

Elizabeth Frances Kanouse Mattox
April 6, 1906 - May 3, 2014

Elizabeth Frances Mattox, 108, of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, passed away peacefully on May 3, 2014, at a local nursing home.

Elizabeth was born on April 6, 1906, in Armour, South Dakota. Born Deaf, she experienced a lifetime of remarkable changes. Her family moved to a homestead near Paola, Wyoming, west of Cheyenne, in 1909. Life there included fierce snowstorms, lightning strikes that killed farm animals, and the ever-present concern of rattlesnakes.

In 1916, a visiting aunt from Denver offered to take Elizabeth and her older sister, Faye, to the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind in Colorado Springs. Elizabeth was ten and Faye was thirteen. It was their first separation from their parents. School records preserved the sisters' letters home, including requests for money to pay a dentist's bill. Both girls earned academic awards and were remembered as bright students. Elizabeth graduated in June 1928 and became a seamstress.

Her sewing skills took her to Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1933. There, she worked at a laundry and dry-cleaning business owned by the parents of Carl Mattox, who was also Deaf. Elizabeth and Carl eloped to Washington, D.C., and married on March 23, 1934. Years later, she still smiled coyly when asked about their elopement, keeping the reasons for their decision to herself. During her time in Washington, she lived in a little white house not far from the nation's White House.

Their honeymoon included a visit to Sioux Falls, where they attended a Deaf Club meeting. A club member, Joe Servold, asked Elizabeth whether she had a Deaf sister. Elizabeth helped connect him with Faye, and the two began exchanging letters. Joe traveled to Denver to meet Faye in May 1934, and they married that August.

Elizabeth and Carl eventually settled in Portland, Oregon, where she worked for the White Stag clothing company. Her life took her from a Wyoming homestead to communities on both coasts, while her sewing skills provided a lasting occupation and source of enjoyment.

Carl died in 1988. Later that year, Elizabeth's niece, Peggy Teslow, brought her to Sioux Falls. Elizabeth and Faye were reunited and lived together until Faye's death in 1991. Elizabeth was a member of the South Dakota Association of the Deaf and the Deaf Seniors of South Dakota.

As she approached her 102nd birthday in 2008, Elizabeth continued cross-stitching in her apartment at the Inn on Westport. Peggy recorded many of her aunt's memories, preserving family stories from an earlier generation. The family also delighted in the resemblance between young Elizabeth and her six-year-old great-great-niece, Morgan Malcomb. An old childhood photograph showed that both shared a similar wave of light-colored hair across their foreheads.

Elizabeth's long life was filled with family connections, work, travel, and quiet pleasures. At the time of her death, she was known as one of the oldest living Deaf individuals and was believed to be among South Dakota's oldest residents.

She is survived by her niece, Peggy Teslow of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and her nephew, Charles Kanouse of Fishers, Indiana.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Carl; her parents; two sisters, Myrtle Rodgers and Faye Servold; a brother, Robert Kanouse; and a nephew, James Kanouse.

A private memorial service was planned for a later date. Arrangements were under the direction of Miller Funeral Home and Onsite Cremation Services in Sioux Falls.