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AN EXCEPTIONAL COLORADO PIONEER WOMAN

MRS. SARAH ANN MORTON WHITE KEMPF

EAGLE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.
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AN EXCEPTIONAL COLORADO PIONEER WOMAN

MRS. SARAH ANN MORTON WHITE KEMPF

From Histories Compiled By:

Mrs. Eileen Ewing Archibold

And

George Griffith White II

Grandchildren

Sarah Ann Morton was born two miles south of Platte City, Platte County, Missouri on March 27, 1847 in the farm home of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin R. Morton.

Mr. and Mrs. Morton were prominent and successful farmers in Platte County, Missouri, they were highly regarded by their neighbors, also the business and professional people of Platte City, the County Seat. Mr Benjamin R. Morton was a conservative, southern Democrat, interested in all of the current governmental affairs in his State and County. He was elected to, and served as a County Judge for a number of years, representing the district in which his farm was located.

Little is known of the very early lineage of Sarah Ann Morton, however, the family knows that both of her parents were of English descent. Both families had their American beginnings in the Commonwealth of Virginia and pioneered from that State to the Commonwealth of Kentucky and thence to Platte County, Missouri where Benjamin R. Morton and Sarah Hunt met and subsequently were married in 1838.

On September 12, 1867, Miss Sarah Ann Morton married Mr. George Griffith White, I, in the farm home of Miss Morton's parents in Platte County, Missouri.

George Griffith White, I, was born in Nelson County, Kentucky on December 3, 1845. His parents, also, pioneered from Virginia and they, too, were farmers.

Briefly, it should be noted that Mr. White's parents, subsequently, pioneered from Kentucky to Dardanelle, Arkansas, where he received his elementary and high school education. At age eighteen, Mr. White moved to Texas, with his parents, and shortly thereafter joined the Civil War Confederate Army. He was soon captured by the Federal Army and incarcerated in the Fort Levenworth, Kansas Military Prison until the Wars end in 1865. Upon release and discharge from the Confederate Army, Mr. White, crossed the Missouri River from Kansas to Platte City, Missouri, where he met Sarah Ann Morton.

Mr. White attended William Jewell College in Liberty, Missouri and read Law in a Law Office in Platte City, and was admitted to the Bar and the practice of Law in 1867.

The young couple settled themselves in Platte City where Mr. White opened his first Law Office and where their first child was born, a daughter, Loretta Jane White, on July 13, 1868.

The great pioneer spirit of that generation came forth in Sarah and George, and the decision was made in 1869 to leave Missouri for the new Territory of Colorado, its extensive mining activities, and its Gold and Silver fields, and to seek an active and busy mining town in which to reside.

Sarah and her family made the trip to Colorado Territory, partly by rail and partly by Stagecoach, as the Railroad from St. Joseph, Missouri to Denver, Territory of Colorado, had not yet been completed. They had read about Denver and about Golden, Colorado's first Territorial Capital, and decided that their

first home in their newly chosen land should be Golden. They chose Golden because it seemed to offer more opportunity for the start of Sarah's husband's new Law practice.

Shortly after settling in Golden, and the Law practice was begun, Sarah's father gave her and George the funds to construct their first home, as a gesture to wish the young family well in their newly chosen Territory, and certainly their newly chosen pioneer life, which was a decided change from the more settled and luxurious life that Missouri had offered them. It was in this home that their second Daughter, Georgia Murial White was born, on November 12, 1876.

Sarah Morton White was most surely the pioneer wife, morally supporting and backing the pioneer husband in their endeavors to contribute to the economical and governmental beginnings of the Territory striving for statehood. She maintained the home and cared for their daughters, while her husband practiced Law, served as County Attorney for the County of Jefferson, and as District Attorney. He also was a delegate to the Constitutional Convention which led Colorado to statehood on August 1, 1876. She must have spent numerous days and weeks, with their children, alone in the home, while her husband helped build the new State.

Sarah and George, by now were thoroughly endowed with the spirit of the Colorado Pioneer. More and more families were moving into the new State and settling in the mountains; establishing new Towns and Cities, Georgetown being prominent among them.

In 1877 they decided to move on west and chose Georgetown for their new home. Georgetown was in the same Judicial District as Golden, therefore Mr. White remained on as District Attorney. It was in Georgetown where their first Son was born, Benjamin Morton White, on September 29, 1878. Once again Sarah White, maintained their home, saw to the early education of her older Daughter and cared for her two small children and advised her husband in his very busy civic life.

While Georgetown was a thriving mining Town, it had come to the attention of Mr. and Mrs. White that Leadville, Colorado, farther west, had developed into a much larger City. It had tremendous mining activity and had good schools, a most important consideration for Sarah and her plans for the future development of her children.

In the later months of 1879, Sarah and her family moved from Georgetown to Leadville where they established residence, entered their oldest daughter in the good school system and established, what was to become, one of Colorado's leading Law firms of the era.

Many friends were made by this pioneer family in the years that they had lived in Colorado, some of whom had moved to and settled in Denver, now the State Capital. Mr. White found that he had business from time to time in Denver, and the winters were most severe in Leadville. In the early winter of 1882, Sarah, and her children, temporarily, moved to Denver for the winter, spring and early summer. It was in Denver that Sarah gave birth to her fourth and last child, a son, Hume Stanley White, I, on July 11, 1882.

During all of this time, the pioneering spirit still burned in the minds of Sarah White and her husband. They had discussed their future and the overall security of their family; they realized that should something occur to suddenly prevent Mr. White's earning capabilities, they should prepare themselves for other income for Sarah and her children.

In the early 1880's Sarah and George White traveled over the Continental Divide from Leadville, to the Eagle River Valley in western Colorado, with the intent of finding good land for homesteading purposes, and eventually establishing a large working ranch.

They traveled some sixty miles west to the mouth of Brush Creek, where the Town of Eagle is now located, and found a

wide and fertile valley, just what they were desiring for their ranch location. They noted there were only two other families in the area and that the land in the Brush Creek Valley had not yet been inhabited.

Under the homestead laws of Colorado, and the United States, it was necessary for Sarah to settle on one hundred-sixty acres of land, in order to eventually own it, and for her husband to do the same on another one hundred-sixty acres, each must construct a cabin on his claimed land, and it must be fenced in, this they each did. They felt this was not sufficient acreage for their plans, so Sarah asked a bachelor cousin in Platte County, Missouri to come to Colorado and file on an adjoining one hundred-sixty acres, which they were to purchase after the homestead laws were complied with. This would give them the amount of land they desired for the start of their ranch.

After the ranch was established, Sarah White's cousin remained on to operate it, as the White family were still living in Leadville.

On January 19, 1884 George Griffith White, I, passed away in his home in Leadville at the age of thirty-nine.

Sarah M. White found herself a widow, thirty-seven years of age, with four children, ages sixteen, eight, six and two. She now had no income from a Law practice, she had only the ranch, they had so wisely established. She was faced with educating her children in a proper manner, she knew the importance of a good education, and vowed to do so.

Mrs. White's ranch, up to this time, was just producing hay and grain for the horses and some produce for her cousins living, and to be sent to the family in Leadville, when possible. She knew that plan would not adequately see to her long range needs, and that the ranch must, not only be put on a paying basis, but also must show a profit, that it should become a going business.

She made numerous inquiries around areas already settled, determining that the cattle business seemed to be the most profitable to the ranchers. Thereupon, she purchased a sizeable herd of Texas Longhorn Cattle, thus she had her start in the cattle business.

The ranch provided ample pasture in the summer months and produced enough hay and grain to feed her cattle and horses well through the long winters. She had one major problem, among her many others, that being transportation of her cattle from the ranch to market. The railroad did not reach Eagle, Colorado until October 5, 1887. This meant that the cattle had to be driven to the nearest railroad point some sixty miles distant.

Another major problem for a lady of that time was ranch labor. Sarah White's cousin, from Missouri, who had been operating her ranch since ownership, was murdered, shot in the back, by a neighbor in a dispute over a fence line, in November 1887. By this time she had determined that she must live on the ranch and had moved from Leadville into one of the three cabins they had built. But, of course, she, a very small lady, could not do the hard and heavy work required to operate a cattle ranch in remote Eagle County, Colorado. She had to depend on whoever and whatever type of men were in the area and available to work. Some were disillusioned miners and prospectors, some were itinerant cowboys, and some were ex-convicts. Mrs. White, however, commanded their respect, and apparently had little or no trouble getting the work done. She did carry a pistol and she slept with the pistol under her pillow, but never had to use it.

Sarah Morton White reached the stage where she knew she must have a dependable man at the ranch, at all times, to oversee the help and properly aid her in its management and give her time to care for her children. Oscar Kempf, a mining man,

had been acting as Foreman for some time, she liked and trusted him. In due time Sarah and Mr. Kempf were married.

Sarah, by this time, had purchased another ranch in the high mountain country, some ten miles distant from the main ranch, at the head waters of Salt Creek, in Eagle County. This new ranch was located immediately adjacent to the open range where she had unlimited range rights for her SW cattle. The place had two good natural fresh water springs, and a creek flowing through it. She had the ranch fenced, with gates opening onto the range, and she built a round corral where the calves were branded in the spring and fall. By now, she had greatly improved her grade of cattle from Texas Longhorns to good Shorthorns, and was reputed to have one of the finest cattle herds in western Colorado. This made her ranch operation a very successful and profitable venture.

The problem of educating four children in the 1880's in a remote place such as Eagle, Colorado, was something to weigh heavily on the shoulders of a Mother, such as Sarah. She decided to send her eldest daughter, Loretta, to a convent at Montreal, Canada, to be educated by the Sisters of the Sacred Heart there. While none of the family had ever been Catholic, she realized that Catholic schools were far advanced, that they afforded the opportunity of a better background for her children than the schools of Leadville or Denver had at that time. The other three children were sent to Notre Dame for their elementary work. Notre Dame was ideal in that that school offered board and room for Boys and Girls and strict supervision.

Sarah's financial status had reached the point in the early 1900's that she felt she could well afford to rise from the old cabin living on the ranch to a good home with sound, workable out buildings for a more efficient operation. She had a modern nine room house constructed with two baths, a parlor and living room, fireplaces and a furnace. The out buildings, also, were built at the same time, they were well

constructed and complemented the house. The entire complex made a fine ranch home for her and her family, this was all completed in 1905.

As all who may read this work about this remarkable lady know, we cannot predict the events to come, and as fate would have it, Sarah White Kempf was not to enjoy the fruits of her labor, the ease she had earned by her shrewd thinking and planning, and her accomplishment in raising and educating her children. She did have a short time to know one Granddaughter, however, Eileen Ewing Archibold, Georgia Murial's only Daughter.

On October 26, 1905, Sarah White Kempf passed away at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, following an operation for cancer. She was only fifty-eight years of age.

March 4, 1976

FACTS OBTAINED FROM:

Parents, Family Bible and
other family documents.