



Louise Arner Boyd (1887-1972)

Biographical Sketch by Jane Radcliffe, Archives Volunteer

Born in 1887 into a socially prominent San Francisco family, Louise Arner Boyd was taught by governesses and then attended Miss Murison's School in San Francisco. She did not go to college. Her two brothers suffered from rheumatic fever, and died at ages sixteen and seventeen, respectively. Her mother died in 1919, and her father in 1920. Although, in young adulthood, Louise appeared at all the right social events, always impeccably dressed, once all her family was gone she made travel the center of her life.

For a few years, touring Europe satisfied her. But in 1924, she chose Spitsbergen in the Arctic Sea between Norway and Greenland. She said later that the trip laid the foundation for her life as an explorer.

The first expedition, in 1926, was simply a charter-boat hire to take a group of her friends to hunt polar bear. Louise was an excellent shot, and killed many. For the second, in 1928, she chartered the same boat and turned it over to the Norwegian party searching for Amundsen (himself missing on his search for the Italian Umberto Nobile who attempted to fly a dirigible over the North Pole). She photographed all through the three-month voyage. When it was clear that she was the only one to document the tragedy, she donated the negatives and the motion-picture film to the American Geographic Society.

Now familiar with conditions of navigation in polar seas, in 1930 she did a two-month photographic trip to collect botanical specimens in Franz Josef Land, and photographed Lapps in the north of Scandinavia. In 1931 she organized a serious scientific expedition to East Greenland, a very dangerous cost because of icebergs. She organized subsequent expeditions there in 1933, 1937, and 1938, all in the 125-foot Norwegian sealer the *Veslekari*. The inner reaches of the Ice Fiord that she charted were named "Miss Boyd Land" on the map put out by the Geodaetizk Institute of Copenhagen. In 1943 the U.S. Board of Geographic Names followed suit.

World War II curtailed her expeditions. Once Germany had invaded Denmark and placed a few weather stations in Greenland, the United States became uncomfortable enough to decide to occupy Greenland itself. Louise Boyd was the person most familiar with the ground in the eastern half of the continent, and they called on her often for help. Her book *The Coast of North East Greenland* was ready in 1940 for publication by the American Geographical Society, but the U.S. government requested that publication be delayed: it was feared it would make too much detail, otherwise unpublished, available to the enemy forces. The book finally came out in 1948.

In 1939, she was awarded honorary LL.D. degrees by Mills College and by the University of California. Also in 1939 she became a Fellow of the California Academy of Sciences, and in 1949 an Honorary Member. She served on the Board of Trustees from 1940 through 1948. In 1955 she chartered a plane and flew over the North Pole. She was decorated as a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor and received the award of St. Olaf of Norway, the first woman to receive that honor. She was awarded the Andree Plaque by the Swedish Anthropological and Geographical Society, the medal of King Christian Xth of Denmark, and a Certificate of Appreciation by the U.S. Army.

She was a member of the Royal Horticultural Society of London, the American Society of Photogrammetry, Association of Pacific Coast Geographers, American Horticultural Society, Society of Women Geographers, National League of American Pen Women, California Botanical Society, Geographic Society of Philadelphia, and Marin Garden Club. She was an officer of the San Francisco Garden Club, a member of the Council of the American Geographic Society, and Honorary Director of the American Polar Society.

In the 1960s, the Marin Junior Museum changed its name to The Louise A. Boyd Natural Science Museum. Eventually the museum and its association with nature led people to bring injured, ill, and orphaned wild animals for care. Over time the emphasis shifted from education to wild animal rehabilitation, and the Boyd Museum morphed into the Marin Wildlife Center, later renamed the California Center for Wildlife.

Failing in health and in finances, Louis Boyd passed her last days in a San Francisco convalescent home. She died there September 14, 1972, two days before her 85th birthday. She had asked her long-time friend Dr. Walter Wood, a member of the 1933 expedition to scatter her ashes over Polar Regions. He carried out her wishes.

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