

MRS. COLLINS PASSES AWAY

Prominent Woman Who Has Lived
Many Years in the Valley
Is Dead.

(Special to the Daily Chronicle.)

Belgrade, Dec. 10.—Mrs. C. C. Collins died at her home on Quaw boulevard Sunday night at eight o'clock, after a week's illness. She was taken sick Sunday night a week ago with pleurisy which later developed into pneumonia. Her husband and all her children were at her bedside when she passed away.

Mrs. Collins' maiden name was Lavina Yates and she was born April 12, 1837, in Platt county, Missouri, and was the daughter of Grandma Yates, who died at Dry Creek several years ago. She was married in 1855 to William Tribble of Andrew county, Missouri, and to them three children were born. They are Mrs. Kate Cowan of Bozeman, Mrs. Mary Ballard of Dry Creek, who died seven years ago, and G. D. Tribble of Dry Creek. Mr. Tribble died when her children were young and in 1870 she crossed the plains to Montana with her mother and other members of her family. The trip was made by ox team. She went to Radersburg to live and there married C. C. Collins, a Montana pioneer. Three children were born to them, Mrs. J. M. Lewis of Three Forks, Mrs. T. W. Brewington of Fromberg and Mrs. Frank Collins of Manhattan.

In the spring of 1872 Mr. and Mrs. Collins moved to Gallatin valley and settled on a ranch on Dry Creek, where they made their home for more than thirty years. They sold this place several years ago and have since made their home in Belgrade.

Deceased leaves besides her husband and children, one sister and three brothers, B. F. Yates of California, Solomon Yates of Dry Creek and G. L. Yates of Butte and Mrs. Annie Miller of Dry Creek. There are also twenty-four grandchildren besides a host of nieces and nephews.

Although over eighty years Mrs. Collins, until this last brief illness, has been most active and prided herself on being able to do all her work without assistance. She was lovingly known to a host of friends outside the family circle, as Aunt Vina and her home was always open to her friends, who loved to drop in and hear her relate the experiences of the pioneer days in her graphic and fascinating manner.

She was a devoted mother and a kind friend and neighbor and in her death the valley loses one of its finest citizens. She has many friends throughout this vicinity who will wish to extend to the a host of friends outside the family will be held Tuesday at twelve o'clock at the Baptist church in Belgrade, of which she has been a member since childhood.

Granny Yates Held up Sermon While She Spanked Child, Says Old-Timers in Letter

The following letter from George Byron Morse, who years ago preached at the Dry creek and East Gallatin Baptist churches, those who are related to or knew the grand old woman of the Gallatin, "Granny" Yates:

Mr. John M. Peets,
Bozeman, Montana.

My Dear John:

The legend "From J. M. Peets" on the wrapper of a newspaper just to hand this morning sent through me a thrill of pleasure followed by a deep streak of repentant regrets. The feeling of delight was that the bearer of that name was still alive and remembered me and that I yet possessed the opportunity of voicing regret at failure to respond to that political poetical picture card that arrived a few years since.

Whose happy thought was it to thus keep green the memory of dear old Granny Yates. What a strong, outstanding personality she had. How her character stamped itself on scores and scores of those who lived within a number of miles of the district known at that time as Dry creek. Well do I remember her and her sharp characterizations of people. One was not apt to forget her remarks. I recall her speaking of one for whom she had no use at all and some one asked if she did not think he would get to heaven. Quick as a flash came back her answer, "Oh, I suppose so; he'll be saved for a fool."

Granny Yates caused me to stop my sermon in the old Dry creek schoolhouse one Sunday morning for a few moments while she carried out a little family discipline. Granny was sitting right in front of me on the front row. Big, jolly, laughing George Yates, her son, was sitting about midway back in one of the school seats. With that jovial spirit of his he was not disposed to be too severe on his little three or four year old daughter who was inclined to run around the aisles, laughing at those she knew. This quite annoyed Granny who turned and looked at George several times throwing into that one good eye of hers all the rebuke that should have been necessary. But George would not exercise his rights and prerogatives of a father, so unable to endure it longer Granny as the baby ran by her grabbed her by the clothes at the belt line, lifted her across her lap and administered a few rousing spanks and as she set the baby down said to her, "Now go back to your father, where you belong." I then went on with my sermon and finished without any more trouble from babies running about.

We were expecting Reverend Frank Bostwick of the American Baptist Publication society to hold a few weeks meeting at Dry creek. It was decided that I as pastor should go down there for a week ahead and hold some meetings and as it were "tune up" for his coming. On the third of my meetings, I had been pressing upon those gathered the value of prayer for our own families, those in them that had not yet accepted Christ. Then I gave out the hymn, "Revive us again," turned to the organ which was up in a corner of the platform and started to play and lead the singing with my back to the people. Suddenly, in between the lines I heard a strange weird crooning, sounds that I had never heard before and that sent cold chills chasing up and down my spine. Turning, I saw Granny Yates standing at the front, her hands clasped and her arms waving rhythmically with her crooning. Before the chorus to that verse was finished, I could hear sobs and groans from different parts of the room and I knew that we were in for a real, southern camp meeting time. Granny had started it.

There was a revival of spiritual interest within what one might call family lines. And I verily believe it began with that crooning of Granny Yates which undoubtedly represented the Spirit making intercession for us in groanings that could not be uttered. The impulse that got Granny Yates to her feet was, I feel sure, the sense that she had more at stake, family-wise than anyone else there; the majority were her descendants, she loved them, she did not want that one should be missing from the salvation and the glory which she knew to be hers through the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have no doubt that the ingathering at that time with an answer to the groaning and crooning of Granny Yates as she gathered her descendants in her arms of faith and held them up before the Lord. It was in connection with those meetings that I had the privilege of baptizing in the East Gallatin Mrs. Anna Miller mentioned in the article. Should you ever see Mrs. Miller and have a chance to speak with her, kindly give her my christian love and tell her I often think of her mother, her brothers and sisters, and her children. I often think of the brethren at Dry creek and also those at East Gallatin. What wonderful interest they manifested in the meetings, the miles they would drive to hear a sermon. The energy they put forth in those days should shame us today.

Thank you, John, for remembering me with that paper. Not many names in it now to catch my eye. I do not think the lack is due to any failure of memory on my part. Probably I knew some of them as girls and marriage has obliterated their names for me. The advertising columns had one name for me, Maxwell's, and the groceries and fresh vegetables identified it for me. Remember me to them if you please. As I run down the column "Bozeman and Vicinity," I find names that recall persons I knew, some well, some only slightly, perhaps some of them are names of the children rather than those I knew. Kleinschmidt; S. A. Mendenhall; J. L. Hartman, is that the judge or a son? Fred Willson—I'm wondering if that is General Willson's son whom I knew as a boy. We had on our force here some years ago a Dr. Lee Willson, cousin, I believe to Fred. The names of Mrs. E. L. Houston brings back to my memory a numerous family. Miss Houston, the teacher and superintendent of schools who sang for a while in our Baptist choir; a sister, Mrs. Bagshaw who came from the south with a lively daughter named Dixie. Mrs. Bagshaw also taught in the schools. Then there was that charming daughter of Editor Alderson whom I had the privilege of marrying to one of the Houston brothers. Poor fellow he went south and died of tuberculosis, I believe, the wife now a sweet, gentle widow bearing her sorrow with wonderful outward fortitude and devoting herself to her little daughter whom I had the great privilege of carrying through an attack of scarlet fever to become later their family physician. What a flood of memory that newspaper has started. The name

of Chisholm brings back to the picture of Col. O. P. Chisholm. And of course quite a group came before me when I read the name of Matthew, though I do not recognize the initials.

I hope you and your family are well. I think of you and them frequently. You may be interested to learn that my sister, Phebe, Mrs. Fullaway, has been compelled on account of failing health to resign her position in the Y. W. Her trouble, although the physicians have not told her or her family,

pernicious anemia. Personally, I fear that in spite of the excessive feeding with liver and liver extracts, they will not be able to control it. However, these matters are in the Lord's hands.

Had an interesting call the other evening from Rev. Mr. Norton, who is now located here. I also saw in the paper that his successor had just passed away.

Affectionately, your brother in Christ,

GEORGE BYRON MORSE.

MARY WELLS YATES
"GRANNY" YATES OF THE GALLATIN VALLEY

by
Betty (Mrs. D. J.) Davis

History 300
History of Montana

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MARY WELLS YATES

Mary Wells was born in Virginia on November 14, 1815. At the age of 17 she married the widower of her sister, George Yates. Mr. Yates had three children by his former wife and needed a mother for them. The Wells family were strong Baptists of the southern "Hardshelled" variety and searched the Bible over for a word that might say it was wrong for a sister to marry her brother-in-law. They must have satisfied themselves because Mary and George were married and soon afterward left Virginia for Missouri - each on a horse and with a bedroll tied behind. They traveled this way for 1600 miles and settled in Jackson County, Missouri. This was Mr. Yates' home and his three children remained here while he went to fetch a new bride. Nine more children were born to the family. Later they moved to Platte County, Missouri. Some sources that are not completely authentic say that they lived in Savannah, Andrew County, Missouri.

Not too much is known about the life of the family in Missouri. When the Civil War broke out, raiders came in to Platte County and were shooting the slave holders. The Yates family freed their slaves voluntarily about this time. Some of the Yates' kinfolks lived in the same vicinity and when the raiders stopped to find out where this particular family lived, Mary Yates gave them directions and then ran across the field and warned the family. When the raiders entered the house they found the beds still warm and returned to Mary Yates to question her. But the ones warned had escaped and the man of the family joined Price's army. ^{1/}

Mr Yates died in the late fifties from typhoid fever. Apparently the family was self-sustaining on the home farm. However, in 1863, when the news of the gold strike in Montana's Alder Gulch reached Missouri, the spirit of adventure that moved Mary Wells Yates to leave her Virginia home again, made her decide to go to Montana. Mrs Yates was 48 years old by this time and most of the children were grown, or nearly so. Subsequently she joined a wagon train, probably at Independence, and drove

1/ This information has been gathered by conversational means only. So far as is known, nothing has been written that has been documented. Many of the stories are only half told--such as this one. They are used in order to give indication of the personality of Mary Wells Yates.

out six shod cows. She brought three of the older boys with her. Because she had cows she was able to milk them and churned butter on the side of the wagon as it bumped over the rocky trail.

When Mary Yates arrived in Virginia City the cows she had driven out were sold at such a profit that she was able to finance another round trip back to Missouri in 1864. This time she brought more of her children, and instead of coming through the south Pass in Wyoming as she had on the first train, came up the Missouri River to Fort Benton--the way she had returned to Missouri. When she made the trip back in 1864, the flat boats were held up close to Fort Benton by herds of buffalo crossing the Missouri River from their winter range to summer range. It is said that they crossed for three days and nights along 18 miles of the river--a lot of buffalo.

This was only the first of five more such round trips. Before she died in April, 1907. ^{2/} Mrs. Yates had gone across the plains between Missouri and Montana 13 times. The last time she returned to Montana by the Oregon Shortline Railroad to Dillon. On several of the trips Mrs. Yates - now called Granny by those who knew her, acted as guide and organizer for the emigrants. She first brought all her relatives from Missouri to Montana and others who wanted to come. Apparently she was acutely aware of the possibilities for a new life in the northwest and wanted to aid in populating it with relatives and friends.

The third trip was made up the Yellowstone - probably in 1865 or 1866. The train was always careful to make camp on a rise so that a lookout could be kept for Indians. One morning on the Yellowstone when the stock was being taken down to the river for watering before starting on the long day, Indians rose out of the bushes and attacked the herders. The man on the bluff immediately fired and drove off the attacking Indians. One of the Yates' boys, Sol, was wounded in the leg-- the only injury resulting from the attack. Sol managed to jump on the back of his brother Ben's horse and return

^{2/} The dates of birth and death were found on a grave marker in the Dry Creek Cemetery, north of Belgrade. The newspaper article at the time of Mrs. Yates' death stated that she was 93. A paper written by a descendant in June, 1949, Mrs Jennie Ballard, states that she died at the age of 94. The marker states that she was 91 years, 3 months, and 13 days old at the time of death.

safely to camp. His leg was bound and splinted and tied to the wagon braces and he recovered without any infirmity of any kind. After the Indian attack, the youngest boy, George L.,

named for his father, was put among the flour sacks or barrels for protection and rode that way the remaining miles to Virginia City. On another trip through the south pass, just out of Salt Lake City, she met a stranger coming from the north who went by without passing the time of day; this amity would certainly be usual on a long and lonely road. The next day three vigilantes from Virginia City asked after the stranger and it developed that he was a murderer heading east to escape the vigilantes. The vigilantes asked Granny for some whiskey for their canteens, saying that Bill Officer, Missourian living in Virginia City, had told them if they met her on the trail she would have some whiskey for them. With this recommendation she accommodated them, and in a few days when they returned with their prisoner, she again filled their canteens with the promise of payment when they all met in Virginia City. On this particular trip Mrs. Yates brought back three barrels of whiskey and three barrels of dried apples. She made pies from the apples and sold them to the miners for one dollar apiece. This is not a great price in 1951, but undoubtedly quite a premium in the 1860's.

After the first trip out with the cows pulling the wagon, Mary Yates rode horses and was careful to see that only good horses and mules left Missouri with the emigrant trains. She rode side-saddle after the manner of the period. Some of the horses in Gallatin and Madison Valleys at the present time are from the breed stock Granny brought west.

Mrs Yates set up the newcomers in some cabins she had built. These they could use until they could get located. This place was called "Pilgrim's Rest," and was located below

Emmett Huffine's on Foster Creek where it runs in to Smith Creek. Strangely enough she never homesteaded, but bought a place of her own eventually.

Granny Yates must have been a woman of character and purpose with much forcefulness in her makeup. Perhaps if more were known of her motivations and "modus operandi" a better picture could be drawn of her personality. She was not given the opportunity for any sort of formal education, but the fact that she could not read nor write did not prevent her from having well-defined opinions. From the reports of those who knew her she was first a woman, then a Baptist and then a Democrat. And the intensity of the progression increases with it. One story told of her has it that during a Republican administration, when the grandchildren would return empty handed from the mail box, Granny blamed it on the "Black Republicans."

She apparently found some spiritual sustenance from the Bible and often quoted and misquoted it. If any attempt was made at correcting the misquotation her indignation prevented the accurate one from pressing the correction.

Perhaps because she did discipline herself, Granny Yates demanded proper conduct in those about her. She was not even yielding with her grandchildren as grandmothers often are. On one occasion she snatched up a youngster who was running up and down the aisle at church and delivered a sound spanking in the presence of the child's parents.

Mrs Yates was a woman of sturdy build, well proportioned and able to hold her own in the frontier life she chose for herself. She was about five feet seven or eight inches tall and weighed about 160 pounds. A great-grandson tells a humorous anecdote that is credible. In later life the children often did Granny's shopping in the town of Bozeman. When the

shopping trip was to be made every three months or so, someone would stop by Granny's home close to Belgrade and pick up her shopping list. One time she order a corset and when it came it was too long and uncomfortable. Granny did not propose to wait the three months necessary to make the exchange so took the corset out on the chopping block and hacked it down to her length. Since a male was telling the story it was not possible to probe out some of the finer points such as which end was cut, how it was rebound, regartered, etc.

At one time when Granny was settled in a place by herself, she took a boy from the orphans home into her own home. The boy, Georgie Farrell, was about nine or ten years old at the time. He grew up under Granny's guidance and gave her companionship as her own family went about their everyday affairs.

Granny's independence is known to have asserted itself in more than one way. She once drowned out and killed a large badger with a shovel. The badger had been molesting her garden. As the years went by and her eyesight failed she still rode horseback to visit friends and relatives about the valley. Once when approaching a gate, someone called directions to her. She informed them that she knew the way as well as they and to please keep quiet.

When her eyesight was completely gone she often would sit and rock and talk to herself. Doubtless these monologues were of great interest to the grandchildren, but Mrs. Yates preferred to hold forth in solitude and would send them from the room. One enterprising youngster, however, when sent from the room, walked to the door and shut it but did not leave. Granny discovered his presence and whacked him with her cane. It is a fact that he never listened in again.

The decendents of Mrs. Yates are scattered over most of

the western part of the United States and some of them returned to Missouri. In a recent reckoning it was found that there were 60 grandchildren and 90 great grandchildren. One of her children, Zack, was killed on the Yellowstone in the 1870's by the Indians. Sam, another son, drowned at about the same time in the slough at the confluence of the Jefferson and the Boulder rivers.

One of the daughters, Lavina, who came west with her mother on the trip of 1864, married Columbus C. Collins. Mr. Collins had come west in 1863 with Dan Creighton. Dan Creighton drove an outfit of 62 wagons loaded with telegraph wire and each drawn by four mules. The wagons debarked from Davenport, Iowa, with destination Virginia City, Montana. The son of C. C. Collins and Lavina Yates, Frank Collins of San Diego, California, and a grandchild of Mary Wells Yates, has contributed a great deal of information for this paper. He also has many interesting observations on boom days in Virginia City which were passed on to him by his father.

C. C. Collins is reported to have been the individual in the crowd to whom Clubfoot George called during the tense moments of the hanging of the stage coach robbers by the vigilantes in January, 1864. Mr. Collins was also present at the arrest and hanging of Captain Slade. He has passed on the sidelight that it was when Molly Slade was observed dashing over the hill toward Virginia City that the officials called out, "Men, do your duty," which they promptly did. Both of these incidents are reported at length by Thomas J. Dimsdale in "The Vigilantes" published in 1866.

These accounts give us almost direct reports on the kind of life that Mary Wells Yates was projected into upon her arrival

in Montana. For a widow woman to come and leave and return again and again to this rugged frontier and to be enterprising and strong enough to make an honest place for herself among Montana pioneers, gives pause for conjecture. Pherhaps her reasons for the role she played were never voiced, perhaps they were obvious at the time--but they are still obscure to the rising generation.

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HISTORY OF GRAY YATES

(Taken from newspaper clippings loaned me by Mrs Rex Duncan, February, 1959.)

HERE AND THREE

V. T. B.

Mary Wells Yates, better known by hundreds of people as "Granny Yates," was a prominent figure in Gallatin County history. A great many people count her as one of their ancestors and will be interested to hear something of her life. I am not related to her but I found her story intensely interesting, having read the inscription on the headstone of her grave in the Dry Creek cemetery.

She was born in Virginia, November 14, 1815. When she was 17 she married the widower of her dead sister, George Yates, who had three children, and needed a mother for them. Being strong Baptists and extremely religious, the Wells family were not sure it was entirely proper for a sister to marry a brother-in-law. The wedding was postponed while they diligently searched the Bible for some definite information. They must have found enough to satisfy themselves for Mary and George were married and left for Missouri on horseback. The bedroll was tied behind. 1800 miles were covered in this manner to Jackson County. Mr. Yates had already established a home and his three children had remained there while their father went to Virginia for a stepmother. Nine more children were added to the family. Later they moved to Platte County, Missouri.

They were living here when the Civil War broke out and the Yates family voluntarily freed their slaves. George had died in the late fifties, but many of the children were nearly grown; so the family seemed able to care for themselves. In 1863 came the news of the gold strike in Montana. Mary Yates decided to join one of the wagon trains going west. Three of the older boys accompanied her. They drove six shod milk cows which helped pay their way as butter churned readily fastened to the side of the wagon, bumping over the prairies.

When she arrived in Virginia City the cows sold for such a high price that she was able to finance a round trip back to Missouri in 1864 to bring out some more of her children. Most of us would have considered one trip in a wagon across the roadless plains and mountains beyond endurance. Mary Yates took a number of them. The second time she took the river trip from Fort Benton. The flat boats were held up by herds of buffalo crossing the river at one point. It was said they crossed for three days and nights along 18 miles of river. It is hard to believe that over a period of a few years trigger-happy hunters could all but exterminate such great herds.

In all Mary Yates made the trip before she died in April, 1907, 13 times between Montana and Missouri. The last time she returned by the way of the Oregon Short Line to Dillon. This must have been a vast improvement over a wagon pulled by cows. On some of the journeys she acted as guide and organizer for the emigrants. The State Chamber should honor her memory as she brought all her relatives and many friends, and was a booster for a new life in the Northwest.

The third trip was made up the Yellowstone, probably in 1866. Camp was always made on a rise; so that a sharp lookout could be kept for Indians. One morning when the stock was being taken to the river for water, Indians attacked the herders. Men above in the camp on the bluff, fired and drove off the intruders. A son, Sol Yates was wounded in the leg, but he managed to jump on a horse and ride to safety. The youngest boy, George, was hidden among the flour barrels after the attack and he rode there until they reached Virginia City.

On another trip through the south pass, near Salt Lake City, she met a stranger coming from the north, who passed without stopping. This behavior was unheard of on the long lonely trail. The next day three Vigilantes from Virginia City rode up and asked if she had met a stranger. He was an escaped murderer heading east. In a few days

they returned with their prisoner.

On this trip Mrs Yates brought back three barrels of apples from Missouri, made pies and sold them to the miners in Virginia City for a dollar per piece. That was quite a price for a pie in the 1869's even in the gold camps. Considering the long haul for the apples, the price was not great.

The first time only was made by using cows to pull the wagon. Thereafter good horses and mules were used. The lady, herself, rode side-saddle and many horses in the Gallatin were descended from those she brought across the plains.

Mrs Yates built some cabins at "Pilgrim's Rest" on Foster creek where she housed the new comers until they could get located on land of their own. It is strange that she never homesteaded but eventually bought a place.

From her activities it may be assumed that "Granny Yates" was a lady of great character and determination. She accomplished what a great many men could not have done. She had no formal education and could neither read nor write. She was an ardent Democrat and blamed every drawback under an administration of the opposing party or the "Black Republicans." The Bible was her authority and she apparently gained much comfort from quoting, or misquoting from its pages. Any attempt to correct her was met with such indignation that the offender did not press the correction.

She insisted on proper conduct in all these around her and was unyielding even with her grandchildren. In one instance at church she snatched up a child, who was running up and down the aisle, and administered a sound spanking in the presence of his parents, and the congregation. There was no further disturbance in her presence. Modern day ministers would probably enjoy having her as a member of their congregation.

Mrs Yates was five feet seven or eight inches tall, sturdily built and well able to take care of herself. A story is told of her ability to make things do. In her later life, a grandson or great grandson stopped at her home near Belgrade to get her shopping list on a trip to Bozeman. Since in the horse and buggy days sometimes several months went by between trips. One time she ordered a corset and the purchased one brought back was too long. Not wishing to wait for several months until the next trip to have it exchanged, Granny had her own ideas about how to remedy the matter. She took the garment out to the chopping block and hacked it down to the proper size.

After all her children were grown and had homes of their own she took an orphaned boy to raise. He was about ten years old and gave her companionship for some years. Even at an advanced age she rode horseback about the valley to visit her friends and relatives. Once she killed a badger with a shovel for molesting her garden.

When her eye sight failed, she sat for hours rocking and talking to herself. Her private conversation should have been most interesting, considering her long life of many adventures but she would not let anyone listen in. Once a great grandson attempted to secretly; but he was discovered and driven from the room with Granny's cane in attendance at his rear extremity.

Some of her descendants returned to Missouri; but many are scattered over Montana and other western states. At one time it was estimated that she had 60 grandchildren and 90 great grandchildren.

One of her sons was killed on the Yellowstone by the Indians in the 1879's. Another was drowned at a point where the Boulder River flows into the Jefferson.

A son-in-law, C. C. Collins is supposed to have been present at the hanging of Clubfoot George Lane in 1864, and also at the hanging of Captain Slade.

Granny Yates had enough experiences in her lifetime to fill several books. It is too bad that some enterprising individual did not make the attempt when she was here to give first-hand information. There are many other pioneers whose true stories would make fiction seem tame to comparison; but these stories are buried with them.



Mary Wells Yates
1815-1907

By David A. Miller

Mary (Granny) Wells Yates was my great-great grandmother. Granny's daughter Lucy Anne married Solomon Hill Miller, the wagon master of the train that brought them to Montana. My great-grandparents Lucy Anne and Solomon Miller's son Jacob Frye (Yoke) Miller married Lucy Frances Cowan and became my grandparents. To Jacob and Lucy, my father Newell Hill Miller was born. Newell then married my mother Edna Yvonne Parker, daughter of Skip and Frankie (Coursien) Parker. Most of the known story of her life as written here takes place following the death of my great-great grandfather, Solomon Yates in Missouri. A "Granny Yates" picnic continues to be held the first Sunday in August in honor of her life. The last several have been held in Three Forks, Montana with as many as 100 family members in attendance.

Mary Wells was born in Lee County, Virginia on November 12, 1815, the daughter of Zachariah, Sr. and Rebecca Wells. Her father had come from Wales to Virginia in 1762. Her mother came from Ireland in the same year. As a young girl Mary had went by the nickname of Polly. In her childhood in Big Stone Gap, Lee County, Virginia Mary's life was pretty normal. This was in the western most part of Virginia, nestled between Kentucky and Tennessee. Now a part of Wise County, Big Stone Gap is in the area of the "Three Forks" of the Powell River and very near Daniel Boone's Cumberland Gap that opened Kentucky for settlement. The countryside is hilly, wooded and green. In the community of Big Stone Gap,

three families were entwined: Sheppard, Yates, and Wells. These families were all presumed to be Baptists of the southern "hard shell" variety.

When Mary reached the age of seventeen or eighteen, her life changed dramatically. Her sister, Rachel had married Solomon Yates. Solomon was born about 1802 the son of William Yates and Cecilia (Seley) Yates. The Yates were owners of an estate in Missouri. Her sister and Solomon had three children, Isaac, George Anderson and Rebecca when the sister passed away in Missouri. Some notes state they had another child, William H.

When Mary's sister died, Solomon Yates immediately left Missouri to return to Virginia to marry Mary. The Wells family was a strict family who lived completely by the Bible. They were members of the Baptist Church and did not know if it was proper for a sister to marry her brother-in-law, so the wedding was postponed until the Bible had been searched for an answer. Apparently an answer was found and they were married on September 9, 1834. They were married by Andrew Turner (according to the Lee County Marriage Register) At the early age of eighteen Mary became the mother of three stepchildren, who were still in Missouri. Solomon was known to be a young man of excellent qualities. Both families had lived in Wilkes County, North Carolina and then in Lee County, Virginia before the Yates family moved to Missouri.

As soon as the wedding was over, Solomon and Mary left for Missouri. Some articles state the trip was 1,000 miles and some say 1,600 miles. In any event it was quite a trip for a young bride. Their entire trip west to Jackson County, Missouri was made on horseback. The time traveled was said to be 37 days and was without mishap of any kind. The couple remained in Jackson County for two years and then over the next fifteen years moved to Platte purchase, Nodaway and Andrews Counties, in that order. After living in Platte County for ten of those years they sold the farm to Lish Arrington. Lish paid for part of the purchase in slaves (probably five in number). Solomon and Mary took all their belongings, their growing family, and their newly acquired slaves and moved to Andrew County. They purchased a larger farm in Andrew County. After two years there, new land kept calling and they once again sold out there and moved to Gentry County.

Solomon Hill Yates died in 1857 while they were in Gentry County. He was stricken with Cholera (or Typhoid Fever), an illness that from which he did not recover and crossed the dark valley of death. Mrs. Yates was left with nine natural living children and three stepchildren. The three stepchildren, Isaac, George Anderson and Rebecca were the oldest. The children born of Solomon and Mary were Rachael, born May 25, 1835; Lavina, born April 2, 1837; Benjamin Franklin, born February 16, 1838; Evaline, born April 22, 1841; Solomon, Jr., born in 1845; Lucy Anne (Annie), born October 1, 1847; Samuel P., born in 1849; Zachariah Thomas, born November 21, 1853; and George L., born in 1856. Two children, Bettie and Willie died in infancy. Mary had given birth to eleven children, which was no small feat.

The entire family continued to make their home in Gentry County until after the Civil War began. Mary proved to be quite capable of taking care of herself and her large family following the death of Solomon. While she was still on the estate, she had trouble with guerrilla forces. One day a group of them came and stole a barrel of her good meat. As the soldiers left she told them she had "pizened" the meat. With that remark, she later recovered the meat where the soldiers had dumped it. With a fortitude rarely seen in women today, Mrs. Yates took up the battle of life for herself and children. She was apparently a brave woman,

who successfully fought the battle of survival. Mary was written up in "Progressive Men of Montana", c1901, an unusual place for a woman to be written about. The article which was included as a part of her son-in-laws history, James Sitton, began "Grandmother Yates was a prominent character in the early history of both Missouri and Montana." In an excerpt from that article, Mary stated, "Constant discouragement made me leave the land within which I had found a wilderness and for thirty years had seen blossom as the rose, and once again seek frontier life." On May 5, 1864 she and her unmarried children left for Virginia City, Montana.

Mary had heard about the many opportunities to be found in the West. She sold her large estate, freed her slaves (according to the Great Falls Tribune of 8/12/29 Mary possessed a family of five blacks, which she sold in 1859 sensing the possibility of a war between the North and the South), and joined a wagon train at Denver, Worth County, Missouri (*some reference is made to the wagon train beginning at Yates, Missouri*) headed for Virginia City, Montana. The route from Denver, Worth County, Missouri to Virginia City, Montana was up the South Platte by way of Fort Kearney, Fort Laramie, Fort Halleck and the Bitter Creek Valley, which was the California Overland route. The boss of the wagon train was Solomon Hill Miller. Mr. Miller was to become Mary's son-in-law with a few months after the wagon train reached Virginia City. Mr. Miller married Lucy Anne (Annie) on November 13, 1864.

On this first trip between Missouri and Montana in May of 1864, Mary brought only her three oldest sons and apparently Lucy Anne, as she was married in Virginia City a short time later. The other children remained in Missouri with relatives. With the money she had gotten from the estate, she purchased a team of oxen and six shod milk cows. The oxen were used to pull the wagon, while the cows produced fresh milk. Mary also produced fresh butter. This was churned while fastened to the side of the wagon as they moved along. Mary had a number of chickens along and had fresh eggs. Mary Wells Yates was credited with bringing the first Plymouth Rock breed of chickens to Montana Territory. Where wood was plentiful they would cut and tie an ample supply under the wagon beds to last over the desert places and were always providential.

"A train just ahead of us had its stock stampeded, with two of their men killed and two women captured. We hauled the families to Deep Creek station, but had to leave their supplies along the road. Mary stated that the Indians took what they wanted and burned the rest. A party from Illinois traveled with us a few days, but said we were traveling too slow. They pulled three miles beyond where we camped at Cold Springs. They had stopped to feed at noon, when the Indians ran their stock off and killed two men. Our men followed and recovered all the stock they could, also buried the dead. The Reverend (later of Bozeman) Mr. Bird officiating at the burial. "It was a wholesome lesson to our wagon train," said Mary Wells Yates. Nearly every accident on the plains of that nature was the result of foolhardiness or carelessness. Later a wagon train overtook us and we were informed that they had found two empty graves and two nude corpses near the graves. The Indians had evidently been watching, and saw us roll the dead in their blankets."

"The next camp was at a stage station. A lot of immigrants had been there the night before and engaged in a warm political discussion. Argument ran high for a time, then blows followed, when one Rueben Cox, later of Idaho, single handed, cleaned out the whole of one faction. The station was kept by half breed Indians, and it was laughable to hear them tell of the fight."

On a few long hills the wagon train used double teams. Mary remembered one mountain where the timber was very dense. It was almost dark and they were in terror of the Indians, which they had noticed them following some miles back before the timber got thick. Some girls went into the bushes to pick berries and being out of hearing we were sure the Indians had gotten them. Their parents were almost frantic until they were found. We came through Echo and Weber canyons to Ogden, which was a small Mormon hamlet at the time. They then passed up Gear river where Mary said it was the finest fishing she had ever seen. They then crossed to the Snake river over the sand holes route. This trail was so called because you could dig holes in the sand and find water anywhere, but Mary said, "we had to hurry in getting water or the holes would be gone." "It filled right up again with sand without leaving any trace of the hole." The wagon train was comfortably outfitted and provisioned for at least a year. The wagon train arrived at Alder Gulch on September 1, 1864, according to one source. Another source said they arrived by the old stage route in Virginia City on October 7th.

Once when Mary was leading a wagon train from Joplin, Missouri, she finally realized that they had gotten off on the wrong trail and traveled about 2 days into what is now Idaho, she retraced the route coming again to the Jefferson River. River crossing was by ferry, which was run by a Frenchman. When he wanted \$100 to take the wagons across, Mary refused, knowing the wagon people could not afford such a steep price. She said, "We will camp here until the river goes down, and then we will ford the river." So they made camp, cooked up beans and made hard tack (a bread fried in a skillet), unloaded the wagons, washed clothes, and aired their bedding. It was while Mrs. Yates was plumping her featherbed that the Frenchman approached Mary and offered to buy the bed. She said it wasn't for sale. That featherbed must have really looked good, because the Frenchman finally offered to take the wagons across the river and in addition give Mary a \$50 gold piece just to have it. A deal was made.

In addition to the many miners, a few families were already in Virginia City, and there was quite a village. Mary had brought several head of cattle with her and they never lost a one that first winter in Montana. The day they arrived a man was hung. He had been mining with a partner and ran away with the proceeds. The Vigilantes followed him down toward Utah, catching him at Red Rock (south of Dillon, MT). They had brought him back and tied him to the fatal tree, as an example to all evil doers. That winter of 64-65 was a red letter year for Utah. A freight blockade brought necessities up so high that people forgot all about reasonable prices, and that territory shipped nearly everything in the fruit, vegetable and flour line. The latter sold for \$1.00 a pound, potatoes 60 cents per pound and everything else in proportion. The merchants were holding flour for higher prices, when the miners held a meeting and agreed to give them the above price and distribute it among those who needed it. Which they did.

During the many years in Virginia City, the family witnessed many historic events, such as the opening of the first official Montana Territorial Court, Judge Hezekiah L. Hosmer, presiding, and the eventual end of "Vigilante Days" in 1867. In January 1865 a tremendous Virginia City crowd watched one of the longest boxing matches in history when Con Orem and Hugh O'Neil fought, or perhaps struggled, to a 185-round draw. They witnessed the creation of Montana's first newspaper, the Montana Post, that spoke out constantly the "law or order" virtues of vigilantes and the Republican party. Granny's son-in-law Christopher C.

Collins was present at the hanging of Clubfoot George Lane in 1864 and also the hanging of Captain Slade. She herself was a witness to the lawlessness of Henry Plummer's gang and the work of the Vigilantes.

The next spring Mary sold her cows for such a high price that she could well afford a round trip back to Missouri with one of her sons in September 1865. This trip was to bring out more of her children. This time they traveled by mule train. She and her son joined a train consisting of 30 wagons. Not being loaded they made a quick trip, reaching their home in Missouri before cold weather. However, this trip was not without incident. Going down the Platte they came to a station where some men had been attacked and had killed two Indians. One woman went to her mess box, took out a long butcher knife and scalped one of the Indians from his eye brows to his back bone, rolled it up to take home with her. She had remarked that she intended to show the people that she had not been to Montana in vain. Mary stayed on the farm that winter and in May started back to Virginia City with a married daughter and her family.

They crossed the Platte River at the old California crossing and came up through Ash Hollow, headed for the Yellowstone route, a long and tedious drive. On this route they had their daily Indian scares and the birth of Mary's granddaughter to relieve the monotony of the trail. They fell in with one Mr. Rich who was bringing thirteen wagon loads of guns and ammunition to Fort Ellis. Just this side of the Big Rosebud we found two new graves and a wagon. An old man, by the name of Howell and a Dutchman had been killed while out fishing. They struck the Yellowstone at Benson's landing, expecting to find a boat, but it had broken loose and gone down the river the day before we arrived. They then had to pull up to the present site of Livingston, Montana and forded the river. They raised their wagon beds on ox yokes and got over the river very well, but the water was extremely swift and deep. One of the wagons capsized and all of its load of merchandise was lost or damaged. They then came on through old Fort Ellis to Bozeman, which at the time consisted of three cabins. They camped where main street is now.

The next morning they crossed the West Gallatin River about where the crossing is now, an on up the road through Red Bluff, arriving in Virginia City on September 11. The mines in Alder Gulch began to be worked out and new ones were being discovered elsewhere, causing the people to scatter. A great many going to Helena's Last Chance and Confederate gulches.

"Granny", as Mary became known rode a good portion of the distance across the plains side-saddle. She believed that Montana needed plain home folks to mingle with the miners, gamblers and outlaws. She was well on her way to helping to stock Montana with settled home folks. At 50 years old Granny showed that fortitude and endurance it was her fortune to posses.

Granny Yates had many experiences during her thirteen trips back and forth across the United States. Some, no doubt were very pleasant, and others a bit on the hair-raising side. She had brought back three barrels of Missouri apples on one of her trips and made homemade pies and sold them to the miners in Virginia City for one dollar each. That trip also included three barrels of whiskey, of which there is no record of what happened to it. On another trip she was going through the South Pass near Salt Lake City when she met a stranger who would not stop and talk. The next day the Vigilantes came along and asked if she had seen a stranger passing. Three days later the Vigilantes returned with the prisoner, an escaped murderer. On one the later trips, the wagon train had to stop long enough for Granny

to help deliver a baby, her granddaughter Jenny Collins. On a third trip up the Yellowstone in 1866, she met Indian trouble. The train was attacked and she grabbed her youngest son, George L., who was about nine years old and stuffed him into a flour barrel. She then grabbed her gun and joined the men to see if she could down an Indian or two. Her son Sol was wounded in the leg in this attack. He jumped onto a horse and had ridden to safety after being wounded. The Indians were finally drove off, but George L. rode on to Virginia City submerged in the flour. On a trip down the Missouri River from Fort Benton, the flatboats were held up by herds of buffalo crossing the river. She had never seen so many buffalo. It was said that it took three days for the buffalo to cross and they were spread over an eighteen mile stretch of the river.

In 1868, Granny took her cattle to the South Boulder and took up a ranch. In 1869, she sold out of this place and with two of the boys started to return to Missouri to stay. She took a team to Fort Benton intending to sell it, but not being offered enough took the team on the boat with her as far as Sioux City, Iowa. There her boys started across country horseback for home and she went by rail to St. Joe. Mary's two boys were just not satisfied, so in the spring of 1870, with the entire family they started back for Montana. We were going to sell out at Omaha and come by rail, but not being able to dispose of their outfit for a fair price and meeting other Montanans there, they decided to charter three rail cars and all of them came together, 33 people, 17 horses, seven wagons and seven wagon loads. They got everything in except three wagon wheels, which they had to pay freight on. They all came as far as Corinne (Utah), reloaded and proceeded directly to Radersburg to the mines. Granny stayed there for two years, then took another trip back to Missouri. Her son took her and Reverend Stateler to the railroad. Reverend L. B. Stateler arrived in Montana just after gold was discovered in Montana. He and his family were among the first wagon train organized by Major Jim Bridger consisting of 562 persons out of Denver. Reverend Stateler was a circuit minister and covered the area between Virginia City and Willow Creek. For 30 years he traveled some 200 miles a week from his home in Willow Creek. On this trip Reverend Stateler brought six preachers back to Montana with him. When we got back to Corinne, Father Stateler was sick and the rest started out. He was waiting to come up with Granny and he was riding in the trail wagon, loaded with apples, the wagon was upset on hillside. The apple boxes burst, but the preacher undaunted, lit at the bottom of the hill calmly eating an apple. On this particular trip, Evaline, Granny's daughter, gave birth to twin boys. Evaline died 5 days later. Other mothers that were on the wagon train took care of the baby boys the rest of the trip.

Granny went back to Radersburg and stayed a year. Then she moved to the North Boulder and took up a ranch, where she had the misfortune of having her son, Samuel P. drowned in the Jefferson River while driving a herd of cows across the river. In 1874 her son Zachariah was killed during a fight with a band of marauding Indians. He had joined the ill-fated Yellowstone expedition and was the only person killed during the expedition. This was a foolhardy expedition organized by the merchants of Gallatin Valley to open the trail routes east that was in complete possession of the Indians. The expedition set off on the weatherwise troublesome date of February 13, 1874, from Bozeman. It was well equipped with 147 men, 200 horses and mules, 28 yoke of oxen with 22 wagons and supplies for 4 months. Completely without fear, they took on several groups of Sioux Indians, one as large as 1500 braves supposedly led by Sitting Bull himself. Several reasons had been given for this expedition, such as to find the head of the Yellowstone for navigation, to build a road, and to

establish a city. They probably were trying to locate gold. It could have been a scam to get the government to send more troops to the area.

Granny returned to Missouri again on business and got back to the ranch in May of 1875. (some articles have this as 1877) In August of that year she sold out and moved to Dry Creek, north of Belgrade, Montana. This would be Grannys final location in the Dry Creek area. She made two short trips back to Missouri, returning once via Nevada.

During the last twelve years of her life she lived most of the time with her daughter, Mrs. Annie (Lucy Anne) Miller, moving from Dry Creek to Sixteen Mile and staying there about three years. She then went to former home in Little Basin, near the Horseshoe mountains. There Granny died on April 25, 1907, at the age of 91 years, five months and 13 days.

In 1875 when Granny moved to the Gallatin Valley, she built some cabins just below Emmett Huffine's farm on Foster Creek where it runs into Smith Creek, north of Belgrade. She built these cabins for the use of new comers who did not yet have homes. The cabins were known as "Pilgrim's Rest". During this time Granny, rather than homestead, bought a place located about eight miles north of Belgrade. This is where she lived until she could no longer care for herself.

Granny Yates was five feet seven inches tall and was sturdily built, weighing in at 160 pounds. She was not only physically strong, but was also strong-willed. She was an extraordinary woman. In the first place, her strength and determination were proven by the long grueling journey first to her new married life in Missouri and then her many trips between Missouri and Montana. After her marriage to Solomon Yates, she never heard from her parents. She had no idea even when they died. Of her many trips of strength and endurance only the last one was in any kind of comfort. That time she returned by the railroad called the Oregon Short Line to Dillon, Montana.

Granny Yates, it was told had no formal education. She could neither read nor write. She lived by the Bible and got great satisfaction from quoting and misquoting the Bible, indignation followed. Granny did not like to be corrected. She was also a strong "Democrat" in the political arena. When something went wrong during an administration, she readily blamed it on the "Black Republicans." One story told of her is that during a Republican administration when the children would return empty handed from the mail box, Granny immediately blamed it on the "Black Republicans."

Granny was a true and firm believer in proper conduct. In a letter to John M. Peets, the Reverend George Byron Morse, minister of the Dry Creek and East Gallatin Baptist Church years ago, called Granny Yates "the grand old woman of Gallatin." "What a strong, outstanding personality she had. How her character stamped itself on scores and scores of those who lived within a number of miles of the district known at the time as Dry Creek."

"Granny Yates caused me to stop my sermon in the old Dry Creek schoolhouse one Sunday morning for a few moments while she carried out a little family discipline. Granny was sitting right in front of me on the front row. Big, jolly George Yates, her son, was sitting about midway back in one of the school seats. With that jovial spirit of his he was not disposed to be too severe on his little three or four year old daughter who was inclined to run around the aisles, laughing at those she knew. This quite annoyed Granny who turned and looked at George several times throwing into that one good eye of hers all the rebuke that should have been necessary. But George would not exercise his rights and prerogatives of a

father, so unable to endure it longer Granny as the baby ran by her grabbed her by the clothes at the belt line, lifted her across her lap and administered a few rousing spanks and as she set the baby down said to her, "Now go back to your father, where you belong." I then went on with my sermon and finished without any more trouble from babies running about."

It was said that after that incident that there were no further disturbances made in her presence during church services. She always believed her children should act properly and so should everyone else's. She even insisted upon this when she raised a ten-year old orphan boy after her own children were grown. She had raised the thirteen children by herself, because she never remarried. She said the only way she would have remarried was if he had been a Southern general.

Granny Yates was ingenious. People would travel to Bozeman to do their shopping, usually once every few months. One day a grandson stopped by to pick up Granny's shopping list. On this list there was a new corset. The grandson did get the corset, but it was too large. He had miscalculated her size. When the boy returned that evening, Granny discovered the error. Since it would have been months before another trip was taken to town and Granny thought she needed the corset then, she showed that cleverness by going out to the chopping block and hacking the corset down to her size.

Granny was totally blind for five years before she died. This curtailed Granny's activities somewhat, but did not stop her completely. She could still see even though she had lost her eyesight. One day at church Granny was all dressed up and was holding her great-great-granddaughter. As she sat there, Granny felt the little child's face and said, "Ain't she purty."

Granny used to sit and rock for hours thinking about her earlier days. During this time she would talk to herself. This was a precious time to Granny and she did not want anyone to hear. One day her great-grandson Harold decided to hide in the room. Granny somehow discovered him and drove him from the room with her gold-headed cane in attendance at his rear extremity. The great-grandson did get revenge one day when he had to walk Granny to the bathroom out behind the house. He deliberately walked her into the clothesline and "tried to string her up." During her blind days, Granny always carried a cane hooked onto her arm. When this little boy teased her, she would hook him with the end of her cane. She was still quite active even though she was blind.

Even at an advanced age, she would ride horseback to visit her neighbors. One day she even killed a badger with a shovel for raiding her garden. Even in old age she proved her independence.

Mrs. Mary L. Yates died after being confined to bed for only three weeks. She died at the home of her youngest daughter, Mrs. Annie Miller at Little Basin near the Horseshoe Hills north of Belgrade. It was April 25, 1907. She had lived a full and colorful life. The funeral was April 27th at the Dry Creek Baptist Church. The Reverend Rickman of Helena and one-time pastor at Dry Creek conducted the services. Burial was in the Dry Creek Cemetery.

At the time of her death, Granny had six living children. Three daughters, Mrs. James Sitton, Mrs. Christopher Columbus Collins, and Mrs. Annie Miller. They all lived on farms in the Gallatin valley. Her three living sons were scattered. Solomon lived in Great Falls, Montana, George lived in Billings, Montana and Benjamin lived in Elko, Nevada. In addition, she was survived by about sixty grandchildren, three of whom lived in Bozeman. They were

Kate Cowan, Mrs. Louis Accola, and Mrs. T. S. Stiles. She was survived also by ninety great grandchildren and eleven great-great-grandchildren.

When Granny died she had no home of her own. After she went blind she lived with one daughter and then another. She spent most of the last five years of her life living with her daughters, Mrs. C. C. Collins and Mrs. Annie Miller. At the time of her death, she was living with Annie. Annie in turn was living with her son Jacob F. (Yoke) Miller, who lived at Little Basin.

When Granny died, her things were distributed to various family members. The one prize possession the family Bible has been lost in the shuffle. Apparently the Bible was placed in the hands of a member of the family who has probably passed it down through the generations, but to this day has not come forward. The gold-headed walking stick or cane was given to Yoke Miller, who passed it to his son, Newell and it is now (1997) in the possession of David Miller (writer of this article) of Three Forks. A photograph was taken which all the relatives cherished. It shows five generations. Mrs. Yates being the first in the generations, and the oldest daughter of Mrs. Cloninger, being the fifth generations. In that picture Granny is holding the gold-headed walking stick.

The experiences of Granny Yates were so rich in historic value and so typical of the west that existed in the early part of the 19th Century, that Winston Churchill, one of the great American novelists, chose her for the foundation of the character Polly Ann in his historical novel "The Crossing." He spent a considerable period of time gathering information from Mrs. Yates before the completion of the book which was published in 1904. While the travels of Granny from Missouri to Montana were not referred to in this novel, her experiences on the trail between Virginia and Missouri and of her home in the wilderness were brought into play in the story of Polly Ann's journey from Virginia to Kentucky during the period following the Revolutionary War and before the time of the Louisiana Purchase. The book had three main characters, David (Davy) Ritchie, Tom McChesney and Polly Ann. Polly Ann as a young lady eventually married Tom McChesney and the story tells of their travels through the wilderness. Many references in the book talk about Polly Ann cooking johnnycake. Perhaps this may have been one of Granny's favorite. Johnnycake is a flat corn cake baked either on a griddle or in any other way by the heat of a fire: for example, on a board before the fire or on hot stones. In use since the late eighteenth century and was originated in New England. In the book it was cooked by Polly Ann on the trail on flat stones she found on site. Since the book was also placed during Daniel Boone's time, he was mentioned throughout.

Winston Churchill wrote from Boston on April 18, 1904. "This book has been name "The Crossing" because I have tried to express in it the beginnings of that great movement across the mountains which swept resistless over the Continent until at last it saw the Pacific itself. The Crossing was the first instinctive reaching out of an infant nation which was one day to become a giant. No annals in the world's history are more wonderful than the story of the conquest of Kentucky and Tennessee by the pioneers."

Granny did much to create a legend in the family and her story has been told many times over and over. Granny was not as famous as most heroes of the West were, but she probably did as much to help to settle the West as any of the famed personalities. She acted as guide and organizer for the many journeys. Some people say she was actually the boss of the trains.

The above is a composite of several articles from notes, books and newspapers and gathered history by several persons and publications. It was written and collated by me trying to cover all things known and accumulated over the years and for future generations to read and enjoy. It certainly is only the highlights of this courageous woman of Montana.

David A. Miller

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