

JULIA BENNIGHOFF

Julia Bennighoff was born in the village of Klein-Niedesheim in Germany in late 1861. After completing her schooling, she received extra training at the Domestic Science School in nearby Worms. Her older brother George had immigrated to the United States, and when he spoke enthusiastically about his experiences on a visit back to his family when Julia was 18, she was inspired to join him. They ran a small grocery store in Oregon before opening a successful hotel in Sprague, Washington. Like Billings, Sprague was an up and coming railroad town. Unfortunately, a devastating fire in 1895 burned much of the town, including the Bennighoffs' hotel. George and Julia moved to Billings in 1896, purchasing the Grand Hotel on the northwest corner of N 27th St and 1st Avenue N.



Hotels then served travelers of all stripes and served as a social center for the locals. Most rooms offered few amenities, even the basic ones of heat or bathing facilities. But the Grand was different. The dining room was immediately redecorated. The Bennighoffs were the first in the area to offer private baths in 1899. They installed the first elevator in the region in 1906. Their brother Andrew joined them to manage the bar. The restaurant was highly regarded, and the hotel also hosted many evening dances, though Julia put an end to them when the music and noisy dancers started to keep hotel guests awake. An addition accommodated more guests. The siblings operated the hotel for 26 years, becoming affectionately known to residents of a wide swath of Eastern Montana as Uncle George and Aunt Julia.

The hotel was sold in 1922 and replaced with a new building. Julia bought a home on Clark Ave, where she lived until her death in 1939.

(Note: Her name as written on the photograph is not spelled correctly.)