

DESERT DUST

Carlin Historical Society - Carlin, Nevada

Carlin's Doctor



Dr. Claude Eastman, his wife Ada Brown Eastman, and their children, Richard Eastman and Marian Eastman. Not pictured is Dr. Eastman's step-son, Henry Brown Eastman.

WRITTEN BY ELLA B. TRUJILLO

The transcontinental railroad changed a lot, much of it for the better, but it also had a downside. Railroads are dangerous, especially for those who work on them but also for the thousands who travel by rail. The Central Pacific Railroad company quickly realized they needed to protect their workers, passengers, and especially themselves when accidents occurred. And a new branch of medicine was born, railway surgery. The railroad began to hire doctors, specifically surgeons, to work along the line of the new railroad. A central railroad hospital was also built in Sacramento, although it was later moved to San Francisco. But, these railroad doctors did not limit their activities to treating railroad-related injuries. They treated all manner of illnesses, gave routine checkups, performed elective surgery, and delivered babies. They provided a service that would not have otherwise existed in many towns.

Carlin was chosen as a location for a railroad doctor and an “emergency hospital” - just a room staffed by a doctor who could handle minor emergencies. Any major or life-threatening cases were immediately put on a train and sent to the railroad hospital in San Francisco. A couple of doctors came and went until October of 1923 when fifty-year-old, Dr. C.W. Eastman and his family came to Carlin. He had previously worked as a railroad doctor in Sparks. In 1919, Dr. Eastman struck an 80-year-old man with his car and the victim died from his injuries. This was likely devastating and may have prompted his transfer to Carlin. Dr. Eastman would remain in Carlin as the “doctor” until he died in 1954. He brought with him his wife, Ada, whom he had married in Goldfield, Nevada in 1907, where he had previously practiced medicine in nearby Tonopah, and his children, Marian and Richard. Dr. Eastman had earned his medical degree from Washington University at St. Louis. Many older Carlinites remember Dr. Eastman very fondly. One tells a story of him piercing her ears for her in his office inside the S.P. Depot and another recalls that he was fond of gambling and played a slot machine inside the Overland quite a lot. Dr. Eastman was also very active in the community and the town celebrated his 80th birthday with great gusto at the State Hotel. The description of the event says that earlier in the day he had been called upon to provide medical treatment as a result of a local automobile accident. But, there are a few more tidbits about the man and his family that make one wonder about the man behind the medical kit. First, his marriage to Ada wasn’t his first foray into married life. In 1900, the newspapers reported the shocking news that Claude Eastman, having not yet finished his medical degree, had eloped with the daughter of his employer. Dr. Eastman worked as a barber to pay his way through medical school. He married Gertie Renner in St. Louis but what became of the couple between 1900 and 1907 when he married Ada in Goldfield is not known. Of course, Ada was no stranger to scandal either as she came to the marriage with a son of her own, Henry “Harry” Brown, born in 1898, when Ada was 23 years old. There is no indication who Harry’s biological father, as he went by his mother’s surname and then he took Dr. Eastman’s name. Marian Eastman, their daughter, told many the story of how her mother had worked on the silent film circuit as a piano player. Mrs. Eastman’s obituary said she was the first to play the organ for silent films at the Hunter Theater in Elko. Marian donated two items to the Northeastern Nevada Museum before her death, a traveling medical kit that belonged to her father and a mink coat that her mother wore as she played the piano in the chilly theaters. In the end, the family was happy and many will always remember them in Carlin.



Southern Pacific Railroad Hospital, San Francisco

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