

Grand Canyon Women Who Didn't Get Their Feet Wet

by Betty Leavengood

My recently published book, *Grand Canyon Women: Lives Shaped By Landscape* (Pruett, paperback, \$18.95) profiles 18 women whose lives were associated in some way with the Grand Canyon. Many were on the Colorado River -- Bessie Hyde, Elzada Clover and Lois Jotter, Doris Nevills, Georgie White Clark, Katie Lee, and Louise Teal. Others didn't get their feet wet!

Ada Bass : Ada Diefendorf grew up in East Worcester, New York. In 1893 she traveled to Prescott to visit her aunt, manager of the Commercial Hotel. While in Prescott, Ada learned that a William Wallace Bass gave tours to the Grand Canyon and signed up for an August 1894 tour. Ada was enthralled with the Canyon, but apparently even more so with the guide. She returned home to collect her personal belongings and returned to Arizona to marry W.W. Bass. Little did she know what the future held. Ada's life with the Grand Canyon Guide, as Bass became known, was not easy. Still, she raised four children at the Canyon and was an active, albeit unwilling, participant in Bass' tourist enterprise. When she was 80 years old, her son Bill took her to the North Rim. Sitting on patio looking out over the Canyon, Ada remained silent for a long time. Then she turned to Bill and said, "You know, I love the Canyon too."

Mary Elizabeth Jane Colter: Unlike Ada Bass, Mary Colter did not keep a diary and we know little of her private life. We do know that her marvelous structures at the Grand Canyon -- Hopi House, Hermit's Rest, Lookout Studio, Phantom Ranch, the Watchtower, and Bright Angel Lodge -- remain today as testimony to her genius. Colter was born in 1869 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Her interest in art led her to the California School of Design to study architecture. She apprenticed in a San Francisco architect's office, where the current trend was to build in harmony with the landscape. In 1902, Mary began a long career with the Fred Harvey Company by designing the interior of gift shop in the new Alvarado Hotel in Albuquerque, New Mexico. As a woman working in a man's world, she was often criticized for her toughness and sharp tongue; but she endured, retiring in 1948 at age 79.

Elizabeth Kent Meyer: When Fred Harvey advertised for "young women 18 to 30 years of age" to go west and staff his famous "Harvey Houses" no one could have predicted the response. Thousands applied. One such young woman was Elizabeth "Betty" Priest who came to work at the Grand Canyon in the summer of 1926. Six weeks later, she and a Santa Fe Railroad worker, Bill Kent, married at Rowe's Well, a tourist camp near the Canyon. Betty, in her crisply starched Harvey Girl uniform, often waited on Arizona Governor W.H.P. Hunt. She and Bill joined in on the parties during prohibition where homemade whiskey led to some wild times, particularly the New Year's Eve unofficial dedication of the Watchtower. During the depression she and Bill struggled to survive and when World War II started, both answered the call to work in the defense plants in California.

Polly Mead Patraw: Polly Mead first saw the Grand Canyon from the North Rim in 1927 as a college student in botany. She returned in the summers of 1928 and 1929 to do research for her Master's Thesis. Her topic -- analyzing why the tree line stops abruptly -- led her to establish weather stations, climb trees to install wind recording instruments, and sleep in the forest with nothing but a bedroll and her pistol. Following graduation, Polly was hired

as the first female ranger at the Grand Canyon and the second female in the entire park service. Her career ended in 1931 when she fell in love with and married assistant Grand Canyon Park Superintendent, Preston Patraw. Polly explains, "Preston didn't want me to work, and I just said, 'Yes, dear.' You know how we were in those days!"

Ruth Stephens Baker: Ruth Stephens came to the Grand Canyon in 1920 at the age of two when her father accepted a position with the Fred Harvey Company. She grew up there, working for Emery Kolb, from babysitting his grandson to developing pictures. In 1937 Harold B. Anthony of the American Museum of Natural History in New York City planned to climb to the "lost world" of Shiva Temple where he said no man had ever set foot. When the Park Service refused to let Emery Kolb accompany the expedition, Kolb planned his own. Ruth Stephens accompanied the climb only days before the Museum expedition. Ruth, fearing that Emery would lose his business at the South Rim, kept the climb a secret for years.

Gale Burak: Gale Gardner Burak came to the Grand Canyon in 1942 when she was 24 years old. Her husband had TB and they came west for the cure. They both found jobs at the Canyon, but soon decided to part company. "He took the car and I kept my bicycle and the Canyon," Gale said. "I got the better deal for sure." Gale hiked to Havasupai and worked as a cook in a mining camp for three months. Adventurous and fearless, Gale hitchhiked to Yosemite, met her husband-to-be, moved to New Hampshire, had three children, and returned again and again to the Grand Canyon. She worked in the backcountry office, as a ranger for four years at Cottonwood, and later at Phantom Ranch. She has hiked in the Grand Canyon more than any other woman.

Louise Hinchliffe: Louise first saw the Grand Canyon in 1947. She wrote to then superintendent Harold Bryant about the possibilities of working at the Canyon. As luck would have it, the Naturalist Division was looking for a new secretary and Louise got the job. She boarded the train in Massachusetts on Thanksgiving Day 1951 and came alone to the Grand Canyon. She remained there until her retirement nearly 34 years later. She was much more than a secretary, filling in for the rangers at talks and designing exhibits, but it is for her long role as librarian that she is best remembered. Louise worked at the Grand Canyon longer than any other female employee.

Mule Wranglers: Women entered the male domain of wranglers in the mid-fifties when a sex discrimination suit against the Fred Harvey Company forced them to hire women. Today about half the wranglers that take tourists into the Canyon are women. Livery manager Ron Clayton says, "My women wranglers are great. You don't need brawn to be a wrangler. It's the knowledge of the animal and skill with people that counts." Patty Knox, a wrangler on the South Rim for 11 years, writes songs and she and her husband, cowboy poet Russ Knox, have released a tape. Bernice Reeves has returned to the North Rim for over 16 years now to guide tourists into the Canyon. She says the Canyon has "some type of magical draw to it." Kitty Marr, who has been wrangling mules at the North Rim for over 11 years, agrees, saying, "I think the Grand Canyon has a hold on me."

Denise Traver: Denise first hiked the Grand Canyon in 1988 and vowed never to come back. But she did. Her love of backpacking led her to get a job in fee collection at Mather Campground so she could spend her days off in the Canyon. Later, while volunteering in Search and Rescue, she learned of an upcoming opening at Cottonwood Campground. She attended the Santa Rosa Ranger Academy

and the next summer began a stint as ranger at Cottonwood. In 1991 Denise began guiding backpacks for women in the Canyon. In her days at Cottonwood, Denise observed the difference in backpacking styles between men and women. She says, "Let us do it in our own way and we are very strong. Women are tough."