

Mintie White, Teacher, 1850–1937

By Margaret Koch

In Watsonville there is an elementary school named for a teacher who once said, "I never knew a child I couldn't love."

Arminta Allison, better known as "Mintie" for most of her life, was born in 1850 in Redrock, Iowa. When she was four years old her family brought her across the plains to California in a covered wagon. In telling of the journey once, she recalled that she walked much of the way.

In 1854 the family arrived near Vacaville in Sonoma County where they lived for a time, but five years later the Allisons moved to Pajaro, across the river from Watsonville.

While Mintie was attending a private school for girls she met her future husband, Professor William White, and they were married in 1870. Following the marriage, the young couple moved to San Francisco where he taught in another private school. The Whites had two children, a son and a daughter. When the daughter was in her late teens she became very ill with tuberculosis, and the family moved back to Watsonville, hoping the change in climate would improve the girl's health. In spite of this effort, Mintie's daughter died when she was 21 years old, and Professor White died shortly afterward.

The double tragedy must have been hard on Mintie, but she decided to devote the rest of her life to children. Between 1895 and 1900 she obtained her teaching certificate. At the age of 45 she became a first grade teacher at the Watsonville Primary School.

Her abilities were so outstanding that she was offered the position of school principal. Mintie declined the honor, explaining that she felt the first grade was the most important year in a child's school life, and she was needed more in the classroom. She devoted all her teaching years to first graders.

She died in 1937 at the age of 87, and the following year a new elementary school on Palm Avenue in Watsonville was named Mintie White School in her honor.

Sources

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