About the Author

In the August 13, 1967 obituary, The New York Times wrote, "Miss Forbes, a novelist who wrote like a historian and a historian who wrote like a novelist, achieved a reputation as one of the most exciting and knowledgeable authors on the Revolutionary era." Indeed, her reputation was ensured when she won the 1943 Pulitzer Prize for History for Paul Revere and the World He Lived In and, in the following year, received the Newbery Medal for Johnny Tremain.

All her life, Esther Forbes loved history. As a child growing up in Worcester, Mass., she became an avid reader. Not only did she read fairy tales, but she also tackled harder works like The Iliad. She read Shakespeare, Kipling, Scott, and Thomas Hardy. At thirteen, she attempted her first novel starring Achilles.

Her sense of the past was deep-seated. Her family heritage could be traced back to the colonial period. Her grandfather told her stories of two uncles who had been captured by Indians and taken to Canada where they eventually became chiefs. In her house hung a bedspread embroidered by Sam Adams' mother and grandmother. Her name, Esther, was the name of a mother who had been accused of witchcraft. Her own mother was a respected researcher and writer. Having been immersed in so much history, it is no wonder she developed such enthusiasm for it.

Having graduated from Bradford Academy, she attended the University of Wisconsin to pursue the study of history under such notable historians as Frederick Jackson Turner and Reuben Gold Thwaites. At the outbreak of World War I, she interrupted her studies at Wisconsin to volunteer as a farm hand in Harper's Ferry, Virginia, to aid the war effort. Here she was able to work with horses, a love she had from youth. This may closely relate to the attention she gives to Johnny and Goblin. At the close of the war, she did not return to Wisconsin but took a job with Houghton Mifflin where she learned the editor's craft between 1920 and 1926. Two events in 1926 caused her to leave Houghton Mifflin—the publication of her first book, O Gentle Lady! and her marriage to Albert Leonard Hoskins. After an extended stay in Europe, she returned to the United States and published four novels—A Mirror for Witches, 1928; Miss Marvel, 1935; Paradise, 1937; and The General's Lady, 1938—and one biography, Paul Revere and the World He Lived In, 1942, which won the 1943 Pulitzer Prize for History. Johnny Tremain, which derived from her extensive research for Paul Revere, won the Newbery Medal in 1944. When she was writing Paul Revere, Forbes became intrigued by the character of the silversmith. "What was this boy like? I had no idea. I would very much have liked to make up a character for him. But I was determined to hold myself in check. This was to be 'straight' biography...As a sort of reward for this Spartan virtue I was practicing, I promised myself that sometime I would write a story and make up anything I wanted as long as I kept it typical of the period. Then I would know not merely what was done but why and how people thought." At first she was going to write a story about a character
who remained neutral during the Revolutionary War, but the "...Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor convinced Forbes that in war, there is no such thing as neutrality. She began work on Johnny Tremain the day after Pearl Harbor."

During the remainder of her life, she published three more novels—The Boston Book, 1947; The Running Tide, 1948; and Rainbow on the Road, 1955—as well as a children's biography, America's Paul Revere. She also received honorary doctorates in law and literature, was the first woman member of the American Antiquarian Society, and was a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Society of American Historians.

Esther Forbes died on August 12, 1967. As she once said, "I suppose one of the most fundamental groupings of novelists is into two classes: those who primarily want to know what is done, and those whose interest is largely in why. For better or worse I belong to the second group." (The Newbery Medal Acceptance.) Readers both young and old will remain thankful for that!