



## Otero County, New Mexico History and Genealogy



### Mary White Girl Scout Camp Mary White



Gracing N.M. 24 and Bear Canyon Road, a newly installed historic roadside marker acknowledges the contributions of one local woman whose legacy is remembered by women across America.

“In 1927, Miss Mary established one of the earliest Girl Scout camps in America and the first in New Mexico. Situated on 200 acres in Otero County, a stately pine lodge, Ingham Hall, nestles amid cabins and outbuildings of Camp Mary White. Generations of girls, who learned stewardship of nature and community at the camp, continue to be energized as activists by Mary White’s pioneer spirit.”

Established by the New Mexico Historic Women Marker Initiative, the marker stands as one of a growing number to recognize women whose significant contributions to our state’s history have been too long unacknowledged by our state’s historical markers. In 2008, the nonprofit camp alumni organization, Friends of Camp Mary White, Inc., (FCMW) applied to the N.M. Historic Women Marker Initiative on behalf of Mary L. White. The application was selected, and in June, the state installed the roadside marker to formally recognize White’s dedication to generations of girls and young women in establishing one of the earliest Girl Scout camps in the U.S.

A lifelong resident of southern New Mexico, Mary White’s family moved here in 1898 when she was 4. At age 23, she was appointed by President Harding as the first woman in Chaves County to hold a federal office: acting Postmistress. By 1925, she was fully confirmed by President Coolidge in the position she would hold until 1931. Her father, Elza White, built Muleshoe Ranch as his summer home in Bear Canyon amid the Sacramento Mountains near Mayhill, N.M., in 1927.

“Miss Mary” quickly became one of the earliest pioneers of the Girl Scouting movement which began in 1912 under Juliette Gordon Low. In 1923, she helped launch the first Girl Scout troop in Roswell, and during the next six years, she rose quickly through the ranks of Girl Scouting to become a member of the National Board of Directors of Girl Scouts of the USA. From 1931 to 1940, White served on the National Staff of Girl Scouts of the USA as Camp Adviser for their largest region: the Cactus Region (New Mexico, Texas, Arizona, and Oklahoma). For the remainder of her lifetime, she worked with the Girl Scouts and for many years served as director of the

camp which bore her name.

In her later years at the "White House" at Muleshoe Ranch, "Miss Mary" often sat on her long porch, from which she waved to campers as they hiked to and from Camp Mary White. She died on May 15, 1988, at the age of 94, leaving a legacy now honored by the State of New Mexico through the official scenic historic marker.

To assist his daughter, Elza White donated 200 acres bordering the Lincoln National Forest to aid the Girl Scouts in their primary goal of establishing a Girl Scout camp west of the Mississippi. Known affectionately as "Daddy White," Mary's father prepared large chuck wagon dinners at the camp, hosting the governor, senators, and commissioners and other dignitaries. By 1928, the stately pine lodge known as Ingham Hall and six units with open-air kitchens and three-sided Adirondack cabins were completed with the aid of the New Mexico Military Institute.

For the next 10 years, until 1937, Camp Mary White served as one of two National Training Centers with emphasis in training Girl Scout Leaders and Camp Directors. At that time, the only other facility providing this training was Camp Edith Macy in New York, which today still serves as a Girl Scout National Training Center.

Because Camp Mary White was known for its unique approach to training women in outdoor leadership, women from across the U.S. and Great Britain came to the camp each summer to ride with "Miss Mary" and "Daddy White" on a 100-mile horseback trip to Carlsbad Caverns known as the "Camp to Cavern Pack Trip." It was a rugged journey off the Sacramento Mountains, across the desert and into the Guadalupe Mountains; a trip taking 8-10 days. The trip ended at Carlsbad Caverns and a night at the La Caverna Hotel in Carlsbad. The "Camp to Cavern Pack Trip" was re-enacted in 1977 to celebrate the camp's 50th anniversary. Many members of today's FCMW, Inc., were participants in the 1977 reenactment, including current Homeland Security Secretary and former Arizona Governor, Janet Napolitano.

In 1972, a celebration of the 60th Anniversary of Girl Scouting and New Mexico statehood was hosted by Camp Mary White. The Girl Scout U.S. Wider Opportunity event was named "Mystique," symbolizing the mystery and charm of the state; 107 girls attended, representing the U.S., Switzerland, Guatemala, Bermuda, Puerto Rico and the Canal Zone. In 1982, another international event, "Montage," focused on southwestern folklore and primitive camping.

In early 1928, "Miss Mary" charged the participants of the camp with ensuring the continued stewardship of the camp for generations to come. For more than 70 years, the camp offered Girl Scouts from around the region and nation a place to experience horseback riding, hiking, covered wagon trips, out-posting, animal pack trips, and backpacking. It was a place for laughter, singing and dancing, creativity and self-discovery. Yet during the 1990s, as the focus of Girl Scouting shifted from camping and outdoor expeditions, the camp was allowed to fall into disrepair. The local Zia Council closed the camp in 2003 and sold it in 2006.

When alumni gathered in 2003 and discovered the state of the camp, they moved quickly to found FCMW in order to ensure the continued legacy of Mary White. Now over 150 strong, FCMW's mission is to solicit members and resources supporting the preservation of the facilities, the natural environment and the varied historical and cultural traditions of Camp Mary White for the safety, growth, and enjoyment of present and future generations. The organization continues to work with the new owners, CMW, LLC, to preserve the camp and its historic heritage.

The "Mary White" historic marker will be dedicated on Saturday, July 18, at 1:30 p.m. followed by an open house hosted by FCMW at the camp. Representatives of the Mary White Family, local and state dignitaries, as well as community members and camp alumni are invited.

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