



Lillian Alling: The Journey Home (Extraordinary Women)

Susan Smith-Josephy

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In 1926, Lillian Alling, a European immigrant, set out on a journey home from New York. She had little money and no transportation, but plenty of determination. In the three years that followed, Alling walked all the way to Dawson City, Yukon, crossing the North American continent on foot. She walked across the Canadian landscape, weathering the baking sun and freezing winter, crossed the rugged Rocky Mountains and hiked the untested wilderness of British Columbia and the Yukon. Finally, on a make-shift raft, she sailed alone down the Yukon River from Dawson City all the way to the Bering Sea.

Lillian Alling is a legend. She has been the subject of novels, plays, epic poems, an opera and more tall tales than can be remembered. Her life has been subjected to speculation, fiction, and exaggeration. But as legendary as she may be, the true story of Lillian Alling has never been told. “The Mystery Woman,” as she came to be known, is as intriguing to us now as she was to those she met on her trek. Lillian’s name lives on in the folk tales of British Columbia, the Yukon and Alaska, but her life leading up to her journey and what waited for her at home in Eastern Europe still remains a shadowy mystery.

Lillian Alling: The Journey Home is a collection of personal documents, first-hand recollections, family tales and archival research that provide tantalizing new clues to Lillian’s story. Smith-Josephy places Lillian firmly in the context of history and among the cast of unique and colourful characters she met along her journey.

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