Edith Minerva Brace

Clan William

The Life of a Teacher

by Lori Hahn



Clan William descendant Emily Cowles and husband C. Lusk Brace made smart little babies. Son Dr. DeWitt Brace was a world-class physicist. Daughter Edith was a biologist and teacher. She stretched the boundaries of what women could do in her education and in her career. She had a passion for teaching and learning. She had impact that might not be remembered were it not for her paper trail.

Minerva was born 29 Dec 1867 in Lockport, Niagara County, New York, the youngest child.

She attended University of Nebraska at Lincoln, where brother DeWitt was on faculty. She studied biology with an emphasis on botany and zoology, her true passions. I believe there was a good chance, since her mother was living with DeWitt prior to his marriage, that she also resided with them in Lincoln, though I have no source to prove that at this time. She received her bachelor of science degree, then attended the University of Chicago, where she recieved her master of science degree in biology.

Many men of that era with such a scientific and resarch interest, might have gone on to teach at the college level. That was not an easy for a woman and an almost impossible option at that point in time, with rare exceptions. Women weren't open to attending University of Rochester prior to 1900, but at least 12 did, including Edith. Those individuals attended classes with men, but could not receive credit for their classes.

Her first noted teaching gig was beginning in late 1899 at the Rochester Free Academy, which was the first secondary public high school in Rochester, New York. While there she also stayed involved in the science research world, and was the editorial assistant for neurology for the *Journal of Applied Microscopy and Laboratory Methods from 1899*.

It's not known when she left Rochester, but in 1904, she was teaching as a professor at Western Maryland University. During the summer of 1904, she participate in a summer program in zoology for the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Science teaching zoology.



The Rochester Free Academy

In 1908, she began teaching at the secondary level in Brooklyn. Sorting through the various transfers was quite a project, but here's how it broke down so far.



Eastern District HS, Morris HS, and Erasmus Hall

Her obituary mentions she worked at Morris High School in the South Bronx between Eastern District and Erasmus Hall high schools, but the only reference I have to her teaching at Morris HS is in 1922, when in the 2nd semester, she was transferred from Morris to Eastern District. We do know she was at Erasmus Hall, teaching biology, from 1924 through her retirement in 1939.

School	Year	Salary	Address
Eastern District	1908		
Eastern District	1910	$1.340	520 Quincy St Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn
Eastern District	1917		1181 Bergen St Crown Heights Brooklyn
Eastern District	1918	$2,050	1181 Bergen Crown Heights Brooklyn
Eastern District	1920	$2,650	14 E.16th St Union Square Manhattan
Eastern District	1921	$3,700	325 Jefferson Ave Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn
Morris HS	1922		Transferred from Morris to Eastern District 2nd semester
Eastern District	1922	$3,700	325 Jefferson Ave Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn
Eastern District	1923	$3,700	325 Jefferson Ave Bedford-Stuyvesant Brooklyn
Erasmus Hall	1924		117 Winthrop St Flatbush Brooklyn
Erasmus Hall Retires 2/1/39	1924- 1939		
Edith dies	1954		128 Linden Blvd Flatbush Brooklyn

Look at the salary! Ediths teaching/living locations.

Edna lived in several apartments over the course of her career and taught at three high schools and live primarily in Brooklyn.

Edith wasn't all work. She also vacationed! In a 1915 article in the Brooklyn Daily Eagle, titled "Notables at Easthampton," it's mentioned that Edith was spending time at The Osborne House in Long Island. Then, she discovered the Poconos.

During the middle half of the century, the Poconos Mountains of Pennsylvania was a hot spot for vacations—honeymooing, skiing, camping, swimming, fishing and more. In the 1940s, Edith visited several times. Buck Hill Inn was built in 1901 on 1,000 acres. The resort, one of the premier resorts in the Poconos, had horseback riding, golf, and tennis. The Inn had a downturn in business in the 1960s and 1970s and closed forever in 1990 and was finally demolished after several failed starts at renovation, starting in 2016.



Buck Hill Inn, Poconos

World War I Loyalty Oaths

Now, to the most interesting part of Edith's records. Her opposition to signing a "Loyalty Oath" in 1917 at the onset of World War I.



Summarizing the issue in the most compact way possible, before our entry into World War I against "The Hun," (Germans), a trend swept across the nation to bolster support for us entering the war that required people in government, education, and other industries to sign "Loyalty Oaths," which basically said they agreed with the US involvement in the war and would not do anything to hinder or subvert our policies or efforts around the war.

Now, many people took issue with signing such an oath. Many people lost their jobs for failing to do so and it became basically a witch hunt to punish those who would not sign. That included the Quakers, conscientious objectors, and others who did not agree with the war. Teachers in New York who failed to sign were put in front of what to me sounds like a tribunal and forced to state their case. They were nearly all fired or transferred to less desirable schools. Some would later be rehired, but many were not.

A large group of teachers fired with a mob mentality went for those educators who refused to sign They formed committees and organizations intent on vilifying those who wouldn't toe the line. One group even supported having those who didn't sign interred, as we would later do with the Japanese during World War II.

Our brave Edith made headlines over the course of several days despite the fact she signed the loyalty oath. She refused to sign the next document proferred, which opposed settling for a "negotiated peace." The newspaper even published her home address in the articles!

It does not appear as any significant fallout befell Edith for this defiance, but many, many educators fell victim to this rabid "patriotism" from 1917-1919 and suffered long-term effects.

Edna retired in February of 1939. She lived the remainder of her days in Brooklyn. At the age of 86 she became ill and was hospitalized in Brooklyn Hospital, where she died on 10 Nov 1954. Her only living relatives were nieces and nephews.

Capt Thomas Munson > Samuel Munson > Samuel James Munson > William Munson > Peter Munson > Lydia Munson > William Zelus Bristol > Emily Cowles Bristol > Edith Minerva Brace