

**Calvert, K. (2015). June Mickle: One Woman's Life in the Foothills and Mountains of Western Canada. Calgary: Rocky Mountain Books.**

Reviewed by Dena Lamothe, MacEwan University

Kathy Calvert's book, "June Mickle: One Woman's Life in the Foothills and Mountains of Western Canada", is a biographical look at the life of June Hamilton. June was an only child raised by her single mom, Clara, with support from Clara's brothers John, Bob and Fred. Clara's second marriage was to a cowboy named Tip Johnson when June was a teenager. Tip, Clara and June lived on Tip's ranch until June was in her mid-twenties. At that point, she married Bert Mickle and took his name. The two were life-long lovers who shared a passion for everything related to horses. As a way to earn a living, the newlywed Mickles lived on Bert's family homestead while growing and harvesting hay which they then sold. That first haying season was difficult as June was trying to maintain a house and help with the haying, but also discovered that she was pregnant. That spring, June gave birth to a healthy baby boy they named Don. June and Bert found that caring for a young child while running a farm was difficult, but a few years after Don was born, their daughter Faye was born, completing their family. The Mickle family spent their days always looking for adventure. Bert and Don enjoyed catching and taming the wild horses that were often found in the pastures surrounding their house. Deciding to build a log cabin on their property west of Millarville was an adventure as Bert and June had to provide the cabin builders with room and board while living in sub-par conditions. Owning and operating an outfitting business in the Canadian Rockies

provided more adventures as the Mickle's had to learn "new skills such as skiing and running a snowmobile". June lived a full life always willing to help a neighbour, a friend or a family member. Calvert mentions examples throughout the book of June opening her house to anyone who needed a place to stay. June was known as a social butterfly before she was married. As with most new moms, June's social activities were diminished while Don and Faye were young but once the children could participate in the social gatherings, June continued her usual ways of socializing. June spent her years after Bert died helping to raise her grandchildren, operating a novelty shop and traveling with whoever would travel with her.

Bert and June instilled many life-long lessons into their children and grandchildren. June's generation was raised during a difficult time period during the inter-war years and the Great Depression. This generation was often known for their resiliency and ability to forge ahead no matter what life threw at them. This is a major aspect of June's story. I believe that June's ability to be resilient and adaptable helped her succeed in so many of the various situations in her life. The seed of being adaptable and resilient was started early as June was raised in a non-traditional household with her mother and three uncles. That household dynamic changed when Clara moved her and June into Calgary so that Clara could find a better paying job. Often, this left June fending for herself while Clara worked long hours. June's resiliency was further tested as she fought smallpox and had to adjust to being in a hospital, quarantined and alone. To finish convalescing June went to live with her Uncle Bob and his wife Edna in the country to fully recover. June's ability to endure the "years away from the farm, [was] partly because she was innately cheerful and mainly because the tedium was relived by frequent visits to the farm on weekends and summer

holidays” (p. 26). Clara enrolling June into the Sacred Hearts Convent, although it provided Clara relief from having to take care of June, would have caused some shock to June as there would have been a huge lifestyle change. Being resilient carried into June’s adult life. Life threw her many curves while she was taking care of a homestead, raising a family and being a caregiver to Don who was often sick. Owning an outfitting business required a lot of work to just make the trips for guests run smoothly. The Mickle’s lodges at Skoki, Temple and Point Camp were only accessible on foot, horseback or snowmobile which meant it was difficult to get supplies such as the stove pictured in the book being loaded to take to Skoki. In order to have food available to cook for guests meant “organizing menus and ordering the food” (p. 180). June’s management skills were what the Mickle’s needed in order “to make a success of the place” (p. 180). June and Faye successfully ran the pony stand at Lake Louise. June acquired her guiding license so that she could do day trips and trail rides from the pony stand. Faye enjoyed being away from the city and “was in her element and was so good with the horses and the people” (p. 222).

June led a very different life from what was seen as typical for women from the time period she was raised. Women of June’s generation were expected to help on the farm and do the cooking, cleaning and child-rearing. In addition to handling these parts of her family’s life, June was also an active participant in the decision making and, in some cases, she was the decision maker when considering aspects of June’s family and business life. The decision to move off the Mickle homestead to a place in town, where schooling for Don and Faye would be more easily accessible, was a decision Bert and June did not consider lightly. It was also a decision they made together. In making the decision to move into town, Bert and June made it clear that their “stay at Royalties

was not intended to be permanent ... June and Bert were ranchers first and had no intentions of settling in a town” (p. 147)

A critique of Calvert’s book is that not many dates were included within the piece of writing. This would have been helpful to the reader to give them an idea of when these events were happening in the Mickle and Hamilton families in comparison to events happening in the rest of the world. I can understand from Calvert’s perspective as to why she did not include many dates in the book as she as was wanting to write a book to share June’s story and not be so concerned about the exact dates of events.

Calvert’s book aims to tell the story of a woman’s life who lived during a time period in society that saw a lot of change. June was born into an era of conflict and depression and died in an era where her home had an “electric powered dishwasher, TV, vacuum cleaner, and washer/drier” (p. 335). These were all “luxuries she had never dreamed of throughout most of her adult life, and she had no problem accepting the ease they brought to her life” (p. 335). Calvert’s book can serve as a multi-disciplinary introduction to sociologists interested in women and family life on the Canadian prairies between the 1920’s and early 2000’s. Other disciplines that may benefit from the book are education, history and women’s studies. I found “June Mickle: One Woman’s Life in the Foothills and Mountains of Western Canada” a pleasure to read. It is very balanced with a plot that was easy to follow. The book gave me an insight to life on the prairies in an era I have not personally experienced. I would recommend this book to anyone who is interested in learning more about women and family life on the Canadian prairies.