

FFOTO

MINNA KEENE

(b. 5 April 1861, Arolsen, Germany; d. November 1943, Oakville, Canada)

Minna Keene, née Bergman, lived in Great Britain, South Africa, and Canada. She emigrated to the United Kingdom in approximately 1880 to become a Governess in Scarborough. While in Scarborough, she met Caleb Keene (b. 1862) a “decorator's apprentice”, who she married in Chelsea, London, in 1887. Caleb Keene was a noted painter and brother of the landscape painter cum “photographic artist” Elmer Ezra Keene (1853–1929). Minna decided to experiment with photography while recovering from a toothache, and eventually became a member of the London Salon of Photography, a fellow of the Royal Photographic Society (1908), and a nominee for membership in the Linked Ring (1909), although the society disbanded before it could conduct a vote to admit her.

Minna's first photographic work was of plant life, for which she made exposures during different stages of growth. Later, she made a successful series of ornithological photographs that were illustrated in English textbooks which remained in use over several decades. Her first mention in photographic literature occurred in the late 1890s while living in Bristol, UK, by submitting to exhibitions and earning recognition in the art journal the *Studio*.

In 1903 Minna emigrated to Cape Town, South Africa, where her husband opened a showroom. During this period she made studies of Boer life in South Africa while operating an active photography studio and raising two children. She exhibited her photographs of Boer life at the Lyceum Club, London, in April 1907, which was favourably reviewed by the *British Journal of Photography* and *Amateur Photographer*. In 1909 this work was included in the “Pictorial Photographs by Colonial Workers” exhibition at the Amateur Photographer's Little Gallery in London. In 1910 Minna exhibited in the Fifty-fifth Annual Exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society of Great Britain, and in each year until 1929. In 1911 her photograph of her daughter Violet, entitled *Pomegranates*, was awarded Picture of the Year at the London Photographic Salon.

In 1913 the Keene family moved to Canada, first settling in Montréal, Québec, with Minna practising as a professional photographic portraitist. She was commissioned by the Canadian Pacific Railway to photograph the Rockies in 1914 and spent several months in Western Canada. In 1919 the family moved to Toronto, Ontario, and opened a studio, and in 1921 moved to Oakville, Ontario.

In 1926, Minna was featured in a Maclean's magazine article that mentions the highlights of her career and enthuses about her being a "home lover!". In the 1930s she continued to exhibit internationally and was assisted in the studio by her daughter Violet, who eventually succeeded her and became a photographer in demand at the Eaton's photography studio in Toronto.