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## Reading in the Home: Knowing America Through Books - Third Years

Leora J. Lewis

Mary A. Dolve

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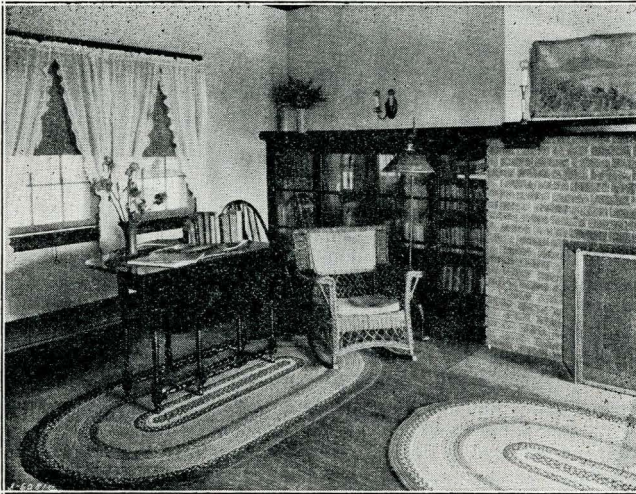
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# Reading in the Home

*Knowing America Through Books*

Third Year



Books and a Comfortable Chair are a Good Substitute for Travel

SOUTH DAKOTA STATE COLLEGE  
EXTENSION SERVICE  
C. Larsen, Director  
Brookings, S. D.

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# Reading in the Home

## *Knowing America Through Books*

### Third Year

By Leora J. Lewis, Director, South Dakota Free Library Commission  
Mary A. Dolve, Supervisor, Home Extension Work, State College

Most people are bound more or less in their outlook upon life, by the limitations of their own horizons. The man who has always lived in an eastern industrial town forms his opinions as to the country's needs from his knowledge of those changes which would make for better trade conditions or an improved standard of living for the industrial worker. The city resident is concerned largely with matters of urban improvement. Housing and transportation problems are vital with him, also questions of sanitation, more adequate police protection, etc.

In all probability neither of these men knows much of agricultural problems. Plenty of fresh air and space and the opportunity to raise clean, wholesome food makes farm life look like a paradise and there is no knowledge nor appreciation of the hard work which goes into successful farming, the uncertainty of the market for produce and the constant fight against weather conditions, insect pests and blights.

The farmer on the other hand, has little idea of what it would mean to work without adequate air, sunlight or space and often but remotely understands the economic problems of industry.

**A Varied Citizenship.**—Our national differences are not all due to varying occupational interests. We have three races, black, white and red, each distinctly different from the others and the two darker races absolutely dependent for their well being and advancement upon the sympathy and understanding of the white race. We also have a citizenship which includes people from every race and nationality in the world. Some of these people are so scattered and assimilated that they have no separate and distinct entity; others live in groups of their own kind forming small foreign cities within our larger American cities, or making up rural colonies in different sections of the country.

**Sympathetic Understanding Through Books.**—It is a duty of citizenship and a fascinating study as well to try to gain some understanding of these various groups of Americans. The more one can travel, the easier it is to broaden one's sympathies but for most people a knowledge of what lies beyond their own country or state has to come largely from books rather than from personal contacts.

Fortunately there are in the United States a large number of writers each of whom is trying to interpret for the rest of the world some particular one of these racial or sectional groups. These men and women are using various literary mediums of expression. Some few of them try to tell the story in poetry; others use drama. Some content themselves by offering simple narratives of their own travels, while others write of the lives of men and women who are typical of their kind.

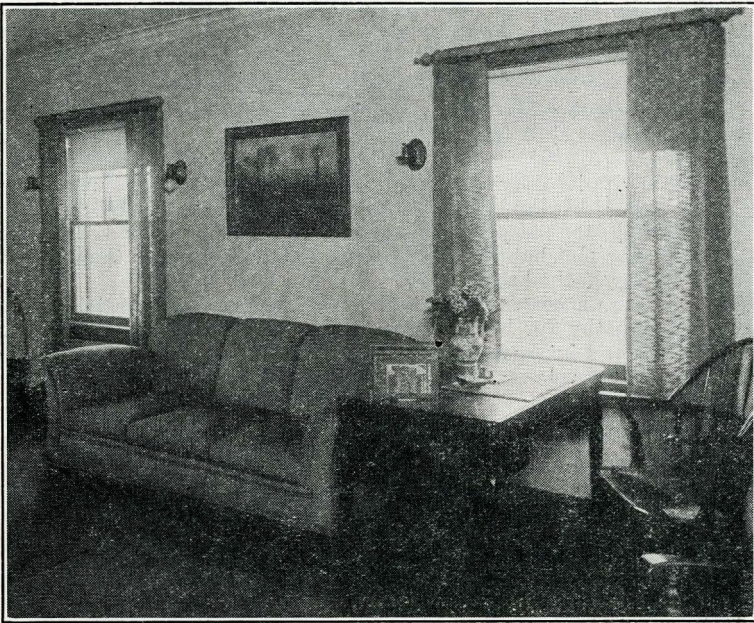
Since to most people the novel is the most popular form of literature, it is not strange that books of fiction make up the major part of this regional literature.

**The Local Color Novel.**—There are many difficulties in the way of writing a successful local color novel. As a rule, the writer must be some



one who has lived in the section which serves as his background and who knows the people and the problems from the inside. An outsider rarely gets the right flavor in his story no matter how conscientiously he works at his interpretation. The novel cannot be written for propaganda purposes or it fails in appeal, and the background or setting must appear as subordinate to the characters and the action of the story. In other words there must be that clever blending of background, characterization and plot which makes you feel as you read the novel that the action is not only true to the locality but that it could have taken place in no spot in the world other than the one featured by the writer.

Among the outstanding local color novels of the present century are "The Virginian" that well known western story by Owen Wister, "The Time



Good books conveniently placed, a comfortable place to sit, and a good light help one to get enjoyment out of a few minutes rest.

of Man" by Elizabeth Maddox Roberts, which tells the story of the tenant farmer of the South, "The Harbor" by Ernest Poole, which uses the harbor of New York as a symbol of modern unrest and the negro stories of Julia Peterkin.

Not a perfect novel, but a very interesting one is "Mamba's Daughters" by Du Bose Heyward. We analyse it here because it is a good example of a recent local color novel.

"Mamba's Daughters" is a picture of a southern city, Charleston, South Carolina, and concerns itself with the relationship of the two races, black and white, which make up its population.

The novel includes two distinct stories; the one has to do with Mamba, a Charleston water front negro, her gigantic daughter, Hagar, and her grand daughter, Lissa. Mamba and Hagar, have a mutual ambition to give Lissa an opportunity for musical training and social standing among a class of negroes with whom the two older women have never mingled, and in their sometimes blundering but always conscientious efforts, there is both humor and pathos.

The second story is that of the romance of Saint Wentworth, the son of an impoverished but socially prominent Charleston family and Valerie Land, a New York girl who is the daughter of an artist.

The negro characters are skillfully drawn: Mamba, the shrewd, indomitable grandmother, and Hagar with her huge body and naive childlike mind are outstanding characters in modern negro fiction. On the other hand, the white characters never seem to be real people. You can never quite understand Saint Wentworth's transition from an awkward, impractical boy to a forceful man of affairs and his mother seems more like a shadow than a flesh and blood woman.

It is in presenting his setting and background that Mr. Heyward has shown the greatest skill. He vividly pictures the social life of Charleston, explains the negro problem as it appears to a southerner, gives glimpses of negro life with its religious fervor, superstition, humor and utter abandon to the joys of life, and hints at the exploitation of negro labor. He introduces perhaps too many stories and incidents which have no direct connection with the plot but you forgive him for these because they do have a place in filling in the background.

Since it gives a better understanding of modern southern life, broadens one's sympathy for both negroes and whites and for the most part holds the reader's interest, "Mamba's Daughters" may be termed a successful regional novel.

### Recent Books Which Interpret America

#### DRAMA

The Adding Machine, by Elmer L. Rice

Depicts life in the machine age.

Beggar on Horseback, by George S. Kaufman and Marcus C. Connelly

A popular comedy satirizing big business.

The Great Divide, by William Moody

A play on the conflict of ideals between New England and the West.

Green Pastures, by Marcus C. Connelly

An interpretation of the Bible from the view point of the primitive type of negro.

Hell-bent fer Heaven,, by Hatcher Hughes

A drama of the Carolina mountains.

Holiday, by Philip Barry

Contrasts people whose chief aim is money-making and social prominence with those who know the worth while things of life.

Icebound, by Owen Davis

The acrimonious bitterness of a northern Maine family over a possible inheritance.

In Abraham's Bosom, by Paul Green

Negro life in the South.

- The Inheritors, by Susan Glaspell  
 Play of Iowa farm life.  
 Miss Lulu Bett, by Zona Gale  
 Pictures small town life and the transformation of the household  
 drudge into an independent woman.  
 One Act Plays, by Alice Brown  
 Plays portraying homely New England life and characters.  
 Street Scene, by Elmer L. Rice  
 Tenement Life in New York City.  
 Sun-Up, by Lula Vollmer  
 Penetration of the war into the lives of intensely ignorant Carolina  
 mountain folk.

#### POETRY

- American Rhythm, by Mrs. Mary Austin  
 Collection of Indian songs, poems and tribal lays.  
 Color, by Countee Cullen  
 Lyrics by a leading negro poet.  
 Cowboy Songs, by John Lomax  
 Songs of logging, gold-mining and cow punching, collected from the  
 southwest.  
 Indian Earth, by Witter Bynner  
 Folk ways and customs of New Mexico, Mexico and Arizona  
 Sun and Saddle Leather, by Badger Clark  
 Poems of the West by a South Dakota poet.  
 New Hampshire, by Robert Frost  
 The flavor of New England in Verse.  
 Complete Poems, by Paul Dunbar  
 Negro dialect poetry.  
 Selected poems, by Carl Sandburg  
 Impression of Chicago and the middle west.  
 Slow Smoke, by Lew R. Sarett  
 Indian and nature poems.

#### SOCIOLOGY

- America Comes of Age; a French analysis, by Andre Siegfried  
 A study of America for the thoughtful reader.  
 Brown America, by Edwin R. Embree  
 The author believes that a new race is emerging in America, the result  
 of an intermingling of the white, black and Indian.  
 The New Negro, by Alain Locke  
 Accomplishments of the modern negro in art, literature, etc.  
 On New Shores, by Konrad Bercovici  
 Describes foreign peoples in the United States with emphasis on rural  
 settlements.

#### TRAVEL

- Abroad at Home, by Julian Street  
 American ramblings, observations and adventures.  
 Adventure under Sapphire Skies, by Charles Finger  
 Anecdotes, bits of history and other information of the west.  
 America as Americans See It, ed. by Frederick J. Ringel  
 An illustrated symposium of American life of today to which 46 writ-  
 ers have contributed.  
 Around the World in New York, by Konrad Bercovici  
 Description of the 20 or more nationalities in New York City.  
 Great American Band Wagon, by Charles Merz  
 Vigorous presentation of some American idiosyncracies.  
 Letters of a Woman Homesteader, by Mrs. Elinor Stewart  
 Observations of Wyoming Life.



On Wandering Wheels, by Jan and Cora Gordon

Two English artists travel by car through East and South.

Our Southern Highlanders, by Horace Kephart

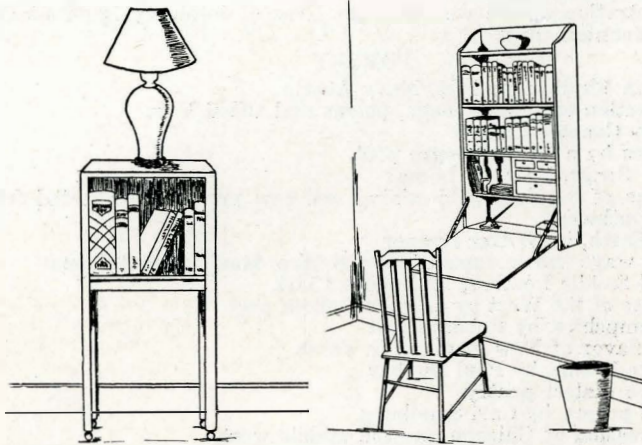
Sympathetic description of the lives of southern mountaineers.

Uncle Sam's Attic, by Mrs. Mary L. Davis

Modern Alaska described with color and enthusiasm.

Seeing the Middle West, by John Thompson Faris.

Other books in this series are: Seeing the Eastern States; Seeing the Sunny South and Seeing the Far West.



Many places about the house can be used to hold books. Books make a room more interesting and livable.

Story of the Cowboy, by Emerson Hough

An uncommon study of the western cowboy.

These United States, by Ernest H. Gruening

Essays on the states and outlying provinces of the union.

### BIOGRAPHY

American; The life story of a great Indian, Plenty-coups, by Frank B. Linderman

Information on Indian history, customs and traditions.

Americanization of Edward Bok, by Edward W. Bok

Public career and success of the Dutch boy who became editor of the Ladies Home Journal.

An American Idyll, by Mrs. Cornelia S. Parker

Life of an investigator and mediator in labor problems.

Autobiography, by Lincoln Steffens

Social and political life in America from 1900 to the present.

From Immigrant to Inventor, by Michael I. Pupin

The growth of modern science told through the biography of an electrical expert.

Hunger Fighters, by Paul De Kruif

Stories of men who have helped to overcome plant and animal diseases, emphasizing the difficulties encountered in carrying on such work in America.

Life of an Ordinary Woman, by Mrs. Anne Ellis

Life in a western mining camp.

Log-cabin Lady

Adjustment to social life of a girl brought up in a pioneer community.

Lone Cowboy, by Will James

Life on the range as told by a cowboy.

Out of the Shadow, by Mrs. Rose Cohen

Family life in a Jewish quarter in New York.

Paul Robeson, Negro, by Mrs. Eslanda Robeson

Sympathetic biography prefaced by an intelligent discussion of Harlem and the Negro problem.

Sawdust and Solitude, by Lucia Zora

Life in a circus and on a homestead in Colorado.

Soul of an Immigrant, by Constantine M. Panunzio

The struggles of a young Italian immigrant to understand this country.

Up Stream, by Ludwig Lewisohn

A German Jew's story of disillusionment and repression.

FICTION

Against the Sky, by Konrad Bercovici

Portrayal of present day Gypsy life on the road and in New York City.

American Beauty, by Edna Ferber

Decadence of New England stock and the rehabilitation of the farms by Polish stock.

Bright Skin, by Julia Peterkin

Miss Peterkin is probably the most faithful interpreter of the life of the negro in the southern community. In reading her books, the reader should realize that the moral code of the more ignorant negro is not that of the more sophisticated white person and should not be too critical of the frankness of the portrayal.

The Asking Price, by Helen Hull

Family and social life in a western college community.

Barren Ground, by Ellen Glasgow

Story of a run down farming community in Virginia.

The Blazed Trail, by Stewart E. White

Realistic account of logging in Michigan.

The Bonney Family, by Ruth Suckow

The story of a small town in Iowa.

Bred in the Bone, by Elsie Singmaster

Story describing the lives of the Pennsylvania Dutch.

Barnabetta, by Helen Martin

Pennsylvania Dutch story.

Captain Archer's Daughter, by Mrs. Margaret Deland

The flavor of New England life and family pride are portrayed in this novel.

Cap'n Eri, by Joseph Lincoln

Jolly story of three retired Cape Cod captains.

Chinaberry Tree, by Jessie R. Fauset

A novel dealing with the lives of educated colored Americans.

Down Yonder with Judge Priest and Irvin S. Cobb, by Irvin S. Cobb

The Kentucky temperament as portrayed by Judge Priest.

The Enchanted Canyon, by Mrs. Honore W. Morrow

The Grand Canyon and the Arizona desert form the background of this story.

Five and Ten, by Fannie Hurst

The building of a chain of five and ten cent stores.

The Four Million, by O. Henry

Sympathetic story of New York City.

Happy Mountain, by Mrs. Maristan Chapman



- Life in the Tennessee mountains.  
 The Harbor, by Ernest Poole  
 The harbor of New York used as a background and symbol for a story of social unrest.  
 Hillsboro People, by Mrs. Dorothea C. Fisher  
 Short stories of Vermont village life.  
 Hungry Hearts, by Anzla Yezierska  
 Russian and Polish immigrants in New York.  
 In the Land of Cotton, by Dorothy Scarborough  
 Story of the Texas cotton fields.  
 Joe Pete, by Florence E. McClinchey  
 The story of an Ojibway boy—an intimate picture of Indian life.  
 Knuckles, by Clarence B. Kelland  
 The adjustment of a New York family to Vermont village life.  
 Laughing Boy, by Oliver La Farge  
 A beautiful tale of Navajo life.  
 Lion's Den, by Mrs. Janet Fairbank  
 Present day life in Washington, D. C.  
 Little Aliens, by Myra Kelly  
 Stories of East Side Jewish children.  
 Main Street, by Sinclair Lewis  
 Middle western village life portrayed with some truths and some exaggerations.  
 Mamba's Daughters, by Du Bose Heyward  
 Relationship and problems of whites and blacks in Charleston, South Carolina.  
 Ol' Man Adam an' his Chillun, by Roark Bradford  
 Negro interpretations of the Bible.  
 Overland Red, by Henry H. Knibs  
 Tramping, ranching and gold hunting in present day California.  
 Perennial Bachelor, by Anne Parrish  
 Panoramic comedy of American manners from 1860 to the present.  
 Proud House by Mrs. Annette Esty  
 Polish immigrant life in New England.  
 Quare Women, by Lucy Furman  
 Kentucky mountain stories.  
 Red Rust, by Mrs. Cornelia Cannon  
 A farmer's devotion to the raising of a rust-proof wheat.  
 Rim of the Prairie, by Bess Streeter Aldrich  
 Story of a small town with a pioneer background.  
 Stepdaughter of the Prairie, by Margaret Lynn  
 Childhood memories of the prairies which are interpretive.  
 Three Black Pennys, by Joseph Hergesheimer  
 Development of the steel industry in Pennsylvania.  
 The time of Man, by Elizabeth M. Roberts  
 Picture of the wandering life of a southern tenant farmer.  
 Smoky, the Cowhorse, by Will James  
 Picture of western range life shown through the life of a horse.  
 The Virginian, by Owen Wister  
 The outstanding novel of western life.  
 Wild Geese, by Martha Ostenso  
 A rather sordid story of a Scandinavian farming community in the northwest.  
 Years of Grace, by Mrs. Margaret A. Barnes  
 Chicago through two generations.

NOTE.—A limited number of copies of each of the books on the above lists are included in the book collection of the South Dakota Free Library Commission at Pierre. If they cannot be secured from a local library, they may be borrowed from the commission as an individual loan for a period of a month.