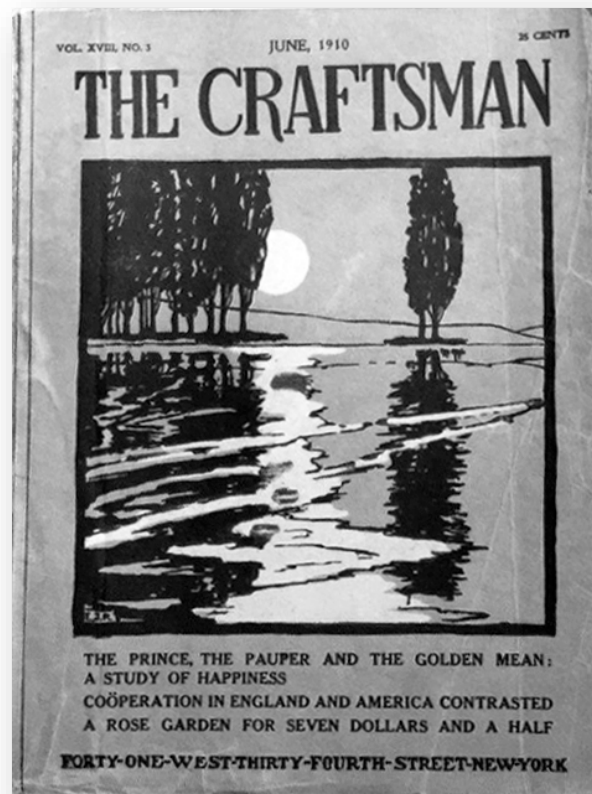


# Uncovering Eloise Roorbach

An Unsung Hero of *The Craftsman*



An Exhibition Produced by  
The Stickley Museum at Craftsman Farms

Curated by Heather E. Stivison

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# Uncovering Eloise Roorbach

An Unsung Hero behind *The Craftsman*

by Heather E. Stivison

More than any other artist, Eloise Roorbach is responsible for our mental picture of *The Craftsman*. Between June of 1909 and October 1913, she designed at least fifteen covers for magazine — the most of all designer in the magazine’s entire history. At various times Roorbach worked for Gustav Stickley as a sales clerk, exhibit attendant, writer, illustrator, designer, and garden editor for *The Craftsman*. She also was a prolific writer and illustrator for many other publications over the course of a long and successful career. And yet, for most of us, Roorbach’s life remains a mystery.

She began life as Eloise Jenkins on April 17, 1868, in Lincoln, Illinois. Her parents, John T. Jenkins and Hilda Amelia (Minnie) Spencer-Eads, raised five children, Mary Lorena (nicknamed Rena), followed by Eloise, John, Lewis, and Grace. Their father held the elected position of the Logan County Clerk from 1849 to 1869. An important leader in the Republican Party, Jenkins was closely associated with Abraham Lincoln’s campaign manager,

Senator David Davis. Jenkins was eighteen years older than his wife, and did not live to see his children grow up. He passed away, at the age of 66, on November 15, 1883, when Eloise was only fifteen.



*Eloise Jenkins Roorbach, c.1894.*  
Courtesy the Mystic River Historical Society.  
Detail of original photo.

The family was well-to-do, and saw to it that their children were well-educated cultured. The eldest of the Jenkins children, Rena, was described as “prominent in literary circles” and a brilliant pianist. The youngest, Grace, was a professional violinist who toured with John Philip Sousa as a featured musician and soloist. Eloise was a gifted writer, artist, and musician. At the tender age of nineteen, she became a

professor of drawing and painting at Lincoln College, and soon was named head of the art department.

Eloise resigned from Lincoln College to further her own artistic studies and career in New York City. There, she fell in love with an art teacher named George Selden Roorbach. Eight years her senior, George was an accomplished Hudson River School landscape artist, whose work was exhibited at the National Academy of Design in 1891. The couple was married at St. Mark’s Episcopal Church, Mystic, Connecticut on August 24, 1889.

Eloise and George divided their time between the New York City art scene in the winter months and the rural beauty of Mystic Bridge, Connecticut in the summer. Their early years together were happy ones with many shared interests. They enjoyed sailing their little sloop yacht, *Zelva*, which had an artist’s palette painted on its mainsail. George was a serious bicyclist, who easily cycled 110 miles in two days. Eloise shared his interest in cycling, even getting mentioned in the bicycle journal, *The Wheel*, in 1890.

The two artists shared a delight in drawing the countryside and coastal beauty of Connecticut. In 1890, they combined some of their drawings into a still-surviving booklet they called "Mystic Memories." Eloise became fully involved with the cultural activities in the Mystic community, including performing as first violinist with the Mystic Connecticut Orchestra.

Both were interested in progressive issues, environmentalism, social justice, and peace. George became very active in the Connecticut Branch of the Universal Peace Union at the Peace Temple in Mystic.

In 1899, the young couple pulled up stakes and left the quiet beauty, soft grey light, gentle hills, stone walls, and New England farmhouses for a new and very spiritual existence in California. Evidence indicates that in the eleven years (1889-1900) the Roorbachs wintered in New York, they encountered the Hindu philosophies of the Vedanta Society, which inspired their move.

America's first Vedanta Society was established in New York in 1894 by Swami Vivekananda, and attracted intellectual individuals who infused their own literary

and artistic endeavors with his spiritual teachings. Followers included such figures as W.H. Auden, E.M. Forster, Somerset Maugham, Aldous Huxley, and for a time J.D. Salinger. To put these philosophies in a more contemporary context, Swami Vivekananda's writings later became the inspiration for Beatle George Harrison's own spiritual transformation. In fact, Harrison's lyrics to "My Sweet Lord," were derived from Swami Vivekananda's words. Some seventy years before Harrison's transformation, Eloise Roorbach was equally transformed by Swami Vivekananda.



*Eloise Jenkins Roorbach, cooking in a rustic outdoor kitchen, while on a Hindu retreat led by Swami Vivekananda in Camp Irving, 1900.*

Upon arriving in California, George and Eloise became involved with the Alameda Vedantic Society. The 1900 Census for Alameda lists George S. Roorbach as a full-time resident of the "Home of Truth," with an occupation of "Divine Healer." In the Home of Truth's printed history, the

25-year period, between 1893 and 1918, is described as their "Golden Years," in which they had a total of 27 "teachers." Eloise and George are both listed among those teachers.

Eloise was one of only five women who took part in a rustic tented retreat led by the Swami at Camp Irving (now a part of Samuel P. Taylor State Park) in May 1900. George became devoted to this branch of Hinduism, and actually built some of the cabins for the retreat center that was created in later years.

The couple's spiritual quest was only a portion of their California experience, where they strove to live life to the fullest. Eloise wrote and illustrated a series of articles about road trips in California based on their personal outdoor adventures. Her love of hiking, wilderness, and outdoor adventure was evident later in her writings for the *Girl*

*Scout Handbook*. In it she described the rewards of mountain climbing as seeing "mountain peaks like waves of the sea flashing with white snow foam, piercing the blue sky as far as the eye can reach; clouds forming below her feet," breathing "rare air," drinking "from the pure source of rivers,"

and hearing “the mighty roar of waterfalls.” Contemporary author Stephen Brennan acknowledged Roorbach as an adventurous role model in his book, *The Adventurous Girl’s Handbook*, depicting her as an athlete, hiker, and mountain-climbing naturalist.



*George Roorbach (L) with a Swami on another retreat in the California mountains.*

The couple continued expanding their art careers. George exhibited his work in the Del Monte Art Gallery. Eloise had numerous illustrations and articles published. She also took art classes at the Mark Hopkins Institute, where her artwork was exhibited in 1905. We do not know what works were shown there because, in April 1906, the famous San Francisco earthquake resulted in a series of raging fires, destroying all of the Institute’s records. The Home of Truth and all its contents were also destroyed in the fires.

Deeply moved by the disasters of the earthquake and fires, Eloise

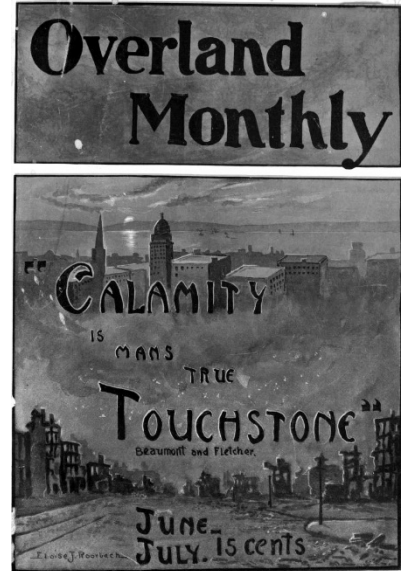
illustrated a cover for a special edition of *Overland Monthly* (shown at right). She included a quote from 17th century playwrights Beaumont and Fletcher, “Calamity is man’s true touchstone,” in recognition of the courage and goodness of residents during that tragic time.

The *Oakland Tribune* would later report about the Roorbachs, “The pair lived together quite happily up to the time of the earthquake and fire.” In the four years after the 1906 earthquake, their marriage deteriorated.

George was a talented member of the famed Carmel Art Colony, and described as “the successor of Tonalist painter William Keith.” Like Keith, his paintings were in the spirit of Albert Bierstadt, Worthington Whittredge, and George Inness. His landscapes were notable collections such as those of Marie and Averell Harriman and J. Pierpont Morgan. After the quake, George began showing his paintings less and less frequently, and by 1910, he had resigned from the Carmel Art Colony. He spent much of his time carving signs from redwood for “ornament and designation” of homes throughout the Santa Cruz area.

In the same four years, Eloise became extremely productive, with numerous articles and illustrations appearing regularly

in a range of publications including *Overland Monthly*, *Western Field Magazine*, and *Pacific Monthly*. She became the main source of income for their household and even used her earnings to purchase property in Brookdale, in the Santa Cruz mountains.



*1906 magazine cover designed by Eloise Roorbach, immediately after the disastrous California earthquake and fire.*

Ever curious about the world, Eloise took advantage of every opportunity to learn new things. She studied nature and had a passion for reading the writings of John Muir and Henry David Thoreau. She learned about forestry, dendrology, botany, arbor culture, mountain climbing, and established a reputation as a naturalist.

In February 1909, the *Santa Cruz Evening News* described a lively and entertaining lecture she gave on the latest scientific research on toadstools, illustrated with her

own detailed drawings. Other detailed botanical drawings appeared elsewhere, such as in *The Silva of California* (University of California, Berkeley Press) the following year.

Always productive, she grew increasingly unhappy in the state of her marriage. In 1909, she left George behind, in the cabin she owned, and moved to New York, where she asked Mr. Stickley for a job at *The Craftsman*. “Why did you come to me?” Mr. Stickley is reported to have asked. “I liked your magazine,” Eloise replied simply. And indeed, her writings and artwork resonated with the publication. That year, she designed four covers for *The Craftsman*, where she would eventually become its most prolific cover designer. *Craftsman* editor Mary Fanton Roberts hired her as both an illustrator and a writer. Eloise designed twelve more covers for *The Craftsman* and began writing articles for the magazine as well.

Two years later, she quietly returned to California to file for divorce, citing George’s “failure to provide the common necessities of life.” She described George as “an artist with sufficient income to support her comfortably” who “ever since the wedding has frittered away, squandered and dissipated his income and wasted the same by his extravagance and unwise use thereof.” Their divorce proceedings were widely reported and quite sensational. *The Oakland Tribune* reported on August 8, 1912: “The fashionable and exclusive colony at Carmel-by-the-Sea have been shocked and thrilled as the result of the filing of a divorce suit here today by Eloise Roorbach, the wife of George S. Roorbach, an artist of note.” On that same day, *The San Francisco Chronicle* reported, “Roorbach is at present living in a small cabin near Brookdale, in the Santa Cruz mountains, owned by his wife. The place is said to be a treasury of oil paintings, valuable as works of

art, which Roorbach has taken no trouble to put on the market.”

While the scandal was unfolding in California, Eloise wrote to her editor, Mary Fanton Roberts about the impending divorce, saying, “.... you have been so kind always and shown so much patience that I feel this little statement .... is due you .... My heart has been so benumbed and lifeless and hopeless these last painful years that I have at last taken .... a firm and desperate hand and am going to try to set my life in better working order .... I have applied for a separation and will be legally free in two or three weeks. .... You can do as you wish about telling Mr. Stickley, he may strenuously object to the legal methods of bringing peace and a mite of relief into a life.”

Eloise had a right to be concerned. Divorce was considered both a scandal and a social disease. However, earlier that same year, Mr. Stickley’s magazine had run



One of Eloise Roorbach’s illustrations for “*The Craftsman*” 1912.

an article entitled, "Education as a Preventative to Divorce." Its author, Marguerite O.B. Wilkinson, expressed the progressive sentiments that "If the marriages of tomorrow are really to be happier than the marriages of today, girls must demand this status of full equality with the men they marry..." and "The young wife must be strengthened in her vague belief that, although married, she is still a person and should be the director of her own physical, mental and spiritual activities, and responsible for them..." Mr. Stickley was as open-minded and progressive as his publication, and he did not object to having a divorced woman on his staff. Eloise returned to *The Craftsman* promising new energy and dedication to the magazine.

Eloise remained true to her promise. In addition to her unattributed works, she produced at least 25 bylined articles, along with assorted illustrations. Some of her articles, such as her December 1912 feature, "Bells of history and romance: with pictures from Frank A. Miller's vast collection of bells at Riverside, California," continue to be referenced by researchers today. So too, are her writings about her friend, Irving Gill, beginning with the September 1913 *Craftsman* feature, "Outdoor Life in California houses, as expressed in

the new architecture of Irving J. Gill." Her appreciation of the work of the innovative architect earned her the title as "Gill's biggest fan." She would later, in 1921, publish an analysis of a house Gill designed for Walter Dodge in *House Beautiful*, which would be considered the defining moment for the architect's work. She herself lived for a time in Sunny Slope Lodge, a home Gill designed in 1902, now on the national historic register. But those events had not yet occurred in the fall of 1913.

At that time, with her divorce still pending, Eloise was searching for a fresh perspective on life. She departed on an extended trip to Japan, and was abroad when her divorce was finalized on November 20, 1913. Eloise returned from her travels on April 21, 1914, full of new ideas for articles and garden designs. Her article, "A picturesque Japanese finishing school, where girls are taught to be charming women and good housekeepers," appeared in September. The November issue of *The Craftsman* announced that she was "in charge" of the Garden Department. Her article, "A Japanese garden in America: garden-making that in formal manner expresses history, romance, and poetry," was published in March. In October, her name appeared on the masthead as "Garden Editor." While working at *The Craftsman*,

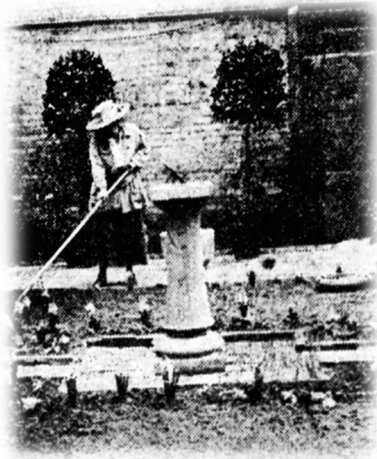
Eloise continued her busy freelance career in publications as varied as *St. Nicholas: An Illustrated Magazine for Young Folk*, *Sunset Magazine*, *Technical World Magazine*, and *The Theatre Magazine*.



One of Eloise Roorbach's illustrations for "American Forestry" magazine, 1914.

She was faithful to *The Craftsman* until its demise in December 1916. In the spring of 1917, she published two half-page illustrated garden articles in the *New York Tribune*. Loyal to her friend and mentor, Eloise followed Mary Fanton Roberts

to her start-up publication *The Touchstone* magazine, which began publishing in May 1917. Eloise appeared on the masthead with the title “Associate Editor and Garden Department,” and numerous articles on flowers, nature, garden design, and architecture displayed her byline. She also worked directly with *Touchstone* architect, George E. Fowler, designing gardens on paper to make his house designs feel like homes. Eloise served as a garden design consultant for *Touchstone* readers, and famously designed the gardens for *The Touchstone* offices, located at 118-120 East 30th Street, New York City, across the country.



*Eloise Roorbach, working on the Touchstone Gardens she designed, as seen in a half-page article about her work on the gardens. It ran in major newspapers across the country.*

*The Touchstone* struggled financially and in 1920, Eloise returned to California. She stayed in Lemon Grove, with her sister Grace, making time for a much-needed rest. Her title at *Touchstone* was changed to “California Representative.” She gave talks

about *Touchstone* for California woman’s clubs, and even tried to find West Coast investors to help the journal out of its difficulties, but *Touchstone* folded in 1921.



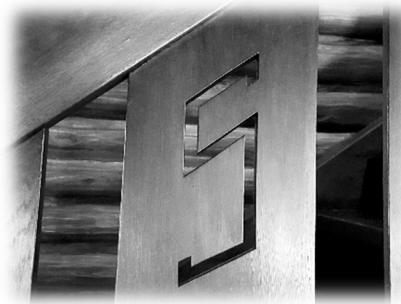
*Beloved niece, Jean Hay, stands beside Roorbach’s mother, Minnie Jenkins.*

Eloise settled into life in California, enjoying a close relationship with her mother, sister, and beloved niece, Jean (above) who called her “Aunt Weezie.” She was happy to once again be surrounded by California’s forests, mountains, coastline, and architecture. She was very closely associated with the famed Mission Inn, living there in winters and serving as hostess. While there, she took on many roles, from presentations on phases of Spanish architecture, to helping to create a thriving astronomy club, to teaching children about Japanese ceremonial dolls.

Eloise always loved adventure and learning new things. One notable experience was a 1928 world tour with her sister Grace, niece Jean, and a friend. They

traveled through Japan, China, the Philippines, Dutch East Indies, and India including the remote Kashmir district and the Kyber Pass. They continued into the Persian Gulf, on to Europe, and returned to New York in July 1929. Another trip was revealed in a 1935 letter she sent from Papeete, Tahiti, in which she describes seeing the camps of Robert Louis Stevenson and Zane Grey, the homes of Hall and Nordoff, Gauguin, Keeble, and Rupert Brooks. During World War II, she entertained women of the Red Cross Surgical Dressing Unit with a talk entitled “Kings that I have seen and met on my travels.” The *Santa Cruz Sentinel* reported, “She has a dry humor and kept the guests in gales of hilarious laughter.”

This lively, multi-talented, witty, adventurous, woman lived life to the fullest for 92 years. She passed away on February 16, 1961 leaving her mark on the Arts and Crafts world. She gave a special gift to us at Craftsman Farms. Next time you admire the “S” that graces the Log House stairs, think of Eloise, who designed it for Mr. Stickley.



*The conventionalized “S” on Craftsman Farms’ Log House stairs.*

# About This Exhibition

This exhibition was curated by Heather E. Stivison, who also wrote the essay. The essay is part of Stivison's larger research project on Eloise Roorbach, which is generously funded by a 2018 grant from the Arts & Crafts Research Fund.

All sixteen *Craftsman* covers, the 1913 calendar page, and the selection of drawings exhibited here at the 32<sup>nd</sup> National Arts & Crafts Conference, were designed by Eloise Roorbach. Some were graciously lent by Gustav Stickley's great granddaughter, Barbara Fuldner. The remainder come from the archives of the Stickley Museum at Craftsman Farms.



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The Stickley Museum at Craftsman Farms is a 30-acre historic house museum on the campus of Craftsman Farms in Parsippany, NJ. Designed and built by Gustav Stickley, an early 20th century home furnishings designer, manufacturer, publisher and tastemaker, Craftsman Farms was a 650-acre home, farm, school, and community that represented Stickley's Arts and Crafts ideals. It was his "Garden of Eden." Today it is a National Historic Landmark. The Stickley family home at Craftsman Farms, the Log House, is open for tours year-round.

Craftsman Farms is owned by the Township of Parsippany-Troy Hills and is operated by The Stickley Museum at Craftsman Farms, Inc., ("SMCF") (formerly known as The Craftsman Farms Foundation, Inc.). SMCF is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization incorporated in the State of New Jersey. Restoration of the National Historic Landmark, Craftsman Farms, is made possible, in part, by a Save America's Treasures Grant administered by the National Parks Service, Department of the Interior, and by support from Morris County Preservation Trust, The New Jersey Historic Trust, and individual members. SMCF received an operating grant from the New Jersey Historical Commission. SMCF gratefully acknowledges a grant from the New Jersey Cultural Trust. Educational programs are funded, in part, by grants from the Arts & Crafts Research Fund.

