

learning about the shared experiences of other Native children and sharpening her academic skills. As Castaneda points out, “scholarly calls to transcend generalizations about boarding schools and alumni are not denials of profound suffering, death, and intergenerational trauma. They are challenges to discern distinctions” between individual boarding-school students and their families, as “parents and children occasionally deflected its corrosive potential, navigating its presence *as* families and its possibilities *for* family” (42). In adding nuance to existing scholarship on boarding schools, Castaneda is able to demonstrate how Native students like Potts were able to harness their experiences and education for their own purposes. It is this ingenuity and resiliency that helped propel Potts forward to become such a dynamic activist, as she drew on “the academic knowledge and confidence wrested from her boarding school education to educate and empower California Indian people” (128).

While the strength of the book is the presence of Potts’s wit and humor, the slight downside is that, when the focus drifts away from Potts, her absence is notable. This is seen in the fourth chapter, which focuses on the FIC. This chapter is necessary to help show the history of Native land claims and litigation over the unratified California treaties and the preposterous governmental “attempts” to rectify these injustices. Although this period was crucial in Potts’s transition to activism, serving as the FIC’s starting point and the launch of the invaluable *Smoke Signal*, the welcome candor of Potts’s voice is conspicuously missing here (apparently, Potts’s writings did not include her personal insights about this period). Fortunately, these Potts-less interludes are brief.

The majority of studies of twentieth-century Native American activism focus, understandably, on the Red Power movement of the 1960s and ’70s. This has resulted in a relative dearth of studies on activist people and movements of earlier decades. For those wanting to learn more about the roots of the Red Power movement or to gain greater insight into the national politics of Native American activism in the earlier part of the twentieth century, this book is an essential resource. As Castaneda herself surmises, Potts’s “lettered Mountain Maidu life emerges as representative of Native women’s experience at the turn of the last century,” yet her life was also distinctive, “a portrait of Native exploration and agency exercised within and across multiple, interpenetrating domains of indigeneity and settler colonialism” (280).

Martin Rizzo-Martinez

Sherry L. Smith. *Bohemians West: Free Love, Family, and Radicals in Twentieth-Century America*. Berkeley: Heyday Books, 2020. 408 pp. Hardcover \$28.00.

No one can question the radical credentials of Charles Erskine Scott Wood and Sara Bard Field, two early twentieth-century free love advocates who carried on an open relationship for more than three decades while participating in a range of West Coast social movements, such as labor activism, free speech, and women’s suffrage. In the words of their chronicler, Sherry L. Smith, “they offer extraordinary insight into the lived experience of their era—a perspective of American radicalism on a granular scale” (xiv). And yet, in

many ways, the most radical thing the couple did was to donate reams of personal material and correspondence documenting their lives (more than 350 boxes) to the Huntington Library, allowing Smith to recreate their story “from the vantage point from which you can see personal desires, choices, and consequences up close rather than only in large-scale panorama” (xv). The result is an irresistible combination of the personal and the political.

Sara Bard Field and Charles Erskine Scott Wood met in Portland, Oregon, in 1910, and their lives remained intertwined—often in complicated and messy ways—for the next thirty-four years. She was married to a minister, the mother of two, and ready to break out of her conventional life, although she didn’t realize it until she met him. He was thirty-one years her senior, also married and the father of five children, a successful lawyer who was committed to radical causes while also enjoying a privileged upper-middle-class lifestyle. But he longed to be a poet, an aspiration that Sara, who also harbored poetic aspirations, encouraged from the start. In many ways poetry, not politics, was the glue that held the relationship together for so many years.

Both professed allegiance to the doctrine of free love, embracing the ability to love whomever they wanted and not be bound by such conventions as marriage and monogamy. But, like many other things in life, the consequences of free love depended on the gender of the lover. Sara struggled to extricate herself from a marriage she could no longer tolerate, lost custody of her children when her divorce was granted, and then had to figure out how to support herself. Meanwhile, Erskine blithely juggled multiple emotional entanglements without any damage to his social or economic standing. At one point he was involved with four women: his wife and three mistresses! He once noted—correctly—that if anyone ever published his love letters, he would come across as either “the most extensive polygamist or the damndest liar of the poet tribe” (153). In the words of his long-suffering wife, Nanny, his “selfish willful indulgence” (274) made him always want to have it all. And yet, as Smith tells the story, the balance of power eventually shifted more in Sara’s direction, as she found her voice through the suffrage movement and laid claim to some of the freedoms of modern women’s lives. Still, her primary aspiration was always to share her daily life with him, and only him.

One of the most fascinating aspects of this dual biography is that, while it focuses primarily on the love affair of two individuals, it is also of necessity a family history, or rather, multiple family histories. Both protagonists were married when they met, so those extended family networks were very much part of their story. And when you add in Erskine’s various love interests and those additional complicated histories, the cast of characters gets even wider. One of the most rewarding aspects of the broad chronological sweep of the narrative is the ability to watch these family relationships evolve over time, as individual family members, especially their children, grappled with the fact that Erskine and Sara were true soulmates and that nothing would break that bond.

That being said, readers should be forewarned that the bulk of the book covers the first five to seven years of their relationship, when they actually spent far more time with their families than with each other. That very absence, and Erskine and Sara’s propensity to pour out their feelings and doubts in long and copious letters, provide the core material for the book. Not until the last quarter of the book do circumstances finally allow the couple to contemplate living together.

The final section of the narrative describing their life together at “The Cats” (the English translation of “Los Gatos,” the property they bought in the town of the same name as a retreat from San Francisco) is especially enjoyable. Smith paints a picture of a shared life that still had its emotional challenges, including the fallout from the death of Sara’s teenaged son in a car accident that Sara caused. But at The Cats, they could finally devote themselves to their shared passion for poetry, especially his poetry—notably promoting his magnum opus *The Poet in the Desert*—but also some modest publications by Sara. As Smith charmingly describes the couple’s daily life, with its constant parade of visiting friends and relatives, she makes it clear that Sara and Erskine had found another way to create poetry: “through how they lived . . . the artistry in their existences” (300–301). Despite all the Sturm und Drang of two complicated individuals with a thirty-year age difference trying to live out the ideals of free love, Erskine and Sara’s greatest achievement was the life they built together. Still (spoiler alert) it is a bit of a shock to learn that, after a lifetime of determination to steer clear of the constraints of matrimony, the couple secretly married in 1938, mainly to protect Sara’s property rights after Erskine’s death. He lived on until 1944, dying at the age of ninety-one. She lived another thirty years, passing away in 1974 at the same age. Their dedication to making their letters and other memorabilia available to future generations allows them to live on for us.

Smith confides in the preface that, when she talked about her central characters while writing the book, she would often “strike a chord . . . or a nerve” (xv), prompting people to ponder their own personal relationships and experiences. That is one of the ways Smith’s book stays with readers: it encourages us to think about what actually brings people together, the joys and comforts of being in love alongside the heartbreak and disappointment that can tear lovers apart, all of which are contained in a living, breathing relationship that is always in flux. And let us not forget that this story of free love and radicalism takes place not in New York City, but in the West. Take that, Greenwich Village.

Susan Ware

Daniel Story, series producer. *Stories from the Epicenter*. University Library at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History, and Santa Cruz Public Libraries.

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Stories from the Epicenter is a ten-part documentary podcast that explores the experience and memory of the Loma Prieta Earthquake through oral history records and interviews with current residents of Santa Cruz and Watsonville. Coproduced by the University Library at the University of California, Santa Cruz, in partnership with the Santa Cruz Museum of Art and History and Santa Cruz Public Libraries, this production shows its