

Neysa McMein, Artist During the Model A Era

~ Jeanie Adair

Over the years as I've collected vintage magazines for the fashions from the era of our Model A Fords, I noticed the unusual signature of the artist who did the covers for the *McCall's* magazines. Then one day I noticed an ad for Cutex nail polish in one of these magazines, it showed this photo (right) of Neysa painting.

So I did some research to find out just who was this Neysa McMein, besides the artist whose work I had been admiring on the covers of vintage *McCall's* magazines.



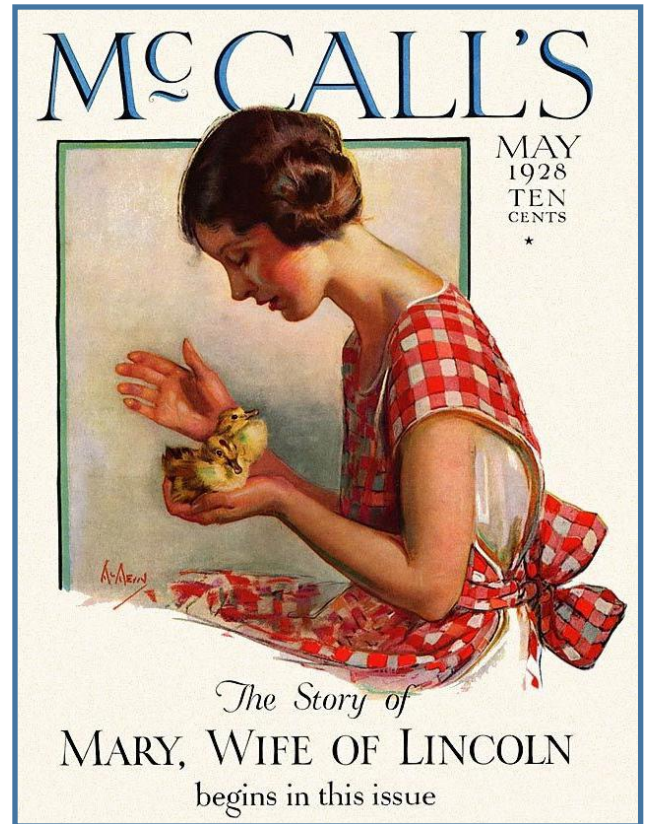
The following is information that I found out about this artist...

Neysa McMein 1888-1949

As popular as her male counterparts in capturing "The American Beauty", and a beauty herself, she sold millions of magazines with her covers for McCall's, Saturday Evening Post, Collier's, McClure's, Woman's Home Companion, Photoplay, Liberty, Associated Sunday Magazine and Ladies World. She also did advertisement work for Palmolive, Cadillac, Lucky Strike,



Adam's Gum, Coke, Hummingbird Hosiery, Gainsborough Hair Nets, and Colgate.



In 1936 she painted the first Betty Crocker, a fictional housewife whose brand name was intended to be a seal of solid middle class domestic values.

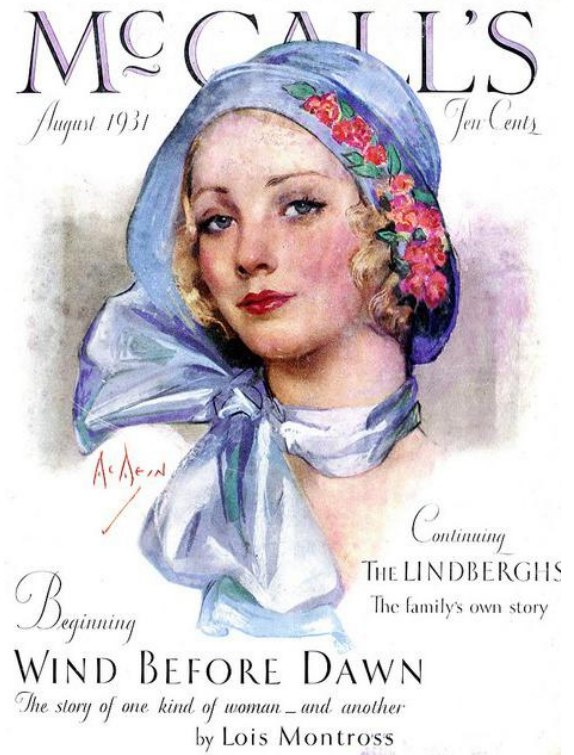
She was born Marjorie Moran in Quincy, Illinois. She attended the Art Institute of Chicago and went to New York City in 1913. After a brief stint as an actress, she turned to commercial art. On the advice of a numerologist, she adopted the name Neysa McMein, and thereafter credited the name change with her rapid success. She studied at the Art Students League of New York for a few months and in 1914 sold her first drawing to the Boston Star. The next year she sold a cover to the Saturday Evening Post. Her pastel drawings of chic healthy American girls proved highly popular and brought her many commissions.



Neysa with a 1929 Studebaker Commander



Neysa carrying the flag in 1917.



Neysa was an ardent supporter of the Women's Suffrage Movement. One of the things she came to New York for was to be a fully emancipated woman, socially, sexually and economically. With her, the idea was more personal than ideological. If she was a feminist, she was only by example. She participated in such things instinctively rather than intellectually.

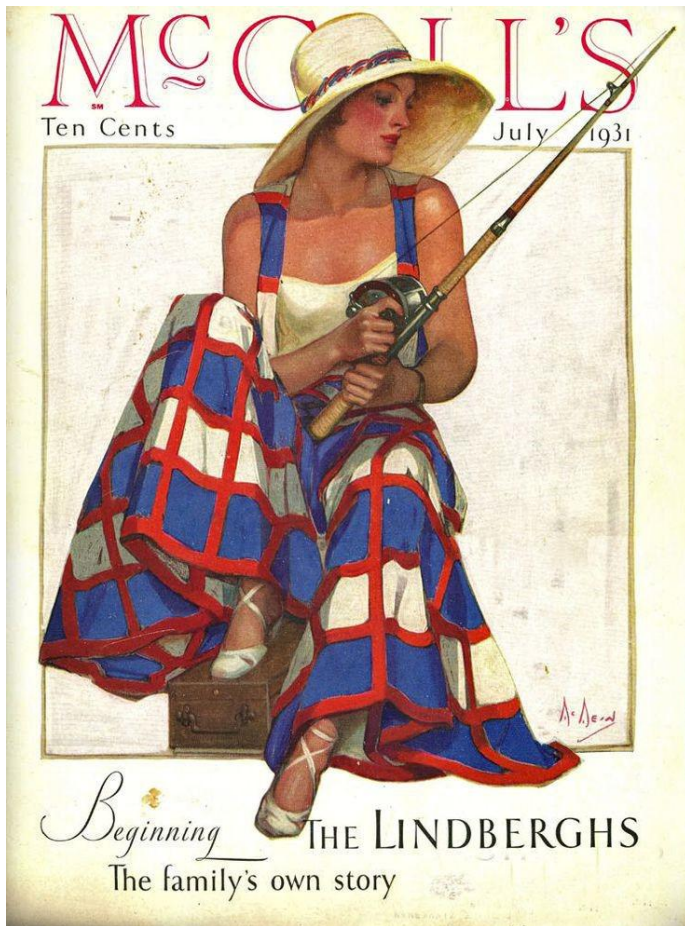
A member of the Algonquin Club, a celebrated group of New York City writers, critics, actors and wits, they lunched each day and inspired creativity. There and at her studio, she entertained famous people such as Mary Pickford, Dorothy Parker, Harpo Marx, Noel Coward, and Irving Berlin all while she painted.

In 1923 she married John C. Baragwanath, a mining engineer and author. Theirs was an open marriage, and though the proprieties generally were observed, there were exceptions. In his memoirs, the lyricist and publicist Howard Dietz recalled hearing that on one occasion, when Neysa noticed that her model for the day was impatient to leave, she asked, "Have you got a heavy date?" The model replied, "Yes, with a great guy, Jack Baragwanath." Neysa had several affairs too.



• Neysa McEwen, famous artist, tells the story of a thrilling trip to Detroit

This is as photo of Neysa with a 1931 Desoto.



From 1923 to 1937 she created all of the *McCall's* front covers.

Her more private artistic ambitions laid in the field of portraiture, at first in pastels and later in oil. With the decline in popularity of her style of commercial art in the later 1930's she turned increasingly to portraiture. Her subjects included Warren G Harding, Herbert Hoover, Anne Morrow Lindbergh, Dorothy Parker, Helen Hayes and Charlie Chaplin.

Neysa McMein died of cancer in New York at the age of 61. I feel she left a legacy of wonderful era illustrations for those of us who are Model A fashion enthusiasts!