

Edgar Watson Howe Biography

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Biography

Edgar Watson Howe (1853-1937), American author and editor, wrote realistic regional and romantic novels and coined widely circulated aphorisms.

Edgar Howe was born on May 3, 1853, in Wabash County, Ind. He acquired much of his education while learning and practicing the printer's trade, and he eventually became a journalist.

Howe was editor and proprietor of the *Atchison (Kans.) Daily Globe* (1877-1911) when he wrote his first and most famous novel, *The Story of a Country Town* (1883). Harshly realistic, it portrayed, in a rather colorless but easygoing style, the hopeless lives of men and women in two midwestern prairie towns. Unable to place his novel with any publishing house, Howe ran it off in his own printshop. It was a great success. It was praised by such prominent contemporary writers as William Dean Howells and Mark Twain, and years later it was rediscovered and hailed as a classic. Later Howe turned from realism to romance in *The Mystery of the Locks* (1885) and *The Moonlight Boy* (1886), which were less successful.

A character in Howe's first novel observes, "A man with a brain large enough to understand mankind, is always wretched, and ashamed of himself." This shrewd and disillusioned comment was typical of Howe, who was known as "the Sage of Potato Hill." He won fame as a commonsense coiner of curdled aphorisms. His domestic life may well have helped sour him; in 1873 he married Clara L. Frank, but his home life was "wretchedly unhappy." In 1901 he was divorced and never remarried. *E. W. Howe's Monthly*, which he edited between 1911 and 1937, contained many of his bitter observations. Books in which these were collected include *Country Town Sayings* (1911), *The Blessings of Business* (1918), *Ventures in Common Sense* (1919), and *The Anthology of Another Town* (1920). Howe's two sons became successful journalists, and his daughter became a successful novelist. One of Howe's great admirers was H. L. Mencken, himself skilled in creating cynical aphorisms. Howe died in Atchison on Oct. 3, 1937.