

Historical Threads

Remembering the First Graduates of the Branch Normal School

by Jay M. Jones

As communities in Southern Utah began to develop, providing an adequate education for the young generation was difficult. Experienced teachers were in short supply throughout the area and the youth were needed to help wrestle a living from the challenging local environment.

The Branch Normal School, a predecessor to Southern Utah University, was established in 1897 in Cedar City to provide three years of a required four years of higher education for the certification of teachers. A final year of study at the University of Utah was needed to complete the process.

It was hoped that by training young Southern Utah students as teachers, the shortage of educators in the area would be alleviated.

In the year 1900, the first group of six students completed the mandated course work for teacher education at the Branch Normal School and became the first graduates of the school. But it was not clear how they would gather the resources needed to complete their education in Salt Lake City.

One graduate, Amelia Dalley, wrote, "I was very anxious to go to Salt Lake City to the University of Utah and finish the normal course. All summer I worried about how I could get the money to go . . . In the fall it was decided that all six who had graduated could go to Salt Lake and live together [in a rented home on 1100 East]. Mother borrowed \$200 from Mary Dalley. Mother went with us to be our housekeeper."

All six graduates of Branch Normal School completed their course work at the University of Utah in 1901 and began their teaching careers. All had agreed, as part of the arrangements made for them to complete their education, that they would devote at least three years to the teaching profession.

Anne O. Leavitt wrote in her book *Southern Utah University, The First Hundred Years*, "A brief review of these students and their teaching careers gives a view of the educational impact of the Branch Normal School upon the whole region. It was an impact that was realized in a remarkably short time and clearly validates the vision of the founders."

Ella Berry was the first graduate to have her name called out in the graduation ceremony, due to the alphabetical order of the last names. She was born in Kanarraville in 1879 and attended schools in Kanarraville and Cedar City. After completing her education she taught school in Cedar City for three years. She married William Henry Leigh in 1903 and raised ten children.

The 1940 U. S. census shows the Leigh family living at 104 South 100 West in Cedar City's historic district. Ella lived to be 100 years old and died in Cedar City in 1980.

Amelia Dalley was born and raised in Summit, Utah, along with her twin sister Minnie. After completing school work in Summit and Cedar City, both twins attended the Branch Normal School in Cedar City. Minnie married Lehi Thorley and did not continue at the school.

Following her graduation, Amelia taught in Summit for one year at the same school she attended as a child. She taught in Cedar City the next year. She married George Bernard Green in 1903 and moved to Alta, Wyoming where she continued her teaching career. While George was on a church mission, she taught school in Summit another year. When her husband completed his mission, she returned to Alta, Wyoming where they lived the remainder of their lives, raising nine children. Amelia died in 1960.

Julius Dalley, a half-brother to Amelia, was also a native of Summit. His teaching career started at Parowan and included teaching posts at Summit and Monticello in Utah and Fredonia and Mocassin in Northern Arizona.



First graduates of the teaching curriculum of the Branch Normal School, which later became Southern Utah University. Front row: Emma Gardner, Alice Redd, Amelia Dalley and Ella Berry. Back row: Joseph Wilkinson and Julius Dalley. Southern Utah University Special Collections Photo.

Julius spent most of his career teaching in Kanab, where he met his wife, Rachel Woolley. They raised four children, who all attended and graduated from the college in Cedar City. Julius was a member of the Utah State Board of Education. He died in Kanab in 1953.

Emma Gardner, born in 1877, attended elementary school in Pine Valley, Washington County. After graduating from the University of Utah in 1901 she taught school in Pine Valley for five years, then in St. George for two years, followed by 23 years of teaching in Mesquite Nevada. She became the school principal in Mesquite and was active in the community.

She married David Arthur Abbott in 1909 and they had two children. She died in St. George in 1963.

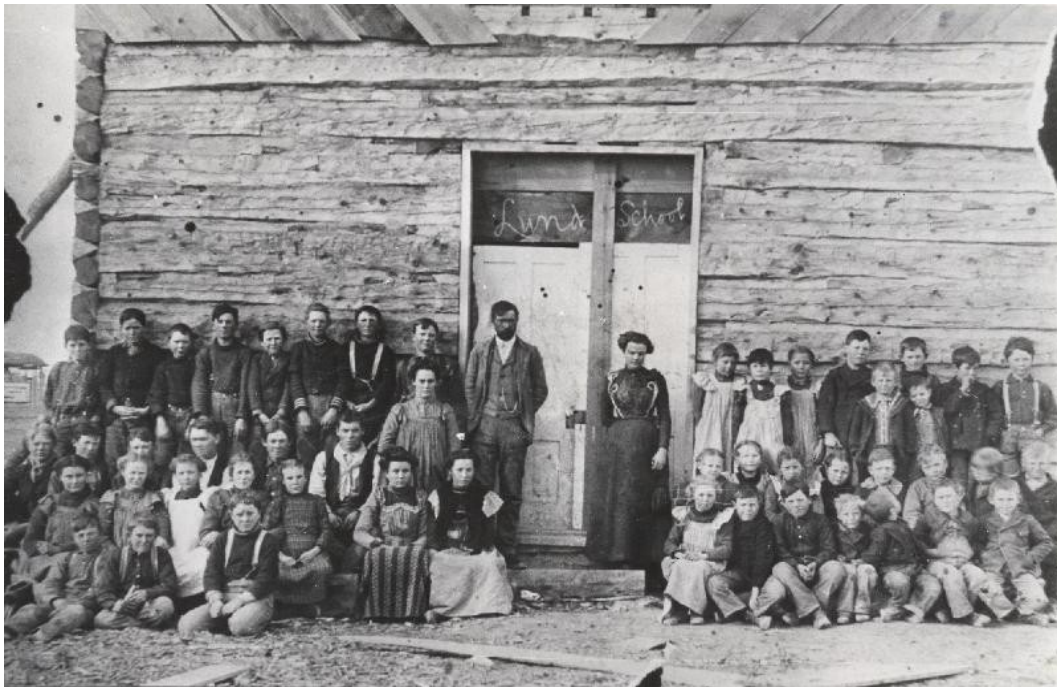


Photo of the Lund, Nevada school in 1902, with teachers Alice Redd and Orrin Snow. Hendrix family photo.

Alice Redd was born and raised in New Harmony. Her first teaching experience was in Lund, Nevada. She wrote: "For two years I taught a mixed Primary School in Lund, Nevada where my two married sisters Delle Ivins and Ellen Bryner lived. That first school house was a pioneer log cabin with little or no convenience. I built my own fires and swept out the room. For desks we had planks and for seats planks without back rests. My pupils were children of settlers who had come there from Utah to turn a big cattle ranch into a town."

She continues: "I had forty-five children in five grades. Conditions were rather wild and woolly but the children were bright and active and there I had a good workout. My two years there garnered me many good friends and many pleasant memories."

Her next two years were in Cedar City, teaching fifth and sixth grades. She then accepted a teaching position in Paris, Idaho, where she met her husband Abel Rich, also a teacher. They had six children, three of whom became teachers.

Joseph Wilkinson was born in Leeds, Utah in 1878 and moved as a child with his family to Cedar City, where his father ran the weekly newspaper, the **Iron County Record**. For a time he was associated with his brother Charles in publishing the **Dixie Advocate** in St. George.

In 1905 he married Annie Webb of St. George. Both were school teachers and both were proficient musicians. Soon after marriage the couple filled an LDS Mission to Tahiti for three years, where two of their nine children were born. While on his mission, Joseph assisted in the publication of a church newspaper and a hymnbook, both in the Tahitian language.

Joseph taught school in Rockville, Hurricane, and Springdale in Utah, as well as Mocassin, Cane Beds, Lee's Ferry and Mt. Trumbull in Arizona. He homesteaded at Cane Beds in 1916 and finished raising his family there. He died at Cane Beds in 1938 from a brain tumor, and was honored and remembered at a Founder's Day commemoration at the college in Cedar City the same day that his funeral was held in Hurricane.

Many of today's graduates from SUU have had advantages that previous generations never dreamed of, and they face challenges that could not have been imagined just a few years ago. Like the first graduates, the newest group can make a positive difference in the communities where they will live and with the individuals whom they will influence.

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