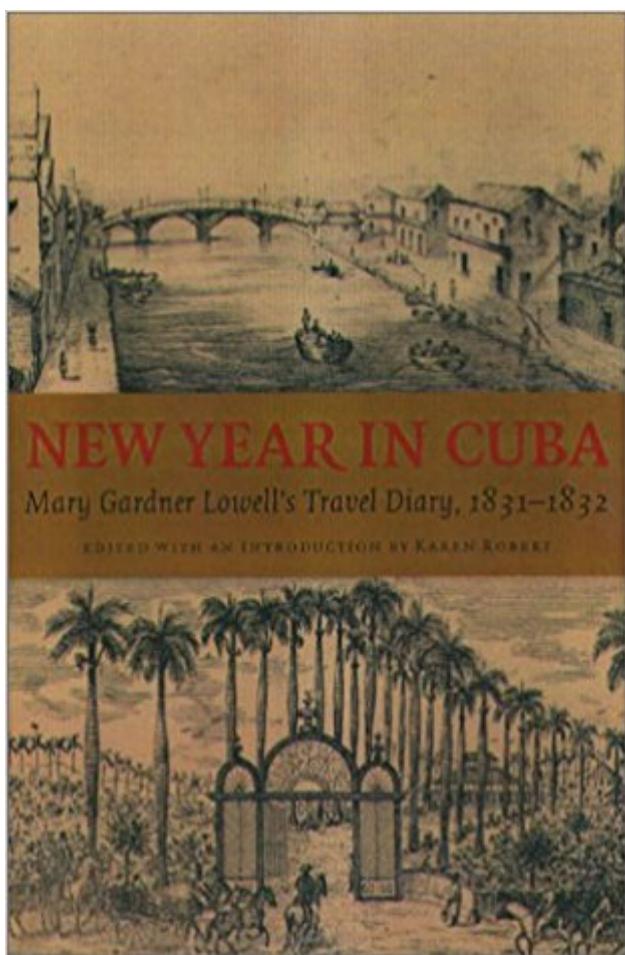


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New Year In Cuba: Mary Gardner Lowell's Travel Diary, 1831-1832 (New England Women's Diaries Series)



Synopsis

In late 1831, at the age of 29, Mary Gardner Lowell and her young son George accompanied her husband, the leading Boston financier and merchant Francis Cabot Lowell II, on a voyage to Cuba, a newly popular destination for the Boston gentry. They spent several weeks on the island travelling from the bustling commercial city of Havanna to the slave plantations of Matanzas province, before making their way up the Mississippi River by steamboat on the return home. Lowell's journal of the adventure that took her from the safe and comfortable environs of Beacon Hill is published here in its entirety. She describes in vivid detail each event and observation of a journey that crossed many boundaries: between abolitionist Boston and slave-owing Cuba, between the parlour and the sugar mill; between refined Boston and the hinterlands of the Caribbean and river towns of the Mississippi Valley. As befitting a woman of her privileged class, Lowell's diary includes chronicles of social calls, parties and invitations, as well as intimate descriptions of domestic and family life. She also comments extensively on the different social conventions for American and Spanish women, and provides astute accounts of the workings of the can sugar mills, the brutal living and working conditions of the slaves and the tensions involved in "managing" the slave population. Lowell is a colourful storyteller who writes with precision and a critical eye, salting the narrative with gossip and a good dose of humour about her experience throughout the trip. Her journals are filled with stories of arrogant Spanish men, shipwrecks, slave uprisings, business deals gone bad and scandalous marriages. The diary brings Mary Gardner Lowell and her times to life and offers illuminating insights into class, race and gender relations as well as the evolving relationship between the USA and Cuba in the antebellum period.

Book Information

Series: New England Women's Diaries Series

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: Northeastern (March 27, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1555535585

ISBN-13: 978-1555535582

Product Dimensions: 9.4 x 6.1 x 0.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.7 ounces

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars See all reviews (2 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,040,502 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #174 in Books > Travel >

Customer Reviews

I first read this journal in its original format: a handwritten, early-19th-century document now kept in the archives at the Massachusetts Historical Society. I loved it on the first reading--Lowell is an articulate, insightful writer who recorded this journey for her friends and family back home in Boston. (Just as we take snapshots of a trip, 19th-century travelers wrote journals.) Now we can all read it without making a trip to the research library in Boston. A well-educated, well-read woman, Lowell drew on a wealth of knowledge and considerable skill as a writer, but she was also somewhat more irreverent than she should have been, according to the conventions of the time. She took note of the local gossip, the scandalous histories of some of her hosts, and the harsh treatment of slaves on the sugar plantations. It makes for an engrossing read. Professor Robert's introduction provides the historical context for the journal, covering the Boston background as well as the Cuban information.

Ably edited for a contemporary readership by Karen Robert, *New Year In Cuba: Mary Gardner Lowell's Travel Diary, 1831-1832* recounts the journey of a twenty-nine year old wife, her young son, and her husband on a journey to the island nation of Cuba. Mary Gardner Lowell's astute observations are peppered with gossip, humor, criticism, scandal, and stories of arrogance and danger. *New Year In Cuba* is highly recommended as being an engaging and vivid transport through time and space in a yesteryear travelogue adventure.

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