

KATE ELDER CUMMINGS

by Tom Kollenborn (c) 2001

The following story is certainly filled with much speculation, but still has some interesting historical points and a possible link to the old mining camp of Silver King.

One of Arizona's true infamous characters was a madam by the name of "Big Nose" Kate. She was born Mary Katherine Harnoy in Budapest, Hungary, on November 7, 1850. Her father, Dr. Michael Harnoy, was a physician and her mother's name was Katherina Boldizer Harnoy.

The Harnoy family moved to Mexico City in 1863 when Kate was thirteen years old. Her father was one of the court physicians to Maximilian, Emperor of Mexico.

After the fall of the Emperor Maximilian, the Harnoy family escaped from Mexico to the United States. They finally ended up in Davenport, Iowa in 1866. Shortly after arriving in Davenport, Kate's mother passed away.

Kate Harnoy left home a year later in 1867 at the age of seventeen. She took the alias of Kate Fisher and by 1864 was working for Bessie Earp in a saloon and hotel in Wichita, Kansas. The next year Kate was working in Dodge City, Kansas, at another hotel and saloon.

In 1877 Kate took up the name of Kate Elder and moved on to Fort Griffin, Texas, where she met Doc Holiday in 1877. Kate broke up with Doc Holiday in 1881 while living in Tombstone. It was in Tombstone she acquired the nickname "Big Nose" Kate. She worked as a madam and gave special favors to certain Tombstone citizens.

After Kate's breakup with Doc Holiday she moved to Globe, Arizona, in 1882 and operated a hotel and served as a madam. Kate met many of the prominent male citizens of Globe during her stay and there is some speculation that she may have met George P. Hunt for the first time long before he became the first governor of Arizona.

Kate lived in Pinal and Silver King for a short time in 1884 where she rekindled her friendship with Cecilia N. Blaylock Earp, Wyatt Earp's first wife. Blaylock is buried in the old Pinal Cemetery.

"Big Nose" Kate returned to southern Arizona by 1887 where she married a blacksmith named George M. Cummings in 1888. Kate and George worked in several of the mining camps between 1888-1897, and they also worked briefly in Pearce, Arizona in 1897. Some historians of Kate Elder Cummings say she separated from George Cummings in 1898.

"Big Nose" Kate was managing a hotel in Cochise, Arizona, 1899 and another hotel in Dos Cabeza, Arizona, in 1900. Between 1900-1920 Kate operated hotels and brothels throughout the mining districts of Arizona. "Big Nose" Kate made an impact on Arizona history, although maybe not a page historians would like to write about or mention.

Next Week, Part II

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George M. Cummings died in Courtland, Arizona, in 1930 and left Kate a small estate, amounting to a house and some mining claims.

At her advanced age in 1931, Kate petitioned the Office of the Governor for permission to live at the Arizona Pioneer's Home in Prescott. "Big Nose" Kate, the most infamous madam in Arizona history, was accepted into the Arizona's Pioneer's Home where she died on November 2, 1940, at the age of 89. She is buried in the Prescott Pioneers Cemetery as Kate Elder Cummings.

You might ask, how is this story linked to the Superstition Wilderness Area? Much of the following is speculation and supposition. I have no direct documentation to support this except the word of a few old pioneers whom I respected. Not everything is documented in the early history of Arizona Territory.

It is said that Kate Elder Cummings wrote a letter to her old acquaintance Governor George P. Hunt explaining her destitute situation. There is a story about three men who made a trip over to the old Silver King Cemetery and made a grave cap out of concrete. On this grave cap was printed the letters, "Big Nose Kate" 1850-1884. Hunt allegedly recommended Kate Elder Cummings petition to be approved because he knew "Big Nose Kate" was buried at Silver King and that the petitioner was a pioneer citizen of Arizona and deserved the rights of such.

We must thank many people for the above information. I would like to thank Marshal Trimble, Ben Traywick, Malcom Comeaux, Grace Middleton, Jack Kinslow, and many others. Any mistakes or supposition not documented are my responsibility.



Silver King Mine

