

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Westlake Terrace Project

Personal Experiences

O. H. 658

GERTRUDE HENDRICKS

Interviewed

by

Elisa Calabrese

on

December 9, 1985

## GERTRUDE POTTER HENDRICKS

Gertrude (Peg) Elizabeth Potter, the daughter of Caleb Fuller Potter and Kathryn May (Rogers) Potter, was born on February 23, 1907 in Worthington, Ohio. After graduating from Worthington High School, Peg attended Ohio State University where she received a B.S in 1928 and an M.S. in 1931. Gertrude Potter became Mrs. Oscar W. Hendricks on August 1, 1931. She has two sons: William H. and Robert C. William is First Vice-President of Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland. Robert is Senior Research Engineer for N.A.S.A.'s Lewis Research Center of Cleveland.

The impressive employment record of Gertrude Hendricks includes: Home Economics Supervisor of Women's Projects, WPA 1935-1939, Farm Security Administration 1939-1942, instructor of psychology of marriage at Youngstown State University 1942-1975, and the Youngstown Board of Education where she retired in 1972 as director of Family Education with 30 years of service.

Mrs. Gertrude Hendricks has received many honors, awards and much recognition for her academic excellence and community service. On November 8, 1970 she received a most outstanding award of recognition--the Centennial Award of the Academic Faculty of Vocational-Technical Education from the College of Education at Ohio State University. Also, a graduate scholarship at YSU bearing her name was set up by the Youngstown Family Life Council in 1972.

Mrs. Hendricks is a member of Trinity Methodist Church. Organizations of which she is affiliated include: Phi Upsilon Omicron (Honorary Home Economics), Delta Kappa Gamma (Honorary Teaching), Quota Club (Women's Service Organization), Youngstown Federation of Women's Club, Ohio Congress P.T.A., Mahoning Retired Teaching Association, United Nations (Youngstown Chapter), and serves as a consultant for the Mahoning County Nutrition Program.

A special interest of Mrs. Hendricks is people. She has devoted many years of her time and energy to the cause of helping humanity.

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INTERVIEWEE: GERTRUDE HENDRICKS

INTERVIEWER: Elisa Calabrese

SUBJECT: WPA, Farmer Security Administration, Youngstown school system, Hagstrum House

DATE: December 9, 1985

C: This is an interview with Mrs. Hendricks for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Westlake Terrace, by Elisa Calabrese, on December 9, 1985, at 738 Mineral Springs Avenue, at approximately 2:30 p.m.

Just to get started just tell me a little bit about yourself, your origins, your work, and those types of things.

H: I wasn't a native of here at all. I married and came into the area. I came into the area in 1931. I guess it was September of 1931 when I came into this area.

I came into the area after having my two degrees from Ohio State. I had my degree in home economics in 1928 and then my master's in child development and parent education in 1931. I was married during that time. I married Oscar Hendricks. It was in the Depression years. My husband taught at East High. One morning he went to school and he had a heart attack and died, in May of 1935. So then I was thrown on my own to raise two children by myself, but I had my education, which was great.

The Depression was deep. People didn't have jobs, but there was some WPA (Works Progress Administration) work. Fortunately, I could get an assistant position as one of the assistant supervisors in WPA on a sewing project because I had my home economics background. So I immediately went to work. I went to work around Thanksgiving time. Then they needed a district super-

visor for the WPA women's projects in Warren and they needed one in Cleveland; they wanted one in Cincinnati and I was interviewed, but I chose the one in Warren because I thought I could manage it with my two children here. So I went to Warren. I went there in February, and then that same year they needed a state home economics supervisor at Columbus. I was offered the job and went there in September, a real break for me as my parents lived nearby on a large, dairy farm and could help with the children. Anyway, I worked from February until September in Warren covering the five upper counties; that is, Ashtabula, Trumbull, Portage, Mahoning, and Columbiana.

We worked on sewing projects; we had housekeeping aid projects; we had school lunch projects. School lunches we still have; the housekeeping aids we still have, but they are in a little different form, the same basic kind of thing for women. We did home work, that is housework for people who were physically unable to do it. At that time we just had workers who needed employment, and they worked for a living wage, and they were sent into homes to work. This was for the housekeeping aids.

As supervisor of women's professional projects I had all the records projects too, where we were copying records that were in the courthouses. Then they would put the original records in a vault and preserve those and leave the copies for the attorneys to use. Brigham Young's first marriage license is in the Chardon Court House.

I was there as I said until September. I was there while WPA was in its prime. My first assignment as the State Supervisor of Women's Projects was to try to get a diversified program for 4,000 women who were sewing on domestic sewing machines in the Cleveland Coliseum because they were producing more garments than they needed.

The purpose of WPA was to give people generally enough training so that they could go back into industry with usable skills. Certainly there weren't industrial opportunities on home sewing machines, but there would be opportunities on power machines. We tried to establish a unit with power machines, which we did for approximately 1,000 women, but we needed a diversified program too because we had to find employment for about 3,000 other women.

I had to find other kinds of projects. So they sent me to Milwaukee where there were 900 people working under one roof with a diversified program. I went up there, and I was there a week. I was trying to think of what I could do in Ohio that would be similar. I came back and wrote several different kinds of projects of which some

were institutional projects because we felt a very definite need.

We came back, but we had difficulty in getting them approved for more than three months at a time, but one day Eleanor Roosevelt visited them. She was thrilled at what she saw and made sure the Bureau of Budgets gave us continued approval. She also visited the Dormitory for Men built under the bleachers at the Ohio State University Stadium where needy students lived (room and board) for \$3 a week. She was so excited and stated, "I always wanted to know what those dark places could be used for." She included the findings of her visit in Ohio in a subsequent "My Day" column. It was a real thrill and privilege to be hostess for such a great lady. She made me feel as comfortable as an old shoe.

We had this huge labor supply. You were just amazed of the people with the training and skills who were wanting a job just to put bread and butter on their table. At that time \$71 a month was all that they paid; that was the top wage in the industrial area for a family of four. We worked with them and we wanted to put them on these projects.

We had another project where we trained women to work in homes and be managers because there was an opportunity for a woman who could go into a home and take over and do the managing and do the buying and take care of the house. Some people were calling it maid service at that time. Of course, we called it maid service, but we also called it Home Management training because we wanted to do more than what maids had done in the past; training was the concept. We wanted the managerial part, for which we trained them.

During these years, Youngstown was more politically conservative than<sup>^</sup>it now is. In my opinion we were hurt somewhat, because we did not want to be controlled by the Democratic money. We suffered, therefore, in contrast to other communities like Toledo where projects were built with \$.05 paid by the city on every dollar spent by the federal government.

I had all of this experience in WPA at county, district, and state levels. I wanted to get some rural experiences with Farm Security. There was an opening for a district supervisor out at Mansfield; so I went with Farm Security. We made loans to low income families. They were basically chattel loans, things for animals, the farm, or things for your house or family--homemaking activities. I worked as a home supervisor at the county and district levels and as a Home Management and Nutrition Specialist at

the regional level covering the five midwestern states (Ohio, Iowa, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri) with headquarters in Indianapolis. The war broke out in 1941 and travel became difficult with priority given to the armed forces. I longed for a home with my boys, now eight and ten. Teaching seemed to be an answer. I thought I would like to come back to Youngstown. There was one opening to teach. Dr. George Bowman, superintendent, offered me a contract which brought me back to the Youngstown area, so I came here in 1942. I decided to settle down to teach, and I taught at Rayen. I didn't teach that full year, but during that time we established first aid, home nursing, and child care in the school's curriculum. That was September when I came. I guess it was May when I was offered the job of setting up child care centers while the women were working in the war plants. A supervisor was needed. Well, I had all this government experience, and I had day care experiences so Dr. Bowman transferred me from Rayen to the Board of Education. We set up five day care centers, three operating 24 hours a day and two operating at 12 hours a day, and nine extended centers open before and after school hours.

Kindergartens had been closed for twenty years. Good kindergarten teachers were available. Some equipment was stored in school buildings in out-of-the-way places and custodians were my best friends. What we couldn't find, we had made by a retired cabinetmaker, for you couldn't buy equipment--the war was on. All these well-equipped centers were put to good use after the war. Kindergartens were restored and kindergarten teachers as well as all other women could be married and teach. Married women were generally not employable as teachers before that time.

C: You moved back to Youngstown in 1942 you said.

H: I came back to Youngstown in 1942. I started teaching at Rayen in 1942.

C: What was Youngstown like during the war years?

H: It was great because everybody was working, not like it is today. Everybody was working. Of course, there was East Federal Street, and all that downtown business is completely gone. We had East Federal and West Federal. There was a lot of business downtown, loads of it.

C: Do you remember anything about the Westlake Terrace homes, the projects over there on Federal Street?

H: Westlake was built in 1939-1940. We did some work there, too, early during the war in that area, 1943. At that time Westlake was an upper project and a lower project. The upper project was predominantly white, and the lower project was predominantly

black. We had one center in the white area, and we had one center in the black area, but it didn't make any difference who could . . . The children could go to any school. I had black instructors though in the predominantly black center and white in the predominantly white center.

C: They had the same qualifications though?

H: Yes, yes, they had to be. The qualifications had to be; I couldn't put them on the payroll. It was just like a teacher today who can't teach unless she has a certification. That was what we had then. Some of them had temporary certification because they hadn't been in school for a while. The state would give them temporary certification, but we had constant training programs. Every week there was a training program that I held. It was a two hour training program. It took some additional training at that time.

In the training projects conducted for the residents in this area, I remember doing several different ones there. In a family life project we tried to help them to improve their homes, and we had group work up there too. I established groups. One of the last group projects was for them to band together to improve their homes, and if they wanted to make drapes, they did it. In some places they didn't make drapes; they just did the cleaning.

In the housing area they had problems of getting people to use the right things to clean with. Maybe they hadn't lived in a home like that before. You had linoleum floors and you had blocks, and they had to be treated a little differently, and they had the counter tops, and they had to be a little different than the wooden ones, maybe, different than some of them were used to. And there were the walls; if they washed the walls right, they were grand, but if they didn't wash the walls right, they would make an awful mess out of them. So we would have each in the groups . . . One of the members in the group would have the wall washing project, and another one would have the floors or the draperies as another one. They would divide up so that somebody in that group would have one of those projects.

I can remember the drapery ones and why they wanted the drapes. I asked them why they wanted to cover up all of their windows because they only had that one window for light anyway. They said, "Well, Miss, you don't live up here. Everybody comes and peeks in your window; so you have to have heavy drapes to cut the light." I never realized that until I was in that area. It was certainly true. It was so true. They needed to have blinds. They didn't have blinds so they had to have drapes that they could pull.



C: Yes, everybody lived so close together.

H: They lived so close. I had not had that experience of group living. We never had it before with the people's housing. They hadn't had it before, and they were finding it very difficult and they were also finding it difficult for people coming into their kitchens and sitting and spending an awful lot of time, sometimes eating the food they needed themselves. There was a lot that went on in those groups that we shared. So then that got ideas out and we did it in terms of sections in the project. There would be a group in this section and that one there. You only had the housing authorities who could help you and those who wanted to do it.

Of course, today it is quite different. It is entirely different. You just don't take people out of poor areas and put them in better areas without giving them some help. There just happened to be some help in training of how you take care of things. That was what we were doing at that time. Of course, no longer are those programs available.

C: You worked with Westlake during the 1940's, 1950's?

H: That would be in the 1950's. I have reports of everything I have done since I have been in this area. I have kept definite detail records of all of the groups.

C: Do you have anything else you would like to add about Westlake in particular?

H: I haven't been there for a long time, and I don't know what it would be like. Wait a minute, I did go back when we had that special money for the last five years (1967-1972). We did another phase. It was upholstering. We did upholstering in the projects up there. They would bring their kids, and the kids would be really quiet. They didn't bother us. We had that project in one of the washrooms that Mr. Chester Amedia, Director of Metropolitan Housing Authority, turned over. We left our equipment there, and they left their chairs. They would buy their own materials, and they would get their materials from Mr. Jewel up here from Jewel Upholstery, on Glenwood Avenue. He gave us a lot of stuff at very reasonable prices. They would make their selections for what they wanted for their chairs. We didn't help them with the money. They had their own money for it. Once in a while I would take somebody if they couldn't buy much. Basically, they did their own thing, and they learned how to do it. Some of them are still upholstering. That was one of those projects there at Westlake.

C: Thank you very much, Mrs. Hendricks. It is very much appreciated.