

**Local History Research Report**

**on**

**Mary Tennant**

**by**

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**Presented**

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**to**

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## INTRODUCTION

Mary Gray Tennant came to the United States, as a Scottish lass, at the age of nineteen.

She had an average education and had worked in the textile factories in Scotland.

She married Alexander (Sandy ) Tennant in 1872.

Her life was not to be an easy one, nor a life of leisure.

She was glad of devoting her life to mankind. She was very religious, and felt that what she had to do, was what God would have her do. I know when God called her to heaven He said, "Mary, your work was well done."

She gave me this interesting story. I took the notes in 1939. She was then 87 years young.

Her mind was very alert. She was living in her home with her two sons, James (Mugsy) and Arthur (Art).

Her many friends, neighbors and relatives were frequent visitors. She was still the wonderful hostess.

Her health failed. She went to live with her daughter, Belle McNees, in Rawlins, Wyoming. She required constant care. The ladies who took care of her said she was always considerate and tried to take care of her needs more than her health would permit.

Many relatives and several friends were with her when she passed away.

I thank Mary Tennant and her daughter, Belle McNees, for the notes which made my article possible.

I also thank the following for his or her memoir:

E. A. (Bud) McNees

W. H. (Bill) McNees

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Isabelle Posey

## MARY TENNANT

The family of James Gray and his wife Christina Irons Anderson lived in Bonnie Brae, Erdire, Ayrshire, Scotland. \*(1) The family was of Presbyterian faith, and had eleven children; nine girls and two boys.

Mary was born November 4, 1851. She was the sixth daughter and lived a normal, active childhood.

In school she was taught the regular subjects, but also had to study the Bible.

Mary worked in a Glasgow \*(2) factory, and in the Steam Looms at Ernie McPhersons, for three years. These were textile factories. The work was very interesting to Mary, as she loved to work with her hands.

Mary and her sister, Agnes, came to the United States in 1871. They went to Barton, Maryland. Agnes married a man whose last name was Lees.

Mary worked for and stayed in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Banaman for two years. She also worked for Mr. and Mrs. Greenlees during this time.

Mary met Alexander (Sandy) Tennant, and after the usual courtship married him at Pekin, Maryland on November 16, 1872. Here they set up housekeeping, and had three children born to them; Alexander in 1873, Christina in 1875, and James Gray in 1877. All together there were eleven children born to them.

The Tennant family moved to Kansas March 16, 1879. Here they obtained a farm on which they worked the land, raised a large vegetable garden, raised a few milk cows, mules and horses. Sandy traded and sold horses and mules, but did not get rich.

Life for Mary was harder in Kansas, as her house was made of mud, with a dirt floor. This made it almost impossible to keep clean. She had to make all their mattresses from corn husks, sew the clothing by hand, carry water to drink and wash her clothes with, which she did by hand on a wash board.

There were no doctors in the community at this time, so the neighbors depended upon one another for help. Mary, always willing to help a friend, began her career as a mid-wife. She delivered the neighbor's babies and in return a neighbor delivered Mary's baby, Robert, who was born in 1879.

The spirit of "Go West, Young Man Go West", was in the air. Mary, Sandy and family moved to Wyoming, October 9, 1881, locating in Carbon. This was a coal mining town belonging to the Union Pacific Railroad.



Sandy tried to work in the mines, but suffered from Brights Disease \*(3) and asthma. The dust did not help his breathing, it only made his suffering worse.

After six months in Wyoming, they returned to their farm in Kansas in the year 1882. The farm was near the Nebraska-Kansas line, a few miles from Republican City, Nebraska, which is now owned by one of the neighbor's sons.

During this stay in Kansas, three girls and a boy were born; Jannette in 1882, Isabelle Miller in 1884, Agnes in 1887 and John in 1890.

Once again the family of Sandy and Mary Tennant returned to Wyoming in 1890. They stopped in Hanna, a coal mining town, where the trains stopped to put coal and water in the engines. These elements made the engines run.

Here in Hanna was a coal chute which made loading the coal easier and a water tank holding many gallons of water. These were close to Mary's home, as she lived across the street from the railroad.

Sandy's health had not improved, so Mary started a boarding house. There were fifty boarders, all miners, who were very glad to have good home cooked meals.

Every day she put up fifty lunches, baked pies, cakes and bread. Each was a chore of its own.

Her meals were so popular with the railroad personnel; she was known from the Atlantic to the Pacific for them.

She tended the sick and helped the disabled. Her career as a mid-wife began once more. Mary delivered a total of 403 babies.

She was never too busy, nor too tired to help others when needed.

As her daughters were very good about helping her, she took in sewing and ironing. The daughters did the dishes and made the beds before leaving for school each morning.

A terrible explosion happened in Union Pacific Coal Company's Mine Number One, June, 1903. \*(4) One hundred seventy-one miners were killed. Many of these were Mary's boarders, but as luck would have it, not one of her three sons who worked there was killed. \*(5)

Mary's husband, Sandy, died in 1904 of Brights Disease. Six children survived. Five other children preceeded him in death.

Two explosions occurred in the same mine on March 28, 1908. \*(6) Fifty-eight miners were killed, leaving thirty-three widows and one hundred fatherless children.

