



# I Do: Courtship, Love & Marriage on the American Frontier

*Cathy Luchetti*

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The Westward Expansion Was A Time Of radical change in America. The upheaval of moving west and beginning a new life from scratch was difficult for those who made the trip. "Except for love..." said Isabella Bird of Colorado in 1873, "this is a wretched existence." In spite of the rough conditions and frequent shortages of suitable partners in the West, the pioneers met, fell in love and married, but were forced to adapt their courting to a frontier life. The civilized comforts and proprieties of the East yielded to many new ways of finding a mate, from personal ads to rental brides. The West was not all wild, however: Religion still played a strong role in western life, whether lovers were Mormon, Catholic, Baptist or Buddhist; and the traditions of immigrants from Europe, Asia and the Americas all helped to form courtship and marriage rituals on the frontier.

Through period photographs, extracts from journals and letters and reminiscences, Cathy Luchetti's subjects tell the true story of romantic life on the American frontier, reminding us of what it was like to fall in love then -- and now.

"I sat there in the dark waiting. I had waited only a few minutes. when I heard the longed-for footsteps come to my gate. I went to meet him and would have thrown my arms around him, dust covered and dirty as he was, but he would not allow it. He caught me by the arms, and with he on one side of the low fence and I on the other, he delivered a tirade of accusations and abuse....

"Then he put his hand on my face, pressing gently, and said, 'Now, old lady, if you're going to marry me you've got to say so right now, and we'll get married and camp under a tree, for I haven't a damn cent. What d'ya say?'

"I had been waiting all this time for the tirade to be over so I could say yes. Now I said it.

"'Good God, old lady! Do you mean it?' And it didn't take him long to jump that low fence. He didn't even stop to open the gate. Then our arms went around each other in one long embrace." -- Sarah Olds

"And so I told her girl, that I would come the next Thursday, and bring a horse, bridle, and saddle for her, and she must be ready to go. Her mother declared I shouldn't have her; but I know'd I should, if somebody else didn't get her before Thursday."

-- David Crockett

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