

Ada McPherson Morley
1852–1917
County : Catron

Ada McPherson Morley came to New Mexico as a young newlywed and settled in Cimarron, New Mexico. Her husband was an engineer and, like her, a crusader. They openly opposed the infamous Santa Fe Ring—a Santa Fe based group of corrupt politicians who were not above sending hired gunmen after their enemies. She moved with her husband to a ranch near Datil, NM where they constructed and lived in the “White House of Datil Canyon.” Shortly after their move to Datil, her husband took a job in Mexico, where he died under mysterious circumstances. She ran the ranch the rest of her life. She also raised three children; all of who were college educated and became prominent contributors to New Mexico’s history.

Family and ranch duties aside, Ada McPherson Morley remained a crusader. She became the president of the New Mexico Chapter of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and organized the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. She worked for women’s suffrage for thirty-five years and wrote hundreds of letters to congressmen and New Mexican women, urging them to press for the women’s right to vote.

Her daughter Agnes Morley Cleveland was born in 1874 and initially grew up on the family ranch and, for a while, in the town of Datil. Her mother sent her to school in Philadelphia and then she continued her education in California, where she lived most of her adult life. She became a successful and noted author. Her book *No Life for a Lady*, first published in 1941, is an autobiographical story of a women’s life on a turn-of-the-century ranch that has been an invaluable resource to subsequent generations of scholars interested in the ranching west.

She always returned to Datil throughout her life. She spent the last few years of her life on the ranch with her sister Lorraine Lavender. Agnes died there on 8 March 1958.

Sources:

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Morris Bakkem, Morris, and Brenda Farmington. *Encyclopedia of Women in the American West* (Thousand Oaks, Ca.: Sage Publications, 2003).

<https://nmhistoricwomen.org/location/ada-mcpherson-morely/>

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