

Faculty – Mary Ormond Butler.



She spent most of her life in Memphis until she supposedly retired about a decade ago. After her “retirement,” she taught for three years in a consolidated school in Barton AR. Silvery-haired and pert, Miss Butler says “I liked teaching boys better than girls, because they are more of a challenge. There never was a really bad boy, but I enjoyed having

boys’ others called bad. “I’d be pleasant to one of these ‘bad boys,’ give him something to do, and sell him on the idea that I was interested in him. I never liked ‘angel boys’ as much.

“I knew how to discipline my pupils --- and that’s the most important thing to be a good teacher. I can’t tell anyone else how to do it --- but I’m proud that I never had to send a pupil to the principal. And I always had a disciplined class.”

Miss Butler was graduated from the Memphis Conference Female Institute, now Lambuth College, in Jackson, in 1895, when she was 16. When she was 17, she began teaching at Levi School in south Shelby County, beginning a career in which “I never missed a day in 53 years.”

After five years, she moved into Memphis schools, teaching in turn at Prescott, Gordon, Snowden, and at Memphis Technical High School.

And during those years, she attended summer sessions and Saturday classes, was in the first graduating class of Memphis State University, which was then West Tennessee State Normal College, and obtained a master's degree from the University of Georgia.

She was athletic, too, and likes to recall that she was coach for the girls' basketball team at Gordon when it won the city championship in 1909.

"I've seen an evolution in Memphis schools," she reminisces. "When I went to Snowden to teach, the schools were just employing physical education directors. And while I was there, the first PTA in Memphis was founded in my classroom. I also introduced the first national honor society to Memphis when I was at Tech High."

Miss Butler lists among her former pupils many Memphis "businessmen, bankers, lawyers, doctors and men who are presidents of their own companies --- but I hesitate to name any of them. So many are dead, now.

"For instance, I taught Connie O'Sullivan, who was the fire department chief for years. I had a special weakness for him. I'm Irish, too, you know."

She has a store of memories of incidents concerned with mischievous children. For instance, "It was unusual for a boy to ask to leave the room. When one got up and started out one day, without leave, I barked at him "Where are you going?" and

he answered saucily 'nature calls.' You could have heard a pin drop in the room. But I just ignored it and excused him, and hid my smile.

"One time, a mother came to visit her son's room, saying, "Tommy says you preach the nicest sermon.' Which reminds me, it makes me so depressed that we can't say prayers in school any more. Many children never hear a prayer except in school. There's no such thing as grace at table in many homes -- the working parents go one way and the children another."

Miss Butler, an Episcopalian, a member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Daughters of the American Revolution, taught Sunday School – to ninth grade students. "I used to teach Bible class for old ladies --- but no more. I have no time for fussy old women," she says perkily.