



Sisters in the Wilderness: The Lives of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill

Charlotte Gray

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In the inhospitable and hardscrabble bush of Canada, facing a pioneering existence that they never even knew existed, the well-educated, but modestly married, British born Strickland sisters, Susanna and Catharine, turned to the pen to ease their loneliness and isolation. Susanna Moodie's *Roughing It in the Bush* warned her countrymen from taking the bait and emigrating to Canada; Catharine Parr Traill's *The Backwoods of Canada* and *Life in the Clearings* celebrated her new-found freedom in Canada's classless society, and the spirit of industry. Both women had great influence on England's understanding of colonial Canada, as well as on Canada's own vision of its young self. Their writings have become central to all Canadian studies courses and are considered classic examples of pioneer memoirs.

Sisters in the Wilderness: The Lives of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill **Details**

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Author : Charlotte Gray

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From Reader Review Sisters in the Wilderness: The Lives of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill for online ebook

Ann says

Fascinating biography of two real-life heroines. The sisters lived in the area where I live, so I connect so well with the story.

Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill were early settlers in what was not even Canada yet, but what separated them from other women on the same journey was that they were both writers. Pioneers in New World publishing whose works still inspire writers today.

While they had no idea what they were in for when they emigrated from England, they were both up to the task. After reading about their daily deprivations and struggles for survival, I feel like a slug on the rug. They were absolutely astounding women. The only fault they seemed to share, was their choice of husbands. The men they chose were not able settlers. If their spouses were more in the mold of their brother, they would have had easier lives, but then perhaps not been so eager to earn from their writing.

Charlotte Gray brings history to life brilliantly. She includes everything from little details like how the mail system worked and what the sisters cooked, to an overview of politics in the country at different times.

Brilliant!

Deb says

I have an interest in local history and really enjoyed reading this book. The author provides much information about the physical, financial, and social hardships facing the sisters as they adjusted to life in the backwoods of Canada, as well as information about their attempts to publish literature here and in England. I usually presumed that people who made the choice to move to Canada in the early to mid 1800s had a very good reason for doing so, and consequently didn't likely regret their decision, despite hardships. This biography, however, demonstrates some of the regrets that pioneers of a certain social class in their home countries may have had. It also highlights the extreme struggle for survival in a time before UI and welfare. Much of it read like a novel and was all the more engaging because the story is true.

Judy says

This is the tale of two sisters from my part of the world, Suffolk in England, Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill, who travelled to the remote Canadian backwoods and lived a backbreaking life there - yet both became famous authors by writing about their experiences. I found this a fascinating and very readable account, good to read alongside the sisters' own reminiscences. The whole family is very interesting, as several other siblings were also writers, including another sister, Agnes Strickland, who was a celebrated Victorian writer specialising in royal biographies.

Petra says

I really enjoyed this book. The early days of Canada, experienced by two sisters ill equipped for such an adventure, were brutal and beautiful at once. The sisters saw a Canada that none of us can even imagine: pristine forests, wild flora, a wildness & goodness that is long lost. It was extremely interesting to read their descriptions & thoughts of such places and comparing that with the image of cottage country area of Ontario today.

The two sisters came to Canada with their two husbands in the early 1800s. The country was wild and unsettled, the land was uncleared and hard on "genteel" folks. These two husbands were not prepared or experienced enough to make the experience work for their families. Attempt after attempt failed and the families got poorer and poorer.

The sisters worked hard on their writings. They kept their families together with hard work and gumption. They both had a lot of backbone.

An interesting look at history, seen up close to two pioneering spirits of interest and spunk. .

Elinor says

I could not find any fault with this book, which was both well-researched and well-written. I admire the redoubtable Charlotte Gray for her devotion to the subject. It was not an uplifting book because the journey taken by the two sisters, who emigrated to Canada with their husbands, was so difficult. Their life was filled with deprivations -- poverty, illness, natural disasters, and bereavement -- and spite of their best efforts, they simply could not get ahead in the new world. Their story is told primarily through the enormous number of letters they wrote to each other, and to the sisters who remained in England. What will future researchers do when letters, such a valuable source of printed information, no longer exist? I especially enjoyed the historical context and learned a great deal about Upper Canada in those years leading up to Confederation.

Evelyn says

Lent to me by a friend who was not able to finish, this biography sat on my bedside table a month before I cracked it open. But once I started, I was swept up into the lives of Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Trail. Both women were familiar to me as pioneer Canadian authors, but I knew nothing about their personal lives. This biography of these two sisters drew heavily on their own writings, both published works and letters. I was saddened to learn about their trials and tribulations, and the financial struggles they both endured even though their books were so successful. The many photographs and maps add a personal touch to the history. The final paragraph is so striking, I have reread it multiple times:

"Yet the legacy of Susanna and Catherine is as sturdy as Sam's mansion or the Moodie angel in the Belleville cemetery. Their most important books are still in print. More than a century has passed since the sister's deaths, but plenty of contemporary Canadians have shared the feelings they captured on paper about emigration, and their ambivalent relationship with a landscape both majestic and savage. Every new Canadian who thinks longingly of "home" and every brave adventurer who sets off into the bush, brushing off black-flies and marvelling at nature, is following in the sister's footsteps."

Donna says

I've had this on my stack for over two years now. It was one of our very first selections for CanLitReaders, and I had trouble getting hold of it. By the time the bookstore got it in, the discussion was over, and I just never got around to reading it before now. This is a biography of two sisters who came to Canada from England in the early 19th century, settling with their husbands and families in the areas around what is now Toronto and Peterborough. Engrossing depiction of colonial struggles and the difficulties of forging a home out of the Canadian wilderness. Left me thinking a lot about my own grandparents who arrived here around 1915, and what their early lives must have been like. Both Moodie and Traill are authors of some renown, and the book quotes heavily from their works. As much as I enjoyed the story, I was left wishing that I had read the original works rather than this one.

Maryan says

I read this book in preparation for reading *Roughing it in the Bush* by Susanna Moodie an account of her 7 years as a settler in Canada (1832-1839). It was time so well spent that I want to read more by Charlotte Gray. She is a master at presenting the focus of her interest, in this case Susanna Moodie and her sister Catherine Parr Traill within a historical and social context. The different characters of the sisters, their motivations, and their challenges both in England and in Upper Canada were drawn in a clear, objective and yet compassionate way. No judgment was ever felt but consequences of poor decisions were not sugar coated. I always felt her opinions were well grounded in the research she itemized and her knowledge of the times. My learning through this book was essential for appreciating the motivation that drove Susanna to write *Roughing it in the Bush* as well as understanding the influences that shaped her point of view, her actions and her incredible fortitude in trying times.

Marilyn says

I often switch up my reading genres, mixing it up between, fiction, non-fiction and classics. Written by a Canadian author about Canadian authors from the 1800's, this non-fiction was so interesting on many points, living your life in the Canadian wilderness in the 1800's alone can fill the pages, however to know what got the sisters through these tough times, their love of nature. Catherine writing books and articles until into her 90's is inspiring alone. This is a well written biography of two very strong and determined women.

Tracy Ward says

An intriguing telling of two of Canada's earliest authors of note. I love how Ms. Gray intertwines the lives of these two sisters taking the reader along for an impressive, spell binding journey. And I relished the little

tidbits of information regarding relating topics which do not detract from the main topic but rather enhances the overall understanding of the time period. I am interested in reading more about these two women and the challenges they faced as early pioneers in the Canadian colonies. I am also interested in reading more books by Ms. Gray.

Norman Smith says

What a delightful book!

Elaine Weeks says

What these sisters had to deal with and overcome in order to write is awe inspiring and humbling. A fabulous book about two incredible women that I would recommend to anyone - especially aspiring writers. You'll never say "you don't have time to write again"!

Angie Gallop says

What I learned from this book? They kept writing anyway. Through all of it. If they can do it then so can I.

Kris - My Novelesque Life says

SISTERS IN THE WILDERNESS: THE LIVES OF SUSANNA MOODIE AND CATHARINE PARR TRAILL

Written by Charlotte Gray

2000, 400 Pages

Genres: canadian, history, biography

If you have attended a Canadian school you would have heard of Susanna Moodie, even if you don't remember now. You may not know much about Moodie but *Roughing it in the Bush* is probably a title you have at least heard of. I remember both book and author mentioned in a few of my History and English courses. It is supposed to be a Canadian classic so of course it is now on my tbr list. Other than what I have gleaned from the title I don't know when or where in Canada this book takes place. Then, recently on my library's "new" book list I saw that Charlotte Gray (also Canadian) had written a biography of Moodie and her sister, Catharine Parr Traill, so I figured this might be the best place to start. *Roughing it in the Bush* is a memoir, but how much of the author we get in the book can sometimes be iffy so I wanted to know a little something before delving in.

This book, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Lives of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill*, was way better than I had thought it would be when I picked it up. I figured I would skim through the book, and just get the gist of the two women's life and then could read their memoirs. After the first chapter I was totally flying through the book. Gray's writing, in my opinion, reads like a novel. She is able to take facts and put them in a

more entertaining format. My other books were put to the side as I devoured all I could from this historical biography. I didn't realize that Susanna Moodie was actually born and raised in Britain or that her family was so literary (4 out of her 5 sisters have written books, as well as one brother). Catharine Parr, older than Susanna was her confidant and at times her only relative in Canada.

While Catharine Parr was the peacemaker of the family, Susanna was more of the prickly one. Catharine Parr was looking for stability while Susanna wanted love if she was giving up her literary life full-time. These two women would marry and move to Upper Canada - separately. Each would have their own experiences that differed so much from their British Country home. Childbirth was their first sort of major culture shock that affected them personally as women. They would go on to write memoirs of their life in "the bush" and how living in Canada differed from Britain. These sort of portrayals were important as many British folks were looking at opportunities somewhere out in one of the Colonies. Agnes Strickland, "spinster" and older sister of the pair was also a writer but wrote more about the elite and Monarchs that she hobnobbed with. Susanna had dedicated her book to Agnes, who was appalled to have her name associated with this "inappropriate" book. Agnes felt that Susanna described things that should never be talked about in front of company. Agnes would go so far as getting her brother Sam, who also lived in Canada, to write his own memoirs that contradicted the "roughness" of Susanna's book. Susanna would only write more books in her own style.

I loved how Gray gave each sister their own personality and you got to know them versus just facts about them. The story from when they were young to their death was perfectly paced. She gave you enough information that was needed at each point of their lives. This made the book flow and not lag with too much detail or descriptions. I highly recommend this book to those that love history, biographies, women's studies, Canadian life, or those that love a good story like I do.

My Novelesque Blog

Debbie says

Really interesting read. Great reminder of what the early settlers faced and how unprepared most of them were. Also, we think politics is corrupt now, boy we have nothing on the early government of our country and cities!
