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## Grand Little Lady - Dr. Dora Ann Stewart

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*(many myths and legends, none of which will be repeated here because of their familiarity, have developed around the subject of this article)*

GRAND LITTLE LADY —

## Dr. Dora Ann Stewart

by H. H. Risinger

She was an institution. Records in the SOSU Vice-President's office show that she was born in 1877, no month or day of month given, at Commerce, Texas. These records also show that she finished high school with 16 units in 1894 in Commerce. She began teaching that same year in a rural school in that vicinity and continued until the year 1896 at the salary of from \$50.00 to \$75.00 a month for eight months; in 1901, she moved to Duke, Jackson County, Oklahoma and stayed until 1904. Then she moved to Mangum, Greer County, Oklahoma and stayed until 1906. From Mangum, she went to Hollis, Harmon County, Oklahoma and taught there in the public schools until 1909. Her next move was to Southwestern State Normal in Weatherford, now Southwestern Oklahoma State University, where she became chairman of the History Department in the 1909-1910 school year at a salary of \$1250. She remained chairman of the department until her retirement in 1948, serving approximately forty years.

While she was teaching in these various places, she was continuing work on the higher-education level. She attended Belle Plain College, Texas, Fort Worth University, and Oklahoma City University, where she received the B.A. degree in 1920.

She took a nine-month sabbatical leave from Southwestern and earned a master's degree from OU in 1921. The title of her Master's thesis was HISTORY-GOVERNMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF TERRITORIES IN THE CONTINENTAL UNITED STATES.

Miss Stewart took another leave of absence in 1929-1930 to complete the requirements for the doctor's degree at OU. She received the Ph.D. in June, 1931. She then returned to Southwestern to continue her teaching career until retirement.

It has been mentioned that her beginning salary for 1909-1910 was \$1250; in 1911 she received a raise to \$1400 a year; from 1912-1931, she received an annual salary of \$1600.

Upon receiving her doctorate, she received a salary increase to \$3720. Records do not indicate any additional increases from that time to retirement. The title of her doctoral dissertation was HISTORY OF THE GOVERNMENT AND DEVELOPMENT OF OKLAHOMA TERRITORY.

Dr. Stewart did other research and publications. Among them are A COURSE OF STUDY ON LATIN AMERICA FOR HIGH SCHOOLS, A HISTORY OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF WEATHERFORD FROM 1899 TO 1944, and UNITED STATES DIPLOMACY AND DOMESTIC RELATIONS IN TRANSITION, 1935 to 1945. She also spent much time in the Congressional Library, Washington, D.C. doing research on these and other publications. So with this review of her academic achievements, one is surely impressed with her scholastic background.

Somewhere along the line, Dr. Stewart came to own a large home at the corner of Broadway and Kee streets in Weatherford, just a block off the campus. It is somewhat a mystery as to how she managed to own such valuable property and it well furnished on such meagre salaries.

Dr. Stewart loved people, especially young people. Her home had a full basement divided into rooms where she kept boys. Her rentals may have enhanced her income.

Since she like to have people around her, she did much entertaining and opened her home to special groups. In fact, the SOSU Baptist Student Union, still flourishing today in a beautiful, modern center on the corner of College and Bradley, was founded in her home in 1928.

Her home was well furnished. A wood-burning fireplace was in one end of her spacious living room and enhanced the coziness of the setting. She had lovely furniture, including a grand piano. She also had sterling silver, servers, china, and fine linens. She had all that it took to entertain, and she did so

unstintingly.

I was in her home on numerous occasions; she was sponsor of the International Relations Club in which I participated. So I had the joy more than once of experiencing her hospitality and at the same time profiting from discussions on international affairs of that time.

Dr. Stewart was small of stature, plain in dress and general appearance. But in character, she was sterling-genuine. There was no put-on, no facade; she was what she was, and in her classroom appearances she told it as it was. At times she became dramatic, and to some extent she would lecture with gusto. And interestingly enough, she knew her subject matter in the fields of history, government, economics, and related subjects.

Any student who had the temerity to challenge her on factual information, or her ideology, was likely to be taken aback at once. She had strong convictions on thoughts presented and was quick on repartee and rebuttal to defend herself. One need not be in her class long until noticeably her political party affiliation emerged. She was what I would term a "rock-ribbed Democrat." And she was unabashedly a devout and unswerving Baptist. She taught Sunday School for years at the old site of the First Baptist Church at the corner of Custer and Franklin streets downtown. And she managed to get 1/4 hour's college credit for those who enrolled and stayed for one semester.

A good many jokes emerged from time to time from students in Dr. Stewart's classes, centering around some unusual happening; and it's doubtful that any student responsible for such intended any disrespect. I feel certain that most, if not all who had her classes, adored and respected her.

Dr. Stewart, in her approximately forty years at Southwestern, served with at least ten presidents beginning with Dr. Campbell, the first president (of the Old Normal), to R. H. Burton, who was president when she retired. As to deans, there were too many to mention.

So presidents and deans came and went; Dr. Stewart stayed. Another interesting facet of her tenure was that she taught under four different institution names—Southwestern State Normal, a two-year institution; Southwestern State Teachers College; Southwestern State College of Diversified Occupations; and Southwestern Institute of Technology. Could she have stayed a few more years, there would have been two more names.

The grand little lady was never married; and so far as is known, she never owned an automobile; but she managed to get about wherever she needed to go. Reference has been made to her hospitality and generosity. Upon her retirement, she donated her grand piano to the First Baptist Church where it is still in use.

I think that no finer tribute could be paid to Dr. Stewart than that included in remarks made by the editorial staff of the 1948 yearbook which was dedicated to her. Some of the statements were:

No other person in the history of Southwestern has spent so many years of continual and unselfish service to this Western Oklahoma college. During Dr. Stewart's forty years of service to our school, she has not only interpreted history *par excellence*, but she has been an inspiration to thousands of young men and women by virtue of her Christian living, her ideals of good citizenship, and her upholding of the American way of life.

This is a most fitting and deserving tribute to an unusual and valuable person.

*After her retirement, Dr. Stewart taught for a while at Oklahoma Baptist University but later returned to her familiar surroundings in Weatherford. The last few months of her life, she lived in a nursing center in Alva, where she died on January 2, 1971 at the age of 94.*



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