



# Dearest of Geniuses: A Life of Theodate Pope Riddle

*Sandra L. Katz*

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
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Theodate Pope Riddle was one of America's first successful female architects. She was the only child of a Cleveland millionaire whose hobby was collecting Impressionist paintings. Her first architectural project, a mansion she designed to house her father's magnificent collection, is now the Hill-Stead Museum, in Farmington, CT. Theodate was an educator, who founded the prestigious Avon Old Farms School. She created its spectacular medieval campus and developed its progressive curriculum. She was a Spiritualist, who held a major position in the Society for Psychical Research. An early feminist, Theodate did not care what others thought or said, and she rebelled against society's norms and restrictions. While an unmarried woman, she took in a two-year-old boy, and after his death from polio, she raised two more orphans. She fought the men who tried to take over her school. She spoke and did as she pleased. In May 1915, despite the danger of traveling to England, she sailed on the Lusitania, and when the ship was hit by a German torpedo, she refused to join the panicked crowd trying to get into lifeboats. Instead, she jumped into the icy Irish Sea and miraculously survived. Theo's husband, John Riddle, called her his "Dearest of Geniuses," because, despite failures, tragedies, and conflicts, Theo always forged ahead. She was an extraordinary, gifted woman, who fulfilled her ambition to make the world a more beautiful and better place.

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