

Like thousands of other "girl homesteaders" at the turn of the century, Edith Eudora Ammons Kohl came west seeking opportunity and adventure. During her later career as a writer, she published a lively account of life on her South Dakota claim in her 1938 autobiographical novel, *Land of the Burnt Thigh*.

Kohl was born in 1884 in Huey, Illinois. Her mother died when Edith and her sister, Ida Mary, were young, and the girls alternately lived with their father or his sister. By 1907, family finances, health concerns, and a sense of adventure prompted the young women to move west.

Accustomed to hearing romanticized tales about the West, the Ammons sisters were ill prepared for life on the Great Plains when they arrived to homestead between Pierre and Presho. To help raise cash to improve their claim, Ida Mary took a teaching position and Kohl ran the *McClure Press*, one of a string of newspapers operated by Edward L. Senn that specialized in publishing homesteaders' final-proof notices. With assistance from neighbors, the sisters proved up.

Rather than collect their profits and return home, both women decided to stay in the West, where they enjoyed independence and the invigorating climate. When the Lower Brule Indian Reservation opened to white settlers in 1908, they started the homesteading process anew in the area east of McClure known as "the Strip." There they opened the Ammons post office and general store, and Kohl started her own newspaper, the *Reservation Wand*.

In 1909, fire destroyed their enterprises. Later that year, Ida Mary wed rancher Imbert Miller. She died in childbirth in 1910. Kohl moved to Wyoming to work as a locator, guiding homeseekers to claims. She met Aaron Wesley Kohl, an architect and inventor, whom she married and moved with to Denver, Colorado, around 1920. Her husband died in 1926.

From the early 1930s through the mid-1950s, Kohl worked as a freelance writer and feature writer for the *Denver Post*. A champion of western agricultural development, she became a prominent leader of the cooperative movement in Colorado. Although *Land of the Burnt Thigh* was her best-known book, she also wrote *A Christmas on the Frontier* (1945), *Denver's First Christmas* (1945), and *Denver's Historic Mansions* (1957). Edith Kohl died in Denver on 19 July 1959.

by B. Katie O'Mara

Dakota Images



Edith Ammons Kohl

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