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## Review of *Governor Lady: The Life and Times of Nellie Tayloe Ross* By Teva J. Scheer

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sworn into office fifteen days before Miriam Ferguson in Texas, a precedence that earned the former a lasting legacy as the nation's first woman governor. The novelty of her status and her elegant charm won Ross the attention of her contemporaries. A series of autobiographical essays titled "Governor Lady," published in 1927 by *Good Housekeeping*, fed the interests of an admiring public. A more recent tribute is Teva Scheer's *Governor Lady: The Life of Times of Nellie Tayloe Ross*. "How should history evaluate the nation's first woman governor?" asks the author. For despite Ross's later accomplishments as an organizer for the national Democratic Party and director of the U.S. Mint, it is as Wyoming's governor that she is most remembered. Scheer's evaluation, reflecting extensive research, is an affirmative one that recognizes Ross's historical significance and argues her continuing importance.

Even as Ross extolled the virtues of hearth and home, after her husband's death in 1924 she would seldom devote her own energies there. Ross's story involves copious context, ranging from late nineteenth-century farming conditions to early twentieth-century monetary policy, from the nuances of Wyoming state politics through the years to postsuffrage feminism. Ross is described as a kindergarten teacher in Omaha and wife in Cheyenne, as gubernatorial candidate in the West and Chautauqua speaker in the East, as a political outsider among former suffragists and a Washington, D.C., insider during a succession of administrations. Explaining these shifts involves introducing a swelling cast of characters and conditions as much as portraying the woman herself.

Scheer describes Ross as the Missouri-born child of former slave owners, accounting for her Southern manners and perhaps some racist comments revealed in Ross's later correspondence. She connects Ross with the "typical middle-class American woman" of her era, in contrast to her college-educated contemporaries who also distinguished themselves as female firsts in the public sector. She evaluates Ross's tenure as Wyoming's governor as a

*Governor Lady: The Life and Times of Nellie Tayloe Ross*. By Teva J. Scheer. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2005. xviii + 287 pp. Photographs, notes, bibliography, index. \$34.95.

Nellie Tayloe Ross, governor of Wyoming from January 5, 1925–January 3, 1927, was

mixed lot, attributable to political conditions and Ross's inexperience as an elected officeholder. She rebuffs misogynistic criticisms Ross endured from a D.C. bureaucrat with Senate accolades and employees' loyalty.

It is in her explorations of the political world in which Ross developed that Scheer is most sure and persuasive; it is in her efforts to signal Ross's enduring importance that she missteps. It seems Scheer would have us see Ross not as "a most unusual woman," as her contemporaries did, but as "truly modern" and a "spiritual ancestor." To suggest that Ross's efforts to "[balance] her role as wife and mother with a demanding career" offer "useful insights for the many young women who will be starting careers in the next decade" misrepresents Ross's widowhood.

Despite these and other out-of-place comments, readers' understanding of how a farmer's daughter and Western lawyer's wife became a consummate national politician will be enriched by the narrative that emerges on these pages.

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