

Grace Jeanette Bordewich

At A Glance:

Born: June 19, 1910, Carson City, Nevada

Died: March 01, 1999, Carson City, Nevada

Maiden Name: Bordewich

Race/Nationality/Ethnic Background: Norwegian

Primary City and County of Residence and Work:
Carson City (Ormsby)

Major Fields of Work: Education, Mentor

Other Role Identities: Daughter, Teacher, Educator



Grace Bordewich
Photo Courtesy
Carson City High School

Carson City English teacher recognized nationally and locally

Grace Bordewich or “Miss Bordewich,” as she was known to legions of high school students throughout her 33 years of teaching, was born June 19, 1910, in Carson City, Nevada to early Nevadans. Her father, Arthur Bordewich, (later changed to Bordewich), a native of Cook County, Illinois had made his way to Carson City, Nevada in 1906. Arthur’s parents had immigrated to the United States from Norway sometime prior to the turn of the century. In Carson City, he met and married Agnes B. Cutts, a native of the city, whose father’s parents had made their way to Carson City from Kennebec, Maine and had settled in Carson City in 1863. Arthur was employed at the Nevada State Printing Office when Grace was born and where he worked until his retirement in 1949. As was customary in the 1900s, Agnes remained at home with Grace. Six years later Grace’s sister Carolyn, “Nance,” was born and Agnes spent the remainder of her life caring for her husband and their two children.

In the early 1900s, mining booms had died out and Nevada's population decreased. By the year 1925 when Grace was fifteen years of age, the population of Carson City was just under 2,500 inhabitants.

Grace attended both elementary and high school in the old sandstone block three-story school building which was located on West King Street just three blocks west of the State Capitol. Her high school year book showed Grace participated in Spanish Club, Science Club, Glee Club, drama, band and was on the yearbook staff. She also participated in sports and received the prestigious "Block C" athletic award. Grace graduated from Carson High School in 1928 and went on to the University of Nevada to further her education. She was a member of the Pi Beta Phi fraternal organization, played varsity basketball, worked on the Artemisia college yearbook and during her senior year she served on the Upper-class Committee. She graduated in June of 1932 with a teaching degree and signed her first teacher's contract with the Ormsby County School District on September 5, 1933. She wasn't much older than her first students and some wondered whether she would be able to control her classroom. After the first few weeks, Grace had left no doubt in anyone's mind that she was there to teach English, and it was English she taught.

During summer months between school years, Grace attended continuing education classes at Stanford, the University of Pacific, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of California at Los Angeles. Local newspaper articles from the 1930s and 1940s show she was an avid bridge player and that she was a frequent traveler to the Bay Area, often accompanied by her mother or sister.

Grace was active in the American Association of University Women and was awarded an honorary membership in The National League of American Pen Women. She enjoyed hiking and picnicking with friends.

By 1940, Carson City's population was now on an upswing. When I asked Nevada State Demographer, Jeff Hardcastle, what the population was in 1940, he advised me the population count was 3,209. As the school system grew, so did Grace's English classes. Grace had informed her last Principal, Kirk Kinne, that she had as many as 55 students in a class and 42 was not unusual until a second English teacher was employed. Grace taught it all – spelling, grammar, composition, and literature, never teaching one without the other.

Grace was becoming a highly regarded teacher of English at Carson City High School. She was dedicated to her job. Her students were required to turn in themes on a daily basis. Duane Glanzman, former student, Class of 1952, who later taught with Grace at the high school recalled Grace believed "writing was so very important for each one of us and of course she was correct. But when she decided to require five themes a week we protested. Miss Bordewich was a fair person who was always willing to listen to our points of view. In respect of the students' feelings, she decided not to require a fifth theme a week." ¹

In 1960 when Carson City had a population of just over 5,000 individuals, Grace Bordewich was nominated by *McCall's Magazine* as one of the outstanding English teachers nationwide. Ultimately, she was named one of seven State Teachers of the Year and a National Teacher of the Year finalist by the Council of Chief State School Officers. "The National Teacher of the Year (NTOY) Program began in 1952 and continues as the oldest, most prestigious honors program that focuses public attention on excellence in teaching." She and the other nominees attended a White House ceremony which honored the nation's Teachers of the Year.

Morse Burley, Principal of Carson High School (1954–1981), wrote "No student ever having Grace as a teacher failed to thank her for her part in helping him be successful in his chosen field of endeavor. However, there were some things that Grace was not overjoyed in being assigned to. One such activity was LUNCH DUTY! She managed to corner Mr. John Borda (another teacher) and promise to provide him with excellent lunches, provided he assumed her lunch duty. John Borda enthusiastically accepted her deal, fully aware of the delicious, gourmet lunches she would prepare and would have delivered to him during the week of duty." ²

Grace retired from teaching in 1965 but her interest in people and education was ever present in her life. During the 1960s, she was an "active fund-raiser for UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund which was created by the United Nations General Assembly in 1946 to provide emergency food and healthcare to children in countries that had been devastated by World War II. In 1953 that organization became a permanent part of the United Nations System with a mission of providing long term humanitarian and developmental assistance to children and mothers in developing countries. In a 1966 Nevada State Journal article, "Doll" Smith of the Elko Soroptimist Club, quoted Grace Bordewich's reply to a woman at the U.S. Embassy who had impatiently asserted that "the Indian women (Mayan) don't know any better and it's useless to try and change them." Miss Bordewich's response was "her mother and grandmother once had rubbed clothes on a board and boiled them on the stove. They didn't know about the washing machine then, but when they found out, they weren't slow to change."³



Grace Bordewich fishing at Virgin Valley, 1959

Courtesy University of Nevada Reno, Special Collections. Photo by Gus Bundy.

On September 20, 1974, the old Carson City High School building, built in 1936 and later used as a middle school was renamed and dedicated to Grace Bordewich, Carson City's beloved English teacher. At the dedication, many of Grace's former students gathered to honor their former teacher.

In 1988 Grace Bordewich was inducted into the Carson School District's Hall of Fame. Bordewich School Principal Kirk Kinne, a former Miss Bordewich student, was quoted as stating it was with much trepidation, he sat down to write a brief speech inducting her into the school district's education hall of fame.⁴ Grace attended the event along with many of her former students and friends.

That same year Governor Richard Bryan proclaimed March 4th as Grace Bordewich Day throughout the State of Nevada.

In the mid-seventies, Gertrude Gottschalk, long-time Carson City resident, recalled the Democratic Women's Club honored Grace (as well as Gertrude and former Nevada State Superintendent of Instruction Mildred Bray) at a dinner held at the Carson City Nugget. Grace, a very non-political person, and her sister Nancy attended and listened as Monique Laxalt read a tribute from her father Robert who had been one of her protégés many years before. He included these lines in his tribute. "What you are doing here today in honoring Grace Bordewich is a fine thing. Teachers are so often passed over when it comes to public recognition. And yet, of all the people who influence our lives – teachers are the ones who touch us most deeply – and lastingly."⁵

In 1989, Laxalt, internationally acclaimed and twice nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in fiction, dedicated his eighth book "The Basque Hotel" to Grace Bordewich. In an interview he said "It was Miss Bordewich who first taught me teachers can be human....It did not come from the tedium of grammar, but from poetry and short stories, from the magic of writing. In those times, her eyes would brighten, and her voice soften, and a student would have to be dead not to be affected. The mark that a single teacher can make upon a student is a mark that lasts a lifetime. So, it has been with me. She gave me the love of language." A book signing was held that same year at Bordewich School and Grace attended and shared the afternoon with her student of long ago.

During her teaching career and long after Grace Bordewich retired, she was the recipient of innumerable accolades from the students she once taught. Former student, Barbara Dofflemyre Longero, wrote "Miss Bordewich was an example for all who are interested in the teaching profession. She was dedicated to the subject she taught, as well as to the students assigned to her for instruction."⁶

Don Toral, a retired Carson High School English teacher stated, "to be taught by Miss Bordewich and to pass her class was a standard in excellence."⁷

Mary Kay Graves Fry wrote "I still so often use what Grace Bordewich taught us. Those weekly or more often writing assignments, which I tentatively handed in already

apprehensively awaiting their red-marked return, had such a worthwhile purpose. (I wonder how she would correct this last sentence!)”⁸

In 2010, the Carson High School class of 1960 held a 50-year reunion. Individuals were asked to provide a short note about a teacher who had made an impact on their lives for a reunion book. The following was written by Carol Bernardini Laxalt:

“I will never forget how kind, encouraging, compassionate and caring Ms. Bordewich was to me when I gave birth in the spring of my senior year of high school. It was with her guidance and wise counsel that I finished my required credits, via a correspondence course, took the final exams and received my diploma that June. She reached out to me when I most needed reassurance, instilling in me the confidence that despite being a young mother, I could achieve whatever I wanted. Her inspiration has followed me since those days. That my own daughter is a first-grade schoolteacher, guiding, nurturing and influencing so many young lives, much like Grace Bordewich, is my great bonus!”⁹

Some of Grace’s most notable students during her teaching career in addition to Robert Laxalt, class of ‘41, were Governor and later U.S. Senator Paul Laxalt, class of 1940, Rhodes Scholarship recipient John Hall, class of 1951, Governor Robert List, class of 1954, and District Court Judges Mike Griffin, class of 1961 and William Maddox and James Todd Russell, class of 1965. However, there are many teachers, principals, administrators, attorneys, technical writers, foreign exchange students, social workers, etc. whose names are less well known but whose writing skills were honed by Grace Bordewich in her English III and English IV classes.

Perhaps John Blakie, long time Carson City resident and school administrator said it best when he stated “she was the best English teacher there ever was. All of the students learned. She was very concerned about the individual and spent time with students outside of class helping them with social as well as academic problems.”¹⁰

In the hundreds of lives Grace Bordewich touched, she was an amazing teacher and mentor and for those of us who still remember being taught by Grace Bordewich, she remains a legend!

Researched and written by Marcia Bernard Cuccaro.

Posted on Web site April 2012

Sources of Information:

Bordewick – Bordewich

Source Citation: Year: 1930; Census Place: Carson City, Ormsby, Nevada; Roll: 1296; Page: 15A; Enumeration District: 1; Image: 1100.0; FHL microfilm: 2341031.

Source Citation: Year: 1920; Census Place: Carson Ward 1, Ormsby, Nevada; Roll: T625_1004; Page: 8B; Enumeration District: 33; Image: 1023.

Source Citation: Year: 1900; Census Place: Chicago Ward 14, Cook, Illinois; Roll: 262; Page: 14A; Enumeration District: 429; FHL microfilm: 1240262.

Cutts

Source Citation: Year: 1910; Census Place: Carson City Ward 1, Ormsby, Nevada; Roll: T624_859; Page: 1B; Enumeration District: 0060; Image: 415; FHL microfilm: 1374872.

Source Citation: Year: 1900; Census Place: Carson City, Ormsby, Nevada; Roll: 943; Page: 12A; Enumeration District: 36; FHL microfilm: 1240943.

Source Citation: Year: 1880; Census Place: Carson City, Ormsby, Nevada; Roll: 759; Family History Film: 1254759; Page: 46C; Enumeration District: 038; Image: 0094.

Source Information: Barghouti, Kim, comp. Nevada State Census, 1875 [database online]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2000. Original data: Report booklet published for the state in 1876. Carson City, NV, USA: State Publishing Office, 1876.

Source Citation: Year: 1870; Census Place: Empire, Ormsby, Nevada; Roll: M593_834; Page: 294B; Image: 594; Family History Library Film: 552333.

Source Citation: Year: 1860; Census Place: Pittston, Kennebec, Maine; Roll: M653_439; Page: 224; Image: 225; Family History Library Film: 803439.

A.H. Bordewich Rites Are Held At Carson City – Wednesday, January 25, 1957, *Nevada State Journal*, page 4: Newspaper Archives.com

Icon of education Grace Bordewich dies, March 02, 1999, *Nevada Appeal*, page 1.

Grace Bordewich obituary, March 02, 1999, *Nevada Appeal*, A-4.

Nevada Department of Education. Teachers Service Records -1937-1968/1908–1934. Reel # 29-ED 81/Ed, Roll 13, No. 2996, Nevada State Library and Archives, Carson City, Nev. (microfilm)

Wells' Mrs. Matt Smith Tells of UNICEF Work in Guatemala, Tuesday, May 10, 1966, *Nevada State Journal* page 6, NewspaperArchives.com

Subcounty population estimates: Nevada 2000-2007 (CSV). United States Census Bureau, Population Bureau

www.questia.com/googleScholar

Rio Raigadas, "Robert Laxalt: The Voice of the Basques in American Literature." Center for Basque Studies University of Nevada, Reno. Reno, Nevada. Series: Occasional Papers. Publication date March 2007.

A dream comes true, page 32, *In Focus Magazine* Spring/Summer 2011

Kinne, Kirk. Personal papers. (foot notes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10)

Kinne, Kirk. Personal interview February 28, 2012, Carson City, Nevada

Glanzman, Duane. Personal interview. March 5, 2012, Carson City, Nevada

Gottschalk, Gertrude. Personal interview. March 9, 2012, Carson City, Nevada

Carson High School "Class of 1960," 50th Year Reunion, August 21, 1960, unpublished memorial book (footnotes 8 and 9)

Carson City Nevada website – last updated 6/19/2006 5:51:44PM

www.visitcarsoncity.com/history

http://www.ccsso.org/projects/national_teacher_of_the_year/State_Teachers/1960

NV1960 Nevada state teacher of the year. Grace Bordewich Carson City High School in Carson City NV English grades 9-12 <https://nvstoy.com/nevada-teachers-of-the-year/>

www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/UNICEF

Above Downtown Carson City, 1981, Scott Schmaltz, AroundCarson.com, posted 01/27/2007.