

Jeanette “Jennie” Wright was born on April 1, 1847, in Dodgeville, Iowa, to John Wright and Mary Ann Bridges. Her siblings were Eli Green, Sarah Elizabeth, Milton, Cassandra “Cassie,” John Council, Harriet Lavina, Ida Estella, and Laura.

Jennie Wright initially taught primary grades at the Nebraska School for the Deaf in Omaha, where she learned sign language. This was particularly significant, as she had a deaf sister. In 1879, Jennie resigned from her teaching position and moved to Sioux Falls, where she became actively involved in the movement to establish a school in the Dakota Territory. During this time, Rev. Thomas Berry hired Jennie as the school’s first teacher.



Since the territorial government did not allocate funding for the school, it was established largely through volunteer efforts. Neither Rev. Berry nor Jennie received a salary, demonstrating their unwavering dedication. Jennie personally contributed \$500 for advertising alone, in addition to covering numerous other expenses during the school’s first year. Following the death of Rev. Berry’s wife in the fall of 1881, he returned to Buffalo, NY. Jennie briefly served as the superintendent and teacher for less than a month before stepping down from the position.

On October 29, 1881, Jennie married Daniel F. Mingus at the school for the deaf in the presence of her beloved students, a few close friends, and the new superintendent, Professor James Simpson, who was married to her sister Laura.

Jennie and Daniel lived in Sioux Falls, SD, until January 17, 1887. Their departure was delayed by a winter storm, but they eventually moved to San Diego, California, where they settled. Jennie became involved in furniture dealing. Daniel passed away on September 19, 1919, in San Diego.

In August 1920, at the age of 68, Jennie married 31-year-old Arthur S. Moyer. However, the marriage did not last due to Arthur’s criminal history, and Jennie divorced him. Jennie died on March 25, 1926, at the age of 78, in San Diego, California. She passed away sick and lonely, and it is believed she was cremated.

First Class of Students



Shown are teacher Jennie Wright and her first class of students of the Territorial School for Deaf Mutes, ca. 1881. Image owner: South Dakota State Historical Society.