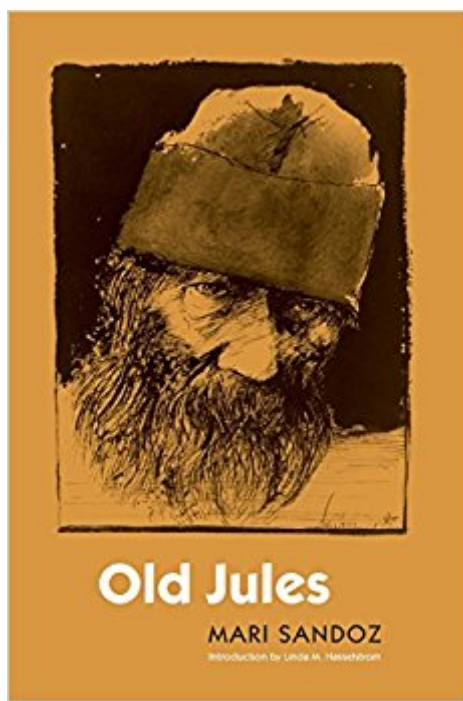


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Old Jules



Synopsis

First published in 1935, *Old Jules* is unquestionably Mari Sandoz's masterpiece. This portrait of her pioneer father grew out of the silent hours of listening behind the stove or the wood box, when it was assumed, of course, that I was asleep in bed. So it was that I heard the accounts of the hunts, the fights with the cattlemen and the sheepmen, of the tragic scarcity of women, when a man had to marry anything that got off the train, of the droughts, the storms, the wind and isolation. But the most impressive stories were those told me by Old Jules himself. This Bison Books edition includes a new introduction by Linda M. Hasselstrom.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In the book *Old Jules*, Sandoz presents a biographical account of her immigrant/pioneer father, Jules Ami Sandoz. By presenting the information in chronological order, Sandoz guides the reader through her father's arrival on the western frontier, emergence as an early community builder and agricultural expert, and role in establishing the identity of the Niobrara country of frontier Nebraska. Sandoz presents her father Jules to the reader relative to his position amidst the dynamic social, cultural, and political climates of late 19th century American frontier life in the Nebraska Territory. The author follows Jules through his involvement in land speculation, agriculture, political dealings, community building, and family life in order to acclimate the reader to the multifaceted realities of frontier life. Sandoz employs her personal knowledge of her father alongside historically accurate data, presenting the reader with not only an entertaining, but also informative biography of Old Jules. Mari Sandoz argues that the biography of her father - Jules Sandoz: pioneer, settler,

entrepreneur, agricultural and horticultural experimenter, area enthusiast and developer, friend of Indians, enemy of entrenched cattlemen, and devil to his family - not only provides entertaining reading, but also accurately depicts the historical period of American frontier life. In the biography of Old Jules, Sandoz focuses on details of her father's life that distinguish him from other stereotypical pioneers and settlers, as well as commonalities that frontiersmen of the Nebraska Territory shared in their experience.

Old Jules is a fascinating look at life on the northern Great Plains and provides a great counter to the sanitized versions of America's frontier, for those of us that learned about it through media like "Little House on the Prairie" and "Bonanza" style depictions. For that, it is a great book. But it is up to each reader to decide if Jules was a great guy who succeeded despite the tribulations and hardships of his place and time, or if he was an abusive husband/father who fled his prior home and simply did as he pleased for the rest of his life. This is the enigma... My own opinion is that Jules was somewhat mentally unstable. His leaving Switzerland is understandable, despite the vast majority of immigrants from Europe having been from lower class families than his who had rather more limited opportunities in the 'old country'. By that I mean the West had plenty of cultured people who were attracted to the openness of the frontier (both societal and geo-physical); we just don't hear so much about them. This story indicates he was educated and may have been a medical student, although it's left speculative. He apparently consulted frontier doctors, and performed rude medicinal and sanitary practices that don't square with what one could safely assume he ought to know if he had medical training (even for those times). Although both author/daughter Mari Sandoz and her younger brother (who wrote "Son of Old Jules") later dismissed the idea that their childhoods were unusual for that place and time, they clearly were extreme. Possible explanations for his lack of concern for his family never really come out in the book. I highly recommend the book. It begins immediately after the "Indian Wars" period but before society with its laws and structure had really taken hold.

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