts.” Colton evidently valued the experience of practitioners as well as that of researchers.

17 Ibid., 19-20.
18 Ibid., 20.
19 Ibid.
Colton argued that the proposed Indian Arts and Crafts department should conduct a systematic study of the ethnology of each American Indian tribe, including their artistic heritage. The “folk art” of each tribe could then be linked “with modern methods of teaching the applied arts, adapting these to the special requirements of the different peoples.” The results of the study could be utilized to create a series of introductory courses focusing on the ethnology of each tribe for the purposes of educating teachers working in Indian schools about the arts and way of life of the tribe with which they were working. Additionally, the department could use the results of the study to develop an intelligent course of art training for the use of their teachers. This would eliminate the danger which follows allowing individual teachers, improperly equipped, to introduce methods and types of art that are undesirable. This mistake is often made by conscientious teachers with the best intentions, and is due only to a lack of preparatory training for their exceedingly specialized jobs.

Colton was particularly concerned about the harm that she perceived as resulting from introducing native peoples to outside art influences; it was that practice to which she referred as undesirable. She blamed the problem on a lack of knowledge on the part of the teachers in Indian schools and was careful to note that no ill intent was involved. In Colton’s mind proper training was the solution.

While visiting the Navajo and Hopi reservations and Indian schools in northern Arizona and New Mexico, Colton had an opportunity to see firsthand the struggles that the teachers faced, and she understood the value of teacher training, particularly for those working in environments with few resources. Part of the problem stemmed from the lack

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20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
of a system to disseminate existing knowledge. Colton commented on an ongoing ethnologic study of Native American tribes started by Major John Wesley Powell in 1879 when he became the founding director of the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE). By the time Colton wrote *Art for the Schools of the Southwest*, the BAE had more than fifty years worth of data collected. Colton saw the value in this information for use in teacher training. She observed that: “A Department of Arts and Crafts, such as has been suggested, might organize this material in a series of convenient pamphlets which would be of considerable value in educating Indian School teachers.”

The BAE was not the only source of research about the ethnology of Native American tribes; Colton was aware of the work being undertaken by colleagues throughout the Intermountain West and the Southwest. She and Dr. Colton corresponded with Dr. Frederic H. Douglas at the Denver Museum of Art for many years. Douglas authored publications about the archaeology, ethnology, and arts and crafts of Native American tribes that were geared towards school children. The Coltons shared the results of their work with Douglas as well. Beginning in the 1930s, the BAE became more open to collaborating with “unofficial agencies and individuals interested in Indian Welfare problems.”

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22 Congress established the Bureau of American Ethnology (BAE) for the purpose of transferring archives and records relating to the North American Indian tribes from the Interior Department to the Smithsonian Institution. But John Wesley Powell, the founding director, promoted a broader vision for the BAE, to gather and organize all anthropological research in the United States. The BAE sponsored many long-term ethnographic, archaeological and linguistic research projects and produced many publications. It promoted the emerging discipline of anthropology, created museum exhibitions, and served as an official repository for documents relating to American Indians collected by several United States geological surveys. Further, the BAE developed a library with manuscript and photographic holdings.

23 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, *Art for the Schools of the Southwest*, 20. The Bureau of Indian Affairs established the Indian Arts & Crafts Board in 1935 due in part to Colton’s input.

24 Ibid., 21.
Given this new spirit of cooperation, Colton deemed it appropriate to share her own findings about Native American art. She concluded that:

A native ethnologic or ‘folk’ art is peculiar in that it is indigenous to a certain geographic locate. From this locale it receives its inspirational creative impetus. It is the visual reaction of a people to beauty in their particular environment. Removed from its natural environment, folk art loses its inspiration and gradually its distinction and character. Therefore, [sic] a native art should be taught in its own environment by native teachers to young children, for it is inseparable from its own world whence its materials are derived and from which its patterns and colors are created.\(^\text{25}\)

Colton used the terms native, ethnologic and folk art interchangeably, an important point to consider when analyzing her work. In the twenty first century those terms have different meanings. Native art could refer to traditional art forms of any given culture, but is most commonly used to refer to the art of Native American tribes. Folk art is usually produced by hand using traditional methods by artists with little or no formal training, and rightly or wrongly is sometimes consider as lesser than fine art, created by formally trained artists. Ethnology is a branch of anthropology that compares and analyzes various traits of ethnic or racial divisions of contemporary peoples, including their art forms. Typically, ethnologists use research conducted by ethnographers to compare and contrast different cultures, whereas ethnographers study a single group of people typically through direct contact.

The emphasis that Colton placed on the connection between environment and art was not surprising given the region in which she chose to live and the influence that the Colorado Plateau had on her own artwork. She viewed environment as the inspiration for much artwork, a means by which any given culture (or artist) could visually convey the

\(^{25}\) Ibid.
beauty around them. Colton specifically mentioned beauty in the environment, but did not seem to consider that art could also be a means of generating dialogue about environmental degradation. Further, she observed that folk art loses its uniqueness when removed from its original environment. Ideally, folk art was to be taught to Native American students at a young age, in their own environment, by teachers from the same tribe, ensuring access to traditional materials, designs, and methods.

Folk art reflected the reaction of an individual or a group of people to their environment. When the folk artist was removed from this environment, the art became less distinctive and lost part of its character. Colton utilized this argument to advocate teaching Native American arts and crafts in the environment of origin. Many Native American tribes view the world in a distinctive way, as evidenced in their arts and crafts. Colton feared that Native American art would become mediocre, or inauthentic, if Native American children were taught to paint and draw by non-native teachers.

The vision that Colton painted for Native American education was intriguing but not very practical for the time when she was writing. Some changes had been made in the federal boarding school system for Native Americans, but more often than not Native American children were still removed from their family and their environment and sent to off-reservation schools far from home. Seldom did they have teachers, or even any

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26 This belief was probably not unique to Colton; many of her contemporaries likely held similar beliefs. The terms “folk arts” and “folk crafts” are often used interchangeably. Coined in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, these terms relate to “the making of traditional objects, usually by hand or by traditional methods.” J. A. Simpson, and E. S. C. Weiner, The Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), s.v. “folk art.” People usually produce folk art with little or no academic training in art or interest in “fine art.” Even within the field there is no widely accepted definition of folk art.

27 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Art for the Schools of the Southwest, 21-22.
interaction with adult members, of their own tribe. Further, Native American children were introduced to many outside art influences at the federal boarding schools.

A purist at heart, Colton was very concerned about the dangers posed by the commingling of art forms from various Native American tribes with Anglo art. She insisted that:

The Museum of Northern Arizona feels that it is extremely inadvisable to mix or confuse Indian Arts. In their purity of design and adherence to the old methods of manufacture and in their ethnological correctness of both production and type, lie their greatest charm and their claim to a high place among the folk arts of the world. The introduction of new forms in pottery and basketry by outside influence is extremely dangerous and should not be encouraged. Any such change should be the invention of the craftsman himself, for art, like other forms of human enterprise, is never static.

While citing the Museum, Colton surely meant that her position was that mixing the arts of different Native American tribes was inadvisable; she was the voice of the Museum’s art department, and the Museum served as a vehicle for her ideals about art education. When writing about the introduction of new forms of pottery and basketry, she likely referred to the Hopi Indians; the evolution of their traditional art forms is addressed in chapter six. That being said, Colton’s warning that changes in art forms should arise

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from the native artisans was ironic given her role in the advent of Hopi silversmithing, also discussed in chapter six.

While discouraging adaptations to traditional manufacturing methods by non-native artisans, Colton found no problem with traditional designs being applied to modern objects, particularly if the tribe could benefit economically. However, she cautioned that: “Modern application of the crafts, should not be allowed to replace or become confused with the ancient or purely Indian types of work.” Colton sought to maintain a separation between traditional Native American crafts created by hand-made methods and art forms utilizing modern manufacturing methods. She observed:

The charm of a native art lies in its contrast to modern mechanical methods and its wonderful primitive invention and utilization of the natural materials at hand. In order that the public may appreciate Indian art, it is necessary to show demonstrative material to explain these primitive methods of manufacture which so greatly enhance the value of a hand-made article in the eyes of the public.

With regard to demonstrating traditional methods to the public, Colton practiced what she encouraged through the Hopi and Navajo Craftsman Shows, discussed at length in chapter six. She understood the need to educate the public about the difference between hand-made arts and objects made by modern manufacturing methods, particularly the value of each.

The traditional art forms of the Native American tribes that Colton was most familiar with (Hopi and Navajo) were predominantly decorated ceremonial and household objects rather than graphic arts. Speaking of no particular tribe, Colton observed that: “The graphic arts, as an aim in themselves, are new to him, though he is

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30 Ibid., 21-22.

31 Ibid., 22.
beginning to show a decided facility for expressing himself with new tools and mediums.”\footnote{32} Presumably, Colton supported these new methods only because she perceived graphic arts to be a new medium for Native Americans. Otherwise, she would have discouraged the tainting influence of outside methods.

Basic training in the principles of art was applicable to all students from Colton’s viewpoint, including those in Indian schools. However, she cautioned that: “Its details should be carefully adapted to the mental characteristics of the particular people to whom it is to be applied. The usual stories and art projects should be replaced by local native material within the experience of young children.”\footnote{33} Giving Colton the benefit of the doubt, we can assume that by mental capabilities she was referring more to the frame of reference of the children rather than their actual mental capability. Following that line of thought it would make sense to use local stories and materials when teaching Native American children.

Colton advised teachers to allow Native American students the freedom to express themselves in their own fashion. She reasoned that: “If we encourage the Indian child to draw and paint in our own manner, seeing the world through our eyes in three dimensions, Indian art will soon lose its individual character and be swallowed up in the mediocre.”\footnote{34} Once again, Colton feared losing the essence, or uniqueness, of each tribe’s artwork. More than anything she was concerned about the possibility of Native American arts being subsumed under, or eclipsed by, that of Anglo artisans. She

\footnote{32} Ibid.
\footnote{33} Ibid.
\footnote{34} Ibid.
encouraged teachers of Native American students to foster their pupil’s artistic abilities rather than trying to mould them to follow art forms practiced by Anglos.

While recognizing the artistic traditions of native peoples, Colton also acknowledged that it would on occasion be:

. . . Advisable to introduce certain ‘foreign’ crafts to the Indian, such as decorative wood carving, and the manufacture of furniture, metal work, wrought iron, block printing on cloth, stencil work, and art embroideries. These crafts all lend themselves to the Indian’s decorative ability, and by the use of characteristic design and treatment he could readily make them his own and thus increase his economic opportunities.35

While some of these art forms may have been unfamiliar to the Hopi and Navajo, they certainly were not foreign to all American Indians. The tone of Colton’s writing struck a paternalistic tone. Further, she implied that the adaptation of traditional designs to modern crafts was perfectly acceptable as long as it provided an economic stimulus.

Applying these ideas, Colton outlined a plan for teaching “Indian Arts” to both the Hopi and the Navajo; her plan for the Hopi, with whom she had worked most closely, was the most detailed. She explained the complex relationship between the arts of native peoples and their economic well-being. With few other sources of income at the time, or even today, many Native American tribes relied on the sale of their art. The Hopi were no exception. The Hopi’s only source of income besides agriculture and stock-raising came from sales of their artwork. Colton observed:

Not only have these remarkable little people, patient, stubborn, and industrious, held their own economically, but they have produced an individual and unique art of their own, comparable to any folk art in the world. This should not be lost to what will some day be our mutual civilization. Therefore, it is both a practical and an aesthetic necessity to teach the young Indian his own arts in our schools. Thus he will have an

35 Ibid., 22-23.
immediate source of livelihood on his return to his own environment. He will not suffer the humiliation of ignorance and will be able to take his place economically and socially among his own people.\textsuperscript{36}

While praising the Hopi for their artwork, Colton’s tone, while acceptable at the time she was writing, could be perceived today as patronizing. As fond as she may have been of the native peoples of the Plateau, Colton did not view them as her equal. Although she broke with many traditions when leaving the East, Colton could not completely escape her upbringing.

Colton was unable to envision a life for the Hopi off the reservation. Perhaps for this reason, she advocated continuing to teach Native American children their own art forms in the boarding schools. Ultimately, Colton believed that these children would return to the reservation where they would need a livelihood that would not only provide an income, but that would also be socially acceptable. Students who attended off-reservation boarding schools more often than not returned home having lost the ability to speak their tribal language along with many of the cultural traditions that would have been taught in their native environment. Shunned by their elders, these individuals suffered a period of readjustment while searching for a way to apply their education on the reservation.\textsuperscript{37}

Ensuring the survival of traditional art forms posed a possible solution to this problem. Colton observed:

We are convinced from many years of close contact with these people, that teaching them their own crafts when they are young and thus encouraging them to feel a \textit{pride in race}, [emphasis original] would go far toward solving most of the more difficult and painful adjustment

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 23-24.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 24.
problems, as well as promoting a more sympathetic feeling between men and women of the older generations and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The introduction of more Day Schools and of Reservation High Schools, to replace the Boarding School, will eliminate many of these problems and make the teaching of Indian Arts and Crafts a comparatively simple matter.38

Arguing for fewer boarding schools and more on-reservation day schools, Colton hoped to facilitate the teaching of native arts. Such a proposal was consistent with the direction that the federal government was taking toward setting Indian policy in the 1930s when Colton was writing. For several decades prior to that federal Indian policy had been one of forced assimilation. Rather than being condescending, when Colton mentioned encouraging Native American children “to feel a pride in race” she was likely thinking of the Indian boarding school system where the children were forced to abandon their native heritage. She imagined a system that respected the heritage of each tribe.

Colton enumerated a number of suggestions for teaching Hopi arts, among them utilizing native Hopi teachers. She argued that native arts were: “A subject which the average white is ill equipped to handle.”39 Colton’s phraseology here indicated that she had a tendency to paint with a broad brush when characterizing people. That she also does so when discussing Anglos should be kept in mind when analyzing some of Colton’s writings about native peoples. Colton advocated for the use of traditional Hopi designs and methods, but she understood that those were very localized due to the geographic distribution of the Hopi tribe.

The Hopi are concentrated for the most part on three mesas; the Navajo Reservation surrounds their reservation. Each of the mesas specialized in different art

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 25.
forms, with marginal overlap. Colton advised that the day school on each mesa “... should teach only those crafts, thus not confusing the arts of the different village groups.” Further, she recommended that: “In each village, craftsmen who stand high in their profession should be chosen as teachers. They should be paid for their services and be made to feel that it is an honor for them to be chosen to teach their young people.” Evidently Colton understood well the importance of intergenerational learning and oral traditions among the Hopi. She proposed two teachers for each school, one to teach male crafts and one to teach female crafts. Acknowledging a disparity between male and female Hopi arts, Colton remarked that: “... The women have been much more limited in methods of artistic expression than the men.” She explicitly outlined the crafts, by gender, indigenous to each village.

Hopi art forms, like those of many Native American tribes, were as much about process as product. Therefore, Colton stressed that:

These arts would be taught from beginning to end, each process complete, from collection of raw material through all the processes, to the completed article. These courses would commence with field excursions, led by the teacher, male or female, for the purpose of collecting raw materials . . .

Further, she recommended that students provide their own local raw materials with a few exceptions such as wool, cotton, and yarn. Students were also to make any necessary tools out of local raw materials, “... thus exercising their inventive ability and ingenuity,

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40 Ibid.
41 Ibid., 25-26.
42 Ibid., 26.
43 Ibid.
with which excellent qualities they are naturally well endowed.” Following each semester, Colton suggested that an exhibition be held of the recent student work.

Specific to the Hopi, Colton’s plan was adaptable enough that it could be modified for other pueblo peoples of the Southwest. She expressly noted the Rio Grande Pueblos of northwest New Mexico. At the time Colton was writing the only art forms produced by the Rio Grande Pueblos were pottery, jewelry, and a bit of embroidery. But that may not have always been the case as Colton hypothesized:

. . . It seems reasonable to believe that at one time these people must have been proficient in many of the arts still practiced by the Hopi today. It is hoped that ethnologists working in New Mexico will make a careful study of what remains of the crafts in the pueblos and may still find there some trace of their former character, especially in the line of textiles. Should this prove possible, such a work might be used as a foundation upon which to further reconstruct the arts of the Pueblo peoples of New Mexico.

Colton was aware of the interconnectedness of Native American tribes in the Southwest and she understood the broader implications of the work that she was undertaking. Indeed, her work dovetailed with that of her colleagues in Santa Fe, a topic discussed in chapters five and six.

Colton’s work with the Navajo intersected with that of her contemporaries in Santa Fe even more closely, as the Navajo Reservation spanned the entire Four Corners region. One reason she may have focused less on the Navajo than the Hopi can be found in her observation that: “A great deal has been written about the Navajo. His

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44 Ibid.

45 Ibid., 27.

46 Mary Cabot Wheelwright, a philanthropist in Santa Fe founded the Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art in 1937, shortly after Colton published Art for the Schools of the Southwest.
literature is, perhaps, more extensive than that of any other one tribe.”⁴⁷ Navajo weaving and silversmithing were Colton’s primary concerns. She lamented the decline in both art forms.

Especially troubling was the decline in Navajo weaving. Colton observed: “First, since the establishment of the boarding school, young girls have not had the opportunity to learn the art of weaving from their mothers at an early age, as was formerly customary with their people.”⁴⁸ The girls who chose to take up weaving lacked the experience and training traditionally passed from mother to daughter. They had to acquire the knowledge by whatever means possible. Colton noted that: “This change in the life of the Navajo is certainly responsible for one factor in the decline of Navajo Arts.”⁴⁹

Another factor in the deterioration of Navajo weaving was a change in the type of wool used by the weavers. Colton observed that:

A blanket can be no better than the wool of which it is made. No matter what the color or design, it is not redeemable if the yarn is spun of a short, kinky, greasy wool. Such wool is not suitable to hand spinning and the result will always be a rough and knotty blanket. Much of the beauty of the old blanket with its soft silky surface was due to the use of old type Navajo wool: long, loosely weaved, and free from grease. Native Navajo wool is an ideal wool for hand spinning. The short, kinky, grease-laden wools of the introduced Merino types, while most desirable for machine weaving are entirely unsuited for hand spinning and scouring.⁵⁰

She proposed to solve this problem through education in the schools. Colton recommended that: “Experienced native women should be employed to instruct the

⁴⁷ Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Art for the Schools of the Southwest, 28.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.
young girls in the art of weaving.”\textsuperscript{51} The native teachers would ideally take the girls through the entire process, beginning with the selection of “the proper type of wool,”
dying, scouring, carding, and spinning.\textsuperscript{52} With regard to dying, Colton advised that the girls “. . . should be taught the use of the few old (or standard) vegetable dyes, and how to gather and prepare them.”\textsuperscript{53} If commercial dyes were substituted, Colton cautioned that they should only “. . . be taught by a white person who has made a study of modern types of dyes and their uses.”\textsuperscript{54} The reason for Colton’s suggestion that the teacher be Anglo is unclear. Finally, Colton urged teachers not to encourage Navajo weavers to make their designs too standardized, but rather to maintain the charm of traditional designs that usually evolved from the weaver’s imagination.

Consistently an advocate of traditional designs and methods, Colton offered similar suggestions for Navajo boys. The primary art form practiced by Navajo males was silversmithing. Colton advised:

A silver-smith of real ability should be selected to teach the young boys; the modern type who uses all sorts of short cuts in his trade should be avoided. The charm of Navajo silver lies in the fact that it is very evidently all worked by hand, with crude tools. As soon as mechanical appliances are used and the surfaces are polished by an electric ‘buffer,’ and the turquoise cut and polished mechanically, it is no longer real Navajo jewelry and you had just as well buy any other silver work made by a machine.\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 29-30.
She valued the uniqueness of handmade items and feared that Navajo and Hopi arts were being tainted by the introduction of new tools, designs, forms and influences from the marketplace.

The final chapter of *Art for the Schools of the Southwest* focused on the maintenance of Native American arts and crafts. Colton honed in on the qualities that made native arts one-of-a-kind and offered ideas for nurturing them. She remarked that:

> The mark of a hand made article is its individual character – there are never two just alike. The supply is always limited and always variable and this has a tendency to keep the market steady. Nothing should be done to standardize hand made goods or to speed up production at the expense of quality, for as soon as the hand made article loses its individual character its charm is gone and its market value falls.\(^{56}\)

To prevent this from happening, Colton recommended that teachers and Native American students visit local museums where the finest examples of traditional native arts were preserved. She emphasized that museums, their work, and the collections they held could be sources of inspiration for native artists, and useful to the proposed Arts and Crafts Department of the Bureau.

Colton advocated for the establishment of a small local museum in every community on the reservations. These organizations were not museums as we think of them today, or even as they were conceived of in the 1930s. Colton proposed that:

> A small collection of representative crafts work could be established in one of the school buildings in each community, or in the central Boarding School of a district. This material would be a loan collection, placed there by each year’s prize winners at the local Museum’s annual ‘Indian Crafts’ exhibition, and would be changed annually.\(^{57}\)

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\(^{56}\) Ibid., 30.

\(^{57}\) Ibid.
Her suggestion was similar to a plan proposed by Dewey, who envisioned a museum at the center of the ideal school, and even included one in his diagram of such a school. Dewey championed museums throughout his career, promoting them as an essential component of any educational setting.

The kind of museum that Colton proposed would certainly have pleased Dewey, who encouraged “merging life experiences with educational activities in schools.” Colton’s plan called for the collection items at these local village museums to be selected from the winners of an annual crafts exhibition; the collection would thus change every year. She ventured:

This small exhibition of loan material would serve a three-fold purpose: 1, to stimulate the local craftsmen themselves; 2, to set a standard of excellence for the ignorant visiting tourist and procure individual orders for the people; and 3, to set an excellent standard of comparison for the students themselves.

Long before it was en vogue, Colton favored the phrase “standards of excellence,” using it regularly in her writing, particularly when discussing Native American arts. Her opinion of tourists was abundantly clear; while they were the lifeblood of many Native American tribes in the Southwest they were simultaneously one of the reasons for the perceived decline in the quality of the arts produced by those tribes.

Placing responsibility for the maintenance of traditional Native American arts squarely on the shoulders of the traders, Colton argued that:


60 Ibid., 421.

He [traders] can materially raise the standard of goods produced in his [their] district, by regulating his price to the quality of material produced. From recent developments, it is believed that the trader is beginning to realize the necessity of using his influence to improve the quality of Indian wares and to prevent destructive commercialization.62

From Colton’s perspective, the traders had the ability to manipulate the market, ensuring that a premium price point was maintained for traditional handmade Native American arts. In doing so, they would demarcate tourist kitsch and traditional Native American arts.

The traders would benefit from the local village museums if “properly advertised by the Indian Bureau and seen by the tourist” because the general populace would become more educated about traditional Native American arts.63 Further, Colton insisted that these local museum exhibitions “would undoubtedly stimulate the traders to demand a higher standard of work from the craftsmen, and thus greatly assist the Indian Bureau, the museums, and the traders themselves, in raising arts and crafts standards among the Indians.”64 The Bureau, the museums, the traders and the Native Americans themselves would, in theory, be united in the cause of maintaining native arts and crafts.

Colton concluded Art for the Schools of the Southwest by emphasizing that “art education [was] not a ‘mere cultural frill,’ but a basic necessity.”65 She then summarized her suggestions for art education in the Southwest, remarking upon necessary adjustments based on ethnic background. She recommended resources that should be available to

62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
every teacher. Further, Colton reiterated the need for “the establishment of a Department of Indian Arts and Crafts, under the Department of Education of the Indian Bureau to control the policies of art education in the Indian Schools, and to equip teachers with an ethnologic background for their work . . .” She emphasized the significance of educating Native American students on the reservations utilizing teachers of the same culture, and avoiding co-mingling the art forms of different tribes. Colton ended by underscoring the value in utilizing teachers with a background in the ethnology of the tribe they were working with, collaborations between museums and the Indian Bureau, museums as sources of inspiration for students, and the value in the traders’ role in maintaining tradition Native American arts.

Colton developed this publication as a guide for schools throughout the Southwest, not just those in northern Arizona. The program she advocated was basic and flexible with examples and demonstrations of techniques easily adapted to different tribes. It contrasted sharply with the existing system in Indian schools.

Federal Indian Boarding Schools

The Federal Indian Boarding School system began a program of assimilation in the late nineteenth century that carried over into the twentieth century; Native American students were forced to discard their own culture and beliefs and blend into mainstream American (Anglo) culture. In 1928 the U.S. Department of the Interior commissioned a

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66 Ibid., 32.

67 While Colton’s papers do not specifically point to the theoretical framework she used for this guide, although it is possible to speculate she was influenced both by progressive education and noblesse oblige.
survey known as the Meriam report for its author Lewis Meriam. A scathing evaluation of the Indian Boarding School system, the Meriam report represented a turning point in Native American education. Colton began advocating the teaching of traditional Native American arts and crafts in reservation and boarding schools shortly after the Meriam report was published. She lamented the existing system because the curriculum lacked native arts and crafts, and because traditional methods, ignored and under-appreciated, were forgotten as tribal elders passed away. Moreover, students who attended the boarding schools experienced difficulty applying their Anglo education, poorly equipped for life on the reservation after graduation. Colton recommended “Teaching them [Native American youth] their own crafts when they are young and thus encouraging them to feel a pride of race [which] would go far toward solving some of the most difficult and painful adjustment problems.”

Teaching Native American youth about the arts and crafts of their tribe in reservation and boarding schools also provided “an immediate source of livelihood on his return to his own environment. He will not suffer the humiliation of ignorance and will be able to take his place economically and socially among his own people.” Colton developed a model for teaching Native American arts and crafts in reservation schools beginning with the Hopi day schools. This model may have been adapted from an

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70 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, On The Teaching and Maintenance of Indian Arts & Crafts, MS207-306-1, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

71 Ibid.
existing theory, although Colton’s papers do not indicate her influences. According to the Meriam report “the Hopi day schools [were] perhaps the most encouraging feature of the Indian school system.”\(^\text{72}\) As aforementioned, Colton favored the use of native teachers; she recommended two per school, one to teach male crafts, and the other to teach female crafts, as a process from the collection of raw materials to the finished product. Prizes would be awarded each year, and the most representative works placed on display at the school to stimulate local craftsmen and set a standard of excellence.

Art education in reservation schools remained weak throughout the first decades of the twentieth century, although some attempts were made to improve the curriculum. Educators lacked the training and ethnologic background to teach native arts and crafts; Colton argued that teachers should take a course in the history and customs of the group or tribe with whom they were working.

During the early 1930s Colton drafted a plan for establishing small museums in reservation centers and villages. Each would display “a representative collection of the arts and crafts practiced in that particular village,”\(^\text{73}\) but only the highest quality pieces. The purpose was twofold: to educate tourists and Native Americans about traditional native arts and to set a standard of excellence and inspire the artisans in the area. Colton hoped the establishment of small museums on reservations would provide a means for Native Americans to be self-supporting.

The answer to the social and economic struggles that the Hopi and Navajo (as well as other Native American tribes) faced was education. Robin Colton observed:

\[\ldots\text{I think my grandmother so much wanted more for the children and to know that they, for them to know that they were important in the realm of the world and not just out on the reservation, even though that was terribly}\]


\(^{73}\) Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Plan For Establishing Small Museums In Indian Villages And Reservation Centers, MS207-306-1, File, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
important to them, that they needed to show and display the art that they had in them, and also learn other things that they could take back to their homes as well. I do know that that was so important to her. It always was. And, as far as having an influence, I think it must have had an influence on, on the Indians and their, their education, their more modern education.\textsuperscript{24}

Robin Colton’s recollections are a window into Mary-Russell Colton’s soul. Mary-Russell has been criticized for ‘othering’ the Hopi and Navajo, for objectifying them and for taking a patronizing stance towards the revitalization of their arts.\textsuperscript{25} Her work with the Hopi and Navajo is discussed at length in chapters five and six. While those charges undoubtedly have some truth to them, they need to be weighed against Colton’s granddaughters’ recollections. Robin and Denise were adolescents and teenagers at the time the memories were formed, theoretically pure and untainted. Granted, Robin and Denise cherish the memories of their grandmother, and those memories are being recalled decades later, but they also knew her better than anyone else still alive. Colton tended to be slightly shy, and had a small inner circle of family and friends with whom she shared her most intimate ideals and beliefs. Thus, Robin Colton’s assertion that Mary-Russell cared deeply about the education and welfare of the native peoples of the Colorado Plateau should not be taken lightly.

\textsuperscript{24} Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns.

Feedback on Art for the Schools of the Southwest

Educators from across the country responded to Colton’s publication. A. C. Cooley, Director of Extension and Industry for the Office of Indian Affairs, who was stationed at the Salt Lake City Office, wrote Colton about her publication on April 16, 1934: “I find it very interesting and the many suggestions in it very constructive and helpful.” Colton also shared her work with Cooley’s staff; Henrietta K. Burton, Supervisor, Home Extension Work, also wrote to Colton. She responded:

Your course of study has been read from cover to cover with much interest. In my opinion it is a carefully prepared work which should prove particularly helpful to persons who are now working along these lines in the field. It is also helpful to me in my work and I thank you very sincerely for remembering me and sending me a copy. In this, as in many similar instances, you have been especially helpful to me in my work.

Curators responded as well, including Frederic Hodge from the Southwest Museum. He reflected: “You have done an excellent and an eminently sensible piece of work, and I sincerely hope that the powers will see the errors of their ways and take unto their bosoms your little book which carries a very appealing and important message for education.” Similarly, Charles Amsden of the Southwest Museum responded:

Your paper on art in the schools should be of lasting value in many ways, not the least of which will be a greater appreciation of the native crafts. It bears evidence of a large amount of work in its thorough, orderly, and...
considered presentation of the subject. I don’t doubt you have been at it a long time; but I’m sure you have not labored in vain.  

The History of American Art Education

The history of American art education is a highly specialized subset of the only slightly larger field of the history of American education. Many excellent works are available that focus on educational history, which is set apart from mainstream history despite attempts to integrate the two. As early as 1960, Bailyn asserted that educational history could be brought into mainstream history if educational historians would recognize that education involves a much broader process than schooling.

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79 Charles Amsden, Los Angeles, CA, to Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ, February 7, 1934, MS207-306-26, Art for the Schools of the Southwest, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.


81 Bailyn, Education in the Forming of American Society; Needs and Opportunities for Study.
Dougherty (2000) observes that within educational history, sub-topics, the history of art education among them, are insulated from one another. Further, Dougherty fears the space between educational history and the discipline of history is growing, and urges educational historians to “ensure that our sub-field maintains a central place for scholarship on the education of people in distant times and faraway places.” Chalmers (1993) argues that the gap may partly be due to a tendency, particularly within art education history, to provide more of a chronology than an actual history, or to write biographies that create demigods.

Calling for closer examination of the methods that historians use, Chalmers urges scholars studying the history of art education to be outward looking. He encourages researchers to ask the more difficult why and how questions, and views “history as a process of presenting and defending a thesis and for explaining and interpreting, not just documenting the past.” Further, Chalmers argues that: “We need to see policy studies making more use of history in art education.” If policy makers today studied the history of American art education they might see the connection between the expunging of art and music from the public school curriculum in the 1930s and those same subjects being cut from the budget today in the midst of the deepest recession since the 1930s.


83 Ibid., 17.

84 F. Graeme Chalmers, "'Doing' Histories of Art Education" (Studies in Art Education. 34, no. 4, 1993, 254-256.

85 Ibid., 255.

86 Ibid.
Art Education History in Arizona

Smith (1999) and Stokrocki (2000) cited a lack of studies about art education in the Southwestern United States. The existing literature about art education in Arizona was minimal. Smith, a Professor Emeritus of Art Education at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, found “a lack of attention in the art education historical literature to areas of the United States other than the Northeast,” and argued that: “Events and issues that arose in the Southwest are particularly relevant to problems related to pluralism or diversity in art education.”\(^8^7\) He remarked upon the complex functions of art, which vary from one culture to another. Using Dorothy Dunn and the Santa Fe Indian School as an example, Smith analyzed the aesthetic and social disruptions caused by the introduction of non-indigenous art forms to the Pueblo tribes of northern New Mexico. He concluded that lessons can be learned from this: “Insisting on a straight jacket of Euro-derived notions of art disciplines too narrowly defined does not lead to an understanding of how to teach art to culturally diverse populations or how to teach about art as understood by those populations.”\(^8^8\)

Many popular volumes have been published about artists and writers in the colonies in Santa Fe and Taos, but primarily by scholars outside the field of art education writing for general reading audiences. Meanwhile, the Southwest has escaped the attention of art education historians. Smith found an “almost complete absence of accounts of art education in the Southwest,”\(^8^9\) not unlike general history of education

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\(^8^8\) Ibid., 126.

\(^8^9\) Ibid., 114.
texts that tend to focus on the Northeast United States. He urged “researchers to thoroughly investigate the region’s contributions and what they might mean to art education.”

Art educators are generally unacquainted with the significance of the Southwest’s art legacy to the field of art education. Smith called “for art education historians to turn away from their exclusive attention to the dominant cultural origins of the Northeast center of art education . . . and to examine instead the issues and events that have lived in the Southwest,” sparking a response from Stokrocki who suggested that Smith’s review was incomplete. Smith focused primarily on art education in New Mexico, and largely on secondary sources. Stokrocki, an Arizonan, argued that Smith ignored primary sources such as oral histories, theses, dissertations, and journal articles, and more specifically research by women and Native American scholars. She cited some additional research Smith missed as evidence that there is “much more art education historical research . . . [about] the Southwest.” She overlooked Smith’s point that there are voluminous primary sources available for research yet to be fully investigated. Further, Stokrocki failed to mention Colton, one of the most prominent art educators in her own state, or the availability of a vast archive of Colton’s papers at the Museum of Northern Arizona.

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90 Ibid., 115.
91 Ibid., 126.
93 Ibid., 83.
The problem seems twofold; art education historians have not concentrated as much on the Southwest as other areas of the country, and the research that does exist is scattered and obscure. Stokrocki’s summary of the situation is apt: “some research has been published, other sources ignored, and much has been undervalued.”\textsuperscript{94} She seems to infer that research relating to art education history outside of the Northeast United States, the traditional center for such studies, is viewed as less valuable. Stokrocki opined: “Much more has to be done by gathering different views . . . before it is too late.”\textsuperscript{95} While she does not specify what “too late” means, Stockrocki, like her predecessors from the early twentieth century, seems to be concerned that Native American art traditions in the Southwest may be fading away.

The dearth of information about art education history in Arizona is particularly acute; most of the existing literature addresses the study and teaching of art rather than art educators, and is historical largely because it was published so long ago. This literature includes three M.A.Ed. theses: “Art Education in Elementary Schools of Maricopa County, AZ,” “Proposed Methods of Integrating Art in the Elementary and Secondary Schools,” and “A Survey of Elementary Art Programs in Rural Arizona Communities.”\textsuperscript{96} Neither Johnson, nor Lewis, mentioned the Museum of Northern Arizona or Colton. Boothby referred to a youth art exhibition at the Museum of Northern Arizona, but provided little information about Colton or her educational efforts through the

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 85.

\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.

Museum beyond the number of children who participated in the exhibition. Assessing the impact of the exhibition on the lives of those children is virtually impossible.

Colton was as passionate about Arizona as she was about art education; the Colorado Plateau was the focus of her life work. Inseparable from the environment she lived in, Colton’s work and ideals are heavily influenced and inspired by the landscapes and peoples of northern Arizona. To place Colton’s work into context it is important to understand what her peers were or were not doing to further art education in Arizona during the early twentieth century. Colton’s contemporaries in Arizona included Lillian Wilhelm Smith, Kate Cory, Maie Bartlett Heard, Winifred Jones MacCurdy, and Rose Hayden Fulton. While each contributed to the cultural fabric of the state, Colton’s influence was broad reaching, leaving an imprint upon the progressive education movement and the Native American arts and crafts movement.
CHAPTER 5

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING AT THE MUSEUM

Native American Education 1924-1944

The height of Colton’s career at the Museum roughly paralleled a period in the history of Native American education that marked a distinct change from the fifty years beforehand, and many years following. To understand the regional and national context within which Colton was working, a basic understanding of federal Indian policy between the 1920s and 1940s is necessary. Colton was not working in a vacuum; she was very connected to national trends in Native American education, progressive education, and art education as evidenced by correspondence with nationally influential figures in these fields.

The opening of the Museum of Northern Arizona in May 1928 followed closely the publication of *The Problems of Indian Administration* in February 1928, popularly known as the Meriam Report after Lewis Meriam who led the team charged with conducting an extensive survey of Indian affairs. Secretary of the Interior Hubert Work authorized the survey in 1926. Privately funded and conducted by the Institute for Government Research (also known as the Brookings Institute) at Johns Hopkins University, the survey included “Seven months of field work, thoroughly examining the social, economic, legal, and health conditions among the Indians as well as the state of
Indian education. Education was considered in the broadest sense possible; no aspect
was left untouched.”¹ The findings of the Meriam Report revealed intolerable conditions
in all of these areas, but its emphasis was on educational reform. Dr. W. Carson Ryan Jr.,
a respected figure in the progressive education movement, wrote much of the Report’s
education section, which was informed by the scholarship of Dewey and other
progressive educators.²

As aforementioned, for more than fifty years before the Meriam Report was
published the focus of Native American education was on assimilation and acculturation.
Those policies, charged critics, had failed; the Meriam Report called for changes in the
Indian boarding school system that had dominated federal Indian policy for decades. The
off-reservation boarding schools in particular failed to provide adequate education or
health care for the Native American children who attended them. Specific criticisms
included overcrowding, substandard medical care, poor nutrition, and forced labor
through a work-study program. Further, minimal qualifications and low salaries for
teachers were identified as the reasons why the level of education in Indian schools was
substandard to that of non-Indian schools.³

Most of the federal Indian boarding schools were situated hundreds of miles from
students’ tribal lands and the curriculum was rigid; discipline was strict as were daily
routines. All of these conditions impeded the children’s educational growth. Instead of
removing Native American children from their homes, the Meriam Report suggested that

¹ DeJong, Promises of the Past: A History of Indian Education in the United States, 134.
³ DeJong, Promises of the Past: A History of Indian Education in the United States, 134.
they be educated near their homes where they could benefit from interaction with their families and their native culture. DeJong (1993) summarized:

The Meriam Report brought changes to the Indian Bureau, and fostered a philosophy in Indian education, that is, bringing education to the Indians rather than bringing the Indians to education. In 1929 W. Carson Ryan, the Meriam staff’s educational specialist, became the director of education for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Using the Meriam Report as his guide, Ryan sought to develop a more responsive education system by organizing community school systems on the reservations. Ryan was also instrumental in the general reduction of the Indian boarding schools after 1929.4

This was the environment within which the Museum of Northern Arizona and the Coltons began their work.

Mary-Russell Colton embraced the idea of taking education to Native Americans, as evidenced by programs such as the Treasure Chests and the Junior Art Show, discussed later in this chapter. As an ethnographer, Colton understood and respected the differences between Native American tribes and surely favored the Meriam Report. The findings of the Meriam Report reinforced what she had discovered firsthand in her work with the Hopi and Navajo: that educational programs needed to be tailored to each tribe or reservation due to the extent of individuality among and within tribes.

Native American education had to include adults as well as children to be successful; the Meriam Report recommended programs to eradicate illiteracy and teach modern day farming methods and self-reliance. Ultimately, the authors of the Meriam Report envisioned Native Americans being able to be independent citizens of the United

4 DeJong, Promises of the Past: A History of Indian Education in the United States, 134.-35.
States, while maintaining their own identity.\(^5\) That vision lent validity to the idea that Native Americans were educable.

Attempting to answer the then often asked question: can the Indian be educated, the Meriam Report suggested that with regard to Native Americans the definition of education had to be expanded beyond formal schooling to include informal learning opportunities and environments. Challenges inherent in the existing system of Native American education were enumerated, including inexperienced teachers and staff, language barriers, illiteracy, and assimilation. The Meriam Report concluded that:

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\ldots \text{It is the task of education to help the Indian, not by assuming that he is fundamentally different, but that he is a human being very much like the rest of us, with a cultural background quite worth while for its own sake and as a basis for changes needed in adjusting to modern life.}\(^6\)
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In most of her interactions with the native peoples of the Colorado Plateau, particularly the Hopi, Colton followed the same philosophy, treating them with dignity and respect.

The Meriam Report encouraged preservation of the cultural heritage of native peoples, a subject near and dear to Colton’s heart, and a cause to which she devoted much of her career. One way to achieve that goal was through education, but teachers, or anyone who worked with native peoples, had to have the appropriate training to provide quality education. The Meriam Report cited abysmal training standards for teachers, administrators and staff in the federal boarding school system. Combined with low salaries, long hours, less than favorable accommodations and locales in some cases, and

\(^5\) Brookings Institution & Meriam, \textit{The Problem of Indian Administration; Report of a Survey Made at the Request of Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior, and Submitted to Him, February 21, 1928.}

\(^6\) Ibid., section “Indian Psychology.”
poor morale, the result was an inequitable learning environment for most Native American students in the system.

Suggestions for improving the Native American education system were included in the Meriam Report, beginning with the course of study. Recommendations in the Report included:

. . . No course of study should remain static; it should be constantly revised in terms of children’s needs and aptitudes; and no course of study should be made uniform in details over a vast territory of widely differing conditions. These are the chief difficulties with the present course of study for Indian schools.7

Colton made the same point in *Art for the Schools of the Southwest*; methods that worked well with the Hopi were not well suited for the Navajo. Each tribe possessed a unique cultural heritage and set of economic and living conditions unlike any other; sometimes variations occurred even within a tribe as with the Hopi where distinctions could be found between one mesa and another.8

In recognition of those differences, the Meriam Report advised that minimum requirements be set within the Native American education system, but that teachers and local communities be given the freedom to adapt the course of study as needed. This recommendation was a significant departure from existing policy, which was “. . . a uniform course of study for the entire Indian Service . . . to be carried out in detail. The Indian school course of study is clearly not adaptable to different tribes and different

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7 Ibid., section “The Course of Study for Indian Education.”
8 Ibid.
individuals.” Instead, the Report suggested that the course of study be based on tribal and individual needs and take into consideration interests and aptitudes.

Regarding Native American arts, unique to each tribe, the Meriam Report found that: “The possibilities of Indian arts would make a book in themselves; already in one or two places, notably among the Hopis, Indian children have given a convincing demonstration of what they can do with color and design when the school gives them a chance to create for themselves.” Released before Colton began her work with the Hopi in earnest, the Meriam Report suggests that an interest existed in Hopi art, and that some work was being done. What was needed was someone to guide those efforts; Colton filled that void. She worked with all types of schools in the system that provided education for Native American children: off-reservation boarding schools, reservation boarding schools, government day schools, mission schools, and public schools.

When Colton began her work the vast majority of Native American children were being educated in off-reservation boarding schools, as had been the policy for the past several decades. The Meriam Report proposed changes to that policy:

Whatever the necessity may once have been, the philosophy underlying the establishment of Indian boarding schools, that the way to ‘civilize’ the Indian is to take Indian children, even very young children, as completely as possible away from their home and family life, is at variance with modern views of education and social work, which regard home and family as essential social institutions from which it is generally undesirable to uproot children.\(^9\)

In particular the Meriam Report advised that young children be left with their parents on the reservation; older children could receive some benefit from being socialized in the

\(^9\) Ibid.

\(^10\) Ibid., section “The Non-Reservation Boarding School.”
Anglo world. The findings favored government day schools most of all: “Except for sections where good public schools are open to Indians, the government day schools offer the best opportunity available at present to furnish schooling to Indian children and at the same time build up a needed home and community education.”\(^{11}\) The Meriam Report underscored the synergy between education at school and at home.

The Meriam Report concluded that: “. . . The major problems of the Indian, health, social and economic development, as well as education in the more restricted sense of schooling, are all in need of the kind of handling that comes from people who are qualified by special training.”\(^{12}\) Colton wholeheartedly concurred with this assessment and advocated for specialized training for teachers throughout the 1930s. Momentum was lost as the 1940s dawned: “World War II greatly disrupted the entire Indian school system. Decreased funding left many schools understaffed and poorly maintained. The day schools that reform-minded Commissioner John Collier valued were devastated.”\(^{13}\) By the time Colton’s career began to wane in the late 1940s, World War II had taken its toll on the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), like many federal agencies, and the course of Native American education reversed once again; the off-reservation boarding school system came back into favor. Colton was surely aware of this change; it may have contributed to the melancholy that she felt during and after the War.

Public attention was focused on the War, patriotism surged, and domestic struggles such as Native American education were less scrutinized than during the

\(^{11}\) Ibid., section “Government Day Schools.”

\(^{12}\) Ibid.

\(^{13}\) DeJong, *Promises of the Past: A history of Indian Education in the United States*, 160.
previous decade. After President Franklin D. Roosevelt died and the War came to a close, the mood in Congress shifted and a more conservative mindset prevailed; New Deal policies fell out of favor and the Bureau of Indian Affairs returned to its previous policy of assimilating Native Americans into Anglo society. No longer would Native American children’s needs be addressed by tailoring programs; nor would they be prepared to return to reservation life after finishing school.

The pitfalls of such a policy became evident within a few years, particularly among the Navajo and Hopi. The proposed solution was the Navajo-Hopi Rehabilitation Act of 1950, designed to address the serious ongoing educational and economic needs of those tribes. A largely nomadic tribe living on an expansive reservation, the Navajo were ill served by the day schools. Distances were too far for the children to travel to school and back in a day. The Navajo favored on-reservation boarding schools instead. The Act provided $25 million for education, but failed to produce the anticipated results. In 1954, the Navajo Educational Emergency Program was created to build more schools, yet the Navajo educational system still lagged behind many other tribes for years to come.¹⁴

The New Deal and Progressive Education

The most productive period in Colton’s life coincided with a time of great change in the field of education, particularly for Native Americans. The Meriam Report was the beginning of a sea change; progressive era educators seized the opportunity to effect as much change as possible. Within the field of Native American education, several advocates from the progressive education movement emerged; Colton corresponded

¹⁴ Ibid., 160-176.
regularly with them, including W. Carson Ryan Jr., Willard Beatty, Charles J. Rhoads, John Collier, and J. Henry Scattergood. In 1928, President Herbert Hoover appointed Charles J. Rhoads as Commissioner of Indian Affairs. John Collier who served in that position until 1950 succeeded Rhoads in 1933. In 1930, when the Education Division of the BIA was created, W. Carson Ryan Jr. was appointed Director of Indian Education, a position that he held until 1935. Together, Rhoads and Ryan fought for increased funding for boarding schools, hiring educated professionals, and phasing out assimilation.16

The 1930s proved to be a decade favorable for Native American education. Reyhner and Eder argued that:

. . . The Great Depression caused considerable rethinking about whether the United States was progressing toward a future of wealth and plenty. Some people, including John Collier, looked to the close-knit, nonmaterialistic world of the American Indians for an alternative to what they saw as wrong with modern society.17

This rethinking paved the way for changes in Native American education; the pendulum swung away from a policy of assimilation toward one of accommodating differences. Progressive educators like Collier, and others, saw promise in the progressive education movement for solving the challenges of Native American education.

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15 Reyhner & Eder, *American Indian Education: A History*, 216-222. William Beatty served as president of the Progressive Education Association from 1933 - 1936 and as Director of Indian Education in the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) from the time that Collier appointed him in 1936, until 1952. Together, Collier and Beatty worked to close some off-reservation boarding schools, open new day schools on reservations, provide texts in Native languages and encourage teaching about Native American cultural heritage. They also employed anthropologists to work with the BIA. Given their interest in Native Americans, anthropology, and art, it is not surprising that the Coltons were supportive of the efforts of the BIA during the Collier-Beatty administration.

16 Rhoads was president of the Indian Rights Association at the time. The Coltons were members of the Association.

The child-centered focus of progressive education was well-suited to Native American children, who generally speaking, faced significant previously ignored social and economic challenges that inevitably factored into the educational process. Like Collier, Rhoads favored integrating children’s daily experiences into their education. And Rhoads, like Colton, encouraged the inclusion of local content in the curriculum. Discussions about Native American education were soon included in the professional literature about progressive education.

Plan for Establishing Small Museums in Indian Villages and Reservation Centers

The journal *Progressive Education* devoted an entire issue (February 1932) to new trends in Indian education. The introduction aptly summarized the state of Indian education:

Schools for Indians have in the past almost entirely ignored the cultural traditions, ethnology, environment, and economic situation of the tribes from which the children were drawn. Under the old system the best Indians were the ones who had managed to avoid going to school. Today, instead of teaching that everything Indian is bad, we try to help the children and through them their parents to understand something of the precious nature of their heritage as Indians.\(^{18}\)

A pronouncement such as this from a national educational organization likely steeled Colton in her efforts to provide art education (in traditional arts) for Native American students within the context of their own environment. During the early 1930s, Colton produced an unpublished paper titled *Plan for Establishing Small Museums in Indian Villages and Reservation Centers*. While undated, this paper clearly draws on the

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aforementioned issue of *Progressive Education* and served as a basis for *Art for the Schools of the Southwest*.

The introduction to Colton’s plan read like the beginning of a speech: “I am here at Dr. Cummings request and because of our mutual interest in Indian Welfare. Dr. Colton and I have been coming and going in Arizona for nineteen years and have made our permanent home in Flagstaff for the past seven years”¹⁹ Based on this statement it is safe to assume that the plan was written in 1932 or 1933. The focus of this speech was on finding a solution to the decline in traditional Native American arts.

Colton created the Hopi Craftsman Show in 1929 (discussed at length in chapter six), but she determined a need to do more than the yearly exhibition. She formed a strong bond with the Hopi and sought to assist them in their artistic endeavors.²⁰ Speaking in general terms, Colton observed:

> As you are all aware, a gradual degeneration in Indian Arts has been taking place over a long period. This is due to a series of complicated causes – chief of which are, lack of intelligent appreciation of the Indian as an artist and consequent cheap commercialization of his products. His markets have been extremely limited. The advertising which he has received has displayed him as a curiosity rather than a people possessing a folk art rich in dream and the creative arts.”²¹

The degeneration of Native American arts that Colton cited is also addressed in chapter six, as is the commercialization of said arts. Her remark about Native Americans as a curiosity is ironic as will be demonstrated in this chapter and the next. Even in the above

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¹⁹ Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, *Plan For Establishing Small Museums In Indian Villages And Reservation Centers*, MS207-306-1, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

²⁰ Interviews with Barton and Margaret Wright and Robin Colton mention the kinship that Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton felt for the Hopi. For whatever reason, she focused her efforts on assisting them more than any other tribe. Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns; Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns.

²¹ Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, *Plan For Establishing Small Museums In Indian Villages And Reservation Centers*, MS207-306-1, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
quote Colton’s patriarchal approach toward Native Americans is in evidence; her reference to their folk art (as opposed to fine art) is a good example.\textsuperscript{22}

Colton’s patriarchal tendencies are not necessarily to be condemned, but they do need to be acknowledged. She was a product of the time in which she lived. Concerned with the poverty, disease, and associated problems that she saw on the reservations in northern Arizona, Colton sought to assist native peoples on the Plateau. This desire came from a genuine sense of caring, but sometimes came off as lofty: “There is no ‘cure all’ but there are many ways in which we can assist him [Native Americans] to regain his self respect, his pride of craftsmanship and his economic independence.”\textsuperscript{23} The Coltons assisted in this endeavor, focusing first on the Hopi.

Building upon a plan suggested by Amelia E. White, one of her contemporaries in Santa Fe, Colton proposed to establish a small museum in each village on the Hopi mesas where a collection of traditional native arts from that village would be displayed. She proposed to limit the collections to pieces of the highest quality (as determined by her standards) and insisted that those works not be for sale. These local village museums had two intended audiences: Anglo tourists and native peoples. In theory, these mini-museums were designed to educate tourists about the standards of quality to look for in Native American arts, which in turn would produce a demand for higher quality goods.

\textsuperscript{22} At the time Colton wrote this the term folk art carried more of a negative connotation than it does today. Folk art was considered somehow less than fine art.

\textsuperscript{23} Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Plan For Establishing Small Museums In Indian Villages And Reservation Centers, MS207-306-1, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
For Native Americans, it was intended to “serve both as a standard and an inspiration, arousing his competitive spirit.”

Focused as she was on the art itself, Colton never forgot the marketplace, probably because of her background as an artist. She observed of these local village museums: “For the trader it will also act as a standard of excellence, causing him to demand of the Indian craftsman a better type of material, because the tourist coming to him, after seeing the Museum, will demand better goods.” In principle this theory was wonderful, but there was no way to ensure that the average tourist, even with the education provided by the village museums, would understand the difference between a traditional, hand-made piece of art and a cheaply made piece that was inferior in quality.

Colton and White were leaders of their time (or even in the present day) in their concern for museum ethics. Each village museum was to have a paid caretaker from the local tribe, and that individual was charged with connecting interested buyers directly with the native artisans, thus removing themselves from the marketplace. Colton insisted that: “The caretaker will do no buying or selling!” Whether Colton inherently understood the need for this separation, or whether she sought to adhere to the relatively recently adopted (1925) code of ethics of the American Association of Museums, is unknown.

As part of her plan to revitalize Native American arts, Colton drafted a proposal for strengthening Hopi craftsmanship. The small village museums played an integral role

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
in the plan. Colton estimated the cost of maintaining these village museums at $616.00 per year, including rental fees for the facility, a salary for the attendant, and purchasing the collection. She even suggested that: “In some cases it might seem better to build a small house on the outskirts of the village, close to the entering road where all would pass. This built of native material and by native labor, would probably cost about $800.”27 Colton indicated that if the Museum ever obtained the finances to create a village museum like the one outlined in her plan that they would donate the staff labor and time to develop and maintain such a facility. She was confident that: “It would not be difficult to gain the approval and official sanction of the Indian Bureau for such a plan.”28 This pronouncement underscores Colton’s ties to the transformation that was then underway in the area of Native American education.

Colton had a modified plan for other Native American tribes besides the Hopi. She recommended: “. . . The establishment of Miniature Craft Museums in the schools or administration buildings of the Agency.”29 Further, she acknowledged that the plans would have to be modified based on the conditions among each tribe. Presumably, she spoke about the tribes that she knew best: the Hopi and Navajo, and to a certain extent the Zuni. Colton concluded her plan with a summary of the conditions among Native American tribes:

I urge you all to realize that our Indians here are not yet ready to stand alone among the whites. Eventually they must do this, but much education must intervene. At present even the educated boys and girls are often compelled to fall back upon their own villages where they must

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.
support themselves, for there is not sufficient employment outside as we are all painfully aware. Also, there is a large population of older people who will never leave the villages.

It seems to me, therefore, logical to do all that we can to make the Indian self-supporting in his own environment. It is also true that when we remove a folk art from its inspirational setting, it almost invariably deteriorates and loses character.30

By “here” Colton presumably meant northern Arizona, which included the Hopi, Navajo, Hualapai and Havasupai tribes. Colton was certainly aware of the latter two tribes, and she included them in her Treasure Chests program, but never conducted any studies or worked with them extensively. She was most interested in education for the Hopi and Navajo in their own environment rather than forcing them to assimilate into Anglo culture. Toward that end, Colton drafted a plan titled On the Teaching and Maintenance of Indian Arts and Crafts With Special Reference to the Hopi Indians.

On the Teaching and Maintenance of Indian Arts and Crafts
With Special Reference to the Hopi Indians

This plan reads almost verbatim like portions of Art for the Schools of the Southwest. It was written in 1932 or 1933 and served as a draft for portions of Art for the Schools of the Southwest.31 The plan was widely distributed: E. H. Hammond, District Superintendent in Charge of the Office of Indian Affairs, Leupp School & Agency wrote Dr. and Mrs. Colton on March 1, 1933:

The receipt of Mrs. Colton’s paper on the teaching and maintenance of Indian arts and crafts in the Indian Hopi School is acknowledged.

30 Ibid.

31 Museum of Northern Arizona Archives, separates file 9945.
I had copies made and sent to all the Hopi Day School teachers and later discussed the paper with them. I found the paper very interesting and helpful and the teachers have expressed their interest and appreciation of the suggestions which Mrs. Colton offers.

You may not know that we have been endeavoring to develop instruction in Indian art and crafts along parallel lines but as usual, have been handicapped by the usual lack of funds and employees necessary to carry out such a program. . . . I shall follow this instruction in the Hopi Day Schools as often as I can and I will encourage the development of instruction along the lines suggested wherever and as often as I can.

I wish to express my appreciation for the interest you have shown and the help you have given me in this excellent paper of yours.32

This correspondence revealed a rare instance where the direct effects of a museum educator’s work can be evidenced. While traveling to the Hopi Reservation on her annual fall visit to return objects not sold at the Hopi Craftsman Show (discussed in chapter six), Colton made “it a custom to visit the Indians for the purpose of talking over Hopi Craftsman affairs, but . . . also like[d] to call upon all the Day School teachers to stimulate their interest and gain their cooperation for the Junior Art Show work” (discussed later in this chapter).33

Not only did On the Teaching and Maintenance of Indian Arts and Crafts With Special Reference to the Hopi Indians reach officials on the Hopi Reservation, but also on the Navajo Reservation, particularly the western portion in northern Arizona. Martha Birkeland, Demonstration Teacher for the Southern Navajo Agency at Fort Defiance, Arizona, wrote Colton on April 22, 1933:


33 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ to Dr. Luella M. King, Demonstration Teacher, Southern Navajo Agency, Fort Defiance, AZ, October 1, 1934. MS-207-306-33 Untied States Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs – Field Service, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
I have your letter of April 17, and have received the copies of your paper on the Teaching of Indian Arts and Crafts. I am indeed happy to have them; you can be sure that I will make good use of them in my schools and with my teachers. . . . I have always wanted to meet you and Dr. Colton but so far I have been unsuccessful. I am hoping that I may have the pleasure soon.34

What is clear from Colton’s correspondence and notes is that she maintained a strong interest in Native American education throughout her career. Moreover, she reached out to colleagues nationwide both to remain apprised of the latest developments in the fields of Native American education and progressive education, and to voice her own opinions and advance her ideas.

Colton’s plan was recognized at the regional level within the Office of Indian Affairs. A. C. Cooley, Director of Extension and Industry for the Salt Lake City office, wrote Colton on November 28, 1932:

This will acknowledge and thank you for your letter of November 18 inclosing [sic] a copy of your circular in which you set forth your ideas of teaching arts and crafts in the Hopi day schools.

I have read your circular with much interest and find it full of constructive suggestions and in my opinion some very good philosophy. . . . I am passing your circular on to Dr. Ryan for his attention and comment and also to Mrs. Burton who as you know has charge of the arts and crafts work for our division.35


35 A. C. Cooley, Director of Extension and Industry, Office of Indian Affairs, Salt Lake City, UT, to Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, November 28, 1932. MS207-306-27 File, United States Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs Extension Department, Cooley, Miller, etc., Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
The Progressive Education Association

Founded in 1919, the Progressive Education Association (PEA) reached its height in the 1930s and then began a slow decline until its demise in 1955. Thus, the PEA fits neatly into the second phase of the progressive education movement as defined by Cremin. The lifespan of the PEA also roughly corresponded with Colton’s career as an art educator in northern Arizona. The reforms of the second phase of the progressive education movement were more closely aligned with Colton’s background and her own ideals about education. In her history of the PEA, Graham observed that: “Postwar progressive education bloomed in private schools and, although it was later taken over by the educational professionals, its reforms from first to last appealed primarily to the middle and upper middle classes.” But, during the second phase of the progressive education movement, the definition of progressive evolved. During the 1930s, the most productive period in Colton’s career, “a quite different social reformist sentiment had boiled up as a result of the Depression, a ‘progressive’ school could be either one bearing down hard on individual development and creativity or one that emphasized the schools’ responsibility in society.”

It is within this context that Colton worked to achieve her goals at the Museum. Her files contain issues of the PEA’s publication *Progressive*

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38 Ibid., 12.
Education; through this journal Colton was aware of the views of the Association with regard to creative expression.\textsuperscript{39}

During the height of Colton’s career the fortunes of the PEA shifted from prosperous to bleak. Graham summarized this change:

Sometime between 1919 and 1955 the phrase ‘progressive education’ shifted from a term of praise to one of opprobrium. To the American public of 1919, progressive education meant all that was good in education; thirty-five years later nearly all the ills in American education were blamed on it.\textsuperscript{40}

Undoubtedly Colton sensed this shift, but she seemed unable or unwilling to adapt in the twilight of both her career and the movement.

Museum Education as it relates to Progressive Education

The field of museum education blossomed during the progressive education movement. The two fields “share not only a common history but also common features. Both emphasize pedagogy based on experience, interaction with objects, and inquiry. They also share a social vision of serving the entire society, including underserved audiences.”\textsuperscript{41} Museums by their very nature are educational institutions; many museum mission statements mention this important function. Museologist George Hein observed that: “Museums as public institutions have always intended to teach, inspire, impress, or

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., 47. Further, Graham observes that: “Progressive Education was an important mouthpiece of the educational profession throughout the thirties,” 86.

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 145.

persuade audiences.”42 But, the profession of museum education only began shortly after the turn of the twentieth century around the time that public education expanded significantly.

With a similar set of practices and ideals, museum education and progressive education evolved together. Both emerged in response to prevailing social changes, which is what makes them still relevant today. Hein observed that: “Most of the larger social issues facing the United States after the Civil War to which progressives responded are still familiar today . . . .”43 One of the hallmarks of progressive education, as espoused by Dewey in particular, was that it emphasized practical experience, including museum visits, “. . . as the basis for intellectual analysis. Most educators today acknowledge the value of experiential education even if it is seldom practiced to the extent that he [Dewey] advocated.”44 As observed by Cremin, many progressive educators also believed that education in the arts and sciences was for everyone.45 Hein observed: “This democratization of the arts and sciences and access to them for the whole population matches particularly well the parallel emergence of museum education.”46 Colton definitely shared this philosophy; she believed that the arts were within reach of everyone and all could benefit from an arts education.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 162. Those changes included immigration, social reorganization, industrialization, urbanization, criticism of public schools, and the role of government in providing for the basic needs (including education) of all citizens.

44 Ibid., 163.


Museums were well suited to provide an arts education through learning from objects, also a progressive education ideal. Colton promoted learning from objects via her Treasure Chests program (discussed later in this chapter), the Navajo and Hopi Craftsman Shows, and the Hopi Silver Project (all discussed in chapter six). Colton was very much aware of developments in the fields of museum education and progressive education. One of the Treasure Chests was included in an exhibition at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts in 1941 titled *Educational Work of the Museums of the United States.*

The Newark Museum

The Newark Museum has been called “the first, if not the only, progressive, visual institute of instruction” in the United States. Under the leadership of John Cotton Dana, the Newark Museum implemented ideals of the progressive education movement, among them those of Dewey. The Progressive Education Association provided a synopsis of the tenants of progressive education in the first issue of its journal *Progressive Education* in 1924. Museums fulfilled several of the criteria; they were places where independence and self-expression was encouraged, where staff acted as facilitators to learning, and where an array of diverse objects was available.

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47 MS207-3-2A File, History of the Museum Volume 2, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.


49 Ibid.
Mulryan argued that the progressive movement and Dana’s philosophy “were anti-traditional, since they were both forms of retaliation against antiquated methods used for developing exclusive educational institutions. Both Dana and Dewey, as progressives, were interested in egalitarian education.” Dana sought to make the Newark Museum accessible to the general populace, shunning the exclusivity of European museums. He did so by choosing subject matter that was meaningful and relevant to the everyday lives of the citizens of Newark. Through his work at the Newark Museum Dana applied many of Dewey’s theories and ultimately created an institution that was essential to the local community.

The exhibitions at the Newark Museum were approachable, relevant, and pragmatic to the lives of Newark citizens. To accomplish this, “Dana transferred the focus of his museum from the fine arts to the practical or applied arts. In this fashion, he won the public’s confidence while simultaneously causing them to visit his museum in greater and greater numbers.” By presenting exhibitions that sparked the interest of the general populace, Dana and his colleagues created a progressive learning environment.

In Dana’s eyes, the Newark Museum embodied a progressive learning environment in contrast to other museums at that time because it was an active educational organization as opposed to a showplace of priceless artifacts that were only

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50 Ibid., 2. Further, Mulryan concluded: “As contemporaries one can imagine that they almost could not have avoided knowing each other since both men were frequently featured in the New York Times,” 3.

51 Hein argued that “Dana constantly stressed the need for the museum to serve the community – to connect what occurred in the museum with the life of the society – and he emphasized learning from ordinary objects . . .” Hein, “John Dewey and Museum Education,” 422.

enjoyed by a select few. He sought to transform “the image of the museum by making it accessible and instructional for the public.” Docents were an important component of the education program at the Newark Museum; they “acted as a progressive guide helping the visitors to discover what the object had to offer.” Further, artists and craftspeople were regularly present at the museum demonstrating their work. And, students could continue learning after their visit to the museum through a program that loaned objects to the local school system. Much like Colton’s Treasure Chests program, the Newark Museum lent objects to the schools to foster learning by visually reinforcing what the children observed on their museum visit.

In *Art as a Personal and Economic Necessity*, Colton mentioned the Museum of Commercial Art in Newark, New Jersey. An exhaustive search failed to turn up any mention of a museum in Newark by that name. Colton was likely talking about The Newark Museum, founded in 1909. Dana became director of The Newark Public Library in 1902. When the Newark Museum was founded it fell under the auspices of the library. Dana led the Museum until 1929 implementing sweeping innovations that were much discussed in the museum profession then, and now. Remote as Flagstaff was, it is entirely possible that Colton was aware of Dana’s work as evidenced by her interaction with museum professionals and educators both regionally, and nationally. Evidently

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53 Ibid., 5.

54 Ibid.

55 A search of yahoo, msn and google on October 27, 2009 returned zero matching hits for “Museum of Commercial Art.” Further, a search of American Association of Museums directories and membership records revealed no such museum. It is possible that Colton used this name to illustrate the scope of The Newark Museum, or she did not have access to complete information about the museum.
impressed by an exhibition at the Newark Museum, Colton remarked upon the artistic value of the works included and the economic cost.

Louise Connolly, a peer of Colton’s, worked as Educational Advisor for the Newark Library and the Newark Museum. Dana sent her on a series of trips in 1912 spanning the East Coast to the Midwest, to assess current educational practices in museums and schools. She visited eighty-two museums in New York City, Washington DC, Philadelphia, Boston, Detroit, Toledo, Indianapolis, Cincinnati and Pittsburgh.\footnote{Connolly, \textit{The Educational Value of Museums}.} The West was not included in the survey.\footnote{Connolly conducted her survey in 1912, the same year that the Coltons visited Arizona on their honeymoon. Dana does not explain why the survey ended at Chicago. Another staff member had recently visited Buffalo, Chicago and St. Louis. Dana may have considered anything west of St. Louis as still uncivilized. This provides some insight into the environment into which the Coltons entered when they moved to Flagstaff.}

A progressive educator herself, Connolly found that museums played a role in educating the general public. She utilized progressive education methods and relied on visual materials, including the new field of film, to educate students.\footnote{Mulryan, “John Cotton Dana, John Dewey, and the Creators of the Newark Museum: A Collaborative Success in the Art of Progressive, Visual Instruction,” 14.} Connolly concluded that museums were great places to learn by doing, and that: “The best teaching is that which causes the pupils to apply promptly the knowledge that they gain.”\footnote{Connolly, \textit{The Educational Value of Museums}, 26.}

Museums were among the institutions involved in education outside of the schools; others included libraries and volunteer groups such as fraternal organizations or woman’s clubs.
Educating the general public was another hallmark of the progressive education movement. Museums joined in that effort by “. . . developing programs and exhibits that reflect[ed] the needs and enthusiasms of the (potential) audience.” By focusing on potential audiences, museums sought to reach underrepresented populations. Some museums, such as the Newark Museum, exhibited objects that reflected the everyday experiences of a broad spectrum of American society. These objects were often inexpensive, but always well designed. Exhibitions at the Newark Museum demonstrated how beauty and art could be incorporated into any person’s life, regardless of socioeconomic position.

Dana believed that education was for all members of society, and he disliked the fact that museums were “at times an exclusive institution that created many barriers,” and in effect a hindrance to the working class. People of all socioeconomic classes and ethnicities were invited into the Newark Museum. In doing so, “Dana was democratizing the most exclusive educational institution in America.” Dana and the Newark Museum were on the forefront of a movement that was intended to result in equal access for all to museums. His beliefs were decidedly Populist as evidenced by his writings; Dana disliked privilege.

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61 Ibid., 171-172.
63 Ibid.
64 Dana, A Plan for a New Museum, the Kind of Museum It Will Profit a City to Maintain; Dana, American Art, How It Can Be Made to Flourish; Dana & Peniston, The New Museum: Selected Writings; Hadley, John Cotton Dana, A Sketch; Kingdon. John Cotton Dana; A Life.
Locally made artistic pieces interested Dana far more than high value paintings and sculpture. He believed that collecting such pieces, and donating them to museums, was a way for the wealthy to “flaunt their financial and intellectual superiority over the common people.” Further, it “affirmed their social status and expressed their disdain for the general public.” In this regard, Colton and Dana differed somewhat. Colton advocated for Native American arts, folk art in general, and locally made art. But, she embodied the class of people that Dana held in great disdain.

The Newark Museum was as egalitarian as possible, not unlike the ideal progressive school; everyone was welcome and the museum was intended to be accessible to all. They exhibited applied art that was more approachable to the general populace as it was often locally produced and related to their daily lives. Colton was aware of the work of The Newark Museum, and may have used it as a model for the Museum of Northern Arizona (or at least its art program). Yet, that vision never quite came to fruition. The MNA has struggled since its inception to overcome a stigma as an elitist institution. Whether correct or not, the perception has long been that the Museum was the Colton’s project, and a haven for academics, but that it did not offer much for the general populace. While she may have held some Populist ideals, by no means did Colton share Dana’s Populist leanings.

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66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., 28.

68 Bill Breed, interview by W. James Burns; Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns, Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns.
Dana sought to create a museum that would serve as broad a spectrum of the general populace as possible. He had very specific ideas about how to accomplish this task, including a suggested location in the center of town, and a long list of educational goals. The Newark Museum accomplished most of those goals, and in the process a true community museum came into being. Dana believed that “the snobbishness of scholars created an unnecessary division between knowledge and experience, a division that could be redressed with new and innovative pedagogical techniques.”

The institution that Dana and Connolly created embodied many of Dewey’s philosophical principles about progressive education. These principles are still relevant for museums today. Hein argued that:

The twin pillars of progressive education – learning through hands-on activities that also engage the mind (currently most commonly called ‘inquiry’ or ‘constructivism’), and social goals of providing access for all potential museum visitors, especially underserved populations – are as relevant and appropriate today as they were for the pioneers in museum education. We can serve our profession well if we strive to emulate their social goals and accomplishments.

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69 Dana’s goals for the ideal museum included “(1) be a source of entertainment and interest for all its visitors; (2) instruct with labels, leaflets, handbooks, talks, and illustrated lectures; (3) welcome children of all age groups and use different pedagogical techniques accordingly; (4) lend slides and artifacts to schools, thus making each school a progressive laboratory of learning; (5) place exhibits in schools; (6) build independent teaching centers and branch museums (e.g. mini-exhibits in department stores); (7) secure the cooperation of specialists in the community; (8) not only send objects and exhibits to schools, but also send them to societies, groups, and individuals; (9) prepare and display local industry exhibits at the museum’s headquarters, branches, and at schools to show the results of local men and women’s labor; and (10) publish lesson plans, leaflets, and brochures for schools.” Mulryan, “John Cotton Dana, John Dewey, and the Creators of the Newark Museum: A Collaborative Success in the Art of Progressive, Visual Instruction,” 31. See also Dana & Peniston, The New Museum: Selected Writings, 26-28.


71 Ibid., 41.

Colton’s Art Philosophy

During the early 1930s, Colton recorded her ideals about art education in an unpublished paper, possibly written as a speech. This paper, titled *Art as a Personal and Economic Necessity* provides deep insight into Colton’s beliefs about art. This is the only surviving document that so clearly elucidates her philosophy about art, museums, and the necessity for both in Flagstaff. The paper is quoted in its entirety followed by analysis:

Art is generally regarded as a luxury, something to be practiced by the talented few; owned and enjoyed by the rich; something quite outside our ordinary every day life; something that we must acquire painfully, by spending weary hours in vast museums and picture galleries and forgetting when we go home.

I regard it quite otherwise, as a very intimate and human thing, impossible to disassociate from the home and the lowly affairs of everyday.

The desire for beauty and art – they are one and the same. Man’s earliest craving after he had found food and shelter seems to have been to make more attractive his every day tools and utensils.

Primitive man and his art were inseparable. Today we are pleased to believe that the machine, and a machine made civilization has robbed the people of their creative ability and their individuality; that art is a segregated luxury rather than a human necessity.

But that craving for something beautiful is still just as strong within us. It demands expression and satisfaction, and though we no longer make with our own hands everything that we need, we still have the power of exerting our individual choice and expressing our love of beauty in the things with which we surround ourselves in our homes.

I can hear many voices saying now, ‘But I cannot afford to have beautiful things.’

Oh! yes you can, my friends, in this day and generation. The only possible excuse for your not enjoying them may be the fact that you have

73 This document is undated but was found in a folder with other papers dated during the early 1930s. Moreover, the writing is consistent with other pieces written by Colton during the early 1930s.
not taken advantage of the many opportunities offered today to improve your taste, to learn to know, the good from the bad.

Back of every machine today stands an artist, a fellow who has received an expensive training in a school for craftsmen. It is his brain that dreams out the lovely patterns for your printed goods, your silks and cottons, in rainbow shades, your carpets, linoleums, and wall papers. He planned our lovely kitchen of today — such a joy to work in, where we may have the lovely colors that we crave in pots, pans, china ware, painted chairs and tables. And these lovely things turned out in such quantity by tireless machines are not necessarily more expensive than the ugly, dull things. All that we need is the taste to choose and combine them. A coat of jade green on the old kitchen table and a canary yellow kettle singing on the newly polished stove, some bright print curtains at the windows (and you can get them cheap). Such a combination may be ‘a joy forever!’

In Newark, N.J. there is a Museum of Commercial Art whose business it is to put before the public the best in machine-made art. They recently held there a notable exhibition of articles of high artistic value, none of which exceeded 50 cents in cost. I am told it was a very beautiful exhibit.

I have been trying to tell you that our Museums are not to be considered an end in themselves but merely a school in which it is endeavored to set a standard by which we may be assisted to carry into our homes an ‘every day art’ which we can all enjoy.

In a town the size of Flagstaff we can never hope to maintain a permanent Art collection, but owing to the wonderful service offered thousands of little cities all over the United States by the American Federation of Arts, our Museum is able to offer through its ‘traveling exhibitions’ the best in art. Our Federation shows have consisted of prints, etchings, facsimile drawings and reproductions, water colors, and Japanese Prints. Up to date, we have not had sufficient funds to afford the rental of larger shows such as oil paintings and arts and crafts works. Whatever the Museum shows it endeavors to secure the best of its kind.

All these prints and etchings are so reasonably priced that almost anyone can afford to own and it will not be a second rate thing, but the best of its type. Three or four dollars so spent will continue to bring you great joy.

The Museum of Northern Arizona has six exhibitions planned for the spring and summer. And so I feel that art is a personal necessity.

We travel rough roads in life and we all know that there are many joys that slip away and many disappointments along the road, but if we have a love of beauty, life will hold many satisfactions for us which we cannot lose,
and we can feel that it has been worth while. Even commercialism has been forced to fall back upon art. Its busy machinery could not earn their bread and butter without it. These people were calling for more beauty to lighten their lives; the demand created the supply and now an endless supply of lovely gay things is poured out upon the dull, old world and the artist’s brain is busy behind the monster he has enslaved to his purpose. The bill boards in our cities show us luscious compositions of fruits and flowers and under cover of these advise us to eat this or that or ‘Say it with flowers’; or they allure us with scenes of China and the Orient. Lovely bits of color and design to delight the eyes of the humblest along sordid paths.

And then there are the magazines – advertisers paying thousands for a page of beautiful color in the part – and if you ask me, quite the best part of many a modern magazine too.

Now just to illustrate the economic need for art, most of us will remember how Mr. Ford tried to force a perfectly utilitarian article down our throats, and we would have none of his ‘Lizzie’. We were sick and tired of the drab old thing; we were color-made and we wanted ‘stream lines’ and such things. Mr. Ford held out a long time because he had always said that art wasn’t a commercial necessity, but in the end he had to give way, and we behold the final triumph of art!74

A person who stood by her convictions, Colton never missed an opportunity to explain things just as she saw them. Not something meant to be appreciated and possessed only by the wealthy, art was intended for everyone as a part of day-to-day life. Colton argued that art could, and should, be a part of everyone’s home, not something that was admired only in museums.

Beauty and art were synonymous in Colton’s eyes, from the earliest prehistoric peoples to modern man. Denise Colton recalled that Mary-Russell Colton’s “. . . philosophy was that art . . . was a means to let one self’s feelings flow – through the pen, the brush, the charcoal, and the colors.”75 She saw creativity and individuality as

74 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Art As A Personal & Economic Necessity. MS207-306-11, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

75 F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
important, even in the industrial age. Art was essential to everyone’s life, not an indulgence to be enjoyed by only a few. Although few things were still handmade, Colton contended that people needed an outlet to express themselves and their individuality; art was a means to achieve that expression.

Colton transcended her socioeconomic position by recognizing that not everyone had the means to afford expensive paintings and sculptures. She explained that art came in many forms and could be enjoyed even on a meager budget. Lack of knowledge about quality art/design and how to refine one’s taste was the root of the problem; Colton maintained that there were ample opportunities to enjoy art.

Understanding that even behind machine-made goods there was an artist at work, Colton highlighted the ways that artists contributed to the simplest household goods. She made an argument for surrounding oneself with beautiful objects, regardless of the means of manufacture, rather than purchasing unattractive, uninteresting objects. Further, she depicted museums as an integral piece of the educational system, an informal school. The role that museums played in the realm of art education was important; they set the standard for art, and using this standard anyone could apply that knowledge in their everyday life to choose beautiful objects by which to be surrounded.

Museums needed to show works of high artistic quality (if not value), but Colton concluded that Flagstaff could not possibly support a permanent art collection. Instead, she touted the exhibitions available through the American Federation of Arts (AFA). While the Museum did bring a number of AFA exhibitions to Flagstaff, it also succeeded, possibly unwittingly, in building a superb collection of art of the American West. Thus,
today, residents of Flagstaff are able to enjoy world-class artworks owned by an organization in their own city.

Stressing the affordability of many of the works shown in traveling exhibitions from the AFA, Colton urged everyone to purchase art for their homes that would add joy to their lives. This suggestion is not surprising given her view of art as a personal necessity in everyone’s life. Beauty held innumerable satisfactions in life according to Colton. Even the world of mass consumerism had roots in art. Colton contended that people clamored for artfully mass-produced objects and that industry responded. Artwork became engrained in marketing mass-produced goods for everyday life. No matter one’s station in life, good design and delightful colors were still within reach.

A Plea for Art Education

In May 1935, Colton published a supplement to *Museum Notes* that implored the citizens of northern Arizona to support art education. She made an impassioned plea for the importance of art in everyone’s life:

Taxpayers! Mothers, and fathers! Do you know what is happening in your schools? You are paying for your children’s education – investigate before it is too late!

Do you know that art education is being deliberately strangled in the public schools? Your children are being deprived of their right to a creative education.

The jobs of self expression, through the constructive medium of art, build character, produce contentment, and eventually a useful and intelligent citizen. Education is not to be found complete within the covers of the text book – it does not consist merely of cramming the young mind with facts, but rather of presenting the child with the opportunity to observe, to express himself, and to gain experience with his brain and hands.
It is just this costly mistake that our politicians and many of our educators are making today. It is costly indeed in its far reaching consequences to our young people. All over our country, appropriations for art education in the school budget have been drastically cut, and the salary of the art teacher has suffered severely. This shameful situation is due to the ignorant attitude that art is a ‘frill’ and therefore is the first subject of the curriculum to be lopped off on the economy program.

This is poor economy indeed! For art education is both a practical and liberal education in life and is closely and inextricably correlated with every other subject in the school. Our ‘enlightened’ country should feel shame indeed at having countenanced for a moment such a backward step in education.

Look about you, parents, when you visit the ‘Junior Art Show.’ Don’t you think it is worth while? Why don’t you help us to help your children and their plucky teachers! Our teachers are working under desperate difficulties, salaries pitifully cut, no decent materials for their children to work with. They have actually to beg for a bit of leather or cast-off scraps in order to allow your children to make this showing.

WOULD YOU RATHER HAVE YOUR BOYS AND GIRLS THRILLED AND HAPPY WORKING OVER SOME CREATIVE ART PROJECT IN THEIR SPARE TIME, OR DO YOU PREFER TO HAVE THEM ON THE STREETS? [capitalization original]

Much of the work in the junior Art Show was done by the children after school hours, because of their love and joy in the work.

PARENTS, WON’T YOU HELP US? [capitalization original]76

Were she alive today, Colton would likely have made the same appeal as public schools in Arizona, and across the nation, slashed art programs from their curriculum in the face of budget cuts resulting from the Great Recession of 2008-2010.

The parallel between the education cuts taking place in the present day and those that took place during the 1930s when Colton was writing, is striking. The arguments that Colton used to advocate for funding art education were prescient and remain relevant.

seventy-five years later. Emphasizing the advantages of self-expression through art, Colton touted the benefits of exercising one’s hands and mind as opposed to learning only through observation.

Castigating politicians and educators alike, Colton explained the consequences of slashing funds for art education. Citing a prevalent “ignorant attitude” about the value of art, Colton lobbied for maintaining arts education funding. Acknowledging the poor economy during the 1930s, she posited that art was integrally linked to every other subject taught in school and that a liberal education provided great value to children.

As evidence of the benefits of art education, Colton referenced the Junior Art Show, (discussed later in this chapter) in which many children from the schools in the Flagstaff area participated. Robin Colton recalled:

I think that she felt that it [art] was a very important part of any student’s education, because without the appreciation of art and beauty, that the rest of your education would never quite take hold because you had to listen to music, you had to see beautiful art and, I think it was something in her that she wanted to do in the museum so that people that would come there would be inspired, youth as well as older people.\(^{77}\)

Urging parents to support educators and their children, Colton highlighted the dearth of materials, the woeful salaries for teachers, and the lack of support. In conclusion, Colton implored parents to help the Museum in its work by supporting their children’s creative interests in art.

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\(^{77}\) Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
Arizona Artists Arts and Crafts Exhibition

Colton’s first attempt to encourage local art occurred in the summer of 1929, just a year after the Museum was founded; she taught an art class at the local high school and organized several exhibits at the Museum, including the First Annual Exhibition of Arizona Artists, which opened on July 9th. The First Annual Exhibition of Arizona Artists evolved into the Arizona Artists Art and Crafts Exhibit, an annual event that occurred until 1935. Featuring artists from around the state of Arizona that had never been shown before in Flagstaff, the Arizona Artists Art and Crafts Exhibit brought together Arizona artists and gave them a feeling of unity. In addition, the exhibition helped rural communities in northern Arizona becomes more art conscious.  

The Arizona Artists Arts and Crafts Exhibition was the first of its kind in the state of Arizona, and was popularly received. Colton later observed that:

This exhibition was inspired by a desire to give the widely distributed artists and craftsmen of Arizona a feeling of unity and common purpose. Awards were offered in many classes of work and judges invited from various parts of Arizona. The social side of this exhibition became an important feature, and it was widely attended.

According to the 1930 census, the population of Arizona was just over 435,500, small for the sixth largest state in the nation; the state was largely rural with long distances

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79 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “Art Department of the Museum of Northern Arizona,” 64.
between towns and relatively primitive roads.\textsuperscript{80} With this exhibition, Colton hoped to create a synergy among Arizona artists. There were few museums in the state at the time, and the Museum of Northern Arizona was the only one emphasizing art so strongly.

The exhibition was held annually from 1929 until 1936 when the Museum moved into its permanent facility. Colton cites the development of art organizations in towns and cities around the state as the reason for discontinuing the exhibition, arguing that: “By 1936 the Museum felt that the project had accomplished the purpose for which it had been designed . . . .”\textsuperscript{81} The Museum may well have accomplished a great deal in that seven-year period, but it is also possible that Colton’s interests shifted or that she determined the institution’s resources would be better utilized in other pursuits. Although the Museum no longer organized an annual exhibition for Arizona artists, at various times over the next several decades, groups of artists did exhibit there, such as the Northern Arizona Artists in August 1950.

\textbf{Junior Art Show}

Colton encouraged art among all ethnic groups and ages, and was particularly devoted to introducing young children to art. A concern for the lack of art education on reservations in the region, and a desire to promote local art, led Colton to establish the Junior Art Show in 1931. An annual exhibition including works of art by children in grades four through eight from public and reservation schools in northern Arizona, the Junior Art Show fostered art in these schools; prizes were awarded for the best work. In

\textsuperscript{80} In 1925 the now internationally popular magazine \textit{Arizona Highways} was founded as a publication for those who were interested in a how-to guide for motoring around the state. The maps from those early issues attest to the primitive nature of the roads in Arizona at the time.

\textsuperscript{81} Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “Art Department of the Museum of Northern Arizona,” 64.
a 1931 press release for the show, Colton observed: “Art education must begin with children. We must grow our own artists. The material is here awaiting encouragement and cultivation.”\textsuperscript{82} During the Great Depression, school budgets were slashed, especially for art classes, considered a non-necessity. The Junior Art Show was her way of combating the problem. (See Figure 12) In spite of Colton’s passionate appeal to retain art education in the Flagstaff schools, art was cut from the budget in 1935.

A 1936 announcement for the exhibition that was circulated to schools across northern Arizona stated its purpose: “To stimulate and encourage both the young artists and the art directors and teachers of northern Arizona.”\textsuperscript{83} In the 1930s, the Junior Art Show was open to grades three through eight; the third grade was later eliminated from the exhibition. The reason for that was not recorded in Colton’s notes; perhaps the older students’ advanced ability gave them an unfair advantage in winning the prizes. The Junior Art Show was always the first exhibition of the season at the Museum, usually opening in late April and running into mid-May. Up to two-dozen schools participated prior to World War II, and the artwork was grouped according to school. The 1936 announcement listed examples of the work submitted in the past:

\begin{quote}
. . . Cut-outs, creative compositions, original design for textiles or wallpapers, work from nature, copy work, sculpture (small), block print, batik, tie and dye, stencil and stick printing, woodwork, woodcarving, art leather work, metal work, art embroidery, effigies, toys, bead work, rugs, jewelry, basketry, and bookbinding.\textsuperscript{84}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{82} Mangum & Mangum, \textit{One Woman’s West: The Life of Colton Ferrell Colton}, 85.
\textsuperscript{83} Museum of Northern Arizona Archives, separates file 7144.
\textsuperscript{84} Museum of Northern Arizona Archives, separates file 7144.
\end{footnotes}
Figure 12 Native American children waiting outside the Museum to see the Junior Art Show, 1934, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-21A.1934.3.
Reflecting back on the creation of the exhibition, Colton remembered that the Junior Art Show was designed:

... To encourage art in the schools of northern Arizona. A competitive exhibition was organized and prizes were offered for grades from four to eight. This exhibition was open to all schools in the northern half of the state, and included our Indian schools. It was designed to stimulate the young artists and assist their teachers in the Arts and Crafts.85

Federally run schools that were located on the New Mexico portion of the Navajo Reservation were also eligible for the exhibition.86 As the years passed, a greater percentage of the awards were given to Native American students. Colton attributed this partly “to their cultural heritage.”87 The exhibition was held annually every summer until 1942 at which point it was discontinued until the end of World War II.

Following the War, near the end of Colton’s tenure at the Museum, the exhibition was revived, in 1947. Colton met with teachers from the public school system in Flagstaff to determine their level of interest in participating in the exhibition. She found that during the exhibition’s hiatus, “... the educational policies of the public schools had changed considerably, and competition was now to be discouraged; cooperation had become the theme.”88 The Flagstaff public school teachers had become disinterested in the Junior Art Show but the teachers at the Indian schools remained committed to participating. Colton reworked the rules for the exhibition; henceforth only Native


86 The vast Navajo Reservation spans northeastern Arizona, northwestern New Mexico, and a small portion of southeastern Utah. When the Junior Art Show was started many Navajo children were still part of the Federal Indian boarding school system. Apparently she reasoned that those Navajo children who were at boarding schools in New Mexico should be eligible as many of them came from northern Arizona, the more populated portion of the reservation.


88 Ibid.
American students were eligible to participate. (See Figure 13) The Flagstaff city schools and the Coconino county schools ceased participating in the exhibition. The name of the exhibition was changed to the Junior Indian Art Show.\textsuperscript{89} Virgil Hubert, Assistant Curator of Art at the Museum during the late 1930s and 1940s, observed of the Junior Art Show:

> It gives them [the students] a chance to compete, both within the school and between the schools, and to see how their own work stacks up against the work done by other schools. There are some eighty money prizes offered, besides many honorable mention ribbons awarded.\textsuperscript{90}

Children from Navajo, Hopi, Havasupai, and Apache reservation schools contributed their artwork. (See Figure 14) In 1949, then Curator of Art Alexander O. Brodie developed a traveling exhibition called the Junior Indian Art Traveling Showbox. Brodie selected paintings and other artworks from the Junior Indian Art exhibition each year for inclusion in the Showbox. Developed for schools and children’s museums, the Showbox traveled to reservation schools, colleges, and other museums across northern Arizona during the 1950s. (See Figure 15) The Showbox was also circulated to institutions such as the Phoenix Indian School, the San Francisco Museum of Art, the Fine Arts Gallery of San Diego, the Memphis Academy of Arts, Long Beach Academy of Art, Fresno State College, the Dallas Museum of Fine Art and the University of Houston.\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{89} The exhibition was also called the Junior Art Show for Indian Schools.

\textsuperscript{90} Museum of Northern Arizona Archives, separates file 9953. This quote came from lecture notes titled “Talk: Place of Art in Educational Programs, esp. Muse. No. Ariz. ca. 1947.”

Figure 13 Distant view of paintings displayed on the Museum's patio, Junior Indian Art Show, 1951, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-21A.1951.5.
Figure 14 Shungopovi school children at the Junior Indian Art Show, 1951, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-21A.1951.21, photograph by Alexander O. Brodie.
Figure 15 Willie Coin with the traveling Junior Indian Art Showbox (2nd panel), 1949-1950, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, photograph by Alexander O. Brodie.
The Junior Indian Art Show did much to promote art training in reservation schools, an endeavor Colton found very important, likely because of her interest in fostering native arts. The exhibition continued until 1976. In 1977, a retrospective exhibition of children’s art from the permanent collection was shown. The Northern Arizona Art Invitational replaced the Junior Indian Art Show, and then in 1978, the name was changed to the Student Art Exhibition of Northern Arizona. This exhibition included works of student art from Flagstaff schools as well as reservation schools, and local art teachers played an active role in the show. It was “designed to carry on the Museum’s tradition of fostering and encouraging children’s art.” Held yearly until the early 1980s, the exhibition was discontinued when the Coconino Center for the Arts began a similar annual exhibition. During the many decades that the exhibition was held at the Museum, tens of thousands of children, both Anglo and Native American, were introduced to and participated in the creation of art.

Treasure Chests

The Showbox was based in part on an earlier outreach program developed by Colton in the 1930s, the Treasure Chests. In *Art for the Schools of the Southwest*, Colton discussed the traveling trunk program she created for local and reservation schools. These Treasure Chests, as Colton named the trunks, were not unique within the museum profession, but they were certainly the only outreach programs of its kind for schools in northern Arizona. Colton mentioned that the idea was adapted from a similar successful

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93 Hermann Bleibtreu, Report From the Director, 1977, 8.
program at a museum in California. Additionally, the Treasure Chest program bore a strong resemblance to the Bragg Boxes developed by Laura Bragg at The Charleston Museum in Charleston, South Carolina.  

The first treasure chest was developed in 1934 to circulate to local schools; the chest stayed at each school for one or two weeks. This large wooden pirate chest held examples of arts and crafts and demonstrations of techniques. (See Figure 16) Three large scrapbooks with instructions for creating works of art similar to the ones contained inside chest accompanied it. Serving as a supplement to the school art education program, the treasure chest was so successful that another one was created in 1935 and circulated to reservation schools. (See Figure 17) The treasure chest brought art into the lives of countless Navajo and Hopi children; in many instances this was the only contact many of them had with art of any kind, including the artwork of neighboring tribes.  

This program was the earliest of its kind in the state of Arizona. The treasure chest for the reservation schools contained a statement from Colton that read:

The ‘Indian Treasure Chest” is dedicated with sincere friendship to the Indian children of northern Arizona.

It is intended to stimulate and assist the rising generation of young Indians to maintain a high standard for their own native arts. In order to attain this ideal it is necessary to provide the teacher in the Indian school with authentic information and background material. The Museum sincerely hopes that this chest will perform this dual service and begs teachers and  

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94 Allen, A Bluestocking in Charleston: The Life and Career of Laura Bragg.  

Figure 16 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton’s Treasure Chest with contents, 1934, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-20.2.
Figure 17 Treasure Chest exhibit, 1935, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-21A.1935.1.
pupils to protect it thoughtfully so that it may long continue upon its travels giving pleasure and encouragement to those in need.  

The treasure chests provided students in remote locations, or those who were otherwise unable to visit the Museum, with an opportunity to study art collections. Colton declared: “It is necessary, both for the art teacher and the student, to have some standard for comparison.” The examples of various art forms and demonstrations of techniques in the chests provided a benchmark for the children to use when creating their own artwork. Luella M. King, Demonstration Teacher on the Southern Navajo Agency at Fort Defiance wrote Colton on October 3, 1934: “I had hoped to see you at Flagstaff early this fall. I am interested in seeing the chest of samples of art work that you were planning to have.”

At the time Art for the Schools of the Southwest was written, the treasure chests had not yet begun circulating; Colton hoped that they would “serve to stimulate art training in northern Arizona.” The chests circulated for decades until the program eventually diminished in popularity. However, the actual chests survived and were discovered in the Museum’s education department in the early 2000s and have been catalogued into the permanent collection.

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96 Signage associated with E11033A and E11032, treasure chests in the ethnology collection of the Museum of Northern Arizona.

97 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Art for the Schools of the Southwest, 6.


99 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Art for the Schools of the Southwest, 6.

Arizona Photographers

The first annual photographic exhibition created by Colton began in 1939; it was titled *Arizona Photographers*. Photography was a medium previously unexplored by the Museum, and this exhibition: “. . . Was designed to show the work of several active groups of Arizona’s photographic artists, as well as that of individuals both professional and amateur.” Regional photographers Milton Snow and Robert Fronske were featured in the first year’s exhibition. In subsequent years photographers such as Barry Goldwater (prior to his becoming Senator), Joseph Muench, Forman Hanna, and Norman Garrett, participated; all became noted twentieth century Arizona photographers. Designed to bring together disparate groups of photographers throughout Arizona, this exhibition introduced the photographers to one another’s work and provided residents of remote northern Arizona with an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the work of all of these photographers. The *Arizona Photographers* exhibition was the Museum’s first attempt at encouraging local art since the *Arizona Artists Art and Crafts* exhibition was discontinued in 1935. Short-lived, the exhibition was notable as the first in Arizona to showcase photography as an art.

Outside Art Influences

While encouraging local art, Colton also sought to end Flagstaff’s cultural isolation by bringing in outside art exhibits and by establishing an art collection at the Museum. An artist herself, Colton was determined to bring the fine arts to Flagstaff via traveling exhibitions, which she did, beginning in the spring of 1929. Through Colton’s

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efforts, the Museum was successful in “. . . making life better worth living by bringing some of the fine things of life to the people of the towns and region and even to the people of remote rural communities.”

In 1929, the Museum became affiliated with the American Federation of Arts, an organization based out of New York City that sent traveling exhibitions across the nation. Working toward one of her goals – to introduce residents of northern Arizona to the fine arts – Colton pursued every opportunity to bring outside art influences to Flagstaff. Beginning in 1929, she procured exhibitions from the AFA; even during the middle of World War II, the Museum held traveling exhibitions from the AFA, testimony to Colton’s desire to introduce the residents of Flagstaff to art.

Colton considered art a personal necessity and urged people to take advantage of opportunities to improve their taste and educate themselves about the difference between good and bad art. A believer in lifelong learning, she observed: “Our museums are not to be considered an end in themselves but merely a school in which it is endeavored to set a standard by which we may be assisted to carry into our homes an ‘every day art’ which we can all enjoy.” During the 1940s, Colton brought in exhibitions from nationally


104 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Art As A Personal & Economic Necessity. MS207-306-11, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. The introduction to American Indian Art, The Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, Inc. sums up the treatment of Native American arts in the previous decades: “It is only recently that white teachers of Indian children have stopped trying to educate them away from their own art. For decades we tried, and in some cases unfortunately succeeded, in instructing Indians to forget their own culture and to force themselves into ours. We tried to mechanize their crafts and induce them to use factory mass production instead of their own individual tools and technique. . . . To the extent that white teachers succeeded in persuading the Indians to abandon their own methods, their art deteriorated. . . . The Indian Bureau of the Federal Government is now encouraging the Indians to continue to create and to develop their own arts. The old, ignorant attitude of condemning anything Indian as
renowned museums such as the Denver Art Museum, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Museum of New Mexico.

While the Museum’s exhibition program was quite diverse, Colton did place some emphasis on art of the American West, defined by its subject matter rather than its style or the artists’ place of residence. Paintings and photography of the West featured prominently in the exhibition schedule, and many of the works displayed became part of the Museum’s fine arts collection. Colton chose some then relatively unknown painters who later became highly acclaimed artists. Among these were Louis Akin, George Elbert Burr, and Maynard Dixon, to name a few.

Outgoing Exhibitions

The flow of art went two ways; in the early years of its existence, the Museum circulated exhibitions to museums nationwide, including a display of Native American rugs sent to the International Tapestry Exhibition at the Toledo Art Museum in 1930, a selection from the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition sent to the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts in New York and Philadelphia in 1931 and 1932, and rotary exhibitions of Hopi arts and crafts that circulated to venues such as the Indian Arts Fair in Santa Fe, the Arizona State Fair in Phoenix, the Prescott Woman’s Club, the Syracuse Art Museum, and the

‘uncivilized,’ is giving way to sympathetic understanding, and even instruction in the schools by older tribal artists. At the same time, scientists and artists are painfully aware of the danger of losing what remains of the esthetic heritage of the Indians. They realize that if the arts are to survive, they can do so only as any other arts do, through the support of discriminating buyers anxious to possess the creations for their own sakes.” Reprinted in Oliver LaFarge, “An Experimental School for Indians,” in Progressive Education: A Review of the Newer Tendencies in Education (Washington, DC: The Progressive Education Association 9 no. 2, February 1932), 93.
From 1930-1933, Colton organized a small exhibition in cooperation with Navajo trader Lorenzo Hubbell called *Craftsmen of the Painted Desert*, which was circulated nationwide through the AFA.  

Art Program

As her career came to a close and her health declined, Colton thought about the future of the art department at the Museum. A file in her papers labeled “Art Department” contains several documents relating to the history of the department and its future. Some are dated; others are not. Alexander Brodie, then Curator of Art at the Museum, wrote some of the reports; the authorship of other documents is unclear. One document, simply titled “Art Program,” contains handwritten revisions in Colton’s handwriting. Whether the original document was drafted by Mrs. Colton, Dr. Colton, or Brodie, Mary-Russell’s influence is evident and it is worth reviewing in full to understand her hopes for the continuation of her work:

The proposed policies of the art department will be as follows:

1. To stimulate the best in Indian arts and crafts.
2. To stimulate the creative art abilities among the population of northern Arizona.
3. To encourage the artistic presentation of scientific subjects.
4. In general the art department will endeavor to make the greatest use of the Southwestern environment as is seen in northern Arizona, but will not

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106 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “Art Department of the Museum of Northern Arizona,” 68.
duplicate any work that can be accomplished just as well in some other locality.

To carry out the policies it is proposed to add to the staff an Art Director whose duties will be to organize art exhibitions in the Museum during the four summer months and direct a group of advanced students from recognized art schools who wish contact with Indian arts and crafts, and experience in museum techniques, and who will serve as assistants to the Art Director.

(1) It is proposed that the students will aid in the planning and preparing of exhibits.

(2) They will help in construction of permanent and traveling exhibits planned by Director.

(3) They will have the opportunity to learn many new techniques.

(4) The seminar and scientific sessions will be open to members of the Art Department.

(5) The Museum library is strong on work dealing with arts and crafts, as they apply to the Southwest.

The following art courses have been suggested:

(1) Course for young Indians of Arizona who plan to teach. This will include the history of tribal art (the Museum has the material). How to teach it to their own young people.

(2) An art course for Arizona art teachers, instructing them how to use correctly material [sic]. This ties in with our Junior Art.

(3) A short course on methods and techniques to use in a small museum for National Park custodians.107

The goals stated in this document are consistent with those established by Colton when she created the art department at the Museum in 1928, with the exception of trying to bring outside art influences to the peoples of the Plateau.

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107 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “Art Program.” MS207-2-196 File, Department of Art, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
The work of the art department was to continue focusing on stimulating local artists with a special emphasis on the native peoples of northern Arizona. The suggestion of encouraging the artistic presentation of scientific subjects was in keeping with the Northern Arizona Society of Science and Art’s mission of encouraging science and art. And, the concentration on the Southwest environment, specifically in northern Arizona, maintained the Museum’s geographic niche – the Colorado Plateau, while recognizing the work of other institutions (probably in Santa Fe and Taos) and being cognizant of not duplicating efforts. Thus, even as her active participation in the Museum came to an end, Colton maintained her longstanding interests.

The idea of using high performing students from art schools to work with the Museum to develop the summer exhibitions was new, but is again consistent with Colton’s interest in collaborations. Correspondence between Colton and Dorothy Dunn, founder of The Studio at the Santa Fe Indian School (discussed at greater length in chapter six) reveals that the two women were well aware of the similarities in their work and ideals. Many years after Dunn left the School the women corresponded again. A letter dated December 1, 1950 from Colton to Dunn (then using her husband’s name - Mrs. Max Kramer) observed: “I remember you as Dorothy Dunn in Santa Fe, and I am not quite sure but I think that you taught art at the Santa Fe Indian School. If I am right, you did a wonderful job, and your influence is still felt.” Dunn had written to Colton to ask for information about the mission of the Museum, the Junior Indian Art Show, the Hopi and Navajo Craftsman Exhibitions, the Hopi Silversmithing Project, and the Museum’s collection of Native American art.

108 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, to Mrs. Max Kramer, Las Cruces, NM, December 1, 1950. Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, 93 DDK.104.
During her tenure at the Santa Fe Indian School Dunn was definitely aware of Colton’s work at the Museum of Northern Arizona. Her papers include a brief typewritten document titled The Museum of Northern Arizona and American Indian Art.

In this document, Dunn remarked:

The Museum of Northern Arizona, strategically located in living Indian country, is a naturally regional museum, a Southwest Museum. . . . To Indian arts of other regions, Museum of Northern Arizona could, although not necessarily, pay its respects through occasional select shows, yet it would need no acquisitions from them other than perhaps a few items for comparative studies. . . .

Of course, the monumental natural history museums – the Field, American, Brooklyn, Smithsonian, et al – always will need the particularization of the regional centers for the most exact interpretation and selective specimens within a given area. . . .

As for Museum of Northern Arizona’s neighboring institutions, the principal museums of Arizona’s capital city, although Southwestern in certain specialties should be in no conflict with MNA. . . .

The Heard Museum also heads into an expanding role as an urban institution related to varied civic groups and enterprises. Education seems natural as one of its major concerns. Inter-tribal Indian art interests, somewhat comparable to that of Philbrook Art Center, pertains especially here where large exhibitions and one man shows could be nationally important and attended in the winter season. In these respects, Museum of Northern Arizona and the Heard Museum could be mutually helpful.

Art Committee

Upon retiring as Curator of Art and Ethnology in 1948, Colton was appointed Chair of a newly formed Art Committee at the Museum. This appointment seems to have served two purposes: 1) to provide a sense of continuity in the art department as new staff took over and 2) to allow Colton to retain a certain amount of control over the activities

of the department. A handwritten draft of the duties of the art committee included the following:

(1) The Art Committee was appointed by the Board of Trustees to advise the Director of the museum in matters relating to exhibitions of arts and crafts.

(2) The Committee should formulate policies to guide the Director in planning special exhibitions and aid him in carrying out the plans.

(3) Members of the Committee should act as judge in competitive exhibitions or approve the qualifications of judges according to material to be judged selected by the administration, should they not care to act.\textsuperscript{110}

Originally, the word “director” read “curator;” in each instance “curator” was edited out and replaced with “director.” Generally, boards of trustees and their appointed committees have policy oversight responsibilities for an organization, and they work with the director of the organization who oversees implementation of those policies. Thus, it makes sense for the Art Committee to advise the director of the Museum about policy, not the curator.\textsuperscript{111} The stipulation that the Art Committee members serve as judges or approve the judges for the competitive art exhibitions at the Museum is somewhat unusual as it crosses the line into day-to-day operations of the Museum, typically a responsibility of the staff. All of this indicates that Colton evidently had a difficult time letting go of the department that she created and nurtured for twenty years.

\textsuperscript{110} Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “Function of Art Committee.” MS207-2-188 File, MNA Art Committee, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

\textsuperscript{111} At the time the Art Committee was formed Dr. Colton was still the director of the Museum. He retired in 1959; he simultaneously served on the Board of Trustees. Dr. Colton and Mrs. Colton were both on the Board and worked as staff at the same time throughout their tenure at the Museum from its founding in 1928, until 1948 in her case, and 1959 in his case. Today for a staff member of a museum to also serve as a member of the board of trustees would be seen as a breach of the Code of Ethics for Museums, American Association of Museums, 1994.
Colton was Curator of Art and Ethnology from the Museum’s founding in 1928 until sometime in the 1940s.\textsuperscript{112} When Colton retired as Curator she assumed the position of Chair of the Art Committee, which she held until 1958.\textsuperscript{113}

Reflections on a Career

Reflecting back upon the first twenty-five years of the Museum’s history, Colton divided the development of the art department into three phases: the first from 1928-1936, the second from 1936-1939, and the third from 1939-1953. In each phase she focused on different goals; as one goal was completed to a certain degree she moved on to another, never completely losing sight of any of her goals. For the majority of that time period, Colton directed the art department of the Museum, and was responsible for setting and achieving its goals.

During the early days of the Museum from the time it was founded until it moved into its permanent building in 1936, the art department was:

. . . Concerned basically with two problems. At the end of the ‘Pioneer Period’ our community was culturally isolated and far from contacts with both east and west. Though situated in a country of exceptional beauty with undeveloped opportunities for research in the arts and sciences, very little work had been done.\textsuperscript{114}

\textsuperscript{112} Various sources list Colton’s retirement at 1942, 1946, and 1948. I have chosen 1948 as a majority of the sources list that date.

\textsuperscript{113} There is some confusion about how long Colton officially held the position of Chair of the Art Committee as well. MS207-2-188 File, MNA Art Committee, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives, lists the date at 1958. Other sources in the Colton collection list the date as 1953.

\textsuperscript{114} Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “Art Department of the Museum of Northern Arizona,” 62.
Founded in 1876, Flagstaff was still in its first half century; aside from the railroad connection the town had few links to any of the cities on either coast that had established art communities.

Utilizing a variety of different means, Colton brought outside art influences to Flagstaff while simultaneously stimulating local art interests. She did so via a series of exhibitions, classes, and lectures. Some exhibitions were held annually, including the Hopi Craftsman, Navajo Craftsman, Arizona Artists Arts and Crafts, Junior Art Show, and Arizona Photographers. Other exhibitions were one-time events; their subject matter was broad, ranging from paintings to prehistoric pottery created by artists spanning the globe. Colton recalled that:

In 1928, with these basic objectives to guide us, a program was designed to bring to Flagstaff, a series of exhibitions throughout the year, both for children and adults. These were chosen from the best contemporary art collections in the United States. These exhibitions alternated with local and state exhibitions of all types of art work . . .

The focus of this first period from 1928-1936, according to Colton, was on Flagstaff residents rather than the native peoples of the region.

During the second phase of the development of the Museum’s art department, from 1936-1949, Colton concentrated more on the native peoples of the Plateau, phasing out some of the annual exhibitions, adding new ones, and expanding others to include

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115 Her third goal was to revitalize Native American arts and crafts in northern Arizona, a subject that is covered in depth in chapter six.


117 Colton overlooked the founding of the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition in 1930, which served as a model for future exhibitions as part of the Museum’s work to revitalize Native American arts in northern Arizona. The period from 1928-1936 marked the years before the Museum moved into its own building on Fort Valley Road; this is perhaps another reason for defining it as the first phase in the development of the art department.
Native American children. She began a study of Hopi dyes that was subsequently published and is still widely used today. Under Colton’s guidance, the Museum also conducted a study that resulted in the Hopi Silverwork Project, discussed at greater length later in chapter six.

By the end of the 1940s, Flagstaff was moving out of its “pioneer period” as Colton called it; the work of the art department at the Museum moved to a new phase in its history as well. She observed that:

> A changing world has touched the desert people and cultural isolation is a thing of the past. The necessity of maintaining the native crafts is now of first importance. The old ways are disappearing and the ways of our youth are passing into history. Therefore, at the beginning of this period a new policy was adopted. The Art Department of the Museum of Northern Arizona hereafter directed its efforts entirely to exhibitions of native Indian Arts. Old types of weaving and embroidery were encouraged, while at the same time, modern forms of self expression using new methods and materials were accepted.

During the twenty-five years between the Museum’s founding and the time that Colton wrote this statement, the reservations of northern Arizona became much more accessible to the outside world, creating new opportunities, but also new challenges, for native artisans. Colton was likely reacting to that development when she focused the art department’s efforts solely on Native American arts. It is also telling that Colton wrote as if she still directed the activities of the art department five years after her retirement.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Museum’s founding marks the end of a chapter in the Museum’s history. After that time Colton’s health began to decline to the

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118. Once again, Colton’s choice of 1949 as a new phase in the history of the art department is not random. While she never explicitly stated this, Colton no doubt saw her retirement from the position of Curator of Art and Ethnology in 1948 as a significant watershed moment in the Museum’s history.

point that she was able to do little more than assist with judging the annual Navajo and Hopi Craftsman exhibitions, the focus of the next chapter. Her direct influence over the activities of the art department had waned significantly. In 1959, Dr. Colton retired as director of the Museum. Although Dr. Colton lived until 1970 and Mrs. Colton until 1971, their level of involvement with the Museum changed significantly. While their physical presence grew slight, their spirits and vision remained strong. The evolution of the Museum, specifically the art department, is examined in greater depth in chapter eight, revealing some of the present day manifestations of Colton’s work.
CHAPTER 6

NATIVE AMERICAN ARTS

Native American Arts Advocate

Although very concerned about teaching children and adults about art in general, Colton especially lamented the decline of Native American arts, particularly among the Navajo and Hopi. She blamed the degeneration of Native American arts on a “lack of intelligent appreciation of the Indian as an artist and consequent cheap commercialization of his products”\(^1\) on the part of Anglos. More of a curiosity than a folk art, Native American arts were often overlooked. The revitalization of native arts on the Colorado Plateau, through education, became one of Colton’s goals even before the Museum was founded.

The Office of Indian Affairs, Field Service, circulated Colton’s paper referenced in chapter five, *On the Teaching and Maintenance of Indian Arts and Crafts*, to the teachers at the Hopi day schools; administrators discussed the papers with the teachers.

E. H. Hammond, District Superintendent at Leupp School & Agency remarked:

I found the paper very interesting and helpful and the teachers have expressed their interest and appreciation of the suggestions . . . You may not know that we have been endeavoring to develop instruction in Indian art and crafts along parallel lines but as usual, have been

\(^1\) Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Plan For Establishing Small Museums In Indian Villages And Reservation Centers, MS207-306-1, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
handicapped by the usual lack of funds and employees necessary to carry out such a program.\textsuperscript{2}

In a letter to Colton dated March 1, 1933, Hammond continued:

I shall follow this instruction in the Hopi Day Schools as often as I can and I will encourage the development of instruction along the lines suggested wherever and as often as I can. I wish to express my appreciation for the interest you have shown and the help you have given me in this excellent paper of yours.\textsuperscript{3}

Colton’s interest in the Hopi and Navajo began with her honeymoon visit to northern Arizona in 1912, and it never faded. A few years after the founding of the Museum, Colton remembered:

We believed that our first duty lay with our native population, the Indians of the Painted Desert, our next door neighbors. We were rather well fitted for this work, having traveled about among the people for years on painting and archaeological trips, and for years having watched with deep regret a gradual degeneration of their unique arts and crafts. In our eagerness to ferret out the secrets of the past, we have failed to preserve the good things of the present.\textsuperscript{4}

Here, Mary-Russell exposed the tensions between archaeology and ethnography, art and science, and she and Dr. Colton’s many competing interests. But, as she grew older, Colton devoted more and more of her time and interest to Native American arts.


\textsuperscript{3} Ibid. Hammond was not the only administrator or teacher on the Hopi Reservation to express gratitude for a copy of Colton’s paper. Martha Birkeland, a Demonstration Teacher at Fort Defiance on the Navajo Reservation wrote to Colton expressing her appreciation for the paper and requesting copies of it.

\textsuperscript{4} Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “My Work For Art Alliance.” MS207-306-1 File, Miscellaneous Articles on Hopi Indian Arts, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
Believing in the myth of the vanishing race, Colton conducted her work with a sense of urgency. A tireless advocate of the arts, Colton was particularly passionate about Native American arts. In 1929, she observed: “Lacking the stimulus of artistic appreciation, Indian art is fast becoming the victim of commercialism and mass production. The Indian’s art is an integral part of his existence; it is a natural expression of his joy in the beautiful things around him.” Although she often wrote in sweeping generalizations such as this, Colton’s interest in Native American art came from a genuine place of caring. She felt a special affinity for the Hopi in particular, as observed by her family and associates.

Colton cited several reasons for the decline of Native American arts, among them, the off-reservation boarding school system and the assimilation policy practiced by the Bureau of Indian Affairs from the 1870s until the early 1930s. The boarding school system prevented students from receiving instruction in their native arts, which were often the only means of earning a living on the reservation. Colton wrote at some length about the specific problems she saw in Native American art at the time. She was almost certainly referring to the Hopi. Colton observed that:

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5 The vanishing race was a concept prevalent between the 1890s and 1930s, promulgated by historians, artists, and photographers such as Edward S. Curtis and many others. See chapter three, footnote nineteen, for more information.

6 Ibid.

7 Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns; Richard Wilson, interview by W. James Burns; Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns; Bill Breed, interview by W. James Burns.

8 Anthropologist Susan Brown McGreevy provides a concise and insightful explanation about the changes taking place with many Native American art forms during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: “By the mid nineteenth century, Euro-American influences from east of the Rocky Mountains had found their way to the Southwest via the Santa Fe Trail. Although a few travelers on the trail settled in the region, the most immediate impact was found in the trade of manufactured goods. Up until this time, Native American-made objects had been necessities of everyday life. Pottery, basketry, and textiles were
No one has a more thorough appreciation of fine workmanship than the Indian. He is aware that the old methods are slipping away, dying out with the old people. But it has not been made worthwhile for him to slave over the fine pieces so that he has grown careless, and art readily degenerates; it needs jacking up. If it does not receive the proper stimulus it will die. The pottery has grown thicker. The characteristic forms are disappearing in favor of pretty little candlesticks, flower baskets, etc. The beauty of design remains, but the product is only half Indian.

Basketry is quickly and carelessly turned out. The texture is irregular and rough, the finer type of design becoming rare. Cotton textiles are suffering from the introduction of string to replace the beautiful handspun creamy cotton thread. The resulting cloth is thick, loosely woven and of a poor color. While writing this, a Hopi weaver has set up his loom in the writer’s studio and is spinning and weaving there, he will also serve as a model.

Commercialism is cutting its own throat and the Indians too, for when it has succeeded in ‘speeding up’ the native arts at the sacrifice of quality, what will it have for its trouble? A wretched article, lacking the distinction of a hand-made article; something which could be turned out far better by any machine. It is said that the tourist does not care, he will buy anything. The question is, how long will he continue to do this? Is this a sound business attitude? Can you continue to present an increasingly poor article to the public and keep your pocketbook full? Business experience has not shown this to be a sound and enduring principle. This applies equally to the producer and the middleman. From the cultural viewpoint, the loss of our native arts would impoverish our country. The Indian has a great contribution to make toward our mutual civilization of the future in his rich folk-lore and his unique arts. The Museum, whose function it is to deal with the science and art of northern Arizona, is undertaking to do all it can to stimulate and preserve the best in Indian art.  

utilitarian by definition, although the high degree of artistic attention lavished on these prosaic objects frequently transcended their functional context. As pots, pans, and other fabricated items became more readily available, there was a gradual decline in the production of handmade household objects. The coming of the railroad in the 1880s brought a flood – which soon became a deluge – of travelers from the East. These visitors were eager to bring home souvenirs of their experiences in the Southwest. This demand soon created a new phenomenon: a tourist/collector’s market for Native American craft arts. From this point on, with encouragement from entrepreneurial agents, Native American artisans began to produce objects for this marketplace.” McGreevy, “Daughters of Affluence: Wealth, Collecting, and Southwestern Institutions,” 77.

Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “My Work For Art Alliance.” MS207-306-1 File, Miscellaneous Articles on Hopi Indian Arts, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
Colton expounded upon an age-old problem in the art marketplace in general, not just specific to Native American arts – why would someone with an undiscerning eye buy a more expensive handmade work of art versus a mass-produced piece for far less money? And, if an artisan was unable to sell his or her work made using traditional methods for more money, then what incentive was there to continue producing such work? Colton argued that this was among the reasons for the decline in Native American arts; further she advocated for a stimulus to promote traditional art forms.

A purist at heart, Colton championed traditional designs, methods, and forms. The disdain dripped from her pen as she wrote about the pretty little candlesticks and flower baskets that the Hopi had begun to create in response to the tourist market. The quality of such pieces was poor argued Colton; indeed she called them wretched. Colton ventured that even the tourists (who she held in low esteem) would eventually tire of the lack of distinctiveness of such pieces and stop purchasing them. She predicted dire consequences should the Native American art market in northern Arizona collapse, impoverishing the area both economically and culturally. Colton once remarked:

We have welcomed the Art and the folk lore of many nations and they have enriched our culture, but the unique and purely American Art of our own Native Americans has been ignored and unappreciated. Now that we have nearly lost this cultural jewel, the ‘powers that be’ have awakened to its possibilities as a means of livelihood to the nation’s long-suffering wards. And it is our belief that the present administration is doing and will do everything in its power to dignify and stimulate the art of our Native American craftsman. It is believed that schools and workshops will be established upon the reservations, where native teachers will work under the direction of trained ethnologists. In the meantime, wider markets must be opened for the Native Craftsman and his work must be protected by the government from cheap imitations.10

10 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, untitled document. MS207-306-1 File, Miscellaneous Articles on Hopi Indian Arts, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. This document is undated, but based upon Colton’s other writings I estimate this to be ca. 1933. “Present administration” refers to the administration of the Indian Bureau rather than the President of the United States at the time. During
While championing Native American arts, Colton clearly viewed native peoples as wards of the government, failing to acknowledge centuries of history that brought them to such a state of being.

Native American Art as Inspiration for Modern Art

While no fan of the modern art movement, Colton did appreciate what she considered to be its origins: Native American art. In the traditional designs of Native American art, Colton identified elements of modern art. She observed that:

Indian Art especially that of the Pueblo dwellers and the Navajo, are particularly well adapted to the taste of today. They are masters of design and its adaptation to simple and dignified form. They are lovers of color, it is interwoven with their lives, the colors of their desert world glow in their blankets, their pottery, their baskets, their turquoise and their rich embroideries. . . .

For a great people, we have been ungenerous in our dealings with ‘The First American,’ we have ground him ruthlessly into the dust and he has died quietly. But in his passing he has left a black smudge on the American conscience that we have yet to remove. Let us commence the good work by doing what we can to make the Indian self-supporting and therefore, self-respecting. His work should become popular with the modern decorator and architect, it is well suited to Pueblo Indian, Spanish, and Spanish colonial type of house now so much in vogue. And also the extreme modern, which has come to us from abroad.

Our Indian Art has already been introduced abroad, and last year at the International Exhibition at Seville, Spain, it created a great sensation. Those interested in advancing Indian Art, feel that Europe, as well as this country, should become better acquainted with the Indian Craftsman and his unique contribution to our civilization.11

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11 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, untitled document. MS207-306-11, File, Indian Arts Articles, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
Colton understood that the artwork of many Native Americans tribes was inspired by the colors and forms found in their respective environments. As discussed in the next chapter, Colton’s own artwork was inspired by her surroundings on the Colorado Plateau. She lobbied for support of the Native American art market by arguing that such art forms had been largely ignored and become nearly extinct.\footnote{Ibid. While there is little doubt that the quality of many Native American art forms had declined by the 1930s, there is no evidence to prove that the market would have died without intervention on the part of Anglos such as Colton and her counterparts throughout the Southwest and beyond. However, their intervention certainly influenced the future direction of the Native American art market.} In Colton’s mind, art provided possible salvation for Native Americans, the “nation’s wards.” Her use of this phrase again underscores the complexity of Colton’s personality; while she championed the work of Native American artisans she could not quite overcome the belief that they, as subjugated peoples, were somehow less than the conquering Anglo society.

Decline of Traditional Native American Art

Concern over the decline in traditional art forms, designs and manufacturing methods of arts and crafts of Southwestern Indian tribes, corresponding with the introduction of modern methods, arose decades before Colton began her work. One of the first people to take note of the problem was Charles Lummis, director of the Southwest Society (later the Southwest Museum) in Los Angeles. In 1907, he found that traditional Hopi and Navajo arts and crafts were in danger of extinction, noting in particular a decline in Navajo blankets and Hopi basketry. A number of reasons accounted for the decline, cheaper processes, new materials, and increasing demand from the tourist trade.
Lummis observed that the younger women who were educated in government schools generally produced new modern art forms, rapidly replacing traditional methods, designs, colors and materials. Further, boarding-school-educated girls looked down on the traditional art of weaving, possibly because the low demand for those pieces would not bring a high enough price to justify the work.\textsuperscript{13} Don Lorenzo Hubbell, a trader who operated a string of trading posts on the Navajo Reservation, also noticed a decline in the quality of rugs, resulting from the use of new materials such as cotton and commercial dyes, and sought to revive the traditional forms of Navajo weaving.\textsuperscript{14}

The demand for tourist trade goods was not limited to Arizona; it also increased in New Mexico as the Santa Fe Railroad brought hordes of visitors to the region after the turn of the century. Additionally, the ‘Indian Detours’ program organized by the Fred Harvey Company in 1926 took travelers to remote sites such as the Rio Grande Pueblos, where the railroad did not traverse. Members of the Santa Fe and Taos art colonies became distressed by the effect that tourism had on the native arts of the area. Dr. Edgar Hewett, Director of the School of American Research and the Museum of New Mexico, Kenneth Chapman, Curator at the School of American Research, and local artists and writers like Mary Austin, John Sloan, Dorothy Dunn, Mary Wheelwright, Amelia Elizabeth White, and Frank Applegate labored to preserve traditional Native American art forms.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} Charles F. Lummis, \textit{The Southwest Museum: Three Years of Success} (Southwest Society of the Archaeological Institute of America Bulletin 3, May 1907), 50-51.

\textsuperscript{14} National Register of Historic Places registration form for Hubbell Trading Post National Historic Site. Located in files of the State Historic Preservation Office in Phoenix, Arizona.

\textsuperscript{15} Beatrice Chauvenet, \textit{Hewett and Friends: A Biography of Santa Fe’s Vibrant Era}, with a foreword by William White Howells (Santa Fe, Museum of New Mexico Press, 1983), 187-190; Arrell
Hewett began the Santa Fe Indian Market in 1922 at the annual Santa Fe Fiesta in an effort to develop a marketplace for high quality Native American arts and crafts. Michael Kirk established the Gallup Intertribal Indian Ceremonial in Gallup, New Mexico, about the same time. These events were much like the Hopi Craftsman Show at the Museum of Northern Arizona, founded just a few years later; indeed they served as models for the Coltons when they were developing the show.

Further endeavors to preserve native arts included education for Native American artisans. The Indian Arts Association was established by Austin and Chapman in 1922: “To encourage the native artists to shun the growing tourist pressure for curios and to produce only the best, consonant with traditions of ancient Indian art.” The Laboratory of Anthropology, founded in 1927 with support from John D. Rockefeller, offered courses in Indian art geared towards teachers in Southwestern schools.

The efforts of artists, writers, and anthropologists in Santa Fe and Taos to generate a renaissance in Native American arts paralleled those of Colton in Flagstaff. Mary Austin, much like Colton, believed that traditional native arts could be saved through education, and she urged the government to teach art at Indian schools. Colton advocated the same type of program for reservation schools in northern Arizona in Art for the Schools of the Southwest: An Outline for Public and Indian Schools. Austin also


17 Gibson, The Santa Fe and Taos Colonies, 160.

18 The Laboratory of Anthropology, largely a research and collecting institution, merged with the Museum of New Mexico in 1947. In 1987 a facility was opened to display the collections, the Museum of Indian Arts and Culture, located on Museum Hill in Santa Fe.
advocated for creating a market for Native American art, for an annual fair with prizes, for traveling exhibitions to be circulated to schools across the nation, and education for the American public about Native American art. In these efforts she was criticized by some as being paternalistic, not unlike criticisms launched against Colton.  

Amelia Elizabeth White, one of Austin’s contemporaries in Santa Fe, was a patron of Native American arts for most of her adult life. A Manhattan socialite, White owned a gallery in New York from 1922 to 1937 where she featured Native American art. She created and subsidized the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts, Inc., an exhibition that traveled around the nation from 1931 to 1933. White invited the Museum of Northern Arizona to participate in the Exposition; the Coltons happily agreed, contributing Hopi artwork. In its conception, the Exposition attempted to set a precedent by displaying the work as art, not ethnographic objects. The work of every Native American tribe extant at that time was included in the exhibition. The purpose of the Exposition was:

. . . 1) to win the aesthetic appraisal of Indian art so long due, and 2) through awakened public appreciation and an enlarged outlet, to encourage the Indians to continue to create and develop their art. . . . [as well as] to educate the American public about Native American arts, which would thereby increase the outside market enabling the artists to improve their economic condition.

White was also one of the founders of the Eastern Association on Indian Affairs in 1922, an organization that supported traditional Native American arts. The Coltons

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were members as well; again this highlights that the Coltons were both aware of, and active nationally in the causes they championed, such as Native American and art education. White advocated for Native American rights, championing the Pueblo tribes of northern New Mexico in particular. She fought against the federal government’s policy of forced assimilation.

White and Colton possessed many similarities; White was also well educated, receiving an A.B. from Bryn Mawr and attended Columbia for one year. Further, she shared some of the same opinions as Colton about Native American art, particularly with regard to quality standards and the use of traditional styles. Both women collected traditional Native American arts to see that they were preserved and to contribute materially to the lives of the artisans – and both collections ended up in museums. With respect to collecting, “Miss White had one aesthetic standard for her gallery and her personal collection. She purchased examples of technical excellence that were typical and characteristic examples of the culture’s traditional styles.”

Colton shared the same collecting philosophy.

Amelia Elizabeth White and her sister Martha R. White funded educational efforts for Native Americans as well, among them what has come to be known as the design project, conducted by the New Mexico Association for Indian Arts (NMAIA), Arts and Crafts Committee. The project’s fieldworkers “. . . brought photos and drawings of older designs in jewelry, textiles, and pottery to artists, Indian traders, and Indian schools in an effort to revitalize the great traditions that seemed threatened by tourist demand for cheap

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22 Ibid., 82.
souvenirs.” Colton’s Hopi Silver Project, conducted a few years later, was highly reminiscent of the NMAIA design project.

Colton and White carried on a correspondence throughout the early 1930s about common interests primarily related to Native American education and arts. On July 26, 1930 Colton wrote to White about a proposed bill in Congress related to Indian art. This letter was in response to a copy of the bill that White had sent to Colton. She commented:

The proposed bill embodies many of my ideas. . . . I heartily agree with your recommendation for an organization within the Indian bureau to deal with Indian applied arts. . . . the whole scheme, as outlined by you, embodies my ideas so closely that it is unnecessary for me to go over the various phases in detail.25

The proposed bill also contained a plan for an Indian school of applied arts. Colton supported the concept but was troubled by “the practical side” of the school, which would have housed students from multiple southwestern Indian tribes. Colton argued that Native American art was highly specialized according to tribe and that it would not be economical to teach students from so many different tribes at one school. Further, Colton remarked: “I have always felt it a great mistake to remove the peoples so far from their natural environments . . . .”28 And, she predicted that teachers at the

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23 Stark, Rayne & Baldinger, _El Delirio: The Santa Fe World of Elizabeth White_, 81-82.

24 Several letters between White and Colton are contained in a file at the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe: AC18:35, Catherine McElvain Library – Archival Collections.

25 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ, to Amelia Elizabeth White, Santa Fe, NM, July 26, 1930. AC18:35, Catherine McElvain Library – Archival Collections, School for Advanced Research, Santa Fe.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid.
proposed school would have a challenging time because “Indian craftsmen, like their white brothers and sisters, are temperamental and difficult to handle . . . .” Instead of one school, she proposed establishing several smaller schools centrally located on each reservation, each one containing a “. . . collection of Indian arts representative of the work of that particular people for study purposes.” This idea, slightly modified, appeared later in Colton’s publication *Art for the Schools of the Southwest.*

White used her fortune and social standing to assist three cultural institutions in Santa Fe, the Laboratory of Anthropology, the School of American Research, and the Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art (now the Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian). The White sisters donated the land for the Laboratory of Anthropology; later some of that parcel of land was used to build the Museum of International Folk Art and the Wheelwright Museum. Anthropologist Susan Brown McGreevy observed that: “The ‘Museum Hill’ complex on the Camino Lejo (in Santa Fe) owes its existence to the generosity of the White sisters.” While Martha pursued other interests, Amelia was:

. . . committed to the development of Santa Fe’s cultural and intellectual community. She was an active supporter of the Indian Arts Fund and an energetic member of the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs. She also served on the Board of the Spanish Colonial Arts Society.

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29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
32 Ibid.
Amelia White left her home, El Delirio in trust for the School of American Research, which now houses the Indian Arts Fund Research Center, “. . . one of the most important holdings of southwestern Native American art in the United States.”

Other advocates in northern New Mexico also contributed to the effort to revive Native American arts. Mary Cabot Wheelwright founded the Navajo Museum of Ceremonial Art in 1937. Like Colton, White, and others of their socioeconomic status, “Wheelwright was enculturated within an environment in which philanthropy and social service were the mandates of noblesse oblige.” She was an active participant in the Spanish Colonial Arts Society and the New Mexico Association on Indian Affairs like White. Particularly interested in Navajo culture, Wheelwright advocated for the revival of traditional Navajo art forms. Wheelwright: “. . . and her niece, Lucy Cabot, worked with the Du Pont Company on the East Coast to develop a set of aniline dyes that would match the colors of native vegetable dyes [used in textiles] and educated the traders about their use.” This project paralleled Colton’s work with Hopi dyes and her efforts to obtain aniline dyes for the Hopi weavers. And, like Colton, Wheelwright worked to develop a market for Native American arts, especially in the East.

In 1925, the Indian Arts Fund (IAF) was founded by a group of concerned artists and writers in Santa Fe, including Mary Austin, Kenneth Chapman, Andrew Dasburg, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Amelia Elizabeth White, John Sloan, Olive Rush, and Martha White to collect and preserve prehistoric and contemporary Native American arts,

33 Ibid., 91.
34 Ibid., 83.
35 Stark, Rayne & Baldinger, El Delirio: The Santa Fe World of Elizabeth White, 82.
particularly those of the Pueblo tribes of northern New Mexico. The IAF grew from the Pueblo Pottery Fund, established in 1922. The purpose of the IAF was:

. . . to obtain the best examples of historic and contemporary Pueblo pottery before it could be siphoned out of the area by tourists, traders and souvenir seekers. Once preserved, their objective was to make the pottery available for study by contemporary Pueblo peoples who would be inspired to revive the artistic heritage of their ancestors. Pottery was the original focus, but jewelry, watercolors, textiles, and other media were also collected.36

In 1928, the IAF became affiliated with the Laboratory of Anthropology in Santa Fe. In 1973, the Fund became part of the School of American Research, now called the School for Advanced Research.37

The purpose of the IAF was reflected in the Coltons’ reason for founding the Museum of Northern Arizona – to preserve local artifacts in the region rather than having them hauled off to museums in the East. Mary-Russell Colton was especially concerned about Pueblo pottery (the Hopi being a Pueblo tribe). And, her plans to foster and preserve Hopi pottery through the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition and the local village museums she proposed are also similar to the IAF. The similarities between the purposes of the arts advocates in Santa Fe and Taos and those of Colton are striking.


37 For more information about the Indian Arts Fund see also: MSS773 SC – Wheelwright, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; MSS231 BC Box 5 – Peggy Pond Church, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; T. M. Pearce, Alice Corbin Henderson, 54-55; Augusta Fink, I-Mary: A Biography of Mary Austin; W. Houghland (ed), Mary Austin, A Memorial: 59-61. MSS611 BC Augusta Fink Papers, Center for Southwest Research, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque; Mary Hunter Austin, Earth Horizon: An Autobiography (New York: The Literary Guild, 1932).
Dorothy Dunn and the Studio at the Santa Fe Indian School

Dorothy Dunn founded The Studio at the Santa Fe Indian School in 1932, and guided it for the next five years. The first such program of its kind at an Indian school in the Southwest, ‘The Studio’ was founded to:

. . . foster appreciation of Indian painting among students and the public, to produce new paintings in keeping with high standards already attained by Indian painters, to study and explore traditional Indian art methods and to encourage new motifs, styles and techniques in character with the old and to maintain tribal and individual distinction in the paintings.

Dunn, trained at the Art Institute of Chicago, acted as an artist/researcher and mentor rather than as a teacher to the students. Selections of the students’ work traveled to art museums, libraries, colleges and public schools across the country. Many of Dunn’s students went on to become very accomplished artists.

Colton and Dunn shared many of the same strategies, colleagues, and experiences. As discussed in chapters four and five, Colton corresponded extensively with advocates for art education and Native American education, as did Dunn. They both were acquainted with Rene d’Harnoncourt, director of the Indian Bureau’s Arts and Crafts Board, and later director the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They each wrote for The School Arts Magazine and corresponded with Pedro J. Lemos, editor of the

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38 The Santa Fe Indian School was founded in 1890, modeled after the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. For more about the Institute for American Indian Arts (successor to the Santa Fe Indian School) see: Winona Garmhausen, History of Indian Arts Education in Santa Fe: The Institute of American Indian Arts with Historical Background, 1890 to 1962 (Santa Fe, NM: Sunstone Press, 1988) and Joy L. Gritton, “The Institute of American Indian Arts: A Convergence of Modernism and U.S. Indian Policy” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1995).

publication. And, they both were invited to serve as judges for the Gallup Intertribal Indian Ceremonial. These similarities are more than coincidence; they demonstrate the intricate nationwide web of connections between advocates of Native American education and art.

Like Colton, Dunn set lofty goals when she assumed her post at the Santa Fe Indian School. In a document titled *A Statement of the Aims of Art Education in the Santa Fe Indian School* she explained:

The Santa Fe Indian School, through its art classes, is attempting to recover and develop American only indigenous art. Much of it has been irretrievably lost, of course, but Indian art students are delving in forgotten places, searching through ethnological papers, studying museum collections, inquiring of their elders, making observations for themselves from what remains of the old cultures, and reconstructing their racial heritage as a basis for building new things which will contribute to American cultural programs. They find that, although their subject matter is different, the outcomes of their efforts do not differ greatly from other modern art developments.\(^40\)

In the few years she spent at the Santa Fe Indian School Dunn accomplished a lot. Widely recognized for her work, Dunn:

\(\ldots\) helped coalesce local and national movements to formulate a painting genre and foster an international market for American Indian painting. \(\ldots\) Dorothy Dunn’s dynamic arts program seized upon these trends and irrevocably turned Indian arts education in a direction that valued the cultural heritage of Native Americans. \(\ldots\) Her stated objectives were subtly transformational for their time: to foster appreciation of Indian painting among students and the public, thus helping to establish its rightful place as one of the fine arts of the world; to produce new paintings in keeping with high standards already established by Indian painters; to study and explore traditional Indian art methods and production in order to continue established basic painting forms, and to evolve new motifs, styles, and techniques in character with the old and worthy of

\(^{40}\) Dorothy Dunn, “Notes on the Paintings Done by the Studio,” undated. Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, 93 DDK.023.
supplementing them; and to maintain tribal and individual distinction in the paintings.41

Colton was working at the same time to organize the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition and to develop the Hopi Silver Project (discussed later in this chapter); like Dunn, she accomplished much in the field of Native American arts education. Both women focused their efforts in a similar manner, on high standards, traditional forms, methods, and designs, and encouraged new work consonant with the best of the historic pieces. Further, Dunn and Colton concluded that by stimulating the market for high quality traditional Native American arts, they could undermine the traders who influenced artisans to create inexpensive works for tourists.

Dunn, like Colton, fostered an appreciation of Indian art among students and the general public. Further, she encouraged students to produce paintings that met with previously established quality standards. But, she was not without her detractors. Eldridge found that Dunn:

. . . viewed southwestern Native peoples as ‘untouched’ for anthropological purposes, more ‘authentic’ and exotic than other Indian groups, and she maintained throughout her writings a romantic view of the splendor of the past. Dunn’s art education objectives institutionalized and codified several of the then current ideas concerning Indian art, and she placed herself in the role of savior, sustainer, and authenticator of Indian art. She saw herself as a preserver, supporter, and expert of Indian art who served as a ‘guide’ to youthful Indian artists. Dunn’s rejection of modernity as an unsuitable subject for her students resulted in a retouching of her students’ expression of their memories and experiences, much as Edward Curtis retouched his photographs to eliminate contemporary items and thus change reality to suit his vision of ‘Indianness.’42

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41 Bruce Bernstein, “Art for the Sake of Life” in Bruce Bernstein and W. Jackson Rushing, Modern By Tradition: American Indian Painting in the Studio Style (Santa Fe, NM: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1995), 3.

Both Dr. and Mrs. Colton placed themselves in some of the same roles as Dunn, by preserving and supporting Hopi and Navajo arts and acting as experts to guide native artisans.

Dunn’s papers contain a file about the Museum of Northern Arizona, which includes a document titled *The Museum of Northern Arizona and American Indian Art*; this document is undated and unsigned. It could have been written by Dunn or Colton, although compared against Colton’s writings it appears dissimilar. Dunn had connections to the Museum; she was a close friend of Dr. Colton’s successor, Dr. Edward ‘Ned’ Danson, and an exhibition of her Native American art collection was held there. The aforementioned document references Dr. Colton as director in a past tense, indicating it was probably written post-1959, which makes it very unlikely to have been written by Mary-Russell Colton. Regardless who authored the document, it contains a synopsis of the Museum’s role in the Native American art world:

> In this artistic and scholarly role already firmly established, and recognized, Museum of Northern Arizona, of all institutions, could be in its esthetic manifestations the most exquisitely specialized in the Southwestern Indian arts. Its collections and experts not only now are widely contributive, but will be increasingly determinant in the concern for American native arts now rising in the whole complex of American museums.⁴³

Dunn and other educators, writers, and artists in Santa Fe and Taos encouraged traditional methods, designs, and materials among Native American artists. They created markets for Native arts, arranged exhibitions, and awarded prizes. Colton was working to achieve the same goals at the same time in northern Arizona with the Hopi Craftsman Show.

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⁴³ *The Museum of Northern Arizona and American Indian Art*, undated. Laboratory of Anthropology Archives, Dorothy Dunn Kramer Papers, 93 DDK.033.
Hopi Craftsman Show

Revitalizing Native American arts was one of Colton’s passions, and she worked tirelessly towards this goal for several decades. She conceived the idea for an annual event at the Museum called the Hopi Craftsman Show, in 1928, and discussed it with Dr. Colton, who had a longstanding interest in Hopi arts and crafts. The Coltons considered the Hopi Craftsman to be a scientific experiment, with research, art appreciation, and educational components. In his unpublished autobiography, Dr. Colton remarked that: “A subject dear to the heart of Mary-Russell was an attempt to revive the decaying arts and crafts of the Hopi.” Mary-Russell Colton hoped that public display of Hopi art in a museum would elevate the status of said work, and the culture associated with it, in the eyes of the general populace.

In 1929, the Coltons scheduled the first Hopi exhibition for the following summer. Mary-Russell Colton remembered:

The Museum experts spent much time in preliminary work in the pueblos advising with the individual workers. A representative of each of the three major arts – a weaver, a basket maker, and a potter – were at work in the gallery during the exhibition. Every encouragement was given to improve workmanship and only the finest pieces were accepted and shipped to Flagstaff. A series of substantial prizes were awarded. Each year we hope to see the exhibition grow in quality until the Museum has established a reputation for itself and its craftsmen.

To establish confidence among the Indians takes time. This means weeks spent in the villages and the collecting of articles from house to house. The results are satisfying up to date. The Indians are gaining confidence

44 Westheimer, Our Most Cherished Ideals: The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition As A Manifestation of American Culture, xxi. Further, Westheimer concluded that: “Research by museum personnel could be integrated into the exhibit, adding to the educational aspect of the project. To work from within a scholarly institution emphasizing science and art gave the project a push toward the successful creation of an educated market for Indian art,” 64.

in us. We have been able to open up new markets for them, and we find with pleasure that they are eager to turn out high quality products when their work finds appreciation.  

Early in her work with the Hopi, Colton understood the importance of building lasting relationships with the artisans and the need to be mindful of the marketplace. The purpose of the Hopi Craftsman Show was to preserve and stimulate the art forms of the Hopi. The first exhibition “received the hearty approval of Commissioners Rhoads and Scattergood” of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Hopi Country

To fully understand the work that the Coltons undertook with the Hopi in 1929 requires a grasp of the geography of the region and some of the obstacles that they faced. An undated document from the Colton papers apparently written by Dr. Colton in preparation for the display that the Museum sent to the Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts in New York, vividly described the region.

In the Hopi Indian country, there are three great mesas, sticking up like islands from the rest of the country. On the mesas lie nine Hopi villages. The rest of the country spreads away for a hundred miles in tones of purple and gold. The sky line is fringed with buttes, flat topped mesas,

46 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “My Work For Art Alliance.” MS207-306-1 File, Miscellaneous Articles on Hopi Indian Arts, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

47 The Exposition’s purpose was “(1) to win the aesthetic appraisal of Indian art so long due, and (2) through awakened public appreciation to encourage the Indians to continue to create and develop their art.” Press release, Second Annual Hopi Craftsman Exhibition, 1931. MS207-306-1 File, Miscellaneous articles on Hopi Indian Arts, untitled document, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. Members of the organizing committee for the Exposition included many people from the Southwest, particularly Santa Fe, whom Colton regularly corresponded with: Mary Austin, Witter Bynner, Kenneth Chapman, Alice Corbin, Mrs. Charles Dietrich, F. W. Hodge, Jesse Nusbaum, Mr. & Mrs. John Sloan, Mary Cabot Wheelwright, Amelia Elizabeth White, and Martha R. White.

48 This document is not signed. It was in a file of Mary-Russell Colton’s writings but having examined hundreds of documents written by she and Dr. Colton I am convinced based on the writing style that this document was written by Dr. Colton.
and the pointed peaks of the San Francisco mountains, home of the Kachinas, benevolent spirits and keepers of the rain. It is a country to inspire an artist and the Hopis are artists.

In that desert soil, a truly indigenous American art took root and blossomed hundreds of years ago. Aloof on their high Mesas, the Hopi craftsmen have continued until this day to make beautiful textiles, exquisite pottery, and coiled baskets and plaques such as are found nowhere else in the world but in North Africa! In order to encourage them to maintain their ancient arts, the Museum of Northern Arizona decided to hold an exhibition, a sort of forerunner in Hopiland of the great Exposition of Indian Tribal Arts which will embrace the work of all American Indians.49

To the uninitiated, Hopi country must surely have seemed exotic and otherworldly; indeed it is remarkable that the Coltons, who both experienced a well-to-do Eastern upbringing (albeit on different levels) found such an affinity for it. Although Dr. Colton likely wrote this particular description, the Coltons both shared a love for the vistas, colors, cultures, and arts of the Colorado Plateau.

Planting the Seed

The Coltons later remembered their trip to Hopi in March 1930, for the specific purpose of generating interest in an exhibition of traditional Hopi arts. They:

... set out to sell the idea to the Aboriginal Mind. An idea planted on Hopi soil must be given ample time to germinate, so we planned only to scatter seed on our first visit to the Villages. We packed food and equipment for a week into our motor car, and started across the hundred and fifty miles of the Painted Desert. The late afternoon discovered the party before the door of the Hopi Indian Agency at Keams Canyon. After an official call on the Superintendent, we pulled up at the Shungopovi School House just as night was falling. Dim oil lamps glowed from the principal’s residence and above loomed the mesa, mysterious, dark. The principal offered the hospitality of the school kitchen which was furnished with a stove big enough to supply a hotel. Here among the mingled odors

49 Harold Sellers Colton, “Putting On An Exhibition of Indian Art,” MS207-306-1, File, Miscellaneous article on Hopi Indian Arts, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
of food and disinfectants, we settled for the night. At eight a.m. the school cook arrived, a pretty girl fresh from boarding school, and with the aid of half a dozen small girls as kitchen police, began to prepare the midday meal. Soon the school bell pealed and down the steep trail off the mesa top, from the old pueblo of Shungopovi, troops of youngsters poured, filling all the swings, climbing all the ladders and shooting the shoots on the slide. Another peal of the bell and they vanished like magic into the school house.

We climbed the rough trail to the village, where Edmund, the interpreter, explained the reason for our coming to groups gathered in the doorways of the stone houses or sitting on the banquettes about the plaza. The Chief of Moencopi Pueblo happened in and, as he was our good friend, he harangued the citizens for almost an hour on the advantages to the people of an exhibition of art.  

The Coltons had spent enough time with the Hopi that they understood the nuances of the culture and knew how to present their idea for the exhibition. Dr. Colton’s vivid description of the traveling conditions and their accommodations at Keams Canyon and Shungopovi provides readers with a sense of the commitment they were making to undertake such a project.

During their stay on the Hopi Mesas, the Coltons and the museum staff traveled from village to village spreading the word about the exhibition. (See Figure 18) Along the way, they viewed several dances and experienced wonderful hospitality. Dr. Colton observed:

Sandstorms, cold, floods, heat, are not the worst of an expedition seeking Hopi Art. The most trying ordeal is the hospitality of the women. Nearly every housekeeper spreads a table, or rather, sets the floor for her guests. She spreads on the clay floor a bright colored yard of oil cloth, on it she places a bowl of homemade Hopi hominy and mutton stew. A tray of piki break – those blue crisp sheets that look like tissue paper and taste like unseasoned corn flakes – completes the repast. Fingers were made before forks, so all delve into the mutton stew, hunting for tidbits. After such a ceremonial feast, and after Edmund had told his story, the guests depart,

\[50\] Ibid.
Figure 18 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton and Uyi Kewanwytewa, June expedition, Hopi Craftsman Show, 1933, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-100.1933.6.
and on to the next house, where there is more mutton stew with the possible addition of delightful tidbits of crisp kerkey.\textsuperscript{51}

The conditions that the Coltons experienced on their many trips to Hopi country, apparently with good humor, speak to the complexity of their personalities.\textsuperscript{52} After spending several days on the Hopi Mesas that March, the Coltons returned to Flagstaff and hoped that the seeds they planted would germinate.

In June 1930, the Coltons embarked on a trip to Hopi country again to collect the artworks that had been promised months earlier. (See Figure 19) Since June is the height of the warm dry season in Arizona, the trip was a bit easier. The Coltons were rewarded for their efforts; Dr. Colton remembered that:

The Chief of Shipaulovi would not let his town be un-represented, so he made a house to house canvass himself and was rewarded in the end by seeing his townsmen receive many prizes for their excellent craftsmanship. Seven barrels of pottery were packed at the First Mesa, barrels of baskets at the Second and Third, boxes of textiles at all three mesas. Two truck loads of material groaned across the desert to the hall of the Museum at Flagstaff.

At last came the exhibition in the Museum. The goods were sorted into classes, judged, prizes awarded, and then re-classified by villages. Each pueblo, therefore, had its own exhibit.\textsuperscript{53}

The first Hopi Craftsman Exhibition opened July 2, 1930 and lasted through July 9; approximate attendance was 1,000, including the Assistant Commissioner of Indian

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{52} Dr. Colton has been called a brahmin; Mary-Russell was often considered aloof by some Flagstaff citizens. While they were wealthy, well educated, and intellectual, the Coltons were able to transcend their upbringing. Some of their writings indicate patriarchal tendencies. But, at the same time they engaged in activities in which many of their peers from the East would never have dreamed. Their trips to the Hopi country were nothing like the Harvey Car tours organized by the Fred Harvey Company for wealthy Eastern tourists beginning in 1926.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
Figure 19 Collecting trip with Ferrell Colton, Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Edmund Nequatewa, Jimmy Kewanwytewa, Hopi Craftsman Show, 1930, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-100.1930.2.
Affairs from Washington DC.\textsuperscript{54} (See Figure 20) Dr. Colton recalled that: “The dry season broke with a gentle rain, which was interpreted to mean that the benevolent Katchinas that dwell in the towering peaks above the town were pleased. The exhibition was, therefore, a huge success.”\textsuperscript{55}

Following the exhibition all unsold artworks had to be returned to the artisans and the money had to be delivered for the works that sold and the prizes that were awarded. That trip generally coincided with the summer monsoon season. On the 1930 trip, Dr. Colton remembered that:

The dry washes became rivers; the roads morasses. The expedition returning the goods was able to reach but three of the twelve pueblos because of high water and impassible roads. So a second expedition was necessary. This fell between rainy spells. But it was hard work, and the washed out roads required sometimes hours of digging before the car could safely pass. The washes, true Arizona inverted rivers (the sandy bed above the water) were filled with quicksand and treacherous. Half a day was spent at one sandy wash digging a road of such a grade that a car could pull it. For even the best cars are not built to negotiate forty-five degree grades with soft sand for traction. Yet the delight of the people on receiving their prize money and money for goods sold, repaid the arduous labor. The delight was childish but genuine.

The base of Shungopovi hill was reached at dusk. The shale was like grease, so the party camped at the foot of the high mesa by the ruins of the seventeenth century Franciscan Mission. A truck full of young Hopis drew up at the same place. Its human cargo poured out and clambered up the dark trail to the pueblo. At dawn they were back and unloaded some freight and were off to Oraibi to discharge the rest. Soon an old man and two burros arrived. He packed cases of lemons, sacks of potatoes, boxes of eggs and crackers, as well as a dozen watermelons, on the patient beasts


\textsuperscript{55} Harold Sellers Colton, “Putting On An Exhibition of Indian Art,” MS207-306-1, File, Miscellaneous article on Hopi Indian Arts, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
Figure 20 Shungopovi exhibit, Hopi Craftsman Show, 1930, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-100.1930.12.
and wended his way to the mesa top. Word had reached the village that the Museum party had arrived. Among those that trooped down from the mesa was a stout, elderly lady. When she received her prize money and her sales money, a long indrawn breath expressed her deep satisfaction and wonder. Then she said ‘We are very grateful that you have done this thing for us. It has come at the right time; there was no flour in the house, and now there will be plenty.’

We could scarcely get away for everyone wished to shake hands. It was like a presidential reception. As we drove away we could almost hear the voice of Edmund as he sold the idea of the exhibition to Hopiland . . .

Dr. Colton’s description of the experience of delivering the prize and sales money to the Hopi reveals much about the results of the work that he and Mary-Russell and the museum staff undertook with the Hopi. Seldom do museum professionals have the opportunity to experience firsthand tangible results of their work, as museums are largely engaged in qualitative education that is difficult to quantify. The effects are often long-term and emerge slowly over time. In this case, the Coltons were able to see how their work at the Museum resulted in material improvements (both artistically and economically) in the lives of the Hopis with whom they worked.

Growing the Exhibition

The July 1931 issue of Museum Notes contained two articles that pertained to the Hopi, Technique of the Major Hopi Crafts, and Art Activities of the Museum of Northern Arizona. The latter article contained a passage that illustrated Colton’s multicultural views:

The Museum of Northern Arizona believes that the Indian has an important contribution to make toward our civilization – his art, unique and beautiful, purely American – is a direct link with the prehistoric past. He is a creator of design and a master of abstract form. We have

56 Ibid.
welcomed the art and the folklore of all nations and they have enriched our culture, but the art of our own native America has remained unappreciated.

Through neglect we have allowed his craftsmanship to degenerate until his art is almost lost to us. But it is not too late to help, to offer the encouragement that will revive his pride of workmanship.

With the approval of C. J. Rhoads, Commissioner of Indian Affairs, the Museum has commenced its work with the Hopi, an isolated pueblo group, with few opportunities and a wider range of arts than any other Indian group in the United States. 57

In the same article, Colton published her goals for the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition. Those goals included:

(1) to encourage the manufacture of objects of artistic and commercial value which have fallen into disuse and are becoming rare

(2) to stimulate better workmanship

(3) to encourage the development of new forms of art of purely Indian design

(4) to create a wider market for Hopi good of the finest type 58

Colton used the Museum and her socioeconomic position and influence as vehicles to accomplish these goals. To do so she built relationships – between the Museum and the artisans, potential customers and the artisans, and experts in the field of Native American art. Colton theorized that the creation of a market for artwork judged to be superior would generate a revival of that work and assist the Hopi in overcoming poverty and adjusting to cultural change. Westheimer explained that:

The exhibition was designed to publicly present the best of Hopi art and at the same time, create an opportunity to teach the public to recognize and


then demand the high-quality work. The sale of these articles would insure the continuing production of the better Hopi arts and provide the Hopi people with needed income.  

The Hopi Craftsman Show was both judged and juried, and the works were for sale; the artists set their own prices. Colton served as a judge every year from 1930 until 1960 when her health prevented her from participating any more. (See Figures 21 and 22) Only works that were judged to be superior were accepted into the exhibition. Those works were then juried and prizes were awarded. Every piece of artwork was tagged; information included the name of the artist, medium, manufacturing technique, some background about its use by the Hopi, the price, an identification number for inventory control purposes, and the Museum’s name and logo. This information educated the public that attended the exhibition and promoted individual artists’ reputation. It also served as a stamp of quality and authenticity upon which buyers could rely.

A great deal of planning went into every show; five trips were made to the Hopi Reservation between spring and fall, four before the show and one after. Twelve

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60 The Museum charged no commission on the sales; the artists received the entire amount.

61 Westheimer observed that: “It was not until 1936 that the judging standards were published. . . . Standards were based upon design of the form, quality of manufacture, and decoration. The backbone of many of the standards were grounded in traditional Hopi material culture – returning to the past as the ideal . . . “ Westheimer, Our Most Cherished Ideals: The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition As A Manifestation of American Culture, 113

62 Ibid., 14, 27.

63 The first trip was made in the fall to promote the exhibition, the second in May to collect artwork, followed by another in June to pick up the final objects, a fourth trip in early July to bring the artisans to the Museum for the exhibition, and the fifth to return them to the mesas afterwards.
Figure 21 Barton Wright, Clay Lockett, Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton judging, Hopi Craftsman Show, 1959, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-100A.1959.9, photography by Parker Hamilton.
Figure 22 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton judging, Hopi Craftsman Show, 1959, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-100A.1959.26, photograph by Parker Hamilton.
villages on three mesas (an elevated area of land with a flat top and sides that are usually steep cliffs) were visited to collect materials; in the 1920s, the trip from Flagstaff through the Painted Desert to the Hopi mesas was rigorous, covering over one hundred miles of rough roads. (See Figures 23 and 24) In the biography he wrote about Mary-Russell’s life, Dr. Colton detailed the collecting trips:

These visits to the Hopi required quite an outfit: a Buick touring car, later a sedan, a Ford station wagon and a 1-ton Ford truck. The personnel during the 1930s consisted of Mary-Russell, Dr. Colton, Edmund Nequatewa, Jim Kewanwytewa, and Katharine Bartlett. Edmund acted as interpreter and drove the station wagon, Jimmy was in charge of loading and driving the truck and Katharine kept the records. Mary-Russell judged whether the objects selected were of the highest grade and acted as cook for the party. She rose with the sun, cooked breakfast while the men packed up the bedrolls and other camp equipment and the party visited a village before the men left for the fields. At lunch they either picknicked [sic] in some scenic spot, bitten by midges, or ate in someone’s house. They worked all the hot afternoon, often in another village, catching the men coming in from the fields in the late afternoon. Outside of every town they had a camping place with a stone fireplace built to hold their two fire irons which Dr. Colton had made by a blacksmith years before at North Platte, Nebraska. With the cars beside them, they made camp and ate a hastily prepared dinner, retiring about 9 p.m. These were hard days but the results of Hopi Craftsman Exhibitions were worth it.64

Every fall, the Coltons made a trip to meet the artisans and determine if they were having any difficulties, to suggest solutions, and to encourage the use of traditional colors and designs.65 In a letter from Colton to LaFarge dated July 12, 1933 she explained that the Hopi artisans were:

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65 Colton, ”Racking My Brain: An Autobiography,” 251-252. After the exhibition was established this trip was also used to deliver prize money and unsold artwork.
Figure 23 Hopi collecting trip, left to right, Katharine Bartlett, Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, and two Hopi men sitting on MNA truck, 1933, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, N-28.2.
Figure 24 Left to right, Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Harold S. Colton, Helen, Edmund Nequatewa at museum house at Shipaulovi, Hopi mesas, 1937, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, N-8C.1937.2.
... aware that this exhibition is for the purpose of establishing their individual reputations as craftsmen and is, therefore not only a matter of sales. Also they are fully aware that we know enough to appreciate good quality when we see it. Therefore, one might say that the judging of material is practically done at the time of acceptance and before the people, and very little material that is not of prize caliber is accepted.66

Thus, the Hopi Craftsman had multiple purposes, among them establishing standards of excellence for the artwork, reviving traditional designs and techniques, creating a marketplace for the work, and recognizing the skill of the artists. Every September, the Coltons reinforced the standards by “spend[ing] a week or two visiting practically every working artist in the twelve villages individually and discussing with them the reasons for the awards which have been made during the exhibition.”67 Thus, Colton also incorporated educational opportunities into her work with the Hopi. Colton’s opinion with respect to the standards for Hopi arts was held in high regard.

Colleagues throughout the Southwest and beyond often contacted Colton for assistance. She regularly offered advice to staff in the Indian Bureau. On at least one occasion she was even contacted by a teacher from Canada about her work with the Hopi.

A letter from Anthony Walsh dated June 27, 1934 read:

I am teaching in the Indian Day School on an Okanagan reserve in Canada, and I have come down to study methods, so as to try to revive the almost lost arts of our Indians.

We have heard a good deal recently of the change of methods in educating the Indian children in the States, and we understand that instead of sending them to residential schools, you are having schools on the reserves and are teaching them their old crafts.

66 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ to Oliver LaFarge, National Association on Indian Affairs, New York, NY, July 12, 1933. MS207-306-32 File, National Association on Indian Affairs – LaFarge, etc., Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

67 Ibid.
We have been experimenting with some of the vegetable dyes. I would be very grateful if you could furnish me with any information on the matter and whether there is any literature or books on the subject that I could obtain.  

Colton’s response to Walsh is lost to history, but the letter illustrates the changes in federal policy toward Native American education, and the extent of Colton’s reputation. Her work could easily have remained isolated in then-remote northern Arizona; instead, Colton possessed a sense of the educational significance of her work and networked broadly to assist fellow educators.

Awards and prizes were given for the best work in several categories. Competition among potential exhibitors was strong, and the demonstrator’s positions were coveted. (See Figure 25) As professor and curator Linda B. Eaton has observed: “Cash awards and the increased likelihood that ribboned pieces would sell placed a considerable financial premium on a maker’s ability to please the judges.” This encouraged pride in craftsmanship, as Colton would not accept inferior pieces. The list of items exhibited in the show included textiles, beadwork, ceramics, jewelry, kachina dolls (representing spiritual beings embodying historical events and things in nature), and paintings. Artisans practiced pottery-making, basket-weaving, silversmithing, and piki bread making (dark grayish-blue, thin, dry rolled bread made of blue corn meal and culinary ash) in the galleries, demonstrating their materials and techniques.

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Figure 25 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton viewing the Hano-Sichomovi exhibit, Hopi Craftsman Show, 1937, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-100.1937.12.
Colton had several reasons for establishing the Hopi Craftsman Show, including protecting traditional Hopi culture, which she saw as rapidly disappearing, promoting fine craftsmanship, creating a market for high quality Hopi arts and crafts, and developing new art forms among the Hopi. In a letter to J. Henry Scattergood, Assistant Commissioner of Indian Affairs, dated May 16, 1932, Colton remembered that the Hopi Craftsman “was organized with the very idea of stimulating individual enterprise.”

The exhibition began as “part of a national movement to transform Indian ‘work’ into ‘art’.” Colton labored to revive traditional styles and dyes used in Hopi basket making and helped elevate it to an art form.

The preservation of Hopi basket making was achieved by several means. Colton conducted an ethnographic study of the Hopi during the collecting trips in an effort to understand the role arts and crafts played in Hopi life; she found they were important both economically and socially. She also found that the quality of Hopi textiles,

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74 Colton did not use scientific methods per se to conduct her studies or analyze the data. However, she and Dr. Colton did work in the field, thus the term armchair ethnographer is not an apt characterization. Yet, Colton had no training in research methods or cultural anthropology; her background was in fine art. The fields of anthropology and archaeology and the use of ethno-archaeological research methods were all relatively new at the time the Coltons began their research in the 1910s. Few (particularly women) had advanced academic training in anthropology; it was the province of wealthy individuals such as the Coltons who had the luxury of pursuing such interests. Even Dr. Colton, who published more than 50 works in the field of anthropology, did not hold a degree in that subject; his doctorate was in Zoology. Dr. Colton’s advanced degree allowed him access to the Academy, while Mrs. Colton, like many of her peers, worked outside the Academy. For many of these individuals their work was more of an avocation than a vocation. This distinguishes Colton from scholars such as Margaret Mead, who worked to professionalize
basketry, and pottery had all deteriorated, as a result of the growing tourist trade. New shapes, figures, and colors were introduced to meet the demands of collectors and tourists alike. Colton placed a premium price on vegetable dyed baskets versus those using commercial dyes.\textsuperscript{75}

As aforementioned, Hopi textiles and pottery had undergone a similar decline in quality; demand for cheaply made pottery was high, leading to careless manufacturing. Colton encouraged the Hopi to make the old style pottery with thin walls, no firing marks, and carefully painted designs. Similarly, she urged the Hopi to produce traditional textiles, both cotton and wool.

Hopi cotton textiles were becoming rare because the Hopi had stopped growing cotton. Further, Colton found:

That the traders do not carry cotton of a proper quality for the weavers’ use in the making of handspun cotton textiles. The traders should carry for trade with the Hopi Indians a good quality of long-staple cotton, so that the weavers may have no difficulty in obtaining this very necessary material. They have likely fallen into the very bad habit of using a poor quality of cotton string for their cotton textiles.\textsuperscript{76}

To address the problem, Colton approached the traders on the reservation and got them to agree to carry long-staple cotton if she could locate a source for them. She wrote to Mr. P. G. Spilsbury, President of the Arizona Industrial Congress, for assistance. Spilsbury wrote back to Colton suggesting that she contact Howard Peek, a cotton buyer with Peek

the fledgling field of anthropology, and Robert Park at the Chicago School of Sociology and Anthropology, who pioneered ethnographic research methods.

\textsuperscript{75} Colton, \textit{Art For The Schools Of The Southwest: An Outline For The Public And Indian Schools}, 24; Charles F. Lummis, 50.

\textsuperscript{76} Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ to G. C. Spilsbury, Arizona Industrial Congress, Phoenix, AZ, October 14, 1930. MS207-306-25 File, Hopi Cotton, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
& Fleming in Phoenix, about obtaining long-staple Pima cotton, which was grown locally at the time. Peek sold Colton the cotton for nineteen cents a pound and she had one hundred pounds of it delivered; twenty to the Museum, forty to Lorenzo Hubbell Jr., a trader at Oraibi, and forty to Tom Pavatea, a trader at Polacca.  

As aforementioned, Hopi wool blankets had also gone into decline, becoming knotty because a new breed of sheep that produced greasy wool had been introduced to the Hopi. Colton wrote to Charles Amsden of The Southwest Museum about the problem; Merino sheep had been introduced to the Navajo, the source of wool for the Hopi. The Merino wool tended to crimp and was excessively dirty. Colton had a solution for the problem:

In fact the whole sheep situation is an awful mess! There is only one real way to remedy it. This should have been done years ago and much trouble and expense would have been saved. The government and all individuals should stop pouring in miscellaneous blood into the Navajo flocks. The Indian Bureau should undertake a scientific controlled experiment, or series of experiments, conducted by breeding experts. This should be based on the actual requirements of the Indian and his geographic habitat.

I was invited to speak at two government conferences in our district last fall on wool and rug improvement. I urged them to stop pouring in Merino blood, or any other blood, until such time as proper investigation and experimentation could be made.

Amsden replied to Colton promptly:

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All of the suggestions will be given careful attention for your authority in this matter is beyond question. I agree with you fully that the government has a clear responsibility to replace its present hit or miss experiments with a policy of careful study. In fact I shall quote you to this effect unless you object.79

Colton urged the Hopi to use the old types of wool.80

As aforementioned, commercial dyes that produced garish colors were used instead of vegetable dyes that produced softer shades. In 1930, Colton wrote to J. Henry Scattergood in the Indian Bureau searching for a source for natural indigo. He responded that natural indigo could no longer be obtained but that there was some synthetic indigo available that was nearly identical chemically. Based on Scattergood’s suggestions, Colton wrote to several companies about obtaining samples of synthetic indigo.81 She obtained synthetic indigo from one of those companies suitable for the Hopi’s use and sold it to them at cost. Beginning in the early 1930s, Colton conducted studies about native Hopi dyes. She performed chemical analysis on the ethnologic material of the Hopi to determine the basis of the dyes, vegetable, mineral and clay. The studies that Colton made of dyes were later published under the title *Hopi Dyes.*82


80 Generally speaking, Colton urged the Hopi to eschew modern materials. Westheimer explained that: “Although the modern materials might be easier to obtain and maybe to use, they resulted in, in Mrs. Colton’s view, an inferior product. The items had lost their connection to Hopi culture and had become what she considered ‘hybrid,’ meaning they no longer solely reflected Hopi culture.” Westheimer, *Our Most Cherished Ideals: The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition As A Manifestation of American Culture:* 60.

81 These companies included Dupont, Bliss Fabyan & Co. Inc. of Boston, L. E. Ransom Co. of New York, McKesson-Eastern Drug Co. of Boston, and Welles & Richardson of Burlington, Vermont. See correspondence MS207-125-358 File, Letters Regarding Hopi Dyes, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

Colton understood the connection between the arts of the past and those of the present among many Native American tribes. In a press release for the 1931 Hopi Craftsman Show, she reasoned: “The Arts and Crafts of the Hopi People represent, today, a living link with the prehistoric past of Northern Arizona. They are still practicing the selfsame arts so eagerly sought by the archaeologist in the ruins of their ancestors.”

Education played a big role in the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition. Scholar Duffie Westheimer, who has written extensively about the exhibition, and who managed all of the Native American exhibitions at the Museum during the 1980s, has argued that: “The process of teaching us to recognize the art we call ‘Indian’ included much more than just learning about the artists and their work.” Colton modeled the Hopi Craftsman after the Santa Fe Indian Market and the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial, both started in 1922. Both of these public presentations of Native American art were, and are, as much of a spectacle as a marketplace. Artisans are on display before the public to demonstrate their work and answer questions. Those interactions, the exhibition itself, and the works awarded prizes, all provided educational opportunities for visitors. Westheimer concluded that: “A museum show implies that the visitor’s experience will be educational, and the focus on objects suggests they are the source of information.”

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84 Westheimer, “The Annual MNA Indian Art Exhibitions: Maintaining Traditions,” 34.

85 Ibid., 40.
combination of the objects and the interaction between visitors and artisans allowed for a more complete learning experience about another culture.\textsuperscript{86}

School Arts Magazine

Interested in sharing the lessons of her experiences with the Hopi, Colton wrote an article for \textit{School Arts Magazine} in 1938. She did so at the request of the magazine’s editor, Pedro J. Lemos; he determined that Colton’s work was especially well suited for a special issue of the magazine devoted to Southwestern Indian arts and crafts. Much like \textit{Art for the Schools of the Southwest}, the text is worth quoting at length because it espouses Colton’s beliefs and provides a vivid description of the Hopi Mesas:

From their dark and lofty pine clad plateau, the blue snowcapped San Francisco Peaks dominate all the vast valley of the Little Colorado and the tawny Painted Desert sweeping away toward the east and north.

From the eastern horizon 100 miles away, the bare rock fingers of the Hopi Mesas thrust out southwestward into the desert and the miniature terraced villages on their crests face the blue and gold of desert and mountain toward the setting sun. As you approach the golden cliffs of the Hopi mesas, rising above the rolling grasslands of the Little Colorado Valley, it is difficult to distinguish the tiny pueblos on their tops, for, like the nests of the mud-dauber wasp, they are built of the same stone and mud as the great sandstone mesas towering up 500 feet into the turquoise sky.

These little villages, overlooking their desert world, are really an ancient form of the modern apartment house. Each village contains a number of related clans, whose families live closely packed together in small box like

\textsuperscript{86} Westheimer summarized: “The Hopi Craftsman exhibition was created to be an opportunity for teaching people to appreciate and desire good Hopi art. Therefore, through the power of economics and the marketplace consumers would ensure its preservation and perpetuation. Hopi work was transformed into ‘Art’ through presentation as such, including organizing the materials into classes for the objective judging and awarding of prizes to the ‘best’ pieces. The work was then reorganized for public display in village groups, reflecting how Euro-American tourists could actually see the Hopis on the mesas where they lived. Educational information was attached to each piece, related research results were transformed into educational displays, and Hopi artists demonstrated the manufacturing of their arts on site.” Westheimer, \textit{Our Most Cherished Ideals: The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition As A Manifestation of American Culture}, 109
rooms usually arranged about a central plaza and built story upon story in picturesque terraced formation.

The mesas upon which these groups of related pueblos are located are known as First, Second, and Third Mesa.  

Colton’s artistic eye is conveyed through her writing. Her love for the landscapes and peoples of the Colorado Plateau is evident; they served as inspiration for her own artwork as is discussed in the next chapter. By transporting the reader to the remote high desert mesas of the Hopi, Colton placed the artwork of the Hopi into context:

The Painted Desert is not a real desert, for much of it is rolling grassland and on the higher mesas there are low forests of smaller junipers and pinon pines and in the canyons there are springs. The short rainy season comes in July and August and when it rains in the high country, muddy floods rush down the wide sandy washes and pour into the Little Colorado on its way to the mighty gorge of the Grand Canyon. The Hopi are an agricultural people though today they own small flocks of sheep and a few cattle. Their method of agriculture is unique for they are dependent upon the shallow shifting sand dunes which act as a mulch preserving moisture for the crops. Their seed corn is planted in holes made by a ‘planting stick’ which is thrust through the sand layer into the soil beneath.

Spring, summer and fall, not only introduce the agricultural cycles, the planting, growing season, and the harvest, but also the ancient and colorful ceremonies, the never ending prayers for rain, and of thanksgiving, which are so inextricably interwoven with the lives of the Hopi. The Kachina spirits whose home is the dark forest of the great Peaks, come to dance with the people and the masks and costumes of the priests who represent them are gorgeous and weird. And so, when the Hopi men are not laboring in the fields, they are dancing and singing with the gods and there is little time for them to work at the loom, but the women are busy preparing food for the feasting and with basket weaving and pottery making, for this is their busy season.

After the harvest comes the time for ‘story telling’ in the kivas (under ground ceremonial chambers), and the winter ceremonies that take place.

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therein and it is during this season that practically all of the weaving is done.\textsuperscript{88}

Colton linked the rhythms of life, the colors and forms of the high desert, and the seasons of the year to the artwork created by the Hopi. An amateur ethnographer, Colton wrote extensively about the Hopi.\textsuperscript{89}

Hopi arts varied from one mesa to another, and sometimes from village to village. Colton summarized the differences:

The arts of the Hopi are extremely varied and methods of manufacture have remained practically unchanged since the coming of the Spaniard in 1540. The men are the weavers, moccasin makers and jewelers. The women are the potters and basket makers. While the villages of the three mesas have certain arts in common, each mesa specializes in a distinct type of work. The manufacture of heavy undecorated household pottery is common to all the villages and it seems likely that decorated pottery, though made only on First Mesa today, was formerly made in most of the towns. The art of textiles weaving is general. Basketry, however, is localized in a most peculiar way, and is practiced in two mesas only. The women of Second Mesa make a heavy coiled basket of yucca fiber, with grass core. A few miles to the west, on Third Mesa, Oraibi and its related towns make an entirely different type of woven wicker basket. First Mesa, with its three towns perched on the rock of Walpi, does not make baskets, but manufactures practically all the decorated Hopi pottery now on the market. Since prehistoric times the Hopi have carried on an extensive trade with the Zuni, Acoma and the Pueblos of the Rio Grande Valley and

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.

today these pueblos still depend upon the ‘Hopi Craftsman’ for many of their textiles which are especially manufactured for the trade.\textsuperscript{90}

The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition did not focus on the artwork of any particular mesa, but rather on all three. The Exhibition featured basketry, pottery, jewelry, and textiles from all of the Hopi mesas. Colton possessed vast knowledge of the intricacies of the various art forms of the Hopi:

\textbf{Weaving Processes}

The Hopi Weaver uses both cotton and wool in the making of his fabrics, but before the advent of the Spaniards, who introduced sheep, he had cotton only, which was grown near the Hopi villages until quite recently. Cotton was grown by pueblo peoples far back into prehistoric times. Both cotton and wool are carded and spun by hand on a wooden spindle. There are three general types of yarn spun in both cotton and wool, the warp, the weft or filler, and the binder. Wool is usually washed before carding and spinning.

When the yarn has been spun dyeing is in order. The colors originally used in Hopi fabrics were of four types: 1. The natural wools, black, white, browns, and grays. 2. Natural cotton, creamy white. 3. Cotton and wools colored with dyes, made from various wild or cultivated plants, roots and shrubs, in yellows, orange and brown, rust red, dull purples, green and black. Some of these were applied to cotton other to wool. 4. Besides these native vegetable dyes indigo was traded in at a very early date. About 50 years ago synthetic dyes made their appearance and as they have grown in popularity the vegetable dye product has become increasingly rare.

Formerly there were two types of looms in use among the Hopi. The vertical loom suspended upright between floor and ceiling and the waist loom upon which belts and sashes were woven. The latter was suspended at the upper and from the wall and at the lower and attached to the weavers’ waist and thus held taut by his body. This type has undergone a revolutionary change toward a more convenient form and now appears suspended in a fixed upright position. The belt is woven in a continuous form passing over rollers and when complete is cut and fringed. All looms are furnished with heddles, the number depending upon the type of cloth to be woven. The weaver sits upon the floor before the vertical loom moving freely back and forth as necessary. The Hopi weaver weaves backward and forward straight across his cloth, his blankets, therefore,

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
never show the irregular diagonal joining lines, called lazy lines, so often seen in the Navajo blanket.

A variety of weaves are employed, some requiring an elaborate set up of heddles. Of these the three principal types are: plain weaving, twilled weaving, and brocade weaving; twining or finger weaving and braiding or plaiting. Embroidery and knitting as well as weaving are also considered men’s work.

Basketry:
There are three distinct types of basketry produced on the Hopi mesas: coil work, wicker work, and plaited yucca work. The coil type is made exclusively on Second Mesa. Wicker work is characteristic of Third Mesa, while the plaited yucca type is general.

The coiled type has a foundation of grass or shredded yucca, which is wrapped and sewed with split yucca. The stitches are non-interlocking and the coiling is counter clockwise, an awl is used to pierce the coil. Designs are highly conventionalized portraying human and animal forms, kachina masks and figures. Four colors are used in addition to the white ground of the yucca. Two of these are natural – green and pale yellow. The two dyed color are an Indian red and black. These baskets are very beautiful and exceedingly strong and durable. All Hopi baskets were originally made in two shapes only, the plaque and shallow ceremonial basket. The many varied forms of these baskets are a recent development.

The wicker work basket has a frame or warp composed of the branches of a shrub, sumac, with a weft of the stems of the rabbit bush. This is packed down on the radiating warp ribs with the aid of an awl. The stems of the rabbit bush are peeled and dyed in a variety of lovely vegetable colors.

There is also a utility type of basketry, made of undyed plaited wicker work. The common yucca winnowing tray is made of split yucca in elaborate twilled and plaited technique.

Pottery Making
Hopi pottery is divided into two main wares: the heavy undecorated cooking and storage wares and the undecorated and polished wares. The pastes or clay of the cooking wares differ from those of the decorated wares in that there is added to them a considerable amount of coarsely ground sandstone for tempering, while the paste of the decorated wares are of three main types: The unslipped or gray clay, which fires a golden orange; a pure white slipped type and a deep rust red type which may be gray clay with a yellow slip or entirely molded of yellow clay which fires red. The clay is dug from layers in the Hopi mesas beneath the Mesa Verde sandstone. It is soaked and kneeded [sic] and kept in a wet sack.
The equipment and implements used in the making of pottery are very simple. A shallow clay supporting vessel to assist the potter in moulding large jars, it forms a base on which to sand the jar while moulding; several small moulding implements made of gourd, shell or wood and a piece of sandstone for smoothing the sun dried pots; a rabbit’s tail or piece of cloth for applying the slip to a vessel; odd smooth pebbles for polishing, and a pail of water. For painting, brushes are made from shredded yucca leaves; several small stone mortars for grinding paint and a few dishes for mixing completes the outfit. For the firing, sheep manure is used; it is broken into large blocks and stored to dry. (Cedar wood, bark and native coal from veins in the sandstone complete the fuel.) Broken pottery, rock slabs, sheets of tin and wooden implements used as pokers complete the firing outfit.

Black paint is made from a concoction of tansy mustard and black hematite (iron compound); yellow paint is made from a clay containing iron which fires orange red; white pigment is produced from an iron free white clay.

The potter commences by taking a piece of clay flattening and shaping it into a round cake and giving it a concave form, this forms the bottom of the vessel. She then takes a small portion of clay and forms it into a long roll between her hands. This roll is attached to the concave bottom cake and laid around the edge. The vessel is then built up spirally in a succession of coils, the roll being pinched and flattened as she proceeds. As the potter build she supports the vessel from the inside with the left hand while using the gourd moulding implement with the right hand to obliterate the coils.

When the work of moulding is complete the vessel is placed in the sun or beneath the family stove to dry.

After the vessel has been successfully dried without cracking, it is rubbed down and smoothed with a piece of sandstone. It is then ready to be polished or slipped. For polishing, a bowl of water is kept at hand from which the potter wets the portion of the vessel upon which she is working and polishes with a smooth pebble. If it is to be a decorated piece it is now ready to have the design laid on.

If the vessel is to be slipped before painting, the white or red slip is made ready by grinding to a creamy consistency in water. It is then applied with the rabbit’s tail, when it is re-dried and polished before painting.

Now the potter gathers her paints and materials about her and seats herself
on the floor with feet extended before her. The design is laid directly upon the vessel without any preliminary sketch from which to work.

Cooking and storage wares are never polished outside or slipped and are usually much heavier than the undecorated wares. Large storage jars are most difficult to mould and fire successfully.

The Hopi always fire their pottery outdoors, in an oven-like structure composed of the fuel itself. The jars to be fired are placed on slabs of stone or broken pottery on the ashes of a previous fire, before which the pots have been preheated. The pottery mass is then covered with a protective layer of broken pottery and the whole is enclosed with slabs of sheep manure and sometimes coal forming a dome-like structure. The mass is fired from the hot ashes beneath and burns fiercely. Five to eight hours are usually required for firing as, unlike the Rio Grande potter, the Hopi does not remove her jars until the fire has burned to ashes and the jars are cool.

Minor Crafts
Besides these principal crafts there are many lesser arts and the most striking among these is the manufacture of kachina dolls or effigies of the gods. These are carved, painted and decorated in beautiful colors with elaborate detail.

In this class also belongs ceremonial head boards, masks, drums and many lesser utility objects.

Moccasins of two types are made: the ceremonial women’s moccasin of spiral puttee form and the ordinary henna red buck skin footwear.

The art of the silversmith is comparatively modern, having been borrowed from the Navajo. The Hopi, however, formerly drilled shell and turquoise and today still manufacture ear pendants of turquoise inlay on wood.

The Hopi, due to their fortunate isolation, have been able to retain their cultural independence and to live and work today, very much as they did when Tovar, the first white man to see the Hopi, visited them in 1540.

Therefore, to the student, they represent today, the nearest approach to a living picture of the prehistoric past.\footnote{Ibid.}
Several of the changes that Colton observed in Hopi arts are discussed further later in this chapter. Hopi silversmithing is analyzed next in detail; Colton considered it a modern art, yet she began a project in the 1930s that transformed Hopi silversmithing, despite her desire to encourage traditional art forms, designs, and techniques.

Colton described the cultural and artistic traditions and living conditions of the Hopi at length. She periodically interjected observations about their physical and mental characteristics: “Physically the Hopi are a small brown people, thick set, sturdy and strong. Mentally, they are intelligent, tenacious, stubborn, excitable and extremely industrious.”92 Statements such as this provide a glimpse into Colton’s personality; while having the welfare of the Hopi in mind, she was still a product of the times in which she lived. While some of the qualities she cites are admirable, the overall tone of her observations here is paternalistic. Colton was benevolent toward the Hopi, yet her work has been viewed as intrusive by some as the Hopi did not seek her assistance. At the time that Colton was working with and writing about the Hopi it would have been nearly impossible to not sound paternalistic.

Hopi Silver Project

Colton’s early work with the Hopi was focused on pottery, basketry and textiles, all art forms that were indigenous. In 1938 she turned her attention to Hopi silverwork, an art form introduced by Spanish explorers and settlers via a Zuni silversmith. A relatively new art form, silversmithing was introduced to the Hopi in the 1890s. But, it was costly given the initial outlay of money for material, and the Hopi did not have the

92 Ibid.
luxury of patronage from traders as the Navajo and Zuni did, so Hopi smiths struggled. According to the July 1939 issue of Plateau, only twelve Hopi silversmiths remained on the reservation; they worked part-time and earned about twenty-five dollars for their silverwork each year.

In 1938, Colton embarked on an ambitious project to revive Hopi silversmithing and give it an identity of its own. In her opinion, Hopi silverwork was a pale imitation of that of the Navajo and Zuni, who produced beautiful turquoise and silver pieces. A letter Colton wrote to Kenneth Chapman at the School of American Research in Santa Fe on December 5, 1938 explained her opinion of Hopi silverwork:

(1) That it is practically without character, just more poor ‘Navajo’

(2) that it is quite what one would expect of an art frankly copied from another people

(3) that in very rare instances has it occurred to the Hopi smith to use Hopi design.

Colton believed that Hopi silverwork lacked distinction because the techniques and designs were borrowed from the Navajo and Zuni. She sought to distinguish the Hopi silverwork from that of neighboring tribes.

The Indian Arts and Crafts Board developed a program in 1937 to provide government hallmarks for Native American silverwork that met federally established standards.

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94 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “Hopi Silversmithing – It’s Background and Future,” Plateau 12, no. 1, July 1939), 4. Times were so tough that the Hopi silversmiths sometimes spread their work out on blankets on the roadside near Flagstaff or Winslow.

95 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ, to Kenneth Chapman, Santa Fe, NM, December 5, 1938. Museum of Northern Arizona Archives, separates file 4966.
If all of the regulations were met, that piece of jewelry was eligible to receive the government hallmark, after sending a request for certification to the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. In turn, the Board would then send a qualified expert to inspect the jewelry and issue a certificate so that the government hallmark could be stamped on the piece. Colton understood the value of the program but wanted to do more for the Hopi silversmiths.

The Coltons, Katharine Bartlett, and Virgil Hubert, all contributed to the Museum’s efforts to assist the Hopi silversmiths. Mary-Russell Colton conceived of the idea to encourage them to use indigenous designs and simplified forms in their work. As Virgil’s son Ron Hubert recalled, the idea was hatched over lunch at the Museum. Virgil, Mary-Russell and Katharine Bartlett used to have lunch together almost every day. One day the conversation turned to curiosity about why the Hopi had such great designs on their basketry, pottery, and other art forms but not on their silver. Colton instructed Virgil Hubert to research traditional Hopi and Pueblo designs that could be used on silver.

Hubert researched the designs, but they were too detailed to use the sandcasting or stamping techniques that were then in use by the Hopi silversmiths. But, he knew about an overlay process used for making clothes and decided to adapt it for silver. The

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96 Colton discussed these standards in the July 1, 1939 issue of *Plateau* (Vol. 12, No. 1, p. 6). The regulations were signed March 9, 1937 by Collier, and focused specifically on Hopi, Navajo, and Pueblo jewelry. For specifics about the standards see the 1939 *Plateau* article or Mangum & Mangum, “The Hopi Silver Project of the Museum of Northern Arizona,” 11.

97 Ron Hubert, former trustee of the Museum of Northern Arizona and son of Virgil Hubert. Conversation with W. James Burns, June 2009.
overlay process allowed the artist to achieve the fine details in the designs that Hubert had identified.\textsuperscript{98}

Colton was certain that success could be achieved between the new designs and the government hallmark program. Not unlike the designs she approved of for other Hopi arts, Colton preferred a clean, elegant look. She turned over the actual drafting of the designs to Hubert, although Colton could certainly have done the drawings herself with her artistic background. Hubert researched traditional Hopi pottery designs and produced a series of nine to fifteen sketches depicting not only the designs, but also possible pieces of jewelry. After the Coltons reviewed the sketches, Hubert created watercolors of each piece.\textsuperscript{99}

Mary-Russell Colton then brought the project to fruition by gaining approval from the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, and presenting the new design ideas to the Hopi. Colton sent letters to the silversmiths between November 14, 1938 and March 30, 1939, detailing her plan. The exact number of Hopi silversmiths who were contacted is uncertain, but falls within the range of sixteen to eighteen.\textsuperscript{100} Colton explained the government hallmark standards and the advantages of getting the stamp; she also urged the Hopi smiths to place their own personal mark on their work. She promised the silversmiths that if they would experiment with the new technique and the designs that the Museum would agree to purchase those works.\textsuperscript{101}

\textsuperscript{98} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{99} Mangum & Mangum, “The Hopi Silver Project of the Museum of Northern Arizona,” 12. As per Mangum & Mangum, the precise number of designs remains in question.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 13.

\textsuperscript{101} Ron Hubert, conversation with W. James Burns, June 2009. Further, Hubert declared that Colton’s idea of using the letter to suggest that the silversmiths experiment with the silver overlay
In the 1930s, the differences between Hopi, Navajo, and Pueblo silver were imperceptible to all but the educated eye (and sometimes not even to the well educated such as Colton). The smiths were often at the whim of the buyer; certain designs were more sought after and the smiths did not have the luxury of turning away business. Colton sought to differentiate Hopi silver from that of other tribes through the use of traditional Hopi designs on jewelry such as necklaces, rings, and bracelets. The designs that she proposed, as drawn by Hubert, had not been used on silver before, but Colton had secured the support of the Indian Bureau and a guarantee that they would give their stamp of approval if the regulations were met.\(^{102}\)

Colton hoped to have new pieces to exhibit at the 1939 Hopi Craftsman Show. The response was mixed to her letter; some silversmiths threw their support behind the project wholeheartedly, others never responded, and a few actively resisted.\(^{103}\) Colton replied to the smiths who opposed the project clarifying her original letter lest there be any misunderstanding due to the language barrier. She acknowledged that the federal government had erred many times in their treatment of and policies toward Native Americans, but urged the Hopi smiths not to spurn the overtures of Anglos who genuinely wished to offer assistance. At the same time, Colton promoted her vision of what Hopi silverwork should look like, and she attempted to educate the smiths about the Modernism movement. Moreover, she built a case for marketing to multiple customers, technique and the new designs was probably the only way that the project could have succeeded. According to Hubert, Colton used a collaborative approach in working with the Hopi. He asserted that she honored and respected the Hopi artisan’s choices and their cultural differences and that this attitude set Colton apart from many Anglos at the time who thought themselves superior to Native Americans.


\(^{103}\) For a detailed analysis of the response of the silversmiths to Colton’s letter see Mangum & Mangum, “The Hopi Silver Project of the Museum of Northern Arizona,” 14-17.
observing that some people still valued hand-made silver pieces created with traditional

techniques and materials -- and that they were willing to pay a premium for such

tieces.\textsuperscript{104}

The new Hopi silverwork quickly grew in popularity as evidenced by sales at the
1939-1941 Hopi Craftsman Exhibition; the public responded as Colton had predicted.\textsuperscript{105}

But, World War II soon intervened, and by late 1942 “silver was declared a strategic
material and became unavailable for the making of jewelry . . . .”\textsuperscript{106} The 1942 Hopi
Craftsman was the last to be held for the duration of the War; the exhibition did not
resume until 1947.

Following the War, the Hopi silversmiths were more constrained financially than
ever, many having returned from years of military service. The smiths needed assistance
in order to pursue their careers as artists. With Mary-Russell Colton’s health beginning a
gradually decline, Dr. Colton stepped in and encouraged Hopi artist Fred Kabotie (best
known as a painter) to use Hubert’s designs and encourage the silversmiths to do so as
well. Kabotie responded favorably as did Paul Saufkie whose silverwork showed much
promise between 1939 and 1942. Mangum and Mangum concluded: “These two men
were the leading advocates of the jewelry promoted by the Museum of Northern

\textsuperscript{104} Mangum & Mangum, “The Hopi Silver Project of the Museum of Northern Arizona,” 15-17.

\textsuperscript{105} The new silver overlay technique adapted by Hubert was particularly popular. Margaret
Nickelson Wright, “Hopi Silver: The History and Hallmarks of Hopi Silversmithing” (Flagstaff, AZ:
Northland Press, 1972), 50-51. Wright explained: “Overlay, as used in Hopi silverwork, is basically a
piece of silver with a design cut out of it – a negative design. . . . the silver that is left after the design has
been cut out of it is the part which is used. This piece is soldered onto a sheet of plain silver and the inside
of the design oxidized to show up black against the polished silver.”

\textsuperscript{106} Mangum & Mangum, “The Hopi Silver Project of the Museum of Northern Arizona,” 22.
Arizona’s Hopi Silver Project, and they trained the postwar silversmiths whose artistry came to define modern Hopi silver.” 107

Kabotie, Saufkie and other Hopi silversmiths formed the Hopi Silver Craft Cooperative Guild in March 1949 after meeting with representatives of the Indian Arts and Crafts Board. The Guild supported the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition and received attention from the press, including the well-respected popular magazine *Arizona Highways*. 108 With the assistance of Museum staff, authentic Hopi designs, symbols and motifs were applied to Hopi silverwork resulting in a new overlay technique unique to the Hopi. The project turned out to be very successful and is still in use. 109

**The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition:**
_Benevolent, Meddlesome, or Paternalistic?_

Colton’s relationship with the Hopi was complex from the beginning. Denise Colton reflected that:

Mary-Russell was fascinated by the Hopi art in particular, and through this fascination her own admiration of it brought her to the point that more had to be given back to the Indians. She thought of ways to help them, in real terms. Once the ideas came, she carried them through to the end. She earnestly wrote letter after letter to outside sources for help. 110

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108 Articles about the Hopi Guild appeared in the July 1950 and July 1951 issues of *Arizona Highways*.

109 National Register of Historic Places inventory nomination form for Coyote Range. Located in files of the State Historic Preservation Office in Phoenix, AZ; Mangum & Mangum, *One Woman’s West: The Life of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton*, 100.

110 F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
This description of Mary-Russell Colton’s relationship to the Hopi portrays her as quite benevolent, but there was another side to her work as well.

Hopi demonstrators have always participated in the annual exhibition. While they were not exactly put on display in a manner reminiscent of a Wild West exhibit they also were not portrayed as human beings, members of a vibrant tribe that was thriving after hundreds of years. The exhibitors at the Hopi Craftsman were an integral part of the show; they were in a sense on display themselves. Some of the visitors did interact with the demonstrators, talking about their artwork, but the vast majority did not.\textsuperscript{111} Even the ones who did interact failed to understand the socioeconomic circumstances of the Hopi or the history behind those conditions.

As supportive as Colton was of the Hopi she also had a condescending side.\textsuperscript{112} When corresponding with officials in the Bureau of Indian Affairs her more candid views shone through. In a letter dated November 19, 1932 to Scattergood, she declared:

\begin{quote}
Westheimer, “Our Most Cherished Ideals: The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition As A Manifestation of American Culture.”
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
In a letter to Mrs. Henrietta K. Burton, a staff member of the Indian Bureau in the Salt Lake City office, Colton revealed another side of her complex relationship with the Hopi: “You may remember that my cook and house boy were Orientals. I have kept them for a number of years; but in the past year I have been so constantly tormented with frequent changes, quarrels and inefficient help at high wages that I have made up my mind to at least try to do something to gain more peace of mind. Of course the outside help and Museum help are all Hopi and most of them have been with us for years. I have a little Hopi girl also who does the washing and sewing in the house. Now it seems to me that I ought to be able to get a capable girl graduating from some of the Home Economics courses in the big schools . . . Could you advise me to whom I should write in Riverside, Phoenix, or wherever there might be Hopi girls in training . . . . These girls are naturally domestic and I believe that this would be an experiment worth trying for one in my situation.” While Colton respected the skills of the Hopi artisans, she also thought of them as prime candidates to be her household help. Colton likely believed that she was providing these individuals with an opportunity for a better life. Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ, to Henrietta K. Burton, Salt Lake City, UT, January 29, 1934. MS207-306-28 File, Indian Affairs General, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. Later in life, in a letter to Pearl S. Buck of the United National World editorial board dated May 22, 1947, Colton remarked: “Indians are ‘people’ to us, as are the many peoples of the world that we have met and known.” Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ, to Pearl S. Buck, Editorial Board, United Nations World, New York, NY, May 22, 1947. MS207-306-37 Indian Correspondence, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. Colton was torn between her
Really, I do not think that any possible practical adjustment of their affairs
would satisfy these old people. They do not live in the present, nor
recognize any of the existing facts of the day. These old chiefs are really
delightful ethnological specimens and we can learn much from them, but
as to considering them as factors in the settlement of the vital affairs of
today, it is not possible and would be extremely unfair to the younger
generation, who realize that they must accept life as they find it, and
cannot afford to live in a world of dreams.\(^{113}\)

While Colton considered many of the Hopi that she worked with and knew to be close
friends, she could not quite escape her upbringing, viewing them as “delightful
ethnological specimens.” A fine line existed between the Hopi being patronized as
objects of research and participating in the Hopi Craftsman as exhibitors. Photographs of
the exhibition depict the spectacle of the demonstrators. (See Figures 26 and 27)

Yet, Colton’s words and her actions were not always aligned. She very clearly
had a close personal connection with many of her Hopi friends. During the early 1930s
she began a practice of sending money to the field nurses in each of the villages on the
Hopi mesas to purchase gifts for her friends who were most in need.\(^{114}\) On December 7,
1932, Colton wrote to Mr. F. H. McBride, Principal at Mishongnovi Day School: “It has
been my custom at this season to send a little check to the nurse on each of the mesas,

\(^{113}\) Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ, to J. Henry Scattergood, Bureau of Indian Affairs,
Washington, DC, November 19, 1932. MS207-306-34 File, United States Department of the Interior,
Indian Affairs – Commissioner, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

\(^{114}\) MS-207-306-33 File, United States Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs – Field Service,
Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. Multiple letters over a period of several years
between Colton and the field nurses and BIA officials document these gifts, which included food such as
milk and beans and cloth for making clothes.
Figure 26 Demonstrators (Jimmie Kewanwytewa, Mary George, Sequoptewa, Poolie, Blanche, Edmund Nequatewa), Hopi Craftsman Show, 1934, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-100.1934.1.
Figure 27 Poolie, demonstrating pottery, Hopi Craftsman Show, 1937, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-100.1937.15.
with the request that she use it as she thought best for emergency relief for the very old or the sick who are likely to suffer over the winter.”

Colton’s longtime friend Willie Coin remembered Dr. and Mrs. Colton fondly. Coin was a regular participant in the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition and worked for the Museum for many years. In a 1975 oral history interview, he commented:

Dr. Colton and his wife are very generous people. They have done a lot of things for the Indian people. Mrs. Colton has started all this, what they call ‘Hopi Indian Arts and Crafts’ here. And all Navajo arts and crafts. And other things that they have done. And they have done a lot for me. . . So I would say that the Coltons, man and wife, are very generous, kind-hearted people.

Colton’s had the best intentions toward the Hopi and Navajo. Richard Wilson, Dr. Colton’s nephew, remarked: “I’m sure without their efforts . . . eventually the art would of continued or revived out there but they certainly got it going much earlier than it would of otherwise.” In retrospect though, Colton’s efforts have been perceived by some as meddlesome.

Curator Linda B. Eaton has argued that museums “serve as translators between Southwestern Euro-Americans and Native Americans who are quite literally their neighbors.” Further, she argued that the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition’s “pressures

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115 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ to F. H. McBride, Principal, Mishongnovi Day School, Toreva, AZ, December 7, 1932. MS207-306-33 File, United States Department of the Interior, Indian Affairs – Field Service, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. McBride responded noting that he “had the pleasure of reading the article, re, Arts and Crafts in the Hopi Schools, that you [Colton] prepared for Mr. Hammond recently. We thought it was excellent. We think it would be a fine thing if our traveling officials could be provided with a copy.” F. H. McBride, Principal, Mishongnovi Day School, Toreva, AZ, to Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ, December 12, 1932.


117 Richard Wilson, interview by W. James Burns.

toward revivalism may be seen as a species of traditionalism . . . [but] in fact [was] both a reflection of and tool for great change.”¹¹⁹ The changes that led to the decline of Hopi arts began many years before the Coltons first visited the Hopi mesas, and that decline prompted them to create the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition.¹²⁰ In effect, what Colton did is “change the direction of the art with financial incentives for a desperately cash-poor people.”¹²¹ To do so she relied on educating the Hopi and the traders by focusing on pre-twentieth century techniques. But, in doing so, Eaton argued, Colton “took the position that there was a ‘right’ way for Hopi arts to be done and expounded on this idea at every opportunity.”¹²²

Both of the Coltons believed that Native American arts could only survive with guidance and support from non-Natives. Eaton found that “. . . the Coltons established the Hopi craftsman Exhibition as a response to what they believed to be a terrible problem for the Indians generally and the Hopi specifically: the danger of losing not only their art, but also their culture.”¹²³ As part of her solution to what she saw as a problem, Colton believed “. . . that she must create a new class of buyer: the collector of fine

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¹¹⁹ Ibid., 25.
¹²⁰ Westheimer observed that: “Examples of ‘good’ Hopi work were usually older items, those that the Hopi made for themselves – where no modern materials were used and where a certain quality was believed to be known and expected. The display of old Hopi work was there for both the Euro-Americans and the Hopis to see as a reminder of the once consistent high quality of Hopi work. The Coltons believed that the Euro-Americans’ demand for quantity rather than quality and the Hopi peoples’ need for cash was resulting in a degeneration of the quality of the design and manufacture of Hopi work.” Westheimer, Our Most Cherished Ideals: The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition As A Manifestation of American Culture: 24.
¹²² Ibid.
Native American art. Such a buyer would pay higher prices for fine pieces, which would encourage Native American artists to strive for higher quality.\textsuperscript{124}

Colton definitely had an opinion as to what defined authentic Hopi arts – most often that meant works from the past created with traditional designs, colors and methods, as opposed to more modern pieces, which did not fare comparatively well. Eaton noted that:

When Colton set out to increase the market for Hopi arts, she was in fact concentrating on pieces that projected ideas about Hopis palatable to Western buyers of the day. Excellence was defined by skillful execution of pre-20\textsuperscript{th} century technologies. She stressed that The Hopi Craftsman exhibition was organized by fieldworkers in archaeology and ethnology . . . tying present ‘authenticity’ clearly to the past.\textsuperscript{125}

Colton repeatedly disparaged outside influences on traditional art forms, but was not opposed to the application of traditional designs to modern objects as long as these items were not mistaken as authentic native art forms. Eaton explained that:

To Mary-Russell, however, anything that had been introduced to the Indians by Europeans, whether material good or methods of production, was not considered part of the ‘traditional’ way of producing crafts; therefore, use of non-native materials and production methods in Indian crafts was to be discouraged.\textsuperscript{126}

In promoting art for art’s sake, Colton ignored the connection between Hopi art and culture, argued Eaton.\textsuperscript{127} Moreover, she was a member of a group “. . . of women and others in the Indian arts and crafts movement [who] believed themselves responsible for generating a ‘revival’ of Indian artistry. Many Indians . . . contested the notion that

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{126} Eaton, “The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition and the Creation of the Art of the ‘Other,’” 47.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 49-58.
their artistry had ‘died out,’ or that whites were necessary for reviving it.”\textsuperscript{128} There were two factions in that group, the preservationists, and those who advocated assimilation; Colton belonged to the former category. The preservationists believed that Native American arts could only survive if the general public was “steered away from buying cheap tourist items” and if Native American artisans were “. . . instructed in how to make the most ‘traditional’ forms in the most ‘traditional’ ways.”\textsuperscript{129} But, some “. . . preservationists did not so much reject all commercialization, as they sought to control and direct it away from ‘cheap souvenirs’ toward what they considered to be tasteful art objects.”\textsuperscript{130}

Colton’s work resulted in the establishment of a market for high end Hopi artwork. Eaton suggested that: “. . . Mary-Russell knew she could never stop the tourist trade; what she could do was to create a tourist with a sophisticated taste in Indian art. . . ”\textsuperscript{131} Colton achieved long lasting success through the Hopi Craftsman by:

Combin[ing] the prestige of the Museum, her access to the press and to other persons interested in Indian arts, and her own financial resources as a collector focused on Hopi art. The exhibition helped her create an ongoing market for Hopi art shaped to her vision of what that art should be. Through it, she became a major taste maker in the dominant society’s appreciation of Hopi art.\textsuperscript{132}


\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 86.

\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{131} Eaton, \textit{The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition and the Creation of the Art of the “Other,”} 75.

Colton positioned herself as an arbiter of taste with regard to Hopi art through her work as a judge for the exhibition. Further, via the awards presented at the show:

“... she influenced what the market responded to as good Hopi art, and it continues to respond to that influence today.”

Patrons at the exhibition vie to purchase the prize-winning pieces or those that look similar. For the artists, the prize money was certainly welcome, “but the influence of judging on the larger market can have great impact on the course of a body of art.”

The work of the prizewinners increased in popularity and value, as did the work of other artists who created art of a similar style and quality.

Colton identified some distinct improvements in Hopi arts during the 1930s after the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition was organized. In a July 1938 article in Museum Notes titled *The Arts and Crafts of the Hopi Indians: Their Historic Background, Processes and Methods of Manufacture and the Work of the Museum for the Maintenance of Hopi Art*, she outlined the changes in detail and proffered her opinion as to the value of Hopi art:

The art of a people is only of value so long as it maintains a distinct pure bred character. Like all native people in the process of readjustment, Hopi art has a tendency to absorb the worst rather than the best, from the dominant civilization that has surrounded them. It behooves this dominant civilization to lend every assistance and encouragement to its native Indian peoples to maintain the purity of their beautiful ‘peasant arts’ that they may bring with them a worthy contribution to the new era.

If Indian art is to continue as a genuine living expression of our Southwestern native peoples the Museum believes that it is absolutely essential for all the scientific institutions and the influential Indian Traders to the Southwest to cooperate closely in a program for the encouragement and maintenance of these Arts. Though the interest of the Museum and Trader vary widely, their objective is the same – both desire to see a continued output of native handicrafts. What both need, is not a greater output of these handicrafts, but *better material*. The cheap junk now being

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133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
produced in such quantity by our Indians and sold along the highways as true Indian art, is injuring the business of the legitimate trader, by creating the impression that his goods are cheap and common. If it were made possible for the Indian craftsmen to receive a better price for good material, it would not be necessary for him to flood the market with worthless junk. In our opinion such a program would eventually raise the standard of Indian goods and eliminate the road-side salesman, who could not afford to purchase such material. Thus all three of the parties vitally interested – the native craftsman, the trader and the museums might be greatly benefited. If the present degeneration of these handicrafts can not be checked by the united interested parties, then Indian art will soon be found only in the cases of our museums.\textsuperscript{135}

Colton’s tone in the beginning of this quotation again reflects a paternalistic stance. Yet, at the same time she appeared to genuinely have the best interests of the Hopi at heart.

Summarizing Colton’s work with the Hopi and Navajo is neither simple nor straightforward. Tsianina Lomawaima, Professor of American Indian Studies at the University of Arizona explained that: “Human beings are not one-dimensional learners or teachers. We select from a repertoire of preferences appropriate to our ages and skill, consciously deciding how best to approach a new situation.”\textsuperscript{136} Colton was no exception; in some ways she overcame her upbringing and in other ways she was a product of it. Lomawaima has written extensively about Native American education during the period that Colton was most active; she found that:

The deeply paternalistic attitudes and oppressive practices of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century were rooted in the need to domesticate the most dangerous cultural differences – those defining Native peoples – that threatened American identity as a nation divinely ordained to ‘inherit the earth’ from Indigenous nations. The moral authority of American’s inheritance


\textsuperscript{136} Lomawaima & McCarty, To Remain An Indian: Lessons in Democracy from a Century of Native American Education, 20.
seemed to require the obliteration of American Indians, if not literally then linguistically and culturally.\textsuperscript{137}

She included an entire chapter in \textit{To Remain An Indian} that focused on the assimilation policies of the federal government with regard to Native American education and where traditional native art forms fell within that policy.

Native arts, crafts, foodways and oral traditions, particularly those associated with women, were among the cultural differences segregated and deemed safe. Lomawaima explained that:

\ldots Navajo rug-weaving, Pueblo pottery, beadwork and basketry across the western United States – fell squarely into the domestic sphere of women’s work, a less threatening arena than the potential competition posed by male Indian loggers, fishermen, farmers, ranchers, printers, or tradesmen.\textsuperscript{138}

These arts were \ldots perceived as safe as long as [they were] being transformed by the social engineers of the federal school system . . .\textsuperscript{139} The aforementioned art forms were demonstrations of native culture that served as non-threatening markers of difference. Lomawaima expounded upon the support provided to Native American artisans and the reasons why it was paternalistic:

\begin{quote}
Indian Office support of Native craftspeople in the name of economic self-sufficiency assumed a characteristic paternalism. White aesthetic values would improve the artistic merit of ‘declining’ Native arts, school training would improve their technical quality, and federal management was necessary for success in the marketplace. . . . Anglos as guardians of Native peoples could save them, help them profit, educate them about their own arts, save them from non-traditional techniques and materials.\textsuperscript{140}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushleft}
\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 43.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 44.

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{140} Ibid., 57.
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Navajo Craftsman Exhibition

Having achieved some success in reviving traditional Hopi art forms during the 1930s through the Hopi Craftsman Show, Colton decided to begin a similar annual exhibition for the Navajo. But, this show did not evolve the same way as the Hopi Craftsman; the first exhibition was held at Wupatki National Monument in 1936. Colton served as a judge at the Navajo Arts and Crafts Exhibition, and was commended by H. Clay Lockett, Associate Supervisor of Education for the Indian Bureau for “set[ting] a precedent in judging which will have a very good effect on future fairs on the Navajo Reservation.” The exhibition was planned as an annual event, but only survived for one year. (See Figure 28) Katharine Bartlett recalled that the Navajo Craftsman Exhibition

. . . didn’t start until much later, probably about sometime in [the] early forties, as I recall. Two or three years prior to the war. I believe that the first show was rather inspired by a kind of a fair that the Brewers held at Wupatki National Monument. That monument is really on the Navajo reservation, and a number of Navajos lived in that area. And somehow, the Brewers got the idea of inviting a lot of people out to the Monument, and having the neighboring Navajos bring their blankets and whatever they had and making it sort of a fair, you see. And I think they had a barbecue or something like that that attracted all the Navajos, and a lot of people in town went. And then, the Museum decided that this was maybe something that would be very good was to get the Navajos in the western part of the reservation interested in sending materials. I can’t seem to remember too much about the first year of our Navajo Show. I believe that we collected from the trading posts on the western part of the reservation, as we still do. And then we had the Navajo Arts and Crafts Guild, which was then operated by Bill Lippincott for the Tribe, send an exhibit of the really super things . . .


Figure 28 Navajo Guild Exhibition, Navajo weaver Judy Yazzie and Mrs. Judy (Brice) Sewell, 1946, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-200A.1946.1.
Colton helped revive the show after World War II. In her history of the museum, Evelyn Roat cited the first Navajo Craftsman Exhibition as 1942. Photographs in the museum’s collection dated 1946 depict a Navajo exhibition. However, the museum recognizes the first annual Western Navajo Arts and Crafts Exhibition in 1949.

Colton’s support of the Navajo Craftsman Exhibition (as the show later came to be known) is striking given some of her early writings about them. Both she and Dr. Colton corresponded regularly with the Indian Rights Association in Philadelphia; the Association was involved in helping to settle a decades-long boundary dispute between the Hopi and Navajo. In a letter dated April 8, 1932 from Colton to Jonathan M. Steer, President of the Indian Rights Association, she made her thoughts on the matter clear:

. . . We were extremely pleased to hear that it is at last proposed to set aside a reservation for the sole use of the Hopi. Dr. Colton and I both feel, as do all the friends of these people, that it is a most important step toward preserving a high type of culture that would be inevitably destroyed by the pressure of amalgamation with a virile race such as the Navajo living in a lower stage of civilization. We, who live in close contact with these people and have every reason to know their qualities, both good and bad, assure you that they are worth saving as a people. If the government does not set aside land for the use of the Hopi alone, it will not only be committing a great injustice but will practically sign their ‘death warrant.’ These people must spread out into small farming communities where they will be unmolested, if they are to survive the ravages of disease in the crowded slums of the pueblos.

Colton’s words were hardly glowing praise for the Navajo, whom she considered to be “in a lower stage of civilization” than the Hopi, possibly because of their nomadic ways.

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These words and her later actions in support of the Navajo Craftsman Exhibition further demonstrate the contradictions in, and complexity of, her personality.

Colton was aware of some of the problems with Navajo arts as early as 1932 based upon her writings, but probably long before that given her connections with Navajo traders such as Hubbell. Her files contain an undated memo from the Office of Indian Affairs, Field Service about the Navajo Rug Project, which was to take place between December 1932 and July 1933. The memo stated:

There are at present many blankets on the market that are very inferior in every way, and as such are not a source of income, as they have little market value. Good blankets still find a ready market, but inferior ones are unsaleable [sic] and in no way a contribution to the Native Arts and Crafts.\(^{145}\)

The goals of the project were to raise the value of Navajo rugs and the standards of Navajo weaving (technical aspects, designs and color) while preserving traditional designs.\(^{146}\)

In April 1942, Colton wrote to John Collier and Rene d’Harnoncourt. She was distressed about:

The recent ruling of the War Production Board forbidding the use of wool for the manufacture of draperies and floor coverings [which] presents itself as a serious problem in the future economic life of our Indians. As our Museum has for many years been intimately concerned with the production of arts and crafts among the Navajo and Hopi Indians, we are deeply concerned over the consequences to them of this ruling.\(^{147}\)


\(^{146}\) Ibid.

\(^{147}\) Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ to John Collier, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Washington, DC, April 29, 1942. MS-20-2-1 File, Hopi Arts and Crafts Show correspondence 1939-1948, Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
Colton sought an exemption for the Native American weavers of the Southwest who relied so heavily on the sale of their textiles for income.

Originally known as the Western Navajo Arts and Crafts Exhibition, the name changed to the Navajo Craftsman Show in the early 1950s. Colton intended to conduct an ethnographic study of the Navajo in conjunction with the annual show, just as she had done with the Hopi. However, the Navajo study presented some problems that she had not encountered with the Hopi. Colton explained that it was difficult to establish contact with the Navajo because they were a semi-nomadic shepherd people. Every family moved around to find grass for their sheep, and different camps were used each season of the year. Museum staff had to learn the location of those camps and then travel over unimproved roads in order to complete their study. Dr. Colton explained that working with the Navajo

... was a more difficult project than that of the Hopi because the Navajo Indians are a much larger tribe, 70,000, scattered thinly over a very large area. To make it more difficult, they are nomads and each family may have several hogans (homes) several miles apart, which they occupy seasonally. She [Mary-Russell] was able to contact very few personally and had to rely on visiting the Indian traders who were in contact with all the Indians of a neighborhood who traded at his store.148

The Coltons did very little of the actual collecting for the Navajo Craftsman Exhibition though. Most of that responsibility fell to Barton Wright as Curator of Art after 1955. Wright recalled:

I went out to all of the trading posts on the western half of the reservation. Go up to a trading post and say do you have any rugs you’d like to show? And they would say oh yeah, you can check that stack back there. And the stacks sometimes would be up to the roof and you got to go through all the rugs taking them carefully off, looking at them, folding them back up

again and laying them back on the pile, which of course they loved because it aerated their stack of everything. But they would then give me whatever I wanted to take in. So, I’d make out a list and fill the car, go to the next post... And then you’d end up stacking them in the truck and I would come back with sometimes I’m sure at least a half a million dollars worth of rugs in the back of that truck. And then hang them up.  

In addition to the rugs, Wright picked up some silver pieces and a rare piece of pottery or some wedding baskets. The breadth of arts in the Navajo Craftsman was not as great as the Hopi Craftsman because the Navajo created fewer types of art forms than the Hopi.

Colton established criteria for the Navajo Craftsman Exhibition, insisting that traditional materials and designs be used; she excluded all but the highest quality arts. She urged the Navajo to continue using traditional forms of weaving and silversmithing. The Navajo Craftsman Exhibition included jewelry, pottery, paintings, and textiles; demonstrators included weavers, silversmiths, and sandpainters. In particular, Colton concerned herself with Navajo weaving insisting upon the use of longhaired wool which was less greasy. Colton advised the Navajo about which types of wool to use and how to dye it with traditional vegetable dyes. Moreover, she encouraged the Navajo to construct their looms and tools out of native materials. The same standards were applied to silversmithing; Colton urged the Navajo to work the silver by hand using unrefined tools rather than machines. All entries to the show were judged for prizes, promoting

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149 Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns.

competition to improve skills, and preventing traditional art forms from becoming extinct.\textsuperscript{151} (See Figure 29)

The Navajo and Hopi Craftsman Exhibitions contributed to the perpetuation of traditional manufacturing methods and designs; at the same time, they discouraged new methods of production. Colton worked to ensure that traditional methods were used to teach Native American arts and crafts. She reasoned: “The charm of a native art lies in its contrast to modern mechanical methods and its wonderful primitive invention and utilization of the natural materials at hand.”\textsuperscript{152}

Fairs and Festivals Versus Exhibitions of Indian Arts and Crafts

In 1939 the Colton’s wrote a small paper titled *Exhibitions of Indian Arts and Crafts*, which was circulated to colleagues throughout the Southwest for review. The paper was sent to Kenneth Chapman at the School of American Research, who forwarded it to Margarett Dietrich, a supporter of Native American arts in Santa Fe. Dietrich responded: “the point I would like to emphasize most strongly is that value of educating the public through the fairs or markets. In Santa Fe we feel that is the chief value; and of next importance, if not equal with it, is the need to educate traders.”\textsuperscript{153} As committed as

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{151} Harold Sellers Colton, “Exhibitions of Indian Arts and Crafts,” *Plateau* 12, April 1940, 60; Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, *Art For The Schools Of The Southwest: An Outline For The Public And Indian Schools*, 28-30.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, *Art for the Schools Of The Southwest: An Outline For The Public And Indian Schools*, 22.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Margrett S. Dietrich, Santa Fe, NM, to Harold Sellers Colton, Flagstaff, AZ, February 20, 1939. MS207-125-133 Indian Arts and Crafts – Report on Exhibitions, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
\end{itemize}
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Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Bill Lipe, Edward B. Danson, Clay Lockett, Barton Wright,
judging Navajo Craftsman Show, 1956. Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-200.1956.13,
Colton was to education, she may not have been cognizant of the educative value of her own work.

*Exhibitions of Indian Arts and Crafts* detailed the efforts of Native American exhibitions and fairs throughout the Southwest, of which there were fourteen or more in 1939. The paper reviewed the goals and results of the exhibitions. Most had three main objectives:

1. Through competition and reward by monetary prizes, to stimulate the individual Indian to improve his or her skill.
2. Through competition and monetary prizes to keep certain worthwhile old skills from dying out.
3. To provide an appreciative market for goods of exceptional quality; a market that is not provided by the ordinary curio dealer.

The Hopi Craftsman accomplished all of these objectives.

In this paper, the Coltons also recommended that prizes and unsold goods be returned to the artisans “with constructive criticism and explanations,” something that the exhibitions did, as opposed to the fairs which were a level removed from the artisans.

Additionally, the Coltons outlined the ways that the fairs could be improved, and suggested some criteria for judging. They concluded: “It seems evident that competitive exhibitions of Indian art are of value to the craftsman not only in improving their craftsmanship but in presenting the material to the public, a factor which will lead to better markets.”

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155 Ibid. Materials at the fairs were generally submitted by traders or Indian school officials, which meant less educational opportunities.

156 Ibid.
Expertise and Reputation

Peers in the Southwest and throughout the Indian Bureau recognized Colton’s expertise in the matter of Hopi and Navajo arts and education relatively early in her career. In 1933, Oliver LaFarge with the National Association on Indian Affairs in New York approached Colton about serving as a judge of pottery for the Gallup Inter-tribal Indian Ceremonial. Further, the exhibition committee for the Ceremonial enquired about the possibility of showing some selected works from the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition. LaFarge wrote to Colton again on March 20, 1933: “The Hopi pottery exhibited up to now has not been the best, and I think it would be of real advantage for the Exhibition if some of your selected material could be brought over.” Just weeks later, Colton was contacted by the Southwest Indian Fair Committee about a similar matter.

The School of American Research in Santa Fe founded the Southwest Indian Fair in 1922; it evolved into the world-renowned Santa Fe Indian Market. Margaret Burge wrote to Colton on April 6, 1933 via the National Association on Indian Affairs regarding

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157 Oliver LaFarge, New York, NY, to Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ, February 17, 1933. MS-207-306-32 File, National Association on Indian Affairs – LaFarge, etc., Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. The Gallup Inter-tribal Indian Ceremonial is an annual event that takes place in Gallup, New Mexico. Founded in 1922, the Ceremonial celebrates Native American arts, cultures and traditions, and is nationally renowned. It was originally held in Shiprock, New Mexico, beginning in 1909 up until it moved to Gallup in 1922. Westheimer cited the goals of the Gallup show and the Santa Fe Indian Market as being: “. . . to protect Indian people and their traditional culture, and to promote the manufacture of, and the market for, their high quality arts.” Just as with the Hopi Craftsman, prizes were awarded, the work was publicly displayed, and everything was for sale. Westheimer, “Our Most Cherished Ideals: The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition As A Manifestation of American Culture,” 89-90.


159 The name School of American Research is used here, as this is what the organization was called during most of Colton’s career. It was founded in 1907 as the School of American Archaeology, and in 2007 the name changed again to the School of Advanced Research on the Human Experience.
a new prize list that the Southwest Indian Fair committee had created. The list was

circulated to schools and Indian Bureau agents throughout the Southwest. Burge wrote:

One of our first replies is from the stockman at Hotevilla. Chap and I
talked it over and we both feel that you have done, and are doing so much
for the Hopi that we do not want to step into a field that is being so
excellently looked after without first writing to you and asking your
opinion and plans. 160

When Burge referred to “Chap” she meant Kenneth Chapman, an artist who had headed
the art department for the New Mexico Normal School before joining the staff of the
School of American Research. Burge, Colton and Chapman were acquainted through
professional circles. A lengthy correspondence between Colton, Burge, and LaFarge
sprang from this initial letter.

A proposal had been put forth (the correspondence is unclear as to by whom) to
add an arts and crafts fair to the annual 4th of July rodeo at Polacca. The timing of the
rodeo conflicted with the annual Hopi Craftsman Exhibition, always held over the 4th of
July. Colton’s reaction was swift and pointed. She wrote back to Burge on April 12,
1933:

It seems to us a useless duplication of effort and expense for the Indian
Bureau to build up from the present ‘Polacca Rodeo’ a Hopi-Navajo Fair,
as the dates of the Rodeo conflict with those of the ‘Hopi Craftsman.’ The
Rodeo is purely local, and due to the many large Fourth of July
celebrations in northern Arizona can never hope to attract a ‘buying
public’, which would make a Fair worth while at such a season. A local
‘Hopi Fair’ might be successfully organized if it was held at ‘Snake
Dance’ time, in August, when the maximum number of tourists gather on
the Reservation. Under such favorable conditions I would, of course, like
to see our Hopi people compete for the prizes so generously offered by the
committee of the Southwest Indian Fair.

160 Mrs. Moris (Margaret) Burge, Santa Fe, NM, to Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ,
April 6, 1933. MS-207-306-32 File, National Association on Indian Affairs – LaFarge, etc., Colton
Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.
The Reservation officials are, I see, in a rather confused state of mind and being, as usual, over worked, are not able to see the issues very clearly. This new ‘Rug Project’ is causing them a lot of grief and they have really neither the time nor the background to cope with it.

Now, the present ‘Rug Project’ does not apply in any way to Hopi textiles, as you have probably noted in reading the specifications. Therefore, I would suggest that as the Navajos in our region are not taken care of by the ‘Hopi Craftsman’ exhibition, it would seem reasonable for the ‘Fair Committee’ to concentrate upon their Crafts, for the present, at least. Thus both peoples would be adequately handled and there would be no duplication of effort and expense.

I have written to Mr. A. C. Cooley, Director of Extension and Industry, Indian Bureau, who I have the pleasure of knowing and have explained the situation fully to him. I feel sure he will see the wisdom of concentrating effort on our already thoroughly established Hopi work, rather than undertaking something new, which everyone is aware they are not prepared to handle successfully at this time.\footnote{Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ, to Margaret Burge, Santa Fe, NM, April 12, 1933. MS-207-306-32 File, National Association on Indian Affairs – LaFarge, etc., Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.}

This letter provides a glimpse into Colton’s personality. While often described as nice, caring, quiet, perhaps a bit reclusive, she could, and certainly did, speak her mind regarding subjects about which she felt strongly. Her work with the Hopi was definitely one of those subjects.

Confident in her knowledge of the Hopi, the market for Southwestern Native American arts, and her status in that field, Colton politely yet emphatically dismissed the idea of another art fair for the Hopi. She also demonstrated a grasp of the issues with which the Indian Bureau, particularly the local agents, struggled. The idea that she would not prevail seemed inconceivable to Colton. She concluded the letter:

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\ldots \text{I believe that it would help to clear things up for the local Indian officials, if the ‘Fair Committee’ made it clear to them that they considered the interests of the Hopi adequately cared for by the Museum of Northern Arizona and would advise them to back us up rather than to}
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scatter their energies. Let me say again, how much I appreciate your attitude of cooperation and how anxious we are to assist you in any possible way.\textsuperscript{162}

Several weeks later Oliver LaFarge of the National Association on Indian Affairs wrote to Colton referencing her letter to Burge. He proposed that due to:

\ldots the growing interest in possible jurisdictional Fairs throughout the Navajo country, as well as the increasing development of the Pueblo Fiestas as exhibitions, it was suggested that this Association, with its close connection with the Indian Fairs Committee in Santa Fe, help to work out a program which would avoid such conflicts.\textsuperscript{163}

He acknowledged Colton’s work and the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition: “The position which your Exhibition holds is well known, and certainly no well-informed person would desire to do anything which would hamper the fine work you are accomplishing.”\textsuperscript{164} The correspondence between LaFarge and Colton continued through the summer of 1933. Colton justified the reasons for her position and explained how carefully the Hopi Craftsman dates had been chosen so as not to conflict with the Gallup Inter-Tribal Indian Ceremonial, the Santa Fe Indian Market, seasonal ceremonial dances, and other fairs and festivals in the region. She also explained the geographical differences between the Hopi mesas and the Rio Grande Pueblos, the former being much less accessible than the latter, presenting a challenge to any fair on the Hopi Reservation. In the end, the matter was dropped and no arts fair was added to the Polacca Rodeo.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{163} Oliver LaFarge, New York, NY, to Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Flagstaff, AZ, June 3, 1933. MS-207-306-32 File, National Association on Indian Affairs – LaFarge, etc., Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

\textsuperscript{164} Ibid.
Recognition

For her work with the Hopi and Navajo Indians, Colton was honored by the United States Department of the Interior, Indian Arts and Crafts Board. Dr. Rene J. d’Harnoncourt, then Chairman of the Board, sent Colton the following letter dated July 1, 1959:

You came from the East into a land which was new and strange to you. Soon you found a new life into which you fit yourself so naturally that you have become as one.

Quietly you approached the Indian artist with the warmth of a friend and the humility of a learner, and he responded by giving generously of his culture. To this you added a depth of perception and artistic sensitivity which enabled you to measure his strengths and limitations.

Realizing that this was expressive of a great tradition and part of our national heritage, you exercised every effort to perpetuate this tradition so that generations yet to come might also enjoy it.

Yet this was never unthinking romanticism. In a practical sense you have demanded that the artist continually create, and strive towards ever-expanding goals. You have never allowed quality to be sacrificed for expediency.

You were never satisfied with merely learning of this culture. You made it your life work to share this with others, and to assist the Indian artist in every way possible. You established the Department of Art in the Museum of Northern Arizona as an important part of the program of that Institution. You developed many exhibitions which have become annual events, and are today so successful in the Museum’s activities. You gave great assistance to the Indian Arts and Crafts Board in the first years of its organization, and you have been of continuing inspiration in the carrying out of its work.

Rarely does a non-Indian have the opportunity to establish an Indian tradition. Yet, in 1938, you proposed a development in Hopi silversmithing which had a long, slow genesis. Today that style of silverwork has become familiar, and is popularly regarded as representing a traditional craft expression of these people. But you were careful not to dictate; yours was the role of counselor – in truth, a pupil turned teacher.
In recognition of what you have so unselfishly given of yourself for the betterment of others, the Indian Arts and Crafts Board takes pride and pleasure in presenting you with this Certificate of Appreciation.\textsuperscript{165}

Colton corresponded with d’Harnoncourt many times over the years about their common interest in Native American arts.\textsuperscript{166} He was well aware of her work with the Hopi and Navajo, and given his background, was well positioned to place Colton’s work into the broader context of Native American education between the 1920s and 1950s. Anthropologist Susan Brown McGreevy also observed that Colton’s work with the Hopi and Navajo “. . . had a profound impact on the survival and revitalizations of the arts of both groups. Her familiarity with the archaeological prototypes of Hopi pottery caused her to be acutely concerned with the commercialization of the craft during the 1920s.”\textsuperscript{167}

**Tentative Plan for Indian Crafts**

Recognizing that her health was failing, Colton drafted a plan for maintaining her work with the Hopi. Labeled “rough draft,” and dated 1959, this document is one of the last found in Colton’s files. In the introduction, she listed three main points:

1. It is my wish to plan ahead for the perpetuation of my work with ‘Arts and Crafts’ of the Hopi people. If this is not planned now, many beautiful techniques will soon be forgotten and will never again be revived in this changing world.

\textsuperscript{165} MS207-209-267 File, Health - Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton. Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

\textsuperscript{166} d’Harnoncourt was appointed head of the newly created Indian Arts and Crafts Board (IACB) in 1936. The IACB was formed to generate a revival of Native American arts and crafts. Colton’s advocacy efforts contributed to the establishment of the IACB. d’Harnoncourt served in the position until 1944 when we went to work for the Museum of Modern Art; he subsequently became director in 1949, a position which he held until 1967.

2. I feel that the first step in this effort to perpetuate the Hopi arts and crafts is to create and maintain a market for their finest work, such as that we have already established in the ‘Hopi Craftsman Exhibition.’

3. I believe that a woman should be in charge of this work, not a man, as both Hopi and Navajo are used to being dominated by their women and wherever possible their customs should be followed.\textsuperscript{168}

This plan resembles Colton’s writings throughout her career and appears to be a summary of her work with the Hopi. The only new recommendation is that the individual in charge of executing the plan be a woman.

Colton proposed some qualifications for the position, including: “some anthropological training; interest in Arts and Crafts; Must like and get along with people; Quiet person; Must have car.”\textsuperscript{169} This brief list of qualifications is intriguing given that Colton herself was self-trained in the field of anthropology, she certainly would not have been considered an extrovert (although she was very close to her inner circle of friends and family), and she never learned to drive.\textsuperscript{170} The plan also specified a yearly salary, an abbreviated list of duties, suggestions for housing, and a proposed yearly calendar of trips.

With this document Colton’s involvement with the native peoples of the Colorado Plateau came to a close. Her work left an indelible mark upon the arts of the Navajo and

\textsuperscript{168} Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “Tentative Plan for Indian Crafts.” MS207-2-196 File, Department of Art. Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. The Hopi are a matriarchal culture.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{170} Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns. Dr. Colton tried to teach Mary-Russell to drive once they moved to Flagstaff, but lost patience with her and in one of her more spirited moments, she refused to ever try driving again. One of Museum staff members, the household staff, or Dr. Colton drove her everywhere. In informal conversations with several individuals in Flagstaff that knew Colton, several people hypothesized that this may be why some people in Flagstaff saw Mary-Russell as aloof or putting on airs. In reality, she just could not drive.
Hopi. Further, her interactions with these cultures served as inspiration for Colton’s own artwork over a period of nearly fifty years. Colton’s artwork served as extension of her life as an educator.
Women Artists of the Twentieth Century West

Colton has been included in some studies about pioneering women artists in the West, including An Encyclopedia of Women Artists of the American West, Independent Spirits: Women Painters of the American West, 1890-1945, Women Artists of the American West, and Brushstrokes on the Colorado Plateau: An Overview of Anglo Art on the Colorado Plateau. Each of these anthologies includes a few paragraphs or a couple of pages of information about Colton’s work as a pioneering female artist in the early twentieth century Southwest. Some of her most notable accomplishments and activities were recognized in the aforementioned studies - usually outlined in a documentary manner rather than in an analytical fashion. These brief mentions read more like a chronological list of events in Colton’s life than a detailed analysis of her work.

Colton’s academic training at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women was the focus of a 1994 article by Walls, Educating Women for Art and Commerce: The Philadelphia School of Design, and her participation in a group of women artists at

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various times called Ten Philadelphia Painters, The Ten, and The Philadelphia Ten, was the topic of a 1998 book by Talbott and Sydney, *The Philadelphia Ten: A Women’s Artist Group 1917-1945*. Walls’ history of the Philadelphia School of Design for Women provided a context for Colton’s training as an artist and some of her ideals about art education as well as offering insight into the shaping of her value system. Detailed and analytical, Talbott and Sydney’s history of *The Philadelphia Ten* offered a means of comparing Colton’s accomplishments to those of her peers.

Like many women artists of the American West, Colton has languished in the shadow of her male contemporaries such as Charles Russell, Frederic Remington, Charles Schreyvogel, William Robinson Leigh, and more. While Colton was far from the only female artist in Arizona, she did arrive relatively early in Arizona’s early historic period – first visiting in 1910 and relocating just fourteen years after statehood. And, she certainly played an important role in furthering art education in the young state. The accomplishments of Colton and her peers were recently recognized in an *Arizona Highways* article:

> With their paints, palettes and plenty of spunk, women artists journeyed to Arizona during the first decades of the twentieth century to render the grand landscape and sweeping sky. Undaunted by Arizona’s harsh climate and reputation for outlaws and Indians, women artists surprisingly outnumbered male artists during the late Territorial and early statehood

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3 *Arizona Highways* started publication in 1925 as a guide to motoring around Arizona. The magazine has evolved over the years to become an internationally acclaimed, award winning publication that has featured the work of many prominent twentieth century photographers, such as Ansel Adams – before his work was widely known. While not a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal, *Arizona Highways* has regularly featured articles about the artists and photographers of Arizona.
periods. No ‘Sunday afternoon painters,’ these academically trained women artists came from New York, Philadelphia and Chicago, with serious artistic ambitions. Arizona offered women artists wide-open spaces to realize their dreams. Canvases ablaze with color, they captured the beauty of a land as boundless as its opportunities for self discovery. Although roughly a dozen women settlers altered Arizona’s early cultural landscape, this story spotlights four who made momentous contributions. . . all left a profound and enduring mark on the developing land.4

Colton was one of the four highlighted artists. Her work as an artist, curator, and educator provided a myriad of learning opportunities for residents of the Colorado Plateau and visitors to the region. Further, her own artwork introduced the Plateau to viewers around the nation and in Europe through her involvement with the Philadelphia Ten, a group of progressive women artists that Colton helped to found after graduating from the Philadelphia School of Design for Women (now Moore College of Art and Design).

The Philadelphia Ten

The alumni files of Moore College of Art and Design provide much insight into the activities of its graduates. One of the more prolific groups of artists formed by alumni of the College was the Philadelphia Ten; this group was active from 1917 – 1945, producing sixty-five exhibitions.5 Colton was a founding member of the group, and one of five to participate in almost every one of its exhibitions. The Philadelphia Ten was formed “to provide additional venues for the members’ work, thereby enhancing their

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5 Ibid. The name of the group changed over time from Ten Philadelphia Painters to The Philadelphia Ten to The Ten. I have chosen to use The Philadelphia Ten as Talbott and Sydney did in their exhibition catalogue.
visibility locally and nationally. The majority of the group’s members studied at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women; the remainder studied at the prestigious Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, also in Philadelphia.

While prolific, and very committed to their work and educating the public through art, The Philadelphia Ten were relatively conservative during a time of tumultuous change in the art world, as they were resistant to modernism. The group’s membership consisted entirely of female artists, yet their work could hardly be classified as feminist and it most certainly was not *avante-garde* or modernist; most of the work produced by artists in the group was very non-confrontational, either landscapes or portraits. Colton’s work was no exception.

The Philadelphia Ten exhibited on an annual basis for most of the group’s history and often created rotary exhibitions that traveled around the country, and sometimes internationally. Their venues included woman’s clubs, art alliances, galleries, and prominent museums such as the Akron Art Institute, the Witte Museum, the Milwaukee Art Institute, and the Syracuse Museum. The group also exhibited several times in Europe, receiving much popular acclaim.

In 1931, the group’s annual exhibition traveled to New York for the first time; it opened at Ferargil Galleries that March. The Philadelphia Ten and the exhibition were featured in an article in the *New York Evening Post* on Thursday, March 12, 1931. While

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6 Ibid., 9.


8 Ibid.
not mentioning Colton by name, the article did remark upon the diversity of genres within the exhibition, including works from the far West.\textsuperscript{9}

Colton received publicity for her work outside of the Philadelphia Ten as well. An article about her artwork with an image of \textit{Sunset on a Lava Field} appeared in \textit{The Christian Science Monitor} on Tuesday, September 2, 1930. The author observed that:

\textbf{Color contrasts of daring vividness characterize the work of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton. In her Arizona canvases, Mrs. Colton gives full sway to her love of color. One is impressed by the sense of vast remoteness that she manages to capture for these western paintings that are bringing her ever-increasing recognition.}\textsuperscript{10}

Colton’s use of color is the art element most frequently mentioned with regard to her paintings. But, her use of perspective was strong as well, helping to convey a sense of place to the viewer. Referring to \textit{Sunset on a Lava Field}, the article concluded:

\textbf{One of her striking canvases appeared at the winter exhibition of the work of the Ten Philadelphia Painters, of which she is a member. Under swirling white clouds that hold the sunlight’s bright reflection and contrast sharply with the deep blue of the sky, purple-topped hills lift their serene heads. Green, cuplike spots brighten the slopes and low, scrubby pines, topped by bright sunshine rise beyond low mounds of red earth. Notwithstanding its vivid coloring the painting is wholly convincing and irresistible, a distinctly interesting contribution to the year’s art.}\textsuperscript{11}

Once again, Colton transported viewers to her beloved Colorado Plateau, offering them a glimpse of the landscapes she so loved. The viewer gains a sense of the vast distances on the Plateau, the vividness of the cerulean sky, and the flora and geology of the area.

Colton was the only artist in the group that painted the Southwestern United States. Her works often stood out from those of her colleagues who participated in The

\textsuperscript{9} Marion Clyde McCarroll, “Ten Philadelphia Painters are Showing Work at Ferargil Galleries” (\textit{New York Evening Post}, Thursday, March 12, 1931).

\textsuperscript{10} MS-207-305-3 File, Newspaper and Magazine Clippings, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. \textit{The Christian Science Monitor}, Tuesday September 2, 1930.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
Philadelphia Ten exhibitions. Colton primarily painted landscapes; less frequently she created portraits. (See Figures 30 through 36) She majored in portraiture at the PSDW, yet was often unhappy with the results of her portraits.\(^\text{12}\) The landscapes of the Southwest captured her imagination.

Art critics frequently commented upon Colton’s choice of subjects, as they were so distinct from the rest of her Philadelphia Ten peers. One critic remarked that: “Mary F. Colton has chosen our own brilliantly colorful Southwest with its canyons and desert, its wilderness and solitary places, which have been made glad through the magic of her brushes and paint.”\(^\text{13}\) Through her paintings, Colton conveyed a sense of depth, scale, strength, and distance, important elements needed to portray the Southwest authentically. She captured the color in the inhuman rock formations and the vastness of the sky.

But, Colton’s work embodied more than just the beauty of the American West. A review of her work in the *Christian Science Monitor* proclaimed that:

\[\ldots\text{The thought lavished upon the work is essentially American. So new, so overpowering is the western message, that its phrasing requires originality, and defies reminiscent tendencies. And therein lies its potency, its value in redeeming American art from the imitation of the European.}\]

The following year, the same paper reported:

\[\text{The grandeur of nature, the insignificance of man is felt in Mrs. Colton’s renderings. She paints an impersonal nature, calm, aloof, suffused with}\]

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\(^\text{12}\) Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns.

\(^\text{13}\) MS207-309-2 File, Art Articles – Ten Philadelphia Painters. Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. The article referenced was printed in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 9, 1924.

Figure 30 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Moencopi Wash, 1925, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C2414.
Figure 31 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Painted Desert, date unknown, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, IL2005-11-5.
Figure 32 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Oak Creek, ca. 1930s, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C763.
Figure 33 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Church at Rancho de Taos, ca. 1913, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C867.
Figure 34 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Cinder Hills, 1939, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C873.
Figure 35 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Aspen Scene, date unknown, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C1365.
Figure 36. Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Hart Prairie, 1930, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C1366.
the intensity of color, each stratum carefully distinguished from its
neighbor, and always, the sense of stately aloofness.15

The list of accolades for Colton’s work is extensive. Her paintings were critically
acclaimed in nearly all of The Philadelphia Ten Exhibitions.

Year after year, Colton’s paintings were singled out among The Philadelphia Ten
members:

Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, a true lover of our great West. Her
wonderful desert scenes, as well as her marvelously colored canyon
pictures, made many friends. Her canvases bear long and careful study,
being, for the most part, simple scenes which however, must be seen many
times to be fully appreciated.16

Never monotonous, her paintings of the high desert captured the drama in the landscapes
of the Colorado Plateau. Colton was “. . . recognized as one of the leading painters of
Western landscapes. She gives an impression of great sweep of desert and sky on a small
canvas in a most convincing way.”17 Further, she encapsulated “. . . the tantalizing
reactions of an artist to the potentialities of that vast and colorful country, with its
fantastic shapes, its unbelievable pigments and the sheer magic of its distances.”18

Her geographic location was not the only way that Colton differed from her peers
in The Philadelphia Ten. Talbott and Sydney found that: “Painters and sculptors alike,

Archives. The article referenced was printed in the Christian Science Monitor, March 10, 1926.

Archives. The article referenced was printed in The Bedford Inquirer, “Success of Art Exhibit” February
18, 1927.”

Archives. The article referenced was printed in a Philadelphia paper, “American Paintings Exhibited,”
June 17, 1928.

Archives. The article referenced was printed in the Philadelphia Public Ledger, “10 Phila. Painters, Now
Reduced to 8, Give Annual Show,” November 10, 1929.
The Philadelphia Ten were self-supporting entrepreneurs for whom sales were critical. Vigorous self-promotion, aggressive marketing, and a creative outreach were all components of their commercial success.¹⁹ For a brief period of time after graduation Colton did try to help support herself through art restoration work and her painting, but ultimately she had her mother and stepfather upon which to rely. Just three years after graduation she married a man of means. Dr. Colton’s wealth combined with inheritances from her mother and stepfather assured Mary-Russell a life free from worry about having to paint, or do any kind of work, to earn a living. This does not mean that Colton lacked a strong work ethic, just that she did not have to promote and market her artwork in the same way that her peers did. Perhaps as a result, Colton’s work is less well known than that of her peers.

Moreover, Colton married and had children, something most of her peers in The Philadelphia Ten did not do. Instead, they “represented the first generation of modern art professionals who felt compelled to choose a commitment to art over home and family.”²⁰ A modern woman in the twenty-first century meaning of the term, Colton was determined to have it all, a career, a family, and her artwork.

Members of The Philadelphia Ten had several means of marketing their work, but one coincided with their belief in art education, their interest in bringing the fine arts to a broader segment of the American population, and their desire to encourage women to explore their innate artistic talents – not only as artists, but as consumers with discrimination and taste. . . ²¹

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²⁰ Ibid., 13.

²¹ Ibid.
the rotary, or traveling, exhibition. Those exhibitions were often held in community centers and other civic buildings that were accessible to non-traditional audiences who otherwise would not typically view artwork. The audiences that came to view these exhibitions were diverse, and included large numbers of children.

Even after moving to Flagstaff, Colton maintained strong ties with her colleagues and peers in the Philadelphia Ten. She corresponded with them for decades. Colton was also one of the regular participants in the group’s annual exhibition and rotary exhibits. An undated press release for the group proclaimed:

To Arizona now where Mary R. F. Colton lives and paints. She of the Valley of the Painted Hills, whose neighbors are the Hopis and Navajos. Here she sees that fine combination of nature’s elements, a dry climate and rarefied air that produces on one’s vision colors that do not seem real. Here she puts on canvas the vivid reds and oranges, the vibrant blues and purples of the desert, and huge massive banks of clouds hanging motionless over brilliantly dyed hills. Reflecting all that color in their honest weather beaten faces are the portraits she does of the Indians, her neighbors.

The majority of the artwork that Colton showed through the Philadelphia Ten reflected the landscapes and peoples of the Plateau, although she did occasionally include work from her travels. An undated newspaper article commented:

Another significant personality is Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, who has been living for some years near Flagstaff, Ariz. Her subject matter is

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23 Ibid. Given the other materials the press release was filed with and the list of artists participating in that year’s exhibition I estimate the date to be between 1939 and 1942.

24 Ibid. Colton exhibited paintings from a trip to Hawaii in the 1933 exhibition, and paintings from Bali and other countries that she visited on a round-the-world trip in 1936-1937 in the 1938 exhibition.
Western. In the past she has contributed landscapes, using the colorful desert, its flora, its distant mountains formations and clouded skies; but this year she combines with landscapes one unusually striking canvas, ‘Se-Quop-Tena, [sic] Hopi Weaver, spinning.’ A blue shirt vibrates against the red of a shawl, yet is held in subordinate interest to the brown-toned head with its black hair caught up in a roll at the nape of the neck with a whitish ribbon. In the hand is a distaff of red-brown thread. In its unity of feeling the canvas is simple and direct. Vivid colors are used, yet so related one to another and so contributing to the character of the subject that one’s interest goes instantly to the face of the old Indian.  

(See Figure 37)

Another article from Colton’s alumni file dated 1931 noted:

Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, who is permanently settled in Flagstaff, Arizona, is doing a splendid work among the Indians. She visited a number of the Hopi and Navajo villages this fall and with the help of an interpreter called the people together and urged them to keep to their old symbolic designs in making rugs, pottery and baskets; and to use more care in the moulding of pottery and the firing. Mrs. Colton has started a Museum in Flagstaff where exhibitions of Indian crafts are held, at which Indians take turns in being in charge during the exhibition. In this way she is encouraging the Indian to attain a higher degree of craftsmanship and to protect the old symbolic designs.

Articles such as these spread the word to alumni of the school and potential viewers about the work that Colton was doing.

Additional Exhibitions

In 1933, Colton participated in a nationwide exhibition organized by the National Association of Women Painters and Sculptors, a group which she was a member of.

Colton submitted Out on the Hopi Mesas for that exhibition. In 1931 one of Colton’s

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25 MS207-305-3 File, Newspaper and Magazine Clippings. Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. The article mentions that the Philadelphia Ten had been exhibiting for twelve years, but on occasion they did skip an annual exhibition. I estimate the date of the article to be ca. 1927.

Figure 37 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Sequaptewa - Hopi Weaver Spinning, 1931, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C874.
paintings, *Valley of the Little Painted Hills*, (See Figure 38) was included in an American Federation of Arts exhibition hosted by the Springfield Art Museum in Springfield, Massachusetts. The exhibition was visited by thousands of people and was much acclaimed.\(^{27}\)

In 1935 Colton was offered a solo exhibition at the Arizona State Teachers College in Flagstaff (now Northern Arizona University). Fifteen of her paintings and sketches of Arizona and Hawaii were shown in the exhibition.\(^{28}\) A few years later, in 1938, some of Colton’s art was exhibited in the foyer of the Museum. (See Figure 39) She also exhibited paintings from an around-the-world trip that the Coltons took in 1936-1937. (See Figure 40)

**Marginalization**

Much of Colton’s career as an artist (and the subject of her paintings) focused on the Southwest. This choice had an effect on her visibility in the art world. Trenton and D’Emilio contended that:

> Geographical location too had its price. The history of women in the American West has generally been treated as marginal to the main narrative of American women’s history, an elision repeated in art history. If women artists have been invisible in the Western canon, their regional affiliation has sometimes made them provincials in the eyes of the New York-based art world. Many of the women whose works grace this book studied in New York and Chicago and Paris, but once they crossed the ninety-eighth meridian, they seemed to disappear.\(^{29}\)

\(^{27}\) MS207-308-10 File, Paintings, Mary Russell Ferrell Colton. Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

\(^{28}\) MS208-305-3 File, Newspaper and Magazine Clippings. Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

Figure 38 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, In the Valley of the Painted Hills, ca. 1928, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C1011.
Figure 39 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton paintings on exhibit at MNA, 1938, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-21E.1938.7.
Figure 40. Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton and Harold Sellers Colton painting in the Philippines, 1937. Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona. MS207.211.3.1-14, photograph by J. Ferrell Colton.
Having studied at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women and traveled to Paris in 1909, Colton definitely had the classical training of her Eastern peers. Yet, she has not received the same recognition by art historians, possibly because Colton spent much of her career working in the West. Even today, a bias pervades art and museums; the East / Northeast remain the epicenter of those professions with the South and the West being perceived as backwaters, the hinterlands. The West was, and is in some ways, remote; but that does not mean that there were not innovative artists and educators in the region. Colton was a prime example.

Colton’s artistic and literary peers in Santa Fe and Taos have received considerable attention as previously cited. Trenton and D’Emilio observed of these women: “Although their lives and careers are generally less well known than those of their male counterparts, in a culture rich in women’s contributions of all kinds their work has left a profound imprint.”30 Colton’s imprint in Arizona is equally profound. Women who ventured to the Southwest in the early part of the twentieth century escaped some of the confinement of Eastern bourgeois society. Further, they found a land filled with unfamiliar cultures, endless vistas, big skies, and a special clarity in the light that fueled their creativity and imaginations.

Similar to her peers throughout the Southwest in the early twentieth century, Colton was not timid when it came to experiencing her newly adopted environment to the fullest. (See Figure 41) She backpacked, rode horses, and traveled by wagon and

30 Ibid., 154.
Figure 41 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton with paint box at Fort Lowell, Tucson, 1923, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, MS-207-211-5-17-2.
automobile on primitive roads to discover the peoples and places of the Colorado Plateau. The landscapes Colton saw and the people she met shaped her artistic perspective. And, her response to the things she encountered in the region contributed to the definition of the Southwest then, and now.

The environment in which she lived was vital to Colton’s work. In *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women’s Writing and Art*, Norwood and Monk clarified:

> Landscape provides the necessary context and background for life. Further, in creating landscapes we express our social and personal identities . . . Yet landscape is more than an object to manipulate or a passive environment; it talks back to us and influences our behavior.  

Colton’s paintings resonate with the cultures of the Hopi and Navajo peoples she encountered, and vistas that she beheld.

Colton’s response to her adopted environment was not unique. Norwood and Monk found that for many women the Southwestern

. . . environment translates into sensations of open space, light, altitude, and immense vistas occurring partially because of the arid climate. The physical and biological landscapes provide a sense of wonder and potential characteristic of the region, a feeling shared by the cultural groups.

Colton drew her energy from the Plateau, and it helped to shape her identity and the direction of her artwork. She melded with the Plateau. Talbott and Sydney observed

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32 Ibid., 8.
that: “emotionally and physically connected to the sweeping vistas of the American Southwest, Colton captured the grandeur and vastness of her adopted land.”

Catalogue Raisonne

Several attempts have been made to create a definitive list of Colton’s artwork, yet no such catalogue exists. Colton’s granddaughter Denise observed that previous attempts to develop a comprehensive catalogue of Colton’s work do not include, by a long shot, all her wonderful paintings. I should know, for I worked in the entire summers of 1960 and 1961 for my grandfather in his office, now the Annex, and one of the first projects which we did was to locate grandmother’s paintings and establish a list of them. We spent several weeks at this.

Comparing and combining the research regarding Colton’s artwork conducted by all of the aforementioned scholars would be a valuable contribution to the literature about twentieth century women artists in Arizona. But, the purpose of this study is not to create a catalogue raisonne. Colton’s body of work is analyzed here to illustrate how she functioned as an educator through her paintings.

Artist as Educator

As an artist, Colton also played the role of educator; the effects can be seen best in those closest to her, particularly her granddaughters, Robin and Denise Colton. Both

33 Ibid., 81.

34 A list of the publications that have attempted to compile a complete list of Colton’s work include: Mangum & Mangum, One Woman’s West: The Life of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton; MS207-308-7 Catalogue of paintings, sketches, and sculpture, December 1958, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives. Susan Olberding, a Research Associate at the Museum of Northern Arizona, has also worked diligently for many years to reconstruct a complete list of Colton’s work, as has Colton’s granddaughter F. Denise Colton.

35 F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
women have fond remembrances of spending time in their grandmother’s art studio. Denise Colton recalled spending “hour after hour listening to her, [Mary-Russell] watching her paint, and talking of her life and the family.” Similarly, Robin Colton remembered that her grandmother “. . . was always trying to teach us the appreciation I think of who we were, where we came from and to appreciate things around us too. And . . . we often went and did things in her art studio with her. She especially liked to have us make little figurines of all sorts, including Indian pottery, and then we would bake it in a bake oven that was over at grandfather’s laboratory.”

Colton’s art studio was separate from the main house and had a wall of windows that faced due north toward the San Francisco Peaks, providing the perfect light for painting. Robin Colton recollected that:

... her studio was wonderful. It always smelled like linseed oil and paint, which it should have. . . . I just loved the smell of the paints, the whole atmosphere of watching her with her easel, her large easel and then her small, [one] the one that had all the paints... (See Figures 42 through 44)

Colton instilled in her granddaughters a love of painting as they watched her work.

Most of Colton’s paintings were created from real life, or from her mind’s eye. Rarely if ever did she paint from photographs. Robin Colton recalled: “I think she painted from real life because what she would do basically . . . was to do what she called sketches.” Those sketches were small versions of the larger works that Colton wanted to paint; she left many behind for her granddaughters.

36 Ibid.
37 Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
Figure 42 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton's paint palette, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, H530.
Figure 43 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton's paint box, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, E10912.
Figure 44 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton's easel, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, IL2005.14.2.
Mary- Russell Colton wrote about her process for creating art sometime in the 1930s:

My own work is mostly landscape in the summer. I have an especially designed field outfit for working directly upon large canvases in the open. Where conditions are most often difficult, I sometimes camp for several days on one location waiting for the hour each day, which will bring the proper mood.

Most of my portrait work is done in the studio during the winter months; when we are not quite so busy at the Museum and I can get my Indian friends to come in and pose for me.\textsuperscript{40}

Robin and Denise Colton both remembered Mary-Russell painting in her studio. Robin reminisced:

. . . I was fascinated by it that she could take a brush and mix some paint and suddenly she had something beautiful going on on the canvas . . . I never saw her painting from photographs ever . . . I think she would go somewhere, you know, and look at a desert and paint it.\textsuperscript{41}

\textbf{Education through Art}

Through her artwork Colton educated viewers about the landscapes and peoples that she loved most. Colton’s most enduring works of art were created on her early trips to the West or during her many years living in Flagstaff. In her paintings, Colton captured the very essence of the Colorado Plateau, the jagged mountains, endless vistas and billowing clouds. She painted with vibrant colors and vigorous brushstrokes. While landscapes were her favorite genre, Colton was a talented portraitist in both oil and charcoal. Her granddaughter Robin recalled:

I think she was, she could have been very good at doing portraits but she was best at doing landscapes. . . . but some of the portraits she did were beautiful. … But then she did some that later she didn’t like and so she

\textsuperscript{40} Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, “My Work For Art Alliance.” MS207-306-1 File, Miscellaneous Articles on Hopi Indian Arts, Colton Collection, Museum of Northern Arizona Archives.

\textsuperscript{41} Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
painted them out even though they were totally painted. One was of my father and his little dog Gyp sitting in the studio and it was wonderful and for some reason, later on, years later she decided she didn’t like the head and she painted it out and put another head on it of my dad but it, to me it looked like a little bit on the large side for the body, maybe a little older than he would have been, you know, at the time. But, I think she, she actually had the talent. She was just more into landscapes, and I’ve seen - I know there are a lot of paintings that I had never seen and I didn’t know who they belonged to but I’ve since seen in publications and things, a few, and some that my cousin Dick Wilson had that were just beautiful, wonderfully done. And, some of her best ones I think she had given away or, I don’t know if she sold them, but I know she gave them to relatives, certain relatives had them, and I was lucky enough to come into possession of about, I guess eight large paintings of hers that I treasure with all my heart.\textsuperscript{42}

(See Figure 45) Colton’s portraits have been called insightful, sensitive, and penetrating; she balanced her academic training with an unusual, strong mix of colors, probably the result of painting the vibrant landscapes of the Southwest for many years. Portraits of Colton’s Navajo and Hopi friends were included in several traveling exhibitions of The Philadelphia Ten, including \textit{Navajo Shepherdess} (ca. 1917) and \textit{Sequaptewa, Hopi Weaver Spinning} (ca. 1931). Talbott and Sydney observed that Colton’s portraits “portrayed her sitters with dignity, sensitivity, and affection.”\textsuperscript{43} (See Figure 46)

The Colton’s were attracted to the Colorado Plateau because of its landscapes and peoples. At that time, the region was still relatively unexplored and austere. Their imaginative, questioning, energetic personalities found endless possibilities to explore on the Plateau. Mary-Russell Colton recorded those explorations in her artwork. MNA

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{43} Talbott & Sydney, \textit{The Philadelphia Ten: A Women’s Artist Group 1917-1945}, 81.
Figure 45 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton painting at the easel, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, 82.0106.
Figure 46 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Navajo Sheperdess, 1918, C869.
Executive Director Robert Breunig reflected that Colton was “a significant, if under-recognized, painter of the land and people of the West.”\(^\text{44}\)

Colton integrated her artwork into the Museum’s educational programs over the years. At the first Hopi Craftsman Show, in 1930, she displayed *Hopi Maiden*; this piece was prominently displayed on a wall behind the Hopi weaver demonstrating his art. Art historians Patricia Trenton and Sandra D’Emilio maintained that: “The inclusion of this painting within the exhibit of ‘Old Hopi Work’ suggests that Colton thought of her portraiture of Native Americans in both an aesthetic and an ethnographic context.”\(^\text{45}\) The ethnographic aspect of Colton’s paintings lent them an educative value. Displayed in context with the Hopi artisans, viewers were able to understand that Hopi culture was very much alive and well. This contrasted with Colton’s motivation for starting the Hopi Craftsman Show – her belief in the myth of the vanishing race. (See Figure 47)

Inspired by the peoples and landscapes she knew best, Colton often painted associates, friends, and family, as evidenced by her 1942 portrait of Edmund Nequatewa, a longtime staff member at the Museum who worked as interpreter and liaison to the Hopi. Trenton and D’Emilio explained that this painting “. . . is a highly symbolic portrait, designed to reveal the artist’s understanding of the intersection of the material and spiritual worlds that distinguished Hopi beliefs.”\(^\text{46}\) Nequatewa is seated in the foreground; the male figures in the background depict the spiritual realm. (See Figure 48)


\(^{46}\) Ibid.
Figure 47 Hopi Craftsman Show, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C-100.1930.3.
Figure 48 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Edmund Nequatewa, 1942, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C872.
As engaging as her portraits were, Colton was best known for her striking landscapes of the Colorado Plateau. They evoke such a sense of place that countless viewers were visually transported to the Plateau through Colton’s work. Many of the landscapes that Colton painted were scenes near Flagstaff, such as Sunset Crater (1930). Flagstaff is situated in the midst of a large volcanic field, now thought to be extinct. (See Figure 49) Sunset Crater is a national monument, due in no small part to the Coltons.47 Trenton and D’Emilio explained that: “Sunset Crater was believed to be the home of the beneficent Kana-a Kachinas of the Hopi, a venerated site since prehistoric times.”48 Thus, even Colton’s landscapes were sometimes deeply rooted in Hopi culture as in the case of this sacred site, as well as the San Francisco Peaks towering above Flagstaff, home to the kachinas.

Via her paintings, Colton conveyed her love of the Southwest to colleagues in Philadelphia, but she did not try to impose an Eastern aesthetic on her peers in the Southwest. One of her Philadelphia Ten friends, Isabel Branson Cartwright, visited Colton in Flagstaff. While there, Cartwright painted a portrait of Colton. (See Figure 50) This portrait captured Colton in the prime of her career and probably at her happiest. She had traded in her Eastern garb for leather jodhpurs and a headscarf, which suited her Southwestern lifestyle. Denise Colton remarked: “My grandmothers’ art often stirs

47 In 1929 the Museum conducted excavations at Sunset Crater, which was formed by a volcanic eruption in 1064 CE. At approximately the same time, a movie company from Hollywood that was filming in Flagstaff planned to blow up the side of the Crater to create a rock fall. Word of this plan created an uproar in Flagstaff. Local citizens prevented the company from blasting, and the Coltons joined them in forcing the government to protect the Crater. The NASSA sponsored the nomination of Sunset Crater, and on May 25, 1930, President Herbert Hoover signed the act that made it a National Monument. Harold Sellers Colton, “1930 at the Museum” (Museum Notes 3, January 1931), 1; Hermann K. Bleibtreu, “Foreword” (Plateau 49, Fall 1976), 1; Katharine Bartlett, interview by W. James Burns.

Figure 49 Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton, Sunset Crater, date unknown, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, IL2005.11.3.
Figure 50 Portrait of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton by Isabel Branson Cartwright, 1927, Courtesy of the Museum of Northern Arizona, C868.
the soul. So many have told me that, and I have always felt it. Her brush was magical, swooping, and unhesitating. Her colors were true. Only those who have been to the Southwest can affirm this.”

Former Museum librarian Dorothy House noted that Mrs. Colton was . . . best known for her fine landscapes of the Southwest, especially the oils painted after 1920 when she began to use gesso grounds, a technique that gave her paintings remarkable brilliance. Mrs. Colton’s work, still greatly admired, has given joy to countless people, both in Arizona and beyond.

Trenton and D’Emilio observed that: “. . . Western women artists have also left us a highly self-conscious visual, plastic, and literary record of their personal visions in a place like no other on earth. The West, of course, is not a monolith, any more than all women are alike.” Colton’s visions are no exception; Denise Colton reminisced: “When I look at her [Mary-Russell’s] paintings I cannot help but think how well they encompass her spirit, the flow of color, the great clouds the mountains.” Further, Denise remembered that her grandmother “. . . wanted to show the world that ‘art’ can help our lives to be happy, by expressing ourselves.”

Through the 1940s and into the early 1950s, Colton painted less and less as her health problems escalated. Denise Colton remembered that her grandmother continued to

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49 F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns.


51 Trenton & D'Emilio, Independent Spirits: Women Painters of the American West, 1890-1945, 3.

52 F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns.

53 Ibid.
paint and sketch in her later life. Robin Colton, however, recalled Mary-Russell Colton’s last painting dating to the early 1950s:

... when she began to fail a little she stopped painting, and my father came on one of his last visits to me in Tucson [and] he saw a painting on my wall that he said was grandmother’s last painting that she ever did, so I was a rather amazed. It was a Sedona painting.54

It is possible that both Denise and Robin Colton are correct: the catalogue of Mary-Russell’s artwork in the Museum’s archives dates her last painting in the early 1950s, but she very likely continued to sketch even after that. A handful of letters that Colton wrote to her husband from the Bells Lodge in Phoenix, where she was sent in 1962, contain small sketches.55

The Artist’s Eye: MNA’s Fine Arts Collection

As an artist, Colton’s background and talent also proved beneficial in her work as a curator at the Museum. Her highly trained eye is evident even today in the choices she made for the Museum’s fine arts collection. The collection is particularly strong in Native American art of the Southwest, somewhat less so in Western American art in general. Within the Museum’s geographical focus, the artists of the Colorado Plateau are well represented, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. Many works of art by children who later went on to become acclaimed artists were collected from the Junior Art Show and the Junior Indian Art Show. Former curator Kathy Chase summarized:

“The depth and breadth of the life of this talented, articulate, and adventuresome

54 Ibid; Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns. Barton Wright recalled that by the mid-1950s when he arrived at the Museum: “there was no way that she [Colton] could paint any longer.”

individual places her at the forefront of important Arizona personalities. Today the results of Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton’s lifework are internationally recognized."\textsuperscript{56}

\textsuperscript{56} Chase, “Brushstrokes on the Colorado Plateau.”
CHAPTER 8

LEGACY

Colton’s Legacy as an Art Educator

Colton’s accomplishments as an educator are still in evidence; the efforts of her work are manifested today. She left a legacy from which residents and visitors to Flagstaff, the gateway to the Colorado Plateau, can derive enjoyment and learning. That legacy continues today through the Museum’s mission “to inspire a sense of love and responsibility for the beauty and diversity of the” region.¹

After two intensely productive decades as Curator of Art and Ethnology at the Museum, Colton retired in 1948, although she continued to be very involved in the Hopi and Navajo Craftsman Shows. Her health had slowly been declining; during the 1950s, Colton became increasingly reclusive and uncomfortable around people she did not know. She suffered from paranoia, and seldom left Coyote Range, the family home.² Mary-Russell’s condition worsened with time, and the Coltons began to withdraw from the Museum. Dr. Colton made every attempt to seek the very best care for Mary-Russell.


She was diagnosed at the time with atherosclerosis of the brain, although her symptoms would most likely be diagnosed today as Alzheimer’s disease. During August 1962 it became impossible for Dr. Colton to care for Mary-Russell at Coyote Range, and she was sedated and taken to Camelback Hospital in Phoenix on Sunday August 12, 1962 in a mortician’s ambulance. Later, she was transferred to The Bells Lodge, where she lived the remaining nine years of her life, until she passed away July 16, 1971.

Many who knew her, who have studied her life, and who work for the Museum, remember Colton as a demigod. Indeed, she felt a sense of duty, an obligation based on her wealth and status in society, to give back as much to society as possible. This stance was consonant with social expectations for wealthy individuals of Colton’s time. But, her sense of noblesse oblige complicates Colton’s personality and assessments of her life’s work. A complex person, Colton’s efforts were sometimes perceived as condescending, as well intentioned as they may have been. She has been criticized for objectification because of studying “the other,” but that criticism could also be seen as presentism. Does this diminish Colton’s contributions to art education?

Overshadowed in the professional literature by her contemporaries such as Mabel Dodge Luhan, Alice Corbin Henderson, Mary Austin, Dorothy Dunn, Frieda Lawrence, Amelia Elizabeth White, Mary Wheelwright, and Maie Heard, Colton’s role in art education in the twentieth century Southwest is relatively unknown compared to her

\[^3\] Olberding, *Telling the Story: The Museum of Northern Arizona*; Miller, *The Life of Harold Sellers Colton: A Philadelphia Brahmin in Flagstaff*, 103-104; Mangum & Mangum, *One Woman’s West: The Life of Mary Russell Ferrell Colton*; F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns; Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns; Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns; Dick Wilson, interview by W. James Burns; Bill Breed, interview by W. James Burns.

peers. Persistent, dedicated, passionate, and determined to bring art to the lives of the peoples of the Colorado Plateau, both Native American and Anglo, Colton established standards of excellence (long before that term was en vogue) that the Museum of Northern Arizona strives to achieve today. Her contributions are worthy of recognition.

Always Educating

Both of Colton’s granddaughters remembered that she was constantly teaching them about anything and everything that interested her. When asked about fond remembrances of her grandmother, Robin Colton responded:

. . . I think one of my fondest memories of her is that she would often come just out of the blue to the house and she would take us out in the woods, especially me, and we would lie down under the trees and watch the big clouds skipping across the sky and I know that she always loved the clouds so much because she painted them a lot, you know, in her paintings, and that’s one thing I particularly love that she did. But, she would always show us the chipmunks and the squirrels and just so many things that brought to a child’s mind the importance of nature I think. But I think it was also part of a teaching experience. I really do, because she really was a true teacher from the heart.5

A naturalist, Mary-Russell Colton tried to instill a love of nature in her young granddaughters. She also attempted to convey an appreciation for the landscapes of the Colorado Plateau, the place she loved so dearly. Robin Colton continued:

. . . Also I think being at the Museum with my grandparents as young kids was a very exciting thing for us. Perhaps we didn’t realize it at the time, how lucky we were that we got to learn firsthand so much about all the displays for instance. That was fascinating to children, and she would tell us all about the meaning of each thing, and she loved the Hopis. She loved the Hopi tribe especially. And, I know she knew a lot about the textiles and the dyes. She wrote a book about it. But all that we were

5 Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns
learning as children, you know, and too, especially exciting were when the shows came up in the summer, because I know that it was so important to her, the fact that the peoples would bring in their finest examples of their work and then she along with others would judge them. I know that was another very important thing to her. But I realized that as a child, how important it was, and Denise and I often had the chance to stand in the doorway and take, be the tickers who counted off the people that were coming in to see the exhibits.6

Thus, even as a child, Robin Colton understood the value in her grandmother’s life work.

Robin, the eldest of Ferrell Colton’s two children, was in her late teens before Mary-Russell was sent to The Bells Lodge, so she vividly remembers her grandmother.

Robin’s sister Denise, her junior by four years, also remembers Mary-Russell well before her health began to fail badly. Robin recalled: “I think, it, it became clear to me even as a young child that, when she [Mary-Russell] was passionate about something she would try to teach us all about it.”7

Robin and Denise Colton were born into a highly educated family, but it was their grandmother who most shaped their educational experiences. Robin commented that her grandmother’s

. . . personality was such that I think she had an open and teaching mind to everything. Whatever she did . . . she was telling us about it . . . she loved having us trailing along after her while she did things so that we would learn how to do them, and we were small then. I think I was eight or nine, you know, and I really remember a lot of these things. But, she also wanted the best education for us. That was another thing that was very important to her, that we be well educated and in a broad way that isn’t, just doesn’t only come from schooling. But, I think that was important to her. She always showed us her books on Bali and just so many things, and, I think one thing that inspired me greatly was, aside from watching her paint, she had different books on painting and of the great artists of the world, and we would sit down and look at those books, and, so I would go

6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
home then and sketch out things and try to paint them. So, I went for a long period of my life painting.\(^8\)

Robin Colton lamented giving up painting; her grandmother very clearly played a strong role in shaping Robin’s interests. Although Denise Colton did not expressly discuss this in her interview, she too possesses artistic talent and credits her grandmother for her love of painting and art.

Expanding further upon her memories of Mary-Russell Colton, Robin recalled: “It was a natural thing for her, [educating] not in a pushy way. You didn’t even notice that that was going on, that she always was trying to teach us something, and I’m, I’m just even at my age now … so much in love with art.”\(^9\) Colton conveyed both her love of art, and learning, to her granddaughters, and countless visitors to the Museum. Robin maintained: “. . . I can only say that she [Mary-Russell] was always teaching. Whatever it was . . . she wanted us to know about it. And, she wanted us to be appreciative of things so that we could go on learning. And, I think she was interested in a higher education for both of us.”\(^10\)

Art Department at MNA in the Post-Colton Years

When Colton resigned as Curator of Art in 1948, Leo Bushman filled her position: after him Alexander O. Brodie took over the job. In 1955, Barton Wright joined the staff as Art Curator, later served as Museum Curator, and for a short time as Assistant

\(^8\) Ibid.
\(^9\) Ibid.
\(^10\) Ibid.
Director. He worked for the Museum for twenty-two years, leaving in 1977. Wright continued the programs and exhibitions that Colton created. During the first couple of years of Wright’s tenure, Colton was still somewhat involved in the Museum, although her health was rapidly declining by that point in time. Wright remembered: “Well, she came over and . . . would oversee all of the programs we put on. And, I think in the beginning year . . . she also approved of any artwork that I did, like posters and such.” Colton became less involved each year to the point that she primarily served only as a judge for the Hopi and Navajo Craftsman Shows. Wright indicated that the early effects of Alzheimer’s were evident in the late 1950s when he worked with Colton, and that 1958 or 1959 was the last year she served as a judge.

In 1977, the year that Wright left MNA, the museum sought to embolden its commitment to arts education by creating the Art Institute of the Museum of Northern Arizona. Students at the Institute were taught silversmithing, blacksmithing, ceramics, weaving, painting, and life drawing. A great deal of resources were poured into the Art Institute that year:

A major expenditure of energy by the Art Institute staff in 1977 was directed toward building studio facilities. Land was cleared and leveled and the old vehicle maintenance garage was converted to a blacksmith shop for metal sculpture. Another building on the grounds was converted to a painting studio, while a barn was cleaned out and used for weaving, painting and clay.

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11 Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid. Barton Wright cautioned that he was not absolutely certain about the last year that Colton served as a judge. Photographs were taken of the judging each year. The last year that Colton appears in those images, housed in the photographic archives at the Museum, was 1960.

14 Bleibtreu, Annual Report From the Director 1977, 9;
Materials for studio improvement and art were donated by Interpace Corporation, California; the Santa Fe Railroad; Southwest Forest Products; and the Navajo Army Depot.

Firebrick was dug and hauled by the Institute staff from the old smelter ruins at Clarkdale, Arizona, to build furnaces and kilns. The staff also made a trip to Marble, Colorado, for marble from the historic Yule Quarry, source for the Lincoln Memorial.

A glass blowing facility was built. Three concrete slabs were poured, a ramada of aspen poles was constructed, and a glass furnace and propane tank were installed.\(^{15}\)

The Art Institute was created under the leadership of the Museum’s third director, Dr. Hermann Bleibtreu.\(^{16}\) Bleibtreu hired Jacob Brookins to organize the Art Institute. Brookins developed an intern program, a series of summer symposiums, and an artists-in-residence program. The Institute functioned as part of Bleibtreu’s vision of the Museum as a center for Colorado Plateau studies. Bleibtreu observed that:

> An artist may catch the subtle nuances of this varied and fascinating geographic region – both its peoples and environs, and interpret the subject in a unique manner. For this reason, the role of the Museum’s fine arts collection extends beyond any formal boundaries and touches, in one way or another every formal discipline covered at the Museum.\(^{17}\)

Bleibtreu’s vision for the Art Institute was grand, but funds for the project were not forthcoming. In 1980 the Museum faced a serious financial situation necessitating massive cutbacks in staff and operating expenses just to keep the doors open. Dr.

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\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) When Dr. Colton retired in 1959 his hand picked successor, Dr. Edward ‘Ned’ Danson took over leadership of the Museum. Danson was father to famed actor Ted Danson. Dr. Danson retired in 1975 at which point Dr. Bleibtreu assumed the director’s position.

\(^{17}\) Bleibtreu, Annual Report from the Director, 1978, 8.
Bleibtreu resigned in 1980 and David Chase stepped in as acting director until a new
director could be hired. The Art Institute was never revived.18

The Legacy of the Hopi and Navajo
Craftsman Exhibitions

The Hopi and Navajo Craftsman Exhibitions continue to provide benefits for the
artists and the public decades after Colton created them. Each has gone through a series
of name changes over the years, from being called shows to exhibitions to marketplaces
and finally to festivals.19 Curator and Professor Linda B. Eaton elucidated some of the
benefits of the Hopi Show, but they actually apply to all of the festivals (as they are
called today) held by the Museum today (Zuni, Hopi, Navajo). Eaton explained that:
“The Show provides another benefit to artists, because it helps to educate the buying
public about quality Hopi art and about Hopi culture.”20 The artists themselves take part
in that education process, assisting the public in understanding the difference between
“genuine Hopi art and what is fake.”21

The festivals, while not entirely altruistic, bring tangible benefits to the native
peoples of the Colorado Plateau. The advantage for the Museum is that the festivals draw

18 For more information about the Museum’s financial woes see Burns, “Gateway to the Colorado
Plateau: A Portrait of the Museum of Northern Arizona.” Since Dr. Danson retired in 1975, the Museum
has had a series of directors, none of whose tenure has been very long: Dr. Hermann Bleibtreu 1975 to
1980; David Chase acting; Dr. Robert Bowen 1981-1982; David Chase acting; Phillip Thompson 1983 –
present.

19 The term marketplace was coined in the mid-1990s under the directorship of Michael Fox. All
of the Native American marketplaces were combined into the Heritage Program, which still exists today,
although some are now called festivals of arts and culture.

20 Eaton, The Hopi Craftsman Exhibition and the Creation of the Art of the ‘Other,’ 78.

21 Ibid, 79.
large crowds that contribute significantly to the annual attendance figure, and to fulfilling its mission. Generally speaking, the festivals remain true to their original intent:

Mary-Russell worked tirelessly to create a camaraderie between the Museum and the Hopis, and she made it clear to the Hopis that the museum’s motivation in holding the Hopi Craftsman Exhibition was solely to help the Hopis, both artistically as well as financially.\(^{22}\)

Eaton summed up two of the three benefits of the festivals; the artists recognized financial gains through the sale of their work and they learned by networking with fellow artists.

Colton has often been credited with revitalizing Hopi and Navajo arts by promoting traditional techniques, designs, and materials, and by providing a marketplace for those works. Barton Wright concluded: “...the Coltons I credit for the Hopis continuing to have such good craftwork as they did because they really did have these good standards and had an outlet where they could sell it and so I think it made a great deal of difference...”\(^{23}\) Linda Eaton concurred: “Although many early blue ribbon pieces were far from her ideals, time and patience produced a trajectory of change that placed Colton’s stamp indelibly on Hopi art.”\(^{24}\)

Colton walked a fine line between being paternalistic and being helpful. Duffie Westheimer argued that:

Mrs. Colton’s overriding goal was to help Indian peoples maintain their unique cultures even as they adjusted to inevitable change. She believed that through continued production of their ‘best’ arts – usually those considered more traditional – they could improve their own lives. It is

\(^{22}\) Ibid, 89.

\(^{23}\) Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns.

impossible to know how the project would have developed had she been able to remain involved and with the inspiration with which she started.\textsuperscript{25}

Westheimer’s statement suggests that Colton’s influence on Native American arts on the Colorado Plateau was significant, and that had Alzheimer’s disease not abbreviated her career, her legacy would have been even greater. She made many close friends among the Hopi over the years; to this day she is still spoken of fondly on the Hopi Mesas.

Highly regarded by the Hopi and Navajo as well as by her Anglo peers, Colton was inspired by the needs she saw. But, the tribes did not ask her for assistance; Colton decided of her own accord to intervene. Westheimer: “. . . once informally asked a Hopi artist if the Hopi people would have ever organized an exhibition project like MNA’s (without urging by Euro-Americans). Before he said a word he cracked a smile and chuckled softly.”\textsuperscript{26}

Zuni Festival of Arts and Culture

The Zuni Festival of Arts and Culture was started by the Museum in 1987 to foster the arts of the Zuni Indians, a pueblo tribe that lives on the Colorado Plateau in northwestern New Mexico. The festival is done “in partnership with the A:shiwi A:wan Museum and Heritage Center, [and is] a celebration of the Zuni way of life and Zuni expressions of creativity . . . .”\textsuperscript{27} The Festival includes native Zuni dances, music, and displays of textiles, jewelry, carvings (fetishes), pottery, and paintings.

\textsuperscript{25} Westheimer, “The Annual MNA Indian Art Exhibitions: Maintaining Traditions,” 43.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.

The Hopi and Navajo Craftsman Shows created by Colton served as a model for the Zuni Festival. Without her work it is unlikely that the Zuni Festival would have been developed. The same is true for the short-lived Pai Festival, which ran from 1996 to 2003. This festival featured the work of the Havasupai and Hualapai Indians.

Year 2000 Plan

In 1993 Michael Fox assumed the directorship of the Museum; soon thereafter he developed the *Year 2000 Plan – Museum of Northern Arizona*. In this plan, Fox reaffirmed the Museum’s commitment to its mission, to the geographical focus on the Colorado Plateau, and to supporting both art and science. As evidence of his commitment to the arts, Fox solicited funds to add a major expansion on to the Museum, the Branigar-Chase Discovery Center, which contains a theatre and space to display some of the fine art collection. Fox also considered reinstating the defunct artists-in-residence program to provide support for artists on the Plateau.²⁸

Fox portrayed Mary-Russell Colton as an educator; he explained that for her “. . . the main mission of education at the Museum of Northern Arizona was to instill in the visitor, both adult and child, an ethical and moral consciousness for the appreciation and preservation of the cultural and natural diversity of the Colorado Plateau.”²⁹ Mary-Russell was especially interested in cultural life on the Plateau. Fox described her as “a multiculturalist who sincerely felt that all peoples of the Colorado Plateau deserved an

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²⁹ Ibid., 35.
equal voice in the recording of their histories, the planning of their future, and the defense of their beliefs.” Robin and Denise Colton both described their grandmother in the same way; they remembered her being very broad-minded for her time, embracing of ethnic diversity. Further, Mary-Russell Colton was a supporter of popular public education for all.

Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy

Twenty-five years after her death, the Museum embarked upon a new venture that Colton would surely have supported enthusiastically, the first museum / public high school partnership in the nation. Opened in the fall of 1996, this charter school, the Flagstaff Arts & Leadership Academy (FALA), quickly became a national model of a public-private partnership. The United States Department of Education recognized FALA for its academic/arts partnership with the Museum, its unique learning environment and its academic rigor. FALA utilized an integrated curriculum emphasizing the visual and performing arts, and results (based on test scores) have been quite positive.

The FALA was founded by Dr. Karen Butterfield, who served as executive director from 1996-2001. Michael Fox, then Museum director, supported Butterfield’s efforts; Fox resigned at the end of 1999. Previously, Butterfield had served as Arts Coordinator for the Flagstaff Unified School District in 1989 and was unhappy with the

30 Ibid.
31 The author was employed by the Museum at the time FALA opened and recalls the circumstances surrounding its founding well.
district’s performance and policies regarding arts education. As the years passed, she watched art instructors being eliminated from the public schools, not unlike what Colton witnessed in the 1930s. The elementary school art program was particularly hard hit. Butterfield determined to do something to address this lamentable situation. She proposed a “Flagstaff-based charter school that emphasized, celebrated, and valued arts education.”

Butterfield envisioned a school with strong core academic classes integrated with a visual and performing arts curriculum. She once remarked: “I wanted to start a charter school because I believe that a curriculum emphasizing the arts strengthens the whole child and develops analytical thinking skills.”

Citing Colton, Butterfield formulated a compelling proposal for a partnership between the Museum and the new school. Former MNA educator Tracy Fleming remarked:

Providing a physical location for a fine arts high school would honor and perpetuate the artistic legacy of Mrs. Colton and would support the Museum’s mission by teaching young people about the artistic traditions, diverse cultures, sciences, and landscapes of the Colorado Plateau.

Indeed, hopes were high in Flagstaff when the creation of the museum/school partnership was announced. A local newspaper article at the time revealed that; “many, many people here in Flagstaff believe that this school will succeed in promoting the arts,


culture, education and leadership potential of our youth in northern Arizona.”

While the vision was wonderful and optimism was high, reality fell short of the dream.

Development of the FALA / MNA partnership was complicated by the lack of a strategic plan to integrate the two institutions, primarily the with regard to implementation steps. The partnership between the Museum and FALA continues to evolve as the school prepares for a possible off-campus move. Regardless of the outcome, this groundbreaking collaboration furthered Colton’s goal of establishing the importance of art in everyone’s life.

The lack of a strategic plan became painfully evident after Fox and Butterfield left; support for the partnership decreased. Resources, always limited, became even more so. Moreover, stakeholders in each organization, never fully included in the partnership agreement, became even more isolated. Fleming explained that; “. . . this partnership was born out of the passion and expertise of two talented individuals, but it lacked a long-term plan for ensuring its viability.” Over time the partnership floundered under a lack of leadership because no road map was provided for how it would function in the long term.

The relationship between FALA and MNA is worth analyzing as it embodied both a well-conceived concept and a poorly executed model. Fleming found that: “Once their [Fox and Butterfield’s] initial influence subsided and as other issues became institutional priorities for both MNA and FALA, over the years, support for the partnership decreased


37 Ibid., 102.
and the connection between the two institutions weakened."\(^{38}\) This underscores the importance of explicit partnership agreements, including plans for implementation and financing. A similar situation occurred when the Colton’s passed away and the Museum struggled to chart its future course and secure funding.\(^{39}\)

Fleming concluded that,

> Because the MNA-FALA partnership lacked a shared vision and did not acknowledge the accommodations and resources that would be necessary to support partnership initiatives, the partnership lacked the ability to remain functional and sustain itself over time.\(^{40}\)

Today, the partnership struggles under the same challenges, a lack of focus and resources. Further, a lack of institutional memory exists as to why the partnership was significant, and “community members have little incentive to care about and participate in the partnership today.”\(^{41}\) Well-intentioned as Butterfield and Fox were, they failed to provide a strong foundation for the long-term health of the partnership. Without that foundation the interaction between FALA and MNA, which was envisioned as the core of the partnership, subsided. The lack of planning, funding, staff, and time, has ultimately taken its toll. The future of the partnership remains uncertain.

Given its purpose and goals, Colton would surely have been supportive of the idea of a charter school / museum partnership, although she probably would not have

\(^{38}\) Ibid.

\(^{39}\) This was the basis of the author’s M.A. thesis: Burns “Gateway to the Colorado Plateau: A Portrait of the Museum of Northern Arizona.”


\(^{41}\) Ibid., 105.
advocated for FALA if she knew the specifics of the partnership as aforementioned.\textsuperscript{42} The idea as originally conceived called for “teachers and administrators working with the entire museum staff to plan the academy’s integrative lessons.”\textsuperscript{43} In reality, that never happened. Butterfield and Fox envisioned students in the galleries and the theatre and interacting with native artisans; that happened at times, but never as regularly as teachers or administrators at FALA would have liked.

The Art Barn

A new phase in the artistic life in Flagstaff began the year after Colton was sent to The Bells Lodge in Phoenix. In 1963, “a group of local artists gained the supervisors’ permission to convert the stock barn into an ‘Art Barn’ where they could meet, paint, have lessons, and exhibit their work.”\textsuperscript{44} This was the first tentative step for a new generation of artists and arts advocates who stepped in to fill the void created by Colton’s departure from Flagstaff.

The Art Barn was established as part of the Fort Valley Cultural Park, created as a complex of educational, cultural and recreational facilities in 1960. The Cultural Park was located about a mile south of the Museum on Fort Valley Road, and also included a historical museum and the Coconino Center for the Arts.\textsuperscript{45} One of the champions of the

\textsuperscript{42} Richard Wilson, interview by W. James Burns.

\textsuperscript{43} Butterfield, “Partners in the Arts,” 50.

\textsuperscript{44} Platt Cline, \textit{Mountain Town: Flagstaff’s First Century}, 457.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 456. Today the historical museum is part of the Arizona Historical Society, a state-run institution. Previously the property served as the county hospital, but was no longer in use and had fallen into disrepair.
Art Barn was Viola Babbitt, a longtime rival of Colton’s. The two women failed to see eye-to-eye on a matter related to the Arizona Artists’ Arts and Crafts Exhibition when the Museum was still located at the Woman’s Club in the late 1920s and early 1930s, and their relationship was cool ever thereafter.46

Babbitt was as passionate about art as Colton. In a 1964 speech to the Flagstaff Chamber of Commerce, she exhorted:

Every town should have an Art barn, weathered and worn, but rich with memories, a heritage from those wonderful, sturdy pioneers who built it – a building with strength and meaning, a place to dream and create, a place to work at something you love, a place for recognition of merit, a place to leave something of yourself to posterity.47

Babbitt convinced the county board of supervisors to contribute to rehabilitating the Art Barn, to lease it to a group of artists for $1 per year, and to contribute to the yearly operating costs. The Art Barn opened Easter weekend, 1965.48 For several years the Art Barn hosted the Flagstaff Regional Exhibit of the Arizona Scholastic Arts and Photography Awards program, which resembled the Junior Art Show created by Colton in the 1930s. The show was “designed to offer recognition and encouragement to outstanding student artists and to present to the public the best of creative work being done in classrooms in Arizona.”49 In 1983, Babbitt was honored as the founder of the Art Barn. Over the years, her appeals for the importance of art to the local community were eloquent, just as Colton’s had been several decades previously.

46 Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns. This underscores the passionate nature of Colton’s personality.

47 Quoted in Betsey Bruner, “Uncertain Future for Art Barn” (Arizona Daily Sun, April 2, 2008).

48 Today the organization is known as the Flagstaff Art Barn.

49 “Listed Student Art Show Winners” (The Sun, February 21, 1974), 13.
Coconino Center for the Arts

The Coconino Center for the Arts (CCFA) was another one of the arts organizations founded in Flagstaff in the vacuum created by Colton’s absence from the local art scene. In 1974, at age 80, Viola Babbitt decided that Flagstaff needed more than the Museum and the Art Barn; “armed with statistics, cost estimates and drawings, she called on the supervisors and asked approval to erect a major cultural center, a building that would house a permanent gallery and theater . . . .”50 The county board of supervisors agreed that such a facility would be a benefit to the community, but they were only able to provide minimal funding. Fortuitously, “in 1977 Congress set up a plan to help counties erect needed structures, while thus sparking the economy.”51 Due to Babbitt’s persistence and diligence, a set a blueprints had already been prepared for construction of the facility and the federal government allocated $300,000 through the Coconino County board of supervisors for construction. The CCFA opened in April 1981. Ultimately, the county could not afford to run the CCFA and it was spun off as a 501(c)3 in 1984, but continued to receive some support from Coconino County.

The CCFA created the Festival of Native American Arts, which became a major annual event that complemented the Museum’s Heritage Program. The goals of the CCFA “were to provide quality programming and education in visual, performing, and literary arts; to emphasize the unique cultural heritage of the area; and to support local


51 Ibid.
artists through workshops, programs, and gift shop facilities.” Its exhibitions and programs were reflective of all of cultures in the county.

In 1986, the CCFA founded an exhibition that assumed a broad definition of art, the *Trappings of the American West*. The *Trappings* exhibition continues today. Included in the exhibition are works by poets, musicians, painters, sculptors, photographers, and many other tradesmen whose everyday utilitarian objects that are used in the American West are exhibited as art. The intent of the exhibition is to highlight common life-experiences of people who have lived and worked on Western ranches. The exhibition was hosted jointly between the CCFA and the Museum for many years, and recently, entirely at the Museum.

Every spring, the CCFA organized an exhibition that featured the work of children from the county’s schools, titled the *Youth Arts Exhibit*. This exhibition bore a striking resemblance to the Junior Art Show founded by Colton in the 1930s. Further, many of the performers in the Center’s programs went out into the schools to work directly with the kids.

**Flagstaff as a Cultural Mecca**

Flagstaff is not often referenced in the same category as Santa Fe or Taos in terms of cultural centers of the Southwest, but it has long supported scientific, arts, and educational organizations. Robin Colton contended that “Flagstaff has become a bit of a cultural center, and perhaps, some of that may be due to my grandparents, or my

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52 Ibid., 459.
grandmother because I do know how serious she was about culture and art . . . .”53 Yet, Flagstaff cannot be compared to Santa Fe, one of the largest art markets in the nation.

Why did Flagstaff not become a haven for artists, writers, and other cultural types? Further, was it ever a goal of Colton’s to create that kind of atmosphere in Flagstaff? Neither question can be answered definitively, but interviews with Colton’s colleagues and family provide some clues. The most compelling explanation was that Flagstaff possessed a different mindset than Santa Fe and Taos. When asked what he thought the biggest challenge was that Colton faced in achieving her goals as Curator of Art, Barton Wright responded:

The attitude of the people because she basically had to change their way of thinking. . . . The men weren’t involved in anything like that and they didn’t see the Museum as a worthwhile thing – it was Dr. Colton’s plaything. And, that attitude had to be changed before the Museum really started to succeed and that was what I think Mrs. Colton did most.54

In this observation, Wright meant that Mary-Russell Colton concentrated more on the arts and on trying to build connections within the local community whereas Dr. Colton excelled in the sciences and his research and was more involved in the broader academic community.55

Wright’s observation overlooked the relationships that Mary-Russell Colton cultivated both regionally, and nationally, within the fields of Native American education and art. As detailed in chapters four through six, she carried on a correspondence with

53 Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns.

54 Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns.

55 While Wright’s reference to “plaything” may seem pejorative, he was not trying to disparage Dr. Colton’s credentials as a scientist. The reference more likely refers to the elitist reputation that has haunted the Museum for decades.
several prominent educators, artists, and writers of her time. Wright contended that Colton never envisioned Flagstaff as an artists’ colony. While Denise and Robin Colton do not remember their grandmother explicitly stating this as a goal, they both maintain that it would have been consistent with her personality and ambitions.\footnote{Ibid; Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns; F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns.}

Whether or not Colton envisioned Flagstaff as a potential artists’ colony, it did not develop in that way. Barton Wright offered a possible explanation,

\ldots If you think of Santa Fe – a whole batch of Indians right next to you in your yard, doing your work, down the street from you and the artists could paint them whenever they wanted. When you got to Flagstaff who [sic] are you going to paint? Those Indians are ninety miles out that way, one hundred miles out this way. They come to town once in a blue moon and their idea of what to do in town does not involve sitting for a portrait.\footnote{Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns.}

Wright raised a good point; by the time Colton came to Flagstaff, Santa Fe had been inhabited for nearly 400 years by a mix of Native American, Spanish, and Anglo cultures. The Pueblo tribes dated back much further than that. These cultures were commingled, to a certain extent, and provided subject matter for artists and writers drawn to the area.

Flagstaff did not possess the same history or the blending of cultures as Santa Fe and Taos did. The area around Flagstaff was home to the Sinagua, the prehistoric people who inhabited the region. After their departure, settlers, or even explorers, were scarce in the Flagstaff area for centuries until the mid-1800s. In its early historic settlement period Flagstaff began as a railroad town, like many towns in the West at that time. It was home to far more roughnecks than artists. The few artists who did come to Flagstaff in the years before Colton arrived struggled to attract their peers to the area.
Artist Louis Aiken settled in Flagstaff in 1904 and lived there until his death in 1913. He was fascinated by Hopi culture, and attempted to lure other artists to the area. Artists Kate Cory, Lillian Wilhelm Smith, and Jimmy Swinnerton followed soon thereafter. And, many other artists visited the area and painted while they were there, but did not settle on the Plateau. The scenery was picturesque, but not as accessible as the sites around Santa Fe and Taos. Oak Creek Canyon and Sedona were twenty to thirty-five miles away, the Grand Canyon seventy-five, the Hopi Mesas nearly one hundred, and the Navajo Reservation even further. Moreover, while Flagstaff was not settled entirely by Anglos, to suggest that it was in any way a multicultural community would be a stretch. Thus, the mixture of cultures that provided so much of the subject matter for the artists and writers in Santa Fe and Taos was not present in Flagstaff.

Flagstaff’s geographic location has long positioned it as a jumping-off place to other locations on the Colorado Plateau. For the past 130 years or so it has been the largest settlement on the Plateau. Rather than a destination like Santa Fe and Taos, it has been a place to pass through en route to the wonders of the Plateau.

Colton’s efforts were further complicated because she did not have a group of colleagues to support her; moreover her gender may have been a hindrance. Margaret Wright explained that:

She [Colton] was a woman but Santa Fe and Taos was artists who went there to paint. They weren’t trying to change something. They just went there to paint and it was a great place to live and a great place to paint and

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58 One example is Warren E. Rollins who became a prominent artist in the Santa Fe art colony. He painted some northern Arizona scenes, including the Hopis, the Grand Canyon, and the San Francisco Peaks.
so another friend would come and so on and so it was a true artists’ colony and in this case [Flagstaff] it was a scientific community with painting . . .

Barton Wright concurred; he and Margaret agreed that art took a back seat to science in Flagstaff.

Despite Colton’s efforts, the arts community in Flagstaff has not evolved as it did in Santa Fe and Taos. Former curator Bill Breed remarked that Flagstaff has been:

. . . a little more backward in development of the arts. I mean, they’re really developing now but the whole thing has been a little slower over here and you see if it wouldn’t have, if Mary-Russell Ferrell Colton hadn’t done that there . . . wouldn’t be as much as it is now.

Whatever her vision was for Flagstaff with regard to the arts, Colton did cultivate friendships with local artists in Flagstaff and Sedona. Her granddaughter Robin remembered: “she [Mary-Russell] had very artistic friends that were living in Sedona for instance and when she would go down there she would see them and that was a thing that brought them together.”

Richard Wilson, Dr. Colton’s nephew noted that Mary-Russell Colton’s work made a difference “. . . not just at the Museum, but, oh, actually, even with the Indian arts and crafts stores and all of the things that probably would not have been there without something happening. I think . . . her influence is there . . . although no name is attached.”

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59 Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns.
60 Bill Breed, interview by W. James Burns.
61 Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
62 Richard Wilson, interview by W. James Burns.
State of the Arts in Northern Arizona, 2010

To understand the state of the arts today, particularly in the public school system, necessitates having a grasp on the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act of 2001. Professor William Hayes discussed NCLB in his 2006 monograph *The Progressive Education Movement: Is it Still A Factor in Today’s Schools*. Hayes provided a succinct explanation of NCLB:

... Schools, districts, and states must show adequate yearly progress as measured by tests that are designed to determine a student’s knowledge of current standards that must be developed in every state. These curriculum standards would be created for every major academic area. The test must demonstrate student progress by the entire student body as well as progress by specific groups whose scores would be ‘disaggregated.’

Schools are given a report card that the general public scrutinizes. The intent was to hold schools accountable for student learning, and penalize, or subject them to corrective action when they are determined to be low performing or failing. The current reform movement has most definitely not been kind to the ideals of Dewey or other progressive leaders. Colton would surely be dismayed by the lack of emphasis on art education, yet again considered a frill that is easily lopped off the curriculum in many schools.

Arizona was one of the hardest hit states in the Great Recession of 2008-2010. Even as the rest of the nation has begun to recover at the end of in early 2010, Arizona faces its worst economic challenges since statehood. Ranking fiftieth in the nation for education spending, the state of Arizona just cut several hundred million dollars more in education funding. Additional cuts are imminent. Funding for arts education suffered some of the deepest spending cuts.

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Reputation

The Coltons, and by association the Museum, have suffered for decades under criticisms of elitism. Denise Colton remarked: “They [the Coltons] worked very hard. Their dedication was complete, their goals clear. I often think that people must have imagined that because there was wealth, there was inactivity, but no.”64 Similarly, Robin Colton commented about her grandparents: “. . . they were people with money, but they did good things with their money.”65 Later, she continued: “. . . I know a lot of people thought, well, the Coltons, you know, they are living out there in this huge property and have lots of money and things like that. . . . But, my grandparents were so normal, and they were so open, and, and accepting.”66 Without the contributions of Mary-Russell Ferrell and Harold Sellers Colton thousands of years worth of human history on the Colorado Plateau would likely have been transported to museums and cultural institutions in the East. Utilizing the Museum as a vehicle for preserving the region’s cultural and historical treasures, the Coltons acquired centuries’ worth of objects to be cared for in the public trust. Their efforts are still in evidence today through the goals of local cultural organizations. The Coltons played an integral role in twentieth century cultural life on the Colorado Plateau.

The Museum has long struggled to be relevant to the everyday lives of the citizens of Flagstaff and surrounding communities on the Plateau. While the Coltons incorporated some of John Cotton Dana’s ideals into the Museum, it definitely did not
have a Populist appeal. Nor were the Coltons entirely successful at attracting the support of the social upper echelon of Flagstaff. Barton Wright recalled: “They [the Coltons] made every effort to incorporate the movers and shakers from town into the Museum and the people in town always said well it’s just their Museum.” Yet, Margaret Wright observed that the Coltons “. . . did not try to foist their elite ways.” There seems to be a disconnect between people’s perceptions of the Coltons and their true personalities, possibly caused by the fact that they were very private people. Colton’s deepest struggle may have been trying to overcome public perception of the Museum. Her granddaughter Denise remembered that Colton’s “. . . greatest frustration might have been to ‘reach’ the public (of all ages).”

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67 Barton Wright and Margaret Wright, interview by W. James Burns.

68 Ibid.

69 F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
CHAPTER 9

CONCLUSION

By examining Colton’s work and the individuals that she associated with it is possible to draw some conclusions about her involvement with Native American education and art education in twentieth century Arizona. Colton wanted to share her knowledge and appreciation of Native American arts with others and to educate the general public.

The work of her contemporaries has been called patronizing, restrictive and ethnocentric by some critics. It is difficult to imagine what state the arts of the Hopi and Navajo would be in without Colton’s work, whether one considers it to be interfering or helpful. To this day, many Hopi and Navajo artists remember Colton fondly although they were just children when Colton worked closely with their parents.

Personality – Elitist or Not?

The Coltons were both very private people, particularly Mary-Russell. She may have been shy, or just uncomfortable in social situations with individuals that she did not know well. Colton did, however, have a group of close friends, and she enjoyed entertaining them at Coyote Range. Denise and Robin Colton both recall their grandparents frequently having houseguests, family and friends from the East. While capable of forming close relationships, particularly with her beloved family, it may be
that Colton was more comfortable interacting with objects and ideas than people. While she was perceived as standoffish, reclusive, snobbish, and elitist at times, Colton’s behavior that was interpreted that way may have had more to do with her personality than her upbringing or socioeconomic position.

Denise and Robin Colton, Richard Wilson, Katharine Bartlett, Richard Woodbury, Marie Stilley, Bill Breed, Dick Wilson, Mary Malmgren, Mary Kittredge, Kay Pollock, and Elizabeth Dobrinski, all remember the Coltons as generous and kind-hearted. These were the Colton’s closest family and associates. Grandchildren can be expected to cherish the memories of their grandparents, and their remembrances need to be filtered through that lens. But, Robin and Denise (interviewed separately), both recalled without being asked that their grandparents were misunderstood, and that they have not always been accurately portrayed in the popular or professional literature about them. Colton’s grandchildren admit that she was very proud of her heritage, as was their grandfather; their lineage may have made them aristocratic, but not aloof. Her associates remember Colton the same way; thus there appears to be some continuity between her personal and professional life.

Colton was aware of her privilege but used it to improve others’ lives. She began her career in museums at a time when most women entered the field through the education profession. They generally entered into education positions in museums because curatorial and directorial positions were typically awarded to their male counterparts at that time.

Colton was an anomaly in that she had an advanced degree and was married with a family, at a time when most women only had one or the other; thus she was
simultaneously traditional and a nonconformist. She was very well respected as a professional at a time when few women outside of education could make that claim. Colton did more than support her husband; she built a career for herself and left behind an impressive list of accomplishments. Part of the reason she was able to do so is that Colton did not have to rely on compensation for her cultural work – nor did she receive any. That was a luxury afforded her by her inherited wealth and Dr. Colton’s fortune. Moreover, Colton entered the museum profession through her work as an amateur ethnographer and archaeologist, and: “Ethnology, anthropology, paleontology, archaeology – these were museum fields in which women were becoming more prevalent during the twenties and thirties.”

In their 1994 study, Glaser and Zenetou discussed many of the twentieth century women pioneers of the museum profession, but their focus was on the Northeast / East Coast, and the West Coast, ignoring the rest of the nation. It is as if the Sunbelt (the South and Southwest), and the Intermountain West did not exist. The bicoastal / Northeast bias in the art and museum world is pervasive as mentioned throughout this study.

The focus of the present study on a Southwestern female art educator and museum professional is a step toward addressing that imbalance. Glaser and Zenetou acknowledged that:

> The mandate for education and excellence was also clearly evident in the work of America’s early female art curators. As we have previously seen with women involved in the founding of museums, the art world has long attracted the interest and commitment of women.

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2. Ibid: 25.
Talented women such as Colton “established collections, education departments, and program activities that became fundamental to the distinctive character of American museums.”

Colton was taught that because of her position in society she had a responsibility to share her knowledge with others in order to make the world a better place. The founding of the Museum was important in Colton’s life; it provided her with a place to display her ideals and a framework within which to carry them out. She set her agenda and established goals when the Museum was founded in 1928, and consistently worked toward them for the next three decades, until the late 1950s.

Goals and Accomplishments

When Colton became Curator of Art at the Museum she set three goals: 1) encourage local art and artists throughout northern Arizona 2) introduce outside art influences to residents of the region and 3) revitalize the arts of the native peoples of the Colorado Plateau. Using the Museum as a vehicle to promote her ideals, Colton achieved those goals. In pursuit of those goals, Colton developed an impressive network of colleagues, both regionally, and nationally, who supported Native American education, art education, and progressive education. Her efforts coincided with those of others in the Southwest who were working toward the same causes at that time: Dorothy Dunn, Amelia Elizabeth White, Mary Cabot Wheelwright, Martha White, Mary Austin, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Frieda Lawrence, Maie Bartlett Heard, Florence Dibble Bartlett, Winifred

3 Ibid: 34.
Jones MacCurdy, William Shirley Fulton, Rose Hayden Fulton, Harold Gladwin, Charles Lummis, Edgar Hewett, Dwight Heard, and Kenneth Chapman. Many of these writers, educators, museum professionals, and philanthropists were wealthy Easterners like the Coltons who came to the Southwest during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Colton’s granddaughter Denise observed that the Coltons’

. . . only earnest wish in both their minds was the communication . . . in every sense of the word, between such centers as Santa Fe and Taos with their work vis-à-vis the Colorado Plateau. That communication was the essence of what they considered important. . . .

Colton’s work as one of northern Arizona’s earliest art educators contributed to a better understanding of the culture of the various peoples of the Colorado Plateau for residents and visitors to the region. She also contributed to the preservation of Navajo and Hopi traditions through education.

A woman of firm convictions and strong ideals, Colton was strong-willed, and complex. Some of her ideals evolved over time, for example her opinion of the Navajo. Colton’s granddaughter Robin captured some of the dichotomies in Mary-Russell’s personality:

. . . I think she was a woman before her time as far as not being a discriminator in race or anything like that. But, on the other hand, she had come from a very, I guess, aristocratic Southern family that owned slaves, and she grew. Her whole life, she supported some of those [former] slaves until they died. . . .

Her work with the Hopi and Navajo has been criticized as paternalistic and praised as altruistic.

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4 F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns.

5 Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
Colton has also been remembered for her artwork and for her role in co-founding the Museum. But, she has been largely forgotten as a female pioneer art educator. Smith observed that:

Insisting on a straight jacket of Euro-derived notions of art disciplines too narrowly defined does not lead to an understanding of how to teach art to culturally diverse populations or how to teach about art to culturally diverse populations or how to teach about art as understood by these populations. If knowledge of the New Mexico art education experience had been disseminated in art education literature, rather than ghettoized in esoteric writings of art historians, art educators could have had an early warning of issues that have erupted since the rising tide of multiculturalism and the increasing pressure to deal with diverse populations. The whole field of art education might have benefited from knowledge of the Southwest experience.6

The same lessons can be learned from Colton’s work.

Colton’s educative style can be discerned from her granddaughters’ remembrances. Denise Colton recalled that her grandmother “. . . gently prodded. At an early age we both [Denise and her sister Robin] knew that we had to do well, try hard, and be diligent.”7 Similarly, Robin Colton remembered that Mary-Russell “. . . always want[ed] to give young people instruction and education. And, she saw in the young Indian children, young children who had as much as any other person the right to have an, an education . . . .”8

Colton was a multi-faceted person with a broad range of interests, and she pursued those interests with passion and commitment. The landscapes and peoples of the Colorado Plateau, the art that she was inspired to create, and education, satisfied Colton’s

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6 Smith, “The Unexplored: Art Education Historians’ Failure to Consider the Southwest,” 126.
7 F. Denise Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
8 Robin Colton, interview by W. James Burns.
soul. She firmly believed that the arts enrich peoples’ lives; that they provide a living; that they are a refuge from the struggles of daily life; that they make a person well rounded; and that they teach about the world around you and how it works. She understood that the arts are not just a luxury or an add-on, that they get to the core of what it means to be human, and that they are an economic generator. The arts reflect our society and history; they define us as a people and society.

Assessing the accomplishments of an individual such as Colton is never an easy task. McGreevy included Colton as one of the “Daughters of Affluence,” wealthy Easterners who moved west in the early decades of the twentieth century and contributed greatly to the field of anthropology:

. . . The objects made by native peoples represented a tangible symbol of new worlds discovered. Through their collecting activities, these women reified their physical and emotional separation from the social and intellectual norms of their upbringing. Yet while collecting and museum creating can be viewed within the context of self-actualization, at the same time these activities were guided by a deeply ingrained social and philanthropic conscience. Furthermore, museums were institutions that were inherently – and historically – the product of Western civilization. Thus, in one sense, the daughters of affluence were forging new frontiers: in another, they remained culture-bound to the mores and values of their forebears.

Nonetheless, from their very inception, the southwestern museums established by women had a singular ontogenesis. Rather than developing as a platform for eastern sociopolitical ideologies, each originated as an idiosyncratic response to the southwestern experience. The vast region provided literal and figurative space for fresh precedents to take root. Here the daughters of affluence found the freedom to explore the natural and cultural landscapes that surrounded them. The persuasive voice of their inherited wealth redefined the boundaries of institutional power structures. The museums they founded were intensely personal statements and, frequently, accidental inventions. The founders achieved prestige and recognition that would not have been possible in their cities of origin.
Indeed, most were viewed as eccentric – at best – by friends and relatives in the East.\(^9\)

The distinction between Colton and most of her contemporaries is that she played an integral role in developing programs that define the Museum’s identity even today. But, Colton’s legacy is vaster than that. McGreevy summarized that Colton contributed to creating “. . . an institution that remains at the forefront of significant Arizona cultural achievements. Colton’s adventurous life, artistic creativity, and enlightened concern for native peoples continue to provide enriching experiences for both local and national audiences.”\(^10\)

Colton made notable contributions to the Indian arts and crafts movement, museum education, and the progressive education movement. Like many women, the accomplishments of her male peers have overshadowed Colton’s contributions. Art historian Margaret Jacobs found that; “The focus on these men [Chapman, Hewett, and d’Harnoncourt to name a few] has overshadowed the contributions of white women in the Indian arts and crafts movement.”\(^11\) Colton’s achievements demonstrate the importance of the Southwest to the progressive education movement and the field of museum education. Although there is no concrete evidence that Colton corresponded with the leaders of the progressive education movement, points of connection can be found in her work, her writings, and her experiences.

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\(^10\) Ibid., 96.

Final Analysis

How did Colton make a difference in the progressive education movement and the Native American arts and crafts movement? Further, how are her efforts evidenced today in the field of museum education? Finally, in what ways was Colton progressive? None of these questions are easily answered, as the evidence of a museum educator’s contributions can often be ephemeral. A quantitative analysis of Colton’s work, examining the number of school children who visited MNA or the number of artisans who participated in the Hopi Craftsman Show does not capture the significance of her legacy. Museums, and by extension those who work in them, are in the business of building relationships. The personal relationships that Colton fostered through her work are the strongest evidence of her continuing influence. Nowhere can this better be seen than with the indigenous peoples of the Colorado Plateau.

Visitors to MNA who attend the Hopi and Navajo festivals can interact with artisans whose parents and grandparents became involved with the institution because Colton reached out to them. The native artisans still speak fondly of Colton. While her intentions can be seen as paternalistic from today’s viewpoint, the voices of the indigenous peoples cannot be ignored. The relationships that Colton fostered have endured, and the artisans sincerely think of MNA as their museum. That in and of itself is a significant achievement; not many non-tribal museums can demonstrate such a relationship with indigenous peoples. Today the Museum consults with tribal leaders about collections management practices, exhibitions, and special projects.

Colton built the foundation upon which these relationships rest. She was progressive in doing so at a time when Federal policy and national sentiment favored
assimilation of native peoples into Anglo society. Favoring instead the preservation of individual tribal identity, Colton labored to revive traditional art forms, methods, and designs. She also championed day schools on reservations as opposed to the Federal boarding school system. In doing so, Colton went against prevailing opinion at that time.

Similarly, some of Colton’s work as a museum educator was innovative. Her treasure chests program was based upon projects developed by museums in major cultural centers on the East and West coasts. Colton borrowed the concept, adapted it to fit MNA’s mission, and used the program to reach out to residents in remote areas of the Plateau. Through the treasure chest program, the Junior Indian Art Show, and the Hopi and Navajo Craftsman Shows, Colton influenced generations of residents on the Plateau.

The origins of Colton’s progressive spirit are uncertain, although the answer may be found in her world view as an artist or in her bohemian nature. Colton’s papers and her library offer scant connections to the writings of Dewey or other progressive educators and reformers. However, she was aware of the work of her contemporaries in the Southwest, particularly in Santa Fe and Taos. Moreover, her correspondence with them suggests that Colton shared their vision.

Quiet and unassuming as she was at times, Colton also possessed an independent streak and strong opinions. She succeeded in getting a college education and forging a career at a time when not many women were afforded that opportunity. Colton excelled as a curator and as an artist while also thriving as a wife and mother. In this way she was also progressive.

A champion for living artfully, Colton considered art a necessity in life. She supported popular education for everyone and focused her educational efforts on lifelong
learning from real world experiences and activities. Colton’s educational ideals paralleled those of her more well-known contemporaries in the progressive education movement. Her focus on education at MNA placed the museum in the vanguard of cultural institutions making that shift during the mid twentieth century. Colton promoted museums as spaces where informal learning could take place, and like Dewey, she envisioned the ideal school having a museum.

Colton took special interest in Native American education, and she was on the forefront of the Native American arts and crafts movement. Objects such as pottery, basketry, textiles, and silverwork, then considered to be crafts by most people, were viewed and promoted by Colton as fine art. Colton generally embraced ethnic diversity and held relatively broad-minded social views, hallmarks of her progressive spirit.

An ambitious, big-picture thinker, Colton sought a national audience for her educational ideals, and she built a vast network. While traditional in some ways she was also intensely independent, adventuresome, and willing to take risks. Colton was very much an enigma, torn between her relatively well-to-do, conservative upbringing, and her independent spirit. She transcended some of the mores of her time while adhering to others. Often forward thinking, at other times Colton struggled to overcome the privileged life that she led. Yet, in the final analysis of her life’s work, nuanced as it was, Colton succeeded in making a difference, a goal that nearly all educators and museum professionals strive to attain.
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