

Emma Montgomery McRae

Emma Mont McRae was born February 12, 1848 in Loveland Ohio. She was the daughter of William and Anna (Newton) Montgomery. At the age of five, she and her parents came to Indiana. She was educated in private and public schools including Brookville Academy and Worchester College in Ohio where she received her Master of Arts degree.

In 1867, Emma Montgomery was hired as a principal of the Muncie schools. The Muncie high school at the time was in the basement of St. John's Universalist church. It was during that year, she met and fell in love with Muncie School Superintendent, Hamilton S. McRae. The couple were married the following summer on August 6, and Emma returned to her duties as principal of the Muncie schools.

She and her husband helped start Muncie's first kindergarten and were reformers and innovators in educational practices. Emma was a strong supporter of the women's suffrage movement and attended several conferences. She was a delegate to the mid-winter national convention held in Washington DC. There she had an opportunity to meet Susan B Anthony. In 1894, she helped organize the Emma McRae club for international and cultural pursuit. As principal of the high school, from the time of its organization, she played a prominent part in the development of the Muncie educational system. She was loved and respected by her students and the community. However, after teaching 13 years in the high school, she found that politics in the Muncie community can sometimes be harsh.

It all began March 1, 1881 when John McClintock announced his resignation as school trustee to be effective March 5. The city Council did not wait until the effective date of his resignation to elect Garrett Leech. In June, George Stephenson was elected to the school board to replace John Husted. It wasn't long before Leech and Garrett announced their intentions to remove the McRae's from the school system. Upon hearing this, a petition to keep the McRae's was circulated. This resulted in 90% of the public signing in favor of keeping Emma as principal and her husband as superintendent of the Muncie schools. At the same time the Council realized they had elected Leach four days before McClintock's resignation was official.

Realizing this mistake, the city Council treated Leech's election in March as invalid and proceeded to elect Harry Wysor as the rightful successor to McClintock. They also elected Erville Bishop to succeed Thomas S. Neely. This action caused a huge disagreement on the board. Bishop and Wysor supported the McRae family, but Stephenson and Leech wanted them out of the school system. Because of this six lawsuits and appeals occurred between June and the beginning of school. Leech finally appealed to the Supreme Court and a temporary injunction was issued restraining Wysor from sitting on the board until 14 September.

The sun rose at the usual time on the first day of school, but the people of Muncie rose considerably earlier to see what was going to happen at the school. Mrs. McRae was at the high school building bright and early and was admitted by trustee Bishop. Bishop unlock the door, escorted her to the school room and authorized her to take charge of the school. Parents soon

began arriving and assembling at the high school building waiting to see if Mrs. McRae would defend her position as principal and teacher of the high school.

When it was time for school to start, Stephenson rose and introduce Mr. Stone as the principal; Mr. Allen, as superintendent, and Mr. Voorhees as the assistant. The introduction was received with a jeer from the audience, and the three men sat without moving knowing that the law as well as the people recognize Mrs. McRae as a person legally appointed to teach the school. Mrs. McRae then stood, called the school to order, read a chapter from the Bible and proceeded with other business. Thus, the school began in the hopes of a good year, but little did anyone know what lie ahead.

Leech took the issue to the Indiana Supreme Court of Fort Wayne, and on Thursday, September 6, the court issued an order restraining Harry Wysor, Erville Bishop, Hamilton McRae, David Shoemaker, and Emma McRae from interfering with Leach's exercising of his duties as school trustee. The next day Leech read the decision to Emma in front of her class. Looking at the paper that was handed to her, she said to her students, "I hold in my hand an order issued by James L Worden, Judge of the Supreme Court, and signed by Mr. Gordon, clerk, by which I am no longer permitted to act as your teacher. I obey the command."



MRS. EMMA MONT. McRAE

As soon as she was finished one of her students exclaimed, "If she goes, I go, too. Come on boys!" McRae and seventy students went immediately to the opera house and opened a private school known as the "Peoples High School."

After conducting classes in the old opera house, the Peoples High School moved to Simpson Chapel, historic Methodist Church at Mulberry and Jackson streets. Shortly after that it moved again, at this time to the third floor of the Patterson building. The People's School averaged seventy pupils. There were five "regulars" and twelve "McRae" graduates in 1882. The school closed June 16, 1882 after 196 days.

Erville H. Bishop resigned his office of school trustee March 20, 1882, and Mr. Wysor was elected to fill this position. Emma was re-instated as principal/teacher at Muncie High School, but only taught in Muncie one more year. In June 1883, she and Hamilton moved to Marion, where they held similar positions, from there Emma accepted a position in the English Department of the faculty of Purdue University at Lafayette. She remained in this position for twenty-five years. But her ties to Muncie remain strong.

In addition to her helpfulness and influence outside of the classroom. She was also known as one of the most able professors of English in this part of the country. She was listed on page 532 of the Woman's Who's Who of America; A Biographical Dictionary of Contemporary Women of The United States and Canada 1914 – 1915 by John William Leonard.

Hamilton Samuel McRae died April 26, 1887. Emma Montgomery McRae died September 26, 1919. Both are buried in Beech Grove Cemetery, Muncie Indiana.