

LIFE BEGINS AT EIGHTY!

— Grandma Moses —

Poetry may be a young man's fancy but art matures with age. All the same, it's not often that an artist starts his – or in this case, her – career at an age when most people have long since retired. This though is exactly what Anna Mary Moses did. To be fair, she had painted all her life, but Anna Mary Moses, better known as Grandma Moses, did not hold her first proper exhibition until 1940, when she was eighty years old!

Grandma Moses was born Anna Mary Robertson on September 7th, 1860 in rural New York, where she was to live all of her life. She started work in 1872 as a "hired girl" on a neighbouring farm and married Thomas Salmon Moses in 1887. They had ten children, five of whom died during or soon after birth. Her husband died in 1927 after forty years of marriage, but it was another 11 years before some of her paintings were spotted by Louis Caldor in a drugstore "exhibit". Caldor was so impressed that he bought all her paintings on the spot and in 1939 Grandma Moses featured in a show of "Contemporary Unknown American Painters" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

The following year, in October, her first exhibition opened, but of the thirty-four paintings on display, she sold only three. In spite of this disappointing response from the art world, this exhibition made her name. By the end of 1940s her work had been included in more than 65 exhibits and 50 one women shows. After World War Two, her fame also spread abroad while 1946 saw the publication of **Grandma Moses, American Primitive** and the first Grandma Moses Christmas cards. Subsequently her paintings were licensed and reproduced on drapery, fabrics, cards, murals etc. but none of this was purely commercial. In 1949 she went to Washington where she received the National Press Club Award from the President, while 1952 saw the publication of **Grandma Moses: My Life's History**. Although the critics dismissed her as "nostalgia", the public were both impressed and eager for more. Her style progressed, although her paintings remained mainly of rural life.

When she celebrated her 100th birthday on September 7th, 1960, she was swamped with gifts and the Governor of New York proclaimed it Grandma Moses Day. She painted right up until her death at the age of 101 on December 13th, 1961; "She just wore out," her doctor said. A postage stamp was issued in her honour in 1969.