

Rattlesnake Kate

Rattlesnake Kate got her name from a day when she had to fight off 140 rattlesnakes.

Kate had ridden to a pond with her 3 year old son, Ernie, to gather any wounded ducks from hunters so they could have them for dinner. She had to climb down from her horse to unlock the gate. That is when the first snake appeared.

Kate was a good shot

Kate knew how to ride and to shoot. She was able to take care of herself and her child as a dirt farmer because of those skills. Those skills are also what saved her and her son from the snakes on October 28, 1925.

Kate saw the first snake by the gate and shot it.

The noise brought out 3 more snakes from nearby brush. Kate was able to shoot those snakes, as well. More snakes crawled out and Kate did not want to use all of her bullets so she looked for another weapon to use.

Kate found a No Hunting sign that she was able to use to fight off the snakes.

It took her 2 hours to fight off enough snakes to get back on her horse to ride home.

A neighbor saw her soon after she got home.

She had blisters on her hands and her face was swollen from the heat. The neighbor went back to the pond with Kate. They picked up the snakes. The battle

with the snakes had been a tough one, and they picked up 140 snakes. The snakes were collected in three large washtubs then hung on a line to dry.

The neighbor told other people about Kate's adventure.

Soon reporters came to hear the story from Kate herself. Kate's experience that day made her famous. Newspapers carried the story all over the world. the story was retold for many years and she was known as the world champion rattlesnake killer. (Even though several others told of similar feats after the Greeley Tribune posted a story about Kate in 1960.)

Kate made a snakeskin dress.

Kate knew how to cure animal skins so they could be kept. (taxidermy) She used over 50 of the skins to make a flapper style dress. You may see the dress on display at the City Museum. She also used snake skins for a pair of shoes and a neck band.

Kate would wear the dress to many functions. She later kept it inside a trunk where curious family members would sneak peeks at it. She would not allow it to be photographed because she thought it would lessen the dress' value. Three weeks before she died, she left it to the Greeley Museum along with other artifacts related to her rattlesnake legacy.

Centennial Village bought Kate's old farm house.

The museum purchased lumber that was most likely from Kate's old home during the summer of 2002 for \$495. The house was in poor shape and needed quite a bit of work to be ready for visitors.

They took pictures of the house, took it apart and numbered the pieces. The pieces were then put back together on the Centennial Village site. The house is a part of the Prairie Section. The house is planned to be left unfurnished so the space can be used for classes.

The house was built by Kate.

She lived in the chicken coop while she was building the house. Kate also took care of her farm alone. She was also known to make "moonshine" in her goat pen. She knew the smell of the goats would cover-up the smell of the still!

Kate later sold rattlesnakes.

She would sell the snake skins for \$2 and the rattles for a dollar. She would also collect venom from them to send to scientists in California. She soon got tired of all the work of milking the venom from the snake, so she would just send the heads. The scientists were not interested in the heads. They only wanted the venom.

Kate died October 6, 1969 in Greeley.

She was 75 years old. The Greeley Tribune featured her on the front page a few days after her death.

Kate's family still tell stories about her life.

Eileen Miller-Soltero shared a few family stories and pictures of Kate. Kate once kept a sick goat in her kitchen to keep it warm. There also was a story that happened while Kate was a nurse in WWII. She had to parachute out of a plane and broke her hip. The plane crashed, and everyone still aboard died. No one

knows if the plane story is true because Kate liked to add to her legend from time to time.

A Few Facts about Kate.

She was born in a log cabin about 9 miles east of Longmont, Colorado, and her name was Katherine McHale. She went to St. Joseph's School of Nursing. She lived in the Hudson area for more than 50 years. She also lived a few years in El Paso, Texas in the 1940's. She was then known as Kate Garner.