

## **Flora Pennell Dodge (1868-1949)**

Flora Pennell Dodge was born on September 14, 1868 in Normal, Illinois. She was the youngest of five children born to John R. Dodge and Caroline Odell. At the time of her death, she was the last surviving member of her immediate family.

Flora was first employed at Illinois State Normal University (ISNU) in 1890 as secretary to President John W. Cook. Other ISNU presidents whom she served as secretary to were Arnold Tompkins, David Felmley, Harry Brown, and R.W. Fairchild.

Flora was hired because of her ability to operate one of the first typewriters in the community. She could also operate a hectograph, an early version of a copy machine. These abilities were considered special accomplishments at that time. Her services were sorely needed by the administration of a growing and dynamic educational institution. Flora's starting salary was \$7.00 per week, with the understanding that a portion of her wages would come from her providing instruction in shorthand and typing to those who desired it. Her regular duties were taking dictation, typing letters, mailing out catalogs, and keeping records of faculty and graduates. In time, she could no longer take time to give lessons in shorthand and typewriting. In 10 years, her annual salary rose from \$360 to \$480, a raise of \$2.00 per week (20 cents per year of service)! She was undoubtedly a wonderful asset to the administration and she was definitely a bargain!

One example of Flora's expertise in her job was that on top of her regular duties, she learned simplified spelling which was favored by President Felmley but not universally accepted. Simplified spelling largely meant not using silent or double letters in words. During Felmley's presidency, catalogs, board reports, university bulletins, even the cover of *The Index*, ISNU's yearbook, employed simplified spelling. Part of Flora's job was to keep track of when and to whom to use conventional spelling vs. simplified spelling.

During the last seven years of her employment, she served as the Alumni Secretary. As Alumni Secretary, she undertook to keep an organized record of alumni by securing names and addresses, photo where possible, and other information on over 10,000 alumni. She kept the information on index cards, and sought addresses in the Alumni Quarterly. Flora finally retired on July 1, 1941, after 51 years of faithful service.

Flora's sense of humor came to the foreground in a lighthearted letter to Madam Askme's Department in the 1910 Index. Flora related that she and Pres. Felmley were having a friendly contest in which she kept track of the mistakes in correspondence they both made. At the end of the year, the one who made the most mistakes must buy the other a box of chocolates. Flora was anxious that the tally would either make her look incompetent or would cause him to be offended. She asked, "Which shall it be, Scylla or Charybdis?" (The phrase between Scylla and Charybdis means being in a state where one is between two dangers and moving away from one will cause you to be in danger of the other. Made famous in Homer's *Odyssey* and Greek myths).

In her personal life, Flora never married. However, for the 51 years that she was associated with ISNU she was wed to her job and had a large alumni family which she faithfully attended. She had lived her entire life in Normal, Illinois and died on September 17, 1949. She is buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, IL.