

[First Baby Born in Roswell]

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words.

AN INTERVIEW

ELLA LEA DOW - "OLD TIMER"

First Baby Born in Roswell

These experiences or stories given in an interview, to this writer, by Ella Lea Dow - who was the first white baby born in Roswell, are incidents taken from her life when a baby, and when a child growing into young girlhood and up to the present time when she is a happy wife and a devoted mother. She is the wife of H. M. Dow, they were married August 18, 1913. Mr. Dow is also an "old-timer," is a prominent attorney of Roswell, and is well known throughout the state of New Mexico.

There are also stories of her father Captain Joseph C. Lea and of her mother Sally Wildy Lea. These intimate little stories of her father and mother are touching, revealing, little incidents showing the splendid manhood of the man, and gallantry of the woman, he chose to share (as he planned) only the pleasures and comforts of his life. It was by her decision and choice that she shared the hardships and the dangers of the pioneers life in this wild new country her husband loved so dearly.

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"My mother was a woman indulged and accustomed to every luxury," said Mrs. Dow, "and my father insisted that she remain in her home until he could prepare a safe and comfortable place for her here in New Mexico.

"She was a brave woman!" She showed me a beautiful photograph of her mother and bravery was stamped in the strong but beautiful features of her face. C18-6/5/41-N. Mex.

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"I have a letter written by my mother to my father in which she said - "I want to be with you, even if there be nothing but the stars over my head." So they were married in Sartartia, Mississippi, February 3, 1875.

"It is strange," said Mrs. Dow reminently, February was always the month in which events of importance happened in their lives. They were married in February, Mother died February 20, 1884 and father died February 4, 1904.

"An old sweetheart of my mother's came to visit us here in our western home. He was shocked to find her mounted on a soap box whitewashing the walls of our four room adobe house where I was born in 1882."

This place mentioned by Mr. Dow was built for and had been, the first hotel of Roswell. It was located in front of where the court house stands at the present time.

"The hard rough life and being far from a physician's care during her last illness was responsible for her early death," said Mrs. Dow, "I was three years old at that time, and when four, while living with my Aunt Ella - Mrs. Ella Pierce,- I was named for her you know - my father came one day and not wishing to distress my aunt by taking me away, he picked me up without her knowing, and carried me to the Thurber's home. My aunt had too many children to care for in her home and he thought it best for me to go to California with Mrs. Thurber and her daughter. So I lived in San Jose, California, four years, until my father's marriage, in 1889, to Mrs. Mabel Doss Day of Coleman, Texas, then I returned to

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Roswell. By this 3 time, my father had turned the waste of a desert land into a safe and pleasant little town. In 1885 he had Uncle Alf, his brother, Alfred E. Lea, come from Denver and lay out the town into blocks and nice wide streets. The work was well done.

“Some years later a friend visiting here remarked how much the town reminded her of her own home town - Cleveland, Tenn., My uncle had lived in Cleveland and had unconsciously used the same plan in laying out this town.”

This writer, than fifteen years of age, was the overnight guest of Ella Lea's step-sister - Willie Day. The two girls were busy packing their trunks. They were leaving the next day for boarding school in Texas.

“I remember that trip well,” said Mrs. Dow, laughing heartily, “It was in 1894, the railroad to Roswell was not yet completed. Willie, my step-sister, and I rode in a topless wagon drawn by mules. We were poking along on our way to Eddy (now Carlsbad) when I took the reins and whacked those mules good and hard, and one of them kicked me clear out of the wagon. I was so sunburned when we arrived at the school, the girls called me the 'mexican from New Mexico,' this bothered me not at all for it furnished amusement for many a day.”

At this point in Mrs. Dow's story, she showed me many treasures accumulated in her beautiful home. Among them was a photograph of an exquisite mural done by her cousin, Tom Lea, who is a well known artist, who has lived and still owns a home in Santa Fe.

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“We had a writer of note in our family as well as an artist,” said Mrs. Dow, “He was Homer Lea, the son of Uncle Alf Lea. Some of the books he wrote are - “The Valor of Ignorance,” “The Day of Saxon” and the “Vermilion Pencil.” They have become so highly prized they have been removed from the library shelves for safe keeping.”

Mrs. Dow showed me the lovely wedding gifts of one of her three daughters, Josephine, a recent bride, who is now Mrs. Carl J. Rohr, whose summer home is at Elk Horn Lodge,

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Estes Park, Colorado. She told me of the still more recent marriage of Dorothy, her youngest daughter, who to now Mrs. Towler Beaty of Larkin, Kansas.

Elinor, the oldest daughter, is manager of The Native Market at Santa Fe. All the unique and beautifully hand made articles - furniture, rugs, wrought from frames, stands, etc. are made by the natives, and sold from this shop or market, to keep them from relief.

"No I can not stay for lunch," I replied to Mrs. Dow's gracious and urgent insistence. I had spent three pleasant hours in her home and still had not heard all I would like to tell.

Mrs. Dow had been glad to talk of the accomplishments of many of the relatives of the Lea family, but she was sparing in praise of those she held close and dear. However, I knew all they had accomplished, and of the love and honor in which her parents were held in the hearts of the "old-timers" of Roswell and the Pecos Valley. It is because of these parents, mainly, 5 that the stories of this first baby girl born in Roswell are of keen interest, and because the pattern of her life - so like her mother's and her father's, has always been closely woven with the history, growth, and development of this city, and because she is the daughter of the man and the woman, responsible for there ever being a safe and beautiful city of Roswell.

At one time Captain and Mrs. Lea owned the entire town of Roswell.

Captain Lea not only gave his untiring efforts in works which accomplished wonderful achievements for the benefit of the town he loved, but he gave freely of his lands on which to build improvements, and the first industrial plant, and the land for the public buildings - our court house and for schools and parks. He is responsible for the establishment of our wonderful school, the New Mexico Military Institute, and for the building of humble homes for the needy.

A movement is on for a memorial for this man so loved by the Roswell people. It should go through to completion at once and should be a fitting one. A memorial towering high,

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overlooking this city, he has built. It should be a beacon, a guide, a welcome to the new-comer - whom he was always first to welcome. Only the best would be a fitting memorial for remembrance, and for appreciation of the achievements of this man - "The Father of Roswell."