

Carolyn (Carrie) V. Shaw Rice (1862-1926)

by Jeffrey A. Ryan

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Carrie Shaw Rice was a pioneering educator, poet and author who helped to broaden the role for women in education in the early years of Tacoma and Washington State. Carrie Shaw Rice was the first Principal and Teacher at Washington School [in Tacoma] from 1901 to 1913.

Born in Illinois in 1862, Carrie V. Shaw obtained her early schooling in Grundy, Illinois and attended high school in Ottawa, Illinois, graduating in 1880. In 1901 and 1905 she attended "summer normals and special work" at the University of California. In 1885 Carrie Shaw married John F. Rice, a marriage that would last but three years before his death in 1887. Following his death, Carrie Shaw Rice took up teaching in a school in Braceville, Illinois.

Within a year she moved to Tacoma to teach at the Tacoma Normal Training School (Central School) and served as a teacher and then the "Supervisor and critic for primary education" from 1896 to 1901. Mrs. Rice was a founding member in the Tacoma Academy of Science in 1891, an organization founded for "The promotion of Science, Literature and the Arts" in Tacoma. In 1894 Governor John Rogers appointed Mrs. Rice to the State Board of Education where she served for four years. She was one of the first women to serve on the board. In 1901 she was appointed to the board of higher education and served on that board until 1904. She also served two terms as the Secretary of the State Board of Education from 1897 to 1899 and again from 1901 through 1903. Then in 1901 she was named Principal for the new Washington School in Tacoma. She served as Principal for the school for eleven years except for an extended period of study and travel in the Orient in 1906. Her tenure as Principal spanned the early years of design and construction of Washington School and from school district files, she appears to have been involved in the discussion of the building's design. Following her years at Washington School, Carrie Shaw Rice served as Principal for Lincoln School (1912-1913) in Tacoma before spending time traveling abroad. In 1915 she accepted the position of Primary Superintendent of Utah County, Utah, but stayed only until 1917 before moving on to California where she taught in San Luis Obispo from 1919 until 1922 when she returned again to Tacoma.

Carrie Shaw Rice was also active in the Chautauqua movement also referred to as the Chautauqua Literary and Scientific Circle (C.L.S.C.). In 1895 she was named vice president of the National Chautauqua Association and served as trustee for the Puget Sound Chautauqua Assembly from 1893 to 1896. At the height of the national Chautauqua movement, there were 12,000 Chautauqua sites across the United States providing culture to the masses. Before radio and television, the Chautauqua movement united millions in common cultural and educational experiences. Orators, performers, and educators traveled a national Chautauqua circuit bringing lectures, performances, concerts, classes, and exhibitions to thousands of people in small towns and cities. Theodore Roosevelt called Chautauqua "the most American thing in America." Summer schools, correspondence and continuing education courses, and civic, fraternal and youth organizations across the country can trace their origins to the Chautauqua Movement. The Chautauqua Institute continues to offer a summer lecture series and art programs. The Chautauqua reading circle is currently the oldest book club in America.

In August 1887, the Puget Sound Chautauqua incorporated and in 1888 the group selected Tramp Harbor on Vashon Island for a permanent home. The site grew to 600 acres with two miles of scenic shoreline, a hotel, dozens of cottages on two miles of streets, parks, viewpoints, a steamer dock, and a 1200 seat pavilion. Advertisements promised that "families may escape the noxious vapors and the immoral influences of a crowded city and combine health, instruction and pleasure." In 1889, organizers offered campfires, excursion cruises, clambakes, concerts, and art instruction in addition to Biblical sermons and lectures on zoology of the Bible, Greek customs, temperance, and the natural history of mollusks, clams, and mussels.

An accomplished poet, writer and song writer, Carrie Shaw Rice was also the author of Tacoma's first official song, "Tacoma, the Rose of the West" a poem that was rewritten to music and sung by 2,000 school children at the opening ceremonies for Tacoma High School Stadium in 1910. Mrs. Rice is also credited for her parlor song "In Childhood Straying," followed in 1900 by the text book "West-land Reader, First to Fifth Years." In 1904 she published "Where the Rhododendrons Grow" and upon her return from California in 1922 Mrs. Rice published the fourth book known to have been authored by her, a book of poems entitled "Windows that Shine."

Carrie Shaw Rice was a notable character in the history of our State and was a person who enriched the culture and educational process in the City of Tacoma at a vibrant time in our history. Washington School represents the only remaining physical link to Mrs. Rice's service as an education and civic activist in Tacoma.

SOURCES

"Death Ends Suffering of Tacoma Education, Writer," *Tacoma Daily Ledger*, 17 Feb. 1926, p. 3.

Charles Payton, "The Spirit of Chautauqua," *Portage*, Vol. 3 (Spring 1982), pp.22-23.

HistoryLink.com Article on Vashon Island Chautauqua:

http://www.historylink.org/essays/output.cfm?file_id=2260

For access to full National Register Nomination for Washington School see:

http://www.dahp.wa.gov/gis/index.cfm?action=mox42_if_frameset

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