

# DR. MARY LATHAM, GREENWOOD CEMETERY

BY JULIE Y. RUSSELL

**D**r. Mary Archard Latham, Spokane's pioneer female physician, is one of early Spokane's most colorful and controversial characters.

Latham graduated from medical school in 1886, at the age of 42, then moved to Spokane in 1887 to practice medicine. She arrived with her three sons, Frank, James, and Warren; but her husband, Dr. Edward Hempstead Latham, arrived two years later.

Latham's practice was an immediate success, and she soon became one of the town's most popular citizens. Mary's prominence and popularity continued to grow as she pushed for a public library, to which she donated money and a set of Encyclopedia Britannica, and sat on the board of directors. She also wrote fictional stories for the local newspaper and magazines, invested in real estate near Mead, was involved with the Humane Society, and worked tirelessly on behalf of children, the poor, and the helpless in the community.

In 1891, Edward became the resident physician on the Colville Indian Reservation while Mary and the boys stayed in Spokane. This marked an unfortunate turning point in Latham's life, as her fortunes and her reputation began to decline. Latham mismanaged her finances, which frequently brought about lawsuits against her for payment of wages, payment on loans, and payment for consumer goods bought on credit. In efforts to belay her money troubles, she responded with acts of forgery, arson, fabrications, and various falsehoods. Ultimately, she was convicted for arson and spent a short time in the women's prison at Walla Walla. Upon parole, she returned to Spokane to continue practicing medicine ... which got her into trouble again when it was discovered she had performed an abortion, known as a "criminal operation" in those days. The charges were dropped upon agreement to permanently retire, which she did.

Shortly after her retirement, Mary fell ill with pneumonia while taking care of a sick infant in her home. Dr. Latham died at Sacred Heart Hospital, at the age of 72.

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