



*Photo courtesy of Great Basin Museum, Delta, Utah.*

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## **Dr. Elizabeth Tracy: Angel of Mercy in the Pahvant Valley**

BY EDWARD LEO LYMAN

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WHILE THE LEGENDARY MORMON women physicians Ellis Shipp, Romania Pratt Penrose, and Martha Hughes Cannon were in the twilight of their careers, another Utah doctor—this time a gentile—was earning a similar, though more geographically limited, reputation. In 1910, Dr. Elizabeth Cahoon Tracy—at around the age of forty—began her first marriage and second medical career amidst the drab greasewood-covered lands of the so-called North Tract area of west Millard County.<sup>1</sup> In a place where transportation was still poor and the population was considerably larger than it would be in later years, the min-

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The author acknowledges the earlier contributions of local historian LaVell Johnson, on whose work he has heavily drawn.

<sup>1</sup> Locals consider the area surrounding Delta, Woodrow, and Sutherland to be “west Millard County”; in reality, the area is miles from the county’s western border.

istrations of this kindly doctor easily made Elizabeth Tracy legendary in her own right.

By 1910 the area where Dr. Tracy would live and practice had attracted a number of settlers still hoping to establish prosperous farms in the early twentieth century. The land was being developed, largely by non-Mormons, under the Carey Act;<sup>2</sup> these developers had agreed to assist the Mormon-dominated irrigation companies in impounding winter runoff at an enlarged Sevier Bridge Dam in southeastern Juab County, making a great deal more water available downstream in Millard County. Largely because of the supposed abundance of irrigation water available for these vast Pahvant Valley lands, the promoters became successful in recruiting settlers from throughout the American Midwest, California, and places in between.

The centerpiece of the new agricultural development scheme was the uncleared but fertile fields soon named Sutherland, which became some of the most productive land in Utah. Several miles farther north, another community, named Woodrow after the recently elected president of the United States, also sprang into existence. Unfortunately, most of the soil there did not prove quite as productive as that in Sutherland. Yet Woodrow settlers, and those on even worse land farther out in an area mainly called Sugarville, worked just as hard as their neighbors in grubbing greasewood stumps, plowing land, and digging irrigation ditches—and they held equally high aspirations for eventual prosperity.

Of future importance to Dr. Elizabeth Cahoon, a man named Jerome Tracy was one of the first to become established at Woodrow. Tracy, a former New York state justice of the peace, “was educated for the [Roman Catholic] clergy, but renounced his training and wandered where he pleased,” according to longtime Delta newspaperman Frank A. Beckwith. Most recently, Tracy had been prospecting and mining throughout the Southwest, particularly in Arizona. When he left employment in a mine nicknamed the “widowmaker” because of its many silicosis victims, he came into contact with promoters of the Oasis Land and Water Company project in west Millard County, and he committed to developing a farm on two forty-acre tracts near a crossroads location soon to become Woodrow.

Tracy’s first winter on the raw land was relatively mild, and he was comfortable in the canvas-topped sheep camp he placed on the site.

<sup>2</sup>The Carey Act, passed in 1894, provided for the reclamation of arid lands by conveying up to one million acres to states that were willing to promote irrigation projects.

The next year he had a framed-lumber granary built in preparation for the good barley or wheat crop he expected. All the fields needed was one good irrigation, but that never occurred, because the Burtner-Delta dam broke that year. All the farmers on the project lost their crops from lack of water. The dam washout essentially bankrupted the Oasis Company, and although many families abandoned the area and others voiced major discouragement, Tracy and a few other hardy pioneers remained optimistic over the region's prospects as a great agricultural center. They proved to be correct. West Millard became the country's premier alfalfa seed-raising region and is still the leading alfalfa hay producer in all of Utah and perhaps the entire Intermountain West.



*Judge Jerome Tracy. Photo courtesy of author.*

There is no reason to believe that Jerome Tracy, described as a "short, bristly Irishman," held any grudge over the dam washout, the irrigation company's most serious crisis. However, later records from his justice of the peace court for Woodrow precinct indicate that he was consistently impatient with the successor irrigation company when it allowed water delivery canals to overflow, creating difficult mud hazards along the roads of the community that he, more than anyone else, was charged to oversee and protect. More than once he levied fines on the Delta Canal Company for offenses that others might have been more likely to overlook.<sup>3</sup> The judge was notorious as "a most colorful character," and he was "keen on issues as he saw them."<sup>4</sup>

Tracy had already met Dr. Elizabeth Cahoon through the mediation—some alleged that it was connivance—of a mutual friend. While most people considered Tracy abrupt and somewhat opinionated, he was apparently also a good-looking, interesting middle-aged man. At one time, Elizabeth inquired if he ever swore, although she had

<sup>3</sup> Woodrow Precinct Justice Court Records, Utah State Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>4</sup> *Millard County Chronicle*, July 31, 1947, in which Elizabeth's close friend Josie Walker told the "Life Story of Dr. E.R.C. Tracy."



*Jerome Tracy and Elizabeth Cahoon Tracy before their marriage. Photo courtesy of Great Basin Museum.*

undoubtedly heard of his fluency in that aspect of communication. His reply that he never did “in the presence of ladies” was apparently adequate. Jerome sent Dr. Cahoon an issue of the local newspaper promoting west Millard County,<sup>5</sup> and while she had probably already committed to becoming his wife, she read it, liked what she saw, and agreed to come to Utah to marry Jerome and live with him on his farm. Referring to the fact that he had wooed and won the hand of the impressive doctor in marriage, Utah friends universally agreed that the judge’s “oratorical ability many times exceeded his ability as a farmer.”<sup>6</sup>

Dr. Cahoon met Jerome at Salt Lake City, where they were married on September 10, 1910. Two weeks later, they arrived at the box-car depot of Akin, soon to be Delta, where they walked a short distance to a tent serving as the first public eating place in the infant town and had a good breakfast. The proprietor informed them that the postmaster was anxious for the bride to retrieve the mail forwarded to her, because all the wedding gifts sent from the East were too much for his cramped log cabin quarters. After a ten-mile drive in

<sup>5</sup> One of those who refused to be discouraged by dams going out for two successive years was former mining camp newspaper editor Norman Dresser, whose initial issue of the *Millard County Chronicle* featured an article on the area’s potential. Elizabeth Tracy later served as Dresser’s local correspondent in exchange for a free subscription.

<sup>6</sup> LaVell Johnson, ed., “Elizabeth R. Cahoon Tracy, M.D.,” MS., Great Basin Museum, pp. 10–15.



*The Tracy home in Woodrow. Also visible is a sidebar mower, perhaps the one Elizabeth sat on as she contemplated her life. From West Millard County, Utah, a booklet produced by the Delta Commercial Club, undated. Courtesy of author.*

a white-topped buggy, Elizabeth first saw the fourteen-by-ten windowless granary that, as was typical for the area, would be her home until better quarters could be moved to their property within the year. Jerome was known to quip at the time, "It's not so hot, but it's all we got."<sup>7</sup>

The couple was soon marooned for the winter in their desert location, at that time two and a half miles from their nearest neighbor. But the bridegroom had so well provided for winter supplies that on occasion local stores came to him for replenishment when freight was not delivered with sufficient promptness at Akin. Besides, as Elizabeth later recalled, she and her husband had a good library and the time to enjoy it. Judge Tracy, according to Frank Beckwith, was a "voluminous reader and the best posted man in seventeen states . . . original, full of mirth, just oozing reminiscences," and as such would have been particularly good company. Jerome also loved classical music and had many good records that would have helped occupy the time; no doubt they were played on a spring-propelled Victrola, since it would be more than a dozen years before electric power would be available in the vicinity.

<sup>7</sup> LaVell Johnson, "A Piece of God's Green Earth for Me," typescript MS., Great Basin Museum, Delta, Utah, pp. 1-6.

One day not long after the first winter, the relatively new bride was sitting on the spring seat of a mowing machine facing the inevitable Pahvant Valley wind with her back to the house, perhaps becoming accustomed to the scenery so different from her earlier life. Her husband came up behind, slipped his hands over her eyes and quietly inquired of her thoughts. Assuring him of no worries or anxiety for the future, she replied rather romantically that she was cruising through her present life with him with "a sense of freedom and exultation." Elizabeth later recalled that even in subsequent years they "lived and worked and dreamed together" with a "mutual sense of freedom from care and responsibility."<sup>8</sup> Other aspects of her life indicate that she actually did feel an acute sense of responsibility for others, but it is certain that those years were indeed a happy and satisfying part of an eventful life.

In one notable incident, the judge publicly displayed his affection for his wife. Many dances were held at Woodrow Hall, soon erected across the road from their home. Elizabeth usually attended, but because of a lame leg she never danced. At one of these dances Jerome suddenly came across the floor, leaned down, kissed her, and stated for all to hear, "God, Betsy, I love you." One of her closest friends concluded that certainly Elizabeth "had experienced the richness in life from this relationship."<sup>9</sup>

As a local correspondent to the *Millard Progress*, perhaps Elizabeth Tracy described Woodrow to the readers in the fall of 1915. Woodrow was not a town or anything similar but was simply an agricultural district which centered on a crossroads intersection. The Tracys happened to reside on one corner; the others were occupied by a district school, a country store, and eventually the Woodrow recreation hall. Yet the crossroads was the vital center of a community with as much unity and spirit as any closely situated urban neighborhood.<sup>10</sup>

This community had a higher concentration of non-Mormons than any other area in Millard County. The 1920 census indicated that the population of 431 was divided almost equally between Latter-day Saints and so-called gentiles. But since more than half of the LDS residents were children, the preponderance of non-Mormon adults in the area was quite large. The situation was similar as well in the com-

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Elizabeth Tracy, "Impressions of a Tenderfoot," *Millard County Chronicle*, July 4, 1935. LaVell Johnson, penciled notes of interview with John DeLapp Jr., Great Basin Museum; *Millard County Chronicle*, July 2, 1981.

<sup>9</sup> *Millard County Chronicle*, July 4, 1935; *ibid.*, July 31, 1947.

<sup>10</sup> *Millard County Progress*, October 22, 1915.



*Woodrow Hall, the  
community center  
located across the street  
from the Tracy home.  
USHS collections.*

munities being established farther north and west, particularly in Sugarville.

Born at Dover, Delaware, to strictly religious parents, Elizabeth had obtained a good education, including eventually an M. D. degree, an achievement that was still unusual for a woman. Tracy's early medical practice was at children's hospitals in New York City, with some time at Bellevue Hospital. While there is every indication that she intended to retire from practice when she married and moved to Utah, there were simply too many people in need of her impressively effective services for her to deny them. She was to serve selflessly in the less-than-prosperous North Tract area of west Millard County for a full twenty years.

Perhaps another reason Elizabeth changed her plans and reentered the medical profession was her disappointment at not becoming a mother herself. The quilt-covered child's trundle bed that neighbors saw, placed carefully under the big bed of the granary-house, was eloquent testimony of the lady's hopes. It probably took less than a year for Elizabeth and Jerome to realize that, for them, the time of child-bearing had passed. Local historian LaVell Johnson aptly conjectured, "That empty trundle bed explains why Elizabeth Tracy worked so hard to save every baby she could which was born to a mother in the [land-irrigation] project." A close friend in the Millard County years, Cornelia Turner, noted the care the doctor took to tie her new infant's hair with a pink ribbon. Elizabeth "loved to wash and play with babies," she stated. This observation is further corroborated

by the doctor's own statement that "each new baby was a beautiful and precious thing beloved by all."<sup>11</sup>

One of the emergencies that essentially forced Elizabeth Tracy back into medical practice was her diagnosis that a neighbor boy, Taggy Hersleff, had a ruptured appendix. She knew he would die if not rushed to Salt Lake City for surgery, so the Tracys took him to Delta, and the doctor accompanied him by train to the city for the successful operation. Another crisis, apparently early in her North Tract residence, occurred when a young neighbor boy—probably Ed Miller—severely burned his hand. Elizabeth sat him in her rocking chair, carefully cleaned the hand, and applied some type of salve to each bit of burned skin. Then she bandaged the throbbing hand one finger at a time, instructing that the bandage should not be removed for about three weeks. When examined after the requisite time, the skin showed no scar tissue, and even after fifty years the former patient could demonstrate full use of his hand.

LaVell Johnson concluded that Elizabeth Tracy "could no more shut her eyes to her neighbors' plight than she could shut her heart." The otherwise doctorless Woodrow-Sutherland-Sugarville region had too many babies to deliver, fractured bones to set, and other medical needs to attend to, and the conscientious doctor could not ignore such demands. Over the years, under primitive conditions with often-improvised materials and equipment, Dr. Tracy's success at practicing the healing arts was phenomenal.<sup>12</sup>

At first, those requesting the doctor's care brought their own conveyances to take her to patients, but Dr. Tracy soon secured a good driving team and buckboard and learned to drive them over the rough roads at good speeds. Night and cold did not deter the fur coat-clad doctor on her errands of mercy. When the roads were too muddy, she was even known to travel by horseback. Many of the dwellings to which she was called were shacks, tents, and camp wagons, where she performed her work with skill equal to that which she had demonstrated in the best of conditions in New York City. John DeLapp recalled that his mother had once assisted Dr. Tracy by holding a girl on a dining room table while the doctor sutured wounds inflicted by a horse bite.<sup>13</sup>

It is uncertain whether Elizabeth Tracy had ever engaged in gen-

<sup>11</sup> Johnson, "God's Green Earth," pp. 2-6; *Millard County Chronicle*, July 4, 1935; *ibid.*, July 31, 1947.

<sup>12</sup> LaVell Johnson, pencil notes, Great Basin Museum; Ruth Clark Done, letter to Great Basin Museum, February 23, 1993, drawing on information from her aunt who had once spent a winter boarding with the Tracys.

<sup>13</sup> LaVell Johnson interview with John DeLapp, copy in Great Basin Museum.



eral practice prior to her arrival in Utah, but her experience in a major metropolitan children's hospital certainly helped her master one of the most challenging and appreciated areas of a physician's calling, pediatrics. She was believed to be "unsurpassed in the diagnosis of children's disease." Whether or not she had previous experience, the doctor also became an expert at delivering babies and caring for the mothers, in some instances bringing every child in a family into the world.

And more than a few adults owed their lives to her skill and medical knowledge. Illustrative of her success is a brief entry in a local newspaper stating, "Mrs. Herman Holdredge was critically ill last week, but with Dr. Tracy in attendance, is getting along nicely." One of the most appreciated aspects of Elizabeth's practice was her bedside manner, for she always talked out the case and relieved as much anxiety as possible. As patient and friend Josie Walker reminisced, "her patients were stimulated by her conventions. Her humor was rich and juicy. One often forgot to groan and laughed instead."<sup>14</sup>

One of the notable contrasts between Elizabeth Tracy and most other contemporary (male) doctors was the use to which she put her skill with a sewing needle. Not only was she famed as a seamstress, making gift clothes for neighbor and namesake children, but when she was waiting for an expectant mother's delivery, she frequently occupied the time stitching baby clothes for the new arrival. Her husband divulged that she did not buy white outing flannel by the bolt but in multiple bolts for that purpose. Her sewing skill undoubtedly helped her improvise surgical bandages and perhaps other useful appurtenances of the profession, since she did not have access to the ready-made items available to her during her New York years.<sup>15</sup>

The Tracys were particularly unoccupied with financial concerns. Even with those patients who were fully able to pay substantial fees the doctor charged but twenty-five dollars for a child's delivery, including subsequent check-up visits—less than half of what a doctor in northern Utah would charge. As early observer Frank Heise recalled, "Money was scarce and many times she knew she would never receive a dime for her services, but she never refused to answer a call, regardless of weather conditions or time of day or night."<sup>16</sup> Her calls were

<sup>14</sup> *Millard Progress*, March 5, 1914; *Millard County Chronicle*, July 31, 1947.

<sup>15</sup> LaVell Johnson, ed., "Jerome and Elizabeth Tracy Helped Found Woodrow," MS., Utah State Historical Society; *Millard County Chronicle*, July 31, 1947.

<sup>16</sup> "Biography of Frank Heise," holograph, 1967, Great Basin Museum.



*"North Tract Gentile Pioneers," according to notes made by LaVell Johnson. USHS collection.*

frequently offered free to those in distress who were reluctant to request assistance. Often her payment was in kind: a bag of alfalfa seed, a load of hay, a home-cured ham, a quarter of beef, chickens, or eggs. These items found their way into the kitchens of needy people farther along her route as often as they reached the Tracy household.

A vivid example of Elizabeth's characteristic generosity and love of her neighbors was the first-hand experience of the Jenkins family, who lived at the same crossroads as the Tracys for over a decade. Lynn and Wanda Jenkins recalled that the doctor was their mother's closest friend and that she gave the family many gifts. On one occasion Mrs. Tracy made beautiful embroidered silk dresses for each of the four Jenkins daughters. One of the doctor's prized possessions was a specially made gold-tinted carnival glass dish given by friends as a wedding present. Young Wanda, who often helped with the Tracy housework at the larger house soon moved across the canal from the original, demonstrated such fascination with the dish that Elizabeth presented it to the mother to give the girl later as a wedding present—and it is treasured to the present time. Similarly, when Mrs. Tracy was preparing to leave Woodrow after her husband's death, she urged Bob Jenkins to do her a favor by taking the big Dodge touring car off her hands, the only approach that would have persuaded him to accept the offer. The family enjoyed the automobile for years thereafter. The most lasting impression of the two neighbor girls who had the opportunity to observe her over much of her West Millard career was that



*The treasured dish that, like so many things, Dr. Tracy gave away.*

Elizabeth Tracy “was kind in every way—a real humanitarian.” Not coincidentally, that was precisely the term the widow of a former doctor colleague, Ivie Smith, used in reference to Elizabeth.<sup>17</sup>

Dr. Tracy played an essential role in helping another family residing not far away make it through the extended crisis of losing a relatively young husband and father. With some frequency,

the doctor would drop by to persuade the mother, Henrietta Barben, that her daughters could handle the family’s housework while Henrietta accompanied the doctor on house calls, where she sometimes stayed to assist after Tracy moved on to take care of other cases. Mrs. Barben did sufficiently well that in subsequent years Dr. Tracy’s successors continued employing her in similar ways. In some cases, when the family paid their doctor bill the entire account went to the widow-assistant, no matter how much she protested that it was more than her share. In addition, the eldest Barben daughter did washing and ironing for the Tracys, as she did for others in the neighborhood. The Tracys paid her a dollar for each session, and when she protested that others paid her less, the judge called them “skinflints,” insisting on continuing the higher fee.

Henrietta Barben recalled that after the judge died and Dr. Tracy began severing her ties to Woodrow, it was a “hard blow” to many she had helped and encouraged for so long. The sprightly Henrietta, in her mid-90s at the time of her reminiscences, concluded, “I don’t think many of us would have made it through all the hardships if it had not been for the encouragement and help of Jerome and Elizabeth Tracy.”<sup>18</sup>

One of the strongest demonstrations of respect is naming a child after a person. It is impossible at this juncture to count the number of male Tracys and female Bettys who were named for the doctor, but the number was unusually large and included Tracy Fullmer and Tracy Shields, Elizabeth (Betty) Shipley Swenson, and Elizabeth (Betty) DeLapp Baker. Childless herself, Dr. Tracy always remembered her

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Lynn J. Wilson and Wanda J. Parish, Victorville, California, June 22, 1993; Ivie Smith (widow of Dr. Bernard H. Smith) to M. E. Bird, April 12, 1974, in Bird file, Great Basin Museum.

<sup>18</sup> LaVell Johnson, ed., “Henrietta Barben Autobiography,” MS., Utah State Historical Society.

little namesakes with gifts on their birthdays. She gave the Shields boy a corduroy suit she probably made herself and thereafter sent an annual check. A decade after she moved from the area, she sent a rather large check from Florida, confessing that in her declining years she would probably be unable to continue the practice.<sup>19</sup>

Elizabeth's family had been devoutly religious, with her father serving at least part of his time as a clergyman. In the Delta area, the doctor was an active member of Reverend Charles H. Hamilton's Presbyterian church, the first Protestant congregation there. But the judge, a former student for the Catholic priesthood, never had much appreciation for the sermon delivery methods of the reverend, whose habit it was to pace the floor and wave his arms as he preached. Jerome drove Elizabeth to church services each Sunday then stayed in the car and read the newspaper until she was ready to leave. Elizabeth was also a teacher in the community Sunday school at Woodrow, and her Mormon friend, Josie Walker, described her as a "deep student and teacher of the Bible."

Elizabeth's faith, far from passive, was one of assurance that God possessed curative powers far beyond those of the physician. This faith undoubtedly stemmed from her own experiences as a child witnessing the fervent devotion of her mother. While involved in a prank at a Philadelphia school, Elizabeth fell from a second-story window, severely injuring her leg. The doctors advised that without prompt amputation the child's life was in jeopardy. The father argued for a one-day delay while he and his wife sought divine intervention for their daughter. A storm further postponed the surgery, and when the doctor came to announce that it was too late to operate, he was astounded to discover no reason for such a procedure. The mother explained the good condition of the leg in terms of her promise to the Lord that "if Elizabeth could survive [they] would see to it that she went to college and learned to be a doctor." They kept that promise, although obtaining admission to medical school and training in a male-dominated environment must not have been easy. Elizabeth always remembered that it was not doctors who had preserved her ability to walk, albeit with a lifelong limp and usually with the aid of specially made shoes.

How natural it was that during her West Millard practice, when she encountered another little girl with crippled legs, she would do all

<sup>19</sup> LaVell Johnson, ed., "Autobiographies of Rom and Cassie Shields," MS., Utah State Historical Society, p. 5.

in her power to assist in alleviating the child's condition. When Ruby, daughter of friends Reuben and Cora Turner, was only three years old, Dr. Tracy took her to Salt Lake City for surgery and personally nursed the little girl through the first part of the convalescent period. It was not likely that Elizabeth expected the operation to do more than improve the use of Ruby's legs, which had been afflicted with muscular spasms since birth. She confessed by letter to the girl's mother that the "case was more complicated than was expected but no more than [she had] feared." Then, implying that the final outcome was in the hands of Providence, she stated, "I want you and all your family to use the utmost faith and prayer that [the] condition of irritability does not return again. Have her blessed for it and have all her friends and relatives who have power in healing treat her for it in their own way." While assuring her parents that much of the muscular irritation had been eliminated, the doctor confessed, "I am willing to trust in the faith of a good Mormon to overcome such tendencies." Elizabeth, whose kindness and dedication are still remembered in the Turner family, then stated that while Ruby's experience seemed like an "awful ordeal to put a little one through," the child had actually withstood it better than an adult would.

Dr. Tracy also treated another of the Turner girls, Connie, who had her thumb almost severed by a washing machine motor belt. The doctor relocated the member then sutured the wounds as best she could and stated, "Her thumb is so small, let's leave it a few days and see if it will start to heal." It did, and though always crooked, it had been saved.<sup>20</sup>

Another illustration of the ecumenical nature of Elizabeth Tracy's faith in the greater healing powers of the Almighty is an account of her role in the delivery of the eldest son of her close friend, Josephine B. Walker. As the difficult labor reached a point of crisis, the doctor turned to the husband and confessed, "Winn, we cannot save Josie and the baby except through prayer." Those present—Aunt Mary Abbott, the husband, the laboring mother, and the doctor—all prayed fervently in their own way. Thereafter the delivery went forward without further trouble. When it was over, the doctor showed the new father the horribly torn placenta, which further illustrated that a safe delivery had been truly miraculous. The appreciative mother later

<sup>20</sup> "A History of Cornelia Sanford and Reuben Lorenzo Turner," privately printed July 1973, pp. 12-13, 15, copy in Great Basin Museum; Tracy to "My Dear Mrs. Turner," undated but fall 1915, in R.L. Turner file, Great Basin Museum.

recalled "how reverent [Elizabeth] was of the religious views of the homes into which she went! One always felt her faith when in dire need."<sup>21</sup>

Because Elizabeth and her two other female classmates had encountered opposition and chauvinistic obstacles during her medical training, she became sympathetic to the women's rights movement. Girls who were her neighbors in Utah recalled her repeatedly assuring them that females were at least as important as their male counterparts. Josephine Walker stressed, "Dr. Tracy's views on a woman's place in the world were emphatic and pronounced," and while she was not known to have taken an active political role other than participating in the important women's club movement, she certainly led out in asserting equality through her example.

One of the great needs in any newly established settlement was for social contacts, particularly for those women who had few regular interactions with neighbors. The Mormon residents of Woodrow who elected to do so could travel with reasonable convenience to the Sutherland Ward social and religious functions. Elizabeth was among the prime instigators of social contact among the remaining female residents of the tract, some of whom resided in wagons, tents, and shacks with virtually no conveniences. Frequently she stopped at a lonely mother's house and took her and the children to another isolated house to visit while she made her professional calls, returning for them on her way home. Sometimes she took needy female patients home with her and secured assistance for their care in her own house. Dr. Tracy trained inexperienced housewives in the basic domestic arts as well. An excellent cook, she contributed several good recipes to a locally published cookbook, and she was also an early advocate of fresh fruits and vegetables for good nutrition.

Another woman in the area, Doris Ottley, also thought extensively "about some sort of social contact" for the rather isolated women of the North Tract. After mentioning this to her neighbors, Mrs. Daley and Mrs. Pound, and upon the latter offering her home for the first meeting, the three women set out to invite other area ladies to a gathering set for August 12, 1913. Thus began what Mrs. E. E. Pound, the first president, named the Jolly Stitchers. While the initiators were all Sutherland Mormons, the center of the organization soon shifted northward to Woodrow. This may have been partly

<sup>21</sup> Winifred W. Williams, comp., *The W. R. Walker Family Book* (privately printed, 1987), copy in Great Basin Museum.



*Jolly Stitches gathering, 1920. USHS collections.*

because of Dr. Tracy, who is definitely credited with quietly promoting and nurturing the Jolly Stitches, which flourished for more than half a century. This was more than simply a ladies' sewing circle; the Jolly Stitches took on many of the civic and educational improvements in an area that came to feel community spirit as fully as any urban neighborhood.

Until the group had a better meeting place, club meetings were generally held at the Tracys' new residence, a square-framed, three-room building purchased from the neighboring Pitino family and moved to the central crossroads. Club records indicate that the portion of dues paid in kind, usually in eggs, was converted immediately into cash by Dr. Tracy, who also served as the quiet financial backer for most of the organization's needs. Besides the welcome social interaction spawned by the semi-monthly meetings, the club affiliated with the Utah chapter of National Federated Women's Clubs. On several occasions, Dr. Tracy attended national conventions when they were held in the East and underwrote the expenses of others going with her. Elizabeth was also an active member of neighboring Sugarville's equally impressive Friendship Thimble Club, which erected its own

club building and developed a circulating library as early as the larger Delta and Fillmore communities did.<sup>22</sup>

Equally significant in promoting community cohesiveness was the movement to construct a local meeting and recreation hall. This started in 1916 at a Christmas party at the local store operated by George Webster. The store was far too small for such a function, and when the conversation turned to the need for a place of entertainment and recreation, those present pledged their support. The next day, several people canvassed further in the area, securing similar commitments for either money or labor. This enabled the instigators to secure building materials from the lumber dealer in Oasis, Nels Peterson.

Built on land donated by Roy Stephens, the Woodrow Hall was in use by spring. It was initially supervised by a board and manager, with individuals offering weekly moving picture shows there for a time. Within a few years, however, the original suggestion by Judge Tracy that the building would be best operated under the control of the Jolly Stitches was put into effect, and they retained control of Woodrow Hall for many years.<sup>23</sup> Records indicate that from time to time Dr. Tracy loaned funds for furnishing and remodeling the building. As she was about to leave the area permanently after hosting her last meeting in 1930, she signed the notes over to the Jolly Stitches, making them legal owners of the hall as well as its caretakers.

As the area became more fully developed and the population increased, the demands on Dr. Tracy grew as well. With the purchase of an automobile, the range of her visits increased. When the judge balked at driving her, the doctor sometimes crossed the road to the school and got one of the older boys excused to do so. Archie Barben always enjoyed this opportunity, and the Shields brothers also remembered it fondly.

The car enabled her to easily reach the community of Sugarville. It was there that Dr. Tracy brought a new mother, Mrs. Joseph Brinkerhoff, through a range of emotions, from delight upon seeing the little boy to whom she had just given birth, to something like dismay upon being shown a second, and to a cry of desperation upon being shown the last of triplets. The boys all reached maturity.

Jerome Tracy was the long-time justice of the peace in Woodrow,

<sup>22</sup> Doris Ottley to Sister [Josie] Walker, March 15, 1949, Great Basin Museum, makes clear that the Jolly Stitches, finally disbanded in mid-1993, were first formed by a group of Mormon women, including the bishop's wife. But the organization was always non-denominational, with the women who were fully involved in Mormon Relief Society usually, if not always, in a minority.

<sup>23</sup> Ralph E. King to Mrs. W.R. (Josie) Walker, June 18, 1968, Great Basin Museum.





*Picnic sponsored by the Jolly Stitches at "Diversion Dam" Spillway Grove, 1923. USHS collection.*

but that did not make him peaceful when he got behind the steering wheel of the relatively new automobiles he was among the first in the area to own. He was often inclined to drive down the middle of the road, shaking his fist and cursing others who presumed to use his personal thoroughfare, warning them to get out of his way. On one occasion that young Wanda Jenkins witnessed, the judge was bringing his wife to Delta, which at that time did not have an overpass across the railroad tracks. Tracy approached the railroad crossing just as a train was coming. He began his characteristic verbal outbursts and fist-shaking as he raced to get across the tracks ahead of the uncooperative locomotive. When the car barely made it safely across, the frightened Dr. Tracy gave him a tongue lashing the likes of which he had probably seldom received. It may have been after this experience that Elizabeth commenced being her own driver.<sup>24</sup>

The Tracys did occasionally get away from everyday events by tak-

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Wanda J. Parish, Victorville, California, June 22, 1993.



ing motoring trips, both close by and cross-country. One such trip was to the hills on the north end of the valley, including the ranch of the legendary Porter Rockwell. On another occasion, in 1923, they encountered and assisted a future mayor of South Pasadena, California, who was stranded with flat tires in the vicinity of Garrison, on the western edge of Millard County. Both parties were in the area to observe the filming of the movie *Covered Wagon*. The Californian, Ernest V. Sutton, remembered Judge Tracy as a tough-looking old chap with a square jaw, hot temper, and acid tongue. The doctor was described as "rather stout but very kindly," and "a most charming lady, cultured, vivacious with urbane address." One of Judge Tracy's favorite stories of the occasion was that he had let one of the movie people place a glass of whiskey on his head and shoot it off with a rifle. This made him, he quipped,

"the only Irishman in all history who so wasted a glass of booze." His doctor wife discounted the tale as one of the judge's yarns.

Three years later, the couple took an extended tour through Arizona, Kansas City, New Orleans, Atlanta, Washington, D. C., and New York City. Leaving in April, they entrusted their house and farm to neighbors Bob and Minnie Jenkins. They returned before the crucial alfalfa seed harvest. It is not certain that the local newspaper was correct in its comment at the time that the judge was "one of the most prosperous farmers in Woodrow," but the Tracys had sufficient for their needs.<sup>25</sup>

It is not known how often Dr. Tracy's practice included residents of Delta, some ten miles away, but during the terrible influenza epidemic of 1918 she was fully involved there. One nine-year-old girl, Ruth Stephenson, was the only member of her family not prostrated by the illness. Dr. Tracy visited her almost every day, offering instructions on how to assist her delirious and bedfast parents, mainly with spoonfuls of water. The doctor found it necessary to instruct Ruth that

<sup>25</sup> *Millard Progress*, April 16, 1926; *Millard County Chronicle*, July 6, 1946, August 16, 1956.

if one of the loved ones stopped breathing she should put the bed covers up over his or her head until help came.

Little Ruth was encouraged to go down the list of telephone numbers asking other local residents for assistance, but except for her Uncle Bert, who cared for the family's livestock amidst the demands of his own afflicted wife and children, she was mainly alone. Daily she walked outside to where she could see how many sheet-wrapped corpses had been added to those already frozen by the weather on a stairs platform of the school-turned-hospital/morgue across the street from the Stephenson residence. There were always new ones. The girl later recalled "poor Dr. Tracy, [who] went day and night and looked as if she would be the next casualty." It is easy to understand the love and appreciation Ruth held ever after for the good-hearted doctor who helped her through the worst crisis of her life.<sup>26</sup>

Early in her Utah practice Dr. Tracy noted several cases of a mysterious disease. The symptoms were swelling glands, intense sickness, and fever. Bishop John Fullmer contracted these symptoms in 1916, and as others did, he later credited Dr. Tracy with saving his life. After inquiring of the state department of health about the disease and getting no response, she began formulating her own theories. She recalled similar symptoms among New York wool sorters, whose disease, it was suspected, was carried by ticks. Tracy also noted that in Millard County most of those afflicted with the disease were men and boys, some of whom she had observed skinning jackrabbits that carried marked lesions on their carcasses. Tracy eventually hypothesized that the disease was transmitted from animal to human by insect bites.

Finally, through former New York medical associates, Dr. Tracy brought her concerns to the U.S. Public Health Service, which eventually sent representatives to Millard County to investigate the disease and Dr. Tracy's theories of how it was transmitted. By then Delta had had a succession of physicians who had each utilized the same residence and office facility. Here, in a new annex built at government expense and in an adjacent garage, government scientists improvised a laboratory that included numerous cartons of the fruit-preserving jars widely used by housewives at the time; probably these were used for bacteria cultures. Both local folklore and documentary sources establish that guinea pigs were also important in the experimental process, which was conducted in 1919.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ruth S. Bishop, "Scrapbook and Notes," copy in possession of author.

<sup>27</sup> Johnson, ed., "Elizabeth R. Cahoon Tracy, M.D.," pp. 10-15.

It was while Dr. Tracy was coming to Delta for a chatauqua program that one of the researchers recognized her vehicle as it passed his hotel and, racing into the street, excitedly announced, "You're right, you are right! We've got it." She was thereby informed that the researchers had confirmed her hypothesis. Unfortunately, when the researchers reported that they had discovered the cause of tularemia, Tracy's name was apparently never mentioned.

Dr. Edward Francis had been the lead researcher sent by the Public Health Service from Washington, D.C. Probably after conferring with Dr. Tracy, he examined several patients recovering from the malady; he also did an autopsy and took tissue cultures from one who had died. At one point, Francis contracted the disease himself, which hampered research for some time. A generation later, a memoir by Paul deKruif explained that the fanatically dedicated Francis had supposedly worked for many years on the problem of tularemia, the plague-like disease carried by rabbits. The book mentioned that the malady, which had nearly killed the researcher himself, was first found in Utah among people who had been bitten by insects. In none of the official documents is Dr. Tracy's contribution acknowledged, but she and the local residents understood her significant role in that matter, as in so many others.<sup>28</sup>

In 1928, Jerome Tracy died of a stroke. After funeral services conducted by his old friend, Ralph King, then Noble Grand of the local International Order of Odd Fellows lodge, the judge's body was shipped to Delaware for burial in his wife's family plot. Soon thereafter, Elizabeth began disengaging from her home of two decades, and in 1930 she moved to Sanford, Florida, to a comfortable cottage in some early version of a retirement community. When in 1948 she was invited to come back to Millard County to a reunion, she replied that her infirmities were too great to allow it; but she confessed that as her still-alert mind wandered over the country, it dwelt more frequently, with fonder recollections, on the Pahvant Valley of central Utah than on any other place she had ever lived. Part of the reason may well have been her understanding that there were so many people there grateful for her immense impact on their lives.

Even as old age approached, Elizabeth contributed meaningfully to her community through church and club activities. Eventually,

<sup>28</sup> Paul deKruif, *Sweeping the Wind: A Memoir* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1962), p. 128; Ralph Chester Williams, "Tularemia," in *The United States Public Health Service, 1798-1950* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Public Health Service, 1951), pp. 190-193; Roger Anderson, "Tularemia," *Great Basin Historical Society and Museum Newsletter*, Fall 1996.

though, she became a "shut-in," without much human contact. Even as she was becoming less able to walk, she did her own housework by scooting about her home on a wheeled chair. In her late eighties she boasted of eating three square meals each day and sleeping soundly each night. A Florida newspaperwoman who interviewed Elizabeth at that time observed that "the smile of good fellowship and interest seldom leaves the face of the little doctor, though she lives alone in her tiny cottage and cares for it by rolling her chair from place to place."

But the poetic lines she penned to distant Millard County friends are poignantly revealing of her situation in her last years. "I am out of humanity's reach. I must finish my journey alone. Never hear the sweet music of speech: I start at the sound of my own. But busy as a bee waiting on myself from morning till night, and oh! so sweet memories of the past." One of her last communications to a west Millard friend averred, "As I near the other side, how convinced I am that there will be no Methodists, no Presbyterians, nor Mormons, but we will all be the followers of our Lord Jesus Christ." She summed up her life as she stated her philosophy, saying, "I am an old woman, almost blind and deaf but I am so filled with interest in my fellow men and the joys and griefs of others, I haven't found time yet to grieve for myself."<sup>29</sup>

She may still have had time for such lamentations, but it is doubtful if she indulged them during the seven additional years she lived, largely in a rest home, before she died in September 1955 at the age of ninety-six. Her remains were undoubtedly sent to the family plot in Delaware where her husband Jerome had been buried many years before.

<sup>29</sup> Maymie Hodgkin, "A Rich and Highly Useful Life," *Orlando Morning Sentinel*, September 18, 1947; Dr. Elizabeth Tracy to Sutherland Ward committee, July 28, 1948, Great Basin Museum; *Millard County Chronicle*, October 6, 1955.