

Alice Egan Hagen Biography

Alice Egan Hagen was born in Halifax on May 28, 1872, to Lieutenant Colonel Thomas J. Egan and Margaret T. Kelley. She had two sisters, Minnie and Jean and one brother James.

Alice Egan married John Hagen of St. Pierre and Miquelon, an official of the Halifax and Bermuda Cable Company in 1901 at St. Mary's Cathedral. They remained together until John Hagen's death in 1964. He strongly supported and encouraged *her* work, and in retirement did the household cooking so that she would have more time with her pottery and her students. They had two daughters, Rachel (D. Campbell; Frederick Dickinson) born in 1902 and Kathleen Fay born in 1905.

PROFESSIONAL LIFE:

Alice Egan Hagen was a graduate of Mount St. Vincent University and Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax which is now called NSCAD.

Alice Egan Hagen was a prolific and skilled china painter and potter. China painting is the hand decoration of commercially manufactured blank forms which have already been fired with a clear glaze. The china painter applies low fire over glaze colours and retires the piece again. Alice Egan Hagen used blanks imported from France, Britain, Bavaria and Japan among other countries. Her studio was located at the corner of Barrington and Sackville Streets in Halifax. In the late 19th century very few women worked as professionals in china factories. Most industrial and commercial china painters were men.

Alice Egan Hagen was a lifelong learner who studied and learned new ceramic techniques throughout her long life. She first became interested in china painting when she was a student at the Victoria School of Art and Design in Halifax where she studied with the school's first teacher, George Harvey. She graduated in 1897. Because china painting wasn't taught there at the time, she took lessons in china painting from a local artist, Bessie Brown.

In 1896 she was one of 16 artists selected to paint a State Dinner Service for the Governor General's residence. The theme of the set was "Canada" which depicted game birds from her province. These were presented to Lord and Lady Aberdeen. Because of this recognition, she acquired her first kiln and her ceramic career begun. In 1897 she went to New York and studied china painting with Adelaide Alsop Robineau. The following year she started to teach on her own. In 1898 she set up her own studio at the Victoria School of Art and Design.

In 1912 she and her family moved to Jamaica where she continued to teach and exhibit

and she donated the proceeds of her work to the Red Cross. She was awarded the silver and bronze Musgrave medals by the government of Jamaica in recognition of her teaching art and her public service to the people of Jamaica. She was the first woman to receive such an award. In 1917 the family returned to Halifax and she held an exhibition at the Women's Art Association Studio in Toronto. While travelling in France in 1930 she visited a pottery that employed disabled war veterans who worked there to earn a living and became interested in the craft. She marveled at the absorption in their faces, realizing what an emotional satisfaction it must be to them, apart from earning them a living. Why couldn't disabled people everywhere learn to handle the sensuously pliable clay? The idea came to her that it would be a great idea to start such an industry in Nova Scotia. Her idea became a determination and at home again she prepared to make it work.

When she came back to Nova Scotia, she studied with Robert Prescott in Lantz and set up a pottery studio and kiln in her house in Mahone Bay. She is considered to be the founder of the studio pottery movement in Nova Scotia.

When she learned to make pots, she wanted to begin teaching. Her first teaching job was at the School for the Deaf in Halifax. General interest was lacking so she started classes wherever there was an interest.

At the age of 60 *she* set up *her* own pottery studio and kiln in Mahone Bay. *She* started to work with local clays. Being an avid experimenter, she developed techniques that allowed her to use local materials. She invented her own blue, white and green ware which she called "Scotian Pebble." She continued to be an active potter into her 90's.

Professionally, her lists of accomplishments were recognized in many parts of the world. She continued her studies in China painting and miniatures in New York with the famous Adelaide Alsop Robineau, the American painter and potter in New York. Although she worked in both oils and watercolours, china painting was her first passion.

Besides being an *innovative* potter, Alice Egan Hagen was also an influential teacher in the province. She was a teacher of china painting at the Victoria School of Art and Design from 1898 to 1901. She also taught pottery classes at her studio in Lantz and Antigonish for the Nova Scotia Department of Education.

CWL INVOLVEMENT:

Based on the Catholic Women's League in England, momentum for Catholic women's group grew in major cities: Montreal (1917)¹, Toronto (1918) and Halifax in 1919. They

functioned in their own area by parish or diocese.

Belle Guerin was the first president of the Loyola Club which became a Catholic Women's Club in 1917 which formed the Montreal City Subdivision in 1920 and claiming to be the founding Subdivision of the CWL.

As this was war time and women had just won the right to vote, they were energized and started campaigning for an end to sexual stereotyping and discrimination. National women's groups were called to Ottawa to share their views with the Minister of Reconstruction & Immigration on how to deal with the influx of immigrants coming to Canada from war-torn Europe. Katherine Hughes' sister, Mrs. Kneil of Edmonton was employed with the women's division of the Immigration Department in Ottawa and the Cabinet Minister asked if there was a national organization of Catholic women and she had to reply there wasn't. This set in motion the desire to organize a National CWL.

Belle Guerin was contacted to meet with the Minister of Immigration and she came away with awareness for the need for such an organization. A letter was sent to locally established councils and a conference was held on June 17, 1920 in Montreal. Alice Egan Hagen was invited to attend. Seven of the then nine provinces were invited. The National CWL was formed and Alice Egan Hagen was elected as a councilor. She not only was Halifax's first diocesan president but served as a charter member of the first national CWL executive and was their last surviving member of that executive.

Halifax being a seaport, immigrants were coming here from Europe. Reverend Abbe Cosgrain Port Chaplain in Quebec wrote to the Archbishop of Halifax, E.J. McCarthy, asking catholic women be encouraged to form a subdivision of the Catholic Women's League. Alice Egan Hagen was approached to do this. On November 25, 1919, a meeting was held at Mrs. Hagen's home and the Halifax Subdivision became a reality.

Because of her volunteer work during the Second World War, she was one of the twelve women awarded Honorary Life membership. This honor has been deemed only for those who have served as National Presidents.

In 1982 the Halifax Diocesan CWL set up a bursary in the name of Alice Egan Hagen. Her family made a one-time donation in her name to remember their mother and the work she did for CWL. Guidelines and eligibility rules were put in place. \$500 was to be given to a CWL member who wished to further her education. The recipient was recommended by Mount St. Vincent. In the early 1990's the Halifax Diocesan Council took over the administration from Mount St. Vincent. Councils donated toward this bursary each year in order to provide the funding to keep the bursary.

Mount St. Vincent University established a scholarship offered to full time students entering or first year taking Physical Sciences in her honor. It is called "The Alice Egan

Hagen Jubilee Endowed Scholarship in Science." The donors are her daughter Rachel and her grandchildren.

My reason for outlining Alice Egan's professional accomplishments is to show why her professional career carried into her religious convictions. She had truly "seen the Lord." She died in January 1972, a few months short of her 100th birthday from St. Joseph's Church in Bridgewater where she is **buried**.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary MacDonald Past President
Nova Scotia Provincial Council