

Dr. Alward McKeel White



r. Alward McKeel White was one of El Paso's early doctors. He was born in Maryland in 1847. He was named after his father and followed in his father's footsteps by studying medicine at the Maryland Agricultural College, graduating in 1864.

Upon graduation he joined the U.S. Army as a contract surgeon with the understanding that he was to go west and protect the settlers from the Indians. In 1868 he passed through El Paso on his way to Colorado. After three years, he resigned from the Army and bought a ranch near Greely, Colorado. He met and married Katherine Payne in Evans, Colorado where their son, Alward, was born.

In 1887 he returned to El Paso with Katherine following a few months later. They initially stayed with the Magoffin family and shortly thereafter moved into an adobe house at the corner of Utah (Mesa) and San Antonio. Their second son, Owen, was born there.

Unable to make a living as a physician, Dr. White took a job as a customs agent and was sent first to Silver City, New Mexico and then Tucson. Kate and the boys followed. After several years as a customs agent in Tucson where daughter Leigh was born, the White family returned to El Paso in 1887.

By that time, El Paso had become a border metropolis with a population of about 10,000 with a need for physicians. Dr. White became the city physician and took on the job of purifying El Paso's drinking water supply and vaccinating a reluctant population for smallpox. He kept a horse and buggy for his house calls at the Longwell Transfer, Telephone No. 1.

He became the family doctor for sizeable numbers of prostitutes operating in South El Paso. His record book still exists that lists the "girls" by first name only. It was reported that when the illustrious Madam Alice Abbott died suddenly of a heart attack, he was moved to tears.

Dr. White died unexpectedly on May 7, 1898. Dr. Francis Gallagher, a close friend, called the nineteen doctors in town to discuss how to express their respect for Dr. White. They drew up a resolution commending Dr. White, arranged for floral offerings and sat together at his funeral. Some have suggested that this may have been the first unofficial act of what was

later to become the El Paso Medical Society. An overflow crowd attended his funeral at St. Clement's Episcopal Church. The following Sunday, the Reverend Cable Martin delivered a memorial address entitled "The Beloved Physician."

(The information for this nomination was taken from a memoir written by Dr. White's daughter, Leigh White Osborn, and published in the Winter 1994 issue of *Password* and a paper written by Oliver Osborn, Dr. White's nephew.)

