



*Grace Wayne Fairchild*

## *Dakota Images*

One of the thousands who moved to the last frontier in the Dakotas was Grace Wayne Fairchild and her family. She was born in Soldiers Grove, Wisconsin, on 30 May 1881. She graduated from Plattsville Normal with a teacher's certificate and taught school in Parker in southeastern South Dakota in 1898. At Parker she married Shiloh Fairchild, and in 1903, the Fairchilds, including two small children, moved west of the Missouri River. In old Stanley County, where the Sioux cession had been opened up to settlement under the Homestead Act, they took a claim of 160 acres.

The free land that lay open after the closing of the frontier was the least hospitable to those who made their living by farming. The average rainfall in the midwest farm states was about twenty-five to thirty-five inches, but west of the Missouri, it was only fourteen to sixteen inches. It was this dry, bunch-grass country that attracted the homesteaders after 1890.

Through feast and famine, drought and grasshoppers, Grace Fairchild stayed on her South Dakota homestead. She raised a family of nine children, kept body and soul together in the lean years, and managed to find a way for all her children to get a better education than most homesteaders' children received. Married to a man who was ill-fitted for the life of a pioneer, she took on increasing responsibilities. In 1930 she and her husband separated and divided the land holdings. However, before she left the old homestead, she had amassed 1,440 acres of South Dakota land, most of it clustered around the original claim of 1902. Of those who took up homesteads on the last frontier, it is doubtful that many had the perseverance, vision, and drive to make a bunch-grass claim grow into a sizeable wheat and livestock farm as Grace Fairchild did.

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