

Vera Frances Clark (1898-1986)

by Edith Theis-Nielsen, class of 1960



Vera Frances

During my four high school years at Woodstock School, Mussoorie, India, I had Miss Frances as class teacher in the Cambridge Class. She taught us math, English language and literature; her other subjects were elocution and drama. To me she was an outstanding woman, an academically very capable and creative teacher with an understanding of her fellow man. I was aware that she was a believing Christian, but her faith was manifested by ‘walking the walk’ without much talk. She radiated an inner balance and integrity like a woman in harmony with herself. Her poems in *I have loved beauty* reveal a sensitive woman with a deep, rich inner life in stark contrast to the firm, no-nonsense teacher, who I have known her as.

She was born May 9th, 1898 in Nainital, India and came to Woodstock in 1921, then left the school in 1922 and came back in 1929 (“wander-lust caught me and I was away for six years enjoying what I considered the best climate in the world, - England’s temperamental weather, its fogs, its sparkling frosty days, its burning sun, which gave prickly

heat...”). She again left Woodstock in 1937 for a one-year stay in England. Perhaps it was during one of these periods that she earned a degree in elocution from Trinity College in London. In 1961 she published her book *I have loved beauty* and left Woodstock in December 1961.

Later she went to West Australia, where she and Miss Mary York were in charge of a Guest Home called “Lezur Tyme” at Olinda, Victoria, Australia; it opened August 1st, 1963 with a wonderful house warming. Miss Frances was delighted with her new project. Then in March 1964 she married Claude Clark and wrote a vivid account for the *Quadrangle 1964* “The Story of Our Wedding” accompanied by a picture. In the *Quadrangle Summer 1986* there is a picture of Vera Frances Clark with her Labrador dog at Braille House for the blind in Victoria Park, Western Australia and in the *Quadrangle Winter 1986* she is reported as still writing poetry. She died on December 3, 1986 in Braille House.

Vera Frances Clark served the school 33 years in various capacities, as a teacher of second and fifth standards, high school mathematics, from 1933 as a dramatics teacher and coach, as supervisor of Ridgewood (boys’ dormitory building). During many years she taught Cambridge classes and was the Senior Class teacher; each year she directed a play from the Cambridge English syllabus and many remember her plays. From the Woodstock history volume I: “We know Miss Frances and her many talents, but her devotion to her work and her sparkling personality have made her one of the best loved teachers in Woodstock history”.

Painting by Vera Frances Clark



When she left many paid her tribute, and she wrote an article in the *Quadrangle* 1961 about her teaching career and summarizes: “I have always maintained that there is some indefinable quality about Woodstock that leaves one better for having lived in her company”.

The president of the board of directors, L.A.

McCulloch, wrote: “Her talents as an artist, a cellist, poet and elocutionist have benefited people in the school both individually and as a group. But most valued is the quality of her life as it has communicated itself to students. This resolution of the Board cannot express in words the radiance or the strength of her faith and character.”

The principal, Samuel R. Burgoyne, wrote: “Vera Frances is an ideal teacher with a backing of sterling character, and an abiding love and concern for her pupils. When all this is within a life framework of love of beauty, demonstrated by her art and poetry, then a school principal has a gem which he treasures.”

Source: *Woodstock School Volume I – The First century 1854-1954, Woodstock School Volume II – 1954-83. The Quadrangle – Woodstock School Alumni Magazine* 1961, 1963, 1964, 1986 and 1987.