

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Early Education Project

Teaching Experiences

O. H. 572

HILDA KONNERTH

Interviewed

by

Caroline Wilms Hall

on

April 28, 1980

HILDA BODENDORFER KONNERTH

Hilda Bodendorfer was born in New Castle, Pennsylvania on July 5, 1912. She is the oldest of four daughters born to Andrew and Sara Lienert Bodendorfer. As the daughter of German immigrants, she spoke mostly German when she entered first grade. Her limited knowledge of English made reading difficult until her teacher kept her after school for extra help with the language. During her fourth grade year, students systemwide were tested, and Hilda was among students who were accelerated a half year. This was due to large classes. Therefore, she graduated from New Castle in January 1930.

She recalls that her women teachers were either single or widows and were guided by strict rules about smoking, card playing, and teaching Sunday school. Even through college breaking these rules meant expulsion.

Since the Depression had left her father without a job, money for college was difficult to obtain. Her father's sale of stock in the Penn Theater enabled Hilda to enroll in Slippery Rock State Teacher's College in September 1930. She completed the Normal School course and received an elementary education certificate to teach kindergarten through eighth grade in 1932. Courses taken in four years today were completed in two years. When no jobs were available, she completed a third year of college. Through a WPA grant she worked for the New Castle schools taking a census of students who would enter school the next year.

She was hired to compile the data collected, and began substituting when needed. In 1935 she was hired as a full-time classroom teacher. Her career continued in New Castle until 1948. The change in society is reflected in the fact that she was married to Alfred Konnerth in 1943 and continued to teach. Though the Konnerth's moved to Salem, Ohio, Hilda soon found herself back in the classroom as she was hired by the Salem city schools in 1949. She remained on the staff until 1976 and worked actively to improve the pay for teachers and their rights through her committee work.

Hilda and her husband, Al, are enjoying an active retirement by playing golf, gardening, bowling, and traveling. They are living in Salem.

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INTERVIEWEE: HILDA KONNERTH

INTERVIEWER: Caroline Hall

SUBJECT: Slippery Rock State Teachers College, Normal School courses, early teaching, New Castle schools

DATE: April 28, 1980

H: This is an interview with Hilda Konnerth for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on early education, by Caroline Wilms Hall, on April 28, 1980, at 7:00 p.m.

Okay, Hilda, will you tell us something about your parents?

K: Well, my father was the oldest of seven children. He was born in a small village at that time in Austria-Hungary. The reason he came to the United States was that when his father died the land would be divided into four parts, because there were four boys in the family. He didn't feel he could make a decent living on one quarter of what his parents had. So after he served in the army for three years, he came to the United States. He came to New Castle, Pennsylvania.

However, when he was at Ellis Island, evidently people had to have a certain amount of money to come into the United States so that they wouldn't become a burden to our country. He had played cards on the boat and had lost most of his money. He arrived at Ellis Island with \$4, and they were going to send him back. He happened to find an older man who could speak German. He explained his situation to him, "I have a job waiting in New Castle; I have my train fare or my ticket, one or another, as far as New Castle, so I promise I won't be a burden to anyone." The man said to let him go. He was young and handsome and would get along, and get along he did.

He went to New Castle and lived in a boarding house. The woman who ran the boarding house was originally from the village where he was born, so he felt right at home.

His first job in New Castle was at the Tin Mill, and he was what they called a shearer. Evidently, from what I recall, they had great, big shears and they would cut the tin as it came through the rollers. Now whether that was a hard job or an easy job, I don't know. I don't remember how much he made, but it seems to me it was like a dollar a day. Now a dollar a day for us wouldn't take us from here to across the street, but in those days it did. You could buy a chicken for 25¢, so a dollar was all right.

After he had been in this country for about three years my mother's father had passed away. Her brother was in New Castle, so grandmother, my mother, and her sister Anna came to New Castle. Evidently they weren't stopped at Ellis Island and had enough money, because they weren't gamblers. So the first place they stopped was at the boarding house where my father lived because my uncle John lived there too. After my father saw Sara Lienert he said to uncle John, "I'm going to marry your sister." John said, "She's just 18 years old," and dad was 28 at the time. Dad said, "I don't care, I'm going to marry your sister," and three years later he married John's sister.

Now I'm the oldest of four girls. I was born in New Castle. Mother didn't go to the hospital, for she had a midwife, and the midwife brought all four of us into the world. I'm the oldest and my sister Minnie is three and a half years younger than I. Frieda is two years younger than Minnie, and Dorothy is a year and a half younger than Frieda.

As I remember my years growing up, I don't remember too much about them except when I started first grade. We were still speaking German at our house, and my teacher didn't understand German. I knew enough English to be able to translate the things that she wanted me to do, but I couldn't read the words. So she kept me after school for about two weeks running. Finally I got the idea that the German words weren't too much different from the English words. They really aren't. Reading was hard for me to begin with, because I was still thinking in German. That made it rather difficult, so I can appreciate these Vietnamese people we have here in Salem at the present time trying to learn our language; although going from the German to English wasn't nearly as difficult, I don't imagine, as the Vietnamese would be to our language.

I went to a place called Highland Avenue School my first year. That's where the rich kids went to school. They had names like Smith and Brown and Jones and here I was with this great, big, long name of Bodendorfer. I went home from school one day and said to my mother, "I'm the dumbest kid in my room!" She said, "Well, why are you the dumbest kid in your room?" I said, "Because I cannot spell Bodendorfer." That night my mother got the slate out and wrote Bodendorfer on the slate. I copied and I went over and over and over Bodendorfer until

she erased it and I wrote it. The next day I went to school-- my first grade teacher's name was Miss Sparkler--and I said, "Miss Sparkler, I can write my name." So I went to the board and started at the very end and wrote Hilda and then Sara and then Bodendorfer. I filled the whole front board. But I could write Bodendorfer then and my teacher was very proud of me. As a matter of fact, as I remember she gave me a piece of chocolate candy. Now we had enough to eat, but we didn't have chocolate candy at our house. I told my mother what a wonderful thing my teacher had, and how good that chocolate candy was. My mother said, "Well, they're too expensive for us to buy at any time, except maybe at Christmas time you might get some chocolate candy." That was the extent of it.

Well then from grade school I remember my fourth grade teacher. Her name was Miss Esther Levine. She evidently had been in Europe the summer before we went to her room. She told us about having been in Switzerland in Berne, the captial, and having seen this beautiful clock. Well in 1973 when we were in Europe she explained so explicitly how to get from the railroad station to the clock that when we were there, I led ten people from the railroad station to the clock. I remembered it that vividly. It really was a beautiful clock. It had all kinds of things going. But it just amazed me that I would remember from the fourth or the fifth grade, whenever it happened, to 1973 how to get there. Everyone said, "You don't know where you're going; you don't know where you're going." I said, "Come on, I know where I'm going." Well, go and go we did.

I remember my sixth grade teacher; he reminded me of what I thought Icabod Crane looked like. Mr. Rainey was in love with the fourth grade teacher. He would assign work for us to do and then he would leave. I don't know where the principal was, but we were on the second floor and the office was on the second floor. I don't know how these two got together as much as they did. Every time Mr. Rainey would come into the room I would be out of my seat. He would clap his hands and he would point directly at me. This one time he clapped his hands and pointed at me and I was sitting behind a post. I stuck my head around the post and I waved at him. That must have tickled him because he turned around so fast and left the room, and then came in looking very, very serious.

Junior high school was quite an experience because the junior high school in New Castle was built in 1925, and I went to junior high in 1927. There we had a beautiful gym, lovely floors and lovely rooms, a swimming pool, and a great, big, auditorium. That was something very exciting for little sixth graders coming from real old schools to a brand new junior high school.

In junior high school I was very active doing all kinds of things as far as gym was concerned. I was on the basketball squad; I was a cheerleader; I was a leader in the gym classes. The same thing was true in high school. When we went to high school, we had cheerleaders, but I wasn't a cheerleader in high school though; I played on the basketball squad.

During study halls instead of just going to the study hall to study I took the commercial courses. I took typing, bookkeeping, and shorthand. During the course of the three years in high school, I was able to get two years of bookkeeping, two years of shorthand, and I had already started taking typing in the eighth grade when I was in junior high school. I took typing all the way through along with my college bound courses.

I could never study with people around me. I always had to be by myself, so there wasn't any sense in me going to study hall and just sitting there. That's why I went and took so many courses. Of course, I had a lot of studying to do at home, because in bookkeeping you had problems you had to do at home. Shorthand, you had to practice your shorthand. Then I had English and history and Latin and this and that and the other things. I had to take math, but I managed. I graduated in January, 1930.

I started to school in September, but in the fourth grade evidently our graduating classes were getting so big in New Castle that they decided to give all of the fourth graders a test. Those who passed the test would go to 4A and those who didn't pass the test would remain in 4B. So we had 4A, 4B, 5A, 5B. Those of us who passed were excellerated a half year and we graduated in January instead of in June.

When I graduated in 1930 things were very, very bad. The Depression was just horrible at that time. There were bread lines in New Castle. People didn't have anything to eat. We were fortunate though. My mother was a good cook, and she used to cater parties to the wealthy people. Those who still had money in New Castle would have parties. That's how she kept us going, because dad was not working most of the time. He didn't have a job. The mill had shut down, and he didn't have much of a job.

A cousin of mine who was two years older than I am had gone to Slippery Rock and had graduated in 1930. She had pictures, glowing pictures, of what Slippery Rock was like, and she said, "I know you'll like it if you can just afford to go." I said, "Well, we can't afford to send me to school." I talked to my mother about it then, instead of my dad, because my mom was the one who wanted us to have an education. Dad said when we graduated from high school with twelve years that was already four more years than he had had, and that should be enough for a woman. I always had a way with my dad. Mom and I talked about it and she said, "Well, now you'll have to give it to

your father--that this is what is to be done." I said, "But mom, where are we going to get the money?" She said, "Well, he has some stock in the Penn Theatre here in New Castle. Maybe he'll sell that stock." We talked and talked and dad said the only way we could do it was to sell the stock. I said, "Do you think I'm a good enough investment to sell your stock for?" He said, "Oh, maybe. We'll think about it." In about two weeks he said, "I sold the stock; now you can go to school."

I went to Slippery Rock in September of 1930. It was just as Catherine had pictured it. It was a lovely, little town. The campus was beautiful. The buildings were old, but they were just beautiful buildings. Of course, in those days we didn't think of knocking buildings down to put new buildings up. We kept the old and we tried to do with the old what we could. We tried to repair them.

We had a lovely chapel. At Slippery Rock I was enrolled in the normal school course which was two years, because we thought that was all we could afford. After two years, I graduated with a two-year course and got my normal certificate in elementary education. Now with that certificate I could teach from kindergarten through the eighth grade, but that summer there were no jobs to be had.

In those times if a woman was married she immediately lost her job, so those who were married weren't telling. They were careful not to get pregnant, because that would have been a horrible thing in those days.

When I was at Slippery Rock if a girl got caught smoking she was expelled. If a girl was caught playing cards, she was expelled. Now they have smoking rooms and rooms where they can pull out the card tables. It's the same school, but different years.

Since I didn't get a job after the second year, dad said, "Well, we've got enough money to send you for a third year, so you go back a third year," so I did. After the third year there were still no jobs and we had run out of money, so that was it.

I went to the superintendent in New Castle and put my name on the list. I had my name on the list all around New Castle. I had one interview in a little place in the hills just outside of Beaver, Pennsylvania. This was a coal mining district. When I called to get the interview, the man who was the president of the board of education was to interview me. He said, "Don't come before 4:30, because I work until 4:00." I said, "All right." So mother and I got there at about a quarter to 5:00. I can still see that house; it was a run-down, old shack. It looked like he had brought all the coal home and

parked it on the front porch. When he opened the door, he was still in his dirty clothes. He had taken his shoes and stockings off, and his feet were as black as coal. He invited us in and the house was filthy. We sat down, mother and I, and talked to the man. He said he would hire me. I said, "I would like to know how much I'm going to make." This was a one-room school. I would be the teacher, janitor, counselor, cook, and everything you had to be in those days. I had to make my own fire and clean the place up. I was going to make \$85 a month and I had to pay him \$50 a month for room and board, so that meant that I had \$35 a month for myself. I said, "No, thank you; I would rather scrub floors." I got up and went out. That was the end of my interview with the Beaver Township president. He said, "Young lady, you'll never get a job." I said, "I don't care. I would have to live in a pig sty like this and pay you \$50 room and board. A \$1 a day would be sufficient, but you said \$50. Now if you would have said \$1 a day, I probably would have stayed, but not \$50 to do all of this and have \$35 of my own. Forget it."

Along with quite a number of my friends I went down to Dr. Green, who was superintendent of schools in New Castle, and we pestered him every once in a while. He would say, "Girls, now I'll hire you as soon as I can, but nobody's getting married. Tell some of these older teachers to get married." I said, "Who wants to marry an old doll," and he would laugh at us.

He got a WPA [Works Project Administration] grant and we had to find out how many children were going to be in the first grade that following year in New Castle. We were on that about two months. Well, when this looked as if it were coming to an end, after we had a meeting with Dr. Green one day I kind of hung back. I asked him if I could talk to him. He said, "Well, what's on your mind Hilda?" I said, "Well, who's going to compile all of this?" He said, "I hadn't thought about that yet." I said, "Well, you had better think about it because we're just about finished." He said, "Do you have anybody in mind?" I said, "Yes, me." He said, "Well, how come you?" I said, "First of all, because I thought about it. Second, because I know I would do a good job for you. Third, because I can type. Most of the other girls and fellows can't type." After the thing was over, I was hired to compile the census for the first graders that year.

If somebody happened to be sick during the course of the day they would call me in the morning and say, "Hilda, go to such and such school instead of coming in, to teach." So I did most of the substituting that way too, because I was right there in the office. They would see me. Someone would call in in the afternoon and say, "I can't come

in tomorrow." They would say, "Hilda, instead of coming in tomorrow you go to such and such a school." We made \$3.50 a day for substituting. I can remember saying to Dr. Green, "Do you know something? A woman who scrubs floors and cleans houses in New Castle is better off than I am." He said, "How so?" I said, "She makes \$3.50 a day. She gets her car fare, her lunch, and she doesn't have to be dressed up in good clothes when she goes." He said, "In other words, you don't think that \$3.50 is enough?" I said, "It isn't nearly enough when you think we spent all that money to go to school." The following year then I was hired, but the following year the substitutes made \$5.

I was always working for teachers. I was on negotiations here in Salem, salary schedule boards, and this, that, and the other thing. I was always working for teachers to make more money. Finally, we're coming to the place where maybe we can hold our heads up and say, "Well, I do make a salary."

H: You were talking about your teachers, your women teachers. Were they all single teachers?

K: They were all. They had to be single. The only married women would be if their husbands had passed away.

H: Widows, in other words?

K: Widows, yes. Those were the only married women. Generally, those who were widows were hired on a substitute basis. They didn't give them contracts. There was one woman when I taught at New Castle at Pollock School who was a wonderful teacher, but she was a widow. She told me she wasn't getting as much money as I was getting and I said, "Good heavens, how do you run a house with less than what I'm making? How come you're making less than I'm making?" She said, "Well, I'm a widow and they won't give me a contract." I said, "Well, somebody should be doing something about those things, don't you think?" I wasn't knowledgeable enough in those years to talk and get on committees like that. I was just a green horn as far as being on different committees the teachers had. After I learned the ropes, I was on all of the committees. Then when I came to Salem I was on committees too.

H: You mentioned that you played basketball.

K: Oh heavens, yes.

H: Did they have a complete sports program for girls?

K: The girls played the preliminary games, and the boys played the main games. We would travel wherever the boys did. We

traveled the whole Shenango Valley and down into Beaver Valley and played basketball. Then we would exchange. We played two games with each team every year, once on our floor and once on their floor.

H: You had uniforms?

K: We had uniforms.

H: Did the school provide those?

K: The school provided the uniforms.

H: What were they like?

K: Well, our first ones were bloomers, real surge bloomers. The top was like a t-shirt, but only it was wool. They were white and had to be washed every time you wore them because you would perspire. The bloomers were pleated. They were really beautiful. Those pleats were just like a knife edge on each pleat. We wore them up as high as we could possibly get them; then we would be sure that pleat came down around and didn't make a bulk. They were quite snappy, even though they were bloomers.

H: Okay, with your normal school certificate what courses did you have to take in order to achieve that?

K: Now, let's see. We had to take teaching of math, history, geography, English, and music appreciation. You had to take gym courses. In our gym course you had to take folk dancing. We learned how to play all different kinds of games. Philosophy of education and all the courses that you have to take now, but we took them in two years. As a matter of fact, we had to do nine weeks of student teaching in that two years also.

H: Okay, if you were going and taking all of these courses in two years time, what was a typical day in college for normal schooling?

K: We had to take 30 semester hours a year. We had classes at 8:00 in the morning. I had to get up at about 7:30. I never went to breakfast; I didn't like breakfast when I was a young person. The first class was at 8:00, and we went straight through until about 11:30. Then at 11:30 we had chapel. We had chapel from 11:30 until 12:00. At 12:00 we would go into the dining room and have our lunch. At 1:15 class would start again, and go through until about 4:00, sometimes 5:00 like when you were taking biology. You would have two periods of biology, because you would have a lab period. You went straight through from 8:00 to 4:00 in the afternoon, and sometimes if you had a lab period until almost 5:00.

H: This was five days a week?

K: Five days a week. No, six days a week. On Saturdays we had classes until noon.

H: Was that normal for schools?

K: That was normal for everybody, yes. When I came to Ohio it wasn't 30 semester hours. I don't remember what it was. When I came to Ohio I had enough credits for almost five years. I had gone in the summer time too. I had gone summers and taken courses. No, we had 30 semester hours a year.

H: Okay then, you lived on campus?

K: Yes.

H: What was the cost of going to school for one year?

K: For each semester I had to have \$144. That was my room, board, whatever. We had to buy our own books. Of course, we had to buy all of our own clothes. We had special gym clothes that we had to wear. Now there, even by 1930 we didn't wear bloomers anymore. We wore a modified pair of what looks like shorts nowadays. We still had to wear stockings all the way up. No skin was to be shown. If you had a real short pair of shorts, you had to buy two pair of stockings and add some more stocking onto the top of the other stocking. No skin except the arms and the neck were showing.

H: Were these worn outdoors?

K: Oh yes, yes. The boys laughed at us, but that was the way it was.

H: Was it normal then to go out in your bloomers during the day time?

K: Oh no, no.

H: Other than gym classes?

K: Other than gym classes, or sometimes in the evening you might have hockey practice and then of course you would put your gym clothes on. We played field hockey, and you would wear your gym clothes. Everybody would stand and laugh at you because you looked so ridiculous, but they didn't know any different. We all looked that way.

H: What type of extracurricular activities were there?

K: Well, I was in the choir. The girls had a basketball team. We had hockey. There were special art classes. Of course, the boys played football and basketball and soccer and baseball, all the regular things they do nowadays too. The girls had archery also.

Now physical education girls naturally had a bigger program than elementary girls. I had a physical education roommate. When she would go over to the gym to practice, like on the parallel bars or the swings or the rings, I would go over and practice with her. I got so that I was better than she was. Well, of course, I wanted to be a gym teacher to begin with, but my father wouldn't permit that. That wasn't lady-like he said. He was afraid that this tomboy would get too tomboyish.

H: Were there a large number of girls who went into teaching physical education?

K: Oh yes. Each year they had about 50.

H: What was the average enrollment then at Slippery Rock?

K: At Slippery Rock there weren't 500. The primary course was kindergarten, first, second, and third. Then what they called the intermediate course, which was four, five, and six. Then the junior high course was seven, eight, and nine. Then the senior high course was ten, eleven, and twelve. Within each group you had that division, so maybe there wouldn't have been 50 in physical education. Slippery Rock, at the time, was obviously a teacher's college in Pennsylvania, specifically a physical education school. It was specifically used as the training ground for physical education teachers for Pennsylvania. They had some good instructors there, some pretty good instructors.

The first year I taught I made a fabulous amount of \$1,000. With that \$1,000 I sent my sister to school. That was the agreement I made with my father. If he would send me through school, I had to promise to send my next sister through school, and indeed I did. I sent her through school, and she got four years from me, whereas I had just three. Then I was bound and determined that she wasn't going to graduate before I did. I got my degree then in the Summer of 1938 and she graduated in the Spring of 1939. I got my degree before she did.

H: Okay, what's the difference? You had a normal school certificate and then you say you got your degree. What was the basic difference, or why the difference?

K: Well, the only difference was during my going through the school you realized the two year course was going to go out, and you would be smart if you would go ahead and get

your four years. After I started teaching then, I took classes in the summer time. If teachers came to New Castle or anyplace close by and had a course that I could take, an extension course, I did. Then from 1935, when I got my job, until 1938--in those three years--I got my degree. I worked off the last year.

Basically you taught the same subjects. I was teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. We had self-contained classes in New Castle just like they did here in Salem. Then for awhile, we changed classes, so maybe you would have reading and spelling and writing and English one year. Maybe the next year you would have math class and science or something like that.

It changed your base pay. If you had two years of education, you got a certain amount of money. If you had four years, you got more. Of course, that was an incentive to go ahead and get your four years. There weren't too many people who did have four years when I started to teach school, in elementary that is. Now, you had to have four years; you had to have a degree in order to be able to teach in the junior high school or senior high school. Even though our certificate stated we could teach kindergarten through the eighth grade, they rarely hired an elementary teacher for the seventh and eighth grade. That's the way it goes.

H: Anyone who wanted to go into the junior high had to take a secondary program?

K: That's right.

H: Okay, how was the school set up yearwise? Was it a sixth through three?

K: Yes, we had six years in our building, 7, 8, and 9 in the junior high, and 10, 11, and 12 in the high school. Six through three.

H: Were there many kindergartens? You could teach kindergarten through, but were there many?

K: There were none. There were no kindergartens in the school system at all, all the time I taught in New Castle. We had no kindergartens at all.

H: Were there many in New Castle itself?

K: The churches, several churches had kindergartens, but I don't think their enrollment was very high. Maybe women who had to go to work would take their children there, but it wasn't very popular to send your children. Of course, you had to pay to send your children to a kindergarten.

In New Castle the books were furnished. The supplies were furnished like the paper and the pencils and the pens; that was all furnished, not like here. You had to buy your own paper in most schools. You had to buy your own pencils and your own pens. None of the schools furnished all of that.

H: Paper, notebooks, everything?

K: Notebooks, everything. Of course, their taxes are a lot higher than ours in Ohio, too.

H: Were they extremely high then?

K: I can remember when we moved to Salem my father's school taxes alone were higher than the taxes my husband and I pay here on our property, the school taxes alone.

H: When was this?

K: It has been possibly about ten years, about 1970.

H: Did they have to pass their bond issues?

K: They don't have to pass any bond issues. If the city of New Castle decides they need more money, they just put it on the tax duplicate.

H: Do they have any set limit that they can go to before?

K: They probably do, but I don't remember.

H: Has the financing of schools always been this way in Pennsylvania?

K: Yes, always, to my knowledge.

H: As long as you have been in the school system?

K: That's right.

H: Okay, you mentioned some of the restrictions as far as being married. Were there any other social restrictions that you faced as a teacher when you started teaching?

K: Well, I never smoked, but for a teacher that was just taboo. A teacher could not go into any of the beer joints. That was taboo. A teacher was supposed to teach Sunday school. If the YWCA asked you to teach one of their classes, you didn't dare refuse, because they would go to the superintendent and say, "Look, we wanted so and so to teach such and such a

course and she refused." Well, then he would get on your back and you would go and teach the course.

I was asked one time to take a girl scout group that the Y sponsored. I had a lot of time so I took the job. I didn't have any problems with anyone. I enjoyed it. Some people just didn't like the idea of being told they had to do this. I didn't feel I had to do it. I felt that it was kind of doing my civic duty occasionally, so I did it.

There is a nice park on the east side of New Castle. It's called Cascade Park, and years ago they would bring big dance bands to New Castle. A schoolteacher should never go anyplace unescorted. If we didn't have any boys to take us, my mother used to go with us. We would always find someone to dance with, and we would enjoy that.

There were many taboos years ago. Schoolteachers had to be a model of everything. Of course, schoolteachers even then were people also. They liked to kick up their heels occasionally. But you didn't dare do it within the vicinity in which you taught.

H: You had to go out of town?

K: Yes, somebody would see you.

H: Tell us about a typical day when you started teaching?

K: Well, school started at 9:00 in the morning. The janitor would go up and he would ring the bell, and the kids would line up outside. Then the music teacher would start to play a march. The kids would march into the building with the principal at the head of the stairs. You had better be in step otherwise he would stop you and put you in step.

The first year I taught in public school in New Castle, I had a really big room on the north side of the first floor. There weren't any desks or seats per se, as you would think of a schoolroom. When I was assigned to that room, I said to my principal, "Now what do I teach in this class without any seats, and without any desks?" He said, "Young lady, you have benches." I said, "Yes, sir." The benches were along the wall. I found out later then that my job was to put together programs. I had the job of teaching dancing, theatre, this, that, and the other thing, whatever. Every Friday morning I had to have a play. The music teacher would help me sometimes. She would teach them some songs to go along with the program. We had to have a program on Columbus Day, Thanksgiving. For Christmas we had to have a Christmas program. The area in which I taught was mainly made up of children of Italian descension and a few colored children. For Columbus Day we had a big thing because they were mainly

Italian and Columbus was Italian. During the course of the year, that's what we did.

The first few years that I taught I had eight classes a day. I had a fourth grade homeroom. I had classes three, four, five, and six in the morning and three, four, five, and six in the afternoon. I always liked the sixth grade best. I always seemed to have a better feeling for the sixth graders than I did for the others. I liked the others, but I liked the sixth grade kids best. They would come in in the morning--In the front of the room we didn't have a cloakroom like we did at McKinley. They were just pull down doors, kind of like on one of these desks that pushes in and back out--and hang their coats up and go sit on the bench. Then I would read from the Bible every morning. We would pray together and say the "Lord's Prayer." We would salute the flag and sing the "Star Spangled Banner." That's when school would start.

H: Did you have to collect lunch money?

K: No, everybody went home. We had no buses. Everybody lived close enough to the school that they could walk to school. The furthest youngsters that came to our building might have had a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to walk, but that's all. Everybody walked to school and everybody walked home for lunch; everybody walked back again and everybody walked home. As a matter of fact, I lived on the north side of New Castle, and I walked all the way to school and that was a three mile hike from my home to school. That was going downhill to school. It was going uphill coming back in the evening. It should have been the reverse, but it wasn't. We were a mile from town and at noon we younger teachers would walk to town for our lunch. That was a mile to town, have lunch, and a mile back, then three miles home. I see why I stayed skinny while I taught in New Castle; I walked it off.

H: How long did you have for lunch?

K: An hour and fifteen minutes, from 12:00 until 1:15. We would start at 9:00 in the morning, from 9:00 until noon. Now all of the children, first through sixth, were there from 9:00 until noon, then from 1:15 until 4:00. We changed classes then. My youngsters might go to the music teacher, and then from the music teacher to the reading teacher, and from her they might go to the math teacher and then from the math teacher to the social studies teacher. They had gym every day. We didn't have a gym. We just had another room in the basement like mine that had benches around the sides. The children had gym 45 minutes every day. We had no recess; we had no playground duty. When we young teachers

would come back from lunch, if the kids were playing baseball-- there was a field across the street from the school--I would always go up and pitch for them. I don't know how I developed a curve, but I did. One of the boys yelled to me, "Come on Miss Bodendorfer, pitch that curve to me." So I pitched a curve to him, and he struck out. I said, "Would you like me to pitch another curve to you?" I always had fun with the kids, as you well know. I did when I taught at McKinley too. They went home at noon. Those were the bad times, because their parents didn't have much. It was right after the Depression and a lot of their parents weren't working. They came to school and they were hungry. I can remember many times giving up my whole lunch in the wintertime. Instead of traipsing to town we would bring our lunch. I remember many times giving my whole lunch to somebody and saying, "Go ahead, eat my lunch." They wouldn't have anything for dinner in the evenings. Maybe they would have something for breakfast. They would go home at noon and maybe have a glass of water, then come back to school with a glass of water in their tummies. Those were bad times. I can still see some of those little kids. They were so thin. There was nothing but skin and bones. It kind of breaks your heart when you think about things like that, but that's Depression.

H: Did they make it through the Depression?

K: Yes, they did. Most of them did. Most of them were on relief. Some of those children from parents, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are still on relief. Some of them pulled themselves up by the boot straps and made something of themselves. Many of the children that I had are lawyers. There are three doctors; some of the girls are teachers. Most of the girls just got married, and were happy to do that.

H: You say you taught dramatics and that type of thing. So from what I gather, you were more or less departmental?

K: Yes.

H: Did you switch and teach any other subjects?

K: No. About the first five years that I taught there, I had a library in my room. The youngsters would come in and part of the period they would be allowed to pick out a book they wanted. It wasn't comfortable reading a book sitting on those benches. I can remember one boy saying to me, "May I sit on the floor?" I said, "Certainly, if you're more comfortable sitting on the floor." I know I would have been more comfortable on the floor than on those hard benches that they sat on. The principal came in and bawled me out

because the kid was sitting on the floor. I said to him, "But he's more comfortable there." "That doesn't make any difference; he belongs up on the bench." So I said to the boy, "You get up on the bench." He finally got on the bench.

I had a class of third, fourth, fifth, and sixth in the morning, and the same thing in the afternoon. From my room they might go to the music room. Then from there they would go upstairs to maybe English, then maybe come back downstairs for gym, and the morning was over then. In the afternoon maybe they would go to math, then social studies, geography mainly, not social studies. In those days it wasn't called social studies. The person who taught reading taught English, spelling, and writing. Then the math teacher taught just math. The geography teacher taught geography and science. We had a gym teacher; we had an art teacher; we had a music teacher. The art teacher taught nothing but art; the music teacher taught nothing but music; the gym teacher taught nothing but gym.

H: Then there was your class?

K: Then there was my class. I had those youngsters in for theatrics or whatever.

H: Library?

K: Library and theatrics.

H: So then a person, even though it was a departmental situation, it was not what we have now where we teach one subject to one group of kids all day? They taught different grade levels?

K: That's right.

H: So they had at least two different grade levels?

K: Yes.

H: Okay, how was discipline handled in schools then?

K: Well, we didn't have too many discipline problems. Those that we did, we just bawled the daylights out of them. We took them up to the principal's office if the child became unruly. I didn't have to paddle too often. I seemed to be able to manage kids for some reason or other. But occasionally we would run into somebody who was obstinate and wanted his way regardless of whether it was the right way or the wrong way. You just gave him four or five cracks with the

paddle. You didn't call the parents and say, "Look, I paddled your boy." You just paddled them. If he would tell at home, he generally got one at home too. They didn't tell when they home then. I remember one time a man came into my room and I paddled his son that particular day. I thought--How on earth did he get the information that I paddled his son already and the kid isn't even home yet? But here the kid hadn't been home for three days. The dad was in school to collect him to whack the daylights out of him. I said, "I just gave him one." He said, "I'm going to give him another one."

You had to have a witness there. You didn't go paddling the kid on your own. If the principal saw you were up in the air about it, he would say, "You cool off. When you're cooled off come back, then you can paddle him." I didn't have to paddle too much, just on occasion like I did when I was a McKinley. I paddled on occasion when they needed it. Then nobody said, "I'll sue you." They just expected you to be sure that their children behaved themselves when they came to school.

H: Was there a lot of parent involvement in the schools?

K: None whatsoever. The only time the parents would come there would be maybe two different days during the course of the year that we would send invitations to the parents and they would come. They could come any time during the day. They could come the whole day if they wanted to and go with their child from one room to the next. Then we would have programs and send invitations to the parents. There wasn't much room for them because the kids filled the building. Our stage was like at McKinley where the steps come up to the landing there on the old part, but the stairway was open further. The stage was right on top of the landing. We even had curtains that we could pull. Of course, the kids who were up on the second floor, they could see what we were doing if we were changing scenery or something. No, we would invite parents for our programs. Sometimes the parents did come, but parents weren't involved at all.

H: There was no PTA or formal organization?

K: No PTA, none.

H: Okay, you were in teaching long enough that you saw some major changes. What were some of the big things?

K: Well, one of the big changes that I felt was after I started teaching in Salem. I came from teaching the children on the south side of New Castle who were mainly of first generation extraction foreigners--They were all workers in factories and that sort of thing, laborers--to a place where we had practically all professional people's children.

I can remember the first day I taught at McKinley; I had a fourth grade. As I stood there and looked at them, instead of all big, brown eyes looking at me and dark, wavy hair, I saw blondes; I saw redheads; I saw blue eyes; I saw green eyes. I saw all different colors of hair. That was one thing that was a big thing as far as I was concerned.

Then the type of homes that these children came from, they had so much more information already that I didn't have to give them all of the information that I had to teach my youngsters in New Castle.

Something else I remember coming to Salem, of course New Castle is a bigger town than Salem. The superintendent didn't come around to visit at all. In New Castle even though there were quite a number of elementary schools, the superintendent came and visited everyone at least once a month. He didn't sit in his office and transact business the way they have to now. His business was the schools. That is one thing that I remember--When is the superintendent going to visit me? I asked Miss Sharpnack, who was my first principal in Salem, if the superintendent visited. She said, "Oh, he won't come and visit you." She said, "He comes and sees me every once in a while, but he won't come to observe you." I said, "Oh, I just wondered. In New Castle our superintendent observed us."

In New Castle all of my principals had college degrees. I don't think Miss Sharpnack even had a normal school certificate. She was one of these people who graduated from high school when she was sixteen, took the county examination and was a bright, young woman. She passed the examination and got a teaching job. She probably did have a normal school certificate, because I think most of those people were almost forced to get a normal school certificate. That was about all she had. She was a good teacher and a good principal. She knew every child's name. Every child in that building she could say his name. I remember one boy in my class went up to her and said, "Miss Sharpnack, do you remember my grandmother?" She said, "Now, that's it. That's enough." She said, "When they ask me if I remember their mothers that's bad enough, but do I remember their grandmothers. Of course I do, but I don't want them to know it."

Something else that I noticed when I came to Salem was the teachers weren't very well-informed about anything in Salem or anything that went on in the superintendent's office. They weren't informed as to what the salary schedule was or if there was a salary schedule. You just didn't know. In New Castle I had four years of college education, and I had almost enough for five years in Ohio. After I had taught my third year I went to the superintendent and I said to

him, "When do I get a continuing contract?" He said, "Well, not until I say so." I said, "Well, what moves you to make you say no?" He said, "I don't like your coming here asking me." I said, "It's my life and I'm asking." He said, "We'll see what we can do at the next board meeting." After the next board meeting I got my continuing contract. In New Castle after you had taught three years they either told you that they wanted you for the rest of the time you wanted to teach or you could depart; they didn't want you anymore. I didn't want somebody to tell me that I had to depart. I wanted to know am I safe or do I get out of here. Then after I had taught here for three years I was asked to be on a salary committee. Mr. Kerr, who was our superintendent then, met with the salary committee. Of course, I was still a new teacher as far as years were concerned here. When they were talking about various things, I gave my opinion on things. The next day he said to Miss Sharpnack, "That Hilda Konnerth isn't afraid of anybody, is she?" She said, "No, I don't think so, why?" He said, "She told me that I wasn't much of a superintendent." She said, "Well, what did she base her facts on?" "On the fact that I didn't inform her that she was going to be hired for a continuing contract. She didn't think that was right. She thought that she should have been informed when she first started to teach here, and how long she had to teach before she got a continuing contract." Miss Sharpnack said, "Well, maybe she's right."

It was that year after my big mouth got going that teachers got informed when they came into town, and told what was expected of them, and how long they had to teach before they would be considered, and how much education they had to have and this and that and the other thing. About every second year we would get a new salary schedule, simply because I was always working for more money, more money. A person who was trying to buy a home and raise a family could not live on what we were offering them.

H: How active was the association or was it?

K: Well, it wasn't. They had an association, but it was made up of people who would bow and scrape when the superintendent would walk in. I wasn't used to bowing and scraping for anybody; I'm still not.

H: When did you come into Salem?

K: In 1949. The first year that the new section of the building was used they needed a fourth grade teacher, because that year they had too many children to put into one fourth grade class, so I was hired. It was strange the way I was hired. I didn't go over to the superintendent's office and ask for a job. One day somebody called me and said, "Is this Hilda

Bodendorfer Konnerth?" I said, "Yes." He said, "This is Mr. Elmer Kerr, superintendent of schools here in Salem." I said, "Oh, I've heard about you." He said, "Well, I just heard about you." I said, "Who from, for heaven's sake?" He said, "From Frank Burton in New Castle." Frank Burton was my junior high school principal. He was superintendent of schools in New Castle at that time. He said, "Have you heard about Hilda Bodendorfer yet over there? She's in Salem." No, he didn't know Hilda Bodendorfer. He said, "What's her married name?" "Konnerth." "Well," he said, "I'll find her." He said to me, "Why don't you come over and talk to me?" About that time I had lived in Salem about nine months and I was getting mighty lonesome for kids. I lived on the corner of State and South Union. I used to take walks at 10:00 in the morning when the kids were out for recess and at 2:00 in the afternoon when the kids were out for recess. I realized I was lonesome for kids, so when he offered me the job I took it. I said to him, "How much can you pay on this job?" He said, "Well, with your education about \$3,000." I had made \$2,800 the last year I taught in New Castle in 1948. I went from \$2,800 to \$3,000. Do you know, Caroline, the most I made all the years that I taught the only time I ever hit over \$12,000 was the last two years that I taught. \$12,300 was the last salary, the last year I taught in Salem.

H: How many years had you taught?

K: That was the end of my 40th year.

H: How many years were you in New Castle?

K: Thirteen years in New Castle, from 1935 to 1948. In Salem I taught from September of 1949 to June of 1976, 27 years.

Another thing, one of the first years I taught in New Castle they had permanent record cards, but they were in the principal's office. They were under lock and key. The secretary had access to them. The secretary was not a college graduate; she was not a teacher. She had access to those records, but we could not have access to those records unless the principal was in the building, and then he would sit down with us. Notice I said he, because they were always men. He would sit down with us and explain what this document was all about, like if we couldn't read it. One of the first teachers' meetings I attended at McKinley, Miss Sharpnack was talking about permanent record cards. I said, "I hope they're not locked up like they were in New Castle." They were locked up like they were in New Castle. Finally, we got access to them. It used to gripe me that the school secretary was permitted to use those permanent record cards,

and we had to have the principal sitting beside us before we could.

H: Was there a purpose for having them under lock and key?

K: Not that I know of. Who wanted them? You were just looking for information. They didn't take as many tests like your Iowa Basics and your intelligence tests. They didn't have too many of those. Occasionally, if you were having trouble with a student, the principal would give some sort of a test to the youngster. Now what it was, I don't remember. We didn't have that type of thing. But occasionally you want to know what the address of the kid was or what the telephone number was. If the kid was sick, you wanted to call to find out what was wrong with him. Here, you had to wait until the principal got there. You didn't know what the father's name was, so how would you look it up in the telephone directory. It was kind of a mess, but I stuck my foot right into my mouth at one of those first teachers' meetings. Everybody looked at me so funny. I thought--Oh, Hilda, you've done it again!

H: Was it very long after that they were unlocked?

K: No, it wasn't too long after that they were unlocked. As a matter of fact, Miss Sharpnack told Mr. Kerr that, "Bodendorfer was making trouble again."

H: Is there anything that you would like to see changed in education or the schools?

K: Well, one thing, I think that the schools are going to bankrupt themselves with all this busing. I think we ought to come back to the days where you have neighborhood schools. Of course, that isn't feasible anymore I don't suppose, because so many people live so far away from the schools. It seems to me in a neighborhood school you don't have near as many problems as you do when you have to bus kids there. I think our problems started at McKinley when they started busing kids in, and how they would stay for lunch so many of them. I think kids should have enough of a lunch period that they can traipse home or run home and get rid of some of their energy, and run back to school. But of course in this day and age nobody's home, so who can go home and get lunch? I don't know what the answer is, but I honestly feel that youngsters nowadays need to be taught respect for their elders. They have no respect for anybody anymore unless you show them that you're an ogre and you're going to knock them down if they don't toe the line. That isn't a good rapport with the kids, but you almost have to with some kids.

A friend of mine said to me, "Hilda, is it true that you're not allowed to paddle in Ohio?" I said, "You've always been allowed to paddle in Ohio." I had her daughter in school. She said, "Nobody ever paddled my daughter." I said, "Well, she didn't need paddling." We were talking about sweet, little kindergarten children. I said, "You should see some of those sweet, little kindergarten children who come in and kick their teachers in the shin and scream, yell, and holler." I said, "You would like to take them and throw them into a cold bucket of water, or throw a bucket of water in their faces." She said, "I can't imagine that." I said, "Well, you don't know. You haven't been around children; you don't know." She said, "Well, you never paddled." I said, "Oh yes I did." As a matter of fact, I paddled five boys on one day. I told them what had happened. They had defied me three times, then I said the third time is the charm. They all got it. I didn't give them love taps either. I swung at them like I was going to swing at a golf ball. One of them I almost picked off the seat. I didn't mark anybody. I said to them, "Children have to learn that there is an authority higher than themselves." It's too bad that that isn't started at home. Now at home the parents say, "That teacher better not touch you." Then the child does what he wants to, or "I'll sue the teacher! My parents will sue you." I don't know, something has to be done about that sort of thing. A teacher doesn't feel . . . not that I believe in beating kids. You know that I never hit too many of them, but something has to be done about that. Teachers can't stand it.

Now in the big cities they come at them with knives and everything else. Who's going to go into the teaching profession if that sort of thing is going to continue?

H: Is there anything important that you feel we have not covered, that you would like to make a comment on or further explain?

K: I can't think of anything right offhand. I think we've covered quite a bit.

END OF INTERVIEW