



Staff photo by Kathy Aney

Emily Marvin stands underneath an old archway that was once part of Union High School which preceded Hermiston High School. Her great-great grandmother Gladys West Graham graduated from the school 100 years ago.

TURNING THE TASSEL ON TIME

By TAMMY MALGESINI
East Oregonian

Although she never met her great-great-grandmother, Emily Marvin of the Hermiston High School class of 2018 feels a kindred spirit with Gladys West Graham.

"I bet we would be best friends," Emily said.

The HHS senior is set to turn the tassel along with approximately 350 classmates a century after her great-great-grandmother received her diploma along with nine fellow graduates from the Hermiston Standard High School class of 1918.

Gladys received her diploma Thursday, May 16, 1918, and Emily will receive hers Thursday, June 7, 2018 — the first time in many decades that Hermiston's graduation will be on a Thursday.

When Emily's grandfather, Lee Geissel, moved to Umatilla in the early-1980s, he was visiting his mother, Betty Geissel, in Milton-Freewater. Lee recalls she brought out Gladys' diploma and said he should have it since it represented history of the Hermiston area.

"It sat on the top shelf of my closet for years," Lee said.

The 14-inch-by-17-inch document had been rolled up into a scroll. After flattening it out and having it professionally preserved, Lee started to look at it more often and realized the connections it represented between his grandmother and granddaughter.

A century of similarities

In addition to graduating a century apart from the same school, both were born in June — Gladys in 1900 and Emily in 2000. And the similarities don't stop there. Both participated in theater productions while in school, like to read and have a common connection with peaches.

In a scrapbook created by Gladys, she labeled a picture of her along with two friends, "Hermiston Peaches."

"It's so ironic because Peach is kind of my nickname," Emily said. "My



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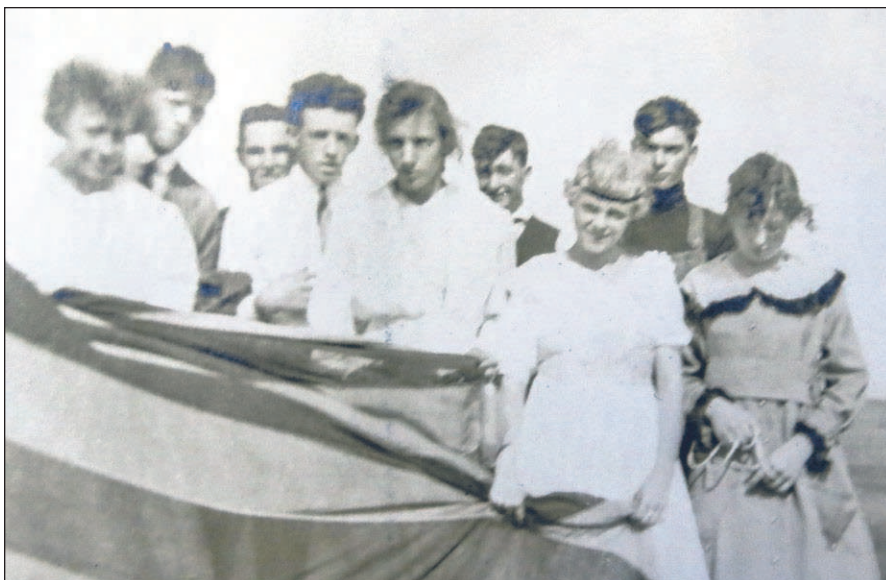
Emily Marvin holds the framed Hermiston High School diploma earned by her great-great grandmother Gladys West Graham. Emily will graduate from HHS 100 years after Gladys.



Gladys West Graham graduated from the old Hermiston High School 100 years ago when the school was in a different building located at East Ridgeway Avenue.

family said I look peachy all the time. My friends just started calling me that."

Donning her purple graduation gown, Emily's long brown hair flowed in the wind while recently standing under the concrete archway of the old Hermiston Union High School. The site on East Ridgeway Avenue and Second Street also is where the old Sandstone Building once stood. According to files reviewed by Briana Cortaberria, Hermiston School District executive assistant to the superintendent and board,



Gladys West Graham (far left) stands with the other students in her Hermiston High School class of nine which graduated in 1918.

the building served as Hermiston Standard High School from 1908-1937.

An interest in education apparently has been passed down through the generations. As part of the family lore, it was said that Gladys longed to attend school and could often be found hanging around the building.

"I guess Gladys used to sit on the steps of the school before she was old enough to go," said Heidi Marvin, Emily's mother. "And Emily always loved school and couldn't wait to go."

Lee's sister, Suzie Sams, said Gladys only got in trouble one time while attending school. As a third grader, she was acting out in class and was sent to the principal's office. After that, she would visit the principal on her own.

"She loved going to the principal's office because she could read books," Suzie said.

Emily said her only visits to the principal's office have been to receive awards.

"I'm a pretty good kid," she said with a laugh.

Gladys was born in Superior, Iowa, to Adora and John Sherwin West. She was the youngest of four children. Gladys' family headed to Hermiston by train in 1908 — lured by the promise of job opportunities through the Uma-

tilla Reclamation Project, which implemented irrigation and hydropower projects throughout the region.

As her graduation from high school neared, Gladys had another important milestone on the horizon — her upcoming wedding to Verlin Graham. According to family stories, her father wasn't too keen on the idea.

"They had to call Sheriff Til Taylor to provide protection," Lee said. "He didn't want his daughter marrying the son of a Methodist minister."

Emily was born in Walla Walla, Washington, to Heidi and Brandon Marvin. She is the middle child with two other sisters. She has lived in Hermiston her entire life.

Her future plans include moving to Corvallis where she will study hospitality and business management at Oregon State University. After being active in DECA, serving as the chief executive officer of the student store and taking nearly every business class Hermiston offers, Emily is looking forward to furthering her education with the ultimate goal of owning her own line of luxury hotels.

"The campus is beautiful and the college of business accepted me, so it kind of worked out rather nicely," she said.

Rather peachy.