

Mary Ford Platten

Arizona's First Female Game Warden



MARY FORD PLATTEN WAS A TRAILBLAZER.

Born June 11, 1869 on Kodiak Island, she was the first white child born in Alaska under the American flag. Her father, a Civil War veteran, was stationed there by former U.S. Secretary of State, William Seward, to help secure the purchase of the Alaska territory.

The Ford family left the Last Frontier, journeying to numerous military stations throughout the “wild” west, eventually settling in Arizona when Mary was 12 years old. She inherited her father’s pioneer spirit and resilient constitution.

At the turn of the 20th century, Mary Ford, entering her thirties, headed east to Washington D.C. to help take care of her orphaned niece, Celia. Mary’s sister, Margaret, was brutally murdered by her husband, Charles (Mary’s brother-in-law), only seven



months after giving birth. He slit her throat over the infant's crib, then fled to a local grocery store where he proceeded to replicate the violent act upon himself. An article dated March 11, 1901 (the day after the murder-suicide) in *The Times*, a D.C. newspaper, revealed Charles' longtime battle with what we commonly refer to nowadays as PTSD.

Mary spent the next decade helping raise Celia while simultaneously becoming involved in civic affairs around the capital. She was a speaker and entertainer at various patriotic functions, notably the Women's Temperance League. She personally witnessed a number of historic events, including the Wright Brothers experimenting with airplanes in North Carolina and President Theodore Roosevelt's inauguration.

City life looked good on Mary, but deep down she longed for adventure. After her father passed away in 1911, she seized an opportunity to return to her roots - a life in the Arizona countryside.

Childhood acquaintance, Fred Platten, proposed to 42 year old Mary, and she headed west to be wed. Fred was known for his irreproachable character and bravery. He was awarded the Medal of Honor for extraordinary heroism after capturing a band of renegade Cheyenne warriors at the Battle of Sappa Creek, Kansas in the spring of 1875. In 1901, Fred joined the U.S. Forestry Service and served as a Ranger in Arizona.

Under the Homestead Act, the newlyweds claimed 160 acres at Davenport Lake, 25 miles west of Flagstaff, AZ. The couple spent six years turning the land into their home, becoming official owners in 1917. Fred resigned from the Forestry Service to raise cattle on the ranch, and a year later, Mary would make history again.



Office of the

State Game Warden
State of Arizona

In January, 1918, Mary Ford Platten became the first female deputy game warden in Arizona. She wrote to Governor Hunt asking for appointment, offering to serve without pay. State Game Warden G.M. Willard refused her offer responding: "If she does the same work as the men deputies and does it as well, she is entitled to the pay that goes with the office."

Following her appointment, an article from the *Arizona Republican*, a Phoenix newspaper, declared: "Violations of the game laws in the vicinity of Williams [Mary's station] may possibly become frequent and flagrant in the next few weeks,

until the honor of being the first man to be arrested by the new woman deputy is definitely bestowed."

Mary's commission was short-lived, but not because of her competence. In 1919, a new Arizona governor was elected. It was customary for wardens to resign with the outgoing administration. She was not reappointed by the new state game warden. Mary expressed her disappointment in the *Coconino Sun*, a Flagstaff newspaper, criticizing the new department for its lack of law enforcement, particularly among unlicensed tourists. She emphatically writes: "It would be a grand thing if every sportsman would band together and see that the game laws are not violated, but tell me, who are the real sportsmen? I haven't met one yet."

After serving as the first female warden, Mary did not settle down to quiet retirement. She continued to advocate for stricter enforcement of game laws as well as other civic causes in her community. She originated the idea of school in summer, as opposed to winter, because snow storms kept children from receiving an education. She joined the Northern Arizona Pioneers' Society

and became affiliated with numerous patriotic organizations. She also became acquainted with politicians, including Senator Barry Goldwater - 1964 Republican presidential nominee.

Mary Ford Platten passed away in 1966 at the age of 97. She will always be remembered as Arizona's first female deputy game warden, but her legacy supersedes her title. Mary is an inspiration to those wearing the badge, and those who have already turned it in. There are no limits when it comes to protecting the voiceless.

➔ *Caleb Ritenour, Assistant Editor*



THE FACEBOOK FAUX PAS

NO DOUBT we live in a world dominated by social media, one where you can learn more about a person's life spending five minutes studying a Facebook page than you could in a few hours of face-to-face conversation.

For conservation agents, social media outlets can be an essential element in successful resource law enforcement, be it an incriminating photo of a suspect with wildlife or commentary implicating some sort of guilt. Perpetrators often cannot help but use social media to share their accomplishments, even if the animal was taken illegally. Ask any agent, most would tell you they have made a case or two from someone boasting about an extra deer or turkey on a social media page. A recent case I made with the aid of social media opened my eyes to how far a person will go to fulfill their idea of a successful hunt.

Early in the week, I sat down at my computer one afternoon to take a look at Telecheck activity from the previous weekend. Keeping up with all checked deer and turkeys is high on my priority list early in the archery season and is still a relatively achievable task before the chaos of firearms deer season arrives. I immediately noticed that "Jeff" checked a 9-point buck two days

International Game Warden Magazine would like to recognize Raymond L. Kohls (AZGFD Retired 1966-2004) & David E. Brown for their top-notch research and writing, inspiring our Spring 2021 piece “Mary Ford Platten: Arizona’s First Female Game Warden”.