



The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West

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All aspects of western feminine life, which include a good deal about the western male, are covered in this lively, informal but soundly factual account of the women who built the West. Among those whose stories are included are Elizabeth Custer; Lola Montez, Ann Eliza Young, Josephine Meeker, Carry Nation, Esther Morris, and Virginia Reed.

The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West Details

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From Reader Review The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West for online ebook

John says

I read this book twice. The first time was years ago and it did not impress me a lot. (That says more about me than it says about the book.) Subsequently I read "A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains" by Isabella Bird. Isabella's opinion and experience of western men's "respect for a lady" almost seemed like she was wearing rose colored glasses. Then I read "The Gentle Tamers" again. The two books complement each other. Now I can see that Dee Brown was developing a theme in his book. The theme is that in the wild west women were highly regarded and treated with respect. Then he concludes the book by pointing out that women's suffrage was first passed in Wyoming. And that 7 states west of the Mississippi passed women's suffrage before it was ever enacted east of the Mississippi. That's something to think about.

Jack says

I was close to rating this book 2 stars. I think 2.5 stars appropriate (get those half stars Goodreads!). While interesting, it lacks substance. It really is a bunch of individual stories that do not amount to a cohesive whole. If I wrote a short biography on 10 different members of my community, it would not necessarily be a good representation of my community as a whole, and I think that is what we have here. Dee Brown knocked it out of the park with "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee". "The Gentle Tamers" I bet barely scratches the surface around women of the old west. But if you are ok with some pretty interesting characters and like the historical context, even while lacking in details, it's worth a quick read.

Jill says

I do not remember who gave this book to me, but I did like it. It is non-fiction and divided into a good number of chapters about the various women and the hardships they had to go through and how many times they were better able to adapt to the West than the men. My favorite selections were those about Elizabeth and George Custer! They had an interesting life and did love each other, tho' he had many women wanting to be with him! Nothing like the General I have read about.

Makes me happy I was not living in the time of the settlement of the West. I did think about the sod house that my grandparents lived in when they were first married in 1909.

This would have been a fun book to discuss in some of my Am. History classes in college.

Jeanne says

Interesting subject, but a little disjointed. Lots of short stories of women who conquered the west under unimaginable hardships. The chapter on Wyoming and women's right to vote was the most interesting.

Lori says

Gentle Tamers is focused on women and what it was like for them to live during the 1800s in the old wild west. The book ranges from the dangers that women faced like being taken by certain Indian tribes, Enduring traveling in covered wagons, or on foot across the nation. Some traveled with their husbands who were in the military. The types of homes they had to live in that could be nothing more than a tent or a sod house. the clothes they wore, how they bathed and took care of their bathroom needs. jobs they had and so many other topics of women and they lived during this time period. I would give this a 3.5. pretty informational and could be interesting.

Sjervey says

Thoroughly readable account of the role of women in shaping the West. From the different ways in which they reached the West, to the different strengths and adaptations they brought, to the cultivating influence on the men who often just wanted a chance to be in the room with a woman, to the adoption of women's suffrage and their rights to hold office and be impaneled on juries in Wyoming, this exhaustive review provides wonderful insight into the gentle, if not always gentle, impact of women. Brown's title makes you think it is about the taming of the West, but the text allows you to see how that taming, through the political advances of women in the West, were gradually extended to greater political rights for women in the rest of the US and well beyond.

Caroline says

I'd read Dee Brown's Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee and loved it, but I found this a bit disappointing. Whilst very interesting, it's overly-simplistic, poorly referenced, and somewhat patronising and sexist. It's also very fragmented, it jumps around in time and place constantly, with no real thematic pattern. I'd probably recommend it to teenagers but not adults.

Sarada says

Engaging and readable survey of the topic, covering a wide geographic era and lengthy period of time, though the organization of the chapters and topics was a little haphazard. The tone of the author (writing in the 1950s) is at times rather old-fashioned itself, and a little condescending at times. The standout chapter for me was about women winning the right to vote in 1869 in Wyoming. A fascinating, in-depth treatment of a subject about which I knew little going in. I found myself looking up information about many of the women discussed in this book, hungry for more detail and depth on the topics. I have about 20 more books in queue from the library or on my amazon wish list as a result of this reading, so it is an excellent starting point for further research.

Hayley says

Nope. I'm out.

This disjointed "history" of women in the Wild West is ridiculous and insulting. I've struggled through the first 75 pages to "learn" that many of these women wore pretty bonnets, didn't know how to cook, and were loved by the men who kidnapped and raped them.

Barb Terpstra says

I give this book four stars for Chapter 13, Wyoming Tea Party.

While the entire book was interesting, particularly as how the Westward movement of pioneer men and women liberated women in unexpected ways, the Wyoming chapter really brings it home.

Esther Morris, described as a self-reliant "55 year old lady of great charm, who enjoyed fierce battles and was accustomed to winning them", had a tea party on September 2, 1869. Esther invited 20 influential citizens to her party. Among her guests, two candidates for the legislature, Col. William H. Bright (Democrat) and Captain Herman G. Nickerson (Republican). She asked each of them to introduce a bill to give the women of Wyoming the right to vote. Both candidates agreed, even though at that time, no woman in the *world* had that right.

Bright won the election and kept his promise on November 9, 1869. Many saw the bill as a practical joke, or an opportunity to embarrass the governor. However the bill also passed the house, with the only change being to increase the age from 18 to 21. On December 10, 1869, Governor Campbell signed the bill. And for the first time anywhere on earth, women had won the legal right to vote. Additionally, Wyoming women could now be elected to office.

When Wyoming applied for statehood 18 years later (1889) the law was in danger of being repealed due to the woman's suffrage bill. Kudos to the Wyoming legislature who sent a telegram stating

We may stay out of the union a hundred years, but we will come in with our women.

There are many more stories of our western women and how their lives changed, but this bit of history, of which I was unaware, made the book for me.

Sarah says

This was an enjoyable read and very informative. However, there was something about the tone of the

writing at times that was a little too "woman as delicate flowers" for my taste. The title seems slightly condescending to me -- women as gentle creatures, angels of the household, rather than being capable of nursing a baby, chopping wood and hogtying a calf. It seems like the title picks up too well on 19th-century/Victorian expectations of gender, when women in the West basically turned those on their head. I mean, why call them gentle tamers, which conjures to mind luring a mouse in with cheese, rather than fending off lions with a whip, when gentle isn't the word for them at all? Those women in the west? Were fighting lions off left and right.

Maybe it just wasn't the book I was looking for. I think I might have been expecting more about women on the fringe of society, and this was definitely about mainstream people.

Enni Gregas says

#21 on my 52 in 52 Quest: Decades ago, I read Dee Brown's masterpiece, "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee" which opened my world view to include the history and experience of Native Americans--one of those life-changing reads.

This book focuses on pioneer white women. Why I love reading---I get to live so many lives! The frontier westward movement lasted only a few decades---our perception is skewed by all the western movies, television shows (especially in my youth), and books that developed all those powerful cultural images and icons: cowboys, wagon trains, Indian wars, buffalo hunts, mountain men, and prospectors. It all makes the western period seem like it lasted for a much longer time.

In all those previous images, the representation of women was minimal---Miss Kitty, Ma Ingalls, Dale Evans, Calamity Jane, and Annie Oakley---oh, and the ever present prim nameless schoolmarm.

This book presents a fuller, more accurate rendering of the role and experience of women in the westward movement.

An enjoyable and enlightening read. I appreciate the extensive notes, documentation, and useful index.

Read "Bury My Heart" for sure and add this one to further clarify your perceptions of the Wild West.

Angelica says

The other reviews nailed it. Dee's accounts are mildly condescending, sexist, and don't offer much depth. The book is readable but doesn't offer offer much nuance.

Jean Marie says

Well, it took a while but it was worth it. I enjoy history and this book is full of it. It tells the many stories of the women of the Old West, their trials, their errors and their suffering. In reading the story, I learned how

the covered wagons were packed and how the women dealt with the close quarters of living and traveling in one. There were stories of Army wives along with dancehall girls and prostitutes. Soddies, log cabins , blankets under the wagons. Insects, snakes, mice and every imaginable unwanted critter. Just imagine doing your laundry and cooking in those circumstances. The most interesting part to me was the fight for women's voting rights in Wyoming. They didn't all survive but those that did helped tame the entire western half of the continent.

Kristi Thielen says

Here's an example of how you perceive things so differently, years later when you've read more deeply in a book's subject area.

I first read Brown's book in the late 1980s, unaware of its copyright date of 1958. I thought at the time that the book was illuminating.

In 2004-2005, I began reading much more about women of the west, for a play that I would produce soon thereafter. I've since read even more, in order to write museum exhibits and a presentation that I give in public events. These books I later read were either written by women - or were collections of women's diaries of the 1850-1910 time period.

Brown' book now looks not only shallow, but sexist. His title reveals his prejudices; he uses the words "gentle" or "fragile" or "feminine" over and over again in the book. He rarely references the writings of women, but more commonly newspapers - or the recollections of men.

Few of the remarkable women I've read of elsewhere are in the book; he is much more impressed with western women because of their association with men. (Wives of military officers in the west, none of them notable, get a good deal of Dee's attention.)

Condescending remarks about women's clothing also attract his attention. A lot. And prostitutes, whom he can't write enough about.

In his cursory coverage of remarkable political orator Mary Lease, he can't resist the stereotypical slur that women are fickle: "But as women will, she later changed her mind and let her fanatical followers down." (She shifted from support of one political party to another.) Men, too, have shifted from one party to the next throughout history - but it's unlikely Brown would say that such a move is done because it is "as men will."

There are many books about women in the west which are well worth reading. This book is one that should be retired from service.
