

Letters tell the Story of Women of the American West

Rita Krabach Blake

I spent many years at my computer inputting data about my mother's family. Much information was gleaned from the many letters she had saved.

She was Esther Bliss Jackson who was born in Chicago, IL to Julius Henry and Rachel May Jackson in 1900. Rachel met Julius in Colorado Springs where she was teaching school. He and his parents and a brother came from Vermont in the 1870's to raise sheep for wool. Esther, like many 19th Century teachers, lived with local families. That is how she met Julius Henry. The Jackson home still stands at the corner of San Miguel and North Nevada Street in Colorado Springs

Rachel's grandmother, Lamanda Chaffee Booth, came to join her husband Horace in Gilpin County in July 1862. She came by wagon train with her youngest daughter Harriett Lillian. Two years later her second daughter, Sarah C. Booth, left Wisconsin to join her parents. Horace Booth was working in the gold mines. They lived in Central City and Nevadaville. By 1865 Sarah had met John Bliss Smith. They both taught Sunday School in the newly formed Methodist Church.

In 1992, I found their 1865 marriage record in the courthouse in Central City. Their daughter, Rachel Mariah, was born there in 1866.

By 1868, Sarah and John Bliss Smith moved to Bent County where he was a stage driver and also grew the famous Rocky Ford Melons.

My mother remembers her mother, Rachel, telling her how the Indians used to visit their melon patch when she was a child. Rachel's father was very friendly to Native Americans. Rachel and her younger brother and sisters used to watch them from their windows. They were a little scared so they stayed inside. The Indians picked melons and would sit down on the ground and eat them. But one time they picked pumpkins and proceeded to crack them open to eat. As soon as they tasted them they spit them out in disgust because they were not as sweet as the melons!! The kids laughed at this!!

Another time Rachel told of her father being asked by an Indian to borrow his spy glass to hunt buffalo. He promised to "bring it back in 3 moons!" John agreed, and when the spyglass was returned as promised, it was in a nice leather case that he had made for it!

Rachel's cousin, Eugene Graham lived next door to them on the north side of the Arkansas River near the Barlow-Sanderson Stage Stop and livery stable. His mother was Harriet Lillian Booth who had married Swain Jasper Graham. He was well known in Bent County. According to a letter I have from Gene Graham they were friendly with Albert Alonso Robinson. He was the Chief Engineer for the Santa Fe Railroad while it was being constructed. Once it was completed in 1878 there was no longer a need for the Stage to deliver the mail.

As a result John Bliss Smith moved his family to Leadville where he again registered as a teamster in 1878. A year later he died of pneumonia and Mr. Graham helped Sarah and her children return to Bent County.

Rachel's brother, Chester M. Smith wrote his own obituary in which he tells in his own words what life was like for him in the Arkansas River Valley.

He married a girl from California and moved there. One of his sisters married and also went to California to raise her family in the San Joaquin Valley. Rachel and Julius Henry Jackson, moved to Chicago with 5 children the year Esther was born. Horace Booth left for California in about 1870 and Lamanda went to live with her daughters in the Arkansas River Valley. Horace died in Sutter Co, CA in 1872 and Lamanda eventually went to California too. Her oldest daughter, Mary, married Isaac Ury and they settled in San Jose, CA where their oldest daughter Frances was a china (dish)painter. I have many of her pieces and also framed paintings. She never married. Most of the letters I have came from that house in San Jose.

Frances lived to be over 90. My mother cared for her. Lamanda and her daughter, Sarah lived to be over 91. Rachel lived to be 81. My mom, Esther. spent her last years here in Paradise until the age of 106!

Mrs. Blake kindly donated copies of her publications "Trails and Tales of Some Colorado Pioneers" and "Lamanda's Covered Wagon Journey to Colorado,1862" to Foothills Society. These were donated to Lakewood Public Library and are available in the reference area.

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