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Review of *Army Letters from an Officer's Wife* By
Frances M. A. Roe

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BOOK REVIEWS

Army Letters from an Officer's Wife. By Frances M. A. Roe. Introduction by Sandra L. Myers. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1981. Illustrations. xvii + 387 pp. \$6.95.

Reminiscences of army wives constitute a distinct genre of the literature of the American West. About a dozen—among them Mrs. Custer, Mrs. Carrington, Mrs. Lane, Mrs. Summerhayes, Mrs. Viele, and Mrs. Boyd—offer perceptive, literate, and often graphic firsthand commentary on frontier army life and the people and conditions of the nineteenth-century American West. Near the top of the list—indeed, at the very top, in the opinion of this reviewer—stands Frances M. A. Roe's *Army Letters from an Officer's Wife*.

In 1871 Frances Mack married Fayette W. Roe, an infantry lieutenant newly graduated from West Point. During the next two decades she accompanied him to rude frontier outposts such as Fort Lyon in Colorado, Camp Supply in Indian Territory, and various stations in Montana. Her letters (to whom is not stated, possibly her mother) are among the richest in detail and insight that we have from any of the army women. Because they are contemporary, they are all the more fresh and valuable. They tell of soldiers, Indians, badmen, and settlers, of life at remote army posts, of the land and its flora and fauna, and of the personalities she knew. These last she thinly disguised with altered names, but readers familiar with the frontier army will have no trouble recognizing Phillips as Penrose, Dickinson as Davidson, or Bourke as Brooke. Mrs. Roe thus becomes a major source for characterizations of particular frontier military figures. For flavor and detail alike, her letters are not excelled.

This Bison Book reprint of the 1909 edition makes more generally available a work long treasured by the few but deserving a much wider audience. The introduction by Sandra Myres, a leading authority on frontier army women, ably sets the letters in their historical context.

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