

Women's Early Impact on the Development of Deadwood, S.D. and the Surrounding Areas

By Melissa Owen

Many tales have been spun and passed along about men in the old west particularly in the early years of Deadwood, South Dakota but the unsung heroes so to speak are ready to have a voice. Many women were integral in the development of Deadwood as well but only a few have been explored. Through the history of Sarah Campbell, Annie Tallent, Lucretia Marchbanks, Phoebe Hearst, Sisters of the Holy Cross, Flora Haywood Stanford and Martha Bullock will show that they may claim a solid spot in that history alongside their male counterparts. Taking a look into their lives will reveal that these women made an impact on the development of Deadwood as well.

During their lives they accomplished much with little support from others when it was considered a man's world and when women were not allowed to vote, did not hold positions as the men did (unless they disguised themselves as one), and could not walk into a bar without others looking at them as an improper woman. Most have heard about Calamity Jane and Poker Alice but the lives of these other pioneer women also deserve their place in the beginning stages of Deadwood.

It is fitting to begin with the exploration of George Armstrong Custer's expedition of 1874 which was initially conducted to inspect land for military reasons and scout along the borders of the Dakotas and Wyoming.¹ His party included a thousand white men and one woman, Sarah Campbell.² Many heard of the expedition, thought it might be to explore the area for gold and waited anxiously

to hear if any was to be found. Not to be disappointed in August of 1874 Custer wrote about the gold possibilities in the Hills by stating "Men without former experience in mining have discovered it at the expense of but little time and labor."³

The first non Native American woman to enter the black hills went on George Armstrong Custer's expeditions; the camp's cook Sarah Campbell.⁴ People that knew her affectionately called Sarah "Aunt Sallie."⁵ She was quoted in an interview that she had "wanted to see the Black Hills for a long time so she seized the opportunity to join it (Custer's expedition) as a cook."⁶ It has been documented on this expedition that Campbell was the first woman to file a mining claim (claim number 7, Custer gulch-Aug. 5th, 1874).

After the Custer expedition Campbell wanted to return to the area because she enjoyed it so much, and did so when she moved to Galena which is located east of Deadwood Gulch. Campbell passed away in 1887 and is buried in Galena, where she had lived for several years.⁷ Campbell was born in 1824 into slavery and was freed in 1865 when slavery was abolished so she saw several changes within her lifetime.⁸

The first white woman to enter the hills six months after Sarah Campbell arrived was 46 year old Annie D. Tallent. She came with the Gordon mining party and unlike the Custer Expedition entered the territory illegally.⁹ Tallent would rather have it referred to as the Collins-Russell expedition which included her husband David, 25 other men, Tallent (the only woman in the party) and a boy.¹⁰ The boy was actually her 9 year old son Robert who came along on the rough trip in

which it is said that Tallent wore out two pair of shoes due to walking from Sioux City, Iowa to Custer.¹¹

Tallent arrived in the hills in the winter so a stockade was built to deter Native American attacks and to protect them from the harsh winter during the three months they were in the area.¹² In April 1874 the party was told to leave by the US army after they finally were able to find them on the third expedition.¹³ Annie Tallent came back to the hills around May 22, 1876 once the treaty with the Native Americans was established and lived in Deadwood for 4 years.¹⁴

While a resident of Deadwood she became a pioneer teacher and later a superintendent of schools in Rapid City.¹⁵ Even though Tallent did not live in Deadwood long, the publicity of her travels through the newspapers perhaps helped other women who might have otherwise been hesitant to come to Deadwood begin a new life there. Although Tallent died in Sturgis on February 13th 1901, much controversy still surrounds her due to her illegal entry into the hills.¹⁶

After the first explorations of the Dakota's in August 1875, a man by the name of John B. Pearson along with 4 other men arrived in the Deadwood Gulch area searching for gold.¹⁷ Then the news in the June 5th 1875 Yankton Daily press reported, "A large party of men returned today from the Black Hills bringing with them \$20,000 in dust. Among the number returned is J.B. Pearson, who located the first claim on Deadwood and who is enthusiastic, returning only for his family."¹⁸ This news along with the previous Custer expedition were two turning points of more women and men taking the initiative to follow in the path of fortune. Pearson's

findings were well publicized and others came to the Hills in hopes of securing fortunes as well.

Once the word was out about the possibility of fortune, the exodus from their homes to Deadwood began. Men and women traveled from various places to be a part of the gold mining experience and to perhaps become rich in the process. Also, many people were looking to find a better means to live by due to difficulties with their current living situations. There was a huge influx of grasshoppers in 1874 which affected many farmers who in turn needed to find something to get them back on their feet.¹⁹

In the early years Deadwood's population was 200 males to 1 female ratio.²⁰ In 1876, Deadwood's population consisting of merchants, residents and gold seekers was nearly 25,000.²¹ It was during this time that Al Swearingan opened up the Gem Theater in June of 1876, which appeared to be a place to be entertained through singing, dancing and an array of comedians. A month before the Gem opened several women would arrive by wagon train. Many of these women thought they were coming to Deadwood to find respectable jobs but were conned by Swearingan whose motive was to use them for prostitution, the hidden agenda of the Gem. Once there, many felt stuck so they just went along with what Swearingan was scheming all along. Some women however were determined to make a living in a respectable way. It wasn't until 1980 that the last of the brothels was shut down.²²

One woman wanting to make it in an honorable and respectable way in Deadwood was Lucretia Marchbanks also known as "Aunt Lou" or Mahogany Lou" who found her way from the gold camps of Colorado to Deadwood Gulch on June 1st

1876.²³ She was the 2nd noted African American to reach those areas, the first being Campbell. However, Campbell did not become an official resident of Deadwood as Marchbanks had.

It was in Marchbank's first year in Deadwood that she began working at the Grand Central Hotel as the kitchen manager and made quite a name for herself due to her great cooking abilities.²⁴ She went on to work for mine superintendents, a couple more hotels and a boarding house before she owned and operated the Rustic Hotel in 1883 where she had earned her right as one, if not the best cook in the Black Hills.²⁵ People would come just to taste what she was concocting in the kitchen, they really enjoyed her plum pudding but her recipes were not shared readily according to some.²⁶

Deadwood residents not only loved her cooking but enjoyed Marchbanks in general. Deadwood had a raffle competition to raise money for a church in town and the prize was to be given to the most popular woman of the black hills and she won that honor hands down. The prize was a diamond ring given as a token of the town's appreciation towards her. Marchbanks sold the Rustic Hotel to another woman in 1886 and went on to ranch in Beulah Wyoming until her death in 1911 at the age of 79.²⁷

Women began to live in some of the mining camps around 1877 which is the same year that the Sioux ceded the Black Hills to the United States.²⁸ This provision allowed people to come into the hills legally. Some of the roles the early women of Deadwood took on were; "cooks, servants, laundresses, prostitutes, mothers,

teachers, temperance advocates, mule skimmers, miners, actresses, missionaries, shopkeepers and seekers of husbands.”²⁹

Living in Deadwood during those times were rough so the women had to overcome many obstacles in order to live there. Some had come from luxurious backgrounds only to be met with dust, shacks to live in and backbreaking work to assist in the development of Deadwood.

Among those to come in 1877 was Phoebe Apperson Hearst, the wife of George Hearst who is known as the creator and owner of Homestake Gold Mine in Lead.³⁰ Phoebe was instrumental in several organizations and established the free kindergarten in Lead which is noted to be the first in the western United States.³¹ She also helped provide the library for Lead and later helped with Deadwood’s library. In 1894 Hearst gifted a library to Lead and two years later it was relocated to the Hearst store. An additional Deadwood library opened in 1905 with the help of Hearst once again, Andrew Carnegie, The Deadwood Ladies Round Table and the Deadwood Women’s club.³² This same library which began in 1905 with 4,353 volumes is still being used by Deadwood residents today but with 23,045 volumes to choose from.³³

Hearst also assisted in helping gain better labor policies for the mine workers which were pretty much non-existent in those days.³⁴ Hearst’s generosity did not end in Deadwood, she was well known in other cities and states as well for her charitable ways in money and time in education, women’s rights, libraries, museums and other benevolent causes. Hearst died in 1919 due to influenza but left behind a legacy of work which lives on today.³⁵

Although most women were not officially trained to take care of the sick and wounded many did in the early years of Deadwood. Increasing incidences of injuries from mining, reckless behavior, diphtheria and typhoid fever were growing which prompted Father Bernard Mackin from Deadwood to seek help from the Sisters of the Holy Cross in Indiana in January of 1878.³⁶ Through much fundraising, the Sisters of the Holy Cross opened St. Edwards hospital in Deadwood in 1878.³⁷ Sadly, the sisters had to close down the hospital two years later due to lack of funding.

In 1880, the first female doctor in the Dakota territory came to assist, Flora Haywood Stanford.³⁸ Stanford left Pennsylvania, her husband and her son and traveled to Deadwood with her daughter Emma in hopes that a new climate would clear up her daughter's tuberculosis. Around 1880, the Deadwood Lawrence County census indicated that there were 3,777 people living around that area, which was the most populated area of the Black Hills towns of that time.³⁹ Considering the vast amount of people, all of the mining injuries, gun fight wounds and such Hayward was a much needed asset to the area.

It was uncommon for a woman to practice medicine in those days and many looked down on it, in the United States less than 600 women were physicians at that time.⁴⁰ Papers including such statements as in this Philadelphia paper were common in those days:

It is as a true friend to women that we have endeavored to oppose the various innovations, under the name of "women's rights," by which a few misguided of the sex are disturbing the relations of civilized and

refined life, and the same spirit animates our opposition to the special branch of that mad movement which is trying to bring women into the medical ranks for occupation.⁴¹

Stanford's own husband did not like or support the fact that his wife was practicing after she earned her degree at the age of 40 from Boston University School of Medicine in 1878.⁴²

Stanford opened her own practice in Deadwood in 1888.⁴³ She treated some famous Deadwood residents of that time to include Buffalo Bill Cody, Wild Bill Hickok and Calamity Jane.⁴⁴ Stanford left Deadwood and relocated again for some time to help her daughter's tuberculosis clear up but her daughter passed away and she decided to move back to Deadwood once again in 1893.⁴⁵ She picked up where she left off with her medical practice there and added an additional medical practice in Sundance Wyoming as well.

Stanford moved to Wyoming in 1897, bought a Double D ranch and continued to do her medical practices in Wyoming and Deadwood which she traveled to and from for 50 miles on horseback.⁴⁶ Horses travel around 10-17 mph. so her trip would take approximately four and one half hours one way to reach her destination not to mention the time allocated for rests within the trip, the untamed trails and other rough conditions of traveling at that time.⁴⁷ Stanford died at the age of 62 on February 1st 1901 and is buried in Mt. Moriah cemetery.⁴⁸ So, against the oppositions of many including her husband, Stanford became a well known, accomplished and well liked doctor.

In August of 1876, Seth Bullock arrived in Deadwood Gulch, became the Sheriff and stayed there for forty-three years.⁴⁹ Initially Martha Eccles Bullock, his wife of two years and their daughter did not travel to Deadwood with Bullock but stayed behind with her parents in Michigan.⁵⁰ In July of 1878 Bullock and her daughter arrived on the Cheyenne Stage to be reunited with Seth because Deadwood had become somewhat more of a lawful place to live.

By May of 1881 Bullock set out to assist with the conditions that met her when she arrived. The Round Table Club was a ladies literary group in which she assisted in founding in 1887 and later on became the president of it. The Round Table Club is considered to be the oldest clubs of its kind today.⁵¹ Bullock also was involved with her church, community and had connections with cultural activities as well. It was also said that she entertained people around Deadwood for various socials at times with her musical abilities. Some of the Black Hills Daily Times newspaper headlines regarding Bullock in 1882 were; Played Music at Blackstone Gathering and Discoursed Some Fine Music at Sociable. Bullock was the subject of many other newspaper articles of that time in the Black Hills Daily Times which highlighted gatherings at her home, her journey to Deadwood with her daughter in 1878 and other social events of the times.⁵²

Bullock also raised three biological children and one nephew in the conditions of early Deadwood. Compared to today, raising a child back then seemed much more difficult due to not having some of the things we have today that are taken for granted such as a washing machine, which an electric form was not invented until 1908.⁵³

Bullock lived in Deadwood until her death in March of 1939 and she is buried beside her husband in the Mt. Moriah Cemetery in Deadwood. Martha Bullock and her husband's shared grave marker only reads "Seth Bullock... pioneer... Martha...his wife."⁵⁴

It seemed that Deadwood in 1879 was a turning point to a more civilized place to be so families were apt to feel comfortable with the thought of calling Deadwood their home.⁵⁵ The New York Times, May 4th, 1879 ran an article which included the following information:

Deadwood is as orderly as any Eastern city of its size. Street broils and murders, that were so frequent at first, do not now occur. There are but few traps for the unwary. The haunts of vice have been rooted out to a large extent. At night time the streets are quiet.⁵⁶

Many women of Deadwood were there from the beginning of the mining town, when it was a rough and tumble place to live, lawlessness, and brothels around every corner. So these women of Deadwood overcame many obstacles to assist in the growth of Deadwood and became contributing members during that time.

They worked hard and pressed on through conditions that were difficult to fathom. They became pioneers and traveled to Deadwood and the hills area with the fear of being killed by others either protecting their land or bandits making their way in a lawless manner. There were sicknesses without proper medical facilities in the beginning, running households without today's amenities and within these parameters women were stepping out of the "common" role of housewife and

housekeeper. Some became doctors, business owners, teachers and philanthropists to assist in the good of Deadwood and helped secure the idea that women could do what they put their minds to while fighting to gain a rightful place in history as pioneer women, women of substance.

Most had racism and women's rights to deal with in addition to the conditions of the time. However they persevered and carved their own spot into the history of Deadwood. These women made an impact through hard work and dedication even through the rough times of that early mining town. These conditions however lent themselves to help produce women with a resolve and drive to meet the conditions head on and make way for future women to take over where they left off.

NOTES

¹ Donald Jackson. *Custer's Gold: The United States Cavalry Expedition of 1874*. 1972 ed. N.p.: Yale University Press, 1972, 59.

² Watson Parker. *Deadwood: The Golden Years*. Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska Press, 1981, 7.

³ John Ames. *The Real Deadwood: True Life Histories of Wild Bill Hickok, Calamity Jane, Outlaw Towns, and Other Characters of the Lawless West*. New York: Chamberlain Bros., 2004, 9.

⁴ Jackson, Custer's Gold, 111. Bob Lee ed. *Gold Gals Guns Guts: A History of Deadwood, Lead, Spearfish, 1874-1976*. 1976. Reprint, Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2004, 40.

⁵ Darrel Nelson. "Reality and Romance: Women of the Black Hills an Exhibition-2004." Adams Museum and House. http://www.adamsmuseumandhouse.org/reality_romance.html (accessed March 14, 2009), 5.

⁶ Edward Raventon. *Island in the Plains: A Black Hills Natural History*. Neenah: Big Earth Publishing, 2003, 54.

⁷ Raventon, *Island in the Plains*, 54

⁸ Kathleen Ann. "Joyce Jefferson Interpretations." *Recreating the Lives of "Sheros" in South Dakota*. <http://www.joycejeffersoncreatesstories.com/interpretations.htm> (accessed May 8, 2009).

⁹ John D. McDermott *Gold Rush: The Black Hills Story*. Compiled by John D. McDermott. Pierre, SD: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2001, 13; Lee, *Gold Gals Guns Guts*, 10.

¹⁰ Annie D. Tallent *The First White Woman in the Black Hills: As Told By Herself*. Mitchell: Educator Supply Company, 1923.

¹¹ Lee, *Gold Gals Guns Guts*, 100-101; Ancestry. <http://Ancestry.com>.

¹² Jay Wagner 1999.P, comp. *The Argus Leader, SD*. Edited by David Kranz. Sioux Falls: Ex Machina.

¹³ "Gold in the Black Hills: Annie Tallent, 1874." Timelines.tv-History, documentary and television on the web. <http://timelines.tv/americanWest/transcripts/transcript%20AWo5.pdf> (accessed May 1, 2009).

- ¹⁴ Gold in the Black Hills.
- ¹⁵ Wagner, *Argus Leader*, 22.
- ¹⁶ Wagner, *Argus Leader*, 21-22.
- ¹⁷ Clowser, Don C. *Deadwood: The Historic City*. N.p.: Fenway Press Books, 1969, 2; Lee, *Gold Gals Guns Guts*, 15.
- ¹⁸ Clowser, *Deadwood*, 16.
- ¹⁹ Ames, *The Real Deadwood*, 11.
- ²⁰ Ames, *The Real Deadwood*, 10
- ²¹ Barbara Mann Wall. *Unlikely Entrepreneurs: Catholic Sisters and the Hospital Marketplace, 1865-1925*. N.p.: Ohio State University Press, 2005, 63.
- ²² Ames, *The Real Deadwood*, 24.
- ²³ David K. Whitlock "Lucretia 'Aunt Lou' Marchbanks was a Beloved Figure." *Black Hills Pioneer*. <http://www.bhpioneer.com/articles/2009/04/26/deadwood/doc4815ecb46e4e4990233451.prt> (accessed April 26, 2009).
- ²⁴ Parker, *Deadwood*, 74.
- ²⁵ Whitlock, "Lucretia "Aunt Lou" Beloved."
- ²⁶ Kathy Weiser. "Lucretia 'Aunt Lou' Marchbanks-The Greatest Cook in the Black Hills." *Legends of America: A Travel Site for the Nostalgic and Historic Mind*. <http://www.legendsofamerica.com/SD-AuntLou.html> (accessed April 6, 2009).
- ²⁷ Weiser, "Lucretia Greatest Cook."
- ²⁸ McDermott, *Gold Rush*, 89.
- ²⁹ Nelson, *Reality and Romance*, 3.
- ³⁰ Nelson, *Reality and Romance*, 6.
- ³¹ Trudy Severson. "History of the Homestake Gold Mine." *Homestake Mining Company*. <http://www.homestaketour.com/history.html> (accessed May 3, 2009).
- ³² Parker, *Deadwood*, 168.

³³ Parker, *Deadwood*, 168; Marshall Breeding. "Deadwood Public Library." lib-web-cats. <http://www.librarytechnology.org/lwc-displaylibrary.pl?RC=8759> (accessed May 3, 2009).

³⁴ Nelson, *Reality and Romance*, 6.

³⁵ Hearst Castle. "Phoebe Apperson Hearst (1842-1919)." Hearst Castle: Hearst San Simeon State Historical Monument. http://www.hearstcastle.org/history/phoebe_hearst.asp (accessed May 2, 2009).

³⁶ Wall, *Unlikely Entrepreneurs*, 63.

³⁷ Nelson, *Reality and Romance*, 7.; Wall, *Unlikely Entrepreneurs*, 63.

³⁸ Nelson, *Reality and Romance*, 10; Ames, *The Real Deadwood*, 75, 77.

³⁹ Lee, *Gold Gals Guns Guts*, 103.

⁴⁰ Chris Enss. *The Doctor Wore Petticoats: Women Physicians of the Old West*. Guilford : Globe Pequot Press , 2006, xii.

⁴¹ Open Collections Program at Harvard University. <http://oep.hul.harvard.edu/ww>.

⁴² Enss, *Doctor Wore Petticoats*, 107.

⁴³ Enss, *Doctor Wore Petticoats*, 107.

⁴⁴ Enss, *Doctor Wore Petticoats*, 107.

⁴⁵ Enss, *Doctor Wore Petticoats*, 108.

⁴⁶ Enss, *Doctor Wore Petticoats*, 109.

⁴⁷ Ultimate Horse Site. "Horse Speed in MPH-How Fast is Your Horse Going." The Ultimate Horse Site. <http://www.ultimatehorsesite.com/info/horsespeedmph.htm> (accessed May 7, 2009).

⁴⁸ Ames, *The Real Deadwood*, 157; Enss, *Doctor Wore Petticoats*, 109.

⁴⁹ Ames, *The Real Deadwood*, 60.

⁵⁰ Ames, *The Real Deadwood*, 64-65.

⁵¹ Kathy Weiser, "Martha Bullock-A Pillar of Deadwood Society," Legends of

America,
<http://www.legendsofamerica.com/SD-MarthaBullock.html> (accessed March 22, 2009).

⁵² "Journal: Black Hills Daily Times 1878-1886-Martha Bullock," in South Dakota Library Network, <http://www.sdlIn.net> (accessed May 3, 2009).

⁵³ Mary Bellis, "History of Washing Machines," in About.com, <http://www.inventors.about.com/od/wstartinventions/a/washingmachines> (accessed May 3, 2009).

⁵⁴ Weiser, "Martha Bullock."

⁵⁵ Lee, *Gold Gals Guns Guts*, 123.

⁵⁶ *The New York Times*, "No Idling at Deadwood: 'Booming in the Black Hills. Few Arrivals, but Plenty of Work for the Workers the Yields of the Mines Increasing Fewer Keno-Players and More Gold New Silver Leads.'" April-May 4, 1879. <http://NYTimes.com> (accessed April 26, 2009).

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