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Interview with Miss Sarah Wiley, Business Education pioneer at the University of Delaware, on her retirement, August 6, 1974, by Rebecca Button.

Q This is an interview for the Oral History Project of the University of Delaware with Sarah Wiley, retired from the university after 23 years, at her home in Newark on August 6, 1974. Miss Wiley, how did you happen to come to the university?

A The university was looking for someone to introduce a program in shorthand and typewriting for Arts and Science students, because they found that these students were unable to get positions--the girls, particularly. That was back in 1951. At that time, they told me that there was a possibility that it would develop into a business teacher training program in Business Education, and I thought this would be a fine opportunity for me to get in on the ground floor. So I came to Delaware.

Q What had your experience been, and how did you happen to be contacted to start this program?

A I had taught in a number of Pennsylvania high schools over a period of years, and was currently . . . and was at that time teaching in the Indiana, Pennsylvania high school as supervisor of business education student teachers, and directing the program in the high school. I decided that I had gone as far as I could go and that if I ever expected to make any change, it was time that I did so. So I started looking around for jobs, and in the course of my looking, I heard about the position in Delaware.

Q Who told you about it?

A I went through a teachers agency in Baltimore. Meanwhile, I also looked into some other positions, and at the time that I was given the word that I was the successful candidate at Delaware, I had a contract in my pocket and a room rented in Towson, Maryland. I canceled both of those and told them that I would sign the contract in Delaware.

Q Was the job to be at Towson State College?

A No. No, it was in the public school system.

Q Did you find the change from the public school teaching, going to the college level, a large difference in your work?

A It was different in respect to the . . . different in this way. The sorts of things that I was doing here were not looked upon with very much respect. It was considered just an attachment, kind of a toy. The school I came from, it was considered one of the major programs, and the standards and requirements that I had for graduation from the public school were about twice as high as those which I could enact at the University of Delaware.

Q Did you find then . . . when you say in the beginning, did you find a

large difference quite quickly?

A Oh, yes.

Q People felt the value, understood the value.

A Oh, no. No, no, no. It took a long, long time to convince people that the program . . . in fact, there are a number of people today who think there is no place for this program in the University of Delaware.

Q Did this make you feel that you had a sort of special place here, that you felt that you weren't part of the community?

A Oh, no. No, I was never treated that way.

Q Not by faculty people, because they understood.

A Oh, no. No, no. No, the faculty people did not understand. We were located in the Department . . . or at that time, the College of Arts and Science. And I was a part of the Department of Business and Economics, Charles Lumier [sp] being the chairman of the department at that time. And we were in that department for quite a long while, and until we became a separate college, there was still a very strong feeling that this was belittling to the College of Arts and Science, this was not something that should be included in the program. And . . . but the program took a great . . . it was changed considerably over the years. In 1951, when it started, it was designed for Arts and Science students alone. About 1955, there were a number of select students admitted to a kind of two-year associate degree program in which the students admitted had to take the regular basic Arts and Science freshman program, language, history, English and so on, in addition to their skills, which meant that they carried a terrifically heavy load in order to get the credits that they needed to graduate. This went on for just a very short period of time. And in 1956, Dr. Perkins decided that he had a new assignment that he would like me to undertake. So he called me to his office and gave me an opportunity to choose between two positions. I could either be his secretary, or I could become coordinator of the Stenographic Service Center, a kind of pool operation, for the University of Delaware. I was to think it over for two or three days and then let him know. This was over the weekend. On Monday I told him I had made my decision that I didn't care for either position, that I had come here to teach and that's what I wanted to do. I got nowhere. I might just as well have hushed, for he just disregarded it completely and proceeded to make plans for me to do the . . . takeover the Stenographic Center. I bargained with Mr. Grubb [sp?], who was business administrator at that time, and told him that I would do this job provided that I kept my faculty status and continued to teach. So it became a double chore. I taught sixteen hours a week and operated the Stenographic Center with about 21 to 25 employees under me. I began work about 6:30 in the morning, and I worked many a night until 11:00. That was . . .

Q But you wanted the teaching so much that the additional load didn't matter.

A Well, I didn't particularly like the additional load.

Q Well, but the choice of having it or not teaching was . . .

A I wouldn't do it at all unless I taught. I would have left the university rather than to become just an ordinary person in a stenographic pool at the University of Delaware would have been cutting one's throat.

Q And you would have preferred teaching on any possible . . . you would have preferred teaching in relation to any other job, period.

A That's correct. I was a professional, I had been trained professionally, I had no mind to step down into something that was going to require less than what I had been trained to do.

Q Was Dr. Perkins' feeling about the program, stopping the program, that it was . . .

A Dr. Perkins was for the program. That's the reason the program was here. He was not opposed to the program. But he also felt that this other was a very necessary thing, and after I got into it, I realized that it was a very necessary things. It was quite a challenge. It made a lot of people very unhappy, because their stenographers were taken away from them, some of their furniture was taken away from them, they thought they were losing status. Any man, regardless of what he does in the university, thinks he must have a "secretary." In actuality these people were merely clerks, many of them, and couldn't begin to do the things required of a secretary. Therefore, they were put into a pool operation. It was the forerunner of what is now the Central Duplicating Service, but when I had it, we furnished secretaries for everybody on the campus, substituted when anybody was out. I would come in on Monday morning, had 21 on my payroll list, and by noon I had nobody there. The work that had to go on in the center, I had one girl to run duplicating devices, and I had one girl to take care of other routine work, and I had an assistant in the teaching. They hired a second teacher, and the two of us ran the center. When I was there, she usually was in the classroom and vice versa. Part of the time we were both there. And we did as much . . .

Q Did you have any men?

A Not at that time. We did as much work as the girls that we hired. In fact, we did more work than the girls that we hired. At that time we did the university budget, we did the . . . that is we literally typed and ran it off, we did everything to it. We did the audit. We did anything and everything that anybody in the university wanted done . . . just anything. We did all the final examinations, if it was to be done . . . anything that was to be done, we did.

Q It sounds like you found then that your workload, which might take you until nearly midnight, was because you had so much work that actually staff couldn't handle it in working hours.

A That is exactly right. We did this Saturdays and Sundays as well.

Many a time we'd work Saturdays and Sundays.

Q How long did that last?

A Well, until they decided that they were going to change it again and they hired two men to take my place. And finally they hired more than that as the thing changed. They got more sophisticated equipment and so on. But it was . . . I had to buy all the equipment, I had to hire all . . . I hired all the secretaries on the campus, interviewed and hired them, tested them, and that kind of thing.

Q Did you have any feeling about a woman . . . do you have feelings, strong feelings, about a woman and her power in employment situations, out of your experience?

A I think women are very capable to do such things. I think that in this particular kind of area . . . now, they have changed the character of that. They no longer do any secretarial work. They no longer do any replacement of people. They do high-powered printing, and that is primarily what they do and nothing else.

Q Well, what my question was a little different. When you say, "I was replaced by two men" . . .

A Well, they decided they wanted to hire men for this job. Those men only lasted about a year. I don't think they lasted quite a year. Then they had a couple of more in. They've had at least . . . I suppose since that time they have hired at least ten people. And they have separated the powers, separated the activities and so on until they have a staff that is tremendous, an administrative staff for that operation that is quite large. I wouldn't know how many are involved.

Q Which would have to be, with the number of students . . . the student [inaudible].

A Well, yeah, I don't know what all is involved. I've been disassociated with that for a long, long time.

Q After you were . . . after the change, after the two men took over your role there, did you continue your teaching?

A Oh, yes. Oh, yes. At the time that I took it over, I had increased the enrollment . . . when I came here, the enrollment was 35 in the program. At the time I was asked to do this, I had built electives-- Arts and Science electives--up to the point where I had over 100 people enrolled in various phases of the program. And I did all the teaching. I taught 18, 20, 21 hours a week. This has always been my teaching load. And then in 1956, . . . 1958, after I was out of the center, I left in 1958, left that operation . . . in 1958, we revised the two-year program to bring it into line with what they thought would be a community college program. And they no longer were enrolled in Arts and Science at that time. We were down now in a separate area in the College of Business and Economics. And we had . . .

Q What building were you in then?

A Well, I first had a room . . . in 1951, I had a room in Wolf Hall, on the second floor at the top of the stairs. And I was there for about three years. And then we moved to Wolf Hall . . . not Wolf, to Robinson, and we were on the first floor of Robinson for two or three years. And then that building was redone when Dean [sounds like "Austin"] came. When he became dean, they redid the building in some ways, and we were moved to . . . by that time there were three teachers . . . and we were moved to the second floor of Robinson. And we had rooms 215, 216, 217. And then any little makeshift corner that we could find that nobody else wanted, we took on for an office, or we took on for an extra room to throw in a couple of machines, something of this sort.

Q When the Women's College was separate, I think the rooms that you had were . . . had been a biology lab.

A Home economics.

Q Was it? Yeah, up there on the second floor of Robinson.

A Well, I really can't say about the second floor. I'm not sure. Art Department was in there before we were. I had the office out over the porch, that faces . . .

Q The campus?

A No, faces . . .

Q South College?

A Oh, that building right next door.

Q Oh, Warner Hall.

A Faces Warner. And we stayed there until we moved into the College of Business and Economics, the new building . . . into Pernell. Now, in 1958, then, we started the Associate Degree Program, and it built rapidly. And in 1963, we finally got the Business Education Program through and approved, and started to train teachers. We started out with two students training to . . . well, we had three students training before the program was approved, with the expectation that it would be approved. And if they couldn't get what they needed to finish, then they could go to some other school. But it was approved, so everything went along fine. And then it has grown to the point where now there are over 100 students in the program, and we graduate something like 20 to 25 students in the Business Education Teacher Training Program. Then that was in 1963. This . . . when we had the 10-year plan, you know, when we did the community design . . .

Q No, I don't know what the community design was.

A Well, about--I've forgotten the exact date, but it's about four years ago, I think . . . three years ago--we had a study of the entire uni-

versity in which each department was to study its plans for a long-range period of from three to five to ten years, and outline what you expected to do, where you were going, what your goals would be. And of course we had in mind that we wanted to develop a four-year degree program, and eventually merge the two-year program into the four-year program. Get away from just the straight two-year program. Well, finally the entire four-year program was approved this past winter, in about the first of January, I think it was, when it was approved. And it is now known as the Office Systems Administration Curriculum in the College of Business and Economics. And students who are admitted to that may have the option of withdrawing at the end of two years and taking an associate degree. But this is an entirely different program from what we have had. It's a highly sophisticated program . . .

Q Using the new techniques.

A Well, not just the new techniques, it's the curriculum itself, the material that's included in it. They have a strong business administration background plus all their skills, plus several directions in which they may go in their 63 hours of Arts and Science courses. They can concentrate on a language, or they can concentrate in some particular area that they think would help them in the direction they would like to go. Anyhow, this program was approved and it was . . . it has been past, it is on the record. Brochures were made, advertising the program, and the enrollment was . . . since the enrollments had been so high, we worked to get the class working size. All teachers were teaching an overload. And there are now--from the one teacher who started in my day--they now have a chairman and seven additional teachers. And we had last winter and the year before. But during that time, we were all teaching overloads of 15, 16, 18, 20 hours. I was chairman of the department and taught 16 hours--as a minimum, sometimes more, and supervised student teachers and advised 125 business ed. teachers.

Q Well, didn't your day almost go to midnight then, too?

A Oh, yes. My day went from early morning--I was at the office every morning before 7:30. And I never left until after five. I didn't even some days take a lunch hour. I had to teach during that period.

Q Because you were really building a program.

A Oh, yes. I found it exciting. But I also would have enjoyed having just a minute now and then. Anyhow, it was way overdone, and now the loads . . . we limited the enrollment for next year to the point where loads could be cut to that which is allowed by the contract agreements with the union, now. They're under twelve . . . they're under . . . well, the normal load . . . the top load for any person teaching is twelve hours, regardless of what he does. Whether he does research . . .

Q Is this under the new contract, or had this been true before?

A No, that's true before. But it never applied to us, but it now applies

to us. And twelve is the maximum they can carry including allowance for advisees, allowance for research and so on. So that almost everybody is down to nine or ten hours for next year.

Q Do you find the new . . . the revolution in technology that you've witnessed in office procedures, always presenting a challenge? The new techniques are coming every year for a teacher in office systems.

A There are some new techniques. Some of them are good, some of them I think need to be tested before we go wild about them. The tendency I think for most people is that as soon as they hear something new, for everybody to rush out and do it, and invest a lot of money in something, and then eventually find that the money is invested and the gadget or whatever it is that you may be trying to use is sitting, and you back-track to some of your older procedures. We did that with a couple of pieces of equipment that we're sorry that we bought. But on the whole, I've tried to hold that down. Now there are those who think that this is not good practice. But I don't believe that you just take the very newest thing that comes on the market, or the newest trend on the market, until it has been tried a little bit and found to be worthwhile. Then if you find something that really works, then you put your money into it and go ahead and . . . I don't think you should always stick to the old, because obviously you're not making progress if you never make any changes, make any advances. But I don't think that you just rush headlong into something until you know that it's valid and that it's worthwhile.

Q Especially because of the expense. The machines are very expensive.

A That's right, they're very expensive. And we have excellent equipment. We've never been turned down on anything we've asked for, and we try very hard to buy wisely, try to invest not just because it has a name or a trade name, or somebody says this is the best on the market. We would look and study and try out and compare and try to get the one that we thought fit our purpose the best and get the most for whatever dollars we were given, so that we could have a good variety. And we do have a good variety . . . have had. I feel that I'm leaving the place in good shape.

Q Did you retire just now? In June?

A June, right.

Q What does it feel like after all these years of working?

A It doesn't . . . I don't like it.

Q Well, you probably will find something else . . .

A I'm going to work somewhere. I haven't decided yet what I'm going to do, but I'm going to work. I will not sit idle. I've got too much . . .

Q Well, your enthusiasm for what you've been doing and the work you've put in, you just couldn't . . .

- A That's where I would like to be right now. I would . . .
- Q You've seen so many changes since you came to Delaware and you're seeing an interest in the program that you really helped design. Can you look ahead at all. What do you see, say in the next five to ten years in the whole kind of curriculum that you've been talking about? Do you see some vast changes coming rather soon?
- A Oh, I wouldn't say vast changes, no. I don't think so.
- Q A continuing professionalism, growing professionalism?
- A There might be. There . . . in the new Office Systems Administration program, that definitely will grow and expand, and the people coming out of that are being trained to hold middle management . . . low middle management positions, particularly women, because that was one of the reasons that we developed the program. Industry told us that there were these positions waiting for young women, or for older women, if they had been trained to do the things that need to be done, but that presently they had no people to fill many of these spots, and government is insisting that women be placed in positions of responsibility. So that will be a development that grows out of this . . .
- Q It sounds like a very good kind of development.
- A So far as education is concerned, it's possible that the teaching program will level off, because at the moment enrollments are leveling off, and unless more children come up through the grades and into the secondary schools, they won't have enrollments to keep hiring so many people. And people are staying on jobs longer than they used to. It used to be there was a good turnover in secondary schools and so on, particularly among the women. But today, they're not stopping, they're not quitting, they're continuing to teach for quite a number of years. And as a result, there aren't the new positions, they're not adding new positions, and if they do not leave for one reason or another, then there isn't any need for someone to replace them. And this will probably cut down on the enrollments in . . .
- Q That sounds like a serious situation.
- A Right now it hasn't been. I don't know about this year. I haven't heard how the graduates are faring. But last year, every person who graduated had a job.
- Q Well, that was very good. In some of the other teaching graduates, people prepared to teach, that was not true . . . it was not so.
- A That's right . . . that's right.
- Q What about some of your graduates, people who have enrolled and completed the four-year Arts and Science or business . . . Office Systems Program.
- A Oh, they are . . . they're all over the world. We've had them working in Europe for NATO, we have them working in Mexico in embassies. There

are a number of them with the State Department in Washington. There are a number of them in various states in the United States. We have some people teaching in junior colleges in the South and on the West Coast. We have . . . Wilmington is full of our graduates. I had a waiting list of some 20 or 30 people who had called in wanting graduates, and our students were placed long before school was out and we just had no one to send them. They'd come begging for people, they'll even take them part-time if they can't get them full-time. They'll do anything they can to get them. That's one of the things that we're very proud of, the fact that when they go out, they perform so well that we have quite a rapport with the business community. I have letter after letter in the file telling me about the quality of the students that have been turned out and how much they appreciate the fact that they were held to high standards.

Q That must be very gratifying for you.

A It is, it is indeed.

Q Can you think of some particularly interesting examples of the combined program?

A We had one young lady who . . . a number of years ago, who chose or elected some of the work that we had in our department. This goes back several years . . . oh, probably 10 years. Anyhow, she was a Spanish major, and she took business English, which has been looked down on a little bit by the English Department and so many people around, but nevertheless she took it. And after she graduated, she wrote to me and told me that she would never in her life have received the position that she did if it hadn't been for her letter of application, that they told her that it was the most outstanding one that they got, and she was hired in a very, very superior position with the U.N. Of course, her language was the thing in which they were interested, but in order to be chosen to use that language, she had to impress them in some manner, and it was her letter of application that did the trick.

Q What would her letter of application have been? What would have made it so outstanding?

A Well, it was the way in which it was written. We have very special . . . at that time there was nowhere in the school that was teaching people to write letters of application, certainly not in the way in which we did it. Too many of them wrote three and four page letters and their facts were all buried in long paragraphs of thirteen and fourteen lines, and sentences were long, involved sentences, and in business people cannot put up with this kind of thing. They won't read letters that they get of that nature. So we trained them to be very concise and to think the things through and put down only the necessary facts, and to write a sharp, interesting letter containing no more than three or four paragraphs on one page, and then include all this other miscellaneous material that they had on a data sheet. And this was the thing that attracted . . .

Q Do you feel that business education . . . because of things like waiting

lists, for example, of some prime employers . . . do you see this expanding in relation to other parts of the university? Because of the truth about the employment pattern?

A I couldn't answer that. I don't know. I wouldn't have any idea.

Q But you do know that your graduates got placed?

A I know . . . right, right.

Q What about their courses in economics? How much business do they get?

A Oh, they take . . . I don't have a curriculum sheet here, but they have to take one year of economics. They may take more. They must take some marketing, they must take some production, they must take-- they take the basic courses in business administration . . . accounting . . . depending what major they're in, what major field that they take . . . and they must take law, business law. And they have a few choices, also, that they can expand . . . that is, they can take more economics if they want to, or they can take additional accounting if they care to.

Q Do you see the program moving into a Master's program?

A Not in that particular area. There is a Master's program in business education that was just approved. But I did not work on that program and I wouldn't care to comment about it.

Q You do think it's a good idea.

A Oh, yes. Surely I think it's a good idea, but at this point I think they have to get this one off the ground before they start thinking about a Master's degree.

Q How did you develop your first interest in business education?

A Well, that was in the day when you didn't do your own thinking too much, your parents told you what you would do. And when I was in high school, I came from a family that was not blessed with a great deal of money, and my father decided that I would have to take something that would enable me to earn a living, or to help earn a living. And when I went to high school, I took as much . . . I took everything in the curriculum that would be considered an academic program, with the exception of language. And in place of language I took shorthand and typing and other business courses. When I graduated from high school, my chief love was, of course, music, and I wanted to be a music supervisor, but in those days music supervisors were not being hired, and it was just about getting around the time of the Depression, and my father said that I would have to take something that would assure me of getting a job. And business teachers were at a premium. So I took my degree in business education.

Q Where did you do that?

A I did that at what was then Indiana State Teachers College in Pennsyl-

vania. It's now Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Q And where is that in Pennsylvania?

A Indiana, Pennsylvania.

Q What part of the state?

A It's in the western part of the state, about 45-50 miles from Pittsburgh and about 26 miles from Johnstown.

Q Is it near Erie?

A Oh, no, it's quite south of Erie. It's in sort of a . . . well, it's a little bit north of Pittsburgh.

Q Had your family always lived in Indiana, Pennsylvania?

A Most of my life was lived there. My father came from Burrsville [sp?], Pennsylvania and we lived in Burrsville, Pennsylvania for . . . up until the time I started to school, and then we moved to Indiana, Pennsylvania, and I lived there the rest of my life until I came to Delaware to make my home. Meanwhile, I had moved around in various sections of the state teaching at various schools.

Q What was your first teaching job like?

A Horrible. Simple horrible, the first one.

Q Where was it?

A It was a mistake--Mt. Pleasant Township, Pennsylvania . . . in Mt. Pleasant Township, it was Hurst [sp] High School and the person who did the hiring had interviewed everybody in my class, and they'd all turned them down. And I was out of town doing practice teaching, and when he came to me, he painted an entirely different picture of the place. I guess he'd learned by having been turned down by everybody else, and he made it sound so rosy that I thought that it was a gem, and I took it, primarily because it was nearer to home and my father thought I shouldn't go too far away. And I had another position I wanted, but I took Mt. Pleasant . . . Mt. Pleasant Township. But I stayed there one year and then I left and went to the school that I had originally wanted to teach in, which was Youngsville, Pennsylvania in Warren County. I stayed there quite a little while and then I moved to another school to become chairman of the department and could buy the furniture and organize the curriculum and that kind of thing.

Q Oh, you got started early, then, at the job you did at Delaware.

A Oh, yes. Then I left there to move into what I thought was quite a promotion to [sounds like "Letrug"], Pennsylvania, and I was there one semester and they wanted . . . my home town wanted me to leave and come back, but I didn't, I stayed until the end of the year and then the next year I started in my home town, in Indiana, Pennsylvania, where I stayed

for 14 years until I came to Delaware.

Q Oh, you did invest time in Indiana. Did you have a large family?

A There were four of us.

Q And where were you in the family?

A I was the oldest. I had two brothers and a sister.

Q Did you find that you have enjoyed your life here and your work at the university most of the time?

A Oh, yes.

Q And you like Delaware?

A Yes, I like Delaware. I didn't when I first came because I had been very, very active musically in my home town, and in a number of other areas--I was very active in welfare agencies. I worked for cancer and I worked for . . . I was chairman of the American Heart Association in Indiana County, and I did many, many things. Of course, having lived there so long, everybody knew me and I had lots of responsibilities and did many things on the outside. And when I came here, I knew no one, no one knew anything about me, they didn't know anything about my abilities, and I was a lowly instructor. And lowly instructors are not considered to be of the caliber to do that sort of thing. So I-- for a long time I felt very left out of things, and that I missed horribly and I've always missed my musical connections, although I've had some here, but nothing like I did when I was in Indiana.

Q Well, what has been your interest in music in Delaware?

A Well, for a while I sang in a choir, and then I played an organ in the Brookside Methodist Church for about seven years. And outside of that, that's about all. Right now I'm currently interested in helping to promote the welfare of the Newark Symphony Orchestra, being a member of the auxilliary that's doing that now. And that's about the limit to my musical activities in Delaware.

Q It sounds to me as though you've given a lot of attention to a lot of different things. Do you see better opportunities to continue larger interests since you don't have the responsibility for the department?

A Oh, yes, I imagine I'll do more things. I'll be more active in [sounds like Siroptimists], of which I'm a member, and I'll probably be more active in some other things. I can't say, but I sort of anticipate that.

Q Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]