

# Miss Zola Coates, Third Grade Teacher

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Parish House Museum Director

Zola Arlene Coates was an exceptional teacher and citizen. Never married, she devoted her life to community. She was born at the Longmont hospital on June 7, 1907 and grew up in the Highlandlake-Mead area. She graduated as the Valedictorian of her class in 1925 and then attended Colorado Teachers College (now University of Northern Colorado – UNC) that fall.

She earned a two-year AB (Life) certificate in August 1927. Jobs were scarce in those days, but she got a job teaching at Gooding School District No. 62 in Boulder County. For three years she taught the first three grades in a two-room schoolhouse and lived in the teacherage.

In 1930, still living in Mead, “Miss Zola” started teaching in the Johnstown school district in the same school where her mother, Mrs. Mansfield, had taught in 1904 and 1905. Zola started out teaching second and third grade “opportunity” students – those who needed extra help with their studies, and then she eventually settled into her role as a third-grade teacher, a position she would hold until her retirement in 1972. Then, she sometimes would comment, “It took me longer to get out of third grade than anybody.”

Zola moved to Johnstown in 1944 and earned \$90 a month for a nine-month school year. In 1948 she received a scholarship and went back to UNC and earned her MA (Life) degree in elementary education in 1951.

Letford Elementary School was built the following year, and Zola was among the first group of teachers to claim a classroom in the brand new school. She also served as the Assistant Principal from 1953-1966.

Zola never owned a car and drove only for a short time. She also didn’t own a television for a long time, but finally made the decision to buy one, stating she had to get one in order to keep up with the kids.

Zola was also a leader invested in her community through the Methodist church and numerous clubs and organizations, holding leadership positions such as the president of Delta Kappa Gamma, a Past Matron of Eastern Star, and as an officer for the Johnstown-Milliken Education Association.

This beloved teacher, revered by her students, taught in Johnstown for 42 years. In 1953 Johnstown High School’s yearbook was dedicated to her. The community also honored Zola in 1987 by selecting her as the Grand Marshal and she rode in the Barbecue Day parade. She died that year on December 29 at 80 years old.

Sources: Ardis Briggs, *Zola Coates to lead BBQ parade*, JTB, 6-13-1987; JTB Obituary 1-7-1988; Johnstown High School Phantom yearbook, 1953. Undated news story and 1927 photo courtesy of Mead Historical Society.



Zola Coates, April 27, 1927



The 1953 Phantom yearbook was dedicated to Miss Coates.

## The Historic Parish House and Museum

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Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Saturdays  
9:00 AM – 12:00 PM and by appointment

