

## From Crawfordsville Female Seminary to Utah, Romania Bunnell made name for herself

By Karen Zach, Around the County

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What do you do when you have two amazing females and only one place for a "County Connection" article in the Montgomery Memories? Ahhh, I'm blessed as I was able to save this one for an Around The County. This gal was indeed way ahead of her times and although MoCo can't actually claim her as our own, she did live here and attended school here for a few years before going on out into the world to make one major big hit for the ladies.

Born August 8th in Washington County, Indiana, 1839, to Luther and Hester (Mendenhall) Bunnell, their daughter, Romania, came to Crawfordsville to the Female Seminary probably about 1852, from their home in Clear Creek, Ohio. She studied here until 1855 when her mother decided to go to the Salt Lake Valley, Romania following. There Romania taught at Brigham Young's private school for his own children. Music was her forte, a main expertise of the majority of the graduates of the C'ville Female Seminary; also like most, she had an amazing mind.

At 19, close to her 20th birthday, she married Parley Parker Pratt. They had seven children; however two of those children passed early, a son living but a few days and her only daughter dying before the age of two. With the death of a young close friend, as well, she decided it was time to do something about not only educating herself in birthing and children raising, but to teach others as well.

She sold her piano and they sold their home so that she could go to medical school, leaving her sons with her mother and going East, helping her husband edit and proof his father's autobiography while attending school. Pratt Sr. was a stalwart in the Mormon Church, his son following to do much for the church, as well. She enrolled in the Women's Medical College in Philadelphia and graduated with the highest of honors in 1877. She became the first LDS female to earn a medical degree, returning to Utah and opening her practice, specializing in midwifery which she taught to Mormon Missionaries for three decades.

Upon her return home, the younger children didn't even know her since she had been gone six years, having returned to Utah only a few times for a visit. In 1877, her husband as the Mormon custom sometimes went married a second wife and left on a mission. This was not to her liking, thus, she divorced him in 1881, one Mormon practice she could not follow.

Although the care of women was her expertise, it was not her only one and she performed the first cataract surgery in the state of Utah, plus helped open the first LDS Hospital. In March of 1886, she married her second husband, Charles William Penrose. In 1905, she closed her practice and followed him when he presided over the European Missions. There she worked with the Relief Society and "proved her power as an administrator."

Upon their return to Utah, she practiced for a short time, retiring in 1912. Besides family, friends and church, she was extremely active in the Suffragette movement. She also wrote many articles, often pinpointing eye, ear, nose and throat advice, another of her specialties. Her husband passed away in 1925, she remaining a widow until her own death November 9th in 1932 at the age of 93 (with 22 living descendants). However, she remained active, always interested in state, national and world affairs and in good health (other than losing her eyesight in her declining years and a sickness the last few months) all of those years! It thrilled me to know Crawfordsville had a bit of influence on this woman's mind and career. Rest In Peace, dear lady!

Karen Zach is the editor of Montgomery Memories, our monthly magazine all about Montgomery County. Her column, Around the County, appears each Thursday in The Paper of Montgomery County.



Romania Bunnell