



Ladies of the Canyons: A League of Extraordinary Women and Their Adventures in the American Southwest

Lesley Poling-Kempes

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Ladies of the Canyons is the true story of remarkable women who left the security and comforts of genteel Victorian society and journeyed to the American Southwest in search of a wider view of themselves and their world.

Educated, restless, and inquisitive, Natalie Curtis, Carol Stanley, Alice Klauber, and Mary Cabot Wheelwright were plucky, intrepid women whose lives were transformed in the first decades of the twentieth century by the people and the landscape of the American Southwest. Part of an influential circle of women that included Louisa Wade Wetherill, Alice Corbin Henderson, Mabel Dodge Luhan, Mary Austin, and Willa Cather, these ladies imagined and created a new home territory, a new society, and a new identity for themselves and for the women who would follow them.

Their adventures were shared with the likes of Theodore Roosevelt and Robert Henri, Edgar Hewett and Charles Lummis, Chief Tawakwaptiwa of the Hopi, and Hostiin Klah of the Navajo. Their journeys took them to Monument Valley and Rainbow Bridge, into Canyon de Chelly, and across the high mesas of the Hopi, down through the Grand Canyon, and over the red desert of the Four Corners, to the pueblos along the Rio Grande and the villages in the mountains between Santa Fe and Taos.

Although their stories converge in the outback of the American Southwest, the saga of *Ladies of the Canyons* is also the tale of Boston's Brahmins, the Greenwich Village avant-garde, the birth of American modern art, and Santa Fe's art and literary colony.

Ladies of the Canyons is the story of New Women stepping boldly into the New World of inconspicuous success, ambitious failure, and the personal challenges experienced by women and men during the emergence of the Modern Age.

Ladies of the Canyons: A League of Extraordinary Women and Their Adventures in the American Southwest Details

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From Reader Review Ladies of the Canyons: A League of Extraordinary Women and Their Adventures in the American Southwest for online ebook

Vicki Holmsten says

In the early 20th century, the Southwest welcomed a group of adventurous, strong, creative women. They found a fit in the landscape and cultures here that did not exist for them in the wealthy Eastern society most of them came from. Natalie Curtis, Carol Stanley Bishop, Mary Cabot Wheelwright, and Alice Klauber get the most narrative in the book, but others floated in the same circles. Poling-Kempes did an amazing amount of research for this book and writes so well it feels like we're on these journeys of a hundred or so years ago.

Diane Anderson says

Fascinating!

Clearly I was born 75 years too late and into the wrong family! [although my birthday is Dec. 16th! :)]

I have always loved the areas described in this book, especially northern New Mexico, so it was very interesting to hear how the Ladies of the Canyons were instrumental in discovering the 'magic' of this enigmatic and beautiful place. Until reading this book one assumed Georgia O'Keeffe was the Leader of the Pack, but that is simply not the case.

The book is meticulously researched, although with some glaring errors, like the start year of WW11 [1939 not 1942]; Paris is called the City of LIGHT not LightS; and some grammatical errors also, but nonetheless, fascinating to see how the Ladies were eventually accepted by virtue of their accomplishments and not their birthright or standing in the Social Register.

This is the first book I've read by this author and would like to investigate some of her other writings.

Kate Koza says

"Single women making their way to individual destinies – who in the home circle understands them? If they try to share what they have found in their further reach, who wants it?"

Brenna says

Thoroughly researched, well written and engaging the pure love of the desert; this book made me homesick and inspired.

Kathleen Rodgers says

Long before artist Georgia O'Keefe and patron of the arts Mabel Dodge Luhan fell in love with New

Mexico, other gutsy women from privileged families back east set out to explore “The Land of Enchantment” and claim it as their own. But their names were lost to history until recently.

Just as Natalie Curtis Burlin left the comfort of privilege in New York City to capture the songs of the Hopi, author Lesley Poling-Kempes left the comfort of sitting on her literary laurels to dive into the past and recreate the lives of some remarkable women who blazed new trails in the American Southwest. As I savored this engrossing and educational tale, it was almost like the author had gone back in time and accompanied her subjects as they bounced along in lumbering touring cars or trotted on horseback under the blazing sun, taking notes that would become *The Ladies of the Canyons: A League of Extraordinary Women and Their Adventures in the American Southwest*.

Even now, a year after the release of this amazing book, I like to envision the author seated at a place of honor in a tiny casita a few blocks off the plaza in old Santa Fe. “The Ladies” are all gathered around Lesley when Natalie Curtis Burlin bustles in and offers her special guest a nice cup of tea. And with piano music drifting in through an open window, Carol Bishop Stanley (founder of Ghost Ranch), stands up and declares, “Dear Lesley, we knew you would come. It was just a matter of time.”

Highly recommended!

Kathleen M. Rodgers, author of the award-winning novel, *Johnnie Come Lately*

Ameya Warde says

I didn't expect to love this book as much as I do. I feel like the Title isn't as descriptive as it could be. This is about so much more than what 'adventuring in the southwest' suggests! Poling-Kempes did a fantastic job with taking what seems like an unbelievable amount of source material (all those diaries alone!) and crafting a fascinating story of the overlapping lives of intelligent, passionate, philanthropic, late-to-or-didn't marry "New Women" who threw off the stuffy social norms of their elite (mostly) eastern upbringings and truly threw themselves into the New Mexican desert life and helped build Santa Fe & New Mexico into what it was/is. I am fascinated by the artistic/anthropologic social/cultural overlap in this era of Santa Fe, and I was so happy to read about these individuals and groups who were passionately fighting for Native American rights & Cultural Preservation, instead of against it. And I'm just seriously impressed by how lax the gender roles/expectations were in this area/time and just how much freedom (wealthy) women were able to experience there.

Samantha Gunning says

I won this book via Goodreads First Reads Giveaway.

June Pecchia says

Lesley Poling-Kempes has skillfully woven together the discoverable facts of the lives of four previously largely unsung heroines of our American Southwest: Carol Bishop Stanley, Natalie Curtis Burlin, Mary Cabot Wheelright, and Alice Ellen Klauber. Especially as a native of San Diego, I am very glad to know

more about Alice Klauber, a founder of our own gem, the San Diego Museum of Art.

Because this is scholarly non-fiction, Poling-Kempes only hints at the pure romance and unending conflict in the lives lead by these adventurous ladies. Each, in her own way, became a curator for future generations to begin an understanding of the native peoples and the magnificent lands found in concentric circles out from magical Santa Fe, New Mexico.

After finishing the last page, I went online to find more to read about these remarkable women, and sadly found virtually nothing. I hope more will come, and perhaps even Poling-Kempes will use her in-depth knowledge to create some historical fiction that will help us further envision these lives of such vision.

Maria says

I enjoyed this book and delighted in learning the history of these ladies and of the incredible lives they lived. It's also a story of place and a story of southwestern arts. In its way, it proves a historical truth about the ladies past, and current for whom the West and New Mexico, in particular, is a strong draw. Poling-Kempes is an excellent writer and I've enjoyed quite a few of her books. This book is well-written, obviously well-researched and a real page turner, a historical work that reads like fiction.

Jaci says

We're familiar with "Go West, young man, go West" [John Babsone Lane Soule], but this book is about the young women that went West in order to escape cultural strictures at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. The American Southwest became the place where they could become women who started art movements, documented native American song and dance, and lived on their own terms. New Mexico and California were the settings and since I've lived in so many of the places mentioned, I especially enjoyed this well written history. [Thanks, Carolyn!]

p.213: "I found out that the sunshine in New Mexico could do almost anything with one: make one well if one felt ill, or change a dark mood and lighten it. It entered into one's deepest places and melted the thick, slow densities. I made one feel *good*. That is, alive." --Mabel Dodge Luhan

p.253: "Carol commissioned Gustave Baumann, a German-born painter and printmaker who had joined the Santa Fe art colony in 1918...to design woodcuts for the San Gabriel Ranch pamphlet."

Sidney says

I really enjoyed reading this book. It was interesting to learn about the arts colony of Sante Fe and how these women helped in creating it. I'm most fascinated by those who were able to write down the songs and stories of the native Americans.

Cristina says

The ladies from the PageTurners book club LOVE this book and recommend it regularly, so we finally read it for the group. I love NM history and stories of the badass women who participated in this rough country during the early 1900s. The author made non-fiction palatable and even compelling, although I don't know exactly HOW. I read this every night before sleeping and it often keep me awake for a full chapter, something Blood and Thunder definitely did not, as a comparison. Too many names of people I didn't know or remember context or care about were thrown in, but other names were recognizable from location in SF and the area -- La Farge, like the library in SF, and the Pajarito Plateau was a common place to visit. Would have loved a map to place some of the locations more easily. Old photos were great, too, and since this wasn't on audio or ebook, I actually bought the book from Bandelier book store last spring.

Story Circle Book Reviews says

I love a writer who teases out the connections from a tangle of sources, a writer whose fascination with her subject shows, who recognizes a deeper truth. And I have found a writer who does all that and then some: Lesley Poling-Kempes. Her most recent work is *Ladies of the Canyons: A League of Extraordinary Women and Their Adventures in the American Southwest*.

The true stories of the remarkable women profiled here are powerfully compelling. Beginning her narrative in 1903, a time when most women's choices were distinctly narrow, Poling-Kempes describes a group of females who took risks, made leaps, and created lives of authenticity and grace. Giving up sidesaddles for riding astride in practical khakis, they allowed themselves to belong to the lands and people of a new place, a raw frontier. When roads were few and either dusty or muddy, "Their journeys took them to Monument Valley and Rainbow Bridge, into Canyon de Chelly and across the high mesas of the Hopi, down through the Grand Canyon and over the red desert of the Four Corners, to the pueblos along the Rio Grande and the Hispanic villages in the mountains between Santa Fe and Taos." They left behind easy comfort, family and friends, and social expectations. They pushed against the norms to follow what called them and, in the process, forged larger models of what a woman's life could be. These women opened fresh territory for all of us, and played a part in shaping American culture.

Yet they were nearly forgotten. When Poling-Kempes went looking for more information about one particular woman, Carol Bishop Stanley, who founded the famed Ghost Ranch near Abiquiu, New Mexico, there was little to nothing written about her in histories of the place. Eventually, Poling-Kempes found some oral histories and "a handful of written accounts and letters," which sent her tracking not just Stanley but over a dozen other fascinating women whose stories were twined together through friendships and landscapes. Her research has been productive.

- Natalie Curtis Burlin, for instance, was one of Carol Stanley's friends. A gifted musician, she became a pioneer in preserving the sacred songs and stories of Native Americans. She had the respectful ear of President Theodore Roosevelt and brought a new awareness of Native culture to policy makers and to Eastern Americans.
- A Boston Brahmin, Mary Cabot Wheelwright became a part-time resident and a full-time supporter of Santa Fe after visiting Carol Stanley. Eventually, she founded the renowned Wheelwright Museum of the American Indian there.
- Alice Ellen Klauber was a painter and a wealthy woman from San Diego. Her travels and adventures in

Arizona and New Mexico, often arranged by Natalie Curtis Burlin, were great encounters with the majesty of the land and the native people, and ever after shaped her work and interests. Klauber painted the Southwest, and in San Diego, she founded and supported many art events and organizations, and brought great artworks to the city.

- Elsie Clews Parsons was a sociologist and anthropologist, the daughter of a wealthy New York banker, who found herself in studying the tribes of the Southwest and Mexico. Her book, *Pueblo Indian Religion*, is considered a classic, and she was the first woman to become president of the American Anthropological Association.

Poling-Kempes brings these women, and more, to life by giving thought to their individual realities while presenting them in the context of their time and their personal connections. Carefully drawing out an impressive web of relationships, she illustrates the power of this female network, and the support the women offered each other. She also gives a glimpse of the hardships they weathered just to experience the harsh beauty of the still-wild land, as well as the life storms they endured in order to make their lives their own. Even now, there are plenty of women, myself included, who can recognize those struggles.

Weaving individual threads into a larger picture, Poling-Kempes has created a narrative tapestry relevant to readers everywhere. As she says, it is the story of "New Women stepping bravely into the New World, of Anglo America waking up to Native America, of inconspicuous success and ambitious failure." That story includes plenty of drama, politics, romance, and heartbreak, too.

As it happens, Poling-Kempes is writing about women's impact on a landscape that I have explored with heart, from Santa Fe to San Diego and points in between. My experiences and interests overlapped with these Southwestern foremothers, and kept me fully engaged. This phenomenon was likely at work for the author, as well, who has lived for many years in the very places that Carol Bishop Stanley loved. Yet even readers who have never been west of the Mississippi will find themselves fascinated by these Ladies of the Canyons, who liberated themselves into lives of passion and purpose. In doing that, they loosened bonds for all of us.

by Susan Schoch
for Story Circle Book Reviews
reviewing books by, for, and about women

Karen Levi says

Extraordinary they were, these intrepid women who came West to venture on their own, in the company of their friends and some openminded men who welcomed them. I was in New Mexico in August 2017, and I always like to bring back books, to further my knowledge of an area and extend the aura of a new place. I thought the book would be a dry recounting, but it is a well-written, interesting account of a period between the late 19th and mid 20th centuries in Northern New Mexico and Southern Utah and Eastern Arizona. This was the last great unexplored--by Americans of European descent--wild areas of the United States, with the exception of what was to become Hawaii and Alaska. Well-off, well-educated women from "good" families left the comfort of homes in the east and midwest to live their dreams. They were artists, musicians, scholars, writers, and dilettantes. They had money, class, and guts. They didn't fit the mold and didn't care, as difficult as it may have been. Eventhough, American society was more conservative then, these women managed to pull off a life of independence. Of course, there was no social media, no cell phones for constant contact and no airplanes for family members to whisk off and "rescue" their sisters and daughters. There is something to be said for slow communication, in the form of letters and telegrams. I highly recommend this book. By the

way, the book only mentions Georgia O'Keefe at the very end. I appreciated this. O'Keefe, genius as she was, has dominated too much of the modern art history of the region.

Brooke says

3 stars for the amount of research that clearly went into this book and for highlighting the accomplishments of these women. BUT, this book felt too clunky for me with facts that most of the time did not flow naturally for me. It was hard to get into a narrative.
