

For Students: Background Reading & Context

ABOUT TUBERCULOSIS

In the nineteenth century (1801-1900), tuberculosis (a dangerous lung disease) was the main cause of death in both Europe and the United States. This serious disease, also called the “white plague,” killed thousands each year. Signs of sickness included high fevers, fast pulse, night-sweats, a cough and weight loss.

We know from the work of archaeologists (scientists who study people who lived a very long time ago) that tuberculosis has been around for thousands of years. Evidence of damage caused by tuberculosis has been found in the chests of Egyptian mummies. Doctors and scientists did not find medicines to cure tuberculosis until 1944. Until these special medicines were discovered, tuberculosis patients were told to rest, spend lots of time in the sunshine and fresh air, and to eat a special diet (beef, bread, milk, and eggs).

Colorado Springs became a city in 1871 and promoted itself as a great place for the treatment of tuberculosis. Our area was well known for its beautiful scenery, sunshine and mild weather. For many years the local Chamber of Commerce created booklets describing the health benefits of the region. Shared across the country and around the world, the advertisements encouraged patients ill with tuberculosis to come to Colorado Springs and enjoy the healing powers of our over 300 days of sunshine a year. For good reason, the city’s official nickname became **The City of Sunshine**.



Modern Woodmen of America:
A Tuberculosis Hospital

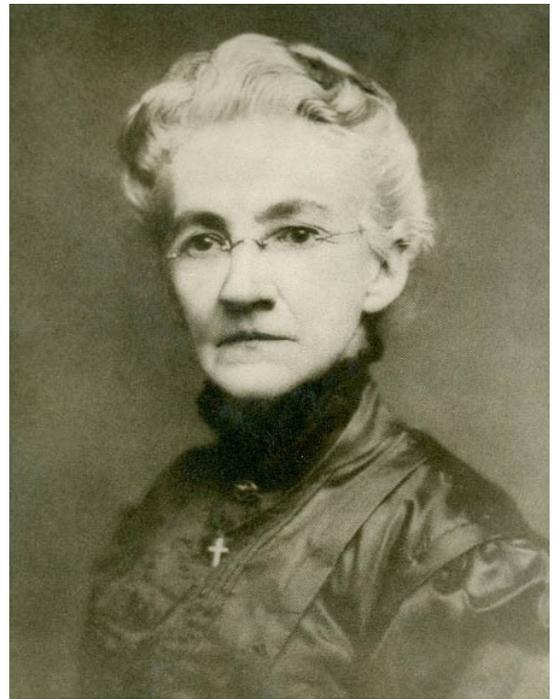
While we do not know how many people came, history experts think that by the year 1900, about 20,000 tuberculosis patients moved to the southwest each year in search of health. Historians think that at least 1/3 of all Colorado residents came to the state in search of a cure for themselves or a close family member. Once cured, many stayed on in the area to build their lives, families, and businesses. They contributed to our community in many important ways.

ABOUT IDA GWYNN GARVIN

In 1915, Ida Gwynn Garvin moved to Colorado Springs to get treatment for tuberculosis. She stayed at a sanatorium (hospital) called Nob Hill Lodge. Ida was from Ohio and left her seven children there to stay with her parents during her treatment. She sent many letters to her family in Ohio to share her worries about money, her health, and the health of her children.

When Ida first arrived at Nob Hill Lodge she weighed 104 ½ lbs. Her goal was to gain weight as low weight was a sign of the disease. Because she could not work during her treatment, Ida got help from her parents to pay for her care. Ida did not like all of the rules (like having to drink a lot of milk and eat many eggs) at Nob Hill Lodge and was bored talking about her tuberculosis all of the time. In April 1916, Ida was worried about the money it cost to stay at Nob Hill and decided to move to Montana to live with her brother John and his wife Ethel.

In November 1916, Ida became a homesteader in Montana (she applied to own and improve a section of land in the state). She was still very sick, so her family helped her to work the land so they could afford to live. In December 1916 she went back to Nob Hill Lodge to “chase the cure” during the cold Montana winter. She finally left Colorado Springs in the spring of 1917. As weeks turned into months, Ida became more and more ill while living in Montana. On January 29, 1921, Ida died of tuberculosis.



Ida Gwynn Garvin