

AGNES YOUNG SOULÉ

Agnes Young was born to pioneer settlers of Oregon in 1866, and grew up in the Portland area, graduating from high school there in 1883. Six years later, she married Clarence Durbin and moved with him to Billings, where he established a ranch in the Blue Creek area. There he raised horses that grazed on lands into the Crow Reservation. The pair had a little girl named Mildred in 1890.

In June 1891, Durbin saddled his regular mount to ride out to check on the herd. His horse spooked, reared, and fell on top of him, causing serious internal injuries. Ranch hands carried him back to the house to the care of Agnes and his visiting parents. The foreman raced to Billings for a doctor, but one was out on a call, and another tried, but missed a crossing and nearly drowned trying to ford the high-running Yellowstone River. When a doctor finally arrived, he offered no hope for recovery. Durbin died the next morning and Agnes was widowed at 25.



When Clarence Durbin died, Agnes was left with a half-interest in a herd of some 500 horses, and his father was left the other half. Solomon Durbin intended to take his half of the horses into the Dakotas and trade them for land, but instead Agnes bought out his interest in 1892, paying \$4,000 up front, and giving notes for a total of \$13,500 more.

At first, Agnes went back to Oregon to be near her own family for a while, but returned to Billings permanently in 1893. In December of that year, she remarried to Sheridan Soulé, a local businessman. She then formally gained legal guardianship over her daughter, a right not always granted to widows in that era.

In 1895, Durbin's father filed a suit against his former daughter-in-law Agnes Soulé in Billings, which was the first jury trial to be carried out in the area. His contention was that she had defaulted on the payments for the horse deal they had made after Durbin's death. She countered that she had cleared a \$3,000 note, and that her entire purchase had been based on his false representations and she wanted the remaining \$10,500 cancelled. The jury decided she had been overcharged for all of the horses and reduced the amount owed to \$1,750, which Agnes was to pay. However, the judge abated that action, after discovering that the original note was not even yet due until January 1896. A new trial was slated for April, but the parties settled ahead of it, with Durbin being given 264 horses to settle his claim and the note was cancelled.

The Soulés were delighted to welcome their daughter Frances in 1898. But in 1905, Mildred was suddenly stricken with pneumonia and died at the age of 15 as a high school freshman.

Agnes was deeply involved in civic organizations and women's clubs. She was a devoted member of the First Congregational Church, the city's earliest church. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and later a regent of the local Shining Mountain chapter. While her husband was involved with the fraternal order of the Knights of Pythias, Agnes was equally so with the women's organization of the Pythian Sisters, serving as the Grand Chief for Montana. She helped found the PEO chapters in Billings – still active – and also was the state president of that organization.

Though her husband passed away in 1925, Agnes stayed busy and active in the community. When older, she moved in with her daughter and son-in-law. Agnes Soulé passed away at 87 in 1954.

Sources:

- *Billings Gazette*, "Early Billings Resident Dies", February 9, 1954
- *Billings Gazette*, "The First Jury Trial in Progress – A Civil Action Involving a Large Sum", December 13, 1895
- *Billings Gazette*, "Killed in His Prime", June 4, 1891
- *Billings Gazette*, "Soule-Durbin", December 2, 1893
- *Billings Gazette*, "Young Life Ended", March 10, 1905
- "Biographical Facts of Agnes Young Soulé", April 24, 1942. Collection of Billings Public Library

Photo:

- Collection of Billings Public Library