

# Mrs. F. C. Roberts First Student To Register at University of Arizona On Its Opening Day, October 1, 1891

Citizen

11/25/20

Mrs. Fred C. Roberts, formerly Clara Fish, tells in an interesting interview of the early days in the University of Arizona. The occasion for renewing her experiences was the celebration of Founder's day at the university on Wednesday, March 12.

Mrs. Roberts says the day had particular significance for her, as it marked the forty-fifth anniversary of the legislative act approved by the "thieving thirteen" legislature creating a state university at Tucson, at which she was the first person to matriculate. The bill was approved March 2, 1885 and the institution was opened for registration on October 1, 1891, the day on which Mrs. Roberts, then Clara Fish, registered, says, in an interview in the Arizona Wild Cat.

It was a small, trembling fourteen year old girl that walked into a room containing but a chair and a table with an open book and pen upon it and signed her name, Clara Fish, half way down the clean page. She was the first to matriculate in the University of Arizona when it opened its doors on October 1, 1891, and in commenting on it said:

"I can remember what my mother, who accompanied me to registration, remarked when we were told that I was the first student enrolled.

"Well daughter, if this University ever becomes a great institution you will have something to be proud of, knowing that you were the first to matriculate."

"And I certainly am proud. We have a wonderful University here," added Mrs. Roberts.

### Horses Used by Students

The university was situated some distance from the little town of Tucson, populated chiefly by Mexicans at that time. Students were compelled to come to school on horseback, leaving their horses tied to wires which had been looped through the knot holes in the barn that housed the president's horse and carriage. At noon everyone went down to the barn to water his horse.

Classes were held in the Main building, which was, in fact, the only building at the time, and it wasn't totally completed when school started. Class rooms were on the east and west sides of the structure, while the centers of the two floors were partitioned off as living quarters for the faculty members.

### Oral Examinations

"Upon entering the University I was given several oral examinations," said Mrs. Roberts. "Although I had spent but a month in the Tucson high school which had one teacher

at that time, I was permitted to enroll in the preparatory department."

After having completed one year in this department, where the students were given intensive work and instruction, almost as if they were under a private tutor, and four years in the university, Mrs. Roberts was ready to receive her diploma. Since she was the only one eligible to graduate that year, and since the administration was desirous of raising the standard of the university, they raised the requirements and Mrs. Roberts had to go to school another year, receiving her bachelor of science degree in 1897.

### Few Activities

The activities were few. Students, including the girls and the faculty, joined in the playing of baseball during the noon hour and occasion-

buildings at the present time are crowded with 1800 students. Practically every activity a student could wish for is to be had on the campus. All these changes occurred in a period of forty years from the time the first student, Mrs. Roberts, matriculated.

Mrs. Roberts has one son, F. Carlyle Roberts, Jr., who was graduated from the university in 1928, and a daughter, Miss Virginia Roberts, attending as a sophomore.

Mrs. Roberts takes an active part in the civic affairs of Tucson. She is regent of the Tucson chapter of the D. A. R. and active in the Landmarks

11-23-20

## OH, BRING BACK MY PEPPERS TO ME, WAS PIONEERS' REFRAIN

Reminiscences of early Thanksgivings in Tucson, sought from Mrs. F. C. Roberts, the daughter of one of the Old Pueblo's first pioneers, recalled to her mind another anecdote of the old days, not concerning Thanksgiving, but an interesting one nevertheless. It seems that Mrs. Roberts parents, Mr. and Mrs. E. N. Fish, and some friends, Mr. and Mrs. Hiram Stevens, went to considerable expense and trouble to import into the desert waste which was then Tucson, a dozen or more pepper trees. These they had set out in a stately row in front of their respective homes on North Main street.

But a Mexican in Tucson, seeing what was going on, developed designs upon these pepper trees. At least, the next morning upon arising, Mr. and Mrs. Fish and Mr. and Mrs. Stevens found only empty holes where before there had been trees.

What to do? Stolen pepper trees wouldn't be so easy to find in green, shady Tucson today. But then, the Fish-Stevens pepper trees were the only ones for hundreds of miles around. So Mr. and Mrs. Fish and Mr. and Mrs. Stevens took a buggy ride that morning, and among the "sights" which the city offered was a row of pepper trees rearing their heads heavenward in front of a dilapidated Mexican home.

So the lost was easily found. And one certain Mexican was forced to put in a day or two of free labor re-transplanting the peppers.



MRS. FRED C. ROBERTS  
(Clara Fish)

ally played "duck on the rock." Essays written by the students were read in assemblies which were held every day at first and less frequently later. It was almost ten years before there was enough material to start a football team.

The early catalogue of the university contained but thirty-two pages, while the last one issued had over 390 pages. Then, one building was sufficient to accommodate thirty-one students. The eleven class room