

THANK YOU MISS MACK

By Richard B. Trask

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Recently the Towns of Danvers and Middleton lost one of its very special educators and a wonderful woman at the noteworthy age of 102.

Mrs. Ethel Lee was a very special lady and an extremely gifted teacher who influenced many hundreds, if not thousands of children in Danvers and Middleton over several generations, both as a classroom teacher and an active volunteer.

Miss Ethel E. Mack was born in Lexington, Mass., and graduated from Plymouth State College, Salem State College and Boston University, earning both a BS and a Master's in Education. She began her long career in Danvers in 1949. I first came into contact with her as a fifth grade student at Great Oak School during the 1957/58 school year.

In the 1950s Danvers was struggling with a large baby boomer population, with the impact of hundreds of new houses being built and families moving into our blossoming "bedroom" community. During that decade new elementary schools were built, as well as the new Danvers High School by 1962. Though by 1957 the Great Oak School was still a new school, the student population of the town was growing faster than the first-built new schools could handle.

My classroom at Great Oak School in 1957 was what was described as the "Great Oak Cafeteria Emergency Classroom," taking over the area originally designed for student eating. Most of us actually liked the space, as it was different than the classrooms we had previously been in during earlier grades. But what made the 5th grade very special was Miss Ethel Mack. She was an enthusiastic teacher who loved kids and loved knowledge. Her enthusiasm and kindness was infectious. Though much of my elementary school life is now just a nebulous blur, I remember many things about 5th grade. She taught us well, not only about our school subjects, but also opened up to us the world in which we lived. I learned about Queen Elizabeth II of England, whom she greatly admired, and about birds and other nature subjects. She encouraged show-and-tell in the class, with items we students owned or collected brought proudly to school to display and explain to our fellow classmates. She opened to me a world of wonder. We visited the *USS Constitution*, Lexington Green and Concord Bridge, string in me a real interest in history. One of the first social things I remember doing was arranging with several other students a little party at the end of the year in honor of Miss Mack and our close-knit class.

Miss Mack was good friends with Miss Barbara King, the school principal and another exceptional woman. I know that by 1957 Miss Mack was also Assistant Principal, a position she worked at full time into the 1960s. Around 1959 she married, and for many years I lost personal contact with her.

Then sometime in the late 1970s she called me at the Danvers Archival Center. Knowing my interest in history and as a re-enactor of the American Revolution during the US Bicentennial, she asked if I would be willing to visit her hometown elementary school in Middleton to talk with the kids about history. Mrs. Lee had become a volunteer with the Middleton Historical Society and was the ever-enthusiastic coordinator of education for the Society. Her request could not be refused, and thus began an annual visit to Middleton which lasted well into the 1990s. And every visit brought me back to seeing that wonderful teacher interacting with new students with the same enthusiasm and zest for life and learning she had displayed as a young woman in the 1950s. What a wonderful legacy, and what a special person.