

## A Dedicated Teacher

Inspiring children to learn has been almost a religion to Agnes Samuelson. She regards the role of teacher second only to parenthood. She held that banner high during the years of teaching in rural schools and on into later periods when she served in important official and professional capacities for the state and nation.

Agnes Samuelson was determined to be a teacher, although she had opportunities to enter the business world before she launched upon her chosen career. She inherited from her parents their absorbing interest in learning, and was eager, upon her graduation from high school, to secure further education. Her immediate goal was to attend Western Normal College in Shenandoah. Since family finances were limited, she earned part of her tuition by baking bread and selling it to grateful neighbors for five cents a loaf.

Her first teaching assignment, at \$30 a month, was in 1905-1906, in the Pleasant View school, two miles north of Shenandoah. Her credentials were diplomas from high school and the scientific course at Western Normal College; a certificate based on examinations in the common branches and didactics, and attendance at a teachers' insti-

tute. The only legal requirement at that time was the license to teach.

She was well recommended for this first position. Prof. Ross Marriott of Western Normal College wrote that "Miss Samuelson is a thoroughly qualified teacher, ambitious to succeed, eager to advance, and determined to make the best possible of herself." He described her as "a natural leader and a *born teacher* — a lady in the truest sense." Other recommendations called her "earnest, faithful and ambitious," and pointed out her Christian graces and her ability to win the love and esteem of her pupils.

The young teacher walked the two miles to and from the Pleasant View school each weekend. During the school period she stayed at a farm home. Each day she swept her classroom, planned and heard the lessons, greeted and waved goodbye to half a dozen pupils, and at the close of day carried the cobs and wood for the morning fire.

Sometimes the precious fuel was used by tramps who found overnight shelter in the snug schoolhouse. One morning Agnes found this message on her blackboard: "I did not kidnap Pat Crowe but I would kidnap the teacher if I got the chance."

This one-room school had no shade trees and no community activities — just plain teaching of the three R's to a handful of youngsters. But there *was* a raise to \$32.50 for the spring term.

In her spare time, of which there was precious

little, the eager teacher read books and articles dealing with the role of education, rural school management, child psychology and related materials. She even found time in those early days for an extension course in the History of Education under the direction of the late Professor Forest C. Ensign of the University of Iowa.

After the working day, she welcomed the hospitable refuge of the farmhouse, often fragrant with baking gingerbread and spicy applesauce. For a few hours she could forget her busy schedule and those lively, wriggling boys and girls.

Her experience in this one-room school prepared her well for her next assignment, a two-teacher village school, located in the postoffice in Page Center. This was the Keystone school where Miss Sadie Beach taught the first four grades and Miss Samuelson's pupils were fifth through eighth graders. There were seven eighth grade graduates that spring. Always interested in adding to the teaching materials of the school, Agnes was delighted that spring when proceeds from a box social permitted the purchase of a set of reference books.

During her entire eventful career, Agnes Samuelson was a champion of rural education. She was well acquainted with the one-room school, but as transportation facilities improved and school consolidation programs were proposed, she kept abreast of the times. She marched neither with

the ultra-conservatives who shunned all change, nor those in the opposite camp who wanted to scrap anything with a traditional flavor.

While Miss Samuelson worked tirelessly for better teaching materials, she also looked about her and saw that nature provides vast resources for the observant teacher and pupil. The flowers of the fields, the rocks, the nearby brook, the birds in the schoolyard trees and the farm animals known to most of the children were topics for interesting lessons.

Said this school teacher, "We need not worry about laboratory facilities in the country school, for there, of all places, the child finds himself in God's laboratory, in the great outdoors, with its natural museums of field, forest and stream."

One might say that Miss Samuelson fell into her next position. On the first weekend after assuming her duties at the Lone Rock school, in 1907, she was thrown from a buggy, and carried her broken right arm in a sling for six weeks. Nothing daunted, she learned to write with her left hand and made the best of her handicap. Her new pupils were understanding and cooperative, paying more than ordinary attention to their studies and helping with the school chores.

Transportation to Lone Rock by livery team proved too expensive for her meager budget, so at the end of the winter term, in 1908, she transferred to the Snake Creek school, near Yorktown.

Now each Monday morning she scampered with several other teachers, into the caboose of the early freight train. They were a gay lot, all of them laughing, joking with the trainmen and playfully jostling each other for the choice seats in the "vista dome" of their quaint conveyance. On Friday evenings they returned in state on the passenger train.

Agnes Samuelson taught the three R's diligently but her teaching influence went far beyond these rudimentary requirements. She was determined to pass on to her pupils an appreciation of their American heritage; an understanding of the value of time; respect for their government; information about leaders in American history. She exposed them to good books.

In her classes she emphasized good manners, proper health habits, character building and the responsibilities of loyal American citizens. *Her* pupils learned *all* of the words to "The Star-Spangled Banner." In one of her talks she said, "To send a child forth equipped with mental and physical skills is not enough. We must build integrity as well."

The child always was her first consideration and she maintained:

Childhood is the pivotal reason for the school. His eyes may be focused to see the beauty of the world; his hands trained to do useful work; his feet guided to tread the paths of righteousness; his ears tuned to the harmonies of

life; his mind developed to its utmost capacity and his heart to beat in tune with the wave-lengths of the universe.

The school is the only public institution which exists solely because of children and is devoted exclusively to their interests and the well-being of our Republic. It is, therefore, essential to our national survival and sustenance. It is our most democratic institution, as the plant belongs to all, is supported by all. Here the children meet on the same level, regardless of creed, background or political affiliation.

From the Snake Creek school our teacher took a pleasant jump to the Silver City High School, where she was both teacher and assistant principal. There was a nice boost in salary, too — from \$360 a year to \$450. She recalls that there was never a dull moment in this challenging position from 1908 to 1911.

In that period, in this Mills County High School, there were no extra-curricular activities for the students. Their days were filled with study and recitations in Latin, history, English, science and mathematics, with no electives. Although preparing for classes and teaching every period of the school day added up to a heavy load for the teachers, no extra demands were made upon them for outside services. All of their time belonged to the students. One year, Miss Samuelson taught an evening Shakespeare class at the request of her pupils. She recalls appreciatively the cooperation of her colleagues, from the school janitor to members of the school board.

But this was not a period of all work and no play. On Saturday nights the teachers forgot books and classes as they strolled down Main Street, trading and chatting or dropping into the corner drug store for a soda or a sundae. They applauded at band concerts in the park. They participated in home talent plays in the Opera House and ate oyster stew after a winter bobsled party. Trips to a nearby city afforded change of scene and there were taffy pulls, masquerade parties and charades.

And every Thursday evening Miss Samuelson joined with other young women of the town who met to sew together, vying with one another in their "fancy work" prowess. Prospective brides deceived no one when they brought handkerchiefs to hem. Everyone knew their "hope chests" were brimming with household linens and dainty lingerie, collected in secret. Some homemakers embroidered pond lilies on piano scarves. Miss Agnes put her tiny stitches into chrysanthemums on a full panel for a dress.

The three years flew by, and, at their close, Agnes Samuelson decided to take time out for studies at the University of Nebraska, in Lincoln. Just before the Wabash train pulled out for Shenandoah, the high school students arrived at the station en masse, with banners and songs, to bid their devoted teacher good-bye. As she stood on the back platform of the train, she watched until

her car rounded a bend, half glad, half sad to see the waving flags and what seemed to be a large, white sheet in the hands of her admirers.

It was the happy experience of Agnes Samuelson to return to this community, some years later, to deliver the high school commencement address. On this memorable occasion she was serving as State Superintendent of Public Instruction for Iowa.

Her philosophy regarding her chosen career is stated eloquently in these paragraphs written in 1948 for the Journal of the National Educational Association. Many reprints were requested for school bulletin boards over the nation. Titled "TEACHING IS MY CHOICE," the article makes these statements:

TEACHING gives me opportunities to roam through the galleries of history and to come in contact with the aspirations, struggles and achievements of the past. I learn to appreciate the heritage of the ages.

TEACHING keeps me in touch with the throbbing present with its lessons from the past and its implications for the future. It gives me perspective.

TEACHING challenges me to inspire the growing personalities who look to me for guidance with the will to write new chapters in the story of human progress. My work has future values.

TEACHING empowers me to help boys and girls to become responsible citizens of our free country. I participate in building the greatness of our Republic.

TEACHING brings me into partnership with fathers and mothers and all other people concerned with the

growth and development of children. Schools help children to acquire the knowledge, skill, abilities, ideals, insights, attitudes and creativeness needed for abundant living. The achievements of my pupils reward me.

TEACHING makes it possible for me to share in the successes of other services and enterprises which sustain and enrich life. They are all nourished and made effective by education. My work reaches all areas of human endeavor.

TEACHING satisfies my urge to adventure into new fields of learning. It has unlimited possibilities for creative work, laboratory experiments, and pioneering activities. I can try my hand at invention.

TEACHING enrolls me among the great immortals, known and unknown, who have envisioned the place of education in human history and labored to make the fruits of learning available to all people. I can help today's children get ready for the long pull ahead.

TEACHING provides me with a thrilling and significant role in the drama of constructing the defenses of peace in the minds of men. Education has given me the chance to help promote world understanding through UNESCO. I can help win the battles of peace.

TEACHING offers me the prospect of accelerated improvements in professional standards, economic returns, social status, public esteem and security. These developments will enhance the skill and nobility of the profession and enlarge the usefulness of schools. I can look forward to greater satisfactions, rewards and avenues of service in teaching.

When Miss Agnes Samuelson's first college professors described her as "A Born Teacher," they were prophetic indeed. In the language of today, she was indeed *a dedicated teacher*.

DOROTHY ASHBY POWNALL