

BOOK REVIEWS

*Kearny's Dragoons Out West: The Birth of the U.S. Cavalry.* By Will Gorenfeld and John Gorenfeld. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. xiii + 466 pp. \$34.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Dave Bush, Adjunct History Instructor, Shasta College.

*Kearny's Dragoons Out West* relates the story of the 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoons, a regiment created by Congress in 1833 and assigned the task of patrolling the Great American Desert, a "worthless and uninhabitable" land (p. 7). But this territory was neither worthless nor uninhabitable, and in fact the recent relocation of Indian tribes from the East to the Great Plains created inter-tribal conflicts as well as disputes between whites and Native Americans. Since dispersed infantry companies were ill-suited to contain these conflicts, Congress created the 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoons as a quick-reaction occupation force. Will and John Gorenfeld argue that the creation of the unit was the "first step toward creating a specialized cavalry capable of controlling the frontier" (p. 23). Their book examines the 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoons' work in this capacity as well as its role in the Mexican War.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoons' inception until the outbreak of war, these soldiers had four main objectives: to enforce American Indian compliance with federal policy by ensuring that eastern tribes recently relocated to the West did not attempt to return to their homeland and to maintain peace among tribal groups living on the Plains; to keep the Indian Territory free of unauthorized white trespassers; to protect the profitable Santa Fe trail; and finally, to map the areas they traversed.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoons had a rocky start under the command of Colonel Henry Dodge. The regiment lacked supplies, including horses, and had difficulty attracting recruits and training mounted soldiers. The Gorenfelds conclude that initially the regiment suffered from "mismanagement, abuse, disease, and death" (p. 83). For Dodge, his most successful mission occurred in 1835 when he was ordered to display the might of the federal government by parading dragoons throughout the Plains. Dodge's command traveled over 1,500 miles round-trip from their base at Fort Leavenworth to the Rocky Mountains while holding numerous councils with Indian nations at which the tribes were encouraged to remain peaceful. For all his failings, the authors conclude, Dodge created a powerful force that impressed officials in Washington with its ability to police a vast territory.

After Dodge resigned, Stephen Kearny was promoted to colonel and took command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoons. The majority of the Gorenfelds' book focuses on the

decade-plus period of Kearny's tenure. The colonel sought to create a disciplined and professional regiment. He lobbied the army for additional supplies and improved weapons and equipment, and he accelerated recruiting and enhanced training. His attention and commitment to detail transformed his dragoons into an elite force. During the regiment's numerous expeditions on the Plains, Kearny avoided using overt force by relying on negotiations – supported by the intimidating presence of highly disciplined and well-armed troops – to enforce federal Indian policy. Concurrently, he removed white interlopers and authorized the burning of their crops and destroyed alcohol confiscated from unlicensed traders. In 1843, when Texas President Houston sent a raiding party, the "Battalion of Invincibles," north to disrupt Mexican trade on the Santa Fe Trail, Kearny's dragoons proved the Texans were not worthy of their name.

With the outbreak of the Mexican War in 1846, most of the 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoons along with Missouri volunteers, collectively known as the Army of the West, headed south under the command of Brigadier General Kearny and captured Santa Fe. The general then took about 100 men west on a punishing thousand-mile desert march to secure California. In a vivid and engaging chapter, the authors scrutinize the Battle of San Pasqual (involving hungover officers, disorganized attacks, and Kearny's disregard for rested and seasoned Bear Flaggers in favor of his professional but exhausted men) and label Kearny's Southern California engagement a "debacle" (p. 279). The authors then turn their attention back to the Plains, the Southwest, and Mexico, detailing 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoon companies as they continued policing the Plains and participating in the battles of Taos, Santa Cruz de Rosales and Buena Vista. The book concludes with Kearny's death in 1848.

The narrow focus of the text is a weakness yet simultaneously a strength. For example, in Chapter 1 there are just a couple of short paragraphs on the causes of the Black Hawk War while far more sentences detail the weapons (including carbine barrel length) carried by Dodge's mounted troops. The extensive regimental detail, at the expense of a broader context, extends to the dragoons' staffing, assignments, equipment and tactics. Using journals, newspaper articles, and official reports, the regiment's story is often narrated through first-hand accounts of both officers and enlisted men. This multifaceted perspective brings to life the soldiers' experiences of sickness and death, culture shock and rough travel through beautiful country. The Gorenfelds write dramatic, page-turning accounts of the dragoons' actions. Particularly riveting, but also disturbing in the graphic loss of life, are the battle reports. This book offers a thorough account and balanced analysis of the policing activities of mounted occupation troops on the Plains in the 1830s and 1840s and the 1<sup>st</sup> Dragoons' participation in the Mexican War.

*The King and Queen of Malibu: The True Story of the Battle for Paradise.* By David K. Randall. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2016. Photographs and bibliography. 255 pp. \$26.95 cloth; \$15.95 paper.

Reviewed by Clay Hoffman, Independent Scholar.

In *The King and Queen of Malibu*, author David Randall tells the fascinating story of the founding of the iconic Southern California city. At the center are Frederick Rindge and Rhoda May Knight, who married in 1887. In many ways, they were an unlikely couple: Harvard-educated and the scion of a wealthy Eastern family, Frederick was a man of refinement, who despite battling rheumatic fever all his life, emanated a spirit of optimism inspired by his Christian faith. May, as she was commonly known, was one of thirteen children raised in a tiny Michigan farmhouse, with her father barely eking out a living. She learned early on that she had to fight for everything, developing a stubborn personality and relying on herself before others.

Desiring to get out from under the shadows of his father's achievements, Frederick left his hometown of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and with his new wife headed west. Crossing the country by train, they arrived in the boomtown of Los Angeles, a place where Frederick believed he could make his own mark. But unlike other newcomers, he was already rich. Capitalizing on the situation, he invested shrewdly and quickly became a major player in the economy of the young city. He either founded or was associated with a variety of businesses, including the Pacific Life Insurance Company, Union Oil, and Southern California Edison. The Rindge Building, which was located just a few doors down from the new City Hall, towered over the City of Los Angeles. With their empire growing, Frederick and May needed a residence just as imposing. Reflecting their ascending social status, they moved into one of the city's most impressive mansions, where they would raise their three children.

As Frederick steadily added to his real estate holdings, he still lacked the one thing that he had desired for some time: a bit of unspoiled land away from the city that he could escape to. In 1892, he learned of such a place: the Rancho Topanga Malibu Sequit. Frederick fell in love with the property and was determined to have it. The towering Santa Monica Mountains made access to the Spanish rancho difficult, bestowing on it a seclusion that was unmatched.

Frederick bought the 13,000 acre Malibu Ranch and soon built an immense three-story Victorian mansion on it. He would spend as much free time there as possible, enjoying with his family the many coves, lakes, and valleys, as well as swimming in the Pacific and sunbathing on the sandy beaches. He had succeeded

at creating his own paradise, but it would not be long before its serenity would be threatened. Homesteaders began staking claims in the Santa Monica Mountains, many edging up against the borders of the Malibu Ranch. Additionally, as Los Angeles grew, there was increasing interest in building a road or railway through Frederick's property to enable travel up and down the coast.

Tragedy struck in 1905: while visiting Yreka, California, Frederick fell into a diabetic coma and was dead just a few hours later. Having inherited much of Frederick's estate, May was now one of the wealthiest individuals in Southern California, and surely the most powerful woman. She took control of the various Rindge businesses, and, as a priority, resolved to maintain control of the Malibu Ranch, fulfilling Frederick's vision.

In 1907, her attorneys sent a proposal to President Theodore Roosevelt, a former Harvard classmate of Frederick. Aware of his interest in creating national forest and park lands, May asked Roosevelt to add seventy thousand acres of the Santa Monica Mountains to the protected list, effectively limiting public access to the Malibu Ranch. The proposal reached the desk of Secretary of Interior James R. Garfield, who rejected it, determining the proposed preserve was not in the public's best interest.

In subsequent years, as the automobile became ubiquitous in Southern California, pressure to open a public road through the Malibu Ranch continued to grow. May was considered a villainous figure as the countless legal battles and political debates played out in the media. Eventually, the matter went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. In 1923, the Court ruled in favor of granting public access to the ranch. Justice Edward Terry Sanford authored the majority opinion, writing that the "taking of property for a highway is a taking for public use which has been universally recognized from time immemorial" (p. 201).

The decision was a major blow to May. She had succeeded at holding off the modern world for almost eighteen years. But now the road along the Malibu coast would be opened. In 1926, a developer approached her with the idea of turning a stretch of beachfront near the ranch's eastern edge into a beach colony. By then, May's personal fortune had been dramatically reduced, causing her reluctantly to accept the offer. Eventually, many of Hollywood's most prominent actors and directors made Malibu their residence. Through the years, people continued to flock to Malibu, and with them came prosperity and growth. The onetime Spanish rancho was destined to become what it is today: a symbol of southern California affluence and beach life.

May Rindge, the "Queen of Malibu" and once one of the richest women in the world, died on February 9, 1941, with just \$750 to her name. But as author David Randall points out, her place in Southern California history was assured: having

never wavered in her principles, she had succeeded at preserving “the natural beauty of one of the most stunning places in the world” (p. 222).

*Gendering Radicalism: Women and Communism in Twentieth-Century California.* By Beth Slutsky. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. viii + 259 pp. \$45.00 cloth.

Reviewed by Doris Morgan Rueda, Graduate Student, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Much of the historiography on Communism in the United States examines the ways Americans constructed their own Americanized brand of the philosophy. Beth Slutsky's *Gendering Radicalism: Women and Communism in Twentieth Century California* seeks to add depth to the literature by applying the lenses of region and gender to the study of American Communism. Her book explores the lives of three Californian women who, at various points in the twentieth century, played influential roles as Party members and as politically active women in the public sphere. In three chapters organized chronologically, Slutsky recounts the lives of Charlotte Anita Whitney, Dorothy Ray Healey, and Kendra Claire Harris Alexander. Each woman represents a different period in the history of California's Communist Party, which allows Slutsky to detail the complexities of the organization as it reacted to and participated in the changes of the twentieth century. Through the individual stories of these diverse women, Slutsky demonstrates the uniqueness of Communism in California as well as the pervasive brand of American-style Communist thought that shaped the lives of women in the Party.

The first chapter explores the unique and eventful life of Charlotte Anita Whitney, a wealthy white Protestant woman from Northern California who, in 1919, was among the first to register with the Party in California in 1919. Unlike the women subsequently discussed in the book, Whitney came to Communist politics much later in life. A member of temperance and suffragist groups, Whitney had a lifelong passion for political activism and social welfare. When those groups failed to be as radical as Whitney would prove to be, she found a home in the Communist Party. Her time in the Party was not without controversy: arrested in 1919 and charged with multiple counts of inciting violence, Whitney became a model martyr for the cause. Support for Whitney came from people across the political spectrum who defended her not as a Communist American entitled to free speech but as a gentle Christian woman whose feminine nature made her incapable of inciting violence. Thus while the Communist Party itself espoused gender equality, its

female members still confronted expectations of domestic femininity.

The following chapter details the life of the radically different Dorothy Ray Healey, a working-class Jewish woman who began her political activism at fourteen years old. Much of her early years in the Party consisted of working in factories and fields organizing laborers during the interwar years. Her work as an organizer continued throughout her career in the Party. Ultimately, it was her attempt to forge a partnership with the emerging New Left that led to a split between Healey and the Party. Her continuing unwillingness to follow orders from Party leaders and her criticism of the Party's resistance to work with mainstream political candidates resulted in her 1973 public resignation from the Party. Despite this, Healey assured her supporters that she was still a dedicated Communist. Ironically, it was this persistent quest for alliances that brought in the last subject of the book, Kendra Alexander.

The final chapter follows Kendra Claire Harris Alexander, a biracial woman who grew up in Southern California during the Cold War. Alexander exemplified the change in the Communist Party during the midcentury. The Party was becoming increasingly diverse and pursuing a wider range of special interests, while also solidifying the separation between itself and the Soviet Union. Alexander became active in the Civil Rights Movement in college when she joined the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE). Her growing role in CORE and the DuBois Club would eventually lead to her official registration with the Communist Party. Her work with the Party was remarkably different from that of her predecessors Healey and Whitney. Alexander, and those of her generation, were dedicated to combating the racist elements in American society. Her rise through the Party's ranks signaled a dramatic change in an organization that had begun as a place for white Protestant elites interested in reform and driven by Christian duty.

With these narratives, Slutsky forces readers to reexamine previous held notions about Communism in America. Additionally, she constructs a convincing argument that regardless of the egalitarian rhetoric coming from the American Communist Party, gender norms and the ideal of domesticity were impossible to escape. Her use of these three dramatically different women in the Party also helps readers understand the ways the Party grew and transformed throughout the twentieth century. Slutsky balances the individual narratives with historical context that brings not only the women, but the world around them, to life. *Gendering Radicalism* is a welcome addition to the study of American Communism that brings women and California to the forefront.