

PIONEER WOMEN TEACHERS OF MICHIGAN

ADELINE WAGER

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Contributed by International Delta Kappa Gamma Society - Alpha Mu Chapter

Miss Adeline Wager decided to retire in 1952, after many years in the Grosse Pointe School System; the hue and cry was great! Parents, teachers, and children were dismayed to learn that their beloved Miss Wager was leaving her career as a kindergarten teacher. Parents whose older children had her as a teacher said vehemently of their younger child, "but Susie or Frankie just must have Miss Wager." Kerby school parents dedicated their final P. T. A. meeting of the year to her. Bert Wicking, President of the Board of Education, paid tribute to her for her outstanding work for more than a quarter of a century in the Grosse Pointe Schools. Miss Wager was presented with a silver service and orchids, and Mr. Wicking said, in part, "It is impossible for us to estimate the good qualities of character and citizenship that she has instilled in children and the important role she has played in the development of the lives of these young people. We do know, however, that her influence has been great."

The reasons for the widespread regret at the loss of this veteran teacher were many; first, she is an outstanding kindergarten teacher - she loves and understands five-year-olds as few people do, second, her greatest characteristic is gentleness, with a quiet smile, soft voice, and a patient, even temperament - and these are qualities most desired in a kindergarten teacher. She is tall and slender, with very blue eyes with a permanent twinkle, and always wears lovely, tailored clothes in soft blues, greys, and dark red.

Miss Wager's parents immigrated from Sweden to Michigan's Upper Peninsula, where she was born and raised in the little town of Thompson. When she entered school at the age of seven, she could speak only a few words of English. How bewildered and lonely she felt when her father left for she could not understand the teachers or her classmates. Her early school experiences show a sharp contrast between today's discipline and that of earlier days. A classmate, George, was severely whipped with a birch switch in front of all the pupils. As the teacher struck the lad a twig broke off and hit another child in the eye. There was no severe injury, fortunately, nor any parental protest! Miss Wager remembers vividly the pranks her classmates played. Alice, who sat behind her, could crawl under the seats and poke the children in the legs with a long hat pin. Though the youngsters screamed, the teacher never learned what happened. On April Fool's Day some of the boys would be most generous with their bags of candy. As the children bit into this treat they discovered it was a cruel joke - not the anticipated candy but hunks of tobacco covered with chocolate. The day following Hallowe'en many pupils were late at the little school at Thompson for they depended upon the ringing of the school bell to warn them. Every year, however, pranksters would climb up to the bell tower and tie the rope so the bell could not ring the next day.

From her childhood experiences she remembers too, many of the lovely Swedish customs observed in her home where, of course, she spoke and was taught to write the Swedish language. On Christmas eve candles were always lighted on the tree and window sills. As the family ate their dinner, they watched the glowing candles. Their dinner was traditional Swedish fare for Christmas eve - lutefisk served with allspice and, for desert, rice pudding. Miss Wager remembers, too, being saved from drowning in the Thompson Creek at the age of four, and the severe forest fire which threatened the town.

When she was seventeen, an opportunity came to this shy, quiet, gentle girl, in the wooded, isolated country of the Upper Peninsula. She was advised by the county school commissioner to try the state teacher's examinations which were given in the county courthouse each spring. These tests lasted two days and covered many subjects such as arithmetic, grammar, orthography, geography, history, civil government, penmanship, physiology, hygiene, reading school law, and theory and art of teaching. In addition three Reading Circle books had to be studied and questions based on them satisfactorily answered. The questions she was asked were: (1) Distinguish between a school teacher and a man or woman who teaches school; (2) What are the distinguishing characteristics of the vitalized teacher?

She passed with flying colors and became a teacher in Schoolcraft County in 1907. Her salary was thirty-five dollars a month for six months, and within five years she was earning sixty dollars per month for a ten month term. Her first school was two and a half miles from town which she walked morning and evening because in those days only the wealthy could afford automobiles. Winter months were rugged - deep snow and bitter cold made the five mile trek very long. One Monday morning, after a severe snowstorm, she hired a horse and cutter to take her to school. When half way there the drifts were so deep the horse and driver turned back, but Miss Wager struggled through the drifts to school. Frequently there wasn't any fire built when she arrived - the farmer boy whose chore it was had overslept, so she had to build the fire. All eight grades were in her school, but eighth graders received much of the teacher's time and attention in those days, for frequently a teacher was judged by the success or failure of these children. All eighth graders had to pass state examinations at the county courthouse, and much time was spent on preparation for these important tests.

During these early years of teaching there were two severe forest fires. During the first of these, she dismissed the pupils from school in order that they might help their parents fight the fire. The whole town of Thompson was threatened by the second fire. Without modern fire-fighting equipment, the villagers were helpless. Water was carried from nearby wells. Very few believed that the town could be saved, and many soaked their rugs with water and put them on the roofs to keep the sparks from igniting them. Others carried their precious belongings to the outskirts of town. Later in the evening the fire department from a town seven miles away arrived, but no one in Thompson slept that night! By noon the following day the firemen had it under control, and the village was saved.

Miss Wager attended Northern Michigan State Teachers College, National College of Education, Ferris Institute, and Wayne State University, during summer months, and finally acquired a life certificate. She went

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of 12 illustrated, newsprint pages, devoted to the family history of descendants of three Luker brothers who settled in Toms River, New Jersey in 1635. Address Luker Family Historical Society, 852 East 8th South, Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Stewart Clan Magazine is a 4-page monthly newsprint bulletin devoted to the history and genealogy of the Stewart-Stuart families in America, and is a must for anyone of that name who is researching his ancestry. \$4.00 per year. Address the editor, George Edson, 801 E. Park Street, Olathe, Kansas.

Is your name Williams? If so, you will want a copy of the Williams Searcher, an 11-page mimeographed bulletin listing many Williams! This may be obtained for 10¢ and a long stamped, addressed envelope. Plans are under way for the organization of a family association and probable publication of an area locator and quarterly informational bulletin. Address John C. Williams, 8112 Lonewillow Lane, Virginia Beach, Virginia 23455.

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on to teach in McBain and then moved to East Jordan where she not only taught but also had the responsibility of the principalship. In 1926 she came to Grosse Pointe. From the Grosse Pointe News of May 22, 1952, is this interesting quote: "She was offered a kindergarten position in Grosse Pointe but rejected it when the superintendent wrote that her assignment would be in Grosse Pointe "Farms." She admits that the word "Farms" caused her to turn down this offer because she had already had enough experience in farming communities. She did accept the position when she learned that the community was actually urban in character and not rural. "Here she became an outstanding and beloved teacher but found time to write two books for kindergarten children. Though quiet and unassuming, her opinions and contributions showed deep thinking and carefully thought-out decisions.

Now that she has retired, she is leading a pleasant, relaxed life. In the spring and summer months, she lives in the family home in Thompson where she gardens and is thrilled by spring's awakening each year. During the winter she lives in Florida where she does oil painting, sight-seeing and enjoys new friends.