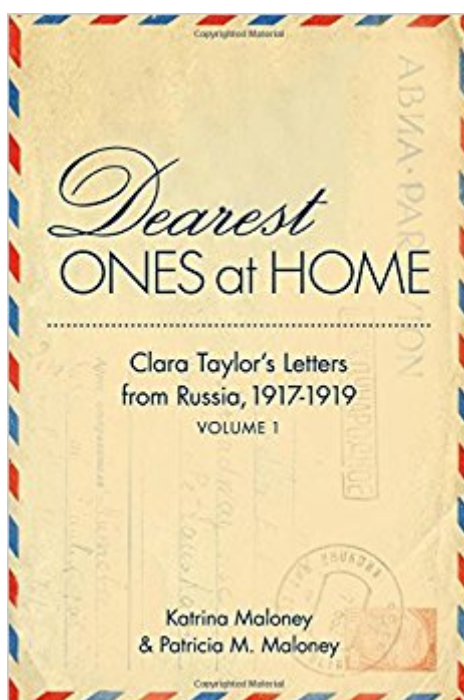


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Dearest Ones At Home: Clara Taylor's Letters From Russia, 1917-1919



Synopsis

On November 5, 1917, Taylorville, Illinois native Clara Taylor stepped off a Trans-Siberian Railway train into a city then called Petrograd, Russia. Employed by the YWCA as an industrial expert, Clara had been sent to Russia to help establish Associations in Petrograd (now St. Petersburg) and Moscow. Her main charge while in Russia was to survey and report on factory conditions, but Clara only spent a fraction of her stay in Russia visiting factories; due to the vagaries of the political, social, and economic revolution—the upheaval of an entire culture—Clara and her colleagues spent most of their first year in Russia teaching English, home economics, book keeping, literature, and basketball, and sponsoring lectures, dances and sing-alongs for Russian working women. Clara's letters, collected in this book, tell of both the mundane and the extraordinary: what the YW staff ate for dinner; how the Bolshevik suppression of free speech impacted Americans' ability to communicate with those at home; shootings in the streets; bartering for pounds of sugar; conversing with nobility, with intellectuals, and with workers; attending the opera; and sight-seeing at monasteries. Together, Clara's letters to her family—her "dearest ones at home"—tell a compelling story of one American woman's experiences in Revolutionary Russia.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A book of letters from an ordinary American woman in Russia watching the 1917 Revolution from the streets, for people who read history and love true adventure.

Katrina Maloney, a former college professor of natural sciences, was born and raised in suburban Connecticut, but now lives and writes in southern New Hampshire, where she and her husband raise chickens and keep cats and retired horses and greyhounds on their small farm. When not mucking out the barn or writing, Katrina plays classical violin and ukulele. Patricia M. Maloney grew up in Nebraska but went east to attend college. She and her husband raised their three children in Connecticut. After her career as a Director of Christian Education, she retired, and she now enjoys boating and swimming at her lake cottage and traveling abroad. She is actively involved in her church, plays the organ and piano, and sings in local chorales.

“I feel as tho I was another Alice in Wonderland so many queer things happen. And here one sees sights daily that is hard to reconcile with the twentieth century as we know it on the western hemisphere.” (letter dated April 1, 1918) As an International Relations major with a great interest in Russian history and the Russian language, I thoroughly enjoyed reading “Dearest Ones at Home, Clara Taylor’s Letters from Russia, 1917-1919, Volume 1”. We are so lucky to have Clara’s letters to read, and that someone had the foresight to preserve so many of them. The letters provide a very personal view of this chaotic period in Russian history, from the perspective of a woman who was not Russian, but who could interact with all levels of society more freely than could many Russians in Russia at that time. I also loved that Clara struggled to learn Russian with many different tutors during her stay in Russia, as it made her so real to me, having struggled myself to learn Russian and never mastering it. The two editors, Katrina Maloney and Patricia M. Maloney, are related to Clara Taylor, so they are able to add perspective to some of the family references and provide lovely anecdotes about Clara after she returned to the U.S. The editors have organized the book into sections, each with a summary of the key events unfolding while Clara was writing her letters from the different cities she was stationed in while working for the YWCA (primarily Petrograd, Moscow and Samara). I found especially enlightening excerpts from Clara’s diary because her diary comments were more honest and direct than her letters, most likely because she knew her diary would not be read by a censor. I look forward to reading Volume 2 when it is available.

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