

# Sarah Chandler Coates

Community Leader  
1823-1897

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by Barbara Magerl

Newlywed Sarah Chandler Coates gazed at the landing as the Missouri River boat pulled into port in 1856. The primitive Town of Kansas was a great contrast to her native Pennsylvania. She wrote in her journal that her heart sank as she asked herself, “Is *this* to be my home?”

Two years earlier Kersey Coates, attorney from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, had come here to buy land for a group of eastern investors. The 110 acres he bought disappointed the investors since it was so far from the bustling riverfront. They told him to sell it—fast. He knew its potential, so he signed a note and bought it all himself.

He returned to his native state to marry Sarah Chandler, a Quaker who shared his anti-slavery beliefs. The couple took up residence here on the frontier and, when needed, assisted members of the Philadelphia Emigrant Aid Society, a Free State group moving to Kansas Territory to help prevent slavery. Pacifists by faith, during the violent pre-Civil War period here, Mr. and Mrs. Coates learned to sleep with pistols beside their bed.

After the Civil War, while her husband became involved in every major enterprise in the developing town, Sarah Coates was a cultural and civic force. She was the social leader of Quality Hill and was known throughout the frontier community for personal charity doled out at her home.

Highly educated, she helped organize a women’s group to study cultural topics. As a young woman in Pennsylvania, she had shocked family and friends by studying human physiology. Now, as a leader in the frontier women’s group, she added science to her agenda.

The daughter of a Pennsylvania state senator, Sarah Coates was very political as well. She headed a local Woman’s Suffrage Club several years and was a personal friend of Susan B. Anthony, the famous women’s rights leader. Mrs. Coates served on many boards and helped found a group that became the Missouri Federation of



Women's Clubs.

The dismayed newlywed who became the progressive Queen of Quality Hill lived in her mansion at 10th and Pennsylvania until her death in 1897.

**Sources**

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