

YesterYear

The Averill Family

Mr. and Mrs. Truman Nathaniel Averill (T.N. Averill) were among the first



residents of Townsend and were involved in many ventures during the early days of Townsend. T.N. Averill came to Montana as a professional carpenter in 1879. He returned to his native state of Michigan to marry Nellie Lois Hale.

T.N. and Nellie moved to Montana and settled in Wickes (just west of Jefferson City) for a short time. They moved to Townsend when it was established in 1883. The Averills built a small home on the north edge of Townsend on north Oak soon after moving here. Room by room the home grew to accommodate the growing Averill

family. The Averills lived in the home for 30 years before building a new home at 602 Broadway. Their son Fred was the second child born in Townsend.

T.N. Averill was the architect and builder of many of the early mid-Victorian homes, as well as being involved in building many of the early business blocks on Broadway. Most notably, T.N. Averill and partner G.E. Burns were the contractors that built the Commercial Hotel building. He was also the contractor for the first schoolhouse in Townsend (1886) and the new brick High School building (1917). The new brick High School was in use until the end of the 20th century.

But T.N. Averill was not only a prominent builder in Townsend. He was the second Mayor of Townsend and served several terms. His educational background made him an ideal public speaker for civic, fraternal and church affairs.

In 1897, M.H Hatch and H.R. Campbell founded the Townsend Star newspaper. In less than a year, T.N. Averill and Joseph Gahrett took over the Townsend Star. After four years, T.N. Averill bought out Gahrett's interest and the Averill family published the Townsend Star for 60 years.

T.N. Averill died on April 7, 1921 leaving a long, distinguished list of accomplishments during his life in Townsend; but, his wife Nellie was also a prominent figure in Townsend. Mrs. Averill was a prominent figure in community affairs: she was appointed to the Works Progress Board during the great depression; she was county chairman of the Infantile Paralysis Association and was chairman of the local chapter of the American Red Cross.

When her husband died in 1921, Mrs. Averill took over as publisher of the Townsend Star and only retired from active operations of the Star in 1947, at the age of 89. During that period of time she was given the name "Queen of Montana Newspaper Women" by the State Editorial Association. During World War II over 300 "Buddies" received free copies of the Townsend Star wrapped and mailed by her personally.



Three young men that apprenticed under the guidance of Mrs. Averill went on to start their own newspapers: Dewey Aker (The Tacoma News), Rudy Glatz (the Winnett Times) and Bill Davis and wife (The Three Forks Herald).

After Mrs. Averill retired, the Townsend Star continued under the management of her two daughters Mrs. Floyd Holloway (Grace Averill) and Mrs. Ray Ward (Rosemary Averill) who had assisted their mother for 28 years. The two daughters of T.N. Averill and Nellie Averill ran the newspaper for another ten years before retiring and selling the paper to George and Florence Brammer.

The information in this article came from the Broadwater Bygones available at the Broadwater County Museum. Stop by the museum and visit with curator Linda Huth to learn more about the distinguished Averill family and their descendants and to learn more about Broadwater County History.