

# YES! ELIZABETH SEAWELL WAS A REAL PERSON!

By Scottie Seawell

Elizabeth Seawell was born on August 10, 1906. She was the oldest of six children born to Bertha Smith and A.A.F. Seawell in Jonesboro, North Carolina. Ms. Seawell graduated valedictorian from Sanford High School in 1923 and then attended North Carolina College for Women in Greensboro, NC graduating in 1927. From there she went to graduate school at Columbia University in New York. Her youngest brother, Don Seawell, recalls that, "English Literature was her favorite subject. She was an insatiable reader and she loved the theater. While at Columbia, she saw every show on Broadway." Her niece, Terrell Seawell Tracy remembers that she particularly enjoyed Agatha Christie mysteries.

In 1931 her parents and siblings moved to Chapel Hill, NC. Ms. Seawell taught for more than forty years in the Chapel Hill Schools. Many of her former students remember her love of Greek mythology and how she brought it to life in her 7th and 8th grade English classes. She also thought it was very important that her students learn how to write. She was a real stickler when it came to English Grammar and Spelling. Even at a very early age, she required her students to write stories and reports, which her keen eyes corrected in extraordinary detail. Her nephew, Buie Seawell says, "I can still remember all the papers from her classes piled around her house either bleeding red ink from correction or waiting to be attacked."

Her former students, particularly John Cates whose construction company built Seawell Elementary School, suggested that the school be named for one of their best teachers. Even though she never had children of her own, she treated all her students as nothing less than her own. Fellow teachers also remember how she rode her bicycle to school everyday, rain or shine. When she first started teaching, Chapel Hill Elementary School was located on Franklin Street. Later, she taught at Estes Hills Elementary School.

While teaching was the main focus of her life, Ms. Seawell also loved to watch the Perry Mason TV show. "She never missed one," said her nephew, Buie Seawell. "I used to wonder if she loved that show so much because of all the lawyers in her family." All four of Ms. Seawell's brothers went to law school at UNC - Chapel Hill.

In her later years, Ms. Seawell lived at a retirement center in Laurinburg, NC. There she often enjoyed getting letters and pictures from Seawell Elementary school students telling her all about the things that they were learning and doing at Seawell. Elizabeth Seawell died in 1995 at the age of 89. Members of her extended family still live in the area and are proud that their Aunt Beth, who was a teacher to so many, has an elementary school named in her honor. Today, two of her great great nieces are students at Carrboro Elementary School.

