



## Mabel B Thompson

October 16, 1909 - February 20, 2012

### MABEL B. THOMPSON

Mabel B. Thompson, 102, died peacefully at her Ephrata, Washington home on Monday, February 20, 2012.

She was born in Wenatchee, Washington to Frank T. and Bertha M. (Hill) Bell of Mae Valley on October 16, 1909. During that same year, Grant County was formed and Ephrata was incorporated.

Frank T. Bell's interests in real estate and Democratic Party politics produced many adventures for Mabel, her younger brother Victor F. Bell, and first cousin Frank A. Bell, who was orphaned at a young age and raised by Frank T. and Bertha. While Mabel's early years were spent in May and Hiawatha Valleys, west of current Moses Lake, she attended schools in Hiawatha, Montana, Seattle, and finally Ephrata through the 8th grade.

Frank T.'s interests in politics led him to the office of U.S. Senator C.C. Dill (Spokane, Wash.) where he served as his private secretary. Mabel attended 9th grade at North Central in Spokane, 10th and 11th grades at Eastern in Washington, D.C. and finished in December 1926 at Franklin in Seattle.

Senator Dill thought the world of Mabel and saw that she got to see Walter Johnson pitch and Calvin Coolidge's inauguration among many other political and social events in Washington, D.C.

Mabel attended the University of Washington and graduated with a B.A. in history and political science in August 1929. The Great Depression had

arrived and she was fortunate enough to find a high school teaching position in Oroville, Wash., where she taught history, English, algebra, drama, and social studies, as well as coached the girls' intramural basketball team for three years.

At that time single women teachers would lose their jobs if they got married. She had met Benjamin D. Thompson while in college. She also needed to teach for three years as part of the requirement for lifetime teach and principalship certificates. Mabel and Ben were married in secret on December 27, 1930, by a justice of peace in Renton, Wash. Ben stayed in Seattle as a meat packing foreman. Mabel returned to teaching in Oroville where she masqueraded as Mabel Bell until June 1932 when she returned to Seattle. This completed her lifetime certificate requirements. The young Warren Magnuson (later U.S. Senator) and Mabel founded the Young Democrats of King County during this period.

In the meantime Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected. He appointed Mabel's father, Frank T. Bell to be the U.S. Commissioner of Fisheries. Frank's job included territorial fisheries as well as fur sealing in Alaska. There had been evidence of governmental neglect in the treatment of the natives on the fur-sealing Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea. He knew Mabel's husband, Ben could go there and see that people would be treated appropriately. Ben arrived on the last boat in the fall of 1933. Mabel was to follow on the first spring boat of 1934 after their first child was to be born. She lost the baby and almost lost her own life. She was told never to get pregnant again.

Mabel did go on the first spring boat of 1934. They spent the next year and a half on the Pribilof Islands. Mabel taught school. With her famous homemade noodles, she bribed the local Russian Orthodox priests to treat the native island children less severely. When Mabel and Ben left the islands in the fall of 1935, the priest said, "Mrs. Thompson, you have been a mother to my people." Mabel was 26 years old.

Mabel and Ben returned to Seattle but moved shortly to manage the Bell Dairy in Cascade Valley near Neppel (now Moses Lake). They received permission

from the mother of a 15-year-old native girl from the Pribilof Islands to bring her to the dairy. They continued to raise Sara Smith (Saraphema Philamonoff), who became an excellent surgical nurse and anesthetist.

In the fall of 1937 when Mabel learned that the Grand Coulee school system needed a high school principal and teacher for one year, she took the job. In the meantime the Bell Hotel in Ephrata was being built. In the spring 1938, Mabel and Ben became managers and part owners of the hotel. Ben was 39 and Mabel was almost 29. Their lifelong commitment to Ephrata and Grant County had begun.

The Bell Hotel was the hub of Ephrata. Mabel and Ben threw themselves into its management. During this time they defied the doctors' orders and had their only child, Bertha (Bebe) Thompson in the summer of 1941. World War II began and the hotel was filled with traveling salesmen, railroad and telephone workers, and military personnel. Mabel was the civilian Red Cross volunteer for the area during her time at the hotel and dealt with many military problems. After the war the irrigation project was being constructed. The hotel entertained everyone from sheepherders on annual break to high officials in construction and from foreign countries. Even the great baritone, William Warfield of Showboat movie fame, spent the night. Mabel's entire family were deeply involved with the Democratic Party and were instrumental in the election of several country and state officials. During this period Mabel became a charter member of the Grant County Historical Society and a subsequent lifetime member.

Ben died suddenly in 1956 and Mabel continued to operate the hotel until 1961 when she disposed of her interest. She began teaching English at Ephrata High School. For 15 years, she directed plays, coordinated dinner theater musicals, and became the favorite teacher of many who continued to visit and correspond with her until she died.

In 1976 the school district decided that she was too old and forced her to retire. She became the Director of the Ephrata Senior Center. During her

leadership the new center was built and at least 400 meals were served per week. After about 14 years of her stewardship of the center, she “retired” at age 82.

In 1991 Mabel volunteered to answer the phone and entertain the clients at her daughter Bebe’s CPA office. She also told her daughter what she could do better in the office and did so until Bebe and Mabel retired in 2007. Mabel continued to be active in the Democratic Party and was a delegate or alternate to national conventions in 1976, 1980, and 1996.

Mabel became famous for her interesting birthday and Christmas Eve parties and dinners at Don’s in Soap Lake. Even at over 100 years old Mabel would sit in the school house answering questions from visitors at the Grant County Historical Museum. She was an avid Seattle Mariners fan and attended many games. Many fans helped celebrate her 100th birthday as her image was displayed on the Jumbo-tron.

Mabel was named Grant County Citizen of the Year in 2009 and had also been honored as outstanding Democrat in Grant County and Washington State. The Democratic booth at the Grant County fairgrounds is dedicated to Mabel as designated by a permanent plaque.

Mabel is survived by her daughter, Bebe Thompson of Ephrata, Wash.; niece, Sue (Bell) Anderson and her husband, Gordon Groff of Moses Lake, Wash.; grandnieces, Kim Groff-Harrington and Stacie Kentop and son, Owen Kentop of Bothell, Wash.; great-grand nephews, Alex Harrington and wife, Brandy of Mukilteo, Wash.; and Zachary Harrington of Annapolis, Maryland; her wonderful extended family including Ron and Linda Purcell of Ephrata, Wash.; Josh and Natasha Purcell and son, Miles of Everett, Wash.; Ron McComb of Seattle, Wash.; Mike Roland of Ephrata, Wash.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to any of the following: First Presbyterian Church, 172 Ivy Street SE, Ephrata, WA 98823; Grant County Historical Society, P.O. Box 1141, Ephrata, WA 98823; Grant County Democrats, 3326 Wild Goose Road NE, Moses Lake 98837; Ephrata School District, Attn: Diane, Drama Department donation, 499 C St NW, Ephrata WA

98823; Ephrata Senior Center, 124 C St NW, Ephrata, WA 98823.

Please share your thoughts and memories for the family and view the online tribute video at [nicolesfuneralhome.com](http://nicolesfuneralhome.com).

Arrangements are under the direction of Nicoles Funeral Home of Ephrata.

# Cemetery Details

## Ephrata City Cemetery

333 E St. S.W.  
Ephrata, WA

# Previous Events

## No Memorial Services

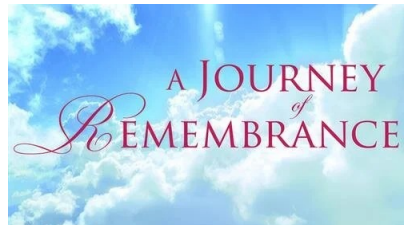
FEB 23 (PT)

Ephrata City Cemetery  
333 E St. S.W.  
Ephrata, WA

# Tribute Wall



“ *Nicoles Funeral Home and Valley View Memorial Park created a Tribute Video in memory of Mabel B Thompson*



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**Nicoles Funeral Home and Valley View Memorial Park** - February 20, 2012 at 12:00 AM

NB

“ *One day as the class was reading, and what seemed random to me at the time, Mabel came up beside my desk and said, "Nick, you need to do something important with your life." I wasn't exactly sure what she meant, but at various career decision places in my life I would remember that and ask myself if what I was going to do was important. She touched many lives.*

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**Nick Brossoit** - April 06, 2020 at 09:30 AM

JM

“ *Had her for English in my senior year at Ephrata High. My favorite teacher ever!*

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**James Matchett** - January 17, 2020 at 03:21 PM

CY

“ *May you rest in peace with your family. I promise to keep your father's legacy alive. Say hello to my father, Mr. Brown in heaven. Thank you*



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**cydonie** - January 28, 2014 at 05:54 PM

SK

“ *Thank you to all of you who shared your wonderful memories of my Aunt Mabel. It is so nice to validate that she really was a great teacher to students, family, and friends. Rest in peace my dear Great Aunt Mabel. I think of you so often. - grand niece, Stacie K.*

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**Stacie K.** - May 07, 2012 at 04:16 PM

LM

“ I, too, have to agree that Mrs. Thompson was the best teacher I ever had. She had that beautiful ability to push her students to think deeply, to analyze the subject, and then to put our thoughts to paper. I recently reread some of the theme papers I wrote in her English class and am somewhat surprised at what I wrote. She always made me think, to not accept words at face value, but to dig deeper into what might be the underlying thought or issue. For this I am grateful.

As a drama coach she excelled. Our class, the class of '67, put on "Our Town" and received rave reviews. She guided us as we pretended to do our daily chores for there were no props or stage sets.

I was also lucky to have Mrs. Thompson as my High School Sunday School Teacher. Here to she not only taught the scriptures but challenged us to examine those teachings in our current life.

Mabel Thompson will be greatly missed. If only every school could have teachers like Mrs. Thompson, our youth would be so much better off.

Linda Ivie McKonly, Class of '67

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Linda Ivie McKonly - March 16, 2012 at 03:22 PM

PM

“Mrs. Thompson influenced me both in the classroom and in plays at Ephrata High School. Though she professed to know nothing about directing plays, she managed to guide us through at least two plays a year, and acting was one of the most rewarding things I remember from high school.

As freshmen at WSU, Evan Sperline and I decided to try out for the first play of the season, and to our surprise, we both landed roles. Once during rehearsal one of the other students wondered how two students from such a small town had made it in the theater department. "Who's the drama coach in Ephrata, anyway?" I had never heard that phrase before, but I was proud to say that it was Mabel Thompson.

*Paul Morris, class of 1967*

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**Paul Morris** - March 15, 2012 at 12:39 AM

M1

“Marian Menzia Pedersen Class Of 1975 lit a candle in memory of Mabel B Thompson



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**Marian Menzia Pedersen class of 1975** - March 08, 2012 at 06:53 PM

M1

*Mrs. Thompson was a great teacher. I was in the cast of Little Women and Fiddler on the Roof. Rest in peace. Marian Menzia Pedersen*

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**Marian Menzia Pedersen class of 1975** - March 08, 2012 at 06:56 PM

RM

“ *Raymond Moog lit a candle in memory of Mabel B Thompson*



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**Raymond Moog** - March 06, 2012 at 12:34 AM

TW

“ Mabel is that special person that you hope to have in your life. Several years after graduating from EHS in 1967, I began to visit Mabel at the Senior Center and then at her home when I was in Ephrata. On numerous occasions my father went with me and I got to hear interesting stories that I would never have known otherwise. My dad's parents and Mabel's parents were close friends and went on trips together, so he knew Mabel very well. In their later years they were both active with the Grant County Museum and functioned as two of the historians people came to, to learn about the early history of Ephrata and the county. Mabel shared a word at his memorial that my family very much appreciated.

Over the years my relationship changed from recognizing Mabel as a great teacher and a person I appreciated and respected, to a deep friendship, to a wonderful love that I will always cherish.

As the class of '67 we invited Mabel to all of our reunions and she always shared something special with us. She was also pleased to tell us that the class of '67 graduated with the highest GPA ever at EHS. We never got tired of hearing it.

At Mabel's 102nd birthday I met one of her dear friends who was a student in the first class Mabel ever taught. Mabel was 20, she was 16. She told me that from day one Mabel was the best teacher she ever had. Those of us who were privileged to have her as our teacher cannot be surprised. Mabel possessed a wonderful joy of life that she freely shared with us. She cared deeply about us as students and she continued to care as we moved into our 60s and 70s.

Mabel bestowed upon me three lasting gifts: the hatred of dead verbs, a love of writing, and a model for giving and caring for others.

*Tom Washington*

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Tom Washington - March 02, 2012 at 10:54 AM

PK

“ Pam Kriete lit a candle in memory of Mabel B Thompson



Pam Kriete - February 27, 2012 at 11:24 PM

DS

“ Dianna Sieverkropp Steele lit a candle in memory of Mabel B Thompson



Dianna Sieverkropp Steele - February 27, 2012 at 04:49 PM

SB

“ Susan Correll Barton lit a candle in memory of Mabel B Thompson



Susan Correll Barton - February 27, 2012 at 02:59 PM

LB

“ We remember Mabel as a gracious lady, a fun person, a great teacher and wonderful friend. We appreciate her influence in our lives. What a great lady!! Lyle and Dixie Bair

Lyle and Dixie Bair - February 27, 2012 at 01:09 PM

PC

“ *Peggy Keegan Campbell lit a candle in memory of Mabel B Thompson*



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**Peggy Keegan Campbell** - February 26, 2012 at 11:58 AM

PC

*The most loved and remembered teacher of all of EHS. She loved each of us and taught us that we had the power to do anything!! Thank you, Mrs Thompson. Peggy Keegan Campbell, class of 1974*

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**Peggy Keegan Campbell** - February 26, 2012 at 12:02 PM

KR

“ *Mrs. Thompson, thank you for being superb at your chosen profession. You were one of the best (if not the best) teachers I ever had, including four years of college and nearly two of graduate school. You believed that we could learn and insisted that we did and it was thanks to you that we did! Your instruction in composition was the best I ever had and if I can write anything, it's thanks to you. We were so fortunate to have you.*

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**Katherine White Rouzie** - February 25, 2012 at 05:05 PM

DK

“ *Mrs. Thompson was my college prep English teacher in the late 1960's. She has always stood out as one of two outstanding teachers I had going to school in Ephrata Washington. She clearly loved to teach and loved her subject. I have measured all later teachers to her example. I was thrilled to see her at our 40th high school class reunion in 2009. Dottie Strnad Kruger "class of 1969". Nevada, Texas*

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**Dottie Strnad Kruger** - February 25, 2012 at 04:27 PM

CM

“ *What a beautiful lady.....I just got on my computer here in Quartzsite, Ariz. and seen about Mabel.....How many great dances we had at the Senior Center when she was there. We traveled every dance night to Ephrata to dance. We live in Moses Lake in summer. She will be greatly missed but know that she is in a beautiful place. Love and prayers to all the family. Chuck and Alice Millspaugh*

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**chuck millspaugh** - February 25, 2012 at 01:05 PM

JB

“ *Jeanne Buchanan Brice lit a candle in memory of Mabel B Thompson*



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**Jeanne Buchanan Brice** - February 25, 2012 at 09:05 AM

CC

“ *Mrs. Thompson was a role model and a favorite teacher for all time. Because she cared so very much about the young people she educated, we are all literate, well-read, and seekers of information and truth. God Bless our dear teacher. Cathy Lowe Clark*

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**Cathy Clark** - February 24, 2012 at 10:45 PM

MA

“ *She made a profound impact on the lives of every student she came in contact with. We were all improved for knowing her. She pulled the best out of every one of us. Thank you Mabel for sharing your knowledge, your gifts and your love.*

*Marianne F Anderson, EHS Class of 69*

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**Marianne Folsom Anderson** - February 24, 2012 at 09:56 PM

DS

“ *Dr. Harold J. Sherwood lit a candle in memory of Mabel B Thompson*



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**Dr. Harold J. Sherwood** - February 24, 2012 at 02:30 AM

DS

*Beloved HS and Sunday School Teacher. You showed us so much. You taught us so much. Lessons we still treasure. You inspired us all.*

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**Dr. J. Sherwood** - February 24, 2012 at 03:00 AM

JH

“ *I always enjoyed hearing stories about "Aunt Mabel" from her great niece Stacie. It was so lovely to hear how much she was loved and respected, and how much fun Stacie and Owen had visiting with, and doing things for her. (like the revised bday picture ;) The Birthday parties sounded fantastic! What a great group of ladies she has as a legacy.*

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**Jill Hatcher** - February 24, 2012 at 12:18 AM

SP

“ *Susie Page lit a candle in memory of Mabel B Thompson*



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**Susie Page** - February 23, 2012 at 11:43 PM

J6

“ Farewell to my beloved high school English teacher, drama coach and stage director: she helped me to believe I could do anything I could imagine, and more. It was she who first placed a copy of Albert Camus' *\*The Plague\** in my hands, and I eventually became a university professor of French and Comparative Literature. Her inspiring teaching and coaching and faith in her students prompted many to become patient, loving teachers. A light has gone out of the world, yet she shines all the brighter in the hearts of her own students and generations of students to come. *Vive Mabel!*”



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**James Winchell, Ph.D., EHS Class of 68.** - February 23, 2012 at 10:56 PM

MA

*Well said, Jim. thank you!*

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**Marianne Folsom Anderson** - February 24, 2012 at 09:51 PM

MB

“ Mary Brandon-Mickelson lit a candle in memory of Mabel B Thompson”



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**Mary Brandon-Mickelson** - February 23, 2012 at 06:56 PM

SS

*I don't think I could say it any better than Jim, but wanted to add my thoughts. The stories we all have about Mabel could keep many hundred EHS students going for many days. I told a story about her just last week to friends of mine when we were talking about favorite teachers. She was definitely my HS role model, and I especially remember the Junior and Senior plays I was in that were so successful with her direction! Let's all celebrate her life!*

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**Susan Freestone Schmaltz** - February 25, 2012 at 07:45 AM