



Eliza Calvert Hall: Kentucky Author and Suffragist

Lynn E. Niedermeier

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In 1907, author, poet, essayist, and folk art historian Eliza Calvert Hall (1856--1935) published *Aunt Jane of Kentucky*, a collection of stories about rural life infused with the spirit and gentle good humor of its elderly narrator, Aunt Jane. The book and several sequels achieved wide popularity, reaching an estimated one million readers in her lifetime, and placed Hall in the front ranks of "local color" fiction writers of her time. Eliza Calvert Hall's life and work unfolded during a time of restlessness and change for American women. Born Eliza "Lida" Calvert in Bowling Green, Kentucky, Hall experienced the upheaval of both the Civil War and family scandal. Forced to help support her mother and four siblings by teaching school, she became a published poet, adopting her grandmother's name, Hall, as her pseudonym. At twenty-nine, she married William A. Obenchain, and in the space of eight years gave birth to four children. As Hall struggled to balance her writing career with the duties of a nineteenth-century wife and mother, suffragist Laura Clay was lobbying for every woman's right to vote. Hall joined the battle, writing fearlessly in support of suffrage and equality. While her passionate essays served as a direct appeal for this cause, her creative writing also carried a feminist spirit, celebrating the strength, humor, love, and art of the common woman. In *Eliza Calvert Hall: Kentucky Author and Suffragist*, Lynn E. Niedermeier tells the story of this remarkable Kentuckian for the first time. Hall's challenge was to balance the artist's creative ambitions with the crusader's passion for achieving the goal of political equality for American women. Her successes did not stem from privilege or leisure; although she was an acclaimed writer, Hall was an ordinary woman, a wife and mother of moderate economic means. Through the power of her words, she challenged others to match her courage, independence, intellectual energy, and loyalty to her sex.

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