

Richard Hicks Papers
Denver Public Library
WH2131
OVFolio 1

Four Very Early Women of Gilpin County

Mary York

May 6th 1859 is the date given to John Gregory's discovery of the first gold bearing mountain in America at Mt. City between here and Black Hawk. Less than a month later, June 1st, Mary York arrived in Russell Gulch as a member of the Green Russell party. This made her the first woman in the Mining District.

She was a short person and her looks were unprepossessing, yet her small frame hid a shy but very big heart and her complete faith in her Catholic Religion made it possible to survive in the raw atmosphere of the Mining Camp.

She had become the cook for the Russell Party on the long trek west and arriving in the Gulch, was immediately installed in a 2 room log cabin where she set up her boarding house and laundry.

Mary considered herself plain and unattractive. There was little gaiety in her life, just the hard work of feeding her miners and washing and mending their clothes.

When Green Russell and his friends went back to Georgia the first winter, Mary elected to remain. She removed herself and her industries from Russell Gulch to a more solid and weather-proof cabin in Mt. City. Mary with her skill as a laundress and cook, immediately established a thriving business of washing in the morning and taking boarders for five o'clock dinner, but only for a select few. She was very particular and her boarders had to be properly introduced.

She missed being able to attend Mass in her favorite church. When she heard that a traveling Catholic Priest was to hold a Sunday service in a saloon in Central City her spirit rose considerably. That Sunday morning she dressed herself in a tight bonnet her best black wool, a suit she had clumsily copied from Millie Haydee, an actress who played a week in Mt. City. Elated at the prospect of attending Mass once again, Mary marched up slippery Gregory Street holding her prized skirt out of the mud and indiscreetly showing the leg above her high bottomed boots. She was afraid she might be holding her skirt too high but she could not afford to ruin her one good article of clothing.

Mary held little hope of romance entering her life, she considered herself unattractive, but Billy Cozens, her favorite boarder had been so kind and treated her with such great respect, he became charming Billy in her mind. She fell quite in love for the first time in her life. There was little on his part to indicate that he returned the affection however. One day he did make a fair declaration, probably the strangest proposal of marriage ever heard. He said since she was the first woman in the Mining Camp, she should have the honor of being the first woman married here. He went so far as to say he'd even sacrifice himself and his freedom to see that she got what was coming to her. On Dec. 30th 1860 the Gulch celebrated to the limit, Mary York and William Z. Cozens were married in Central City by Colorado's first Catholic Missionary.

For this great event in her life Mary didn't choose to wear that good black suit. Instead she copied another outfit worn by that same actress. Mary was able to match the colour fairly well, it was a bit darker than mauve but still lighter than purple and a more practical woolen material than the silk brocade of Millie Haydee. When it came to a hat it just had to be the old tight bonnet - or did it? Instead she made use of a square of lace left over from the inserts in her dress and became a bride with a veil.

Mary York and Billy Cozens were each highly respected individuals but as Mr. and Mrs. William Z. Cozens became staunch pillars of strength and inspiration to the entire Little Kingdom Mining Camp.

Aunt Clara Brown

The second lady of importance to arrive in the District was Aunt Clara Brown. This delightful person came along only a few months later than Mary York. She was a former slave who bought her own freedom in 1857 and came west in the '59 Gold Rush. Her amazing industry as a laundress, cateress and midwife earned her a unique position in the community.

Thru her humble work she happily shared her earnings with all of the local churches as they struggled to build houses of worship. Dedicated to good works she was hostess to the Methodist service in her own home during most of the 1860's. Her tall angular figure was always first to rise for the hymns. She lived and worked for the day when the Methodist Church would be completed and it was in 1872. At the dedication service Aunt Clara was there in a prominent pew, her big eyes rolling and her wide mouth jubilantly singing as her heart was bursting with joy.

This greatly beloved Aunt Clara Brown has always seemed to me a person I'd like to have known. She must have a tremendous sense of humor to overcome all of the hardships from slavery to getting to her haven here in the Gulch of Gold.

Hattie Randolph

And now we approach the stunning figure of Hattie Randolph. She married George Randolph in the summer of 1864 and by November they had made the trip from the east to Central City. Hattie was very cultural minded and was appalled by the lack of it here. She began immediately as the cultural arbiter promoting concerts, lectures, study groups and her greatest passion, dancing parties. Thru her efforts in such diverse areas, she became the social arbiter of the city. Her grandest success in fashion and society came in 1872. Grand Duke Alexis of Russia was visiting this country. After many stops in the cities of the east, the special train of 5 Pullman cars headed west. After a 5 day buffalo hunt in Nebraska, they headed for Denver and a 2 day stop. This visit was all on very short notice and Colo. Society was agog. The Pioneer Club of Denver issued 250 invitations to a gala ball for Jan. 18th at the American House and many of the bids were received in Central City.

1 Week notice was all they had and hence no time to send too N.Y. for the latest fashions. Godey's Ladies Book was consulted and the Gulch ladies hurried down to Denver dressmakers to outfit them for this grand occasion. Once the ball gowns were in the making, other concerns arose, how to meet and greet a Russian Grand Duke.

The Gulch ladies met for several tea times and practiced the etiquette of being presented to royalty.

Hattie with her natural flair for dancing was chosen to illustrate the curtsy and to help the awkward ones. The select few from the Gulch invited to this Gala Ball moved down to Denver's American House well in advance to not miss any of the celebrations.

Several of the ladies braved the zero temperature of the January day to meet the train of the Royal Party. They were all dressed in their warmest woolens and very best furs as they stood in ankle deep snow at the Denver Depot to catch just a glimpse of the royal personage. The next evening was the Grand Ball. While many of the ladies were fretting with worry that their creations would not be finished in time, Hattie had no such concern. Her gown had been hanging in the closet for several days.

Hattie was pleased with the effect of her reflection as she finished dressing for the great evening. The dress was white tarlatan made with 2 skirts, the lower one trimmed with a pleated ruffle bound with pink silk. The ruffle was headed by puffs put on in scallops and edged with Valenciennes lace. Pink roses and ribbon bows outlined the 3 quarters of a yard of train. The neckline was low with an off-the-shoulder décolletage made by a bertha of lace and a corsage of pink flowers. Her hair was arranged in wound braids at the back of her head while in front was a high Pompadour surrounded by the same pink flowers. She was mighty pleased with her appearance.

Hattie was truly the Belle of The Ball. She had been invited to dance the first set after the Grand March with the Duke himself. Alas, it was a plain quadrille and not one of the Dukes greatest accomplishments. His exceptionally large feet along with his ineptness raised havoc with the trains of the ladies dresses. Back home in the mountains, the ordinary people were reading each detail connected with Denver's 2 day entertainment for nobility looking for any mention of their own elite. They were delighted that the 2 stars of the ball were Hattie Randolph and Mrs. Frank Young. When the ladies returned to the Gulch they were guests of honor at a series of parties and at each being requested to wear their Ball dresses. Hattie enjoyed the local glory as much as the Ball itself. Once again she paraded, illustrated the curtsy and basked in the aura of being a society queen.

Carrie Young

In the early 1870's, a charming brunette - Carrie Sims came to the Gulch to teach school. She remained in Central City for two years and during her stay never missed a dance. Her greatest evening was the Grand Ball that opened the Teller House. Carrie spent days on the creation of the gown she would wear at this most splendid affair. It took 4 trips to Denver to call at the dressmakers for fittings and it was a good thing the invitations were out well in advance. As it was, the gown spent very little time in her closet before she was to wear it on the eventful night. Hattie Randolph was in California on a trip so Carrie Sims became the Belle of this Ball with 2 handsome escorts, Frank Young and George Randolph.

The dancing continued 'til dawn with waltzes, mazourkas and quadrilles and Carrie danced every dance. Frank Young was most frequently her partner. When Carrie left to return to her home in Wisconsin after two years here, she took Frank

Young's heart along. The Wedding wasn't far off - they were married at her home on the 9th of September 1873 and returned to C. C. the next month. They were immediately taken up in the social whirl and became an important part of the community.

Madam Wright

Our next personality, I'm sure you've been expecting all the way along. Her name was Madam Wright. She was an attractive person with an immense flair for fashion, especially when it was coloured yellow, and her yellowness became one of the issues in her legal troubles. She was sharp in business, the local merchants were delighted to see her coming, she always paid cash.

Madam Wright pampered her girls. When the weather was fine, the group was to be seen driving thru the Gulch for an airing. They were so conservative in their dress, their hats and gloves, one could hardly guess they worked only at night. However, it was impossible to overlook Madam's bright yellow carriage and it's splendid team of horses. And, Madam was usually dressed to match the carriage.

Now several of the society ladies also favored yellow in their wardrobes but how could they possibly wear that colour after such a revolting display? They were furious of course! Then to make the situation completely intolerable, Madam's establishment was just below the Methodist Church on one of the most public and respected streets in town. It was not to be stood for, not another minute.

The husbands started to hear all about this dreadful woman, night and day. The husbands became hen-pecked, their life was pure hell. When the situation of the better families of the city became impossible, the husbands finally banded together in self preservation, They took Madam Wright to court on trumped up charges. 1. She had long been a nuisance on Eureka Street and 2. of larceny. The judge hearing the case in District Court, finally declared that perhaps such creatures should be permitted to live in a community but certainly be compelled to remove to some remote locality where their presence was not so annoying.

Madam Wright walked straight out of that court room and bought one of the larger houses on Gunnell Hill and continued to ply her trade, and display her merchandise in the yellow carriage when the weather was fine.

Mrs. President Grant

President Grant and his wife, the former Julia Boggs Dent, arrived in Black Hawk in 1873 and were royally escorted up the hill. C. C. considered it such an honor to have a visit of the President that they borrowed silver ingots from a mine in Caribou and when the President alighted from his carriage he could walk on silver bricks into the Teller House. While the President was reluctantly assured that the bricks were indeed real silver, Mrs. Grant walked across them and into the hotel.

After the Grants had freshened up in the special bedroom created for their visit, a reception was held in the parlors where the Presidential Party received the dignitaries of the Gulch. The entire group then moved on to the banquet room for a mid-day dinner of

many courses.

Mrs. Grant was wearing an expensive looking traveling outfit in black. The skirt had a complicated trimming of pleats while there was heavy embroidery around the neckline and flowing sleeves. But because of her dumpy figure, plain features and a cast in one eye - gave no suggestion of being the fashionable First Lady of the Land. She still wore the hats and hair style of 25 years earlier.

After a rather long meal, the Grant Party went on over the hill to Idaho Springs.