

# Life and work of Juanita Carmichael is inspirational

by Justine Weatherford

Early this month we received a letter from William "Ole" Mitchell of Daly City, Calif., requesting a story about his favorite teacher, "Who, he writes, 'did so much to improve the lives of so many county youngsters.'"

He suggested a rather difficult assignment, because that teacher, Juanita Leathers Carmichael, very modestly doesn't like to talk too much about her years of work in this county of her birth, and because, she insists, she is not photogenic. Now that school is about to begin again, readers might be interested in some facts we have managed to glean about this outstanding teacher.

Juanita is the youngest of the ten children of Heatha Belle Hilton Leathers and Nicholas Hanson Leathers who migrated from Kentucky to Hardman, Oregon, in 1882, arriving there in March after traveling by train as far as Arlington. Juanita attended school at Hardman until the family moved to Vancouver, Wash., in 1923, where Juanita was graduated from high school with honors in 1924.

Thinking back on her early years at Hardman, this natural musician recalls that she began playing piano professionally (for \$5 a night) when she was nine years old. She played for dances at Hardman, Condon, Fossil and Mayville. When her small arms gave out, her trombone playing brother, Owen, would take her place at the piano until she was rested and could continue. They also played at the horse races at Long Creek each summer for four consecutive years.

While she was at Vancouver High, Juanita went to beauty school at night so that she would be able to earn a living after her graduation. She then worked in a beauty shop near the army barracks for three months, mainly marcelling hair which had been dry shampooed with cornmeal. She disliked this work so much that she determined to prepare for something else. Her mother's brother was a teacher, and her mother encouraged her youngest child to prepare for teaching.

So with \$35 of her earnings in hand, Juanita departed for Monmouth, Oregon, to enter Oregon Normal School. During her years there she earned her way by playing piano accompaniment for the silent films at the Monmouth Theater and for rhythmic classes at the normal school. She completed teaching requirements there with the class of 1926, again graduating with honors.

She came back to Morrow County to take her first teaching position at the Pleasant Point School on Little Butter Creek. She boarded in the Frank Swaggart home and walked two miles to and from the little school whose door opened toward the unkempt, early day cemetery. Teachers then cleaned their building and nearby privies; carried water they had pre-pumped into the building for drinking and the washing of faces and hands; chopped wood; built and maintained the fire, and taught as many as eight different grade levels. Juanita

only had seven grades her first year, but managed with eight the next year. Times were good in 1926, and she rated generous wages—\$120 per month.

She remembers the children of the Swaggart, Cunningham, Daly, Cunha, Poff and Mitchell families she taught at Pleasant Point. She now laughs over some rather unusual experiences during those two years. At the mention of the name William Mitchell she recalled a Christmas program when young William was in the second grade.

In his role he needed to present an orange to another child. The larger than expected orange became wedged in his trouser pocket and at the moment of presentation he could not, in spite of much twisting and squirming and hard struggling, get it out of the pocket.

Miss Leathers finally rescued him, while viewers tittered with laughter, by telling him to just go on with his part.

"One day at recess when first graders, James Mitchell and Rose Cunningham were sitting on the 2 x 6 plank, front walk, a large rattlesnake rattled beneath the walk. Two eighth grade boys, Merle Swaggart and Bill Cunningham, alerted me and said they would help kill it. So after involving the rest of my pupils in a playground game, the boys and I killed the big rattler with the school axe and shovel."

Juanita treasures the handbell she rang with a pump-like action at that school, along with an older handbell used by her husband's father, John Carmichael, when he taught school.

In 1928 Miss Leathers went back to college at Monmouth for two additional years and took many class hours in music before accepting a position in Heppner School in 1930. Times were not so good then, and she was started at \$95 per month for teaching 40 fifth graders and also teaching music to grades five through twelve. Of course, the special music responsibility meant many special programs such as annual operettas, Christmas programs, May Day events and others; however, because of her many hours of additional work she received additional money—\$15 per year.

During those years Juanita did much to build up the level of music in the schools; she encouraged participation in outside contests where the Heppner band won honors several times. Other school districts tried to hire her away from Morrow County, but she loyally remained here.

In 1937 Miss Leathers married C. C. "Judge" Carmichael, a Lexington wheat rancher. She taught in Lexington for four years and was the Lexington district clerk for nine years before returning to Heppner Elementary. When Juanita retired in Heppner in 1970 where she was then teaching seventh grade language arts, it was 44 years since her first teaching at Pleasant Point.

Juanita can recall many amusing incidents about her pupils. One year when they had been drilling diligently to



Juanita Leathers Carmichael

An early 1930's photograph of Juanita Leathers when she began teaching in the Heppner Schools.

prepare a Christmas operetta, Matt Kenny, who had a leading part and who was really tired out after the final rehearsal, said "After I go home and milk the chickens and feed the cows, I'll try to be back for the program tonight." Of course he made the performance and everyone was pleased with the program.

She recalls when seventh

grader, Jim Barratt, was absent a couple of days and his mother, Cy, had to write a note concerning his absence. Never-before-absent Jim took the note to the school principal, Bill Poulson.

As a joke Cy had deliberately misspelled every word in her note. The shocked principal carried the note to Miss Leathers who was amused by Cy's humor.

As is usual in Heppner, the word of Mrs. Barratt's poor spelling was the subject of lots of good-natured kidding for sometime. Long after that incident, Cy grinned at the very mention of spelling.

At this month's five-class reunion of 1930's Heppner High graduates, Juanita Carmichael was especially popular. Most of these men and women had been in her class or had her for school music. They were delighted to see her looking so well and were so pleased to have her lead them in a few songs.

This fine woman has, as William "Ole" Mitchell writes, influenced many persons' lives most favorably. She and Judge continue to live in their home on Heppner's Gilmore Street. Juanita enjoys gardening, golfing and playing weekly bridge games. Being ambitious and needing to keep her lively mind really busy, she has now, after several years of careful research, almost completed work on the history of her family from 1726 to date. She also has four compositions for piano to her credit.

As schools begin here next week Tuesday, perhaps a little of the story of the life and work of dedicated teacher Juanita Leathers Carmichael, who loved teaching and loved her hundreds of students, may prove inspirational to some pupils and some teachers.

## Senior Citizens

By Justine Weatherford

Last week seniors of Morrow County enjoyed attending the County Fair on passes provided for them. They missed getting together for their dinner meetings in Heppner and Ione. The chief cook for these mealsites, Eleanor Gonty, enjoyed her holiday by traveling into the Bend area with husband Ed. They had several good visits with long-time friends and saw lots of mountain scenery. Assistant cook Marilyn Bergstrom spent much of the week working with the fair. She entered many exhibits in the needlework and foods divisions, and as usual her exhibits were the winners of many blue and red ribbons.

Next week the usual senior programs will resume along a regular schedule. Seniors who wish to have blood pressure checked should come to the Neighborhood Center the afternoon of Wednesday, Sept. 3, when County Nurse Pat Wright will check them. They should also be planning ahead to have flu vaccine shots in Heppner the next Wednesday afternoon, Sept. 10, between 1

and 4 p.m. at the center. In Ione, flu shots will be given on Wednesday afternoon, Sept. 17, at the mealsite between 2 and 4 p.m. On Friday, Sept. 12, the Social Security representative will be in Heppner to help answer questions during the morning at the Heppner Neighborhood Center.

Menus for the senior dinners next week are: at Heppner, Tuesday, Sept. 2, lasagna, buttered corn, tossed salad, cheese sticks, carrot sticks, pickled beets, oatmeal muffins with jelly and strawberry cream deluxe.

On Wednesday, Sept. 3, at Ione and Heppner—apple juice, swiss steak and gravy, mashed potatoes, orange and cheese jello salad, hot rolls and jelly, and peanut butter pie.

Eight residents of the hospital nursing home especially enjoyed the Rodeo Parade. As the result of the cooperative efforts of Pat Brindle, the Neighborhood Center director, Truman Messenger, chairman of the senior citizen transportation committee, Edna Struthers, Anna Schwarzin, Bonnie Arrington, Linda Bond, the Englert Car

Wash and the City of Heppner, arrangements were worked out for five wheelchair patients to attend the parade. Roy Wheelhouse, Clyde Cox, Esther Peterson, LaUna Crowell and Cleo Van Winkle traveled by bus and Merle Boyce, Elmer Byland and Hazel Vaughn went in the Brindle car.

The green and white Quintra Bus had become very dirty and dusty while parked at the county shop area, so Bonnie and Linda, CETA workers at the Neighborhood Center, worked hard at washing it and cleaning it carefully, after the Englert Car Wash had generously donated its facilities.

Pat Brindle made arrangements with Edna Struthers and Anna Schwarzin of the hospital staff to move the nursing home residents. Truman Messenger, who has given countless hours of work on the senior bus and who served as the driver last Saturday, happily parked the bus in a special space marked off by the city authorities beside the hotel so that the special passengers could take their places in the front row near the center of parade excitement along Main Street. A wonderful time was had by all.

## Irrigon News

Frances Rose Wilson

Mr. and Mrs. Orville Buchanan of Irrigon have returned from a visit with their son, Wayne Buchanan, and family, in Kenai, Alaska, and have an exciting story to tell about their 6-year-old grandson, Russel, who caught a 50-pound King salmon.

The Buchanans also enjoyed digging for razor clams. They said they were much larger than any they had seen before. They each dug their limit of 60 the 2 days they dug.

Wayne Buchanan is employed by an oil company in Kenai.

There were 16 boys and girls, ages 9 to 12, who attended the Assembly of God Boys and Girls Camp at Meadowood Springs from the Irrigon Assembly of God. They were accompanied by Pastor and Mrs. Allen Gordanier and Mrs. Earlene Lathrop. There was a total of 208 campers from churches of the surrounding area, according to Pastor Gordanier.

Mr. and Mrs. Panteleis Vrontakis of Salem were weekend visitors of her parents. Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Warner. Their son, Michael, had spent the week with his grandparents and returned home with his parents and brother, Jeffrey.

Karyl Stephens of Portland, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Stephens, was an overnight guest of her grandmother, Mary Stephens, on Thursday and Friday.

Chester Wilson of Irrigon and his daughter and son-in-law, Grace and Chuck Bartlett of Lynnwood, Wash., are among the hopeful archery hunters in the Tollgate area this week.

Police were called to the home of Donna Driver after her sister, Beverley Tejada, had entered the home and found a person, obviously a man, dressed in a green dress with a wig on and make-up on his face. Mrs. Tejada screamed and left. When she returned with her uncle, Bill Ahalt, the man had left.

Miss Driver was away working at the time, but had left her doors unlocked. The moral to this story is "lock your doors!"

## Bible School donates to library



John Maas of the Hope and valby Lutheran Churches presents Heppner City Librarian Bethel Heinrich with a check for \$71 for improvements on the children's library."

The money was earned through donations collected during vacation Bible school. "The children themselves decided where they wanted the money to go," said Reverend Maas.

Mrs. Heinrich said that it would probably take about \$4,000 to bring the children's library up to par. Profits from the book sale held this week at

the library will also go towards upgrading the children's library. This year we're making a special effort to put it (proceeds from the sale) into the children's library," added Mrs. Heinrich. "Unfortunately, our budget is the same from year to year, but books are going sky high." A golf benefit is also scheduled in Heppner to fund a microfilm reader for the library. "It (a microfilm reader) is something we need desperately, especially with so many people now researching their family histories."

**Starting Sept. 2**  
**OUR NEW HOURS WILL BE:**  
**Monday—Friday**  
**8-5**  
**Saturday 8-12 Noon**  
**Morrow County**  
**Grain Growers Inc. HI**  
 Main Office 989-8221

**BELLS ARE RINGING**

# Back to School

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