

The first book-length biography of an influential reformer

Charles C. Painter

The Life of an Indian Reform Advocate

By Valerie Sherer Mathes

Charles Cornelius Coffin Painter (1833–89), clergyman turned reformer, was one of the foremost advocates and activists in the late-nineteenth-century movement to reform U.S. Indian policy. Very few individuals possessed the influence Painter wielded in the movement, and Painter himself published numerous pamphlets for the Indian Rights Association (IRA) on the Southern Utes, Eastern Cherokees, California Indians, and other Native peoples. Yet this is the first book to fully consider his unique role and substantial contribution.

Born in Virginia, Painter spent most of his life in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, commuting to New York City and Washington, D.C., initially as an agent of the American Missionary Association (AMA), later as an appointed member of the Board of Indian Commissions (BIC), and most significant, as the Indian Rights Association's D.C. agent. In these capacities he lobbied presidents and Congress for reform, conducted extensive investigations on reservations, and shaped deliberations in such reform bodies as the BIC and the influential Lake Mohonk conferences.

Mining an extraordinary wealth of archival material, Valerie Sherer Mathes crafts a compelling account of Painter as a skilled negotiator with Indians and policymakers and as a tireless investigator who traveled to far-flung reservations, corresponded with countless Indian agents, and drafted scrupulously researched reports on his findings. Recounted in detail, his many adventures and behind-the-scenes activities—promoting education, striving to prevent the removal of the Southern Utes from Colorado, investigating reservation fraud, working to save the Piegiens of Montana from starvation—afford a clear picture of Painter's importance to the overall reform effort to incorporate Native Americans into the fabric of American life.

No other book so effectively captures the day-to-day and exhausting work of a single individual on the front lines of reform. Like most of his fellow advocates, Painter was an unapologetic assimilationist, a man of his times whose story is a key chapter in the history of the Indian reform movement.

Valerie Sherer Mathes is a faculty member in the Social Science Department at City College of San Francisco. Among the books she has authored or edited are *Helen Hunt Jackson and Her Indian Reform Legacy* and *The Indian Reform Letters of Helen Hunt Jackson*.

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