



The Pearl Of Cripple Creek

Celeste Black

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The notorious red light district was an integral part of the gold camp of the 1890's. Cripple Creek, Colorado, was no exception. Parlour houses, cribs, saloons and gambling halls were located a block away from the main street. Each girl was required to pay a city head tax, donate to church funds, and exhibit lady-like manners when out shopping in order to be left alone by the police. All were required to have physical exams.

Cripple Creek's most elegant parlour house was the Old Homestead, managed by the beautiful, talented, intelligent, and well educated Pearl DeVere. Dressed in full riding habit, with a small derby hat cocked over one eye, her auburn hair flying, she cut a dashing figure on the spirited, unpredictable, horse, called She-Devil, on the streets of Cripple Creek. Probably more than one man fell in love with her.

The Old Homestead employed a staff of seven that included a housekeeper and porter, two butlers and two maids, and a piano player to cater to the four "sisters" that joined Pearl in making the Myers Avenue house the most sought after resort in the area.

Following an elegant party, where Pearl had worn a shell pink chiffon gown, encrusted with seed pearls and sequins direct from Paris, she died of an overdose of morphine. Much speculation took place as to whether the overdose was accidental or on purpose.

When her sister arrived to claim the body, Pearl's true occupation was learned and the sister left town immediately. The town buried her in style, after receiving an anonymous gift of \$1,000 with the only requirement being that she was to be buried in the pink chiffon gown.

The Old Homestead still survives and is open for tours of the fully furnished parlour house. Picture of the interior of the house and vintage pictures of Cripple Creek are included, as well as Pearl's burial site.

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