

Gladys Devore Fletcher

Class of 1935

My teaching career began in September 1935, just after graduating from Haddam High and taking the normal training class under Mrs. Bishop. I received \$40 per month which was a good amount of money then. My first school was Silver Slope near Morrowville. I had seventeen students and all eight grades. It was one of the many one-room school houses in Kansas. They were much the same. There was one large room with about 20 desks bolted to the floor. These faced the teacher's desk at the front on a small raised platform. There was a large backboard behind and a bench in front for students to "come to class."

Some school houses had an entrance way but Silver Slope had a porch and the door opened into the schoolroom. There was a row of hooks for coats, a shelf under for caps and dinner pails and overshoes were lined up below.

There was a large stove in a front corner. The teacher must in, all weather (some sub-zero), have the room warm by 9:00 when students came. There was a shed outside with kindling, wood and sometimes coal.

One memory I have is of frozen ink bottles sitting around the stove. They must be thawed by 11:30 for "penmanship class." From 4th grade on pupils must use pens with metal sharp points to dip in the ink. These points would sometimes stick in the paper. They were required to practice ovals and slanted marks as well as each capital and small letter of the alphabet. Many became beautiful writers. Now, I think cursive writing is not in school curriculums. I don't know when we first had ball point pens.

I taught reading first, then arithmetic and English before penmanship. Then lunch from 12:00 to 1:00. Teachers played outdoors with students whenever possible. We had two recesses at 10:30 and 2:30 I need to mention two "out-houses" in corners of the play ground. One for the boys and one for the girls.

Afternoon classes were geography, history, government (civics) and spelling. Spelling was different. The textbooks had 20 words for each week. On Mondays and Tuesdays they looked up definitions and used each word in a sentence. On Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays the teacher pronounces the words for them to write. Any words

missed were written 20 times on blackboard or paper. Only Friday's grades were recorded. These were mostly 100's! Report cards were sent home each month, "to be signed by a parent."

Teachers were everything – janitors, teachers, nurse, and more. There were no telephones in schoolhouses. I do not remember having any big accident problems.

I swept the floor every day at 4:00. Sometimes school boards furnished a sweeping compound to cut down on dust. The 1930's were the time of "Kansas dust storms." I remember some afternoons so dark that I could not let the children walk home. We would wait for a father to come in a wagon. Driving a car was difficult.

All 8th grade students had to go to the county seat for all day examinations to see if they would graduate. Graduation ceremony was held in the county seat with the county superintendent giving diplomas.

Social life consisted of a fall "auction box supper" with teacher's "secret box" often bringing a good price! The money was used for school supplies. I remember a neat wooden box of twenty long pieces of chalk cost probably 50 cents. Christmas was a night program and a Christmas tree. All parents came to see their children perform. A community pot-luck was the last day. Schools were out the last of April. I do not know when they changed to nine months.

I am sure these "olden" schools seem strange to modern students and educators. Truly, they really gave an effective good education.

In 1943 I graduated from Kansas State University with a B.S. in home economics and teaching. I also married Lt. Thomas Fletcher who was immediately sent to the European War Theater until 1946.

Those years I taught Cuba and Haddam High Schools; English at Cuba and home economics at Haddam. I enjoyed my year at Haddam. I taught my sister and the children of neighbors. I had a boys' cooking class. Wade, Winifred, and Wesley Zenger, Charles Novak, Lawrence Gingles and others in the class. I doubt they gained much from the nutrition I taught them, but they did enjoy eating what they cooked. Interesting that my dad, Chalmer Devore, had taught the Zenger boys' father.

One of the men teachers had to leave early that year (perhaps to the military), and we teachers

divided his classes to finish the year. I was given agriculture during my planning period. I soon saw that the farm boys in my class knew as much or more about Kansas farming than the book. I mostly just let them talk in class and give individual reports. I wonder if anyone in that class remembers it. (1944-45 – 67 years ago).

In 1948 my husband was home safe, our daughter was born, and we moved to Maryville, Tennessee. Tom was to be an engineer with Alcoa (Aluminum Company of America). I taught advanced clothing at Maryville College and then I taught 30 years in the Blount County School System. I taught in Everett and new Heritage, the two largest high schools.

My first year at Everett High there were more than 1800 students in four large buildings. There were four home economics teachers. I had five classes with 24 or more in each, a planning period, and a home room of 30 or more. That was certainly different from teaching in Cuba or Haddam schools.

This meant that I had more than 150 new students each year. I feel that I have an instinct to be a teacher. I found it easy to learn student names and personalities, make lesson plans, and teach effectively. I see many former students now, mothers and grandmothers who tell me how much they learned in my classes and how they enjoyed being in my class.

A good memory I have at Everett is the coming of our microwave oven. It is true that microwave ovens were discovered more than invented. In 1945 Dr. Spencer Tracy, an engineer, was testing a new vacuum tube when he discovered that a candy bar in his pocket was melted. The first microwave oven was 5 ½ feet tall, weighed 750 pounds, and cost of \$5,000. It was 1967 before they were small in stores at about \$500. In 1970 Knoxville Utilities gave local home economics departments small microwave ovens I think they did this promote sales as the public did not receive microwaves well. There were too many bad rumors of how they could injure. Ours was a small one with only On and Off controls, but it was a delight to me and my students. Can you imagine anyone without a microwave now?

In 1979 we moved to new Heritage High. It was a large, beautiful, air conditioned and great! My students sold candy bars and cook books for

window air conditioners at Everett. This new school was a joy!

At Everett I had mostly girls in home economics classes but Heritage had many boys. I had a Bachelor Living Class for boys and a Family Living Class for boys and girls. Some boys enjoyed the regular classes of cooking and sewing. I had one boy in Fashion Design who was very talented He went on to be successful in the fashion world.

I retired when I was 68 in 1985. I had taught for 38 years and truly enjoy it all. I felt that I had helped influence more than 4,000 Blount County teenagers into adults.

During my 95 years I have seen a lot of changes. I think perhaps in education most of all. My grandchildren were studying computers when they were five years old in kindergarten. They do not write cursive. To me computers, cell phones, cameras are miracles! Our world is changing. What will the next 95 years bring?

I now live in assisted living in a very nice retirement home and am content and happy. I have lived 30 years in Kansas and 65 in Tennessee. It is a pretty state with the Smoky Mountains, but I have never forgotten my Kansas roots.