

Abstract

When she died in 1925, Carrie Adell Strahorn was remembered in the Pacific Northwest as the “Wife of Railroad Notable” and the “Wife of Early Builder.” These obituaries recognized her role as the helpmate to her well-known husband, Robert E. Strahorn, a veteran newspaper journalist who was indeed a Western explorer, railroad builder, developer, and propagandist for the American West. But Carrie Strahorn was more than a traveling companion. She was, in the words of another Montana obituary, the “Pioneer Woman of the Northwest,” a characterization established by her extensive frontier journalism, civic activism, and her 1911 memoir, *Fifteen Thousand Miles by Stage: A Woman's Unique Experience During Thirty Years of Path Finding and Pioneering from the Missouri to the Pacific and from Alaska to Mexico*.

Strahorn was an unlikely pioneer. Born in small-town Illinois, Carrie Adell Green was daughter of a prominent physician. Her family's relative wealth allowed her to study voice at the University of Michigan and in Europe. Her music career stalled, but she blossomed as a nascent journalist when her new husband took a job promoting the West for the Union Pacific Railroad. Beginning in 1877, the Strahorns endured the physical and emotional hardships of frontier travel, including life-threatening storms, flooded rivers and hostile Native Americans. While her husband gathered statistics on crop yields and mining prospects, Carrie recorded personal stories about their travels as well as the people and places of the West, sometimes contradicting her husband's professional boosterism. Moreover, Carrie's journalism was personal, informal and genial, a voice that recognized the humanity and sacrifices of the settlers she encountered. Reporting from Eureka Springs, Arkansas, in 1894, for example, Carrie described the “easy going people” of the isolated Ozark village. “The native people and their homes are a quaint study,” she wrote, “and their language is as full of idioms as words will permit.” In other reports, she was less accepting of Native Americans and, as a woman with an independent mind, critical of Mormon men for subordinating their wives. This research describes and analyzes the life and writing of Carrie Adell Strahorn, especially her overlooked newspaper and magazine writing from the American West. The research focuses particularly on the ways in which she developed her own journalistic voice as a woman reporting on the joys and adversities of frontier life and travel. The research also examines Carrie's role as a community builder and organizer. Along with her husband, Carrie helped plan several Western towns, including Caldwell, Idaho, where she founded the town's Presbyterian church and the state's first institution of higher learning, the College of Idaho. For more three decades in the American West, Carrie Adell Strahorn proved to be an energetic traveler, a sharp-eyed observer, and reliable frontier correspondent, a little-known but remarkable American journalist who lived up to her reputation as the “Pioneer Woman of the Northwest.”

Bio

John M. Coward is professor emeritus of media studies at the University of Tulsa, where he taught reporting, media law and other communication courses for nearly thirty years. A native of East Tennessee, Coward was a newspaper reporter and editor in Gatlinburg, Tennessee, before earning a master's degree in communication at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, and a doctorate in communication at the University of Texas at Austin. His research on the representation of Native Americans in the media has been published in *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, *Journalism History*, *American Journalism*, *Visual Communication Quarterly*, *Literary Journalism Studies* and other journals. Coward has also published two books on Native Americans and the U.S. media, *The Newspaper Indian* (1999) and *Indians Illustrated* (2016). Coward served as head of the History Division of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), the major professional association for journalism education in the U.S.