



# **Elsie: Adventures of an Arizona Schoolteacher 1913-1916**

*Barbara Anne Waite*

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IN 1912, the first year of Arizona's statehood, rural Verde Valley was home to enterprising ranchers and farmers who raised cattle, crops and children. These children needed a school. So just as they mail-ordered supplies from the Sears catalog, the community mail-ordered a teacher. ELSIE HAYES, a college graduate, came from a world of concerts and literary clubs. The teacher's tiny shack in Cornville was a far cry from her family's lovely home in Long Beach, California. This cultured young woman drank water from an irrigation ditch, bathed in Oak Creek, and taught in a one-room schoolhouse to children first considered "common," but with whom she soon developed a mutual love. Though she had come to Arizona feeling a bit superior to these "backwoods" folks, her emotions transformed into admiration and respect, and the untamed wilderness became "breathtaking and glorious." IN THIS TRUE STORY, Elsie's 100-year-old journals, photographs and detailed letters home paint a picture of a time and place that has since faded, and give insight into the early history of Cornville and Williams, Arizona. Even more than this, they are a vivid portrayal of colorful adventure, tragedy, and a heartbreaking story of lost love."

## **Elsie: Adventures of an Arizona Schoolteacher 1913-1916 Details**

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Author : Barbara Anne Waite

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## **From Reader Review Elsie: Adventures of an Arizona Schoolteacher 1913-1916 for online ebook**

### **Cassandra. says**

Delightful book; could not put it down. Interesting format - entire story is told thru Elsie's diary entries, letters to and from her, and some added footnotes and comments provided by her granddaughter, Barbara Waite. The setting is rural Arizona (Cornville, Williams) from 1913 thru 1916. Elsie (from California) was hired to teach the children of the area in a one-room schoolhouse. She lives with her teaching companion in a self-described "shack". Imagine a world with no TV, no radio, no running water, no electricity, no reporters, no news, etc. Despite the "deprivation" of these "necessities", Elsie manages to successfully teach the children, meet many new friends, become active in two churches, fall in love more than once, and tour the historical sites of the area before they became national treasures. I recommend this lovely book to anyone who loves the early history of Arizona, the gift of being a teacher, adventure, and romance. A warning, however - Elsie's diary entries are not "tell-alls". You will finish this book with many unanswered questions. So, my friend (Imagination) and I filled in the blanks ourselves! It is a five-star Good Read!

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### **Jessica McCann says**

As Arizona's centennial date approaches (February 14, 2012), here is a book that lovingly captures the state's adventurous and optimistic spirit through the diary entries and letters of a young school teacher from 1913-1916.

Elsie Hayes arrived to the new state by train from California, eager to begin her first teaching job in the farming community of Cornville. She wrote home with great detail and fondness about the people, places and things she encountered. She wrote of the humble school house in which she worked and of the challenges of ordering groceries and school supplies by catalog. She described the stunning sunsets at Oak Creek Canyon and the warm hospitality of the community she grew to love. She told of sweet, talented students and of a rugged cowboy who was sweet on her. And she wrote of another young man who eventually won her heart.

This book was compiled by Elsie's granddaughter, who expertly interspersed Elsie's letters to and from her family with diary entries, photographs and newspaper articles from the early 1900s. The author was even fortunate enough to have visited, many decades later, the communities where her grandmother had taught and to have spoken with a few of Elsie's former students. Some of their personal stories are included in the book, as well.

Lovers of history will not be disappointed with this slim memoir, a coming of age story both for a young woman and for a young state.

\* I thank the author for providing a complimentary copy of this book for review purposes.

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### **Hannah says**

Really enjoyed this.

It totally made me feel unadventurous when compared to those school-teachers of so long ago. Elsie Hayes went tramping nearly every weekend when there was fine weather. She was always up for a new experience and seeing more of her environment.

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### **Linda says**

I love reading historical books, especially when they are truly based on real life people with actual true accounts of what happened. Events in this book were taken from journals written by the main character. Read and enjoy this adventure into true, real life of the past.

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### **Martha says**

I really enjoyed this book. Those women were extremely brave to go west to teach and some developed long standing relationships with their students. A lot of fun from an Amazon bargain book.

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### **Karen says**

I enjoy anything "old west" and was hoping for a little more excitement and adventure here. The story starts with the granddaughter asking Elsie if there was anyone in her life before grandpa and Elsie responds, "There was a cowboy..." . So I'm thinking this could be interesting and fun. But it truly IS just day to day diary entries and several letters back and forth to her parents during her time teaching in two different towns in early 1900s Arizona. I was bored silly reading elaborate descriptions of meals she eats -- she actually writes letters to family about such things! Who cares?! And she seems VERY prim and proper, although fickle, to say the least. I wasn't sure I liked that about her. I can honestly say my favorite part of the book, besides the photographs, was the epilogue. I could have just read that part and known the whole story! But it is a nice tribute to her grandmother that the author compiles her writings and she did a good job with preserving this time in Elsie's young life.

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### **Bernice Rocque says**

Elsie, the Adventures of an Arizona Schoolteacher 1913-1916, was a wonderful read! The best aspect for me was that I could read the actual words of a woman who lived a hundred years ago. Elsie Reed was an independent woman, well educated, from a loving family, but not spoiled. In 1913, Elsie accepted a job teaching in one of the more remote areas of Arizona which had become a state the previous year.

The treasure trove of diaries and letters of her life between 1913-1916, compiled and annotated by her granddaughter, Barbara Waite, reveals an adventurous and resourceful woman, but also a very kind person. Filled with a zest for living and intent to do her best teaching at the edge of the remaining frontier, the diary and letters reveal so much about her life day-to-day. For the span of the book, you are a friend of Elsie's, right there with her, seeing this and that. One of the things that surprised me was how much she traveled, at

sometimes considerable distances, around the areas where she was teaching to visit new friends, attend all sorts of events and social gatherings, and to see the sights. Numerous times there was some risk, weather or otherwise in traveling when she did. My favorite excursion was the one in which she and friends have a memorable experience at the Grand Canyon. The “machine” she refers to occasionally is an automobile, a still scarce mode of transportation at that time. We learn so much about her life in the three-year span from teaching and social activities, to her closeness with her family, to the physical facilities in which she lives and even humdrum housekeeping chores. At times the latter subject seemed repetitive in her diary entries, but that is the way life really is for people in any time period.

The threads of more than one love story weave their way through the diary entries. We have no idea where the stories of Elsie and her friends and family will go, and because we care about her and all these people she meets and gets to know, we want to keep reading, at least I did. Elsie does not reveal everything about how she feels in her writings, especially the more personal aspects of her life, but gives clues to her views and concerns about the men she meets, especially those who are interested in her.

Barbara Waite, Elsie’s granddaughter, did a fabulous job of researching behind the artifacts and adding notes, giving just the right amount of explanations about diary notations that might confuse us or cause us to wonder. I read the eBook version and the photos were outstanding, complimenting Elsie’s descriptions. If this book had a weak point it was that there are numerous characters who are not mentioned enough for you to keep them straight, and in the eBook, it was inconvenient to go back to the list of people that the author provided.

I would recommend this book to anyone interested in an authentic read about this time period of U.S. history, and to those who enjoy a strong female character with heart.

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### **Melissa says**

This book initially caught my interest because it takes place in AZ where I grew up! I immediately was captivated by this young woman at the turn of the century on an amazing adventure, not unlike one I had just taken when moving across the country. I found her journal entries to be really frustrating most of the time, as she scarcely ever divulged her deeper feelings. Yet I kept reading because I wanted to find out where her life would take her next. Luckily the author was able to supplement with some of her research into Elsie's relationships, which gives us the insight we long for; and like any good read saves the best tidbit of juicy facts to the end. Elsie herself has inspired me to embark on a journey of my own! I made a list of all the books she mentions she has read, and started a blog about attempting to read all of them myself. I'm calling it Elsie's Book Club, and anyone can join me, or follow along at <http://walkinginelsiesreadingshoes.bl...>

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### **L.H. Thomson says**

Starts quite brilliantly, loses some momentum from there, but history buffs will enjoy it.

I struggled with how to rate this book. If you love historical non-fiction, you're going to like this more than ... well, anyone else, really. It's not so much a narrative as a diary, with comments interspersed by the diary

writer's granddaughter.

Her grandmother's tale is interesting, but not astounding or surprising. It's personal, due to a relationship she mishandles badly, seriously scarring the other party even though, as a young woman, she's easily forgiven for not realizing the gravity of it. It's the only narrative within the larger context that kept me reading, because everything else she faced is familiar, and has been told before by other writers.

But there's a general lack of exposition and context, because it's a diary. Half the entries are just reminders of what happened that day, and don't add much to the overall picture.

The title is "Adventures" of an Arizona Schoolteacher, but she doesn't really have any adventures. She sees a part of America that no longer exists, the unspoiled west, and in the same nostalgic manner that Hunter S. Thompson's discussions of "Big Sur Country" when it was undeveloped cause us to sigh with the regret of loss, so occasionally does Mrs. Waite's grandmother Elsie.

She also deals with the common occurrence of premature death among loved ones and restrictions such as a lack of refrigeration. This again is interesting only if it seems strange to you. It was 1913. It wasn't strange.

Waite's own writing is clean and efficient. She wisely doesn't try to inject artifice or gravitas into the book. At the same time, her chapter entries and explanations are often more engagingly written than the original source material. One photograph notes that Elsie went to college with Thornton Wilder ... and yet that's all we hear of it. We must assume the source material had nothing else, but it cries out for some inclusion, even if it's just a paragraph explaining his importance.

Elsie Waite seemed like a sweet, nice young woman with a large heart, perhaps too big for her own good sometimes. But she was also as naive as her time, and as young women then tended to be, and perhaps as a consequence, a tragedy takes place. She does a lot of good, teaching and supporting kids in a time in the old west when people still drew six shooters and shot each other over a debate, the end of the horse era and the beginning of automation.

It adds up to an interesting and personal read, but principally for those fascinated with early Arizona.

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## **Rebecca says**

I am sure this book, which consists primarily of letters and short diary entries with some supplementary material, would be an excellent resource for a researcher or a writer working on a novel set in this time period. But as a reader, I must admit I found some of it rather dry and lacking in substance and emotion.

I had expected something more like a biography or a story. The diary entries were generally short and often abbreviated. Elsie's diary was not the confessional sort we'd expect today but mostly simple notes of the days events.

I wish that the compiler of this volume had instead allowed herself to be a writer and had used this wealth of information as the inspiration for a novel based on the true story. A book that would have allowed us to see Elsie as others saw her and to picture more of her experiences. I would have loved more of a glimpse into the real lives and feelings instead of the more superficial look at what Elsie considered appropriate to tell her

family and even to acknowledge in writing in her diary. Where are the stories Elsie told? Where is the storyteller herself?

I guess what I wanted and what I hoped for just doesn't match up with what this book is. And it wouldn't be fair to punish the book for my expectations. The book is a valuable historical resource, but not a story. Should the story ever be told in a way that would allow it to come to life for a modern reader, and in a way that filled in (with educated guesses and information from stories told by Elsie and others) the holes left in this resource, I would love to read it.

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## Renee says

***There's something about the contrast of a cultured young woman displaced in a rough frontier setting and successfully forging a new life for herself that stirs my imagination.*** Think Ma Ingalls making a home for her girls in the *Little House* books; Abbie setting a joyful example for her family with a Lantern in *Her Hand*; or Katherine Mary following her Canadian mounty through the pages of *Mrs. Mike*.

Then add Elsie Hayes, from Barbara Anne Waite's ***Adventures of an Arizona Schoolteacher, 1913-1916***. This charming book shares a portion of the life story of Barbara's grandmother through her grandmother's letters and diary entries, plus additional narrative from interviews, recollections by Elsie's former students, and newspaper accounts.

Elsie hailed from a privileged family in Long Beach, California, (where she was friends with a young Thornton Wilder) and graduated from Pomona College. But after graduation, while other girls her age were looking for husbands at plays and weekend house parties, Elsie was off in wild and wooly Arizona teaching school in a one-room schoolhouse. The experiences and descriptions she shares are guaranteed to take you on a delightful trip back in time. ***For example, here are the 1913 rules for schoolteachers such as Elsie:***

*Teachers are not to keep company with men.*

*Women may not dye their hair.*

*Two petticoats must be worn.*

*Teachers may not loiter downtown in ice cream stores.*

*Dresses must be no more than two inches above the ankle.*

*Teachers are not to dress in bright colors.*

And this is how Elsie described the frontier mining town of Jerome, which struck such fear in her heart upon her arrival: *"I never imagined such a town. It looks like New York slums turned loose on a hillside and like Spain and Italy and almost like Chinatown combined. The mountainside is bare and bleak and the houses are . . . mysterious looking. One goes into a house from a dirty sidewalk and muddy street . . . The dirty saloons are surrounded by groups of foreigners who stare."*

Fortunately, Jerome was not her final destination. Elsie's Oak Creek Schoolhouse—though itself a bit of an eyesore—was in the lovely Verde Valley, surrounded by thick groves of trees at the foot of the breathtaking Black Hills. Once settled there, Elsie thrilled to the beauty of her surroundings and the challenges of teaching her young pupils. *Her words, though penned a hundred years ago, shine with a youthful enthusiasm and spirit of innocence.*

I enjoyed experiencing Elsie's adventures with her—her train rides, first days in the classroom, life among

the country folks, and poignant experiences with love and romance. *Her story touched my heart and kept me turning pages.*

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## **Holly Weiss says**

“Well there was this cowboy...” corrals your attention on the first page of *Elsie: Adventures of an Arizona Schoolteacher*. Writing a biography requires not just a talented author, but also a compelling subject. Barbara Anne Waite’s book about three years in her grandmother’s life have both. Published to coincide with Arizona’s centennial, the book discloses the socio-economic climate during the early 20th century. It captures Elsie’s sense of adventure, optimism and self-assurance. The reader is quickly absorbed in the story.

Cultured, college-educated, Elsie, who hails from a well-to-do California family, sets out in 1913 for her first job in an isolated, rural town. We learn from letters to her family how she adapts to teaching grammar school in a one-room schoolhouse and comes to love Arizona. She bathes in Oak Creek, rides horses and revels in her students. Ever the social butterfly, she quickly makes friends. She falls in love and suffers personal tragedy. Taking the challenge of teaching seriously, she soon works her way up to larger schools and high school classes. She is a no-nonsense woman full of pluck and resourcefulness.

A year after her grandmother’s death, the author found her diary. “I loved and still love Arizona,” Elsie says of her three years there. Waite clearly “gets” her grandmother and portrays her life and emotions clearly. Waite’s website states that her research consisted of not only Elsie’s letters and diaries, but also personal narratives on cassette tapes, manuscripts, interviews with her former students and newspaper accounts.

Biographies often are so overloaded with detail that the reader flips pages to find the "interesting" parts. Not so with this highly readable book. Elsie’s letters are fascinating. They are interspersed with photographs, illustrations, diary excerpts and author explanations. Footnotes bolster the historical context.

Elsie lives and breathes books and words. She inspired her students to love literature. You will cheer this unique, fascinating individual.

Highly recommended.

Reviewed by Holly Weiss, author of *Crestmont*

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## **Caitlin says**

I don't know if I can recommend this book enough.

The book was supposed to carry me over on a flight. What I didn't expect was for it to suck me in and completely engross me in the lives of very real people.

I loved this look at the old West. Reading the diary of Elsie made me go through a variety of emotions. I laughed when she and her roommate first arrived in the frontier town, cheered when she fell in love, and tried not to cry when everything fell apart.



The plot of Elsie's life is much better than anything I've read in a very long time. I would recommend this book to anyone with an interest in the frontier and history.

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## Melanie says

I received this book in exchange for an honest review through the group, Basically Books.

I am slightly biased on my love for this book as I grew up having a close relationship with my Great Grandma. She was born in 1902 and lived to be 101 years old. Hearing her stories (which always started with, "Well I don't remember everything" and ended two or three hours later) was the highlight of my childhood. After my Grandma married and had children, my Great Grandma spent several months of the year traveling. She would send letters home that detailed EVERYTHING. I love looking back in time and reading those letters, it gives me a connection to her that I never had the chance to experience. That all being said, I enthusiastically jumped into this memoir and thoroughly enjoyed the journey.

This memoir is centered around a young, California woman named Elsie. She has just finished college and has a desire to teach. Rather than undertaking a fifth year in college, she enters a program that sends her to the wilds of Arizona to teach in a one room school house. Arizona has just become a state in the US and is still rough. The book is largely a collection of Elsie's letters home and entries from her Diary. What is so captivating about letters and Diary entries? *Everything*. The letters carrying on like a one sided conversation and almost like she is talking to someone who is standing right there with her. Of course the letters also have a story telling feel as well, a gift Elsie was blessed with per her Granddaughter's memories. The letters really give a feel for the land and scenery around her and also a feel for the life she lived. To me it is amazing what joy she had for the little things she received.

Other than the letters and Diary entries, there are forewords, afterwords, and history lessons provided by Elsie's Granddaughter, Barbara Waite. Waite's additions to the book are well written and informative. They usually describe events after her Grandmother's passing, historical events that took place around the same time of her Grandmother's life, and also personal bits and history on her Grandmother. There are also pictures ("Kodaks") to serve as visuals (though on the Kindle the captions would sometimes be strangely formatted and would often times be the only thing on the page).

For me, this memoir got me thinking. A lot of people hop on their Facebook and talk about how hard their life is while they sit at their laptop computers drinking water from a bottle. I sit and write an email to my Mom and receive an almost immediate response. When is the last time I hand wrote a letter home? (*Summer camp, 1995*) When is the last time I was homesick that I couldn't just hop in my car and drive home? (*College, 2005, no money for gas, called home and cried instead*) When is the last time that I HAD to order something from the book form Sears catalog? (*Never needed, just wanted.*) Have I ever taken a bath in a river? (*Nope.*) Have I ever heard someone describe a pen as "abominable"? (*No, they use other, more colorful words*) Has my place of employment ever had a rule that I must wear two petticoats? (*No.*)

I do not think it is necessary to have an interest in Arizona's history to enjoy this memoir. If you have an interest in history in general, this memoir should be an interesting read for you. If you don't have an interest in history, I still believe you could pick up this book and enjoy it.

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## **Mary Ann says**

I found this book very interesting and enjoyable. Brought back many pleasant memories of my own experiences in that part of Arizona. One of my favorites is "Montezuma's Well", and to read Elsie's adventures throughout this area was fun. Her story told thru the journal, letters & people she knew was very well done. A good read for people interested in the "history of a state".

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