

Capitola Pennington Reece

Lifelong teacher was a mainstay at Benton Elementary School for many years

By Mark Fritz

Capitola – it's a rather odd name, and her parents gave their other two daughters names nearly as unconventional -- Cletta and Eulalie. Her mother was named Sadie (nothing unusual about that) but her father was Amasa Ralph Pennington. Everyone called him "Mace." Capitola's middle name was Orpha. Let's just say the Penningtons were bestowers of creative names.

Everyone called Capitola "Cappie" -- everyone except her students, that is. And, well, maybe they did behind her back, but certainly not to her face. (Gosh, if I'd called any of my teachers by their first names, I'd have gotten a ruler across my palms, or across something even more sensitive.)

Cappie (oops, I mean Mrs. Reece) was born in 1908 in Wilkes-Barre, PA, to Sadie Rickert and Ralph "Mace" Pennington. She spent most of her youth at the Pennington homestead (owned then by her grandfather Wilbur) in Fishingcreek Township, Orangeville, R.R. 1.

Her father, who had spent most of his life as a railroad engineer, died in 1929 at age 50. Capitola completed her public school education when she graduated from Coughlin High School in Wilkes-Barre, while living there with her aunt. She went on to the Bloomsburg State Teachers College, graduating with a two-year teaching degree in 1934.



*Capitola's photo from
the 1934 Bloomsburg
State Teachers College's
Obiter yearbook*

Early in her career, Capitola taught at the one-room school house in Waller; then she moved on to Benton Elementary School, where she taught Fourth Grade throughout the forties, fifties, sixties and into the 1970s.

In 1934 Capitola had taken a couple of days off from teaching to marry Emerson “Joe” Reece, who had been born in 1896 to Johnson and Mattie Girton Reece of Greenwood Township. Like Cappie, Joe too had also started off his professional life as a teacher. He taught locally for about eight years before his teaching career was interrupted by World War I, during which he served briefly in the U.S. Army. After the war, he got a good government job as a rural mail carrier for Rohrsburg, and later was transferred to Benton Post Office, where he covered R.D. 2 until retirement in 1959. Joe and Capitola’s only child, Joanne, was born 1935. Sadly, she died at the age of 14 in 1950.



*Mrs. Reece's personal photo of her 4th Grade class
at Benton grade school, 1947-1948 school year*

The death of Joe Reece in 1968 brought their 36-year marriage to a close, and four years later, Cappie retired. In 1983 Mrs. Reece was featured in a *Press Enterprise* article about her progressive embrace of wind energy. At the age of 74, she had worked with the Governor’s Energy Council and PP&L consultants to get a modern high-tech three-bladed electricity-generating windmill installed at her rural home in Forks. Unfortunately, the \$9,000 machine’s output proved to be less-than-stellar. She sheepishly admitted to a *Press* reporter that in the month and a half since installation, the wind had been steady and strong enough to generate electricity during only two days. Nevertheless, Cappie seemed undeterred and upbeat. “Well, it’s a gamble,” she said to the reporter.

Capitola lived to the age of 94, dying in 2002. All told, she had spent 42 years teaching, most of that time at Benton Elementary School. She had become a fixture there, and her shoes must have been hard for the Benton school administration to fill when she retired in 1972. Generation after generation of Benton kids were ushered through childhood by fourth grade teacher Mrs. Reece. I think it is safe to say that for decades Capitola Pennington Reece left her mark on the children and town of Benton, PA.