



Bold Spirit: Helga Estby's Forgotten Walk Across Victorian America

Linda Lawrence Hunt

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In 1896, a Norwegian immigrant and mother of eight children named Helga Estby was behind on taxes and the mortgage when she learned that a mysterious sponsor would pay \$10,000 to a woman who walked across America.

Hoping to win the wager and save her family's farm, Helga and her teenaged daughter Clara, armed with little more than a compass, red-pepper spray, a revolver, and Clara's curling iron, set out on foot from Eastern Washington. Their route would pass through 14 states, but they were not allowed to carry more than five dollars each. As they visited Indian reservations, Western boomtowns, remote ranches and local civic leaders, they confronted snowstorms, hunger, thieves and mountain lions with equal aplomb.

Their treacherous and inspirational journey to New York challenged contemporary notions of femininity and captured the public imagination. But their trip had such devastating consequences that the Estby women's achievement was blanketed in silence until, nearly a century later, Linda Lawrence Hunt encountered their extraordinary story.

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