



# The Gazette Girls of Grundy County: Horse Trading, Hot Lead, and High Heels

*Gwen Hamilton Thogmartin, Ardis Anderson*

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It was 1933 when Gwen and Ardis Hamilton bought the *Grundy County Gazette*. Gwen was twenty-one, barely old enough to vote, and Ardis was twenty-three. America was in the throes of the Depression. Buying the paper had been Gwen's idea, tossed out half in jest: why not buy a rundown country paper, build it up, and sell it in a couple of years? And so that hot July they set out in Nancy, Ardis's 1930 Chevrolet, with their cat, Tarzanna, and all their worldly possessions, and headed to Spickard, a north-western Missouri town of six hundred.

In chapters that alternate between the sisters' distinctive voices, *The Gazette Girls of Grundy County* tells a captivating story of two women's adventures in a small midwestern town. Although both women had been trained in journalism, their education hadn't prepared them for the realities of running a country newspaper. While Gwen sold advertising to local businesses, Ardis worked financial wizardry, often dipping into her own savings, to keep the *Gazette* in the black. With no money for subscriptions, Grundy County residents taught the sisters the fine art of horse trading, offering dressed chickens, quarters of beef, "ricks" and "racks" of firewood, and countless other goods in exchange for subscriptions to the ever-improving newspaper.

The "Gazette girls," as they were known by the locals, were as different as they could be. At five foot two (in very high heels), Ardis was a serious career woman who dabbled in Republican politics. At five foot nine, Gwen was a gregarious, sometimes impetuous, closet Democrat. But both shared persistence and dedication in equal measure. As the sisters waged daily battles with their temperamental printing press, Old Bertha, and their sometimes more temperamental press operator, the *Gazette* began to garner awards for editorials and features and-more important-to earn the enthusiasm of its readers.

Filled with hilarious stories of small-town life, *The Gazette Girls of Grundy County* is a remarkable story of two women coming of age in the newspaper business and an extraordinary slice of Americana.

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