

QUARTERLY NEWS

MARY BAKER EDDY MUSEUM

and Historic Sites



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ELLA PECK SWEET, C.S.D.

A Christian Scientist in Denver, Colorado received a telegram on a Saturday in June 1904. The Christian Science Board of Directors wanted to see her the following Tuesday. Eager to support her church in any way she could, Mrs. Ella Peck Sweet quickly arranged to leave her work and family responsibilities, and within three hours she boarded a train for Boston. As she later wrote in her reminiscences, the Directors were pleasantly surprised that she had been able to get there by the appointed time. Mrs. Sweet remembered William B. Johnson remarking that she must have had her shoes on her feet and her staff in her hand.¹ She was instructed to catch the train for Concord, New Hampshire that afternoon for an interview with Mary Baker Eddy at her Pleasant View home.

It had been seventeen years since Mrs. Sweet had been taught by Mrs. Eddy, and she had seen her teacher only a few times during that period. Her time had been spent healing and teaching Christian Science in Colorado. During their interview, Mrs. Eddy questioned Mrs. Sweet about her work and family, and then asked her if she could come to live at Pleasant View for a while. After a short trip to Colorado to arrange her affairs, Mrs. Sweet took up residence in Mrs. Eddy's household as one of six metaphysical workers.

A willingness to drop everything and move on to something better was characteristic of Ella Peck Sweet's life from the very start. She came from a family of westward-moving pioneers. Her forebears had lived in Virginia and Maryland, but moved west to Ohio in the early 1800's. Ella Peck



Ella Peck Sweet, C.S.D., ca. 1900

was born in 1838 in Pickaway County, near Columbus, Ohio. She was a frail, sickly child and enjoyed a close relationship with her mother, who taught Ella to pray to God for guidance.

By the time she was seven, Ella's parents decided to move west to Illinois. The family traveled by wagon to Pike County, near the Missouri border. Here Ella grew up, and taught two terms at a country district school. Her attendance at Berean College in Jacksonville, Illinois was cut short after a few months by her marriage. She and her husband settled in Barry, Illinois, where he was in the mercantile business. Despite continued ill health, Mrs. Sweet enjoyed church activities and belonged to the Women's Christian Temperance Union.

In 1880 the Sweets moved still farther west to Colorado. They lived in the mountains at Buffalo Springs, a post office town south of Fairplay.² A few miles away, a steady stream of

supply wagons rolled across the flatlands and up over Weston Pass to Leadville. This was a time of extensive mining and railroad-building activity in the area. Mrs. Sweet was unhappy with her life in Buffalo Springs and later described her surroundings as "most uncongenial and cheerless to my thought." Rather than benefiting from the mountain climate, as her family had hoped, Ella found that her various physical ailments became more troublesome.³ In October 1885 her condition was so critical that she went to Denver to live out her final days. At this point she heard of Christian Science.

In the mountains, Mrs. Sweet had come to know Mrs. Mary M. Hall, who lived on a ranch twenty miles out of Fairplay. Mrs. Hall had recently found Christian Science while seeking medical help in Chicago, accompanied by her two daughters, Minnie and Nettie. She had treatment from a Christian Science practitioner instead, and at the end of several months, she was completely healed of blindness and lameness.⁴ While still in Chicago, Mrs. Hall and Minnie had Primary class instruction from Bradford Sherman. They returned to Denver in September 1885 and were soon occupied with a healing practice that involved treating sometimes 100 patients each day.

It was Mrs. Hall's daughter, Miss Minnie B. Hall, just twenty-two years old at the time, who introduced Ella Peck Sweet to Christianly scientific healing. She visited Mrs. Sweet in her Denver sickroom and asked if she might heal her in Christian Science. Mrs. Sweet consented and was astonished at the quick and complete healing that followed.⁵ In the ensuing weeks she thoroughly studied *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, and consequently found new understanding in reading her much-loved Bible.

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Within a few months there was so much interest in Christian Science in Denver, due to the remarkable healing work going on, that Bradford Sherman was summoned from Chicago. He taught two classes in December 1885, in the Halls' home, the first such teaching in Colorado. Mrs. Sweet was a member of the first class.

Upon her return to the mountains, Mrs. Sweet's regenerated condition caused inevitable interest, and calls for treatment followed. Among her first cases were successful healings of inflammatory rheumatism, epilepsy, cancer and hemorrhage. In autumn 1886 Mrs. Eddy invited Mrs. Sweet to enter her next Normal class. However, because Mrs. Sweet had not been charging for her healing work, she did not have sufficient funds for such a venture. Mrs. Eddy told her to be ready for a class the following year.

Again, in October 1887, the call came from Boston to join the upcoming Normal class, and this time Mrs. Sweet was ready, eagerly anticipating the two weeks of instruction. The class began on October 30, and included Mr. and Mrs. Edward P. Bates, Ruth B. Ewing and Alfred Farlow, among others. Mrs. Sweet later wrote of her teacher's method of instruction in part as follows: "She held us in the utmost serious and earnest attention to the fundamentals of the great subject in hand, yet the moment she observed our thought growing heavy, her versatile mind found ready recourse to some incident or anecdote with which to lift and brighten us, while at the same time more deeply impressing some lesson of Truth."⁶

When she returned to Colorado, Mrs. Sweet's work of healing and sharing Christian Science with others greatly expanded. Using her Buffalo Springs home as a base from which to travel, she responded to calls for help in towns within a 100-mile radius, including Pueblo, Canon City, Salida, Buena Vista and Colorado Springs. Because of her pioneer healing and teaching activity, which she called her "missionary work," Mrs. Sweet now found that life in the mountains brought her happiness and great satisfaction.

In the years that followed, Mrs. Sweet taught classes in Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Canon City and Denver. She was listed in *The Christian Science Journal* for thirty years beginning in February 1889.⁷ Her



Mrs. Sweet, ca. 1890

daughter, Clara L. Sweet, was also a Christian Science practitioner for over twenty years, her first listing appearing in the December 1896 issue of the *Journal*.

Mrs. Eddy must have recognized Mrs. Sweet's strength and dedication, for in 1893 she chose her as one of about forty students who were invited to contribute \$1000 each to the building fund for The Mother Church.⁸ Mrs. Sweet later wrote of this experience: "It was only by entire reliance upon Divine Mind that I was enabled to reply to Mrs. Eddy that I would accept her invitation. Such a sum of money had never been in my hands. Infinite resources seemed at once opened to me, and at the appointed time the amount was mine to send, and my gratitude for this great proof of Love's supply was unbounded."

During her visits to Canon City and Colorado Springs, Mrs. Sweet helped gather into groups those interested in Christian Science. These groups later became active churches. In autumn 1891, Mrs. Sweet and her daughter moved to Colorado Springs at the invitation of the group there, to help more closely with the formation of a church. First Church of Christ, Scientist, Colorado Springs, was organized in March of the following year. In May 1892 the church members requested that Mrs. Sweet stay on permanently as their preacher, but soon after this Mr. Sweet finished his business in the mountains and decided that the family would live in Denver.

Although Denver became her home, Mrs. Sweet continued to work with the church in Colorado Springs for the next six years. She traveled seventy-five miles to Colorado Springs each Saturday afternoon,

conducted the weekly testimony meeting Saturday evening, and preached at the Sunday service the next morning. Sometimes she even continued on to Canon City or Pueblo to preach again Sunday evening.⁹ In 1895, when preaching was replaced by reading of the Bible Lessons at Christian Science services, Mrs. Sweet was elected First Reader at the Colorado Springs church. Her selfless work in this capacity continued until the end of 1898, when Mrs. Eddy established Wednesday as the evening for testimony meetings in every Christian Science church. Rather than travel to Colorado Springs twice a week, Mrs. Sweet decided it was time to leave the work there to others and join the work going on in Denver.

In June 1904, a Colorado Springs newspaper reported Mrs. Sweet's appointment to serve in Mrs. Eddy's household: "Mrs. Ella Peck Sweet, formerly of Colorado Springs, but now of Denver, who has the distinction of being one of the pioneer Christian Science teachers in Colorado, has been called to Concord, New Hampshire, by Mrs. Mary Baker Eddy, head of the Christian Science Church, to assist in the work there. The honor is one of the greatest that can be conferred upon a member of that denomination."

A Denver newspaper article explained further: "Those who are called by Mrs. Eddy leave their work wherever the summons finds them. To work side by side with the Founder of the Faith is the desire of all those who are active workers in the church. The close association with Mrs. Eddy gives new ideas, new power and spirit to carry on the work in that portion of the country where the worker comes from."

Mrs. Sweet lived and worked at Pleasant View for about five months. As one of the metaphysical workers, her time was filled with prayerful work to protect the developing Christian Science movement. She said she gained particular inspiration from the hours she and the other workers spent in conference with Mrs. Eddy. Ella Peck Sweet returned to Denver at Thanksgiving time in 1904, looking back on her months at Pleasant View as "the most profitable of all my experience in Christian Science." Her later years were "filled with continued activity in the joyous work of healing and teaching."

JEAN JACQUES PFISTER

Upon urging from Mrs. Mary Beecher Longyear (the founder of Longyear Historical Society), Mrs. Sweet dictated reminiscences of her life and experiences to her daughter during the winter of 1918-19.¹⁰ After her passing a few months later, several of her students expressed a desire for copies of the memoirs. Clara Sweet had them privately published so that each member of her mother's association of pupils might have a copy. She wrote that her mother had left behind "in the hearts of all who knew her, treasured memories of a mother, a friend, a teacher, a woman of gracious, gentle presence, illumined with love." Ella Peck Sweet's life of quiet perseverance and unselfishness greatly helped the establishment of Christian Science in Colorado.

Marylee Hursh

1. Referring to Exodus 12:11.
2. Perry Eberhart, *Guide to the Colorado Ghost Towns and Mining Camps*, Sage Books, 1959.
3. Mrs. Sweet later likened her feelings at the time to the way Mrs. Eddy described her own experience before discovering Christian Science (*Retrospection and Introspection*, p. 23:7).
4. "Pioneers in the West," *Quarterly News*, Spring 1972 and *Christian Science Sentinel*, August 22, 1901, p. 818.
5. For Mrs. Sweet's own account of her healing, see "A 'Bundle of Ailments' Destroyed," *The Christian Science Journal*, July 1897, pp. 221-222.
6. Ella Peck Sweet, C.S.D., "An Account of Pioneer Experiences in Christian Science," 1919.
7. Mrs. Sweet was listed as "C.S.B." through October 1896, and thereafter her designation was "C.S.D."
8. See Mary Baker Eddy, *Miscellaneous Writings*, p. 143 and Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy, The Years of Authority*, p. 69.
9. The Canon City church also organized during the early 1890's. Mrs. Sweet and Minnie B. Hall read the dedication service together because they both had taught classes there.
10. In a letter dated June 12, 1918, Mrs. Sweet wrote to Mrs. Longyear about her work of collecting historical material relating to Mrs. Eddy and those associated with her, as follows: "This seems to me a very wise and splendid work, and the foresight expressed in arranging that the testimony of many living witnesses be gathered into one Library, is to be highly commended. Be assured of my deep gratitude for the privilege of sharing in this work."

Acknowledgment:

The author wishes to thank her father, John W. Hursh, for researching Buffalo Springs, Colorado at the U.S. Geological Survey's National Center in Reston, Virginia, and Mrs. Janie LeHew, Geographic Assistant in the National Mapping Division, for her interest and cooperation.

In April 1937, nationally-known artist Jean Jacques Pfister and his wife, Elizabeth, toured New Hampshire and Massachusetts, using Sibyl Wilbur's book, *The Life of Mary Baker Eddy*, as a guide to search out many of the places connected with the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science. As a direct result of the inspiration gained from these visits to Mrs. Eddy's former homes and other landmarks, Mr. Pfister, a Christian Scientist, decided to paint a portrait of Mrs. Eddy. Several photographs were loaned to him, and from these he painted a life-size profile portrait of the 1866-67 period, and the first of many balcony scene portraits.¹ The latter, which is probably Mr. Pfister's most widely-known work, depicts Mrs. Eddy addressing the crowds from her balcony at Pleasant View.



Profile portrait of Mary Baker Eddy, from 1866-67 tintype

Jean Jacques Pfister was born in Hasle, Switzerland in 1878 and emigrated to the United States twenty years later.² He had first come to love art as a child, admiring the soft blue tones of a painting in his sister's room. He spent many years in art school, attending Hopkins School of Fine Arts in San Francisco, Bremen Art School in Germany, and the Art Students League in New York. While studying in San Francisco, his studio was destroyed in the famous earthquake and fire of 1906. After escaping the city, he painted a highly-acclaimed landscape of the scene, entitled "The Burning City," from the hills across the bay.

The natural beauty of his native Switzerland no doubt influenced Mr. Pfister's artwork, for the monumental grandeur of nature is a recurring theme in his landscapes. Although he worked in several media, including oil and watercolor, he usually used quickly-drying tempera for landscapes. This was particularly helpful when painting on hikes through the mountains. He traveled extensively in the American West, filling canvas after canvas with the majestic beauty of the National Parks in Colorado, Utah, Wyoming and Montana.

Mr. Pfister was also well-respected as a portrait artist, and he was a member of many of America's most prominent art clubs, including the National Arts Club, the Salmagundi Club and the American Water Color Society. One of his most popular paintings from the late 1920's, entitled "We' at Daybreak," depicts Col. Charles Lindbergh's historic flight over the Atlantic.

In the 1930's the Pfisters moved from New York to Florida, where he was head of the art department at Rollins College in Winter Park for several years. He also gave a series of very successful demonstration art lectures, at which he lectured as he painted. Later, the Pfisters built a combination studio/house in Coral Gables.

After 1937, much of Jean Jacques Pfister's time was spent painting portraits of Mary Baker Eddy, working from several life-size photographic enlargements. He had a unique atmosphere in which to work, as he explained in a letter to Longyear Foundation: "... most of my painting of the portraits of Mrs. Eddy have been made while listening to Mrs. Pfister read from *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures*. In other words, we have both tried to shut out thoughts unlike Mrs. Eddy's own exalted conceptions." The inspiration he gained from this method is evident in the quality of the work produced.

To paint the profile portrait mentioned previously, the artist used an enlargement of an 1866-67 tintype of Mary Baker Eddy.³ To him, this portrait represented a period of vital significance in the history of Christian Science, because it showed Mrs.



Portrait of Mrs. Eddy's husband, Asa Gilbert Eddy, painted by Pfister for Longyear Foundation in 1944

Eddy about the time she wrote her first manuscripts. Mr. Pfister completed the work in 1938 and graciously loaned it to Longyear Foundation for several years. In 1943 the Longyear Board of Trustees bought the canvas, making it the first major addition to the portrait collection following the opening of the Museum in 1937.

Mr. Pfister's popular balcony scene portrait of Mrs. Eddy was painted from a photograph taken by W.G.C. Kimball, a Concord, New Hampshire photographer. Mrs. Eddy is shown standing on the balcony at her home in Concord, on June 29, 1903, as she spoke to a crowd of over 10,000 of her followers.⁴ What many do not realize about this now familiar scene is that the temperature that day was over 100° in the shade.⁵ Yet Mrs. Eddy must have been intent on appearing with proper dignity before the people who came to see her, for she was dressed in a heavy jacket, fur cloak, feather boa, hat and gloves.

The balcony scene portrait was so well received and was considered such a good likeness that Mr. Pfister was commissioned to paint it many times over. He presented the first canvas to The Christian Science Board of Directors in 1938. When it was decided to display a portrait of Mary Baker Eddy in the Christian Science Building at the 1939 New York World's Fair, the architect of the building, W. Pope Barney, reviewed all the available portraits and recommended that Mr. Pfister's be used. A copy of the portrait was also ordered for the Christian Science pavilion at the 1939 Golden Gate Exposition in San Francisco.⁶

Mr. William P. McKenzie, C.S.B., ordered a balcony scene portrait for his study, another for a friend in California, and two for The Principia. He and his wife wrote to Mr. Pfister: "We are charmed to have this artistic concept, presented not as a labored likeness, but as evidence of what the artist saw in the whole combination of sky, earth, handsome raiment and noble and winning humanity."⁷ Other known copies of the portrait were made for the office of the Publisher's Agent at The Christian Science Publishing Society; Mrs. Nelvia E. Ritchie, C.S.B.; Mr. Charles E. Heitman, C.S.B.;⁸ and Tenth Church of Christ, Scientist, New York.

Mr. Pfister painted numerous paintings of Mrs. Eddy which are undoubtedly in the possession of various individuals throughout the country. He was commissioned by Mrs. Marie K. Larkin, C.S.B., of Miami Beach, Florida, to paint one of the balcony scenes and a portrait of her teacher, Mrs. Annie M. Knott, C.S.D. The latter was done from a photograph taken about 1918 while Mrs. Knott was visiting Mrs. Mary B. Longyear at her home (which is now the Mary Baker Eddy Museum).⁹



Courtesy of Marie K. Larkin, C.S.B.
Portrait of Annie M. Knott, C.S.D.

Jean Jacques Pfister believed that an artist's purpose is to bring poetry into the lives of others. His dedicated work in making accurate portrayals of Mary Baker Eddy has brought joy and inspiration to thousands and



Mrs. Eddy speaking from balcony at Pleasant View, June 29, 1903

will continue to bless generations of her followers.

Marylee Hursh

1. Reproductions of the profile portrait are available from Longyear Historical Society. The Christian Science Publishing Society has printed and distributed copies of the balcony scene portrait in various sizes throughout the years. The portrait was also used in *We Knew Mary Baker Eddy*, Fourth Series.
2. In 1927, Mr. Pfister became a naturalized citizen of the United States.
3. The tintype and the portrait are on exhibit in the Mary Baker Eddy Museum.
4. Mrs. Eddy's address on that occasion can be found in *The First Church of Christ, Scientist, and Miscellany*, pp. 170-171.
5. Letter from William P. McKenzie to Jean Jacques Pfister, 2/4/41.
6. This painting was later given to the Christian Science Benevolent Association (now Arden Wood) in San Francisco.
7. Letter from Mr. McKenzie to Mr. Pfister, 5/5/40.
8. Mr. and Mrs. Pfister were students of Mr. Charles E. Heitman, C.S.B.
9. See photograph of Annie M. Knott in *Quarterly News*, Spring 1972.

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