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

Dorothy Wickenden
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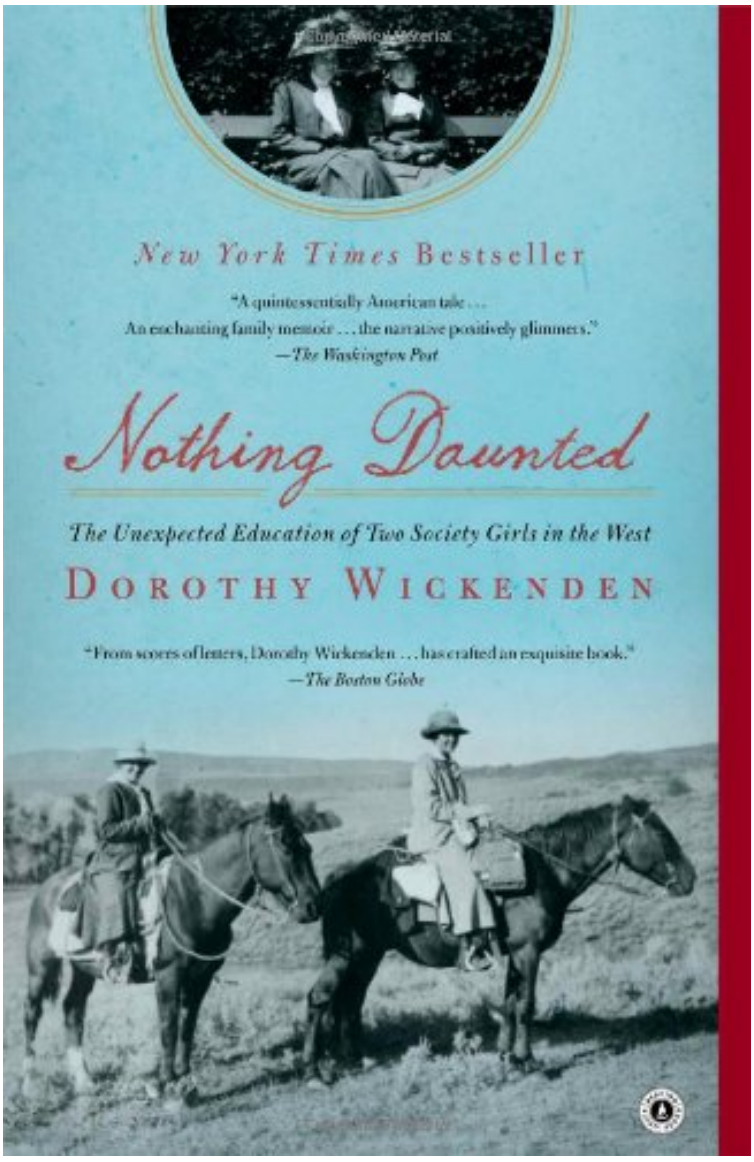

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Dorothy Wickenden : Nothing Daunted: The Unexpected Education of Two Society Girls in the West before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Nothing Daunted: The Unexpected Education of Two Society Girls in the West:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. An Unexpected Pleasure to Read!By AliceThis was "a sleeper"!

Published in 2011, I believe, this book was unknown to me until a friend assured me I would like this true story. And sure enough! I loved learning about these two Auburn, New York women and their improbable 1916 adventure to teach in a consolidated country school on the western slope of Colorado. The story emerges from letters, interviews, and historical documents painstakingly gathered and vetted by Dorothy Wickenden, granddaughter of one of the women. This "sleeper" has reawakened an interest in the U.S. history of the late 1800's--early 1900's. This personal historical view of Elkhead area of western Colorado tells of the costs of economic development and homesteading; relentless winter blizzards; courageous community life centered around the school; true hardships, and solid relationships that lasted a lifetime.2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Amazing!By JBThis story of two New York socialites living in the early 1900's serves as a reminder of just how difficult life was for others in our nation to scratch a livelihood in the early years of Colorado's statehood. As the two best friends sign-on for a year of teaching in a remote Colorado one room school house, it demonstrates the contrasts in society. The book was a slow start but as it unfolds, history of politicians, industrialists, and commonalities are woven into the storyline to grab your interest. I had the greatest admiration for these gals as they shared their challenges, hardships, and successes. Each grew more than they could ever imagine; each touched the lives of others for years afterwards. Certainly a great read and skillfully crafted!1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A Different Take on the Westward TrekBy ME MeadWhat a delightfully refreshing story of two eastern girls meeting the west when it really was "The West," 1916, just before WW1. The cheer, the good humor, the overcoming of hardships gives a different view of 'manifest destiny.' Their main form of transportation was their own legs or a horse's; autos were rare; trains belched black smoke into the blue, blue skies on the west side of the Rockies.The girls went to teach in a two-room school, and found education went both ways. Their experiences reflect what both my husband and I had heard from our parents who were roughly the same vintage and also experienced the west coming from an urban eastern background. Both he and I thoroughly enjoyed the book, and I find myself recommending it to friends, as it was recommended to me by a friend.

The acclaimed and captivating true story of two restless society girls who left their affluent lives to rough it as teachers in the wilds of Colorado in 1916.In the summer of 1916, Dorothy Woodruff and Rosamond Underwood, bored by society luncheons, charity work, and the effete men who courted them, left their families in Auburn, New York, to teach school in the wilds of northwestern Colorado. They lived with a family of homesteaders in the Elkhead Mountains and rode to school on horseback, often in blinding blizzards. Their students walked or skied, in tattered clothes and shoes tied together with string. The young cattle rancher who had lured them west, Ferry Carpenter, had promised them the adventure of a lifetime. He hadnt let on that they would be considered dazzling prospective brides for the locals. Nearly a hundred years later, Dorothy Wickenden, the granddaughter of Dorothy Woodruff, found the teachers buoyant letters home, which captured the voices of the pioneer women, the children, and other unforgettable people the women got to know. In reconstructing their journey, Wickenden has created an exhilarating saga about two intrepid women and the settling up of the West.

If you were impressed with Laura Hillenbrands efforts to breathe life into Seabiscuitor wax romantic about Willa Cathers classic My Antoniathis is a book for you.Grand Rapids PressAbout the AuthorDorothy Wickenden has been the executive editor of The New Yorker since January 1996. A former Nieman Fellow at Harvard, Wickenden was national affairs editor at Newsweek from 1993-1995 and before that was the longtime executive editor at The New Republic. She lives with her husband and her two daughters in Westchester, New York.Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. PROLOGUE One weekend afternoon in the fall of 2008, at the back of a drawer in my old wooden desk at home, I came across a folder I had forgotten. Dorothy Woodruff Letters, Elkhead 191617. My mother had given me the file when my children were young, and I had put it away, intending to look through it, but life had intervened. I glanced at the first letter. Dated Friday, July 28, 1916, it was written on the stationery of the Hayden Inn. At the top of the sheet was a photograph of a homely three-story concrete-block house with a few spindly saplings out front. The inn advertised itself as The Only First-Class Hotel in Hayden. Dorothy wrote: My dearest family: Can you believe that I am actually far out here in Colorado? She and her close friend, Rosamond Underwood, had grown up together in Auburn, New York. They had just arrived after a five-day journey and were preparing to head into a remote mountain range in the Rockies, to teach school in a settlement called Elkhead. Dorothys letter described their stop overnight in Denver, their train ride across the Continental Divide, and their introductions to the locals of Hayden, whom she described as all agog over them and so funny. One man could barely be restrained from showing us a bottle of gall stones just removed from his wife! She closed by saying, They are all so friendly and kindand we are thrilled by everything. We start nowfour hours drive. Goodbye in haste. Dorothy Woodruff was my grandmother. As I began reading the letters, I recognized her voice immediately, even though they were written by a young womantwenty-nine years old, unmarried, belatedly setting out on her own. An avid correspondent, she captured the personalities of the people she met; the harsh landscape; her trials with a classroom of unruly young boys; and her devotion to Rosamond, known to my brothers and me as Aunt Ros. I also was struck by their unusually warm friendship with two men: the young lawyer and rancher who hired them, Farrington Carpenter; and Bob Perry, who

was the supervisor of his fathers coal mine. They were eighteen hundred miles away from their families, and from decorous notions about relations between the sexes. The letters revealed the contradictions of Dorothys upbringing. She was a daughter of the Victorian aristocracy. Her forebears, like Rosamonds, were entrepreneurs and lawyers and bankers who had become wealthy during the Industrial Revolution. In 1906, the young women were sent to Smith, one of the earliest womens colleges, and afterward, they were indulged for a year with a grand tour of Europe, during which they saw their first aeroplane, learned how to blow the foam off a mug of beer, expressed disdain for the paintings of Matisse, and watched Nijinsky dance. Then, like other girls of their background, they were expected to return home to marry, and marry well. Yet they had grown up surrounded by the descendants of some of the most prominent reformers in American history, including the suffragists who organized the first womens rights convention in Seneca Falls, fifteen miles west of Auburn; and the man who overturned barbaric penal practices at the Auburn state prison, Sing Sing, and penitentiaries across the country. Auburn was a stop on the Underground Railroad, and some of the families they knew had hidden runaway slaves in their basements. Dorothys grandfather lived next door to William Seward, President Lincolns secretary of state. One day when she was visiting my family in Weston, Connecticut, she recorded an oral history, speaking with unerring precision about her childhood and about her time in Colorado. Retrieving the transcript of the tape, I was reminded of the breathtaking brevity of Americas past. I remember Dorothy as white-haired, impeccably attired, and sometimes stern. The second youngest of seven children, she grew up in a big hipped-roof clapboard house staffed by servants. Her bedroom and that of her younger sister, Milly, were in the nursery, reached by the back stairs. Raised largely by their nursemaid, they rarely stepped into the kitchen. When Dorothys four children were growing up, she didnt know how to cook anything except creamed potatoes and hot cocoa. Every night she brushed her hair a hundred strokes with a French boar-bristle brush. She joked to us about her heightfour feet eleven and shrinking every year. To reach her high mahogany four-poster bed, inherited from her parents, she had to use a footstool upholstered in needlepoint. She gave me tips in etiquette: how to file my nails, how to set a formal table, how to avoid acting common. When I was a slouching teenager, she showed me how she had been taught to walk across the room with a book balanced on her head. On my eighteenth birthday, she wrote to me: To be happy it is necessary to be constantly giving to others. I do not mean to give in work alonebut all of your self. That means interest in other peoplenot only by affectionbut by kindness. She didnt like the fashions of the 1970scurtains of hair, tie-dyed T-shirts, and tight bell-bottomsand once told me haughtily, I never wore a pair of trousers in my life. For all that, she was spirited and funnynot at all the deferential young woman she had been brought up to be. After she and Ros returned from Europe, they attended friends weddings, along with traditional luncheons and balls, but six years later, they were still uninterested in the suitors who were interested in them. Chafing at the rigid social routines and not getting anywhere with the ineffectual suffrage work they had taken on, they didnt hesitate when they heard about two teaching jobs in Colorado. The nine months my grandmother spent there seemed to have shaped her as much as her entire youth in Auburn. She was full of expansive admiration for the hardworking people of Elkhead, and when she faced great personal difficulties of her own, she called to mind the uncomplaining endurance she had witnessed in the settlers and their children. She and Ros, like other easterners going west, were time travelers, moving back to the frontier. Although they ventured out after the first settlers, and went by train rather than covered wagon, their destination felt more like 1870 than 1916. They took with them progressive ideas about education, technology, and womenand postcards from their travels abroad. The homesteadersmotley transplants from across the country, Europe, and Russialived almost twenty miles north of Hayden. Effectively cut off from modern life by poverty and the Rocky Mountains, the pioneers found the two women as exotic as Dorothy and Ros found them. Although World War I was looming, such a cataclysm was unimaginable to Americans who knew nothing of combat. Dorothy sometimes talked disparagingly about her grandfathers brother, who had avoided service in the Civil War by paying a substitute to take his placea common practice among wealthy families in the North. Just weeks before Dorothy and Ros left for Colorado, President Wilson averted war with Mexico. The prevailing spirit among the elites of Auburn, the industrialists of Denver, and the homesteaders of Elkhead was an exhilarating optimism about the future. These people were swept up in some of the strongest currents of the countrys history: the expulsion of native tribes; the mining of gold, silver, and coal; the building of a network of railroads that linked disparate parts of the country and led to the settlement of the West; the development of rural schools; the entry of immigrants, African-Americans, and women into the workforce and the voting booth; even the origins of modern dance. Their lives were integral to the making of America, yet the communities they built, even their idioms, had all but vanished. As I got to know the children and grandchildren of the people my grandmother told us about, I began to see her story as more than a curious family history. It was an alternative Western. There were strutting cowboys and eruptions of violence, but the records the residents left behind turned out to be full of their own indelible characters and plot twists. Dozens of descendants in Denver, Steamboat Springs, Hayden, Elkhead, and Oak Creek had kept their family memorabilia from that year. Rebecca Wattles, a rancher in Hayden and the granddaughter of the secretary of the Elkhead school board, showed me the 1920 yearbook of the first five graduates of the school, all of whom had been Ross students. They wrote: It isnt the easiest thing in the world to buck trail for two or three miles when the trail is drifted and your horse lunges and plunges; nor yet to ski, when the snow is loose and sticky. But, if as we are told, it is these things that

develop grit, stick-to-it-ive-ness, and independencewell, the children who have gone to school in Elk Head, ought surely to have a superfluous amount of those qualities. One Sunday in early October 2009, my husband and I pulled up to an old white Georgian house on a cul-de-sac in Norwalk, Connecticut. We were greeted at the front door by Peter Cosel, one of Ross grandsons. He appeared to be mildly amused by my mission: a search for the letters that Rosamond had written from Elkhead. For a year I had been pestering him about going through the boxes he had in storage there. Peter called his brother Rob, also a lawyer, who arrived just as we finished a cursory examination of the attic treasures, including a trunk filled with papers dating back to the 1850s from a branch of the Underwood family that had settled in Chicago. I sat on the floor in front of a sagging box, blackened on the bottom from mildew and eaten away in spots by a squirrel, and began to unpack it, setting aside a stack...