

## Biography of Mabel A. Myers

[Mabel Myers holds such a pivotal place in SDE-GWIS history that it is appropriate to reprint two very different articles summarizing her life that appeared almost a decade apart in the Bulletin. She served so long and well as Secretary and was so beloved that upon her death, SDE-GWIS established the Mabel Myers Fund for the support of the national office. The Mabel Myers Fund is not to be confused with the Fellowships Fund to which she made such generous bequests.]



*Mabel Myers*  
1900-1978

Photo of Mabel A. Myers. SDE-GWIS lost one of her most loyal and faithful members when Dr. Mabel A. Myers died on August 4, 1978.

Dr. Myers was born in Indianapolis but spent most of her life in California. She earned her B.A. and M.A. degrees from Pomona College, then went to Cornell University for her Ph.D. degree in histology and embryology. She began her teaching career at Blythe High School in California, then proceeded to Fullerton Junior College. In 1946 she became an assistant professor at San Diego State College (now University), teaching microbiology and zoology. At the time of her retirement from San Diego State in 1970 she was Professor of Life Sciences. She was also coordinator of the biology graduate programs. Her areas of special research interest were comparative reticuloendothelial systems in animals, the nervous systems and life histories of certain insects, and the Myxobacteria.

Mabel missed being a charter member of SDE by just three years; she was initiated into Alpha Chapter (Ithaca, NY) in 1924. She transferred to Alumnae (now called Omega) Chapter in the 1930s, remained active and was very much involved at the national level for the last 20 years of her life. She was a member of the Chapter Establishment Committee from 1957 to 1964, chairing it for most of that time. She filled a vacancy on the Board of Directors in 1965 and chaired the Committee on

Awards and Recognition in 1967. She became our highly capable National Secretary in 1969, holding that position until 1973. For the next two years she was a member of the Committee on AAAS Fellows. Then she was back on the National Council as a member of the Board of Directors, and had completed one year of her five-year term when she died.

Mabel was anxious to see a chapter of SDE in her part of the country. She set a splendid example of committee leadership by organizing the women scientists in Southern California into Tau Chapter while she headed the Chapter Establishment Committee. Tau was installed in 1959, with Mabel Myers as its first president.

Mabel wanted Tau Chapter to host a Grand Chapter Meeting, and Tau did indeed host the very successful meeting of June 1978 in San Diego. There, Mabel was the busy, helpful, warm, cheerful person, giving so generously of herself, that so many of us had known over the years. All SDE-GWIS members who knew and loved her can be happy that her wish was granted.

(The above appeared in the Fall 1978 Bulletin. No author was credited, so I suspect it was written by Harriet Boyd, Editor.)

back to top

Mabel A. Myers was born in Indiana on October 8, 1900, and her sister, Florence, two years later. Their father was a physician. During his daughters' childhood the family moved to Anaheim, CA, and lived on Lincoln Avenue between St. Boniface Church and Anaheim High School, in a large house occupied until her death by Florence Myers.

Mabel attended Anaheim High School and two years at Fullerton Junior College, and earned her B.A. degree at Pomona College. She also earned teaching credentials, and taught high-school Spanish for two years. She entered Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, to do graduate work. She was considering a career in medicine, and her thesis work was on human tonsils.

After two years at Cornell, she returned to California, and taught biology for two years at Fullerton Union High School while completing her doctoral thesis, receiving the doctorate in 1928. Fullerton Junior College then asked for her transfer from the high school to the college faculty in the biological science department. She taught general biology, physiology, and bacteriology the first year, and added geology the second year. After eleven years of teaching geology she was asked to drop it in favor of setting up a pre-nursing curriculum; this caused her much anguish, as geology was a source of refreshment and delight to her. Her pre-nursing courses were very successful, resulting in an invitation to serve on a state committee formed to develop a model pre-nursing curriculum for all state junior colleges and teachers colleges.

In 1946, after 20 years in the Fullerton high school and junior college system, she was invited to join the faculty of the biology department of San Diego State Teachers College (now California State University at San Diego), to be in charge of the pre-nursing, dental, and medical technician programs. She remained there until her retirement in June 1971, during which period she served for a time as Biology Department chairman.

Following her retirement she continued serving as National Secretary of SDE-GWIS. She was a charter and founding member of Tau Chapter of the organization. She lived in her home near the University until her death on August 4, 1978, during this time dividing her activities between San Diego and the old family home in Anaheim where her mother lived until her death and her sister still lived.

When she and her sister were girls, their father took the family on trips to the California deserts, mountains, national parks, and especially to the redwood forests of Mendocino, Humboldt, and Del Norte counties. It was from these experiences in the enjoyment of natural surroundings and phenomena that she endeavored to enrich the learning experiences of her students. Using the nearby creek gully, she led her high school biology classes on field trips to discover small animals and to observe birds. With her fellow teacher, Edna A. Spalding, she bravely led her high-school classes on a four-day field trip to the Fullerton High School Cabin in the forests along the Rim of the World Highway in the San Bernardino Mountains near Lake Arrowhead. The two teachers cooked the meals for the students on a wood-burning kitchen range, then led the students on excursions to identify the forest tree species, to collect insects, to learn the birds, mammals, and reptiles, to observe examples of forest ecological succession, and to discover the role of forests in watershed preservation. These were most meaningful learning experiences for the students.

back to top

Dr. Mabel A. Myers' teaching career spanned forty-seven years, during which she became one of the most distinguished teachers in the U.S. While meeting her classes with dignity and insisting on good discipline and the highest academic standards and achievement, she treated all her students with kindness, affection, and concern for their welfare, encouraging them to set their goals high and perform their best.

Her classes were always thoroughly organized, and the scientific content of her courses was challenging, and revised with the growth of knowledge. She required her geology classes to perform laboratory studies of rocks and minerals, and of type fossils of geological eras and periods, as well as to prepare two collections, rock and fossil, on their own time, in addition to the class lectures. Her geology classes were her special pleasure as they gave her opportunity to conduct field trips with her classes for observation of geological features and collection of rocks and fossils.

With her encouragement, a Geology Club was formed in October 1933. She accompanied the club on field trips to remote areas lasting several days about three times a year during each school year. When the state of California was considering the acquisition of Mitchell Caverns as a state park, she was invited by the state to make a geological reconnaissance and report on the formation of the caverns.

Mabel Myers received many honors as a distinguished teacher. Shortly before her retirement, the Fullerton District (Junior) College recalled her twenty years of outstanding service (1926–1946) to the high school and college, and awarded her the district's Teacher of the Year Award.

To her students, more than four thousand strong, she was a source of inspiration and warm friendship. Those whom she liked especially well would find her sitting in the audience at their graduations or nurse's capping. She remembered them with cards or gifts at holidays and birthdays, their marriages, and infant arrivals, throughout her life. With her service as secretary, the geology club continued to meet, and make trips on occasion, to the end of her life, and they continue this friendly association still, after fifty-four years [this piece was written in 1987]. Her relationships with her professional associates were equally caring. At her retirement her surviving instructors from her college days, her former chairmen, her immediate fellow department members all stood to exclaim over her loving concern for them and for her unfailing remembrances of their birthdays and other eventful occasions in their lives. Both her students and her associates were in awe of her capacity to maintain her devotion to their individual lives, while bearing heavy lecture and laboratory instruction loads in the most exacting sciences. Through her quiet, generous, affectionate attention to her responsibilities as a teacher and co-worker, Mabel A. Myers achieved greatness unsurpassed, enriching ever the lives of all who knew her. As the end of her life approached, she made provisions that her modest estate should continue to support student scholarship funds in three areas at Cornell University, in SDE-GWIS, and in Delta Kappa Gamma; in several hospital foundations; and in the advancement of the Audubon Society's conservation programs. Her unremitting efforts to help those around her will live and continue after her, far into the future.

Dr. Myers was a member of Phi Beta Kappa, the AAAS, the New York Academy of Science, and a Fellow of the San Diego Zoological Society and the San Diego Biomedical Research Association.

(The above, written by J. W. Johnson, a former high school and college student of Dr. Myers, appeared in the Summer 1987 Bulletin.)

[back to top](#)

[back to history main page](#)