

Mary Alice Bybee Boomer



Mary Alice Bybee Boomer was born at Smithfield, Utah, in 1867, the fifth child of Robert Lee Bybee and Jane Miller Bybee. Alice, as she was called, hardly knew her mother, who died just after the little girl turned two. As a young girl, Alice was hit in her left eye by a teeter-totter. She lost vision in that eye for three days. Even after it healed, she periodically suffered severe headaches. The eye continued to cause trouble, and was removed later in her life.

During subsequent years, the Bybee family moved to several towns in Utah, and decided in 1885 to immigrate from Utah to Idaho's Upper Snake River Valley. Alice and her brother helped their father drive the teams and stock. When they reached Logan, Alice chose to stay there and live with her aunt. The rest of the

Bybees continued on to Idaho and settled in Menan, where they faced the usual pioneer trials. Alice rejoined her family a year later. She wrote that during the early summer months at her new home, mosquitoes were so thick that smudge fires burned everywhere. There were horrific blizzards in the winter, and for days at a time, temperatures bottomed out at forty below zero.

In 1887 Alice found a job in Rexburg, clerking at a small ZCMI store. When the management decided to move the business to Eagle Rock, Alice went along. She described her first impression of the little town as "two hotels—the Brooks and the Chamberlain—the Anderson Brothers Store and Bank, Sam Taylor's Livery Stable, several saloons, and the old wooden bridge across the Snake River." There was no green foliage in the barren village, just sagebrush, rocks, and sand.

When Alice came to Eagle Rock, the first "sidewalks" were a challenge to anyone who tried to walk on them, but litter wasn't the problem. According to Eldora Keefer, "There was no

leveling of the ground; the railroad ties which were used for the walks were laid on the uneven ground, and the sagebrush grew in between the ties and beside them.”

While working at ZCMI, Alice became acquainted with A. H. “Dick” Boomer, who was employed by the railroad; he had emigrated some years earlier from Nova Scotia. When the train shops moved to Pocatello in 1890, Dick stayed behind and established a transfer (moving) business, which was located at 397 Broadway, just east and directly across from present-day Ferrell’s Department Store.

That same year, Alice and Dick were married at her parents’ home in Milo. Two years later, the couple were bereft when their first child, a daughter, died at birth. Shortly afterward, they took in Alice’s orphaned niece, Jane. Two years later Alice gave birth to another daughter, Zula, and the family built a home at 447 Cliff Street.

Alice was active in the Village Improvement Society as second vice president, working as a busy reformer of city morals. She served in the Mormon Church, teaching Sunday School and serving as a counselor in the LDS youth organizations, Mutual and Primary. For eighteen years, she was treasurer for the Bingham Stake Relief Society. Her husband never joined the Mormon Church.

About the time Zula turned fifteen in 1909, Alice gave birth to a third daughter, Lois. The baby was a comfort to her when Dick’s health failed, followed by his death in 1916. To support little Lois, Alice went to work at the Golden Rule Store and J. C. Penney’s until 1930, when the sight in her left eye failed and it had to be removed. By then the girls were grown and Jane had married. For a while Alice lived with her in San Francisco, and later with Zula and her husband in Salmon, Idaho. While living there, her right eye also had to be removed, so Alice was blind her remaining nineteen years.

She was able to travel to some extent, and occasionally returned to Idaho Falls to visit old friends and reminisce about the Village Improvement Society. They agreed “The old VIS days were among the happiest of [their] lives.”