

The Polar Adventures of a Rich American Dame, A Life of Louise Arner Boyd. By Joanna Kafarowski. Toronto, Ontario: Dundurn Press, 2017.

Reviewed by Colleen Wirth

The draw of the North is a secret shared by all who live here. Captivating, daunting, alluring, remote, and beautiful beyond imagination, paralleled with aloneness, supreme cold, ice, and lands and waters not yet travelled, are but part of the magnetism that both draws and repels people to and from the great Polar North.

Joanna Kafarowski's biography of Louise Arner Boyd provides insight into the privileged and troubled, and unlikely, life of this rich American girl turned polar adventurer. The story of how an advantaged Californian woman found herself on the weathered schooner the *Hobby*, in the 1928 search for the famed Norwegian explorer Roald Amundsen, begins with stories of her childhood.

Louise Arner Boyd had childhood freedom to explore "all the wonders of country and city life," shuttled by her wealthy parents Louise and John Franklin Boyd "between lavish homes in San Rafael ... and rural Diablo" (23). The adventuresome tenacity of her father is mirrored in Louise's determination to move outside of the young girl's expected summer tutoring of piano, drawing, and singing to explore the fields with her father and older brothers "unshackled from the constraints of citified ways" (24).

The idyllic shelter framing Louise's beginning years were sadly shattered by overwhelming tragedy in the untimely loss of not one but both older brothers. By 1919 she had also suffered the loss of both parents. A lone millionairess at thirty-two years of age, Louise struggled to regain her purpose. In 1924 she sailed off to visit the land of her hero, Amundsen. Seeing the Arctic ice pack for the first time stirred her inner passion to "be in there some day looking out; not here looking in" (64).

Two years later, against many odds, she "landed several miles north at frozen and remote Franz Josef Land and gazed out over the polar ice fields" (64). The year 1926 marked the first Arctic sea voyage planned, organized,

and financed by a woman—the Louise A. Boyd expedition. Thus began a series of seven polar expeditions that were planned, organized, and fully financed by this rich American dame.

The year 1928 saw Miss Boyd returning to the Arctic to continue her research, 1931 marked the reaching of Greenland, and “the 1933 Louise A. Boyd Expedition was planned as a scientific mission that extended the objectives of the 1931 trip” (159). Additional 1937, 1938, and 1940 Greenland expeditions were added to this collection.

This remarkable feat was not accomplished without controversy and complex challenges. Women were simply not welcome in the world of polar exploration in the early 1900s. As Boyd noted in her diary, “That to them, I was an object of curiosity, they did not hide” (105).

Each step of the way this powerful woman strategized and planned every detail of each expedition. Her meticulous preparations ranged from purposeful invitations to crew members to ensuring that food and alcohol was plentiful on board. Relentless in photographing, collecting botanical specimens, and recording every detail along with exploring every inch of ice and Arctic exposure possible, Louise expended endless energy and passion in exploration.

If any flaws in the book are apparent they lie in the absence of the mysteries contained in the photographs, journals, and logbooks yet to be discovered—missing documents that Kafarowski implores her readers to watch and even search for. These details may someday fill in those gaps and provide even greater clarity on the colourful person and explorations of Louise Arner Boyd. Kafarowski paints the life of Louise on a canvas, using brushstrokes of “a treasure trove of letters, documents, and artifacts related to Miss Boyd that are scattered across the globe” (16). Like translucent layers over Louise’s Arctic exploration maps, Kafarowski weaves threads of Boyd’s tenacity, drive, commitment, and resilience into the rich tapestry of her biography.

Avid readers of Arctic exploration and the lure of polar science will find jewels in the pages of *The Polar Adventures of a Rich American Dame*—“Her seven expeditions and the scientific data that was generated as a result should ensure that the stature of Louise Arner Boyd is elevated to that of other outstanding explorers of the twentieth century” (311).

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