

LP2009.013.111-117

Summary of Oral History Talk by Bet Kettle on Frances Kettle

Bet Kettle delivered a talk to the Custer-Fremont Historical Society on February 21, 1997, focusing on the life and contributions of Frances Evelyn Hill Kettle, a dedicated educator and influential figure in Custer County.

Family History and Early Life

Frances Kettle's ancestors immigrated from England to Canada in the late 1860s. Will Kettle, her father, moved from Canada to the Wet Mountain Valley after hearing about the opportunities from Mormon cousins. He homesteaded land in Ula, Colorado, and eventually brought the rest of the family to settle there.

Will and his wife, Isabella, had six children, though only four survived. Isabella, who was highly educated and spoke French, died during childbirth, leaving Will to raise their children alone. Despite his limited formal education (likely up to the eighth grade), Will valued learning and ensured all his children attended college. He became a successful rancher, ran a cobbler shop, and even served in the Colorado State Legislature.

Frances Kettle's Career in Education

Frances Kettle was deeply committed to education. She graduated from high school in Fort Collins in 1911 at age 22 and later earned a degree in Home Sciences from Colorado A&M (now Colorado State University). She began her teaching career in Wyoming before returning to Colorado, where she became a teacher and later the Superintendent of Schools in Custer County.

As Superintendent, Frances spearheaded the consolidation of rural schools, which was met with resistance from old-time ranching families. However, she was determined and persuasive, eventually succeeding in uniting multiple one-room schoolhouses into a more organized school system. She was well-respected and remained in her position long after elected school superintendents were abolished.

Impact on Students and Community

Frances went beyond traditional teaching, ensuring students had access to cultural and social experiences. She personally funded students' trips to state spelling bees in Denver, helped girls afford prom dresses by purchasing fabric and sewing gowns, and even assisted boys in obtaining suits.

She also hosted formal etiquette dinners for her students, complete with fine china, lace tablecloths, and multi-course meals. She believed in preparing them for the wider world, teaching them how to use formal dining utensils and navigate social settings with confidence.

Legacy

Frances Kettle was widely admired for her dedication to education and the well-being of local students. She left a lasting mark on Custer County's educational system and was a beloved figure in the

community. Bet Kettle's talk highlighted Frances' generosity, persistence, and commitment to helping young people succeed, ensuring they would never feel out of place in any setting.

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