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Joyce Litz. *The Montana Frontier: One Woman's West.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2004. x + 251 pp. $23.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8263-3120-5.

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Published on H-Women (February, 2006)

One Woman's Western Story

Joyce Litz has written a very personal book, the life story of her grandmother, Lillian Weston Hazen (1865-1949). After her grandmother's death, Litz acquired a trunk filled with diaries, manuscripts, and scrapbooks, along with family memories and stories, which she used to construct the story of a remarkable woman's life. Although Litz mentions historical figures and events of the age in an attempt to situate the life of her grandmother into a broader historical context, the story remains very much an individual one.

Lillian Weston was the daughter of Edward Payson Weston, a professional walker and "the father of modern pedestrianism." [1] Weston was a self-absorbed but persistent character, who made numerous well-publicized treks across the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His notoriety gave his daughter the opportunity to travel to Europe, where she explored a variety of interests. As she put it, "before I was out of my teens, I had crossed the ocean four times, studied in a French convent, lived in the Paris Latin Quarter, attended lectures at the College of France and Sorbonne, [and] been a pupil in French national art schools" (p. 9). After abandoning plans for a career as a concert pianist, she returned to the United States to become a journalist in New York City. She wrote for the *New York Herald* and later became a columnist. Her columns were published in several newspapers including *The Helena Record* in Montana.

On a train trip to Montana in 1891, Lillian Weston met Frank Hazen, her future husband, with whom she moved to Gilt Edge, Montana in 1899. Much of the book centers on Lillian's marriage and on the ups and downs of frontier life in this era. Frank Hazen was a graduate of Dartmouth College and the son of a well-off Boston family, but he lost everything after the 1893 recession. They started again in Montana where Frank took a job as a bookkeeper and Lillian learned to be a resourceful frontier wife, carrying water in buckets, keeping house in a cabin, raising pigs and turkeys, and nursing her children through epidemics.

Central to the narrative is Lillian Hazen's nostalgia about the lost independence of her single years in New York and her disappointment with her marriage. According to Litz, Frank Hazen was an uncommunicative man who "ignored the fact that he had married a competent, intelligent woman" (p. 78). His financial reverses made the situation worse and Lillian soon realized that her dreams were unlikely to be realized. She used her writing as an outlet, producing fiction and poetry, along with nonfiction, which supplemented the family's often meager income.

The couple bought a ranch near Lewiston, Montana during World War I when wheat prices were at a record high. Although they had lived in Montana for some time, they knew little of the business of running a ranch, and soon found that they had purchased a ranch without a secure source of water. Despite years of struggle, when Lillian worked in the wheat fields, raised turkeys and made butter for sale, like many other farmers and ranchers in the 1920s, the Hazens lost everything and had to start again. They moved to Lewistown, Montana where she wrote articles for farm newspapers, but never again produced the same kind of creative work as she had on the ranch. Litz speculates that small town life did not stimulate her grandmother's creativity.

The strength of this book is in its myriad details of frontier life, and particularly in its documentation of an

energetic, resourceful woman's response to the vicissitudes of this way of life. Litz shows how her grandmother coped with financial reverses, marital problems, the death of a child, and the frustrations of trying to find time to write in the midst of all her work. The life of an intelligent, educated woman who has ambitions for herself, yet must meet the constant demands of family, is a familiar one. Still, each new story adds to a broader understanding of women's lives in rural America in the early twentieth century.

This is not a scholarly work and will be only marginally useful for scholars since historical observations are made out of context and without attribution. The book rarely makes clear which information comes from Hazen's writing and which comes from some other source. In her attempt to place her grandmother's life in the historical context of the times, Litz often interrupts the narrative with discussions of various topics that only marginally relate to the story being told. The effect is incoherence in a story line that appears to jump from topic to topic at will.

Despite these problems, Lillian Hazen's energy and intelligence entice the reader. Litz portrays her as a modern woman, who embraced life and welcomed adventure. Because the book portrays such a dramatic contrast between Hazen's life in the east and her later experiences in the west, it might prove useful in courses on Western women's history. We cannot help but admire Lillian and all the other women who built homes and raised families in the harsh, unwelcoming environment of the American West.

Note

[1]. According to Litz, long distance walking matches were common athletic events in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After Weston set a new world record by walking 550 miles in 141 hours and 44 minutes in 1879, he became an international celebrity.

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Citation: Linda Pitelka. Review of Litz, Joyce, *The Montana Frontier: One Woman's West.* H-Women, H-Net Reviews. February, 2006.

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