

## **Review of *Hoofs In The Distance* by Jeannie Whited**

*Hoofs In The Distance* is a breathless, broad brushstroke of Lida Fleitmann Bloodgood's life with horses. Her love of her younger years is as tangible as her occasionally expressed regrets that those times are past. She writes mostly of 1900-1930, years that saw not just horsemanship but the whole world change. More than once she mentions the "new fashion" of women riding astride, and how she prefers her own sidesaddle for its grace and femininity. As to its security, in one story she writes "it was fortunate that I rode side-saddle or I would most certainly have been unseated." I am not at all certain that she ever rode astride past the days she straddled her harness pony bareback as a little girl, and certainly she expresses no desire to do so.

Sadly, I turned the last page feeling as if I had been told only fragments of Mrs. Bloodgood's stories, and not nearly enough of her stories at that. Who were all these people she mentions? I recognize a precious few from other, contemporaneous fox-hunting works. Others, like the Harriman family, I only know because they were famous for non-horse reasons (Averell Harriman became Governor of New York) or not at all. Why has this avid horsewoman stop riding, as she implies? Why did she move to Italy? How did she become a prisoner of war? Who is this man who retrieved her loose horse after a nasty spill that later became her husband (to be referenced by name only in the index!)? Aside from her love of horses, impetuous nature, and privilege enough in life to indulge both, I am left with little feel for the woman herself.

Perhaps this book ought not be approached as biography, but a sketch of the past. Mrs. Bloodgood herself was a passable artist, and wrote a large survey of equestrian art. Looking, then, at *Hoofs In The Distance* as a sketch in words of a bygone time, the book is a delightful read. Though always eloquent, some of her anecdotes are quite startlingly sad:

**No account of those days at Olympia would be complete without mention of the superb exhibition given by the Samur officers. To the music of "The Mikado" – "Tit Willow" and "Yum Yum" – their perfectly matched thoroughbreds daily performed in unison the *passage*, the *piaffe* and the *pas de coté*, dancing across the ring with a grace and lightness I have yet to see equaled by even the cleverest Lippinzaners.**

**This was in 1914. A year later many of the men and horses I had seen, and even some of the horses I had myself ridden, lay dead on the battle-fields of France.**

But there is also great joy:

**Even in the happiest of lives, moments when the heart truly sings with joy are as rare as they are unexpected. In my own a few shine forth: a certain winter's twilight by a cottage fireside during a snowstorm, a spring morning under the wisteria of an Italian arbour, and yet another, the hour when I realized my most cherished dream – to own a farm.**

She goes on to recount in detail a number of charming, sweet, or simply funny stories of her ill-fated attempt at farming, her neighbors, and guests of the time.

To the sidesaddle devotee, I would recommend this book not for its equitation hints, for there are none, nor as a picture of a great sidesaddle woman, for so Lida Fleitmann Bloodgood must have been. Instead, I give it to you as a portrait of the last time ladies naturally rode aside. A “picture of that vanished, care-free world in which we then all lived, its charms enhanced maybe because gone forever, its trials grown dim, smoothed away like the rough spots in a mountain that from a distance appears all soft blue curves.”

*Hoofs In The Distance* by Lida Fleitmann Bloodgood was printed in 1953. The printing was limited to 985 numbered copies in slipcases (now generally missing), each signed by the author. 122 pages of text, plus foreword by A. Henry Higginson and index. Illustrations by the author’s talented daughter, Lida Lacey Bloodgood (Princess Dominique Radziwill).

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As an interesting footnote, I chanced to discover that Lida Fleitmann Bloodgood’s papers are held at the National Sporting Library in Middleburg, VA. The entry from their website (<http://www.nsl.org/manuscripts.html>) is thus:

**Lida Fleitmann Bloodgood Papers, c1906-1982 (MC 0002)**

Lida Fleitmann Bloodgood (1894-1982) was a renowned horsewoman in both America and Europe. In addition to being an exponent of the side-saddle, she was an acclaimed author, a show-ring rider, a member of the New York Ladies' Four-in-Hand Club, and MFH of the Smithtown Hunt on Long Island. The material in the Bloodgood Collection spans from c1906 to 1982, the bulk of it being from c1930-1982. The collection is divided into three series, based on distinct activities which produced the material. The first and largest of the three series, Equine Art Research Materials, consists of Bloodgood’s collection of equine art clippings, photographs, and reproductions. She apparently began collecting this material while researching her book *The Horse in Art* (1931). The short second series, Personal Correspondence and Clippings, contains a few folders of correspondence, mostly between Bloodgood and Harry T. Peters. The third series, which consists of writings and correspondence of Bloodgood’s friend Major Piero Santini (1911-1960), is arranged into five subseries: “Caprilli Papers,” Articles and Other Writings, Photos, Personal Correspondence, and Scrapbooks.

Also appears on the Index of Correspondents for the Joseph and Elizabeth R. Pennell papers at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Joseph Pennell was an artist, presumably she corresponded with him while working on her own equestrian art book.