

Remembering Miss Flynn

By Jean Luddy

Every item donated to the collection of the Vernon Historical Society has a story. Most times the donor is able to share information about the person it belonged to, when it was used and its purpose. Other times, a donor and museum volunteer can only guess. The common denominator for all donations is that they were used or made in Vernon and Rockville.

Last fall the Society received a donation of material that originated from someone who quietly touched many lives in town. When VHS museum volunteers opened a package received by mail, they found two scrapbooks. One contained family photos. The other one was immediately recognized as a significant donation.



This second scrapbook had belonged to Ethel Flynn who had taught elementary students at Maple Street School. The scrapbook started with her graduation in 1933 from Willimantic State Normal School, a teachers' college now known as Eastern Connecticut State University. Miss Flynn, a Rockville native and RHS graduate, Class of 1931, carefully labeled and mounted school photographs of all of her students from her first class in 1933 to her last one in 1959. In addition to teaching second and first grades, she also served as the librarian for the school.

A look through the scrapbook finds children with gap-toothed smiles, pig-tails and crew cuts. Some students are wearing special outfits perhaps chosen for picture day. In addition to the individual photographs, students are shown with Miss Flynn in class pictures taken in front of Maple Street School. She saved several group photos of school faculty as well. Cards and notes from students to Miss Flynn were found tucked between some pages.

Ethel Flynn taught at Maple Street for 27 years. In addition to her teaching certification, she received a Master's Degree from Hillyer College, part of the University of Hartford. According to the *Rockville Leader*, "Miss Flynn was highly regarded as a teacher and was popular with pupils and associates. She taught up to the week before school closed for the Christmas recess and had the Christmas program for her classroom all planned before entering the hospital." She died on January 3, 1960. She was 46 years old.



On the day of her funeral, all schools were closed for the day. Pall bearers included the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Vernon Schools and several elementary school principals. A special fund for the library at Maple Street School was established in her name.

The scrapbooks came from a donor who said that they had belonged to "her husband's aunt's sister-in-law." The Society is fortunate that they were saved over the years and that someone thought of donating them instead of discarding them.

At the 50th Anniversary Open House for the Society, the school scrapbook was on display. Several of Miss Flynn's former students were surprised and touched to see their faces and those of their classmates, bringing back memories of a time when life was slower and less complicated.

Well respected in her time, Ethel Flynn's life and work have been rediscovered and now will be preserved in the collection of the Vernon Historical Society.