

Sadie Likens

A Life of Service to Others

In the late 1800s, Colorado struggled to help the poor and abused. Sadie Likens was one of the first to lend a hand. This kind-hearted woman devoted her life to helping those less fortunate than herself. As Denver's first policewoman, she came to the rescue of abused women and children. Veterans also received her special care.

Sadie worked at a time when many help organizations were coming into being. These groups served the community. They also gave women a chance to make a difference in the lives of others. Sadie's generous efforts with these organizations eventually won her the respect and love of the people of Denver.

Humble Beginnings

Sadie Likens was born Sarah Jane Morehouse on July 14, 1840 in Trenton, Ohio. Her mother died only four years later, leaving Sadie and her five siblings motherless. In 1847, Reverend Moses Morehouse moved his family to Iowa where he remarried. However, by 1855 the family had moved to Wisconsin.

When Sadie was only nineteen she married a farmer named David Isaiah Washburn. They had their son Fred a year later. Shortly after, the Civil War began and David enlisted in Wisconsin's Volunteer Infantry. In 1862 he fell ill and died. Sadie faced a terrible two years as Fred died of pneumonia soon after the death of his father.

Sadie married William Wallace Likens on August 17, 1869. She had four more children — Ada Belle, Reuel, Velma, and Clarence — between 1870 and 1876. Sadie faced new worries when her husband ran into trouble with the law. The family fled Wisconsin and moved to Boulder, Colorado. Here, William opened a law practice. When he was caught cheating his clients, William was found guilty by a jury. He was sentenced to four years of heavy labor, and his marriage to Sadie fell apart. Sadie picked up her family and moved to Denver.



Sadie Likens, police matron

Looking After Denver

Once in Denver, Sadie became involved with the Women's Christian Temperance Union, or WCTU. This group was known for its efforts to stop the drinking of alcohol. It also pushed to pass laws protecting women and children. The WCTU supported shelters for the abused and greater penalties for crimes committed against women. Sadie first worked as the matron, or superintendent, of women at the WCTU home.

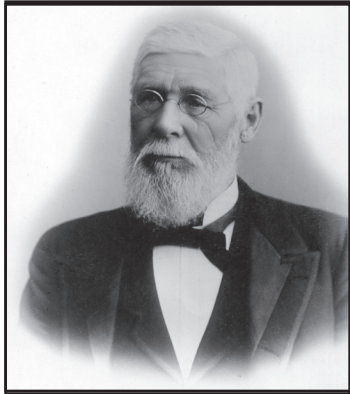
Soon Sadie took the position of Denver's first jail and police matron. Before she joined the force, only men were police officers. This profession was thought to be a "man's job." As the jail matron, Sadie managed the new female prisoners and saw to their well being.

About this time, Denver's population was rapidly growing, and so was the prison population. To help with the workload, Sadie's daughter Ada Belle was appointed assistant police matron in 1891. Mother and daughter worked side by side. When an economic depression hit the state in the early 1890s, many people were left without work. Denver struggled to help those and others who came to the city looking for work. In these troubled times, Sadie did all she could for the city she now called home.

A Rocky Road

More trouble started for Sadie when the citizens of Colorado elected Davis H. Waite governor in 1893. Waite was a member of the Populist party, which claimed to be on the side of small farmers. Under Waite, Denver's fire and police board fired Ada Belle. Officials insisted that Sadie

support the Populist party, but she refused. She let it be known that she was not a Populist or a politician. Her refusal did not sit well with the board or Governor Waite. On July 10, the board fired her, but the public was not happy about that.



Governor Davis H. Waite

To make matters worse, the governor and other officials made up rumors about Sadie's character. They tried to make her look less than respectable. When they were caught, the officials went on trial to defend their actions. They were found not guilty, but they had lost all respect. Because the public rallied around Sadie, she appeared to have come out on top.

Back in the Swing of Things

After the Populist party lost power in 1895, Sadie's job as police matron was returned to her. The problem was that the fire and police board also decided to make the status of the matron and her assistant equal. When news of this change reached her, Sadie voiced her objection. Nothing she could say would change the minds of the board members. She sadly resigned her job, but soon found another position. She became superintendent for the State Home and Industrial School for Girls. The school was a type of reformatory for girls leading a troubled life.

Sadie worked at the school for only nine months before she resigned due to illness. Still intent on helping others, she later went to work for the Florence Crittenton social agency in 1897. It was her job to help single and pregnant young women. The home in Denver was only one of many Florence Crittenton centers across the country. Charles Crittenton opened the first home in 1883 to provide a shelter for abandoned women. He called his program "The Florence Night Mission" in memory of his daughter Florence who had died of scarlet fever when she was four.

In 1899 Sadie decided it was time to help the sick. She became matron of a county hospital where she used her skills to care for patients.

Coming to the Aid of Veterans

Whether caring for women and children, the sick, or war veterans, Sadie gave freely of her time. She and a couple of other people joined forces to start the Farragut Relief Corps in 1881. This organization served as the women's branch of the Grand Army of the Republic. By establishing homes for soldiers and doing relief work, Sadie's new organization helped struggling veterans get to their feet.

During World War I, Sadie volunteered with the American Legion, which supported returning soldiers. By this time, Sadie was in her seventies. She showed no sign of slowing down, though. Caring for others was her calling.

A Sweet Memory

On July 30, 1920, Sadie died after suffering a long illness. All the people she touched over the years felt the loss deeply. Shortly after her death people rallied together to put up a memorial in her honor. The City of Denver erected a drinking fountain and plaque in the park across from the State Capitol building. Denver veterans hailed her as "the one Coloradan who has given the most unselfish service to her country."

On a sunny day, if you walk near East Colfax on Broadway, you will still see the memorial dedicated to this charitable woman. Her gift of service to those in need is a gift for which we can all be grateful.

BY LAURA PERILLE, Colorado Historical Society intern

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