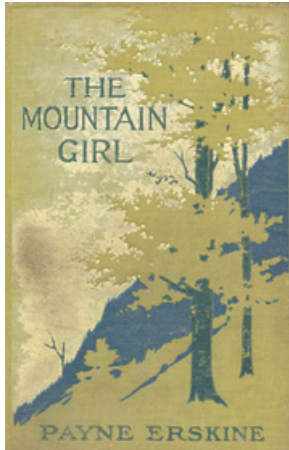


Erskine, Emma Payne ^[1]

Erskine, Emma Payne

By Richard Walser, 1986

10 May 1853–4 Mar. 1924



"The Mountain Girl, by Emma Payne Erskine."

^[2]Emma Payne Erskine, writer, painter, and civic leader, was born in Racine, Wis., the daughter of Alfred and Olive Child Payne. Her father, a native of England, was a portraitist and taught at the [Art Institute of Chicago](#) ^[3]. Through her mother, she was a tenth-generation American. Emma was educated at home. On 8 Apr. 1873, she married Charles Edwin Erskine, a musician and gardener. Their children were Alfred, Harold, Ralph, Violet (Mrs. Macdermid Parish-Watson), Malcolm, and Susan (Mrs. Carroll Pickens Rogers). The Erskines first went to Tryon, N.C., in 1885 with their three small sons and fell in love with the region; in 1895 they moved permanently to Lynncote, their home built of native stone designed by the architect of [Biltmore Village](#) ^[4]. They participated wholeheartedly in community affairs, and Lynncote became a center of civic and artistic activity. He was interested in providing schools and churches. She was energetic in building up the [Lanier Library](#) ^[5], meanwhile clearing and donating the land for Tryon's golf club. She painted dozens of landscapes and "portraits of old ex-slaves still living in the vicinity." Of her seven books, three are works of fiction set in the North Carolina mountains: *When the Gates Lift Up Their Heads* (1901) ^[6]; *The Mountain Girl* (1912) ^[7]; and her best known, *A Girl of the Blue Ridge* (1915) ^[8]. The last two went through many reprintings. *Iona, a Lay of Ancient Greece* (1888) ^[9] and *The Harper & the King's Horse* (1905) ^[10] are books of poems. The other novels are *The Eye of Dread* (1913) ^[11] and *Joyful Heatherby* (1913) ^[12].

Charles Erskine died in July 1908. Nine years later Emma married Cecil Corwin in August 1917. In her later years she was president of the Holly Hills Co., a [real estate](#) ^[13] concern engaged in designing and building homes on land she owned. She was an Episcopalian and a Republican. She was buried in Racine. Her son Ralph married Barbara Peattie, daughter of her close friend, the Tryon writer [Elia W. Peattie](#) ^[14]. An oil portrait of Emma Erskine, painted by her father, is a family possession.



"Where Payne Erskine's Novels Are Written," from *Sky-Land* magazine, 1915. Image from the North Carolina Digital Collections.

^[15]**References:**

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<https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/sky-land-1915-january-v.1-no.-11/501914> ^[15]
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