

Flora Pennell Dodge (1868-1949)

Flora Pennell Dodge was born on September 14, 1868, in Normal, Illinois. She was the youngest of five children of John R. and Caroline (Odell) Dodge. When she passed away, she was the last surviving member of her family.

Flora began working at Illinois State Normal University (ISNU) in 1890 as the secretary to President John W. Cook. She later worked for other ISNU presidents, including Arnold Tompkins, David Felmley, Harry Brown, and R.W. Fairchild. She was hired because she could operate one of the first typewriters in the area and also knew how to use a hectograph, an early version of a copy machine. These skills were highly valued at the time, and her work was very important to the growing university.

Flora's starting salary was \$7.00 a week. Part of her job was to teach shorthand and typing to others, and she earned extra money from this. Her regular duties included taking notes, typing letters, mailing catalogs, and keeping records of faculty and graduates. Over 10 years, her salary increased to \$480 per year, which was only a small raise. Despite this, she was a very important part of the university's work.

One of Flora's special skills was learning simplified spelling, which President Felmley liked. Simplified spelling meant leaving out silent letters and double letters in words. She helped decide when to use this type of spelling, especially for university publications like catalogs, reports, and the yearbook.

For the last seven years of her career, Flora worked as the Alumni Secretary. She kept track of over 10,000 alumni by organizing their names, addresses, and photos on index cards. She worked hard to keep this information up-to-date by using the *Alumni Quarterly*. Flora retired on July 1, 1941, after working for 51 years.

Flora was known for her sense of humor. In a lighthearted letter in the 1910 Index, she mentioned having a friendly contest with President Felmley. They both tracked mistakes they made in their letters, and the person who made the most mistakes had to buy the other a box of chocolates. Flora joked about being worried that she might look incompetent or offend the president. She asked, "Which shall it be, Scylla or Charybdis?"—a phrase from Greek mythology meaning being stuck between two dangers.

Flora never married. She was very dedicated to her job and had a large "alumni family" that she cared for. She lived her entire life in Normal, Illinois, and passed away on September 17, 1949. She is buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, Illinois.