

Pioneer Award

EILEEN HARRIS SCHMIDT
1999



BORN: JULY 23, 1927 IN LOUISVILLE, COLORADO
DIED: FEBRUARY 4, 1998 IN DENVER, COLORADO

Eileen Harris Schmidt was the recipient of the Pioneer Award in 1999, the year following her death. She transformed the stories she heard from her grandmother when she was a child into a vision for the preservation of Louisville history and a blueprint for work by the Louisville Public Library and the Louisville Historical Museum, the two institutions with which she is most identified.

Eileen was stricken with rheumatic fever as a child. According to her sister, it was this childhood illness that likely led to Eileen's love of reading and learning. Also due to her illness, she would spend hours listening to the stories told by her grandmother, Savina Ferrari Zarini, and other Italian women in Louisville in the 1930s.

In the 1970s, Eileen worked as a member of the small staff at the Louisville Public Library and led the story time for children. At the Library, she also helped collect oral history interviews of older Louisville residents.

In 1980, the City of Louisville appointed Eileen to its recently formed Louisville Historical Commission. For nearly two decades, she continued her work to collect and preserve Louisville history. In 1986, the Commission opened the Louisville Historical Museum and its members worked as volunteers to open it for visitors. Schmidt could often be found working at the Museum, and she put in countless hours cataloging historic photos and artifacts, putting up exhibits, documenting historical sites and buildings, and writing about Louisville history for the Louisville Historian quarterly publication and the Louisville Times newspaper.

Schmidt is remembered for her outstanding contributions to the community, especially through her efforts to preserve Louisville's history.