

[Bertha Gusdorf]

[?] [?] [?]

FROM IMMIGRANT BRIDE 'TO BANK PRESIDENT

Mrs. Bertha Gusdorf of Taos

Among the courageous women who accompanied their men to the Southwest in the '50's and later in the '80's were the wives, many of them young brides, of German and Jewish merchants and clerks, to whom the country was especially fearful, on account of complete difference in language and customs.

Among these pioneer women who came to New Mexico with the coming of the railroads, was Mrs. Bertha Gusdorf, who came to Santa Fe and a little later to Taos in 1878. At that time an immigrant girl bride of 18 years, she made the long arduous journey from New York to Trinidad by train, by stage coach to Santa Fe and thence to Taos, over an almost impassable trail; the latter part of the journey taking four days where now an automobile makes the trip in two hours over a non too good road.

Bertha F. Gusdorf (Bertha Ferse) was born of Jewish parents in November, 1860, in the village of Oberlistungen near Cassel, in the Duchy of Hesse-Cassel, in the central part of Germany.

She attended school in her native village, similar to our primary and grammar grades. Was married in the spring of 1878, to Alex Gusdorf, who had returned to Germany after fourteen years in America, most of which time was spent in Santa Fe, Penasco and Ranchos de Taos, where he was in business for himself, operating a large flour mill and other mercantile business.

Library of Congress

The young couple came to New York, May 1, 1878, and traveled by train to EL Moro, Colorado, about five miles east of Trinidad, which at that time was the terminal of the Santa Fe railroad while the contractors were boring the tunnel through the Raton Range. They then traveled by stage coach to Santa Fe where they lived for a short time and then moved on to Ranchos de Taos to make their future home. [????]

2

At that time, Ranchos de Taos, even more so than at present, was almost 100% Spanish-American. About the only Anglos living at Ranchos were the teachers at the Alice Hyson Mission, a Presbyterian institution. The Anderson brothers with their families came to Ranchos in the same year (1878) to enter the employ of Mr. Gusdorf in his flour mill.

The young German woman under the necessity of learning two languages: Spanish, to be able to talk to her neighbors and maids, and also English to talk to the Andersons and the few other Anglos in the village. This she accomplished mainly by the trial-and-error method, aided by Mr. Gusdorf, who had already spent about sixteen years in New Mexico. She now reads and writes English and speaks Spanish fluently.

Mrs. Gusdorf's two daughters were born and spent their childhood years in Ranchos de Taos. They are, Elsa, wife of C. D. Weimer of Colorado Springs, born in 1884, and Mrs. Corrine Wylie, also or Colorado Springs, born in 1890.

In 1894, after the destruction of Mr. Gusdorf's flour mill at Ranchos, by fire, supposedly of incendiary origin, the family moved to Taos where Mr. Gusdorf went into business with Gerson Gusdorf and J. J. McCarthy.

They lived for some time on the lot in the rear of the store building now occupied by MacMarr's and the Taos Variety Store.

In 1909 they erected their new home on the Santa Fe road on the brow of the hill overlooking the lower Taos Valley with the north slope of Picuris mountain in the distance. At

Library of Congress

that time, adobe houses and Pueblo architecture were not customary and the building was sheathed with steel, and the interior finish of hard wood. In later years she had installed steam heat, fired with oil burners.

3

She and Mr. Gusdorf planted trees on the south and west sides of their lot. Also apple and cherry trees, shrubs and flower and vegetable gardens, making a most attractive home-site.

Here Mrs. Gusdorf lived and here her two daughters were married and here Mr. Gusdorf died in the fall of 1923, and here she still makes her home, mostly alone except for a woman coming in to help clean house, and a gardner to look after the gardens, the shrubbery, etc.

After the death of Mr. Gusdorf in 1923, Mrs. Gusdorf took charge of the business of his estate, consisting of about 12,000 acres of land in the Cristobal de la Serna Land Grant, south of Taos, and surrounding the villages of Ranchos de Taos and Talpa and extending up the timbered north slope of Picuris Mountain to the summit, also other property in Taos and Taos county.

In 1924 she was elected a director of the First State Bank of Taos, of which Mr. Gusdorf had formerly been President, and continued in that capacity until 1935 when she was elected President of the Bank after the death of the late Dr. T. P. Martin. In all these years, she has been anything but a dummy director, visiting the bank almost daily, consulting and advising with the cashier and other officials on loans and other business matters.

She still maintains the same routine as well as her health and advancing age permit.

Mrs. Gusdorf is now one of only two women bank presidents in the state of New Mexico, the other being Mrs. H. B. Sammons, of Farmington, New Mexico.

Library of Congress

In November, 1935, her daughter, Mrs. Wylie, assisted by other ladies of Taos, gave a banquet to celebrate her mother's seventy-fifth birthday. This banquet was attended by about fifty of the prominent women of Taos.

4

To the writer, who offered his congratulations, and wished her seventy-five more birthdays, she remarked that she did not care to live that long, that "fifteen or twenty-five years would be plenty."

So this woman, who came to American in 1878, from Germany, a Jewish girl bride, has lived to see her children's children, and to gain the respect, love and affection of the entire community, which when she came to it was entirely foreign in language, customs, and race prejudices.

SOURCE OF INFORMATION

Mrs. Bertha Gusdorf, Taos, New Mexico.