



ARMY LETTERS FROM AN OFFICER'S WIFE

ROE

Army Letters from an Officer's Wife, 1871-1888

by Frances M. A. Roe

Frances Roe was the young wife of a West Point Army officer, whose career took them both to frontier garrisons in what are now the states of Kansas, Colorado, Oklahoma, Utah, Montana, and Wyoming. Her letters home to her family in upstate New York, written between 1871 and 1888, and published in book form in 1909, are a fascinating chronicle of life on the frontier. Despite the grittiness of keeping house in tent-and-log-cabin quarters, Frances took to Western life, learning to shoot and ride, fish for trout and hunt buffalo. Her chatty and detailed letters open windows on varied aspects of frontier and army life: army protocol (including the right of senior officers to bump subordinates out of their housing); the Indians; the black cavalry troops; Chinese cooks (also Polish, Irish, and enlisted men doing kitchen duty). Her letters touch on the disappearance of the buffalo herds, the decline of the Indian tribes and the coming of the railroads. Her emotions run deep when she writes: "I love army life here in the West, and I love all the things that it brings to me--the grand mountains, the plains, and the fine hunting." But, Frances' husband is eventually promoted to a headquarters desk job, and while she tries to show enthusiasm, even shopping for the necessary clothes distresses her: "Parasols have bothered me. I would forget to open them in the street, and would invariably leave them in the stores when shopping and then have to go about looking them up." She then utters a timeless cry of urban angst: "It is the feeling of loneliness I mind here -- of being lost and no one to search for me." (written in Omaha, Nebraska, in 888).

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Read by Sue Anderson

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 Photograph of Frances Roe and her dog Rollo

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