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MARY A. WRIGHT

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Mary A. Wright was born December 3, 1868, in the farming community of Polk, Nodaway County, Missouri. She was the second of six children of Mary Best and the Rev. J. C. Allen, a minister in the United Brethren Church, and a farmer. The family lived adjacent to her grandparent's farm. She was educated in the public schools and the State Normal School in Maryville, the county seat. The year after her mother died in 1886, she married George G. Wright. The young couple moved west to Rockford, Washington, where their first child was born in 1889. The next year they moved to Rathdrum in northern Idaho, where the first child died in 1891 and a second was born. Along the way, she taught school and became active in the populist movement and woman suffrage. Only one of her three children survived age two.

In 1898, she was first nominated for State School Superintendent of Public Instruction (S.S.P.I.) by the Populist Party. She resigned that nomination when the slot went to the Democratic Party after a three party fusion ticket was negotiated, and accepted a state legislative nomination. After election, she served as Chair of the Populist Caucus in the fifth session of the Idaho House of Representatives, becoming the first woman to lead a party in a state legislature in the United States and to be nominated for Speaker. After completing her term, she was elected Clerk of the House for the sixth session in 1901, and convened the seventh session in 1903. She was elected delegate to the national convention in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and continued to work professionally in politics until the Populist Party ceased to exist. After serving as Secretary of the Idaho Pan American Exposition Committee in late spring 1901, she worked for a Populist Member of Congress, Thomas L. Glenn, in the 57th Congress in 1902 until she sued him in court for unpaid wages. She was nominated a second time for S.S.P.I. in 1902, but resigned again with Democratic fusion.

After divorcing her husband in 1904 (for desertion, uncontested) she remained in northern Idaho, where she studied law for a while and taught school. She eventually operated Wright's Loan and Investment Company at Bonners Ferry.

Mary A. Wright died March 31, 1948 in Bonners Ferry, Boundary County, Idaho. At the time of her death her son, Otis A. Wright, and two of her three surviving grandchildren, Barbara and Elaine Wright, were living in Hayden Lake, Kootenai County. Her third grandchild, Otis A. Wright, Jr., was living in Los Angeles, California, with two children.

BIOGRAPHICAL SOURCES

U.S. Census 1860, Maryville, Nodaway County MO; 99 (Allen). [National Archives, Washington, DC]

1870, Polk, Nodaway County MO; 607 (Allen), #29; (Wright) #30.

1880, Maryville, Nodaway County MO; v 25, ed 262, s 4 (Allen), #37, (Wright) #36.

1910, Cocolalla Precinct, Bonner County, ID; sd 46, ed 19, s 15B.

An Illustrated History of North Idaho, Embracing Nez Perces, Idaho, Latah, Kootenai and Shoshone counties. State of Idaho comp. Henry D. Hap, East Spokane, WA (Western Historical Pub. Co., 1903), 882.

Kootenai County Idaho Cemeteries, Vol. II by Alfred E. And Betty J. Shane; and *Record of Teachers Certificates, 1892-1913, Teachers Employed 1895-1925, Common School Diplomas 1900-1925.*

Register of Actions (divorce), Kootenai County, Case No. 1160, n.p., April 9, 1904. [Kootenai Genealogical Society]

Register of Actions (suit for wages) Kootenai County, Case No. 11516: 453, Dec. 11, 1904. [Idaho Historical Society]

Final Decree of Distribution (will), Book 1: 541 of Estates, No. 60045, Bonner County.

“Legal Notice,” *The Silver Blade* (Rathdrum, ID), September 5, 1902; “A State Convention of the Populist,” September 19, 1902.

“Billie Wright Burial Here” (grandson), *The Rathdrum Tribune*, November 26, 1937; “Mary Wright, Former Resident, Passes: Buried Here Saturday,” April 9, 1948.

“Mrs. Mary Wright Services Saturday,” *Bonnors Ferry Herald*, April 1, 1948.