

## **John Fox, Jr.**

1862-1919

Harriet Holman in her article “John Fox, Jr. Appraisal and Self-Appraisal,” said that once Kentucky’s local color writer John Fox, Jr. became an established author, magazine editors bought everything he offered them. A remarkable fact of John Fox’s literary career is that he never had a manuscript rejected. Equally remarkable is that he published two of the first million-selling novels in the United States.

John William Fox was born December 16, 1862 at Stony Point in Bourbon County, seven miles east of Paris, Kentucky in the heart of the Bluegrass. The Fox family was well-known and close knit. John had four full brothers and two sisters, and three half-brothers from his father's first wife who had died in childbirth. His mother was Minerva Carr. His father, John W. Fox, was headmaster of the Stony Point Academy, which John Jr. attended from 1867 to 1875. After attending the Transylvania University for two years, he entered Harvard University in 1880 to study English, graduating *cum laude* in 1883 as the youngest member of his class.

After his education, Fox moved to New York City where he worked as a journalist with the *New York Sun* and *New York Times*. During his stay in New York, Fox met Fritzi Scheff, a prima donna with the Imperial Opera of Vienna, who was performing with the New York Metropolitan Opera. She later was to become his wife.

Upon James Lane Allen’s recommendation, he submitted his first novella “A Mountain Europa” to *The Century Magazine* who published it serially, followed by "A Cumberland Vendetta" a year later. The mountaineer-theme would be repeated in future works. *A Cumberland Vendetta and Other Stories* (1895) was his first published collection of short stories, followed by *Hell-Fer-Sartain and Other Stories* (1897), and *The Kentuckians* (1897). After his

fame began to grow, his new home attracted a number of illustrious visitors, including future President Theodore Roosevelt, who became a life-long friend of Fox's. Fox met Roosevelt after he was sent to Cuba by *Harper's Weekly* in 1898 as a war correspondent covering the Spanish—American War. While there he served with Teddy Roosevelt's *Rough Riders*.

Due to his popularity from the *Century* publications and his successful publishing with Harper's Brothers and Scribner, he launched a lecture circuit, travelling in Europe and America, including visits to President Roosevelt's White House, where he sang mountain songs and read from his own works.

His novel, *The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* was released in 1903 and became the first novel printed in the United States to sell one million copies. In 1904, Fox was sent as a war correspondent to Japan and Manchuria to cover the Russo-Japanese War. That experience resulted in the publication of *Following the Sun Flag: A Vain Pursuit Through Manchuria* (1905).

His wildly popular romance/coming-of-age Novel *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* was released in 1908. This tale of the “outsider” engineer Jack Hale falling in love with mountain girl June Tolliver vividly and honestly portrays the local color of life in the mountains in all its scenic and rugged splendor, with charming descriptions of culture and the people who made up this important aspect of pioneering American life. This novel was to become the first novel printed in the United States to sell two million copies.

The same year that *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* was released, he married Fritz Scheff, the famed opera and movie star he had met in New York. The tempestuous marriage lasted 5 years and ended in divorce in 1913.

*The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come* and *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine* are arguably his most well-known and successful works. He was on the *New York Times*' top ten list of bestselling novels for 1903, 1904, 1908, and 1909. In 1916, Cecil B. DeMille wrote, directed, and produced a film version of *The Trail of the Lonesome Pine*. Other versions appeared in 1923 and 1936.

Fox traveled widely, counting among his friends other such popular writers as Richard Harding Davis, Jack London, and Booth Tarkington. He was awarded many honors in his lifetime including election to membership in the National Institute of Arts and Letters in 1899, a medal for his literary contributions from the Emperor of Japan, and his dedication and lobbying led to the passing of the Federal Copyright Act.

He died July 8, 1919 of pneumonia at Big Stone Gap, Virginia and is buried in the Paris Cemetery, at Paris, Kentucky.