

**MARY
PEARL RICE
GREENFIELD
1876-1969**



**PIONEER
EDUCATOR OF
OKLAHOMA
TERRITORY**

Mary Greenfield has been referred to as “a typical pioneer girl from the plains of western Oklahoma”, who lived every day to the fullest, dwelling on the common, everyday romance of common things and the common people. Her ideas, spirit, purpose and legacy left a lasting impression.

Mary Pearl Rice was born in October 1876 in Cincinnati, Iowa. In 1886 her father decided he needed more land so each of his sons would have a farm, thus moving to McPherson, Kansas. The trek by covered wagon across the rough prairie whetted ten-year-old Mary’s desire to travel and gave her experiences that were vital to enduring future hardships as a pioneer educator.

The Kansas land was unsatisfactory so the family moved to Riverdale, Missouri. In fall 1891, they moved to western Oklahoma Territory because the good farmland in the Cheyenne-Arapaho area would soon open for settlement. At Sapulpa, Indian Territory, the family lost their herd of thirty cattle to Texas Tick Fever. In October, they arrived in Edmond while they awaited the April 1892 land run.

Mary’s father and two brothers staked claims on adjoining farms of 160 acres each near Watonga in the Winnview community. Aspiring teacher Mary attended a training institute. After passing an examination, she received a teaching certificate. At sixteen, Mary began teaching in Winnview’s one-room sod schoolhouse. In September 1893 she taught third grade and received a monthly salary of \$25.

In the summer of 1896 Mary received a first-grade certificate at the Watonga Teachers’ Institute. In June 1889 Mary graduated from Kingfisher College’s academy course, which had been chartered in 1894. A year later, Mary taught a third term at Winnview for \$30. In 1903, at age 26, Mary moved to Weatherford to teach English and literature at the newly-organized Southwestern Oklahoma Territorial Normal School. At the same time, LeRoy Greenfield was appointment department head.

They married in June 1905. After received his master’s degree at the University of Chicago, they returned to Oklahoma for the fall 1905 term. In July 1906 they went camping in the mountains near Colorado Springs. During the following fall term, LeRoy was often sick. By the end of February, he had to resign from teaching. He was diagnosed with a viral infection contracted during their camping trip, with symptoms typical of encephalitis or meningitis. By September 1907 LeRoy had made a full recovery but recurring problems prevented him from teaching full-time.

LeRoy’s teaching career took them to Tonkawa, Henry Kendall College in Tulsa, Iowa State College in Ames, and Simpson College in Indianola before they returned to Winnview in 1919. They eventually moved to Springdale, Arkansas, hoping the climate and outdoor life would benefit LeRoy’s health. Mary taught high school while LeRoy’s condition worsened until he died in March 1924.

Mary taught in Springdale for four years until she moved to Wichita, Kansas to care for her father, who died in November 1928. After earning her master’s degree, she taught at Friends University there because the beauty of the shady campus interested her. Mary taught there for 29 years, including serving as dean of women. She periodically returned to Watonga, but she described Friends University as “home and family”. She retired at age 73 in 1949, but continued to teach as a substitute until 1959.

During the 1950s, Mary traveled extensively to Europe, Middle East, Alaska, Hawaii, and Canada. On her 85th birthday in 1961, friends and students surprised Greenfield with a “This Is Your Life” program, recalling exciting moments of her life. She moved to the Quaker community of Conway Springs, Kansas until her death at age 93 in November 1969.