Elvira Brown Finley (1840-1931

I am Elvira Brown Finley. You can call me Ellie, all my friends do! My family was very progressive, so I was just one of a couple women at Iowa Wesleyan University. There I met John Clay Brown, a brilliant law student. The year was 1860. John had tuberculosis, so when we married, we decided to move west for his health.

Lawyers don't need a lot of farm equipment and a heavy Conestoga wagon, so we bought four mules and a lighter wagon called a Prairie Schooner. We joined a wagon train following the Platte River route to Colorado Territory. As we plodded along at slow oxen speed, we were very fearful of Indians. We decided to join another young couple with faster mules and went ahead of the train, trying to stay hidden from the Indians. We arrived safely in Denver, but later we heard that everyone in the slow wagon train was killed.

We settled in a tiny cabin in Colorado City. Clay was its first attorney and helped write the incorporation. The Indians were warring on all the settlers, so the Territorial Governor called for volunteers to help drive them away. Anthony Bott, Irving Howbert, Bob Finley and ~~Clay~~ John joined up. Three months later they caught the Indians in a place called Sand Creek and killed many of them. When Clay finally returned home, he learned our son Earnest had been born. Like so many babies at that time, Earnest died in a few weeks.

We moved down toward Fountain and Edward (1867) and Mary (1869) were born. Sadly, Clay's tuberculosis returned and he died in 1870. We buried him on top of the hill in what is now called Pioneer Park. The children and I took the new train back to Iowa for a spell, but came back here. We lived in Doctor Garvin's cabin for a couple of years and I found various kinds of work, even milking cows for a cheese factory!

Seven years later (1877), I married Clay's friend, Robert Finley. Bob was one of the first settlers in Colorado City. He was a surveyor and brought the first steam-powered sawmill to El Paso County. His first land included Bancroft Park. He was elected the first Treasurer and later was Assessor and Clerk/Recorder. He was one of the volunteers who went to fight Indians.

After the Indians Wars, Bob took up a 180-acre hay ranch that included the east side of what is now Pleasant Valley. He had a log home, chicken house, and pear, apple and plum orchards. The fields were irrigated by Camp Creek. After we married, we built a lovely home that still stands on the east side of Pleasant Valley. I loved that farm! We had guests all of the time. Our daughter Grace (1878) was born there.

Bob Finley was much older that I and died in 1913 (83). I lived almost thirty more years. I helped start the First Methodist Church of Colorado City. I promoted the Women's Christian Temperance Union and was a Pioneer community leader. I lived an amazing life! I was buried with Bob Finley in Evergreen Cemetery when I died in 1931 at age 91.

Relatives of my son, Edward Brown, still live in the area. When skeleton remains were moved (1930) from the ~~Pioneer~~ Mesa Cemetery to Fairview Cemetery, a stone for my husband John Clay Brown was placed here, but my family believes that he is still buried up on the ~~hill~~ mesa.

"Temporarily"

military marker
block 2 A lot 45
plot NE
Sgt CO G 3
Colo Cav

Barb Sweat 2023

See

Alvira Ann Finley

May 29, 1840-February 25, 1931

Information submitted by:

Edna Mary (Jones) Bernard

Growing up as one of four surviving children in an Ohio family, it is unlikely Alvira Ann Young ever imagined she'd grow up to marry one, much less two, of the Pikes Peak Region's important pioneer settlers.

When her family moved to Iowa for better educational opportunities, young "Allie" met fellow student John Clay Brown while attending Wesleyan University. Brown completed the four-year classical program a year early and graduated with a law degree in 1860. Two years later he and Allie were wed.

Before two more years went by, however, Brown contracted tuberculosis, which prompted the young couple to move to Colorado. Joining a wagon train bound for Denver, they crossed the Missouri River and headed west along the Platte River Trail.

Aware that Indian hostilities made it especially dangerous to travel with slow-moving ox teams, the Browns and another couple traveled ahead with their faster mules. Driving fast and stopping only in the safety of darkness, the small party made it to Denver in June 1864. Theirs proved to be a wise decision: the wagon train they started with never made it, all its members killed in an attack.

The Browns settled for several months in five-year-old Colorado City,* where he became its first attorney and helped in its incorporation. Shortly after Brown and Allie moved into their new home, a call went out for 100-day volunteers to support the U.S. Cavalry's efforts to protect local settlements from warring Indian parties.

Courtesy of Edna Mary (Jones) Bernard



Alvira Ann Finley

Brown answered the call and was mustered into service, as were three gentlemen named Anthony Bott, Robert Finley, and Irving Howbert. (See the Howbert Family entry on pages 70-73.) Three months later, under the command of Colonel John Chivington, the company was ordered to attack a band of Cheyenne Indians camping along Sand Creek. The battle would be known as the Sand Creek Massacre.

As soon as the 100 days ran out, Brown returned to Colorado City to find that Allie had given birth to a baby boy. Little Earnest died a few weeks later, as so many infants did in those rugged days, and the Browns moved farther south, eventually homesteading near Fountain, Colorado. There, son Edward was born in 1867 and daughter Mary the next year.

By this time Brown was serving as prosecuting attorney for El Paso and Huerfano counties, but tuberculosis finally claimed him in 1870 at the age of 37. He was buried in Mesa Cemetery** and although there is a marker for him in Fairview Cemetery, family members say his remains never were moved there after Mesa Cemetery was converted into a city park.

Widowed and all alone, Allie took her toddlers back to Iowa for a time, and then returned to live in a little log cabin in Colorado City. The cabin earlier had been used for meetings of the territorial legislature and later would be wrongly identified as the "Old Capitol Building." Except for two summers when Allie and her children milked cows to service a South Park, Colorado, cheese factory, the little family lived in the log cabin.

**present-day westside Colorado Springs*
***now the site of Pioneer Park*

Once Allie and her children moved out, the cabin thereafter was used for a variety of purposes, including a Chinese laundry. When it was in jeopardy of being torn down, city benefactor Spencer Penrose rescued the little cabin and had it moved onto the Broadmoor Hotel golf course. Today it stands in Bancroft Park.

Seven years after the death of her husband, Allie married another man who would be important to local history: Colorado City rancher-owner Robert Finley. A Pennsylvania native, Finley had arrived in Colorado City on Christmas Eve, 1860, bringing with him the first steam-powered sawmill in El Paso County. He worked at first as a carpenter, miner, and surveyor and the next year was elected El Paso County's first treasurer. He subsequently served three terms as the county's assessor and one term as its clerk and recorder. It was after his stint in that 100-day army that Finley took up the 180-acre ranch, most of which eventually would become the Pleasant Valley housing subdivision.

Today the Finley homestead would be approximately bounded on the west by Echo Lane, on the north by West Fontanero Road, on the east by Crown Ridge Drive, and on the south by West Uintah and West Bijou streets. Primarily a hay ranch, the property had a log home, livestock barns, carriage and utility sheds, a chicken house, pear, apple, and plum orchards, and fields irrigated by adjacent Camp Creek.

After they married, Allie transformed the Finley ranch house into one known for its hospitality and reared her children: Edward and Mary Brown, and youngest child Grace Finley who was born in 1878. This ranch house still stands—many times renovated—but it is no longer in the family.

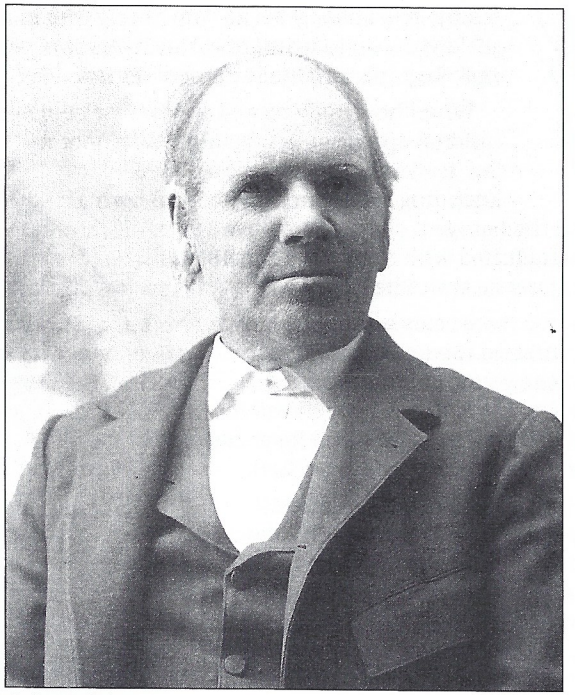
In 1912 Finley leased out his ranch and built Allie a new house in Colorado City. Located on part of the original Finley property, it was at 1025 Monroe Avenue which later became a West Bijou Street address.

Finley died the next year at age 83, and his Evergreen Cemetery funeral was widely attended. By this time Allie's only surviving child was Edward. Grace had passed away in 1898 and Mary in 1904, both daughters dying after lengthy illnesses.

Allie survived her second husband by nearly three decades, becoming a community treasure in her own right. Described as a petite lady of great character, this prominent member of the community belonged to the Half Century Club, the Daughters of the American Revolution and the El Paso County Pioneers' Association. A deeply religious woman, Allie was a founding member of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Colorado City.*** She also was always a strong promoter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, although neither of her husbands was a heavy drinker.

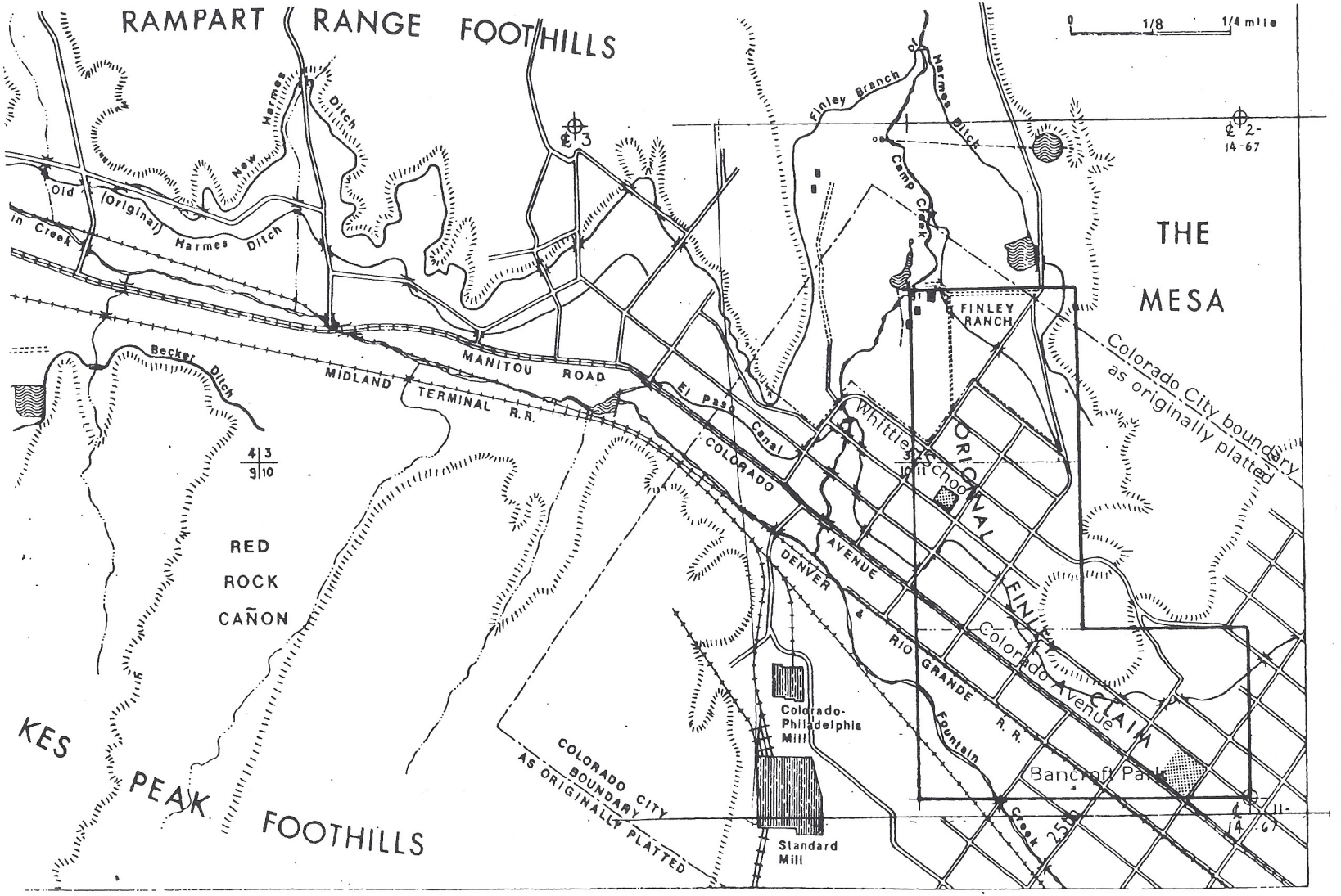
Courageous, resourceful, and hard-working all her days, Allie loved the Pikes Peak Region and passed that love on, first to her own children and then to theirs. When she died, it was in the home on West Bijou Street that her late husband had built for her.

Courtesy of Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum



Robert Finley

***today the Trinity United Methodist Church


RAMPART RANGE FOOTHILLS
0 1/8 1/4 mile
New Harmes Ditch
Old (Original) Harmes Ditch
Finley Branch
Harmes Ditch
Camp Creek
THE MESA
FINLEY RANCH
Colorado City boundary as originally platted
MANITOU ROAD
MIDLAND TERMINAL R.R.
Becker Ditch
El Paso Canal
COLORADO AVENUE
DENVER & RIO GRANDE R.R.
ORIGINAL FINLEY CLAIM
Colorado Avenue
Bancroft Park
Fountain Creek
Colorado-Philadelphia Mill
Standard Mill
COLORADO CITY BOUNDARY AS ORIGINALLY PLATTED
RED ROCK CAÑON
KES PEAK FOOTHILLS



Finlerhouse. Built 1870 417 N. 31st street

