

[Nellie Leahy]

Interview

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NELLIE LEAHY (MRS. J. Y. THORNTON)

Nellie Leahy (Mrs. J. Y. Thornton), daughter of James and Johana (Fenton) Leahy, was born and educated in Monroe, Wisconsin.

Suffering from after affects of pneumonia, which necessitated a change of climate, she came with friends to Lincoln, New Mexico in 1884, and remained to become the wife of James Y. Thornton to whom she was married on February 15, 1886. Mr. and Mrs. Thornton are the parents of four children, all girls namely: Mabel, Eva, Kitty, and Dola.

The young couple, after their marriage, lived in the hotel at Lincoln which was owned by Mr. Thornton and Mr. George Curry. This hotel, still standing, is a few yards east of the Lincoln County jail and court house from which Billy the Kid made his sensational jail break and escape in 1880, thereby, preventing carrying out his sentence of hanging for murder, which was to have taken place May 13, 1880. However, the end of his death dealing career came a year later at Fort Sumner, when he was shot by Pat Garrett - in execution of his duty as a sheriff - on July 15, 1881.

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Lincoln had become a comparatively safe place to live before the coming of Nellie Leahy. The death of Billy the Kid had practically ended the bitter fighting and bloodshed of the Lincoln County War, and the peace abiding people had returned to their neglected duties in stores, in the court room, and on farms and cattle ranches.

Nellie Leahy, who is remembered by old timers as being a lovely blue eyed girl, met Mr. Thornton at the old Dowling Mill on the Ruidoso, and the romance that ended in their marriage was begun at the time of their meeting. C18-6/5/41-N. Mex. Box 2-

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The death from scarlet fever in September, 1892 of their two older children, Mabel and Eva, was their greatest sorrow during the eight years of their residence together in Lincoln. The two little girls were buried side by side in the old Fritz Burying Ground, at historic old Spring Rancho eighteen miles south of Fort Stanton.

In 1895 Mr. and Mrs. Thornton moved to Roswell, which had grown considerably larger since Mr. Thornton and Mr. White had visited there two or three years earlier to organize the Knights of Pythias Lodge.

Artesians wells had been put down and thousands of acres, watered by the underground water source, had been put into cultivation. The Goss Military Institute had been established by Robert S. Goss, who was brought to Roswell by influence of Captain Joseph C. Lea, a bill had been passed in 1893 for the creation of the New Mexico Military Institute, the Gaullieur Block - the first large modern store and office building - had been completed in 1894, and the Roswell Club had been organized, and this club and the Knights of Pythias Lodge occupied rooms in the new office building. The long-talked-of Pecos Valley Railroad had had been completed into Roswell, which brought regular trains with home seekers and had established a means of transportation for cattle and agricultural produce raised in the valley for outside markets. Roswell had indeed

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became the most important town and the center of ranching and agricultural interests of Southeastern New Mexico.

Mr. and Mrs. Thornton in 1897 moved to their own home built by them at what is now 209 North Pennsylvania Avenue, where Mr. Thornton lived continuously from that date until his death in 1919, and Mrs. Thornton lives at the present time. Her daughter, Kitty, who married Raynes V. West, lives in Long Beach, California. Mr. and Mrs. West have two sons - Raynes Thornton, and Donald V. The younger daughter, Dola, married Orville B. Brookshire and lives in Roswell. Mr. and Mrs. Brookshire have five children - Orville 3 Jr., Jack, Beverly Nell, Kitty Lou, and Tommy.

Mrs. Thornton has been a member of the Catholic Church at Roswell since it was first organized, and a member of St. Peter's Altar Society, a member of Chaves County Archaeological and Historical Society, and has belonged to the Woman's Club since 1911.

She is known as one of the most lovable and motherly characters that has ever lived in Roswell. Many girls and women have made their homes with this big-hearted Christian woman and have shared the attentions and love she has showered on her own children and grandchildren.

Will Robinson well known writer and columnist who knows of her helpfulness, especially to young girls, once wrote: "Mrs. Thornton and Mrs. J. F. Hinkle are the two outstanding women who are the main reasons for rejoicing and celebration of Mother's Day in Roswell".

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Mrs. Kitty Thornton West - daughter of Mrs. Thornton, Long Beach, California.

Will Robinson, Roswell, New Mexico

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Former Governor James F. Hinkle, Roswell, New Mexico