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Contact:

Special Collections, University of Delaware Library
181 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19717-5267
302.831.2229 / 302.831.1046 (fax)
<http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec>
askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

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FAULINE DYSON
RETIRED PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHER
NEGRO ONE-ROOM SCHOOLS

Interviewed by:
John H. Gauger
August 25, 1966

Transcribed by:
Marie McNulty

PAULINE DYSON

- 1921 Teacher at Kirkwood in 1921, then St. Georges
- 1926-57 Taught at the State Line School
- 1953 Governor Boggs presented Outstanding Citizen in
Brandywine Hundred Area Award given by the
American Legion Post
- Board of Directors of Brandywine Branch YMCA
- Boy Scout Service Award--only woman to receive
this award

Interview with Mrs. Pauline Dyson, retired public school teacher, August 25, 1966, by John H. Gauger.

Q This interview is with Mrs. Pauline Dyson, retired teacher and community leader. The interview was conducted on August 25, 1966, by John H. Gauger. Mrs. Dyson, are you a native Delawarean?

A No, I'm from Washington. I'm a graduate from the schools of Washington, D.C.

Q How did you come to Delaware?

A Well, I married, and my husband came to Delaware, and when he came to Delaware, I was interested in the school system, so I went to Delaware State College, Dover, and there I got my Delaware Teacher's Certificate, and that was in 1921. And I have been teaching in Delaware until 1957.

Q Um hmm. How did you first become interested in teaching?

A I had always wanted to be a teacher. When I was in the third grade, I said I was gonna be a nurse or a teacher. Now, my father said, "You are too short to be a nurse," so I said, "Well, then, I'll be a teacher." And I'd always wanted to be a teacher, and I've never been sorry that I took up teaching as my profession.

Q Now, did you teach at the same school the whole time?

A No, my first job was in Kirkwood, and then my second job was in St. Georges. When I was there, Mr. Stahl [sp] wrote to me and asked me to come for an interview here at Claymont. That was in 1925. So I came to Claymont with an interview with Mr. Stahl, and ever since then I've been in Claymont.

Q Hmm. What was the Claymont school like when you first came to it?

A When I first came here, they had one building, and that building housed the elementary and the high school, and even the kindergarten. But out here on Hickman Road, we had the school--one of the DuPont schools--for colored children, and that was a brick building, a very nice building, and I enjoyed teaching there.

Q And you taught how many grades at one time?

A I taught six grades at one time. At one time I had 45 children in that one room, and they said if I could get a few more, they would get another teacher and open the other room--it was a two room building. But I didn't succeed in getting enough children for two teachers. Then Depression came on, and when Depression came on, the people left the community and it reduced my enrollment down to 25.

Q Oh, I see. How did you manage to handle teaching that many students at one time?

- A As I taught, it became easy, it didn't seem hard to me. I think teachers with one grade have the same problems that I had in the six grades, because we do have to arrange our children according to their ability. And that's all you do in the six grades. You have them arranged according to their ability, and you go from one group to the other.
- Q Keep one group busy working while you're working with another group.
- A Yes, that's right.
- Q Do you have any outstanding students that you particularly recall?
- A Yes, I do. There's a boy named Clifford Isaac. He's now a noted surgeon in Detroit. I have another boy, Richard Bird, who's teaching school in Wilmington at Stubbs School. I have another boy who's a lawyer, Robert [sounds like "Williard"].
- Q Hmm.
- A I taught one girl who is a teacher.
- Q Do you see these people often, now?
- A Why, they come to see me whenever they are this way. They've never forgotten me.
- Q That's wonderful. Well, then after the children left your school, then they had to go all the way into Wilmington?
- A They had to go into Howard High School. That was prior to 1952. They had to go to Howard High.
- Q Then in 1952 all the schools around here merged with the Claymont District.
- A And in 1952 we had some children who went down to the Claymont School and told Mr. Stahl that they wanted to be admitted to that school, that they didn't think it was fair for them to pass two high schools--that's the Mt. Pleasant School and the Claymont School--and go all the way into Wilmington. Mr. Stahl very graciously received those children.
- Q Did you encounter any problems during this period?
- A We didn't have many problems, because I talked to the children and I told them that they wouldn't find the same treatment there as they would at Howard High, and that when they were called things that they knew they weren't, don't even worry.
- Q Um hmm. So they . . . they didn't want 'em and . . .
- A They didn't know . . . and we got along fine. One of the first graduates from Claymont School was Spencer Robinson, and the other was my granddaughter, Merle Anderson.

Q Could you tell me about the trip you made to New York, "I Speak for Freedom," in 1952, was it?

A Yes. I was quite reluctant about going to New York. I didn't think that I could make it. I didn't think that I could even make the speech. But I got to New York--Mr. Stahl went with me, and my daughter, and I felt that I had support. I made my speech, "I Speak for Freedom," and they said that that was the best speech made on the whole program. I talked about our school and the conditions here in Claymont.

Q And how you had made the change . . .

A Yes. I had a big write-up.

Q That's wonderful. What are some of the other things that you've been involved in in the community?

A I organized in this community the Claymont Hickman Road Civic and Recreation Association. I thought that we should have an organization of our own, and we got along very well until we have no place to meet now, and we haven't had many meetings because of that. We have had one or two meetings, but they weren't the success that they were prior to the time of us not . . . of us having a place to meet. Then I worked with the Boy Scouts. I've been working with the Boy Scouts for the past 20 years.

Q Did you receive some awards from the Boy Scouts?

A Yes, I did. I received a Certificate of Merit, and I'm the only woman who the Boy Scouts have ever so honored.

Q Hmm. What about the role of the industry in this area? Did they help the schools?

A Yes, they did. During Dpression, we had lots of problems, particularly problems of food and clothing. And whenever the children would come to school and I felt that their clothings were insufficient, or would make them feel as they were not up to par with the other children, I would send them down to Mr. Maxwell, and Mr. Maxwell--he at that time, he was with the Worth Steel Company, he would give me an order, or give the child an order, to go to Marcus Hook, and there they would fit them from skin out. Once a week, the Worth Steel Company would send around a truck with fish, and you take your dishpan and go out and get just as many fish as you wanted. They even gave the people blankets so that they could keep warm.

Q Do most of the people in this area work at Worth Steel?

A Prior to the time they sold to Phoenix, you couldn't live here unless you worked for Worth Steel.

Q Oh, I see.

A But after they sold to Phoenix, Phoenix got rid of the real estate.

Phoenix sold the real estate to private owners, and so now most anybody can live in these houses. But prior to that time, you had to work for the company.

Q But they didn't have a school . . . the school was built by DuPont, you said.

A The school was built . . . well, the Worth Steel Company gave DuPont that land on which to build the school.

Q Oh, I see. Um hmm.

A Ever since the "Y" came to Claymont, I have been on the board of management, and they honored me this year to ask me to please not resign, but to continue to work with the "Y." So I work with the Brandywine "Y." I received a citation from them for bringing in the most members at one time.

Q That's very nice. Is that very close to here, the Brandywine "Y"?

A The Brandywine "Y" is well situated on Harvey Road. They do have a building there now, but prior to that time, we didn't have a building on Harvey Road. We started out at what we called the Hobby House down on Philadelphia Pike. And then we moved from one place to another, until they bought the land and built their own swimming pool and rooms for meeting on Harvey Road. But they have now gone out on the Concord Pike, they have built another building out there. But I'm still on the board now.

Q You've been involved in helping them do all this.

A Yes, I have.

Q Um hmm. Do you remember any special projects or things that you were involved with during your teaching that you'd like to tell about . . . trips that you took, that sort of thing?

A Oh, yes, we had lots of trips. Every year I would go someplace. One year we went to Washington, and there we visited the Capitol and the Monument and the Congressional Library, and the Smithsonian Institute. We also had another trip to Washington when we spent a day at the zoo. Another time we went to Valley Forge, and we spent a day at Valley Forge. And of course the little children always looked forward to going to Philadelphia to the Philadelphia Zoo. When they had the sesquicentennial in Philadelphia, we went there. I carried the children to the sesquicentennial.

Q Hmm.

A We had lots of trips. Every year we'd plan a field trip somewhere, but those are the most outstanding.

[END OF INTERVIEW]