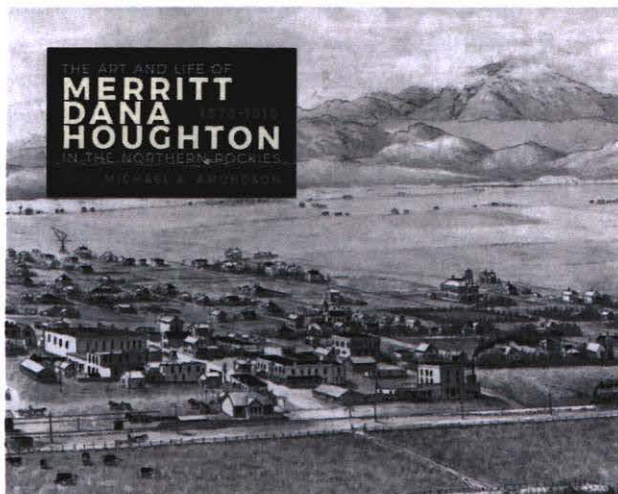


Significant Recent Books on Western and Wyoming History



The Art and Life of Merritt Dana Houghton in the Northern Rockies, 1878-1919. By Michael A. Amundson.

Laramie: University of Wyoming Press, an imprint of the University Press of Colorado, 2023. 221 pages. Illustrations, endnotes, bibliography, index. Hardcover, \$45.00.

Michael Amundson spent thirty-four years researching the life and art of Merritt Dana Houghton. Essentially he was engaged in a multi-part treasure hunt, looking for and finding Houghton's drawings, sketches, photographs, and watercolors and sorting out the people and places that made up Houghton's life. Amundson's tenacity allowed him to document an unusually productive artistic and business career that spanned forty years and covered most of Wyoming as well as parts of Colorado, Montana, Idaho, and Washington.

Merritt Dana Houghton was a midwestern transplant, sometime schoolteacher, and

occasional politician and businessman. He documented towns with detailed birds-eye views, and he produced equally detailed sketches, pen and ink drawings and etchings of mines, mining districts and mining towns. He also painted Wyoming ranches and even created the portraits of most of Wyoming's early forts for Charles G. Coutant's 1899 *History of Wyoming*. For the fort images, there was often little physical evidence left for him to use. Instead, he did historical archaeology coupled with oral histories with people who had lived at the forts to show the posts at various stages of their existence.

Merritt Dana Houghton and his wife Fannie arrived in Wyoming in 1878 by way of the Black Hills of South Dakota. His first stop was Rawlins where he was elected superintendent of schools. He also set up a photo studio there. In 1883 he was creating portraits of Shoshoni and Arapaho leaders which joined images of land, animals and ranches that make up the approximately fifty Houghton photos that exist. The next few years saw the couple living in Buffalo, making and selling photos similar to those he had already produced.

Three years later, in 1886, the Houghtons moved to Laramie which became the home base for Merritt and the home of Fannie who settled into the social life of the city for the next twenty years. He spent considerable time in the Encampment and Saratoga areas, depicting towns, ranches, and mining operations. He also made the transition to drawings, pen and ink works and etchings specializing in birds-eye views that became his signature artistic products.

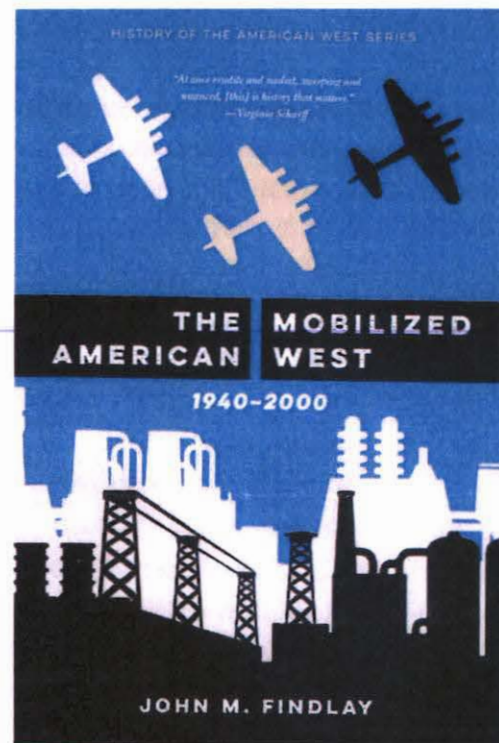
Merritt, however, led an itinerant lifestyle and had a hard time making a living with his art. Only by hustling between owning or working for newspapers and getting contracts from mining companies and ranchers did he keep himself and Fannie supported. In 1904, the couple began a migration that took them to Wheatland and then Sheridan, Wyoming. After producing a number of his signature images, Merritt and Fannie worked their way up into and westward across Montana, and through Idaho. They settled in Spokane, Washington where Merritt created his final works before he and Fannie died of influenza in 1919.

The book is an excellent research resource for a variety of users. It certainly is of interest to historians who study western images. But it is an amazing resource for public historians in towns and cities across Houghton's range of migration. Finding views of the early built environment of towns is often difficult, so this book is a resource for local history. In the same sense, the industrial, military, and ranching historians can find a treasure trove of visual documentation. Environmental historians can make use of the many landscapes that made up a central place in Houghton's works.

Michael Amundson created this attractive and useful book through persistence and luck. In the many years that he worked on this project, the sum-total of images grew as he used research skills and connections to tease out many hidden gems from family archives, business repositories, and archive and museum collections. Fortunately, the keepers of these repositories understood both the need to preserve the images and the need for a book of the sort that Amundson has created.

This volume on the work of Merritt Dana Houghton is an important new addition to the canon of Western American history.

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The Mobilized American West, 1940-2000. By John Findlay. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023. 518 pages. Illustrations, tables, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. Hardcover, \$60.00

There has been a need for a book that explores the development of the modern American West in a national context. John Findlay's *The Mobilized American West, 1940-2000* does this very well and will give readers a broad understanding of how the American West developed and struggled through the last sixty years of the 20th century.

The premise of the book is that the onset of the Second World War brought unprecedented change to what was once considered a quaint and provincial portion of the country. Findlay outlines how the West served as a pseudo-colonial source of minerals and resources used in the more developed and industrialized East. A