

Lura Eyestone (1872-1965)

Lura Mary Eyestone was born on October 14, 1872, in Bloomington, Illinois, to Theodore Riley and Martha (Liston) Congleton. Her father, Riley (as he was known to most), worked as a police officer in Bloomington starting in 1868. He made several arrests during his time on the force, including catching two men stealing shoes from a store. Riley left the police force in 1874.

Lura's mother, Martha, was Riley's second wife. Riley had previously been married to Martha's sister, Elizabeth, who passed away in 1865. After Martha died in 1874, Lura was adopted by Charles and Martha Eyestone in McLean, Illinois. Riley later moved to Indiana and remarried twice.

Lura had three sisters: Letha, Cora, and Dora. Letha was Elizabeth's daughter, while Cora and Dora were Martha's daughters. Cora moved to Indiana with Riley, but Dora stayed in Bloomington and was adopted by another family.

Charles Eyestone, Lura's adoptive father, was born in Ohio in 1846. He fought in the Civil War and later became a farmer. Charles and Martha moved to Bloomington and then to Normal, where he worked as a clerk before starting his own fruit farm. He passed away in 1907 after struggling with heart problems. Martha Eyestone was involved in church activities and worked with the Women's Home Missionary Society.

Lura attended public schools in Normal and eventually went to University High School, where she joined a literary society for girls. After graduating in 1892, she went on to study at Illinois State Normal University and worked as a teacher at Rose Hill School for a short time before it was damaged by a storm. When the school reopened, she returned and continued teaching for the rest of the year.

In the one-room schools of that time, teachers taught several grades at once. Lura taught children of all ages, and when students misbehaved, teachers used strict punishments. Female teachers like Lura faced many rules, such as being fired if they got married, and they were expected to behave in ways that would not tarnish their reputation.

After her time teaching in a rural school, Lura worked at the high school level in Normal from 1894 to 1901. In 1901, she started teaching at Illinois State Normal University (ISNU) and helped train future teachers. Over the years, Lura continued her education by attending other universities and earning her degree. She became known for her work in education and published several books, including a nursery rhyme book and a geography textbook. She also gave many speeches about teaching and encouraged students to value life, learn, and develop character.

Outside the classroom, Lura was very involved in her community. She worked with the Normal Women's Improvement League to help improve the town and organized events like the annual garden show. She was also active in her church and other groups like the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which worked to ban alcohol. Lura helped create the Parent Teacher Association at Metcalf School and was honored for her contributions to education and the community.

Lura traveled a lot, including trips to Guatemala, New Zealand, and many parts of the U.S. She also gave speeches about her travels and experiences. She passed away on March 9, 1965, at the age of 92 and was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery. In honor of her work, the Eyestone School in Normal was named after her. This school, originally called Rose Hill School, became a museum where people can learn about what school was like in Lura's time.