

Ada B. Caldwell led the South Dakota State University art department from 1899 to 1937, inspiring two generations of students to seek careers in teaching and art and setting an example for professional excellence in South Dakota higher education.

Caldwell was born in Bryan, Ohio, on 28 September 1869 to Walter Caldwell and Emily MacGowan Caldwell. The family later moved to Nebraska, and Ada Caldwell attended the university in Lincoln before studying at the Chicago Art Institute from 1893 to 1897. After graduating, she served one year as chair of the art department at Yankton College.

In 1899, Caldwell became head of the art department at South Dakota State University in Brookings, a position to which she would devote the rest of her career. In addition to teaching, she served as dean of women from 1907 to 1917 and supervisor of the women's dormitory from 1908 to 1911 and 1914 to 1917.

Caldwell continued her own education over the years, attending Pratt Institute, Columbia University, and the Chase School of Art. She also spent more than thirty summers studying various art and craft forms at institutes and universities throughout the United States and Europe, returning each autumn eager to share her growing expertise. Famous South Dakota artists Harvey Dunn, Hubert Mathieu, and Gilbert Risvold all benefited from her training and inspiration. Dunn later paid her tribute, writing, "With my eyes on the horizon, she taught me where to put my feet."

Caldwell was an accomplished artist in her own right, specializing in landscapes and adept in oil, watercolor, etching, and woodcut prints. She also sought to cultivate a love of art in South Dakotans, arranging exhibitions for the Brookings community and working with the Agricultural Extension Service to teach handicrafts to rural women. She presented South Dakota State University with gifts of works by several of her most accomplished students and was instrumental in creating campus enhancements such as the Sylvan Theatre and College Union.

Caldwell was also active in community organizations, including the Professional Educators' Organization, Brookings Woman's Club, Business Girls' Club, Young Women's Christian Association, South Dakota Federation of Women's Clubs, Red Cross, and various professional groups.

Ada Caldwell retired to professor emeritus status in 1937 and died in Brookings on 8 November 1938.

by John M. Duffy

## Dakota Images



**Ada B. Caldwell**

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