

H 78-01-01/02

Mary Burgess White  
(Mrs. Sam O. White)  
June 22, 1973

Ind. record:  
1294-  
01860

Mary White of 902 Kellum Street, Fairbanks. Wife of Sam O. White, early Alaskan game warden and pilot.

Mary White was born Mary Burgess in Millbrook, N. Y. Her mother died when Mary was 2 years old (died in childbirth when Mary's brother was born). Mary reared by aunts. She was the daughter of REV. and Mrs. Thomas Burgess. The reverend was a priest in the Episcopal Church.

Mary says she "never did anything important". She is a modest, gentle lady of 85 (almost 85, that is. She will be 85 in September 1973). She recalls that she was "waited on" as a child and a young woman. Servants were employed in the aunt's home. Mary had never even washed clothes until she was married to Sam White.

As a young woman Mary Burgess took two years of Deaconess training at the Episcopal Deaconess School in Philadelphia. She did church work after that training, but nothing spectacular. Mostly near her home. She said she had tried nursing when she was 20 years old, but she didn't work out. "I guess I wasn't given enough responsibility when I was younger," she explained. Anyway, she couldn't hack it and went on to the deaconess training for her church.

Later, after Mary was past 30, she entered nursing training with the help (in getting into the school) of a doctor friend of the family. Her aim was to learn nursing and then become a missionary nurse.

That's what happened. She graduated from Rhode Island Hospital in Providence, R.I. in October, 1926. Soon she was on her way to Ft. Yukon, Alaska for an assignment with the Hudson Stuck Memorial Hospital.

At Ft. Yukon Mary had one other nurse for company and a doctor who was there for a short time while the regular doctor took a year's leave. The Hudson Stuck Hospital, Mary recalls, took care of mostly children and mostly all tuberculosis cases.

Sam White was in Ft. Yukon as a game warden. He would "go whizzing by the hospital on his sled (dog team sled), and, Oh, he looked so romantic" she recalled. After about one year in the Ft. Yukon village Sam talked Mary into matrimony. The couple was married by a ~~constable~~ <sup>Commissioner</sup>, and Mary never told her family that fact. They being good Episcopalians (and her father a reverend and her grandfather a bishop in the church) she didn't want them to know that the knot was not tied by a church man. And it was a woman constable <sup>Commissioner</sup> or magistrate, I guess she called her.

(more)

Mary's family: brother is a retired medical doctor. Three nephews who are doctors. Two grand nieces are doctors. One is Dr. Joan Burgess in Anchorage (this date)

In Fairbanks.... The Whites came to Fairbanks right after their marriage in Ft. Yukon. Sam's transfer to the game office in Fairbanks is probably the move that prompted the proposal of marriage. Anyway, the couple traveled by river boat to Nenana and then by train to Fairbanks. Mary stayed in a hotel in Nenana in a garrish room (all sorts of colors) with a "hard woman" Mary had never seen the likes of before (considering her sheltered life before coming to Alaska). Her memory is hazy on dates, but she recalls that she was almost 40 when she and Sam were married. The couple never had any children though Mary loves children and said she wanted to adopt some (Sam didn't want to adopt since ~~he~~ he already was the father of three boys by a previous marriage)

Nursin work in Fairbanks.... Mary worked for Doctor Dulavern (sp?). She did quite a bit of office nursing for old Dr. Romig. She thinks she also worked for Dr. Chase. Her only hospital nursing was one month when her husband Sam was hospitalized with burned hands. A cabin in the village he was flying to out of caught fire and badly burned his hands. He finally wnet "outside" for more treatment.

Another time Mary was hospitalized for an operation.

Her home life has been a simple one. "I never was a good cook," she says, bringin back to mind that "sheltered and easy" life she had growing up...servants all the time. She never has ~~garden~~ gardened, either. Sam likewise doesn't like to garden. But ~~the~~ the neighbors do.) Mary says all they grow is dandelions)

In Fairbanks Mary was very active in the Episcopal Church. She particularly liked to teach Sunday school, reading Bible storeis to the little children. She had many of Fairbanks' citizens in her Sunday school classes, including the Stroecker boys. She helped out in church activies.

Sam was a game warden for 15 years and then went to work for Wien Airlines. Ralph and Fritz and Sig taught him to fly. He retired some years ago, but he had to quit flying when he was 80 (just couple years ago) because of the mandatory cut off of flying licenses by FAA at age 80. Sam is three years younger than Mary.