



Josephine Dukes (1835-1903)

One of Montana's women pioneers. It is said that she had the unique record of having lived in four states without having moved out of her original house. The four states were Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana.

- **1835-Birth.** 1835 near St Louis IL as Josephine Pelkey (Peltier, Pelletier, Pelky)
- **1861-Marriage.** Josephine married her first husband, Peter Meininger, who drowned in 1861 in the Snake River near Fort Hall ID (Pocatello ID

today). They were on their way west with their small son, Thomas.

- **1861** - She arrived in Missoula in October with her young son, Thomas, and her brother, Robert A. Pelkey and his wife Adaline, and their mother. Adaline gave birth (January 13, 1862) to the first white child born in what is /would become the state of Montana.
- **1862-Marriage.** Josephine married her second husband, George P White. They were the first white couple married within the present boundaries of Montana. They had five children: The oldest three George H (1863) Washington Territory, William (1864) Idaho Territory, and Richard (1866) Montana Territory who were all born in the same house but in three different Territories. They had two other children, one of which died as an infant. Josephine and George had a butcher shop on East Front Street in Missoula until 1870. George died in 1871.
- **1872 or 1873-Marriage.** Josephine married her third husband, Edward D Dukes. Josephine and Edwin had three children, one dies as an infant. Edwin died in 1882.
- **1903-Death.** Josephine died on April 7, 1903 at her home in Hellgate from 'apoplexy' (possible stroke).
- It is believed that Josephine is the first white woman to reside continuously in what is now the state of Montana. There are two or three documented other women, however, like Josephine's mother and sister in law, these women moved in and out of Montana through the years.
- Hells Gate (Hellgate on Mullan Road today) – was barely a settlement when Josephine arrived and settled on a ranch in the area.
- Historical items Josephine witnessed:
 - The first church for whites, St Michaels, built by the catholic priests.
 - The migration of Indians as they camped below her home on their way from the Bitterroot Valley to the Mission Valley.
 - The first saloon in Hellgate as it became a courtroom.
 - The road agents from Henry Plummer's gang hanging the morning after the Vigilantes did their work at the Higgins and Worden store.
 - 1865 Higgins and Worden moved their business to Missoula Mills (about where the Holiday Inn is today)
 - 1860 – 1865 the population of Hellgate never exceeded 14. During this time there were nine or ten violent deaths recorded. Perhaps that is why George P White was a Probate Judge and also Coroner.
- During Josephine's lifetime in Hellgate, she lived in three Territories: Washington, Idaho and Montana; and in the State of Montana.

Information researched and provided by Marcia Porter, retired Missoula County Records Supervisor.