

# EVELYN CAMERON

1868–1929

## Pioneer photographer, diarist, and rancher

Evelyn Jephson Flower was born to an aristocratic family on August 26, 1868, near Streatham, England. In 1889 she married Ewen Somerled Cameron who was born in 1854 in Scotland, to a genteel, but penniless family.

The newlyweds came to Montana for their honeymoon. Enchanted with the badlands of Eastern Montana, the Camerons decided to move to America and raise polo ponies for export to Europe. In 1893 they established the Eve Ranch near Terry. However, the horse breeding venture proved disastrous, as the ponies were difficult to transport and -many died on board the ship to England. The surviving animals were too wild for English riders who were unaccustomed to "breaking" horses. Although Evelyn's family provided her with an annual allowance, the Camerons were unable to make a profit. By 1897 they had to abandon polo pony raising and find other sources of income. Ewen, being more interested in studying Montana birdlife, left ranch work to his wife. (His studies in ornithology became highly regarded and he wrote several articles published in various British science magazines, including *The Auk*.) Evelyn wholeheartedly threw herself into the business of managing the ranch. To help make ends meet, she took in boarders and sold produce from her garden.

One of her boarders introduced her to photography, and in 1894 she purchased her first camera. Photography served many purposes for Evelyn; it relieved some of the loneliness of living on the plains, provided much needed income, allowed her to work with Ewen on his wildlife studies, and supplied an avenue for meeting and learning about her neighbors. Her photographs captured the experiences of men and women on the plains of Eastern Montana in starkly vivid and candid terms. Cowboys, women, ranchers, farmers, children, itinerant workers, sheep herders, and the stark landscape all found their way into her photos. Magazines throughout the country published her work.

In addition to her ranch work and photography, Evelyn was an avid diarist, keeping remarkably detailed accounts of her daily life on the rugged Montana frontier. The combination of her photography, dairies, and letters to family in England provide a unique and unparalleled view into Montana's past.

In 1911 she writes of her life in Montana that she so loved, *Manual labour...is about all I care about, and after all, is what will really make a strong woman. I like to break colts, brand calves, cut down trees, ride & work in a garden.*

In 1914 Ewen Cameron became ill and had to be taken to Pasadena, California, to receive cancer treatments. He died the following year and was buried in California. Evelyn, contrary to the requests of her family, returned to her beloved Montana to run the ranch by herself. She continued her photography for the remainder of her life. She died in 1928 following an operation for appendicitis. She was buried in Terry, Montana.