

Alice Merriam Baltzelle Addenbrooke

At a Glance:

Born: Oct. 10, 1881, in Kentucky

Died: Seal Beach, Calif., April 30, 1972

Maiden Name: Baltzelle

Race/Nationality: Caucasian

Married: Bernard Richard Addenbrooke, Dec. 30, 1902

Children: 3 daughters, Louise, Martha Lee, and Alice; and 1 son, Bernard

Primary City/County of Residence/Work: Reno, Washoe County, Nevada; Washington D.C.; Seal Beach, Calif.

Major Fields of Work: Civic activist, historian



Photo Credit: *Reno Evening Gazette*

Nevada historian promoted Bowers Mansion, Fort Churchill

Bowers Mansion, a well-loved park, pool, and historic site between Reno and Carson City, and Fort Churchill, outside Fallon, might never have become mainstays of Northern Nevada culture if it had not been for the work of Alice B. Addenbrooke. A renowned historian and civic stalwart, Addenbrooke led a life of service to her family, her church, northern Nevada history, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Republican Party through much of the 20th century.

Addenbrooke was born in Kentucky on October 10, 1881, the member of a prominent family there, but spent most of her life in Reno. She was married to Bernard Richard Addenbrooke on Dec. 30, 1902, and together they operated a grocery in Reno for several years before selling it. She raised four children while her husband worked for the Reno Police Department. As a young mother, she and her three daughters were active in the Camp Fire Girls organization, and she studied music under local teacher Ethel Zimmer.

But she was best known for her work in Reno civic groups. She was a charter member of the Sagebrush Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, which she belonged to for 50 years, a president of the Reno Women's Civic Club, a president of her children's school Parent-Teacher Association, and a member of the Federated Church, which was a combination of Presbyterian and Congregational churches that lasted almost 50 years in Reno.

In her duties with the D.A.R., she served as chairman of many committees, many having to do with her primary interest of history. In 1935, she started raising funds for the restoration of Fort Churchill, the remains of a United States Army fort and former waystation on the Pony Express and Central Overland Routes which dates back to the 1860s. Over the years, she oversaw several events there, including the unveiling of a plaque about the Pony Express. At that event, in 1939, a caravan of members of the Oregon Trail Association came to award Addenbrooke an honorary life membership in their organization. Because of her lifelong dedication to Ft. Churchill, she spoke at another plaque ceremony there close to the end of her life, when she was named Honorary State Regent of the D.A.R. She wrote a book about the site which she titled "The Enchanted Fort."

In her 60th year, after her children were grown, and her husband had died, she graduated with honors from the University of Nevada.

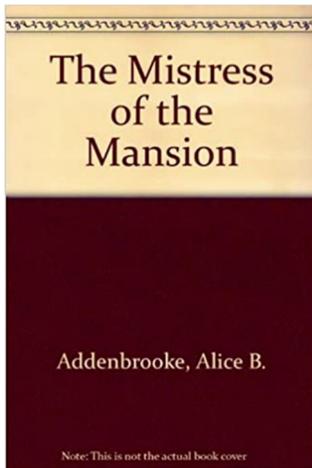
In the mid-1940s, the D.A.R. devoted much of their attention to fundraising for the acquisition of the mansion built on acreage in Washoe Valley built by Sandy and Eilley Bowers in 1864, at the height of their wealth from Comstock silver mines. Addenbrooke and a few others were the primary engines behind the private fundraising effort. They accepted everything from pennies from local schoolchildren to large donations from private out-of-state donors and came close to raising the needed \$25,000 down payment. They realized the futility of trying to raise the entire \$100,000 price, though, so Alice and two other civic club members went before the Washoe County Commission to ask for help. The commission agreed that the public seemed to really want the 56 acres as a park and historical site, not a private business, and agreed to take on the debt burden for the remaining amount.

Addenbrooke was subsequently appointed by the County Commission to the committee to restore the historic mansion to "a condition resembling that of the Bonanza Days," an effort that meant acquiring "furnishings to restore rooms to look like when Sandy and Eilley Bowers lived there," according to a commission statement.

To that end, she collected any item she could find that was associated with the Bowers, she later recalled, "including old ale bottles, rusted flat irons ore from their mine. Each tell a story." She wrote an article in the *Nevada State Journal* in 1949 about the restoration project. In it, she revealed that workers had to remove all but one set of silver door knobs and hinges, because "visitors and tourists show little compunction about how they acquire souvenirs. It was finally decided to have them painted over so they would be less of a temptation."

Because of her work as a county historian, in 1950 she was named the "superintendent" of Bowers Mansion. The commission would not name her as the curator because they

didn't consider it a museum. But she was the official "representative of the county" and continued overseeing the restoration, as well as greeting the ever-increasing numbers of visitors.



In June 1950, Pacific Books published Addenbrooke's slim book, "*The Mistress of the Mansion*," about Eilley Bowers. It included photos of the family and the mansion, as well as stories from Reno residents who knew them. She dedicated it to the Reno Women's Civic Club, which had so avidly raised funds for the building. Shortly after the book was published, the mansion was officially opened to the public, complete with women in period clothing giving tours.

Among her other causes was the Reno-Sparks Indian Colony. She worked with Congressman Walter Baring in hopes of improving the standard of living there. She also was named to the board of directors for the newly formed Reno Light Opera Association in 1951.

She was forced to resign her Bowers Mansion post in spring 1952 when she was seriously injured in an accident. She was walking across Virginia Street at Island Avenue when she was hit by a car. The accident caused multiple injuries, including a badly fractured leg.

By the following spring, she'd recovered enough to be chosen as a delegate to the National Congress of the D.A.R., a position she held several times. Later that year, she joined the staff of Republican Senator George W. Malone in Washington, D.C., as head of research. While there, she did extensive research for the D.A.R. as well at the Library of Congress. She would return to Reno occasionally to speak and offer suggestions to the Bowers Mansion Refurnishing Committee, and she continued working to acquire period appropriate items for the house.

She suffered a tragedy in 1966 when her son Bernard, aged 53, was electrocuted on the job at the U.S. Naval Ammunition Depot in Hawthorne, Nev. After his death, she moved to Southern California, closer to where her three daughters lived. She died on Sunday, April 30, 1972, at the age of 90 in Seal Beach, but her memorial service was held in Reno.



Alice looking over the Bowers Mansion scrapbook she compiled.

Photo Credit: Addenbrooke Family

Researched by Patti Bernard and written by Kitty Falcone

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