



# Object: Matrimony: The Risky Business of Mail-Order Matchmaking on the Western Frontier

*Chris Enss*

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Desperate to strike it rich during the Western Gold Rushes and eager for the free land afforded them through the Homestead Act, men went west alone and sacrificed many creature comforts. Only after they arrived at their destinations did some of them realize how much they missed female companionship.

One way for men living on the frontier to meet women was through subscriptions to heart-and-hand clubs. The men received newspapers with information, and sometimes photographs, about women, with whom they corresponded. Eventually, a man might convince a woman to join him in the West, and in matrimony. Social status, political connections, money, companionship, or security were often considered more than love in these arrangements.

Complete with historic photographs and actual advertisements from both women seeking husbands and males seeking brides, *Object Matrimony* includes stories of courageous mail order brides and their exploits as well as stories of the marriage brokers, mercenary matchmakers looking to profit as merchants did off of the miners and settlers. Some of these stories end happily ever after; others reveal desperate situations that robbed the brides of their youth and sometimes their lives.

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