

Who was Hattie Morris Dyer?

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Several months ago Janice Callarman suggested we do a story on Hattie Dyer since some folks in Krum may not know who she was. For those of us who had her as a first and second grade teacher it is hard to imagine someone not knowing Mrs. Dyer. Many adults and children who walk through the doors of Hattie Dyer Elementary might enjoy knowing what an influence this woman had on so many young lives. So who was Hattie Morris Dyer?

Hattie Estelle Morris was born Jan 24, 1903 in Texas to John W. Morris and Nannie L. Grogan both born in Georgia. Hattie had four sisters Georgia, Lelia, Sallie and Alleene and four brothers Joseph, Mannie, John (this was John Morris of Morris Chevrolet of Krum) and Russell. The Morris family came to Texas from Georgia between 1900 and 1910 first living in Rockwall Texas and then settling in Denton County, Krum Texas area. A Denton Record Chronicle article from 1954 says that Hattie Morris attended Krum High School and later the North Texas Teacher's College in Denton. One could teach with a 'second grade' certificate at the time her career began.

The article goes on to say "Her first school was at Garza (Lake Dallas) when she was 17 years old. She was there for two years and then she transferred to Dallas County where she taught for 14 years under the supervision of Miss Nancy Moseley, who stressed 'the three Rs' in the primary grades." Miss Mosely often came to visit Hattie's classes and critique the students' handwriting. Nancy Mosely also had a school named in her honor the Nancy Mosely Elementary School in Dallas.

In 1923 Hattie's father J.W. Morris died and her mother Nannie in 1924 (both are buried in Garland) which left in her care a younger brother and sister. Despite this she continued teaching in winters and attending college in the summers.

During the summer of 1929 Hattie Morris went on a bus trip to the eastern states and she kept a diary. There were two buses taken on this trip one for the occupants and one was a food bus. They mainly camped out on this trip only occasionally staying in hotels. Here are a few entries from her diary:

June 22, 1929: "Came on to North Hampton where we saw the Coolidge home, Mr. Coolidge on the porch, Mrs. Coolidge leading the dog, was a beautiful drive."

June 24, 1929: "Journeyed on to Boston where we saw Longfellow's home, saw the window where he looked out on the Charles River –the water brought him so much peace and quietness that he always liked to write from this window. He had a beautiful park in front of his home too. Saw the cemetery where he was buried and Mary Baker Eddy's grave- she was the founder of the Christian Science Church."

June 26th, 1929: All set for New York City crossed Connecticut where we visited Yale University. I don't think I have seen anything quite as beautiful as their buildings with all the ivy clinging to its side, the drive was beautiful, had lunch at White Plains and started for West Point

the drive was wonderful crossed the Hudson River.” “Then leaving the hills with all their quietness and peace came through Sleepy Hollow where Rip Van Winkle slept one hundred years-Here’s where the legend of Sleepy Hollow was written.”

Janice Cole Callarman adds from the diary: After visiting Chattanooga, Tennessee the group journeyed on to Florida which Hattie described as barren and desolate with mosquitos making the camping out extremely unpleasant. Going all the way to the Florida Keys by ferry they also rode a ferry to Havana, Cuba where they visited the casinos and nightclubs. It is hard to imagine our first grade teacher dancing the night away, but she did when she was still young and a free spirit.

On June 17, 1933, Hattie Morris married Nelson Dyer in Denton Texas and they made their home in Krum. Charles Cole, a former student of Mrs. Dyer, says this about Hattie & Nelson: “Hattie doted on Nelson, her husband. Nelson was a quiet man, and perhaps that was his defense against what must have been a daunting task each evening on coping with the talkative Hattie. But she dearly loved him and would say so.” Hattie Dyer taught in Dallas for five more years and then in 1937 she started her career teaching the first and second grades at Krum. She continued her education by attending classes in the summer until she earned her B.S. degree and then in 1950 her Master’s degree. Mrs. Dyer taught both first and second grades at Krum until 1971, when a second grade teacher was employed to take care of an increasing enrollment.

Mrs. Dyer taught in the Krum School for 36 years. She completed 53 years of continuous teaching in May 1973 and at age 70 retired. A reception was held in her honor and a plaque was presented to her as well as a scrapbook containing letters from former students. She looked over each letter in the scrapbook “with an expression of joy and seemed to remember each individual.” Her dedication brought her a namesake-the Hattie M. Dyer Elementary School and the open house for the new school was held on January 27, 1974. She was honored by U.S. Rep Dale Milford, U.S. Representative Ray Roberts of McKinney, State Rep. Walt Parker of Denton, 158th District Judge Bob Scofield, County Judge Tom Todd, and 400 guests.

After her retirement she continued her other career which included an egg route to Dallas on Mondays to sell eggs. This egg route started in the 1930’s when she commuted from her Krum home to Dallas to teach. She was known to her Dallas customers as “The egg woman.” She also worked at a Sanger nursing home and Denton State School as a cook 6 or 7 times per week. In addition to chickens and cows she was an enthusiastic gardener and lover of animals. She was a quiet benefactor to many organizations and many needy people and animals.

Below are some comments from Krum students who were taught by Mrs. Dyer:

"A piece of cardboard, a scrap of paper, individually hand-stamped letters to spell a word....this is how Mrs. Dyer taught me to read. With my face toward the chalkboard, my left hand behind my back, a piece of chalk in my right, this is how I learned to write. Although she was very strict, Mrs. Dyer had a passion for teaching and a tender spot for a child who needed shoes. “~~ Betty Miller Venzel

“I think of the Easter Egg Hunts in her pasture. All the school supplies and eye glasses she furnished to the kids who needed help. She put some students through college without anyone in the community aware. I think of the Spring Operettas and Fall plays she and Mrs. Moore produced. I know there are some funny stories about reading class and her falling asleep, but I remember mostly her kindness. She could be scary, like when she shook me at the blackboard till my loose tooth fell out. She sold eggs in Dallas to raise money to help with the supplies and glasses she furnished. But she went every Saturday to Dallas even after she was stooped over from osteoarthritis. I don't know how she was able to do it. It makes me feel sad when I think of all the good she did and never really thanked for it.” ~ Susan Barthold Dodd

“I had my two years with Mrs. Dyer from September 1945-May 1945. As a veteran teacher myself now (40 years) I know she was a good teacher as that time. She made her own reading charts, flash cards, and ditto sheets (on a pan of jell-each sheet made by hand). She also set up a playhouse in the corner for the first 6 weeks. When amused she had a big laugh. We spent a lot of time at the chalkboard practicing math and cursive writing. We were never taught manuscript. Each morning we recited Robert Louis Stevenson poems and sang children's songs.” ~ Janice Cole Callarman

“I indeed had Hattie Dyer and she was a wonderful teacher. When we moved to Krum I was so far behind, couldn't write and all sorts of shortcomings. If I recall handwriting was one of her BIG things and she did her thing with me. Mrs. Dyer got me caught up in about a half year and ready to go to 3rd grade under Mrs. Moore. If I had to name one of my outstanding teachers Hattie Dyer would be near or at the top. May she rest in peace and I am sure she won't tolerate any illiterate angels around her either.” ~Jerry Denney 1944-1945

“I could tell stories from my two years under Hattie's tutelage that would include raps on the knuckles with her ruler and other acts of persuasion that were much more effective than the forms of discipline in today's education system; but I prefer to remember the unvarnished love that Hattie Dyer had for all students that were entrusted to her care. I remember a time when my family took a brief hiatus to Arkansas in the fall of my first year in Hattie's class in 1948. Our interloping to Arkansas did not work out as planned and I found myself standing in the doorway to the first grade classroom in the old two story rock building that stood on the west side of the current Hattie Dyer elementary grounds six weeks after I had left. I wasn't sure of my status in the class as I had not been in the class long before I had left for Arkansas. When Mrs. Dyer saw me standing in the door she rushed over and gave me a hug that would make the Prodigal Son blush. I knew that I belonged! Hattie Dyer treated all in her class this way and I remember many times that I saw her give lunch money to a student that would not have eaten that day. This was the Hattie Dyer that I remember, one that dressed like a pauper, but would give her students the shirt off her back and an education to boot.” ~ Chris Cofer

“ A Saturday trip to Dallas to help her deliver eggs. "What a day at 8 years old!" I rode in the back seat holding the egg boxes so they wouldn't slide and break. She put the eggs in boxes with hay to keep them from breaking. When we got to a house, she would open the door on her side and tell me to take the small box to the front door and give to the lady in the house. The lady would take the box from me and hand me an empty one for Mrs. Dyer to use the next week. I think those were the only times I ever went to Dallas back then. Dugan, my Dad, "let" me do this

with her. I think she paid me 50 cents that day. She would hand me the big coin and then say "I'll see you Monday at school and don't be late"! She taught us ALL so very very much good stuff.
~ Ricky Don Knight

“Hattie Dyer appeared each morning at our first- and second-grade classroom like a combination of Mary Poppins and a Valkyrie from a Wagnerian opera. I vividly remember that first day in class in September, 1942. We children sat in small chairs around wooden tables on the first floor of the red-brick school building, now demolished. Dorothy Standifer (now Ferris) sat directly across from me. Each day Hattie would greet us with a vivacious smile and direct us to some activity. In the fall she brought mums from her garden and in the spring, irises. “Oh, how I love my flags!” she exclaimed over her irises.

Hattie had several weapons in her arsenal as a teacher. The first and foremost was enthusiasm: We children were going to learn to READ! And WRITE! She gave us the impression these were gifts from the gods not far removed from the discovery of fire. Hattie taught cursive writing, now a lost art. She would proceed to show us on the chalkboard: For a capital letter A, she would designate a “humpback.” A capital B was two loops, and so on through the alphabet. It was not only fun, it was easy. That was a second weapon: learning was so simple—there was nothing to it. The psychology had astounding results. We had no idea what we were doing was difficult. Hattie said we could do it, so we did it. I think she must have dwelt overlong on some subjects for the slow students. My mother reported that one day after school she asked me how things had gone, and I said in disgust, “Oh, we wrote ‘A man ran’ again.”

A third and literal weapon was her yardstick. Woe be unto the careless student who talked when he should have been listening, or who threw a spit wad. In those days, corporal punishment was permitted. Given the common attitude in the state of Texas at that time about offenders, it is a wonder our fingernails were not pulled out and waterboarding applied. But of course, Hattie was also lavish in her praise when children responded. She gave us stars on our papers. A gold star from Hattie was a prized possession.

Hattie Dyer represented the best in a small company of dedicated teachers who, with minimum pay, in classrooms without air-conditioning, in the days before electronic media, taught an entire generation not only the skills that would serve them well throughout their adult lives but also the traits of character needed to survive and thrive in the twentieth century.” ~Charles Cole

In a 1973 article in the Denton Record Chronicle Mrs. Dyer said: “I’ve been asked why people love me so much.” Mrs. Dyer told the photographer, “Well it’s because I love them so much. You see it works more than one way.” For those of us who were fortunate enough to have her as a teacher we became the children she didn’t have, the receptacles of her teaching skills, the object of her love.

Visit Krum Heritage Museum online at www.krumheritagemuseum.com



Dyer_1: Hattie Morris Dyer



Dyer_2: Hattie Morris Dyer



Dyer_3: Hattie & Nelson Dyer



Dyer_4: Hattie M. Dyer