

Jennie Parker

Jennie Cardwell was the daughter of Irish immigrants, born in 1856 in Ontario. Her older brother Ed was ranching in Montana, and Jennie moved out to keep house for him, arriving in November of 1882 to a ranch some nine miles south of Stillwater, now Columbus. The Cardwell siblings came into Billings frequently enough that in 1886, Jennie married Billings doctor Dennis Parker. They settled into a home on N 27th Street.

Dr. Parker was the first physician to practice in Coulson and then in Billings and ran a drugstore as well, located on Montana Avenue. He was the physician for the Northern Pacific Railroad in the region. The pair had a son William in 1887. Unfortunately, Dr. Parker had his own health issues as he suffered from tuberculosis, or consumption as it was known then.

Consumptive patients were often encouraged to move temporarily to a warmer climate to improve their health. Dr. Parker left for

California in the Spring of 1889. Jennie, who was heavily pregnant, stayed in Billings. After arriving in California, he realized that his health was failing and decided to go home to be with his family. He died on April 2, 1889 while en route, just a few hours before his train arrived in Billings. The Parkers' daughter Dolores was born three weeks after her father's death. Some two years later, the children almost lost their mother as well. Jennie was in critical condition with typhoid fever, but managed to pull through.

Jennie now needed to raise her children without their father's income. Parker had left his young family all he owned, and fortunately for Jennie, that included a number of parcels of land in the young town, some of which she sold. Jennie's financial status was shaky. The family had moved to a rented house on N 30th, and Jennie took in a few roomers to generate income. In 1900, they had three lodgers who lived with the mother and adolescent children. Three years later, Jennie sold part of her property on N. 27th to the Rocky Mountain Bell Telephone Company.

In 1906 Jennie made a deal with Mrs. Orilla Whitney for a property swap. Whitney received the rest of the 27th Street property in exchange for her large house on N 31st St. Four years later, Jennie was living in that property with her niece and fourteen roomers. Unfortunately, she was listed in the paper several times as being in arrears on property taxes. Records from 1916 indicate she owed for two land parcels and for her personal property, totaling \$559.38, roughly \$13,000 in 2021 terms.

In 1920, she lived with her daughter's family on a ranch near Pompey's Pillar. She sold the 31st St house to her granddaughter in 1927. By 1930, she was back in Billings in a rental on N 32nd with her sister Bessie and one lodger.



Reaching her 80s, age took its toll. Jennie had a bad fall while visiting a brother, and broke her shoulder, wrist and knee cap, and was hospitalized for some time while recovering. She became ill in 1939 and spent some months in the hospital before dying that August.

Sources:

- *Billings Gazette*, "Bought Valuable Property: Two Billings Ladies Make an Important Real Estate Deal", April 21, 1906
- *Billings Gazette*, "Death of Dr. Parker", April 4, 1889
- *Billings Gazette*, "Local Notes", January 23, 1903
- *Billings Gazette*, "Local Pioneer Dies Monday", August 29, 1939
- "Biographical Facts of Mrs. D.M. Parker", June 19, 1936, Collection of Billings Public Library
- United States Federal Census, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930

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