
In Memoriam

Lalia Phipps Boone (1907–1990)

In a career of more than six decades and one that stretched from Texas to Oklahoma, Florida, Idaho, and Maryland, Lalia Phipps Boone made many contributions as a friend, teacher, author, and scholar. Her children, Joe, Martha, and Doris, add “church leader, mother, and grandmother.” She died on December 1, 1990.

I met Dr. Boone when I entered the doctoral program at the University of Florida in 1951. She was the only woman teaching at the University and became the first woman to receive a doctorate from there. In a definitely male-dominated vocation, she was nevertheless making a place for herself through her scholarly and teaching abilities. Despite my consciousness of academic titles, Dr. Boone, who held the rank of assistant professor, soon let me know that she was to be called Lalia, and so has she remained during the forty years that we knew each other. We corresponded often, met at national conventions, and kept each other aware of our career moves and personal lives. Often, I sought her advice during both my years as a graduate student and later in my work in onomastics and American speech. She was my mentor and had strong influence on my career as she did on the careers and lives of thousands of students, colleagues, associates, and friends, as well as her extensive family.

By the time she received her doctorate, she had already had a full career. Born April 19, 1907, in Tehuacana, Texas, she graduated from Westminster Junior College in 1925, age nearly 18, and taught in the public schools in Texas for the next 19 years, becoming a principal of Wortham High School in 1944. During these years, she obtained a BA in English in 1938 from East Texas State Teachers College. In 1947, she obtained her MA in Medieval Literature and Linguistics from the University of Oklahoma, her master’s thesis becoming the basis of her first book, *Petroleum Dictionary*. In 1949, she entered the University of Florida as a student of Professor Thomas Pyles.

She taught at the University of Florida until 1965, rising to the rank of Associate Professor. That year she was offered a professorship and the chair of the English Department at the University of Idaho, where she

remained until her retirement in 1973, but she never retired from her scholarly work, her last major publication, *Idaho Place Names*, coming in 1988.

Although teaching was her vocation, her life's work, she was also a great scholar and the author of many publications in linguistics and tangential disciplines. Her strong interest in the activities of the classroom led her to publish several textbooks for elementary and secondary schools. Her work in lexis led to *Petroleum Dictionary*, the first book-length work on the speech of drillers, roustabouts, and oilmen. During her later years, she increased her activity in onomastics, becoming President of the American Name Society in 1973. The culmination of that interest was her work on Idaho names, producing a state text of major proportions and importance. For this work, she taught herself to use a KAYPRO 4 Computer so that she could complete the text within two years. For both the computer work and the research she received two awards, one from the computer company and one from the University of Idaho.

Few outside her family knew of her work with the Nez Perce people. For her support and commitment to American Indian culture, she was the recipient of a special Nez Perce recognition.

Lalia was perhaps the most enthusiastic person I have ever known. To be around her was to enter into her activities, whatever they were at the moment. She was a great story teller, and we who listened to her became children again and listened as carefully. She told stories about growing up, about her father reading Old English to her, about her visiting oilfield workers at work, about learning to swim one year in Florida, about writing articles that probably no one else would dare to write, about her mastering the computer, and dozens of others. She somehow endowed all the stories with an exuberance and mystique that only she could create.

And we are all the better for having known Lalia.

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