

Lest We Forget ...

BY DAVID W. LEVY

Dora McFarland—crusading mathematician

Dora McFarland was born in April 1895, in the little town of Aledo, Illinois. After high school, she attended nearby Monmouth College, a Presbyterian school of around 250 students. She majored in mathematics and, after graduating in 1916, started teaching math (and coaching girls' basketball) in nearby towns.

Then, in 1919, she decided to take some graduate courses during summer break. A fellow teacher at her high school mentioned a sister living in Norman, and McFarland thought it might be a lark to apply at the University of Oklahoma. Besides, she later joked, Norman was a long way from Aledo, and if she failed in graduate school, it would take a long while for word to get back home.

Instead of failing, she excelled. She devoured courses from Samuel Reaves, Edgar Meacham and Nathan Court and liked it enough to return the following year. In the middle of that second summer, Reaves asked her if she would consider staying on as an instructor.

"I had not asked for the position," said McFarland. "In fact, I had not even thought of such a thing, but I quickly accepted."

She resigned her high school job and began teaching at the University in September 1920. She taught until retiring in 1965, introducing, with consummate skill, nearly 10,000 students to the world of basic mathematics. Among her students were Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Carl Albert, U.S. Sen. Mike Monroney and two freshmen, Eugene Springer and John Brixey, who not only would become stars in the math department, but also her longtime and affectionate colleagues.

McFarland became an assistant professor in 1927, an associate in 1938, and a full professor in 1948. She earned a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in 1936 and, in retirement, authored a textbook with her colleague and friend Eunice Lewis.

Halfway through her career, Reaves wrote an evaluation of her work, "Success as a teacher: Excellent. Cooperation: Perfect. Temperament: Cheerful, cordial, sympathetic, helpful, interested in students (apart from their studies) . . . Highly efficient on committees and as adviser to students . . . Is not interested in mathematical research so much as in doing a thoroughly good job as teacher and adviser. Rating: Superior."

She made dozens of friends and became a figure of admi-



Dora McFarland

ration and influence on the campus. Her special role was to advocate on behalf of women students, Oklahoma women teachers of arithmetic, and women colleagues at the University. She pursued that work in a dozen different ways: as a sympathetic counselor to young women on the campus, as a leading activist and national officer of the YWCA, a sponsor of Mortar Board, the founder and president of the state branch of Delta Kappa Gamma (the honorary women's teacher organization), the adviser of a sorority, the organizer of summer institutes for math teachers, and an energetic member and officer of numerous professional organizations. She usually served as the treasurer, she said, "since I could add and subtract."

Her activism was not limited to helping women. She was one of the founders of the Oklahoma Civil Liberties Union, a member of Common Cause, the League of Women Voters, and many other citizens' groups. In connection with her YWCA efforts, she had opportunities to work with African American delegates, fellow activists and speakers. On several occasions, she defied Norman public opinion and invited Black officials and students to the campus, guided them around town, and several times put them up at her house at 620 East Boyd Street. After one such venture, a furious neighbor rang her doorbell, denounced her for ignoring Norman's longstanding racial practice as a sundown town, and told her that if she continued in her ways, he would call the sheriff. McFarland replied that she would immediately call the sheriff herself if he did not get off her porch. The two never spoke again. She never married. But she was a watchful mentor of her nieces and nephews, luring some of them to Norman for their higher education, housing them, taking them on trips, worrying about their studies, their courtships, their futures, their happiness. Dora McFarland died on Nov. 26, 1987, at the age of 92.

Editor's Note: This issue of Sooner Magazine marks the debut of "Lest We Forget . . ." a column by David W. Levy, OU Professor Emeritus of the Department of History. Levy has chosen to celebrate those individuals who have not been memorialized with their names on buildings or other features on the campus, but who—in more modest, but no less admirable ways—helped make the University what it is.

Your Letters

... The money was used to build the last part of the stadium. She said the University promised those paying \$50 could always get free admission.

1920s stadium expansion recalled

My mother, Velma Maureen Cole, graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 1926 with an education degree. She made a pledge to the Oklahoma-Memorial Stadium Fund in 1925 for \$50. Receipt #84 reflects her September 1925 payment, receipt #5068 of March 19, 1930, reflects a \$10 payment, which I assume was the final payment. Also enclosed is her commitment of April 1, 1925, to make the pledge payments.

I think the money was used to build the last side part of the stadium. She said the University promised those paying \$50 could always get free admission. When my sister, Marilyn Cole, started in 1955, Mother inquired about a free seat but by that time no one seemed to remember the promise.

My mother moved to Stigler, Okla., after graduation and taught mathematics for 40 years before retiring. She was a proud OU alumna and she enjoyed OU alumni reunions, especially her 50th. She passed away in April 1984.

My sister Marilyn graduated in 1959 and began a career in early childhood development and was director of the OU Child Development School before she married Dr. William Stavinoha, who taught at the University of Texas Medical School. Before she was married my sister worked at the Head Start program and lived on Indian reservations in South Dakota and Arizona.

My mother, then retired, joined her and greatly enjoyed the experience. Two wonderful educators of whom OU should be proud.

I graduated from Stigler High School in 1962 and was an All-State football player. I had a scholarship to OU which lasted one year—I was just not fast enough.

I graduated in 1966 with a journalism degree and was immediately drafted into the U.S. Army at Ft. Benning, Georgia, and became a Second Lieutenant. Then I spent a year in Korea as an infantry platoon leader.

I eventually settled in Houston, working for Southwestern Bell/SBC/AT&T, and retired after 40 years. I have been a lifetime member of the OU Alumni Association for 50 years.

Anyway, the purpose of this letter was to send the enclosures about my mother's stadium expansion pledge. I know they are hard to read—but I trust you can decipher them.

Richard Cole
'66 ba, Journ
Bellaire, Texas

In consideration of the gifts of others for the same purpose, I promise to pay to THE STADIUM-UNION MEMORIAL the sum of 10.00 Dollars (\$ 10.00) as follows:

(a) Cash in full herewith.
(b) Initial cash payment herewith and balance as follows
(c) Semi-annually for five years, beginning January 1, 1925
(d) Annually for five years, beginning January 1, 1925.
(e) Quarterly for five years

Name Velma Maureen Cole Class Education
Street Stigler Okla
City, County and State Stigler Okla
Secured by Velma Maureen Cole Sorority or Fraternity None

Norman, Okla., Sept 1925 No. 84
Received of Velma Maureen Cole
New Haven \$10.00
For Contribution to Stadium
OKLAHOMA STADIUM-UNION MEMORIAL FUND
By Richard Cole Treasurer.

Norman, Okla., 3-19-1930 No. 5068
Received of Velma Maureen Cole
Marietta Cole \$10.00
For Contribution to Stadium
OKLAHOMA STADIUM-UNION MEMORIAL FUND
By Richard Cole Treasurer.

Editor's note: Does anyone else recall contributing (or family members contributing) to the stadium expansion of the 1920s? If so, drop us a line at soonermagazine@ou.edu or Editor, Sooner Magazine, 100 Timberdell Rd., Norman, OK 73019-0685.