

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Education in Youngstown Project

Education in Youngstown

O. H. 143

ELEANOR E. DAVIES

Interviewed

by

Jeanne Ontko

on

May 19, 1981

ELEANOR DAVIES

Eleanor Davies was born on March 25, 1910 in Youngstown, Ohio, a daughter of David and Nellie Coombs Davies. Miss Davies was educated in elementary schools in Youngstown and graduated from Canfield High School. From 1927 until 1929 she attended Oberlin College and studied kindergarten and primary education. After further study at the University of Wyoming, Akron University and New Wilmington, Pennsylvania, Miss Davies received a B.E. in 1950 and a M.A. in 1955.

She began her teaching career in 1929 and, for the next 41 years, taught kindergarten and first grade at Taft School in Youngstown.

After retiring in 1970, Miss Davies began working in 1973 at the Arms Museum as a tour guide. She is a volunteer for Meals on Wheels and the Hospital Guild and was recently awarded a pin for 10,000 hours of volunteer work. Chosen as a Jennings Scholar, Miss Davies was also honored by the Taft PTA with a "This is Your Life" tribute in 1969. A member of the First Presbyterian Church where she is a deacon, Miss Davies also belongs to the Oberlin Club, Delta Kappa Gamma, the American Association of University Women, retired teachers organizations and the Mahoning Valley Historical Society.

In her spare time, Miss Davies enjoys travelling and knitting.

Jeanne Ontko

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Education in Youngstown

INTERVIEWEE: ELEANOR E. DAVIES
INTERVIEWER: Jeanne Ontko
SUBJECT: Education in Youngstown
DATE: May 19, 1981

O: This is an interview with Miss Eleanor Davies for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project on Education in Youngstown by Jeanne Ontko at 116 East Boston Avenue, Youngstown, Ohio on May 19, 1981 at 6:30 p.m.

Miss Davies, could you give me a short biography of yourself, your education, family background?

D: I was born in Youngstown, Ohio. I went to grade school in Youngstown. I went to Washington School, West Side School, and Grant School. Then I went out to Canfield, went and graduated from Canfield High School. From there I went to Oberlin College for two years in kindergarten and primary training school. In 1929 I started to teach school in Youngstown. And I went gaily on my way making every summer a vacation until finally I decided I better settle down and get my degree. So, two different summers I went to Wyoming to summer school. And we went to Wyoming because we read it was the coolest summer school in America. Then I went to Akron University one summer and by then decided I better settle down and I went up to Youngstown U. and got my bachelor of education degree finally. Then a year or so after that I went over to New Wilmington to get my Masters degree.

O: I see. Why did you decide to become a teacher?

D: It seemed no decision.

O: Oh really?

D: I had cousins who taught school and I had a cousin who went to Oberlin and that's just what I was going to do, there was no doubt about it.

O: Like you say, your cousins were teachers, was your mother a teacher or your father?

D: No. My mother wasn't a teacher. But my cousins, the Coombs girls, Gladys and Margaret Coombs, I lived in their home for awhile and so I was influenced that way.

O: You went to Oberlin and then eventually in New Wilmington you got your Masters. What kind of training did these schools give you to become a teacher?

D: I always have said, as long as I taught kindergarten, I went by what I learned in Oberlin. It seemed to be the basic foundation for my work. I had a lot of other courses that helped, but fundamentally, that seemed to be my guide to teaching.

O: What did they do?

D: Well, they were a tried and true old college I guess. And maybe we were ready for that basic training.

O: Well, did they teach you different kinds of techniques in teaching?

D: Yes, and we did a lot of practice teaching, practice teaching in kindergarten and first or second grade. It was a two year course and we spent most of the second year in school.

O: Could you give me like an example of something that you did when you were teaching that you learned at Oberlin?

D: The first year that I taught school was a half day session business. I really got started in the right direction. The schools were so crowded that they had half day sessions. The first group of teachers would come at 8:00 and teach through their class until 12:00. In the meantime, from the other crew, teachers would come in at 10:00 and help you from 10:00 until about 11:30. Then, at 12:00, the second shift came to school with their teachers and we stayed and helped them for an hour and a half in the afternoon before we went home.

And the one teacher that I thought so much of and really

helped me a lot when I was first starting to teach would come and look in the door and it would just scare me to death because I wondered if I was doing everything right. But later she said, "Do you know what I really was doing? I was watching you with your manuscript writing." She said, "I know that I have to use manuscript writing and now you just go to it." And that is one of the things I learned in Oberlin.

O: What was the teacher's name?

D: Miss Cowden. And she lives at Park Vista now. I see her quite a bit.

O: You say it was so crowded, now this is at Taft School?

D: In 1929.

O: What is crowded? How many kids were there?

D: Well, there were too many for each teacher to have a class and not enough classrooms so they just split it in half.

O: Approximately how many would you have then in a classroom?

D: Forty. You'd have forty for four hours with the help of the other teachers.

O: How old was Taft? Do you know? Was it one of the oldest ones?

D: This was 1929 and Taft had just been opened, I think, about four years before that.

O: Right off-hand, I can't recall what would be the oldest elementary school in Youngstown, do you know?

D: No. West Side would be a very old one.

O: You say you started teaching in 1929. What effect did the Depression have on your own personal lifestyle and on the fact of teaching and your students? Could you tell me a little bit about that?

D: As I look back, I can't remember it making children that different. Their parents were doing all the worrying and getting things together and youngsters came to school, and happy to be in school. But I know we didn't get paid.

Time would go by and there was no money to pay us. So, naturally, we went right ahead with our school work and it was time for the Cleveland Convention in October and they gave each teacher five dollars to go to Cleveland for the convention for that day. Of course, your train fare was only three something. But, it didn't seem to be a problem in the schools.

- O: Did they have places at school where people might donate things like clothes or food to give to the children?
- D: They gave breakfast to the youngsters.
- O: To the kids?
- D: Yes.
- O: Do you remember what they would eat for breakfast?
- D: Well now, we didn't do that at our school. They gave to some of the more hard pressed districts. So I don't really know, but I have an idea that they had oatmeal.
- O: It may not have affected the students like you suggested to a certain extent, but how about the parents? Did you have any contact with the parents?
- D: Yes, but it was sort of a close contact. And of course, we went from the Depression into rationing during the war and that I noticed the effect on parents more from the rationing than I did from the Depression.
- O: In what way?
- D: They were eager to have these stamps. They were eager to conserve them and not use them. And you'd see, maybe a youngster would come and say that they'd had this to eat because we didn't have stamps for some sort of food that maybe they would like to have had. They had something else. And then of course, the schools registered to give out the food stamps. At Taft School we had our gym fixed with desks all around. The public set up certain places for each one to sign up for their stamps. And we put floor lamps all around. We made it look very nice and people would come in to get their food stamps. Then again, gasoline, and also, the conscription for the war. Fellows came to register and the schools took care of that too.
- O: Really? Were you directly involved then too in that?

D: Yes. And we all tried to learn how to spell Czechoslovakia when we knew we were going to register the young men. (Laughter) There really was a lot more than just teaching those years.

O: How about elections, did they have those in the schools too?

D: No, we didn't, lower grades.

O: What I mean, the political elections and the public, they wouldn't come to the schools to vote or anything like that?

D: Oh, they voted in the schools.

O: Yes, right, that's different.

D: But it was really a minor thing.

O: I like that about Czechoslovakia. (Laughter) I don't even know if I could spell that today.

What I want you to do now is to pretend that you are going into your classroom for the first time and I want you to tell me what you would do, how you would start off a typical day, what the order of subjects might be or tell me how many kids you would be looking at, tell me how you would have the kids arranged if they were sitting down, just imagine if you could. It's a hard question I know but. . .

D: All right, I know what you want I think. Almost every room that I taught had tables and chairs, long tables with four or six, usually six at a table. Once in a while we had individual tables and chairs. I think I only taught in one room where there were desks. I liked tables and chairs better because you could change the room a little bit, move tables one way or another.

O: What grades would this be?

D: This would be first and second grade. When I started to teach, I taught primary grades. The kindergartens were out of the schools because of the money situation.

O: Where would they be then?

D: There wasn't any.

O: Oh, they didn't have it at all?

D: No kindergarten. The first year I taught there were kindergartens then that was the last year until they came back in the 1940's. But, when I would go to school, we opened our school with prayer or usually the Lord's Prayer because youngsters all knew that. And then the big thing everyday, three reading classes in the morning and three reading classes in the afternoon. And you'd get to the place where you felt you really should have four divisions, but you couldn't do it. You just couldn't manage it. The reading classes were great and it was fun. Your big problem was having enough between recitation work with all the youngsters that were at their seats while you were having these reading classes. It was called seat work, it was called busy work, all kinds of, sort of, horrid names for it, but what it really was was to give the child something constructive to do on his own. And so, of course there were papers for him to do. Then, you needed supply of puzzles, books within their scope of reading, anything that they could go quietly, get something to do and work on it. And that was one of the hardest things, to keep a child busy with something he liked to do and something that he would get something out of rather than just to keep him busy.

We used modeling plasticine a lot. And it got to be a joke though because they'd say, "Oh, my goodness. What will we do now" and somebody would say, "Oh throw them the clay." But it did come out there were some youngsters who were perfectly happy and did some beautiful work and you found out that they had ability along these lines. Then it was your reading. I mean, that was a must, you'd have your reading classes. Then you would have your time and everyday you had some sort of an arithmetic class. And it was drill. Arithmetic was drill with flash cards. Then when you knew you needed to do something to relieve the tension, you had your music class.

O: Do you remember what some of the songs were that you used?

D: Well, we had one about rain that we used. Raining, raining, raining, and they just loved it. They'd sing it everyday over and over and over. Oh, and rhythm bands, even in the grades we had rhythm bands. After I was in kindergarten we did a lot more with that.

O: Rhythm bands? What do you mean?

D: With the sticks and the drums and the triangles. I liked finger painting. I didn't do much finger painting until I taught kindergarten. You just didn't get around to it.

And in the afternoon they'd come back and you'd still have your three reading classes. We'd have a project. It was really social science. And we'd bring orange crates and just build up a rough building with blocks and so forth and they'd bring all the empty rolled oats boxes, anything. And they even, on their own then, could play store. They would go back quietly and talk about how much things were and maybe add up what they would be spending. Once you had something like that started and they had the idea, they enjoyed that too. And then they would just take the boxes back and somebody else would buy. It always was a great satisfaction to see that go on while you were up with another group and they were on their own.

I enjoyed that work in primary, but as soon as the kindergartens came back into the schools, then I went to kindergarten. My first kindergarten experience was in the library. They didn't have room for me so I had kindergarten in the library. Over where the bookshelves were we draped material so that we could use it for a bulletin board, hang pictures. And in that one class, we had just open shelves. And of course, with kindergarten, you have so much material, play material and blocks, and books and coloring materials. The open shelves really did look pretty bad and I had one little boy and he's quite a citizen in Youngstown now, and he never was too enthusiastic about what we were doing, but he'd say, "Could I clean the shelves?" And he'd put those shelves in order day after day. He was a godsend to the teacher and he just loved it.

Of course, a day in kindergarten would have been so much different than a day in primary school. I always started my kindergarten day having them come together first. It was quite the thing to do to let everybody come in, take off their coats and go right at something they wanted to do and for them to have their free period first. I never liked that too well because I liked to have them come together and talk about what they were going to do, what they'd like to do, why they were going to something and then let them start out.

O: Would you have them sit around together?

D: They sat on the floor. All the time I taught kindergarten

they sat on the floor to do any talking or anything like that. If there was something we were doing at tables then they'd sit at the tables and chairs.

Then I had a great chance for the rhythm band in kindergarten. When they built the new kindergarten, it's a big room and it was all windows, a big bay with all windows. And when it would storm the children, not all of them, but there would be some children so frightened and they would cry. That's when I got out the rhythm instruments and they all stood with their back to the windows and just made as much noise as they could. And it worked. I mean, they weren't frightened anymore. I always think that rhythm band was wonderful for everything it was worth right then to take away any fear.

O: What time of the day would school start for kindergarten?

D: One group came at a quarter of nine and they stayed until 11:00. Then the afternoon group came at 1:15 and stayed till 3:00. The afternoon session was shorter. We usually had the younger children come in the afternoon. And the kindergarten groups, when I first had kindergarten, were huge. There would be 75 and 80 in the morning and then that many more in the afternoon, but they couldn't give you another teacher. But I always felt that another teacher in the same room wasn't the answer. You needed to have another room. They finally did give us, beside the kindergarten, a regular classroom. So we separated the children and then took turns using the rooms so that each teacher had time in the big room and then in the little one.

O: It would be very draining though, wouldn't it be; physically and emotionally?

D: I sometimes felt when they came jumping and running in in the afternoon I wasn't up to it, but there were only two years where it was so awful. Then groups got to 50s. And then now, from what I hear, they have each session with twenty children and that's the way it should be.

O: Because, at the museum, I mean, to have even ten children sometimes is difficult to take them through on a tour. I just can't imagine all those kids.

D: Well, in the new kindergarten we had our own little cloak room and each child had their own cubicle to put their coats and hats and their boots on the floor. But it

also was a place where if someone was disturbing you, you said, "Would you go out and sit in the cloak room until I talk to you in a minute?" Now this happened to one little boy and he was out there quiet and I was busy with these youngsters. I finally went back to talk to him and he'd taken everybody's boots and mixed them up into a great big pile. (Laughter) When I saw him I thought, oh he really won that one. But it wasn't too bad. There weren't any boots that were exactly alike. So they dug out their own boots and went home.

- O: I was going to ask you on discipline, what you would do. Was that the only way that you would discipline students or was it a problem at all?
- D: It wasn't really a problem. It would be, not really a discipline problem. They were more just aggravating little tricks.
- O: Do you notice any difference when you take, for instance, kindergarten children through the museum today, is there a difference in the type of child or how they respond? If so, why do you think?
- D: Their listening power doesn't seem to be the same. I think they're so used to radios and television that sound just sort of rolls off of them. It isn't the same.
- O: When you were teaching, do you remember any of the children's reactions when television came out?
- D: Oh, yes. Most of them had televisions, well, almost as far back as I can remember. Then, when it got very common we had it in school too. So we had Sesame Street, although, some people, when the television programs came into the school, just decided that was a vacation, you get out the television. We had one day a week where we'd see it. And I really did enjoy the Sesame Street programs. I think they had a lot to them.
- O: Why do you think it's valuable?
- D: They repeated and repeated and they gave these very fanciful names to the letters and the numbers that would just impress them.
- O: Yes, my nephew watches that. He has learned, I think, to count and the alphabet because of the repetition all the time.

D: That's right.

O: Is this one thing then, they stressed at Oberlin was repetition?

D: It must be. As going over, I don't remember that part of it, but it must be because it appealed to me right away.

O: When you were talking about the reading classes, do you remember what the books were that the young children read or some of the stories?

D: It was the Dick and Jane series. Fun with Dick and Jane. That was the one that I was most acquainted with although there was, in the very beginning when I taught grades, a book about a dog and it started out, "Bow wow, I am Terry," and it was a little preprimer with a red cover. Then I think the Dick and Jane series came out with a pre-primer and it was beautifully colored. And the first time I used it I was enthralled. By the time I came home that night I said, "Guess who had the most fun with the new primer? The teacher." Because they hadn't seen the old one, they didn't realize what an improvement that had been.

O: When you say pre-primer, what do you mean by that?

D: Pre-primer is a little paperback book. And when we taught reading, we taught from experience charts. You'd say, "Let's make a little story about what you did today." And maybe it would be four lines, I came to school, I saw a dog on the way. And then they'd read that as a whole. Then you'd make another chart, the same thing and cut it in lines, cut the words apart, take it apart so they'd learn the words and the phrases from the story that they had made. We did a lot of that before we ever went into a book. Then the pre-primer was this little book, regular book size, but very thin and paper covered usually. And the reading in those would be, maybe two lines. "See Dick, See Jane, See Dick Run." And after they'd had experience charts, it was very easy. They could pick up that book and maybe recognize something right away. And you were off to a good start.

O: Do you think, then, that the students responded quickly to learning how to read. Was everything natural?

D: Yes. It's just natural there'd be some youngsters that it was harder for and you took a longer time getting

them started. And that's why you had your three reading groups.

O: Was it an ethnic neighborhood that you were teaching in?

D: Yes, but their background for overseas was a generation away.

O: What nationalities would they have come from?

D: Well, we had the Hungarian and the Slovak people. And the parents were so wonderful to send their children to school and be with you and understand. They were the background of the school because they knew that their children were in good hands and they cooperated. It was great.

O: That leads to a question about PTA. [Parents-Teachers Association] To what extent was your involvement in PTA?

D: Very much. And we had a very strong PTA at Taft School for awhile and they did a lot of nice things for the school and turnout was really great. And I really pulled a boner though, the first year I taught. The PTA night came along and it was the night that we usually went out to Idora Park to see the Lillian Desmond Show. So, I went out to see the show, I thought that was perfectly all right, and didn't go to PTA. But I found out later you went to PTA whatever was on your calender for the week. (Laughter)

The PTA had fairs and then something else, of course, you gave the entertainment. And, oh, as long as I was at Taft School, we did not give very many, but when we gave them, every child in the school had some part in it. It wasn't just a few that could do this.

O: What kind of entertainment? Do you remember?

D: Well, one was called 'Seasons of the Year,' I think. And we went through every month and each grade had a month and they did something. Of course, May they did the 'Maypole Dance.' Christmas was easy, they did all kinds of things and went through the year. And one year Taft School--I can't remember why we couldn't use our gym--but we had to take all the youngsters up at Woodrow Wilson to practice, which is three blocks up the street. And rain or shine we'd trot up there to do our practicing. And when we gave an entertainment we'd usually give it two nights, because with every child in the school, every parent would come and bring aunts and uncles.

- O: At the parent-teacher meetings, at PTA, was this the same parent teacher meetings where you would discuss the child's behavior in school? Is this something different then?
- D: No, PTAs were generally social. If you needed to discuss anything about the child, then we had parent-teacher conferences.
- O: Where would you have that?
- D: At school, after school. But then, during the course of my teaching, there was one year when it was decided that every teacher would visit every home of children in the class. And you did that, but you did that by appointment. That's the only fair way. . . And I'm just sure that you'd call up and say, "Would it be convenient for me to stop in this afternoon at 4:00?" They'd always say, "Yes." But I bet they thought, "Well, here it is again." (Laughter) I think it really is better, it seems to me, for the parent to come to school.
- O: Some teachers say that being a teacher is a 24 hour job. Do you feel that this was so in your own life?
- D: Well, maybe not quite that strong, but teaching came first and it didn't mean just while the children were in school. I mean, you had getting ready, you had things that were on your mind and maybe when you came home, you could almost forget school for a little while.
- O: Do you think it would be easier to forget it more if you were teaching in a kindergarten? Did you have a lot of paperwork to do?
- D: In kindergarten, no, I did not have a lot of that work. The thing that I had in kindergarten that took up my time was getting materials ready to use. And I must say, I don't really believe in the way they're teaching kindergarteners today. I cannot see pushing reading and number work into the kindergarten. I know there are children who can do this, but there are so many that can't. I'm sure you must be frustrating some of these youngsters. And to try to teach a child to read when they don't know which end of the book to hold up, it seems to me we're pushing. Too many of them are learning to read before they can tie their shoes. There are so many things you can do in a kindergarten situation that doesn't involved actual book reading.
- O: And they'd still be learning.

- D: Yes. There are plenty of learning situations, situations that would help you when it is time to read. Just some of the different exercises, to pick out things that are alike and things that are different. Those are the kind of things that really help when it comes then, to reading.
- O: When you were teaching, would you have liked to have seen any changes made, like when you were teaching in the 1930s and the 1940s? Was there anything that you would like to have seen done differently?
- D: I don't think so, Jeanne. We were so glad when we went off half day sessions and had a room of our own. The cooperation always seemed to be so great.
- O: Really? That was going to be one of my questions about what exactly was the cooperation?
- D: You're principal cooperated with and there was never any trouble from downtown. No, it seems to me. . .
- O: Could you tell me who some of the principals were and the teachers that you worked with?
- D: Yes. I taught first for Fred Sexton, then for Harry Geis, then Miss Dingman came to Taft School and I taught for her many, many years and then she retired before I did. I taught for Ted Vestal until I retired in 1970. And I always appreciated working for Miss Dingman because I remember one time when Mr. Wanamaker was going to be coming in as a new superintendent in Youngstown. He came out to visit our school and it was just after Thanksgiving and he walked into this big kindergarten and all the Thanksgiving things were gone and I was getting ready to put up all the Christmas things and it just wasn't there. He came in and I said, "Oh, I'm so sorry you came now. The turkeys have gone and Santa Claus isn't here yet." (Laughter) But, then he asked Miss Dingman something about kindergarten and she said, "You ask Miss Davies, she is the one that is kindergarten trained and I do what she wants to do as far as kindergarten goes." And it was the finest compliment I could have had from anybody.
- O: Do you remember who some of the other teachers were that you worked with?
- D: Well, there was Ruth Barr, and of course, Julie Filson, Irene Ward's sister, and Margaret Nieman and when I first started to teach, there was a teacher by the name

of Bessie Ashwood. She had been my teacher at Washington School. She was English.

O: Did they offer you any advice as a new teacher?

D: No, except Miss Cowden. I mean, I always felt as if I could go to Laura Jane Cowden if I needed to. When I see her now she says, "Oh," and we talk about when I first started teaching.

O: Were there any male primary school teachers?

D: Not until lately, or not in the primary, but we had sixth grade and seventh grade, Joe Yurko and . . . But men came in.

O: Do you remember what your salary was?

D: I started to teach at \$1,150.

O: This would be in 1929?

D: Yes. And then came the Depression and we went down. We went down and some of it we just didn't get on time. Then finally we made up. And then, after the Depression was over and we stayed on this one level, they raised it to what we would have been making that year had there been no Depression.

O: Did it affect you financially not getting a pay check every month? I mean, were you still living in a home or renting out?

D: Not in my situation as much because I lived here with my aunt and uncle and we just managed to get along nicely. They knew eventually we'd pay our room and board if we couldn't do it then. In fact, when we did get money, we got lump sum and we'd pay off anything we owed. And that summer, the teacher that lived with me, Lucille Andrews, and I went to Europe.

O: Oh that's nice. What summer? What year would this be?

D: That would be summer of 1932.

O: Were you a little bit frightened about going to Europe? I mean, did you hear about what was going on in Europe?

D: No.

O: Where did you go, first of all?

- D: We went to England, France, Belgium and Switzerland. Well, no one would believe it, but we went for seven weeks for \$450. We went practically steerage on the ship. But we got along all right.
- O: Really, do you remember what the name of the ship was that you went on?
- D: Franconia. And then we were just to go to England and Belgium and France.
- O: Why did you go then? Just as a vacation?
- D: It was just something we wanted to do. And when we had gotten there we had met two people who were going to Switzerland and they said, "Why don't you come to Switzerland?" We said, "We don't have a ticket to go to Switzerland." And we came to find out and we talked to different people and this one man said, "Well, I've been there before and if you'd like to go along I'll see that you get on the right train." And so we wired my father for \$75 so we could go to Switzerland. My father was out on the golf course. It was on a Sunday. And he was so worried. He thought I was over there starving till he got that money to me. But we came back with, I think we had a nickle between us.
- O: You say you were living with this teacher?
- D: Yes, Lucille Andrews and I lived here with my aunt and uncle and she taught over at West. We were roommates in Oberlin, gone through high school in Canfield.
- O: I should have asked you this before, but what made you come to Youngstown to teach?
- D: Well, I'd always lived in Youngstown up till just the four years I went to high school in Canfield.
- O: How was your interview? Did you have to go for an interview?
- D: Yes, I went down to Mr. Bunn and had my interview.
- O: Was he Board of Education President?
- D: He was superintendent.
- O: Was that the first teaching job then, that you had?
- D: Yes. That was the first teaching job and it was about

the end of when it was easy to get jobs because then along came the Depression and it was hard to get a job for a while.

- O: Going back to the different programs for the kids, how about at Halloween? Did they have something special for the kids?
- D: Oh, we had a Halloween parade.
- O: A parade?
- D: Everyone would come dressed up.
- O: What would they dress up as? Do you remember some of the costumes?
- D: The ones that were the cutest were the ones whose mothers made something to dress them up, little pilgrims, and Indians and hobgoblins of all kinds or somebody would be dressed up as a toe dancer and a lot of ghosts. But we had a regular route and people all came out and watched as we paraded.
- O: Do you remember the route that you would take?
- D: Sure. We came out of Taft School and go east down Boston Avenue and then across to Avondale. Then up Avondale to South Avenue and then back South Avenue and turn. And a crowded parade route. Teachers dressed up too.
- O: Honestly? Did you get dressed up too?
- D: Sure.
- O: What did you get dressed up as?
- D: Well, I had an Hawaiian outfit one time I wore. And another time I was a bum, I was an old bum.
- O: What time of the day would this be at? Maybe the whole day?
- D: This would be afternoon. We had almost regular school in the morning, almost regular school I say. Then they'd come back in the afternoon dressed up. And we'd parade and then have a party in our rooms.
- O: What kind of party would it be like?

D: It would be cupcakes, cookies made by homeroom mothers, and they would help.

O: What's the homeroom mothers?

D: Now the homeroom mothers were PTA ladies and each room chose one of the mothers of the children in the room to be the homeroom mother and they would help us with refreshments.

O: Did they have a program like that for other holidays throughout the year?

D: Well, we didn't do too much as a school at Thanksgiving time, but in kindergarten, we went all out for pilgrims and Indians and we made butter.

O: You churned butter?

D: Churned butter and we made applesauce.

O: Honestly?

D: We'd put cream in a jar and shake it. You put your cream in a jar and they'd sit in a circle and pass the jar around and each one would give it a shake until the butter came. And oh, we popped popcorn and usually have it at Thanksgiving time then I'd save enough so it would be a little bit stale and we'd string it at Christmas time for the Christmas tree. So you see, up at Arms Museum it's nothing new for me to string popcorn.

O: When you say they used a popcorn popper, what kind of popcorn popper did you use?

D: I had an electric popcorn popper.

O: You had a popper then and used it?

D: Yes.

O: Oh, I bet the kids had fun.

D: Oh, yes. And when we made applesauce, I would quarter the apples and take the core out with a knife and they'd pick the seeds out, any seeds that were left. And then we didn't peel them. We'd cook the apples that way then put them through a dilver that strains it.

O: Where would you cook it at, the apples?

- D: I had a hot plate there in kindergarten.
- O: So, they would string popcorn too then, see that.
- D: Yes, the strung popcorn.
- O: You had a tree in the room?
- D: Oh naturally, we'd put a tree in.
- O: Where would you get the tree from?
- D: I usually went down to South Avenue. That's where I bought my tree this past Christmas and they said, "We've seen you." And I said, "You saw me for years."
- O: Where was this at?
- D: Down South Avenue about Dewey where they had trees for sale. Yes, I loved Christmas time. One time I had to be out of school. I had surgery. And I said, "When am I going back to school?" And they said, "Well, it should be a month." And I said, "I don't care, just so I get back the first of December," because that was a fun time to me. And of course, we made presents for their mothers. One of the things that I made more than once were these clay hand plaques. And that came to be almost a request.
- O: You'd have the kids who'd put their hands in there.
- D: They'd get the clay all pressed and then they'd push their hands in there and they painted them. They were the big things. And another year I gathered dried materials, goldenrod, anything that was dried and on a clay base we made a dried bouquet and that was something. But all fall I had things hanging up in my office, bunches of things. And they'd bring some things.
- O: How would they decorate the Christmas tree? Would they just be mostly the popcorn?
- D: I had decorations that I collected as I traveled. When I traveled I had brought something home for my tree always and I had those for my school tree. And we'd put them on. PTA would have favors when they had their Christmas luncheon, all those things were on the tree. Children helped, the lower branches, they could put those on and then we filled in with the popcorn and cranberry.
- O: Did they ever exchange gifts among themselves?

D: No, we never went into that.

O: Did you ever get gifts?

D: Oh yes. I had some real lovely things and we tried to play it down. That really wasn't necessary.

O: Okay, you said you got handkerchiefs.

D: Yes, a lot of beautiful handkerchiefs. And every once in awhile I find some little knick-knack that came from one of the youngsters in school.

O: How about like at Valentines Day? Did you exchange?

D: Now that, they were to bring enough Valentines for everybody in the class with just their name on it and then they could give them out.

O: Did you have a box or something for them?

D: No, not a box because it took forever to call out names.

O: I could imagine.

D: But each one had their own. And again, we'd sit in a circle and they could go around and just give them out. Those days you had to be so careful. You didn't want to hurt anyone's feelings and that's why you brought for everybody.

O: I guess that would be important at that age.

D: Oh, yes. It would be very sad for somebody to have a pack like this and maybe somebody would just have the one that the teacher put in for them.

O: Did you realize how impressionable kids were?

D: Yes, I think I was aware of it.

O: And you still wanted to teach. I mean, I think it's good, but it just seems like it would be very frightening.

D: Well, yes. Sometimes you think, "Am I doing the right thing?"

O: Because they're so young and you think it would affect them the rest of their time. Did you ever see students afterwards?

- D: Yes. Working down in the hospital gift shop not too long ago and a young man came in and I saw him turn around and look at me and then go on. And as he came up to the desk I saw that he was one of the workers in the hospital and he said, "Aren't you Miss Davies?" And I said, "Yes. I know you but I can't put a name with you right now." And he told me his name and I said, "Oh, and how's your brother and your sister and all them?" And so then he turned to the person who was next to him and he said, "She's the one that taught me to tie my shoes." And I said, "Do you still tie them?" And he said, "No, I wear boots." Well, you can't teach school for 41 years in one building and not run up against somebody you know practically everyplace you go.
- O: Right. At the Museum have you ever seen anybody?
- D: Yes, once in awhile someone has come up there. And of course, when the different schools come up every once in a while I see people. Now, Taft School has been up there twice when I've been there. I haven't been on the schedule to take them through, but I met Jackie Garwin who teaches there now with her group.
- O: What would the kids wear to school in kindergarten or primary school, whatever?
- D: They wore dresses. Little girls all wore dresses up until about the last years that I taught. And the boys wore little suits, many of them in a long pants suit, not this knicker kind of stuff.
- O: How about for the teachers? Was there a dress code for teachers?
- D: Well, there didn't have to be. We just wore dresses and that was it, until the pants became popular. As long as I was teaching, I don't think anyone wore pants to school, but then the code came out a nice slack suit was perfectly all right for school.
- O: Would a teacher be allowed to stay if she got married?
- D: We went through a time, no, that married teachers had to quit. Now this would be back in the 1930's probably.
- O: What would the reasoning be behind that?
- D: Because there were other people who needed jobs that weren't working and if a teacher married, there was an income coming into that family.

O: Okay, moving up now to World War II. Did they have the air raid drills or things like that?

D: Oh yes.

O: What would you do then with your kids?

D: When the signal came, it depended what room you were in, but most of the rooms, you would go out of your room and stand up with your arms against the wall with your head on your arms facing the wall.

O: How did you explain this to the kids?

D: We just did it and then after that they. . .

O: But did they know why they were doing it?

D: Well, they knew that there was a danger. I don't suppose they knew exactly what kind, but they knew that something could happen when that bell rang.

O: Did they ever have any relatives that were killed in the war that they would come to school maybe and tell you about?

D: I never had that happen, no, they didn't

O: How about field trips?

D: Oh yes. One of the nicest field trips we took was just up to the fire station on the corner of Boston and South Avenue because we could walk without any trouble and the firemen up there were so great. Well, one of them I had had in school many years before and they told us all about that, and let a few of them maybe climb up on the engine. That was always a successful field trip. I never would venture too far where we had to take a bus or have parents drive. We had a family that lived one block away that in the spring had the most beautiful daffodils and the violets, all the spring things. And so we made a couple trips down there every spring.

O: Do you remember the family, who they were?

D: Crononwett was the name of the family.

O: How about the concerts?

D: I didn't teach in the grades that go to the concerts.

O: Well then Butler Art would be for the older grades that they would do that.

D: We tried not to take any field trips that weren't going to mean something to them.

O: How about when the circus came to town?

D: We never took our youngsters to the circus. And there was only one time that I remember that there was a parade but I think school was out, there was some reason, the parents could take their youngsters to that parade. We didn't take them as a whole.

O: What parade would that be?

D: It was a Barnum and Baily Circus Parade. But when I taught Head Start one summer and the circus was out at the Canfield Fairgrounds, we took 500 children out to the circus.

O: Could you explain the Head Start Program?

D: The Head Start program started for underprivileged really and they would go to school. It was all of July. I think it was a six week program. And it was set up in the city schools and each school had a teacher and a helper and it was run very much as a kindergarten program. That's the age youngster that was in there. And I was in it for two years. The first year I was set up with a situation to teach and they had put two units in one school and not enough children came for two units and I thought, "Well, that puts me out." But Martha Lindsey who was at the head of it then said, "We just knew that was going to happen because we want you and Julie Costa, a kindergarten teacher at Lincoln, you're going to be our supervisors to go around to the different units." And that was an eye opener for me. I'd always taught and been in my own little place and gotten along and just to go and make our calls and see what everybody was doing or not doing. It really was a good program because it did have these youngsters ready to go into kindergarten with some background. I enjoyed that program although it did get to be pretty well regulated, governmentally regulated. And I was sorry about the waste. I mean we had government money to buy books and to buy anything we needed, more than we needed. And in order to keep the money, it had to be spent. And so it was too bad, but we did buy the books and they were able to be used.

O: Recess time, what would that be like for the kids?

- D: We never really had a recess time. We had a basement period and you regulated your basement period and your time in the gym with the whole school because the whole school couldn't all be in the hall at the same time. So first and second grade got to choose the time that would be best for them then the older children worked around that program. And you had so long in the gym, a twenty minute period. Of course, if it was nice you went outside.
- O: What would you do? What would be some of the things you would do?
- D: We'd play a lot of the games. At one time the physical education program was under a supervisor and we'd go once a month down to the Board of Education and learn games we were to teach and dances and so forth.
- O: Really? Like what? Can you remember some?
- D: Oh, we would do "How Do You Do My Partner", none of the fancy ones. We would have almost calisthenics that we would put the children through.
- O: "How Do You Do My Partner," what is it? I'm not familiar with that one, what is it?
- D: Oh, you'd have a partner and you'd make a circle and you'd say, "How do you do my partner?" And you'd bow, "And how do you do today?" And you'd bow to the other partner and "Will you dance in a circle? I'll show you the way." And then they'd skip in a circle.
- O: Really?
- D: Oh gee, I can't imagine anybody not knowing these.
- O: Now, I remember "Old MacDonald", "Old MacDonald Had a Farm", and I don't remember "How Do You Do My Partner".
- D: Oh, and "Lassie, Did you Ever See a Lassie", do you know that?
- O: No.
- D: Well, you'd sing, "Did you ever see a Lassie go this way and that." And somebody chooses something you should do. "This way and that way." And the whole class would do it.
- O: Now I know, right. How about "Mother May I?" Was there

something like that?

D: Oh yes.

O: Oh then the one about--they line up and you say take three big steps and then they say, "Mother May I" or if they just start off and do them without saying "Mother May I" they have to come back and start all over.

O: I remember that.

D: Then I liked free recess. Take them down to the playground and see what they do. And we'd take jump ropes and of course, later on at Taft School, we had the playground apparatus that they could use.

O: What would that be?

D: The swings and the sliding board. But we were so surprised, children got to the place where they hung around and didn't know what to do on their own. And so that's why we started taking so many kickballs and jump ropes. And they eventually got in. And children didn't know how to skip when they came to kindergarten. That was a big thing, teaching them how to skip, "Hop on one foot, hop on the other foot." It seems that they didn't go off on their own and do these things until they got into school and they found a need for it.

O: So you taught your children how to skip. (Laughter)

D: Sure, many times.

O: Did you ever have any of the older students help you in your classroom or at recess?

D: No, we never had that. I know some schools did.

O: How about student teachers, would they ever come?

D: Yes. I had many student teachers and I ended up with one of my student teachers being my helper in the kindergarten, Melissa Radovic, Melissa Varner now, and she came to me as a student teacher and when she graduated she came out Taft School to teach.

O: What did you tell the student teachers or what did you let them do? Were you there when they were. . .

D: I tried to stay in the background and one of the things

that I always said, "You don't have to do things the way I do them. It's the end result. You may find a better way than I to do it." And then you'd just stay in the background.

O: Did you ever give them any advice though?

D: Yes.

O: Like what?

D: Well, if you'd see somebody going on with a lesson or project or a conversation and maybe she has the attention of three or four children and the rest are all lost, then you talk to her about that.

O: I think if I was student teaching, I'd probably come up to you and say, "How do you keep their attention?" Now what would you say?

D: Well, it's the tone of your voice and your enthusiasm as much as anything you have to say. I wondered about that today when we were taking these 23 kindergarteners through the museum. It was a little hard because naturally, they were at a new place and, "What's this? What's this?" And they couldn't wait until we got to tell them, but it comes.

O: You've been answering this throughout the entire interview, but what did you really enjoy most about teaching?

D: I think one of the nice things about teaching, it's not monotonous. You can start with a plan as slick as a whistle but you don't know what's going to happen to it. And there's something comes up almost everyday that will help you through the day. You think, well, maybe some good thing or maybe something you'd say, "Well, I'm glad that doesn't happen everyday." But it's the joy of a differentness, not the monotony.

O: What do you think would be a disadvantage or were there any disadvantages to teaching?

D: There are disadvantages if you really have it in your heart to be a good teacher because you'll come up against somebody you just know you're not getting through to. And it's hard to take until you realize you can't do everything with everybody. And if they don't end up a total flop, it's all right.

O: Getting back to your kids now, and religion, even when

you were in kindergarten then, did you use religion?

D: Yes. We never did dwell on it, but once in awhile maybe I'd read a psalm. We never went off on any dissertations of anything that I didn't think they needed. And as I say, once in awhile somebody would come and say they had a little prayer they wanted. Well that was good, not very often because it doesn't come that spontaneous. But of course, they came from all religions and there didn't seem to be any assertiveness or any difference as far as religion.

O: Did you notice any difference in children's behavior after religion was taken out of the schools? Do you think this had any effect at all?

D: No, not with that age youngsters.

O: In the 1950's, there was that Supreme Court decision about the desegregation. Was there ever any problem at all with desegregation and segregation?

D: No, see, not where I was, we had nothing.

O: Were there blacks and white students together?

D: We didn't have any black students until about 1960 and then we only had one or two.

O: Were they moving into the neighborhood or were they bussed?

D: No, they came in, they had moved in.

O: Did the children respond to them differently?

D: No.

O: As you get older they have these aptitude tests, now, did they have that at that age, an achievement test?

D: No. We had an achievement test that they used to give at the end of kindergarten to adjust maybe for first year. Maybe they'd divide them up into two classes for first year. Some of these tests would give an I.Q.

O: Did a first grade teacher ever come back to you and. . .

D: And wonder why this happened with this person or should this person be doing what that one was doing? Yes, very often, you were surprised. Or maybe sometimes

at the beginning of the year we would go to the first year teacher and give her little hints of something to look for.

O: In kindergarten did you teach printing at all?

D: No.

O: When would that start?

D: First year. Maybe in kindergarten they would learn to do their name. I mean, if they showed any desirability to do that, we went ahead with that.

O: Can you think of any events throughout your years of teaching--I know this is going to be a difficult question too--that stand out as very significant or things that I may not have covered that you remember? Or like current events? Were there certain current events that affected the way you taught? Do you understand the question?

D: I think I know what you mean. I think one of the biggest things was when the war started, was when Japan hit Pearl Harbor, and that was on a Sunday, and when you went to school on Monday, it was very upsetting. These children were upset, "My father might have to go to war." This thing that happened so fast. And that was one of the big moving things.

O: How did you respond to the children?

D: We just had to calm down and tell them that this had just happened and people were saying all kinds of things that probably weren't true and we'd have to wait and see what would happen. And with that age youngster, that would calm them. Of course, when they got home they would probably be riled up again.

O: Physically, did you touch children?

D: Oh, yes. Pat them on the shoulder, pat them on the head and once in a while wish I could pat them on the seat.
(Laughter)

O: Did you ever have to paddle a student?

D: No, I didn't. I tapped somebody on the head and they turned around and looked, they knew why. But, no not any physical. . .

- O: How about testing for any kind of physical illnesses or for the slow learners? Did they have things like this when you were teaching?
- D: We had a school nurse that was in the school and any physical thing that we noticed with youngsters she would take care of. Now, the slow learners, there wasn't too much we did at that age. There are times, though, when we kept youngsters back in kindergarten.
- O: Oh, really?
- D: We felt that we'd have to consult parents but feel as if they had just not made any progress at all and weren't ready to face the first year program.
- O: How old would a child normally be when they start kindergarten?
- D: They would be five.
- O: Can you think then of any other anecdotes or incidents that may have happened that I haven't covered?
- D: Oh my, there's so many things. I don't think of anything right now. But I always enjoy seeing people now when I meet them, they say, "Miss Davies!" and they look at me as if they think, "I can't believe you're still around." (Laughter)
- O: Were you in a union at all as a teacher?
- D: No, I belong to the Youngstown Education Association, not the union. At the latter part there was a ~~vying~~ between the union and the Education Association.
- O: Were there ever strikes?
- D: There was one while I . . .
- O: When was this?
- D: That would have been in 1960 sometime.
- O: What was it for? Do you recall?
- D: Salary.
- O: Was it a long strike?
- D: No, something like three days.

- O: You mentioned on your sheet here that you belong to the Retired Teachers Organization. What do you do at the meetings?
- D: Oh, they have different programs. I must confess I haven't been to one this year. They're on Wednesday and Wednesday is my very busy day. I don't get anywhere. It's also on my list at the museum not to go anywhere on Wednesday.
- O: Well, I want to thank you. I can't think of any questions right now. We've covered so much. It was so interesting to hear.
- D: Well, thank you. I enjoyed doing it too. Of course, I didn't make any notes because I knew once I got started it would just flow.
- O: You mentioned before about the kindergarten. You said you really enjoyed kindergarten rather than first and you taught second grade too then?
- D: Just one semester I taught second grade. But after I had taught kindergarten for several years, then one year they didn't have money for kindergarten and so I went back to first year for one year and then came back to kindergarten. So, I was just out of kindergarten one year. It was a satisfaction teaching first grade that I didn't realize before because what they know at the end of first grade you've taught them.
- O: I can imagine that you'd feel very good about that.
- D: They didn't always make you feel good, but you know what you'd accomplished because they came and they couldn't read and they didn't know numbers as a rule and what they had with them at the end of the first year, you could take credit for a lot of that.
- O: What about nursery school? Did they have nursery schools at this time?
- D: Yes. I could have taught nursery school from Oberlin and at one time I thought I'd be interested in nursery school, but your responsibility is ever greater in nursery school.
- O: Did they have nursery schools here in Youngstown?
- D: Just private ones.

O: Here's another question I should have asked you at the beginning, why did you choose kindergarten students?

D: When I knew I wanted to teach, that's what I wanted to teach and it was always kindergarten.

O: Well, again, thank you very much and if you think of anything else too, you could always add it later on on your transcript. I know there's so much and I feel I wish I knew all the right questions so that I could tap all this information from you.

D: Oh, well, I was glad to do that for you Jeanne.

O: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW