



Nothing Daunted: The Unexpected Education of Two Society Girls in the West

Dorothy Wickenden

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Dorothy Woodruff and Rosamond Underwood attended grade school and Smith College together, spent nine months on a grand tour of Europe in 1910, and then, bored with society luncheons and chaperoned balls and not yet ready for marriage, they went off to teach the children of homesteaders in a remote schoolhouse on the Western Slope of Colorado. They traveled on the new railroad over the Continental Divide and by wagon to Elkhead, a tiny settlement far from the nearest town. Their students came to school from miles away in tattered clothes and shoes tied together with string.

Dorothy Woodruff was the grandmother of *New Yorker* executive editor Dorothy Wickenden. Nearly one hundred years later, Wickenden found the buoyant, detailed, colorful letters the two women wrote to their families. Through them, she has chronicled their trials in the classroom, the cowboys and pioneering women they met, and the violent kidnapping of a close friend. Central to their narrative is Ferry Carpenter, the witty, idealistic, and occasionally outrageous young lawyer and cattle rancher who hired them, in part because he thought they would make attractive and cultivated brides. None of them imagined the transforming effect the year would have—on the children, the families, and the teachers.

Wickenden set out on her own journey to discover what two intrepid Eastern women found when they went West, and what America was like at that uncertain moment, with the country poised for the First World War, but going through its own period of self-discovery.

Drawing upon the letters, interviews with descendants, research about these vanished communities, and trips to the region, Wickenden creates a compelling, original saga about the two intrepid young women and the “settling up” of the West.



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