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In Their Own Words

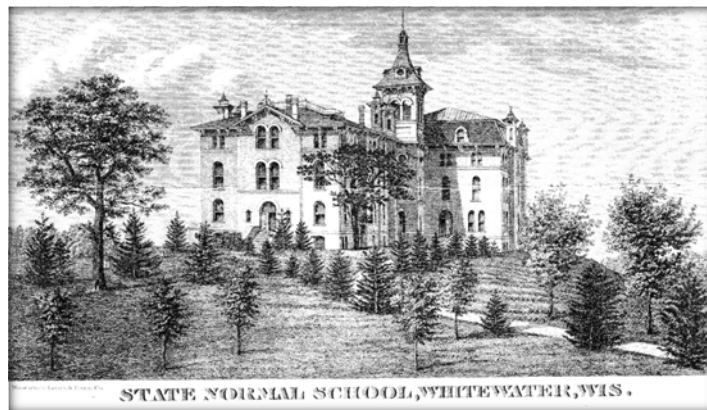
Curated by Gina Neist

Eliza Mae Chapman Meredith, 1893-1991, was a beloved teacher in rural schools throughout the area. In the book Celebrating HER Story; the Women of Eagle, a first-person narrative of her life was imagined using information from The Waukesha Freeman, the Eagle Quill, and documents from the Eagle Historical Society. Visit the museum, located at 217 Main Street in Eagle, on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays from 9 am – noon to see an exhibit of a typical one-room school from Liza's days. The book is available at the museum and from the EHS website at eaglehistoricalsociety.org.

Memories of My Teaching Career

I am Elizabeth Chapman Meredith. I was born in the Town of Troy on October 17, 1893 to Wallace and Anna Chapman. I had eight siblings, and my mother trusted me to help with the instruction of the younger kids. We were fortunate with good parents. There was lots of love and kindness in that house, and someone always wanted to help another understand.

As a young woman, I attended Whitewater Normal School to complete the requirements to receive a Teaching Diploma. Can you believe that it was only a six-week course of study!



I began my career in 1912 teaching in a one-room school near Troy Center in the Randall School District. To my chagrin, the school closed just two years later, but I was fortunate to find work at my alma mater, Baker School. Unfortunately, this school also closed after two years! At that time, there were only three students enrolled in the school, so it was understandable that it had to shutter the doors.

The next five years found me teaching at Adams and Stewart Schools.

People often ask me how I managed to teach children in all eight grades in one room. Well, the older students would help me by teaching and taking care of the younger ones. I was fortunate to have my sister help me correct papers in the evenings! A teacher's work is never done!

In 1921, I was bitten by the love bug, and I tied the knot with my husband, Irving Meredith. In those days, married women devoted themselves to their husbands and families, and I walked away from my teaching career. I became a farmer's wife at the Meredith homestead, located on Hwy. 67 about a mile south of Eagle.

Tragedy struck in, you guessed it, two years, when my beloved husband, Irving, passed away. My father urged me to come home, reasoning that I would not be able to maintain an 80-acre farm on my own.

I moved in with my parents, but I went right back to my former career, finding work at the school at Bakers Corners. After six years there, I transferred to Jericho School in 1929. I enjoyed fifteen years of teaching the farm children who lived in that community. I stayed with the Walter Schaefer family instead of commuting back and forth because the roads were so bad.



Folks often ask me how I was able to manage the behavior of students in my class. I found that discipline was rarely an issue; I would just take the troubled student aside and offer a quiet word of encouragement. It worked like a charm!

In 1944, I was hired to teach a class of 48 students at the one-room school in Eagleville. Quite a different experience from the handful of students at Bakers School from 30 years ago! After the war, it seems many people were moving out to the country and to the lakes. Eagle Springs Lake area was growing, which increased the Eagleville School attendance.



In 1941, there were 231 teachers in Waukesha County; by 1958, the figure was 902! The number of students went from 6500 to over 20,000 in the same years. No wonder I was having trouble with names!

After I retired, I enjoyed visits from former students, their children, and even their grandchildren. I know I taught in the best of times. Those less crowded days gave me names I remember, and they will remember me, too!

I was an active member of the Eagle United Methodist Church, and in 1982 I was honored to receive the Outstanding Citizen Award by the Eagle Lioness Club. For almost a century, I lived a life of service to my family and my community. I am proud to have called Eagle my home!