

# For Teachers: Background Reading & Context

## ABOUT TUBERCULOSIS

In the nineteenth century, tuberculosis was the leading cause of death in both Europe and the United States. The dreaded “white plague” killed thousands each year. Symptoms included high fevers, rapid pulse, night-sweats, a debilitating cough and significant weight loss. The tremendous physical deterioration of a tubercular patient gave the disease two other common names; consumption and phthisis, a Greek word meaning “wasting away.”

Archaeological evidence suggests tuberculosis has plagued humans for thousands of years. TB lesions have been found in the chest cavities of Egyptian mummies and Hippocrates, the Greek “father of medicine” vividly described the disease over 2,400 years ago. With no known cure until the discovery of Streptomycin in 1944 and Isoniazid (INH) in 1952, nineteenth-century physicians prescribed “rest cures” for consumptives in mild, sunny climates. As a result, invalids sought the best care they could afford and “chased the cure” to Colorado Springs.

From its founding in 1871, local boosters advertised Colorado Springs as a premier health destination for the treatment of consumption and “lung troubles,” among other maladies. Our region’s greatest asset-turned-industry was its stunning scenery, abundant sunshine and mild climate. For decades the local Chamber of Commerce published pamphlets extolling the health benefits of the region. Distributed across the country and around the world, the advertisements encouraged invalids to breathe our “100% aseptic air” 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

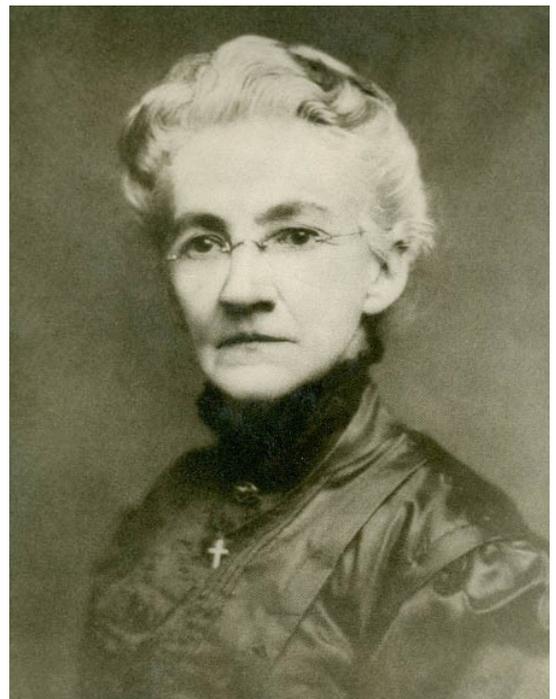
While no exact figures exist, historians and public health officials generally agree that by 1900, approximately 20,000 health-seekers emigrated to the southwest each year in search of health. In his 1907 memoir, *Chasing the Cure in Colorado*, Thomas Crawford Galbreath estimated that at least 1/3 of 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 region to build their lives, families, and businesses. Their economic, political, artistic, and educational contributions to this community are still visible today.

## ABOUT IDA GWYNN GARVIN

In the fall of 1915, Ida Gwynn Garvin was a reluctant patient “chasing the cure” at Nob Hill Lodge. Originally from Ohio, Ida had left her seven children in the care of her parents as she sought sanatorium treatment. Letters home document her constant concern over living expenses and the health threat she posed to her children. Writing her mother in December Ida states, “I think her (daughter Irma’s) lungs and sputum had better be examined at once, as we don’t want to take any chances...I think the home has better be disinfected ...I thought I was careful but I did not exercise the care that we are obliged to here...They are very strict about it in Colorado, but I suppose they have to be when the state is so full of lungers.”

When Ida first arrived at Nob Hill Lodge she was a woman broken in health and spirit, weighing just 104 ½ lbs. Although she later described herself as a widow, evidence suggests that Ida’s husband Norman had abandoned the family. As a result, Ida relied on her parents to pay for her care. Having grown tired of the rigid rules and endless talk about TB that were common in sanatorium life, Ida wrote to her mother, “I really feel that at present I have my bugs (TB) on the run and that when I get where I won’t hear so much about it I’ll improve even faster.” By April 1916, Ida decided that the expense was simply too much. She nervously traveled by train to visit her brother John and his wife Ethel, hoping to regain her health in the dry air of eastern Montana.

In November 1916, Ida filed a homestead claim in Chouteau County, Montana. Able to walk only short distances and often bedridden for weeks at a time, Ida needed help to “prove up” her homestead in order to gain title. Ida’s brother John and her oldest children Gwynn and Nita worked together to provide some semblance of economic security and potential inheritance for Ida and her family. In December 1916 she returned to Nob Hill Lodge with young son Amer to “chase the cure” during the harsh Montana winter. She left Colorado Springs and sanatorium life for good in early spring 1917. As weeks turned into months, Ida became a permanent invalid and watched the world go by from her sleeping porch in Montana. Ida received her homestead patent in June 1920. Seven months later, on January 29, 1921, she died of tuberculosis.



Ida Gwynn Garvin