

WOMEN OF WINSLOW



Emma Bachelder Lee French

(born 1836, died 1897)

This “*amply built woman with a determined jaw was remarkably qualified by bitter experience.*” – Author Maurice Kildaire

Despite her tough self-reliance, “Doctor” Grandma French was known for her healing abilities and gentle nature.

Emma Louise Bachelder was born on April 21, 1836, in Sussex County, England. She received some nursing training as a young woman, though she never earned a degree. She converted to Mormonism when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints visited England in the 1850s.

Emma traded one year of service to the church for steerage to America in 1856. Soon after her arrival, she joined hundreds of church members in a treacherous journey on foot from Iowa City, Iowa, to Salt Lake City, Utah. Emma acted as a nurse and midwife along the way while pulling a handcart full of her belongings.

In 1858, Emma became the sixteenth wife of John Doyle Lee and ultimately bore him seven children. The family was forced to move to Arizona in 1871 due to John’s participation in the Mountain Meadows Massacre of 1857.

They operated a ferry service at a remote Colorado River crossing point that came to be known as Lee’s Ferry. Lee was executed for the massacre in 1877, and Emma operated the ferry and their home, Lonely Dell Ranch, on her own for two more years.

Emma married prospector Franklin H. French in 1879, and they settled near what is now Holbrook. In 1880, a flood burst down nearby Cottonwood Wash, destroying the rail bed and injuring many workers. With no doctor in the area, Emma’s healing skills and tireless efforts led to an ongoing relationship with the Atlantic & Pacific Railroad. In 1887, she and Frank followed the railroad to Winslow and settled on the northeast side of town in what is now Bushman Acres.

Emma became known as “Doctor Grandma” in Winslow due to her abilities and kindly nature. She assisted the contract doctor in the small railroad hospital west of the Harvey House and was also on call along the line from Flagstaff to Gallup, New Mexico. She was especially skilled as a midwife, and she was ahead of her time in demanding sanitary work areas. Always prepared and willing to help, Emma was held in high esteem by local railroaders, ranchers, and Native Americans alike.

Emma died on November 16, 1897, at the age of 61. Her funeral was attended by railroad officials, county and territorial officers, and townspeople, who overflowed the yard and spilled into the street. The railroad ordered all passing trains to halt for a few minutes and to sound no bells or whistles as they passed through the yards. Emma was one of the first people interred at Winslow’s Desert View Cemetery.



Top Left: The beach at Lee’s Ferry

Middle Left: The site of the French homestead in Bushman Acres

Bottom Left: The gravestone of “Dr. French” at Desert View Cemetery