



A Cowman's Wife (Degolyer Library Cowboy and Ranch Life)

Mary Kidder Rak

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Women played a vital and, until recently, frequently overlooked role in the settlement of the American West. They were not only mothers, schoolteachers, and nurses, but also cowgirls, outlaws, and ranchers. Mary Rak's career as a ranchwoman, and eventually an author, began in 1919, when she and her husband Charles Lukeman Rak purchased Old Camp Rucker Ranch, a 22,000-acre spread some fifty miles north of Douglas, Arizona. When she first went to the ranch, Mary admitted, "I had absolutely no knowledge of cattle." Rak went on to recount her struggle to learn the cattle business and cope with the numerous problems of life on an isolated ranch. In *A Cowman's Wife*, she details the seasonal round of ranch chores; the devastating effects of drought; the difficulty of finding, and keeping, competent hired hands; and the exigencies of marketing the cattle, especially during the Depression. But Rak also tells of the pleasures of ranch life - spectacular sunsets; glorious mountain scenery; the camaraderie of ranch people; all-night dances at the neighborhood school house. Despite the rigors, she found time for literary pursuits, and in 1934 Houghton-Mifflin published *A Cowman's Wife* to critical acclaim. J. Frank Dobie and Jeff Dykes, two major scholars of Western literature, praised her contributions to the genre. The new introduction to this rangeland classic was written by the late Sandra L. Myres. Her invaluable research into Rak's life, and into the lives and writings of ranchwomen, provides an excellent background for understanding Mary Rak and her important work. This reprint of *A Cowman's Wife* is a significant addition to the literature of the Western experience and the important role of women in that experience.

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