



Military Writers Society of America

June 2021 Review by Barb Evenson of Military Wives in Arizona Territory

Unlike many formal histories which put theory and context front and center, *Military Wives in Arizona Territory* by Jan Cleere honors the first-hand experiences of women who followed their military spouses to the remote outposts in the American West. The book gives an authentic, immediate account of their travel to and from the outposts, life on the frontier and their homes.

The author has assembled letters, diaries, interviews, published books, and unpublished manuscripts to allow the women to tell their stories directly, and in their own words. The author does provide some context, but does not overshadow the women's own descriptions of their experience.

Each section focuses on a particular woman or group of women. It usually begins with a recounting of their journey across the country. Sometimes beginning with a long train ride or sea voyage through the Panama Canal, the women then moved with wagon trains or by oxen carts through dangerous territories. They speak of their fears: the attacks by Indian tribes, loss of their husbands through battle or accident, and the illnesses which took many along the way.

The book also contrasts the privileged life left behind in the East with the deprivation and rough conditions in the remote outposts. Although most of the women were officers' wives and therefore afforded more than soldiers' families, those privileges might be the use of boxes covered with linen to make up tables and chairs. They recount the creativity necessary to entertain visiting dignitaries or even to feed their families when food supplies were uncertain.

Military Wives powerfully shows the devotion, duty, creativity and grit of women who chose to share life on the frontier with their husbands. It provides a valuable and vivid window into life during a critical period in our history. I would recommend this book to readers who enjoy authentic, first-person history, and those with particular interest in women's history and frontier military history.