



Citation for this collection:

MSS 179 Robert H. Richards, Jr., Delaware oral history collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware

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

Terms governing use and reproduction:

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

A note about transcriptions:

Of the original 252 audio-recordings in this collection, 212 of these tapes were transcribed around the time of the original recordings (between 1966 and 1978). In 2012, Cabbage Tree Solutions was contracted to create transcriptions for the remaining tapes. Corrections to and clarifications for all transcriptions are welcome, especially for names and places. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

Interview with Miss Quaesita Drake, retired professor of chemistry at the Women's College and the University of Delaware, July 12, 1966, by John H. Gauger.

Q . . . Quaesita Drake, retired professor of chemistry, first at the Delaware Women's College and later at the University of Delaware. The interview was conducted on July 12, 1966 by John H. Gauger. Dr. Drake, why did you first enter the field of education? Who got you interested in it?

A Oh, I wanted to teach from the time I was a child, almost. I suppose really one's always influenced by a friend or a close relative, and I was extremely fond of my mother's sister, and she was a teacher, and I always wanted to teach. And after I entered Vassar, there wasn't any question when I started to take chemistry at Vassar--I'd had a year in high school--and I knew I wanted to be a chemist. I don't think any phase of industrial chemistry entered my head--it didn't for most women. Most women had to teach chemistry, but I never wanted to do anything else except teach it. And when I graduated from Vassar, I stayed on as a graduate student for a year, and then I taught in the Chemistry Department there for three years, two years as an assistant and one year as an instructor. And during the last part of the time, I lived in the dormitory, the head of which was Winifred Robinson who afterward was the dean of the Women's College. And of course that is my immediate connection with the Women's College.

Q That's why you came to Delaware?

A Yes, very definitely. I first came down just to call on her one afternoon before I went to Chicago as a graduate student in the fall of '14. The college had just opened, and they weren't ready to open . . . and I--oh, I suppose I stayed here for about an hour. My next direct association with it was a telephone call--the last year . . . I expected to spend the full year at Chicago--from Miss Robinson asking me if I would come as instructor in chemistry at the fall of 1917. I had just turned down a job in Texas which started as chemistry and physics in a small college whose name I've long since forgotten. I turned it down ostensibly because they added biology to the other two sciences, but it would have been a very difficult thing for me to do because my parents were elderly and it would have been just too far away. So when Miss Robinson phoned me--or telegraphed me, I guess it was, that night, I didn't take very long to make the decision. Of course the salary was not munificent--it was the large sum of \$1300.00, which was [inaudible] more than it would be today, but nevertheless the war had begun--we had been in it for several months at that time--and prices were rising and \$1300 was not even then very munificent. So I came in the fall that the first class were seniors. And the chemistry was me. I was the Chemistry Department. When the Chemistry Department started, or rather when the Women's College started, Dr. Penny, who was head of the chemistry at Delaware College, was presumably the head of the chemistry at the women's end just as Dr. Seiffer [sp] was head of the English Department and Dr. [sounds like "Ball"], I guess it was, head of the History Department. But Dr. Penny really didn't have time to

to take that on his shoulders, and there was a young woman here who also came from Vassar who had the peculiar combination of taking some of the chemistry courses and also teaching physical education. She had been picked by the Department of Physical Education and the Chemistry Department, including me, at Vassar, and she was here three years and then decided that physical education was what she wanted to do and she went to Wellesley and took that graduate course there and was some . . . oh, many years later, head of the physical education at Vassar for a long time. Her name was Alfreda Mosscroft [sp] and any of the people who were here in the early days still talk about her a great deal . . . about her and about a young assistant in English named Gertrude Brady who came from Mount Holyoke and whom I never saw. I had no . . . she had gone to California before I came here. But I inherited part of Alfreda Mosscroft's job. That first year . . . I don't think I did anything but work. I taught five different courses, all the groups small, but nevertheless five different courses when you've never planned a full course is quite a thing to tackle. And I remember that I had said to myself, "I'm not going to work on Sunday." But I generally worked from eight a.m. Monday morning 'til nine p.m. Saturday night. Of course I knew Miss Robinson very well and the people who stand out most in my mind as making really significant contributions are Mrs. Alfred Warner, who was one of the people who had the idea of re-introducing higher education for women into the state, and ~~Mrs.~~ Miss Robinson, and I saw a great deal of the woman who had charge of the education courses down at the Women's College, whose name was Mary Rich. But one of the most vivid people that I remember was the young woman who came here to teach biology when I came here to teach chemistry. Her name was Dora Ware [sp?]. She had just gotten a Master's degree at the University of Michigan. I think that almost all my early diversion was with her, and that was partly because we had many interests in common. She was a botanist and I had been brought up to learn about wild flowers. She and I lived near each other, also. And she and I explored the countryside together. We collected chestnuts from what is now Robscott Manor--and I mean real chestnuts, I don't mean horse chestnuts. We used to walk up the Mill Race back of the [sounds like "Curtis"]. Once in the spring we went as far as Strickersville and in the fall of 1918, when the college was closed for the flu epidemic, we walked to New Castle. And we were the talk of the town [inaudible] . . . so I really did see a great deal of her and she was a very vivid and interesting person. She afterward married a man named Ted Hildebrandt [sp?] who became the head of the Mathematics Department at the University of Michigan. His proper name was Theophile Henry Hildebrandt, but he was commonly known as Ted. I think perhaps I should say a little bit about living conditions. The college was getting to be too large for a single dormitory, what is now Warner Hall, which was then called Residence Hall. There were two buildings, Residence and Science, all living in Residence, all classes in Science. The groundbreaking for Sussex Hall took place in the fall of 1917. But in the meantime, they needed more space for living and there was what I call a double-house, a single-walled house that faced Kentway, where Miss Rich and I lived and there was an extra house a few doors up the street--I think it's the same house that's now on Delaware Avenue facing . . . that faces the college . . . what's sometimes called ~~Mosher~~ Hall, where Dora Ware and Miss Janvere [sp], who

Mosher

was the assistant matron, lived. We ate there and we saw a great more--
 much more of each other than . . . of one another than would . . . we
 would see the other faculty. We moved down to our offices to sleep in
 the middle of the winter when the furnaces wouldn't run on soft coal
 and they couldn't buy any hard coal. This was the first year we were
 in the war. Then of course we ate down in the regular dining room,
 which was the basement of what is now Warner Hall . . . the kitchen
 and the dining room and the storerooms and laundry used by the college
 were all down in the basement. The conditions of the times, the war
 and so on and the lack of very good transportation meant that we went
 to Wilmington almost not at all. I think that Dora and I went once to
 the theater . . . I think maybe a whole group of us did, one evening
 to the theater in the whole year. Of course I went to Philadelphia,
 because that's where my parents lived. And there were good trains.
 But we were pretty much confined to Newark, and as far as transportation
 within Newark was concerned, we were pretty much confined to where we
 could go on our own feet. Some years later, we used to walk farther
 by going up to a little railroad station that's where the shopping cen-
 ter is, taking the [~~sounds like~~ "Pomeroy Division"] as far as we felt
 like going and then walking back. The railroad used to go from there
 to . . . up through Avondale out to Pomeroy, which is on the main line
 of the Pennsylvania Railroad. It was a state cutoff. And we used to
 go up to Thompson Station or to Yeckman or anywhere along there . . .
 picnic. Saturday afternoon there was a train at 2:00 and we'd get up
 there, and they'd wait for us if we didn't get there; we'd say, "Oh, a
 friend of mine is just coming down the street," and then we'd walk back
 to Newark along the Creek Road. And it's the one thing in many parts
 which has changed very little in the years that I have been here. It
 still has the same kinds of woods and you can still find wildflowers
 growing in the same places that they grew in those early days. And as
 I say, it's almost the only thing that is really unchanged and we hope
 it won't have to . . . I suppose the dam will change it, but

college?

I thought perhaps you might be interested in knowing, if there was no
 record of it, that in the fall of 1918, as I have suggested, there
 was a whole month in which the completely closed on account of the
 influenza, the big influenza epidemic which struck here about the 1st
 of October. I think it was the full month of October that we were
 closed. Because we were certainly back here when the Armistice was
 declared. And while I think I remember very vividly the first [~~sounds~~
 like "popper"] of November 11th, what stands out in my memory far more
 vividly is the night of the so-called False Armistice when

Q That was November 9th, I think?

A I think it was, yes. Someone on the men's faculty had been perhaps
 it was to Elkton. Anyway, we all knew about the rumor, which we thought
 was of course the truth at that time, and they brought back quantities
 of . . . you know what I mean by sparklers? . . . which I think were
 not illegal at that point, and we all gathered up and brought 'em . . .
 this was a great occasion for the undergraduates, because they usually
 weren't allowed off of the Women's College campus after nightfall. But
 we were all up on Frazier Field and everybody had sparklers and this
 whole field was ablaze. And it is a most vivid and proper memory, it

seems to me, for the close of the war, much more so than the middle of the day when Armistice was officially declared and I guess there was a parade and . . . I know there were no classes. But it wasn't the same thing as this . . . that False Armistice with the night celebration and the sparklers all over Frazier Field, which was called Frazier Field even then, I think.

As I said in the very beginning, I didn't do anything but get my work organized and get my papers corrected and get the laboratory set up and so on. But a little bit later, I did begin to branch out a bit, somewhat to my surprise in one direction, particularly. I was president of the Wilmington branch of the A.A.U.W. from 1924 to '26. There was no other branch in the state of Delaware at that time. And later a state organization in Pennsylvania was formed, and we became a part of that. And in the early '30s I was president of that and at about the same time, if not exactly the same time, I was secretary of what they called the North Atlantic Section, which was the division that included the New England states and . . . and I got the Delaware section moved out of the southern section into that North Atlantic Section because we had many more associations with Philadelphia than we did with Baltimore. So that's one of the things they remembered me for in the local A.A.U.W. And unfortunately at the same time I was also secretary of the section, the Delaware section of the A.C.S., American Chemical Society. That society was . . . that section was formed before I came here, and I don't think I went to any meetings that year. Mr. ~~Lambert~~ DuPont was the first president, and Christmas time, December of 1918, he gave a dinner for the then about 200 members of the American Chemical Society that were in this area. They invited Dr. Mitchell, who was then president, and Dr. Mitchell and I went in together. And I was the only woman there. There were 200 men and I was the only woman. And then about five years later, as I said, I was secretary of the section and most of the time I was the only woman at the meetings. I was sort of prepared for it, because the number at Chicago . . . the number of women at Chicago was quite small. Those were my chief semi-professional outside activities.

Now, you asked me about personalities, and I do think I should say a little bit more about Mrs. Warner because perhaps people haven't. She was the typical club woman of the early 19th century, and she had a concern. I think she had Quaker ancestry, and she had a concern about education for women in the state. And as you know, probably, it was the women's clubs and the Grange who were as instrumental as anything in getting the Women's College started. And it was Mrs. Warner who found out about Miss Robinson as a possibility. I can't remember the whole story, but I know part of the story was that Miss Robinson had been dean of women for several summers at the University of Wisconsin. The regular dean at the University of Wisconsin was a Mrs. Matthews who had taught history at Vassar and was a very close friend of Miss Robinson. And I guess Mrs. Warner and the other people who had charge of the thing wrote around to the various colleges for suggestions and Mrs. Matthews suggested Miss Robinson. But there was . . . somebody met someone on shipboard . . . now, it seems to me it was Dean Hayward, who was the dean of the School of Agriculture, met somebody who knew Miss Robinson and he . . . Dean Hayward was

very much interested in the Women's College and he remembered this person talking about her. Because I know there were two very definite connections, and I know one of them was Mrs. Matthews at Wisconsin and there was Miss Robinson's experience there, because at Vassar, while she wasn't head of the dormitory, she was a member of the Pottery Department and I think she was only instructor at that, because in those days at Vassar there weren't many associate professors. There was a professors and a lot of instructors.

Q Were there many women's colleges at that time?

A Oh, yes, a good many.

Q But there weren't many . . . there weren't any in Delaware until this was . . .

A No, there weren't any here. And there wasn't one in New Jersey. I mean, not a public one, because the New Jersey College is just four years younger . . . the one they now call Douglas College is just four years younger than the Women's College here. But there were all the so-called seven colleges, Wellesley and Vassar and Mt. Holyoke, all those colleges had been established a long time. Barnard was established in I think 1889 and there were women in places like Oberlin and there were . . . oh, Randolph-Macon . . . there were a good many good colleges in the South that lots of people don't know about, Agnes Scott and Randolph-Macon Women's College and so on. So the Women's College was no rarity. It was simply that the short coeducational experience that Delaware College had in the '80s was unfortunate. Nobody seems to know exactly what happened, but you always hear all these rumors about it, and they closed it and didn't admit women again, and it took a good deal of persuasion to make them think that the women did really deserve to have a college in Delaware.

You asked me about outstanding students. The ones that I think of particularly weren't of that very early day, although there were some very good and very interesting students here at the time that I came. And of course I knew them quite well, because we lived so close together. But the most outstanding early student that I can remember is a woman who is now a dermatologist in Philadelphia. Her name now is Carmen Thomas. When she came here to college it was Carmen Tomashevsky [sp] and her father was one of the two German chemists who came over here after the First World War to help with the . . . with the die manufacture. And she came here . . . oh, came to the United States, I mean, when she was about 12 or 13, knew no English. She was a Catholic. She went to Ursuline. She came here, entered with excellent recommendations, stayed three years and finished all her college work except two courses, and then entered Women's Medical and we permitted her to transfer twelve hours, so she graduated with her class. And she has taught at Women's Medical for 20 years and is one of the outstanding dermatologists in Philadelphia. I suppose I should also mention Lucille Petrie, whose present job I can't tell you exactly. She . . . and her name is no longer Petrie, but she is what was she, head of the Women's Army Nurse Corps or something like that, Public Health,

she is one of the outstanding nurses in this country, and she was a member of the class of 1924, and a very excellent student who managed to edit the yearbook . . . I'm not sure if she didn't get through college in three years. She certainly did a remarkable amount of work and edited the yearbook in addition as I indicated before.

When you speak of extracurricular activities, I suppose technically, being secretary of the Women's College Faculty from the time Miss Rich left about 1924 until the Women's College closed, was an extracurricular activity, but it wasn't exactly a form of leisure. It didn't add to my leisure. We did work with the students in some of their own activities and I did my share of being advisor to the Student Government Association and through some kind of sticky times. There were one or two serious cases during the time that I was working with the Student Board, but I think they're the kind of case that is best forgotten. We . . . Women's College Faculty, we usually had a party for the whole faculty once a year and sometimes we put on plays. Miss Robinson was an excellent actor, incidentally. She didn't like to learn lines very well, but she could make 'em up beautifully and sometimes that was a little disconcerting for the people who were playing with her. But she acted in faculty plays at Vassar and there were one or two faculty plays we put on down here just to entertain the other faculty, and Miss Robinson was always a part of those. So she was definitely the best actress that we had. I guess I did act with the drama group at least once in a . . . what was it called . . . a play called The Dead Sister's Secret, or There's Gold in Them Thar Hills. In that particular play, Bob Case and Betty both acted and the play was directed by Taggart Evans. You see, that was much later, but it was still early days of the Women's College, I think. It was before . . . it was before 1935, at least. I don't remember exactly. I think that's . . .

Q Were there any research projects that you've been particularly involved in in the field of chemistry in your career?

A Not very specific ones. I had . . . I had an unfortunate kind of research problem for my doctorate, the kind that had negative results, and when I was here teaching, my teaching load was so heavy and I was also doing advising to Arts and Science students, that I didn't have very much uninterrupted time, nor did I have any regular place to work in the summer, because we couldn't stay around here in the summer. And so research was not my contribution to the Women's College. And all my little problems were just small things that students--seniors mostly, a few graduate students--could pick up and do in the time which a student can do special problems. During all this time I was particularly interested in the field of history of chemistry, because History was my second love in college and I introduced a History of Chemistry course at the Women's College when we revised the curriculum about 1930, and I taught that all the years that I taught and it involved a good deal of work, because I tried to find source material for the students. I collected some old chemistries myself and say to it that the students read contemporary chemistry rather than reading about what happened and reading biographies of

men who were important. They read the original papers of people like Priestly and Lavoisier and Sir Humphry Davy as they were reprinted and sometimes I had one of the early books that they could read. I tried my best to make the course, even though it was only a one-hour course for one semester, as meaningful as it could be, and that kind of thing takes as much time as various types of research. It doesn't need as much facility.

Q Well . . .

[END OF INTERVIEW]