

FANNY CORY COONEY (1877–1972)

UNDAUNTED MONTANA ARTIST

talented illustrator and cartoonist Fanny Cory Cooney epitomized the optimistic, pragmatic Montana artist who was able to mesh creativity with the realities of Western life.

Born in Waukegon, Illinois, in 1877, Fanny grew up the youngest of four surviving children. After her mother's death in 1887, the family moved to the Montana Territorial capital of Helena. In school Fanny encountered local artist Mary C. Wheeler who encouraged her to pursue her obvious artistic talents. In 1895, at the age of 18, Fanny and her ailing sister Agnes moved to New Jersey. Fanny enrolled at the Metropolitan School of Fine Arts in New York City and joined the prestigious Art Students' League.

In 1896 Fanny sold her first illustration, to *St. Nicholas Magazine*, and within a year she was drawing for a dozen national magazines and several major publishing houses. After Agnes' death in 1902, a desolate Fanny returned to Helena. In 1904 she married Fred Cooney, and the couple made their home on an 1,800-acre ranch on the Missouri River near Canyon Ferry. Despite the loss of their first child, the Cooney's raised a daughter and two sons—and Fanny quit the illustrating business to raise her family.

As her three children approached college age, Fanny returned to commercial art, this time as a syndicated cartoonist. She developed *Other People's Children*, *Sonnysayings*, and *Little Miss Muffet* for national distribution. By the time she retired in 1956, at the age of 79, Fanny had created more than 10,000 *Sonnysayings* panels, and *Little Miss Muffet* had run daily for 21 years.

Fanny's earnings funded college educations for her three children, and in 1951 she was named Montana Mother of the Year. Upon Fanny's death in 1972, her children wrote a fitting eulogy to this remarkable Montana artist.

"Fanny Cory Cooney had more than her share of tragedy and heartbreak in her life. Yet she saw and appreciated beauty in the world more than most of us—its sunsets, rainbows, bird songs, spring flowers, babies, crisp winter mornings, clouds, and breezes. Through her trials . . . her humor and imagination bravely returned to make life more joyful and beautiful for the rest of us. She brought sunshine from the shadows."

