

Bonnors Ferry Herald, Thursday, January 10, 2008

**Constance (Connie) Keller Hollenbeck**

Constance Keller Hollenbeck, 98, passed away at Boundary County Hospital on December 31, 2007. Funeral services will be held at Bonnors Ferry Funeral Home on January 12, 2008, at 1:00pm, followed by interment at Moravia Cemetery. A memorial celebration of Connie's life is being planned for Spring 2008.

Connie was born in Leonard, Missouri on May 6, 1909 to Thomas and Libbie Gray Robinson. In January 1914 the family arrived in Bonnors Ferry by train to visit their relatives George and Jerusha Schofield who owned a livery stable here. They were so enchanted by the beauty and bustle of the still-raw community that they decided to stay. For Connie, that stays lasted 94 years. In the early years they raised cattle and farmed in the Kootenai Valley, at that time still natural wetlands. After the valley was drained and diked, they farmed principally in the Moravia area. Living in places that were remote from the conveniences of Bonnors Ferry before the advent of paved roads and motorized transportation, Connie learned at an early age all the skills needed to run a self-sufficient frontier home and farmstead. Her cooking and sewing abilities were widely admired.



Connie graduated from Bonnors Ferry High School in 1928, and in 1930 she married Harry Keller, a nationally known writer of poetry and fiction. Their union produced four children. After Harry's untimely death in 1943, Connie first supported her family by sewing and then in 1946 was employed as Deputy County Assessor. In 1951 she became the first woman deputy sheriff in Idaho and in 1956 was elected to the first of four terms as County Treasurer. She was active in Democrat Party politics at the county and state levels throughout the past 60 years. Her 1951 marriage to Clarence Hollenbeck ended in divorce the same year.

Connie was active in the county's economic life as well, at various times owning and operating a Montgomery Ward store, a Grade A dairy and an antique store in the historic Samaria Hotel building which she had bought and renovated. She was a living encyclopedia of Boundary County history. Having arrived here less than fifty years after the first ferry was established to carry miners and traders across the Kootenai River to the Wild Horse gold fields in Canada, and hardly twenty years after completion of the Great Northern Railroad opened the area to general settlement, Connie's own life spanned the last two-thirds of the county's history and she knew personally many of those who had lived in the earlier one-third. Her first-hand knowledge of community events and personalities can never be replaced.

It is in the social area that Connie will be remembered with the greatest love and respect. Though her own life was not always easy, she was perpetually concerned for others in need. Her home was ever open to children from troubled families, many of whom found shelter and comfort with her for short or longer periods over the years. Connie spent her childhood among the Kootenai people in the valley, and her affection for those early playmates and their elders extended to several generations of their descendants. She was often an advocate and mediator for the tribe and its individual members in a sometimes hostile white community. Until the last few months of her life, Connie maintained a lively correspondence with a host of relatives and friends who will deeply miss those long letters written in her fine, clear hand.

Connie is survived by sons Clint (Mazie) Keller of Coeur d'Alene and Ken (Ligia) Keller of Quito, Ecuador; daughters Margaret Swanson and Rebecca (Cleve) Shearer of Bonnors Ferry; twelve grandchildren; twenty-five great-grandchildren; and 3 great-great-grandchildren.