



## **Mabel K. Holland**

**Director of Elementary Education  
1927-1954**

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**By  
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the Mabel K. Holland Elementary School

# **Mabel K. Holland Story**

**by**

## **Miss Louise Brumbaugh**

Mabel K. Holland, in whose honor the Mabel K. Holland School was named, was Director of Elementary Education in the Fort Wayne Community Schools from 1927 until her retirement in June 1954. She gave a lifetime of distinguished service to this community.

Born November 3, 1887, Mabel Kathleen Holland knew even as a little girl that she would be a teacher. She came from a family dedicated to education. Her paternal grandfather had given the land for a school in Wabash County, Indiana, and all of his seven sons had taught school before entering other professions. Her mother's brothers had also taught for a short time.

She attended school in Paulding, Ohio through the seventh grade. Many years later, in 1955, she was asked to give the address at the dedication of a new elementary school in Paulding.

Moving with her family to Fort Wayne, Mabel Holland entered Jefferson School in the eighth grade. She completed high school in the first graduating class from the Fort Wayne High School, now known as Central. After two years at the Fort Wayne Normal School, she was ready to teach

although she later secured her B.S. and M.S. degrees at Columbia University, New York.

As a new teacher, she admitted having the "jitters" like everyone else in this role. Also she was trying to live up to the reputation of her sister Gertrude who had been teaching several years.

Adding further to Mabel's anxiety was the threat of her fellow teachers who kept reminding her "Just wait until Miss Calmerton gets back." Miss Calmerton, the supervisor on leave in Europe, finally did get back and did visit Mabel's classroom soon thereafter. Despite her fears and wobbly knees, Mabel received a note from the supervisor predicting a bright future for her. The memory of this dramatic moment may have been one of the reasons why Mabel Holland always tried to find something to praise in her visits to teachers, especially the first time.

In a few years she was teaching in an "experimental" room where some daring innovations were tried. She was using tables instead of screwed down desks, and easels so that children could paint big pictures!

Teaching at Jefferson School, she also made her movie debut. In 1914 the University of Chicago made a movie there of a day in school that was later shown as a trailer in commercial theaters.

In 1920 she began teaching in a demonstration room in the Greeley Room at South Side High School. From this experience she wrote a series of articles for *Childhood Education* on creative activities and the functional use of reading, writing, and arithmetic. These articles were later published in pamphlet form by the Bureau of Publications,

Teachers College, Columbia University. One unusual response to the publication of these articles was a letter from the Russian "First Experimental Station of Public Education of the People's Commissariat of Public Education" requesting "some data about the system."

Inspired by her work with Patti Hill of Columbia University, Mabel Holland early showed a deep concern for the education of the preschool child. Soon after becoming Director of Elementary Education in 1927, therefore, she began the organization of preschool study groups under the auspices of the Parent-Teacher Association.

As a teacher of teachers, she taught classes at the Indiana University Center for ten years. She also taught summer sessions at Indiana State Teachers College as well as conducting workshops at Indiana University and Ball State. She took pride in participating for several years in the University of Chicago Reading Conference. And later after retirement from the Fort Wayne Community Schools, she continued as a master teacher at Saint Francis College.

Mabel Holland pioneered also in many professional and community organizations. She was one of the seven founders in Indiana of Delta Kappa Gamma Society, honorary for women in education, and led in the founding of the local chapters of Phi, Alpha Mu, and Alpha Psi in Fort Wayne and Allen County. She was a charter member of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development; also a charter member of the Fort Wayne Association for Childhood Education and a leader for many years in this group.

She was active on the boards of numerous civic and service organizations, including the Altrusa Club, the Family and Children's Service, the Tuberculosis Association and the Crippled Children's Society. During World War II she

was asked to plan and supervise the West Side Nursery. In 1948 she was chosen "Woman of the Week."

Truly Mabel Holland could always look backward with pride; yet forward with hope. She was beloved and respected by innumerable children, parents and educators. As one teacher said at the retirement banquet in her honor "No one ever called Miss Holland 'old fashioned'; yet no one ever accused her of going overboard for some new fad. We liked this fine balance."

Mabel Holland died on March 14, 1962. However, as a person she will always be remembered as buoyant and vital . . . as delightfully companionable and refreshing . . . as impatient with procrastination and mediocrity . . . as highly perceptive . . . as showing deep empathy and concern for others . . . as embodying a great zest for learning and for living to the fullest . . . as a blithe spirit . . . as having a passionate love for beauty . . . as unswerving in her loyalty . . . as a person of ideas and action.

As a teacher of teachers, Mabel Holland will always be remembered as warmly reassuring to the anxious new teacher and as inspiring to the experienced teacher . . . as combining skilled know-how with creative ingenuity . . . as tireless in her research and planning . . . as promoting the provision of scholarships for the continuing education of teachers . . . as dedicated to the maximum development and education of all children, whether gifted or handicapped, brown or white, privileged or deprived.

As a leader of leaders, Mabel Holland will always be remembered as relentless in her insistence upon having what she believed to be best for children and the educative process . . . as a "maker" of educational leaders through her stimulation of their professional growth and of opening ways for their self-realization . . . as herself a leader with strength and decisiveness, with courage and high

ideals, with endless giving of self . . . as a pioneer in the language arts and elementary science, in pre-school and inter-group education, in professional organizations, in community service and in home-school relations, in the building of the Fort Wayne Community Schools.