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Review of *Frontier Children* By Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith

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BOOK REVIEWS

Frontier Children. By Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith. Foreword by Elliott West. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999. Illustrations, notes, acknowledgments, index. xi + 164 pp. \$24.95.

The last decade has seen an increasing number of publications dedicated to the history of young people in the American West. *Frontier Children* is a welcome addition to this genre. Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith have written a compelling and often emotional account of growing up in the American West, providing a comfortable blend of historical background, information, and hard-hitting personal accounts of young persons who witnessed the taming of the West firsthand.

The authors have dealt successfully with the challenge of representing the wide variety of lives pioneer children experienced. The book is well-organized into chapters dealing with such topics as the westward migration,

frontier homes, clothing, familial relationships, work and play, school, and food. Readers may wince as eight-year-old Benjamin Bonney bites into a fruitcake laced with crickets and dried acorns, but smile as he pronounces it "good."

Peavy and Smith's thorough research touches upon the diverse cultures that eventually clashed or played with each other on the frontier, including Native Americans, Hispanics, blacks, whites, and the Chinese. It's hard to imagine the fear that drove the mother of Native American Sarah Winnemucca to bury herself and her cousin alive and plant sagebrush over their "graves" until the danger of an approaching group of white men had passed. Sarah lived to tell the story, but never quite got over the terror of lying in a shallow grave all day under a hot Nevada sun. Such brief but powerful childhood memories are the stuff of which American history is made.

Frontier Children is beautifully illustrated with haunting, eye-catching photographs—most from the nineteenth century. The notation for a photograph on page 14, "three children and their dog on the Mormon Trail in the 1860s," needs correcting since it is, in fact, a picture of Eve, Gertrude, and Hugh Burdick, and their dog Jet, taken in front of a wagon in Sunnyside, Utah, in the early 1900s.

This book is about, but not necessarily for, children. Although young readers will love the carefully-chosen photographs, the text is clearly meant for adults seeking to better understand their heritage in the often unnoticed accounts of America's youngest pioneers.

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