

Still Going Strong

Teacher Marks 90th Year

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Go West, young man!

A young woman took that advice and left her Mississippi home in 1903 for the frontier town of El Paso.

She was Miss Eunice Reading, later Mrs. Eunice R. Payne, the daughter of a Confederate soldier—Southern gentleman who fought with the Louisiana Regiment during the War Between the States.

"We can't call it the Civil War," she said. "There wasn't anything civil about it."

Mrs. Payne, a teacher "52 or 53 years" and Alta Vista School's principal from 1912 to 1941, observed her 90th birthday on Jan. 1.

"The whole world celebrates with you on Jan. 1," she said. "Everybody is beginning a new year. El Paso has a Sun Carnival parade. So never plan anything special."

When she is 100, and she plans to "keep on going" that long, the witty Mrs. Payne will still be enjoying mystery stories and the fast, changing world.

"People ask me if children are worse than they used to be," she said. "They're not. They've just changed. So have their parents and grandparents. You can't compare them in a different world."

To live in the world 90 years, you have to look at the sunshine of it all the time, the still-spry senior citizen said.

"I was never going to worry myself into an early grave. People do it and they should stay busy," she advised. "I wasn't sick a day until after I retired."

She joined the Gray Ladies working at Ft. Bliss, and drove her car until she was 85. Then she decided it wasn't fair to other drivers to be at the wheel when not in the best physical condition.

Mrs. Payne, who broke her leg three years ago, lives in the Robert LaFitte Home, 7631 Highway 80 East, where there are other elderly residents. Her former students and teachers visit her often.

STAYS BUSY

"And I stay on the go between here and my niece's house," she said.

Her niece is Mrs. Howell Smith, 3518 Hamilton Ave., an Austin High School homemaking teacher, who picks Mrs. Payne up every Sunday morning and takes her to St. Clement's Episcopal Church.

The early-day school teacher was graduated from private seminary in Okolona, Miss., and from Sam Houston College in Huntsville, Texas. Later she did work during summer sessions at the University of California.

When San Jacinto School opened, she was one of its first teachers. Later she taught at Almo School and was principal of Franklin. When Alta Vista School was built



MRS. PAYNE

in 1912, she went there as principal and remained.

"I drove out in the buggy to watch it go up," she said. "We started classes with four grades and four rooms."

The longtime El Pasoan was married only 14 months to Frank Hamilton Payne, a wholesale grocer who became one of El Paso's first motor vehicle traffic victims.

They were married in November, 1908, and in January, 1909, his horse and buggy were struck at the corner of Oregon and Franklin Streets by a delivery truck. Thrown to the concrete, he died two days later.

In two weeks, she was back teaching in old Sunset School in the El Paso Tech building.

"I stay busy writing letters on this old Underwood typewriter I bought over 30 years ago," she said. "It's still doing fine."

And so is Mrs. Payne.