

Dakota Images

Alice Ivers Tubbs, who gained notoriety as a gambler and brothel owner in the Black Hills, went on to be celebrated as a colorful vestige of the area's frontier past.

Alice Ivers was born 17 February 1851 in Sudbury, England. After emigrating with her family to the United States, the well-educated young woman married Frank Duffield and moved to Lake City, Colorado. Fascinated by gambling, she spent time at the local saloons studying the games. Soon she took up the hobby herself, and her lucrative pastime turned into a necessity when her husband died in a mining accident.

Tubbs thrived on the frontier, following economic booms to mining camps, cattle towns, and other settlements across the West. After she broke the bank in a game in Silver City, New Mexico, she began a new career phase, dealing faro, the quintessential card game of the frontier. Tubbs presented an intriguing blend of characteristics: a talented woman dealer with an impassive face, smartly and fashionably dressed, who always carried a gun, chewed a thick cigar, and refused to work on Sundays. Her success sent her on trips to New York, where she indulged in the theater and the latest clothing styles.

In the early 1890s, she arrived in the Black Hills. Dealing stud in Deadwood, she acquired the moniker "Poker Alice" and met Warren G. Tubbs, a rival dealer. They married and eventually retired to a ranch near Sturgis. After her husband died in 1910, Tubbs returned to the gaming tables to earn a living.

Tubbs opened a gambling house and bordello in Sturgis, serving the Fort Meade clientele. She also employed a man named George Huckert to raise livestock on her ranch. He repeatedly proposed marriage, and Tubbs accepted when she became unable to pay his wages. Upon his death, she resumed the name Tubbs. Still a religious woman, Tubbs kept her house of ill repute closed on Sundays and taught the prostitutes Sunday school lessons. Despite her piety, disorderly incidents occurred at her establishment, and reformers finally shut her down.

Her glamorous days over, Tubbs had long since taken to wearing a khaki shirt and trademark campaign hat, a costume she wore in the early Days of '76 parades in Deadwood. She died on 27 February 1930 at the age of seventy-nine from complications following surgery. Poker Alice Tubbs is buried at Sturgis.

—Joan Anderson



Alice Ivers Tubbs

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