

THE LEGEND OF THE GRAND OLD LADY

Long before the Narrow Gauge Railroad crossed the Rockies into Southern Colorado a man of means married an aristocratic Eastern lady. To please his talented young bride, the devoted groom arranged for her dearest possession, her piano, to be sent to the frontier town, Durango. Due to the transportation difficulties, the thousand pound piano had to be brought in by mules. Only the stoutest animals could negotiated the treacherous trip through Wolf Creek Pass. (It is not known how many animals died in the effort.)

At last the intricately carved, black piano settled into her new home, where her mistress whiled away many hours playing classical pieces. After a long life in Durango the mistress finally died, probably around 1920 and the piano went on auction.

The Roy Pollard family of Aztec decided their growing children needed the cultural benefit of an instrument in their home, so they bought the piano. Long before this the DRG Railway had been built all the way to Aztec, so the Grand Old Lady, (later dubbed), arrived in style.

While the Pollard children learned to play the piano at home, they attended school under the tutelage of Miss Olive Ransom, eldest daughter of Clyde and Fannie Ransom.

Around 1926 the Pollards moved to California and a young widower from Bloomfield, Dave Sharp, made arrangements to buy the piano. He now played many rags and popular songs of the times such as "Dixie Darling", "Alexander's Rag Time Band" and "Prunes", as therapy over the loss of his wife, the former Annie Hare. The young bean farmer's faith deepened and he found comfort in Christian songs like "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder, I'll Be There" and "Oh, That Will Be Victory for Me".

A couple of years later Dave Sharp became attracted to the former school teacher, Olive Ransom, who due to poor health, had quit teaching and moved to Bloomfield. They married in 1928 and spent many a long winter evening playing duets on the piano.

Their only child, Eloise, was born in 1930. She can't remember when first she began playing melodies on the Grand Old Lady, but her parents helped her learn to read music and memorize numerous little ditties. When Eloise was nine her parents decided she needed

additional instruction. They engaged Mr. Byron Eddie, of Durango, who they thought was the best music teacher in the San Juan Basin. Mr. Eddie taught two days a week in Bloomfield, spending the night with his wife, Gladys' family, Dave Martin and mother. The arrangement lasted only one school year, but the piano had quite a workout that year. Lillie Bell Prior of Farmington, as well as Eloise, had lessons from Mr. Eddie on the piano at the Sharps' home.

During World War II Sharps moved to Farmington, and of course, the piano went along. By this time the Sharps felt Eloise needed more lessons so they engaged Gertrude Smith, a retired Concert pianist. Eloise now gave the Grand Old Lady at least two hours of practice a day and often more.

In 1944 Olive Sharp was elected County Treasurer and the Sharps moved to Aztec. As a most important member of the family, the piano went, too. Eloise's Senior year in H.S. and two years following, she gave piano lessons and worked as secretary at the high school under C.V. Koogler. Warren Noland, Audrey Rhodes and Beatrice Martin were among her pupils.

In 1946 Dave was ordained to preach and became pastor at Flora Vista. He delighted in training young men's quartets. LeRoy Ransom, Kay and Keith Brothers and Roger, roomer at the Sharps, composed one group. An earlier quartet consisted of Wayne Hare, C.J. Wood and the Kettell brothers, Edwin and Charles. The piano always figured in these ventures.

After Eloise went to college, people asked Olive to teach piano to their children. Olive's natural gift for teaching, deep love of music and technique she had picked up when Eloise had lessons under Byron Eddie and Gertrude Smith, helped her develop outstanding pupils. Among these were Liz Ransom (Raney), Annette Frazier, Sherry Green, Claud Vallias and his sisters.

When Olive Sharp died in 1978, Eloise gave the piano to her son, Bryce. Over a century had passes since The Grand Old Lady arrived in her dear San Juan Basin. All kinds of music: Chopin, Beethoven and Bach. to the simplest Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star, from rowdy Rags usually played in bars to sacred songs of deep faith, have sounded from her elegant frame

She was gone from Aztec nearly twenty years. But in December of 1997, Mrs. Tweetie Blancet brought about a wonderful Home Coming for The Grand Old Lady. Now she is displayed (and hopefully played) at the STEP BACK INN.

Eloise Sharpe Garrett