



They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush

By JoAnn Levy



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"The phrase 'seeing the elephant' symbolized for '49 gold rushers the exotic, the mythical, the once-in-a-lifetime adventure, unequalled anywhere else but in the journey to the promised land of fortune: California. Most western myths . . . generally depict an exclusively male gold rush. Levy's book debunks that myth. Here a variety of women travel, work, and write their way across the pages of western migrant history."-*Choice*

"One of the best and most comprehensive accounts of gold rush life to date"^-*San Francisco Chronicle*

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

In the literature of the Gold Rush, women have been generally neglected. Freelance writer Levy here corrects that oversight with a colorful account of intrepid female argonauts--with and without men. She draws on letters, journals and reminiscences for a fresh view of western history. The women traveled overland, by ship round the Horn (one family survived three burning ships); they crossed the Isthmus of Panama by mule, and Nicaragua by steamship and mule. In California they ran boardinghouses, provided meals and laundry service for miners, and organized schools and churches. The cast of characters includes actresses and prostitutes, a stagecoach driver and ordinary women seeking to make a new home. Levy does for the Gold Rush what Lillian Schlissel did for the Plains emigrants in *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey*. The book is a welcome addition to regional history as well as to women's studies. Illustrated.

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From School Library Journal

YA-- In this exciting and inspiring account of the women who helped settle California, Levy explores the leadership roles of those who contributed to the founding of businesses, towns, and mining camps.

Photographs, letters, and diary accounts contribute to the realism of these adventures.

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From Library Journal

Not just another book about the California Gold Rush, this account of the over-looked "gold rushing women" makes a significant contribution to the scholarship of women's studies. Quoting from letters, diaries, and reminiscences, California native Levy skillfully weaves together the stories of two dozen women, re-creating the experience of thousands. Liberated from social restraints, the women Argonauts worked as "boarding house keepers and miners, missionaries and actresses, church builders and gamblers, school teachers and temperance speakers, even a Wells Fargo & Company stage driver." Devotees of Californiana will enjoy this adventure story. Scholars will value the extensive bibliography and the biographical postscripts.

- Virginia C. Parker, *M.L.S., Logan, Ut.*

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