



My Diary: August 30th to November 5th, 1874

Cornelia Adair

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Cornelia Wadsworth Adair's ancestors had pioneered in western New York, where they opened and developed large, palatial estates; and the life they lived was elegant and aristocratic. Adair too was discreetly cultured; yet she took great personal pleasure in the rough and primitive land of her famed JA Ranch in north Texas. Because of physical discomfort and noisy passengers, she detested traveling by railroad coach; yet she could ride all day on horseback and lie down to sleep on a makeshift cot by a waterhole or on an Indian's flea-infested buffalo rug. She was a lady of interesting contradictions.

This little Diary is her lively account of a two-month trip which she and her husband made into the western part of the United States in 1874. The ostensible purpose of the trip was to hunt buffalo; however, these large beasts actually play a very small part in the journal. Rather, the book is an interesting and often amusing account, by an observant woman, of the long journey from her husband's estate in Ireland to New York, to Chicago and on into upper Michigan, across Lake Superior to Minnesota, down the Mississippi for several days, out to the buffalo-hunting grounds in Nebraska, then to Denver and the wonders of the Rocky Mountains, and finally back to New York and the Europe-bound ship.

Adair writes with an easy fluency; and her eye for picturesque detail, her taste for amusing incongruities, her romanticist's delight in Nature, and her instinct for a "good tale" combine to make her Diary pleasant and entertaining reading, while her powers of keen observation provide valuable insight into life as it was then in the West. First printed for private circulation in 1918, the original book is now a rare collector's item of Western Americana. Mrs. Adair said that she was allowing its publication for two reasons. First, she was afraid that her grandchildren and young friends would remember her only as "an old lady who sat in an armchair, and whose stick had to be looked for"; she wanted them to know that she had once been "a very lively person . . . [who] did all sorts of exciting things." Second, she felt it worthwhile to record her experiences because "the world is changing so quickly, ways of travelling especially so . . . and I think it may be interesting to compare what was done in 1874 with what will be done by the time the children are able to travel. No doubt they will do their journeys by air, and do many, many things that I have not been able to do; but they can never see the prairies of America in their wild uncivilised state, or hunt buffalo over them, nor can they pow-wow with the Red Indians in a camp on the Platte River. So every time has its own special joys, and the great thing is to miss as little as possible, and to share as much."



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