Alice Day Pratt (1872-1963)

Alice Day Pratt was forty years old in 1912 when she set out on her own to homestead on 160 acres in Crook County. After eighteen years of ranching and teaching in rugged central Oregon, she moved to New York and published her experiences in national magazines and in books.

Born in Mankato, Minnesota, on June 16, 1872, Pratt moved to Elk Creek, South Dakota, at age fourteen and then to North Carolina. There, she taught school, but longed to "own a portion of the earth's crust in my own right and to tamper with it unrestrained," as she would later write. She researched land availability and dry land farming techniques and chose Oregon to begin her adventure. Free land was still available in the eastern and central areas of the state from the *Enlarged Homestead Act* of 1909.

Pratt homesteaded eighteen years (1912-1930) in Post, near Prineville, on a ranch she named Broadview, raising chickens, wheat, hay, and Jersey cows. She also taught school in Post, Prineville, and Conant Basin.

By 1930, a combination of economic forces (depressed wheat prices, drought, and lack of irrigation) left Pratt penniless. Her cattle were sold to pay off a loan. She made arrangements to leave her horses with neighbors and left her beloved Broadview for New York. It was there that she wrote about her extraordinary experiences as a single woman homesteader.

Her articles, published in *Sunset* and *Atlantic Monthly,* extolled the animals and the Oregon high desert environment she dearly loved. She also published *Homesteader's Portfolio* (1922), (her account of her first five years of homesteading), *Three Frontiers* (1953), and two children's books: *Animals of a Sagebrush Ranch* (1931) and *Animal Babies (*1941). A vegetarian and lover of animals, she wrote with a sensitivity to animals and the natural environment that sets her apart from most homesteaders. She commented upon the impact of humans and domesticated animals upon nature, and her descriptions painted a vivid picture for her readers.

Pratt eventually became incapacitated by arthritis and, following a stroke, died on January 11, 1963, at age ninety. She left several books unpublished. This independent homesteader of Crook County is still remembered by some Prineville residents.

Written by Cathy Alzner

Further Reading:

Alzner, Cathy Croghan. *High Desert Homesteader: Alice Day Pratt, A Single Woman in Post Oregon*. MA Thesis Portland State University, Portland Oregon, 1998.

Pratt, Alice Day. *A Homesteader's Portfolio,* with an introduction by Molly Gloss. Corvallis, Oregon: Oregon State University Press, 1993, orig. NY: Macmillan, 1922.

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