



HAWTHORNE

Fine Art

Charlotte Augusta Morton (1885-1974)

Charlotte Augusta Morton was born in Tescott, Kansas in 1885 to Jessie Wellington and Howard Morton, a farmer. Her paternal grandfather, Ichabod Morton, was a Massachusetts shipbuilder. Her father served in the 39th Massachusetts Infantry and fought during the Battle of Beecher Island. Despite losing an eye during the conflict he continued to fight throughout the siege. Following his death in 1925, his ashes were scattered at sea with military honors.¹

Morton graduated from Kansas State Agricultural College in 1908. Her thesis was on the topic of surface design and stencils.² The following year Morton began working as an assistant in the Drawing Department at the college.³ Morton spent the summer of 1910 studying design and illustration at the Chicago Art Institute.⁴ In 1912, she was granted a year-long leave of absence from her position in order to study at the New York School of Fine Arts.⁵ Following her period of study in New York, Morton returned to Kansas and took up her position as drawing instructor.⁶ By 1918, Morton had relocated to the west coast and was head of the household arts department at California State Normal School in San Jose.⁷ In 1923, Morton spoke on the topic of “Home Economics and Related Art Subjects” at the Stanislaus County Teacher’ Institute in Modesto, California.⁸

In 1927, Morton was an instructor of interior decorating at the University of California. A display home furnished with designs by her students was open to the public and drew large crowds.⁹ In 1929, she spoke on the subject of “Home Decoration and Color” at the Hanford

¹ Peter Cozzens, “Howard Morton: Wounded at Beecher Island,” *Eyewitnesses to the Indian Wars: 1865-1890* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2003)

² “Today’s Graduates at the Agricultural College,” *Manhattan Nationalist* (Manhattan, Kansas), Thu, Jun 18, 1908, 9.

³ “Town Tales,” *The Manhattan Mercury* (Manhattan, Kansas), Fri, Nov 5, 1909, 3.

⁴ “Local Notes,” *The Industrialist*, volume 36, No. 29 (Manhattan, KS: Kansas State Agricultural College, May 28, 1910) 462.

⁵ “Let There Be Lights,” *The Manhattan Mercury* (Manhattan, Kansas), Sat, Apr 13, 1912, 2.

⁶ “Add 28 to Staff,” *Manhattan Republic* (Manhattan, Kansas), Thu, Jul 10, 1913, 11.

⁷ “Miss Morton in War Work,” *The Manhattan Republic* (Manhattan, Kansas), Thu, Apr 18, 1918, 5.

⁸ “San Jose Teacher Speaks at Modesto,” *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, California), Thu, Nov 29, 1923, 11.

⁹ “Display Home of Bridge Co. Remains Open,” *Oakland Tribune* (Oakland, California), Sun, May 15, 1927, 100.



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Woman's Club.¹⁰ The same year, she lectured on "Color Harmony in the Home" at W.P. Fuller Co. where she was employed as an interior decorator in the stores Art Department.¹¹

In 1937, Morton began researching and experimenting with earth pigments from California soil and rocks as part of a Federal Arts Project. Using a pick and shovel, Morton gathered earth and rocks to be pulverized in a machine she designed herself. She developed a number of natural pigments including, "oyster shell white from oyster shells of San Francisco bay, lemon yellow from San Diego earth, light, golden and dark ochre as well as light and Indian red, two shades of violet and a gray, all from the Oakland Hills; terre verte from the Mojave desert and Death Valley, and a velvet-like black from burned peach pits." The pigments were sampled by other artists working on the project who found them suitable for watercolor, tempera, oils and fresco in particular. Morton's earth colors closely replicated the colors used by the old masters.¹²

As the chairman of the gift committee in 1908, Morton had a drinking fountain installed near the home economics building at Kansas Agricultural College. In 1953, Morton returned to her Alma Mater for a reunion. Upon seeing the drinking fountain in disrepair Morton had a sun dial built in its place. She spent the rest of her time on campus making drawings with the intent of having them printed on postcards and stationery to be sold by local dealers.¹³

Charlotte Augusta Morton died in Carmel-by-the-Sea, California in 1974.

¹⁰ "Clubs," *The Fresno Morning Republican* (Fresno, California), Fri, Oct 18, 1929, 12.

¹¹ "Color Harmony in the Home," *The Fresno Morning Republican* (Fresno, California) Fri, Oct 18, 1929, 12.

¹² "California Art Experiment Yields Rich Earth Colors," *The Opelousas Herald* (Opelousas, Louisiana), Fri, Oct 20, 1939, 6.

¹³ "Back on Campus – With a Flourish," *The Manhattan Mercury* (Manhattan, Kansas) Fri, May 22, 1953, 1.