

Grace Barker Wilson

Grace Barker Wilson was born on June 25, 1889, in Moran, Texas. When she was six months old, she moved with her family to Sapello Valley, twenty-five miles north of Las Vegas, NM. That move was made in a homemade cradle, placed in the front of a covered wagon driven by her mother. Grace graduated from high school in Las Vegas and went on to college in Arizona. She received a bachelor's degree in music from Northwestern University and then another bachelor's in arts from Flagstaff Teachers' College. She later received an M.A. from the University of New Mexico.

Mrs. Wilson's teaching career in New Mexico began in 1925 when she moved to the Farmington area to teach at Kirtland High School. She became superintendent of the Central Consolidated Schools in 1930 and remained in that position for nineteen years.

Grace's interests were always New Mexico and poetry. During her years as a public school educator, she often wrote poems dedicated to her students. After her retirement in 1949, she never severed her ties with former students and continued to write poetry. Five books of her poetry have been published; Winds Blow West in 1954, Miles to Go in 1960, Stuff of Dreams in 1964, The Horizons in 1968, and one other. She also taught a poetry workshop for the Farmington writers' Association.

Education "to enable success and contribute to society" was a priority in Mrs. Wilson's life. She was a founder of the Farmington Public Library and often spoke on historical and philosophical subjects. For the U.S. bicentennial celebration (when she was 87), she gave twenty-two presentations on patriotism to schools and various organizations. At age 98, the AAUW Farmington Branch sponsored six of her lectures on "Know Your New Mexico," given at the public library. One friend described her as a "walking encyclopedia."

Grace Wilson was noted for her charisma and personality. She had a wonderful sense of humor and loved watching sports on television. She was always active in public affairs. She was the first living educator and the first woman to be named to the New Mexico Education Hall of Fame in 1956. In 1985, the Kirtland School District honored her by giving an elementary school her name; the first living New Mexican to be so honored during their lifetime. Grace was a member of AAUW (having served as Division Historian), of Delta Kappa Gamma, of the New Mexico Education Association, the Retired Teachers' Association, and the Farmington Study Club. The Study Club is a group of women who have worked throughout this century to bring enlightenment to the children and adults of a farming community.

Grace Barker Wilson, educator, poet, and community volunteer, died at the age of 99 on February 4, 1989 in Aztec, NM. She touched many lives and was a source of inspiration to all who knew her.