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# Mrs. Mary C. Dennison

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: This is Yetta Chaken *[phonetic]* [0:00:03], recording for the special collections library at the University of Delaware. Today we're interviewing Mary Dennison.

Mrs. Dennison: Mary C. Dennison.

Interviewer: Mary C. Dennison.

Mrs. Dennison: Uh huh.

Interviewer: Mary would like to tell us where you were born and when?

Mrs. Dennison: I was born in Wilmington. One of the few now. Born in Wilmington in 1896. And so, I celebrated my 80th birthday the other day. And had a wonderful time with friends.

I lived at that time in the western part of the city, which was brand new at that time. My parents moved in to a house at 1406, it was 3rd Street.

Interviewer: What was life like in western part of Wilmington?

Mrs. Dennison: At that time they moved there, the trolleys *[phonetic]* [0:01:01] came up to Broom Street and that was the end of the trolley *[phonetic]* [0:01:05] time. By the time I arrive the trolleys *[phonetic]* [0:01:08] had gone a little further. But we had a delightful neighborhood, many people for a little girl to play with, neighbors were all interested in their growing families and most of them were participating in various churches around the community and the children all went to public school.

Interviewer: What school did you attend?

Mrs. Dennison: I attended number 15th at 3rd in Harrison Street. And we at that time had a double promote – had promotion in the middle of the year so that we had 10 grades but went for five years to the elementary school. And then I went what was known as number 28 school, the old Willard Hall School, which had at one time been a high school but later was used for soldiers living their during the Second World War, I think it was. And it's now given over for the benefit of I-95.

Interviewer: And was that a high school?

Mrs. Dennison: It was a grammar school. Grammar school and it went through the seventh grade up to through the eighth. So there were four grades there. Two and seven and two and eight year. And then I went to Wilmington High School on Delaware Avenue.

Interviewer: What was the quality of education?

Mrs. Dennison: Strict.

Interviewer: Did you get it – did you have a good background?

Mrs. Dennison: A strict education so that you went in to the classroom, you were prepared or you knew you're going to have trouble. And children respected their teachers. There was a great quite in every classroom. Many of the teachers were locally trained in Wilmington at that time. What was known as old number nine school and it's no longer used at 8th and Wollaston, it was a training school for teachers.

And they would go there I think for one year after graduating from high school and then go into the lower classes, the elementary and this grammar school. The grammar school later became the junior high school.

Interviewer: What made you decide to go on for education beyond high school?

Mrs. Dennison: I expect, I should say my mother. I was not too interested in going on. I had found high school very difficult because of some problems I had in Latin. My teacher went too fast for me. I moved slowly and I don't think too rapidly and her best expression was next, next, next.

Interviewer: But despite that, you went on to where?

Mrs. Dennison: I went to the University of Delaware; I was in the second year of the Women's College. It was not a university then, it was the Women's College of Delaware, coordinated college, similar to Radcliffe and Harvard.

Interviewer: And what was life like at the university campus?

Mrs. Dennison: Well, for me it was wonderful. I had been an only child and I was never very happy about that. And after we left 3rd Street, I lived at 1106 Jefferson Street, a house that had previously been owned by Judge Conrad. And we moved in there. There were no children in the neighborhood. However, the high school is quite close so that I could skip

home for – when we had a half hour lunch, I could skip home and have lunch. Mother always had it ready for me and I get back in time for the next class.

**[0:05:04]**

But I had friends who were living what we call then over Washington Street Bridge. And many of the day I would go home with my friend over Washington Street Bridge, which was at that time a wooden bridge. We walk the planks along as we went over the bridge.

And after – but after high school I went on down to the Women's College and by that time I had great hopes of becoming a librarian. I like books, I enjoyed reading and I thought I would be a librarian. But that was the time of the war.

Interviewer: World War I?

Mrs. Dennison: World War I. And Pratt Institute where the librarians were thought was closed, Drexel was closed and the only library school at that time was in Albany and it was too far away for us financially. However, later the Albany School came down and became the Columbia Library School. But I did not go into library work. And I did not then have any specific goal. I finished college successfully and not knowing what to do, I met a cousin who said, "Oh, there's a position down here in the Equitable Trust Building," which is now has another name, the Bank of Delaware owns it at 9th and Market. And I went in there not knowing anything at all about office work.

Well, I decide I try to learn shorthanded typing but I soon found I didn't like office work. It was you do this and you do that in that office which was a corporation trust company. But I admired tremendously the main boss who was Mr. Seal Ward *[phonetic]* **[0:07:05]**, a lawyer who was very much interested in books.

Building a new house at that time out in the Park Way, he was also buying books I never just understood but they came in by big crates and he would have hundreds of books down there which after a bit it disappear and I never knew just what became of it. He could certainly – he didn't went all of them that came.

Not feeling too interested in that. I was thinking about what I should do next. One day on the street I met a friend of mine who had been at college with me. And with whom I had paired my life almost from that time on to this, Helen Viols *[phonetic]* **[0:07:52]**. She said, "Why don't

you teach school?" I said, "Well, I haven't taken any training for teaching school." Well, she said, "They need teachers."

So I went out to the Wilmington High School where Miss Betsy Devine **[phonetic] [0:08:07]** who was then acting superintendent. Miss. Devine talked to me for awhile and after bit she said, "What makes you think you can teach?" I'd had no experience, I'd had no little brothers or sisters and I can't imagine how I answer that but I didn't get the job.

Interviewer: You were applying for job in the Wilmington School System?

Mrs. Dennison: That's right. I was applying for job in the Wilmington School system. However, had another friend who is teaching down in Dover and she said, "Oh, you'd like it down here and we need a teacher. Would it be all right if I speak to my superintendent about you?" Well, I thought that would be fun. I'd be with her down there.

So he came up to see me, Mr. Thornburgh, who was the superintendent at Dover at that time. And we chatted along and before he left I had signed that I would accept the position. He offered me the position. But it was really something I had not anticipated because I thought United States history, commercial geography, two classes of freshmen English, public speaking and another one.

Interviewer: It sounds like a very formidable schedule that you had?

Mrs. Dennison: I didn't know how formidable it was, until I got into it. But of course it was not wrong since I was in college; it had been two years then. But I found that children very responsive and I had a thoroughly good time there. I enjoyed it very much. And I still have contacts.

**[0:10:01]**

Not long ago, the class had, I guess it must have been its 50th anniversary, graduating from high school. And one of the girls wrote me all about the activities that were there. And then another one was so kind of that she wrote about every individual member of the class so that she reported even those that were no longer living. And it was fascinating to hear about that class that was heading the graduating class when I was down there.

Interviewer: Well, was life in Dover different from life in Wilmington, let us say?

Mrs. Dennison: Oh, very different. For me – I hardly know, I worked all the time. However, we did had some fun and doing things together. But when I had

a little time I was inclined to come back to Wilmington. So that it didn't participate too much, I attended the church, the Presbyterian Church down there and I enjoyed that. But I wasn't in the community long enough to really to get any place there.

One thing I remember, I'm wondering how in the world I ever came to do it. I was told by some of the other teachers that it was my job out at a certain week to participate in a community basketball game. I was to play with the teachers. And yes, with the parents. I was to play with the teachers in opposition to the parents. I had never played basketball. We didn't have any facilities at that time at the Women's College.

But I ran throughout the floor, had a good time, I got away with it with some...

**[Laughter]**

But I left at the end of that year and came back to teach English in Wilmington High School.

Interviewer: By this time they thought you had enough experience?

Mrs. Dennison: They like to have a one year experience before they took teacher.

Interviewer: And did you find Wilmington School System any different from the Dover School System?

Mrs. Dennison: In size it was of course tremendous because we had a very small school in Dover. And this was a great big school but I was at home. It was my high school I should say. And that made it much easier for me. With the English, I was very much at home and I enjoyed that. And after not the next summer but the following summer, I started work at Columbia University for my Masters Degree in English.

I have felt that the English background in great detail would be more valuable to me than the educational classes. I felt that at that time.

Interviewer: It's interesting that you a woman at a time when many women did not seek higher education went to college and then went on to graduate work, did you realized that you were breaking new ground?

Mrs. Dennison: No, I didn't think about that at that time. As I said, my mother was one who always encouraged me. We didn't have very much money. And I was getting about \$1,200 a year. And of that I saved \$300 which took me for the summer six weeks to Columbia. And I've off and wondered how I

would ever have been able to go with the terrific prices of today's because it would have taken near 3,000 I guess than the 300.

Interviewer: Uh huh. How long did it take you to get your masters?

Mrs. Dennison: I went two summers. And then I took a semester off and stayed in the dormitory up there and finished the Masters Degree at that time.

Interviewer: Life in New York must have been exciting?

Mrs. Dennison: Delightful. I tried to see every play in town. It was fun. However, again, I was facing up to a very severe test at the examination at the end of my time and I studied hard.

Interviewer: So that you didn't have as much time to...

**[Cross talk]**

Mrs. Dennison: No. To play around but at that time, we could walk on the streets in New York and feel comfortable. You didn't feel you were not to go on this sort of that street as you are now. One who arrives at one of the dormitories at Columbia now see signs around do not go out at night, do not go out alone, stay within these district and so on.

Interviewer: When you completed your Masters Degree, did you continue teaching English?

Mrs. Dennison: My job was waiting for me in Wilmington and I came back and continued to teach English.

Interviewer: And then your – how long did you continue teaching?

**[0:15:00]**

Mrs. Dennison: Well, I'd like to tell you about that. I continued their, I was – I thought about 10 years at Wilmington High School. But during the last several years, I was in charge of the newspaper. And I was very interested in reading the newspaper on Sunday, I believe it was or recently at which told of the schools here in New Castle County and we're having such a hard time about their newspaper. And I thought how different it was with us. But for awhile, we sat at; I believe that the Board did not approve that.

So after that, we were supplemented by the school. However, I spent one night a week at night time at the high school. But after the first year, we

had arranged that there would be a classing composition, which worked primarily in a journalistic style but it was terrific learning for children because there are some specifics about that.

And at the end of my first year when I have had this permission to have that class, I was moved into a nice corner room, nice big room. And the old rooms, each one had a co-closet, a big closet. We had also in that co-closet an umbrella stand. And I was able to get a nice big board to put on that umbrella stand and some old lapidated typewriters. We removed all the seats from the floor. My class sat in arm chairs that faced the blackboard and had their backs to the windows. And we had some horrible tables but they were useful in the room. And during the free periods, the staff of the newspaper could come in and work.

Girls from the commercial department went in to the closet and type the stories for us so that there was supervision all the time for that. But then, in planning, and preparing and supervising the editing and so on, that was done about Wednesday night, each Wednesday night, certain group of the staff and I were there. And then on Thursday, it was taken to the press and on Friday it was delivered to the children.

Interviewer: It must have been that a marvelous experience for you too?

Mrs. Dennison: Oh, I loved it. And I love the children. They were so responsive. How much you want me to tell?

Interviewer: That's all right.

Mrs. Dennison: On one occasion or more than occasion, we went to New York; Columbia has a great center there where they bring children from many different schools who are doing things with newspaper work. And I took my group up there and they enjoy and participated and had a wonderful time. But they sort of loved to tease their teacher too. It was when the New Yorker was new. And we were staying there and the understanding bus that in the evening, we'd all do things together. And when after we'd finished at the evening, going to the theatre to move your whatever, we would go back to the hotel.

But the night before the end of the visit, which I think we're brought up there about three days, a couple of nights and three days something like that. One of the boys said that Miss. Dennison, what do you think if we'll go out tonight and see the town? And I just laugh and I said, "Oh, we have an agreement about that." And he said, "Well, what do you think if we'll go out?"



So before we all went to bed, again, they told me, they thought they could go out. And I said, "Remember you have to keep your agreement." To this day I don't know whether they went or not. They just kept me guessing all along. I don't think they would because of some different things that were said and happened. But they thought they had a wonderful story about that.

Interviewer: How long after leaving Wilmington High School, did you go into administrative work?

Mrs. Dennison: Well, I went in the – I was assistant principal at Bayard Jr. High School, where I worked with Robert Hook *[phonetic]* [0:19:31].

Interviewer: Were you the first woman administrator of Wilmington?

Mrs. Dennison: Oh, no. They'd had elementary school administrators for quite awhile.

Interviewer: But what about secondary?

Mrs. Dennison: No.

Interviewer: You were the first secondary administrator?

Mrs. Dennison: I'm not sure of this.

Interviewer: There certainly weren't very many, were there?

Mrs. Dennison: No. I think I was in the secondary.

**[0:20:00]**

But I never really felt that I was the administrator in that position. It's like being vice president of the United States I guess. I was very much the vice.

**[Laughter]**

Interviewer: Uh huh. But you continued in administration from that point on?

Mrs. Dennison: Yes. And I went then – well, I was interested in education, really very deeply interested. So I went to University Pennsylvania and took courses. I had done that for my English work too and I knew the university. So I took some courses there. And then later I took quite a few courses at Temple. And I found Temple so much better. There the work was so practical. It was really helpful.

At that time I had gone into the elementary work. And that was what I was studying. And the work at Temple really filled me in where I had great vacant spots.

But then following that, I was appointed to be the vice principal at Bancroft, which was had elementary and junior high and was a big school and Mr. Tom Rooney *[phonetic]* **[0:21:14]** was there. And also to act as principal at Palmer School, which is over 3rd Street Bridge.

And when that appointment came, I begun and I knew that something would follow that. I began to wonder what I should do about my further study. Well, I was in that position for a year and a half and went to Gray School in 1944. And I had already decided that I would go ahead with my studies. And since I had accumulated a lot of credits at Palmer, Temple and Columbia, I decide that I'd get a doctor's degree. And then I proceeded in that and worked in curriculum in teaching and supervision.

Interviewer: And so, you did get a Ph.D.?

Mrs. Dennison: No. I got a Doctor of Education.

Interviewer: Oh, Doctor of Education.

Mrs. Dennison: Uh huh.

Interviewer: And it was after that, you became a principal or how do you going to...

Mrs. Dennison: Well, I was already in 1944. I just mentioned that.

Interviewer: Yeah. That you were a principal?

Mrs. Dennison: Principal at Gray School.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Mrs. Dennison: And when I went there, there were about 800 students there, all white. That was in 1944. And the school grew and grew because we had a community housing there. And the increase in population was terrific so that pretty soon were pushing up into the 1,200. And they added a great big new section to it. And at the time I left, we had 1,250 children.

Interviewer: The school had changed though, in those years of...

Mrs. Dennison: 1954, we had our first Black children come into the school. When I heard that we were going to push, the Supreme Court had made the decision. And I was told that by September of that year, we would be having Black children in our school. And I begun to make some inquiry, there were 18 Black children in the area.

So I anticipated 18 Black children. But by the time September came, there were over a 100 Black children came to me who had been moving into these housing project and in some cases buying houses nearby.

And from then on, it was a great pity what happened. The real estate men would sell a house and then that whole block would have for sale, all the way along. They evidently had convinced the people who lived there that it was necessary for them to get out. And by the time I left Gray School is – for awhile we had a 50-50 population of Black and White children. And it was really – it functioned beautifully.

Our children were – they came in to a school where white children were accustomed to the building and all and well-behaved and our children were never angles, I don't mean that but they were well-behaved. There were sometimes as you had a teacher who have trouble with discipline but that's true in every school. But those children were well-behaved. And we must have just about 50-50.

But very quickly then, we got so many new children in. They hadn't come up through the grades. They were new children and pretty much I thought it was a lurk. So the teachers had their hands full to convinced them that this was a serious matter.

Interviewer: So are you saying that discipline change when it became a Black school?

Mrs. Dennison: When it was overwhelmingly. New pupils, I'm saying. And those new pupils were Black.

**[0:25:03]**

But you see previously, a child would enter a first grade and probably go through all other six grades. But when you have somebody come in, in fifth and sixth grade and they've had none of the experience of knowing what is expected of them through the grades, this made the difference, I felt.

Interviewer: Now, what about – do you think maybe their rooms were also different, the background?

Mrs. Dennison: Oh, everything was different. They were living in a new community. That was entirely different. There was a lot more playground in that area. We had a wonderful playground at Gray School. And we had a very excellent gym teacher, man and a woman and they would plan. So there was activity to get some of that.

Well, you asked about the length of time I was at Wilmington High and I said, about 10 years. I was about 10 years at Bayard and I was 20 years at Gray.

Interviewer: So how many years did and all that you'd spent in education before you retired?

Mrs. Dennison: Well, I think a total of 43.

Interviewer: Well, that's certainly is a very magnificent part of your life to...

Mrs. Dennison: And the part that I enjoyed – oh, really I enjoyed my teaching, my work always. And many of my pleasures today are doing things with people who were at Gray with me or I had known through my teaching. I have a great many friends of people that I thought in high school.

Interviewer: When did your interest with girls and the girls...

Mrs. Dennison: Well, I was at Gray at that time. And I was asked because I was in the nearest to the Fletcher Brown Boys Club to be a member of their Board. And oh, it was so wonderful for the boys to have all of that. And I thought how terrible the girls have nothing, absolutely nothing.

Now, the Girls Scouts, it's an expensive organization. You have to have those dresses and the different things that go along with it. And they met once a week usually.

I sat next to Mrs. Pierre DuPont, the third – yes, it is. And I said, how pitiful that we didn't have something equally good for girls. She said that she was a member of the National Board of the Girls Club and so was her mother.

Not long before that, we had organized a Soroptimist Club here in Wilmington. And I was happened to be the first president.

Interviewer: Did you helped organize that, the Soroptimist?

Mrs. Dennison: It was organized – I was in the first meetings, if that's what you mean. The organizers were old Soroptimist from out of town, from Newark and

cross Salem or in that way. But we were seeking at a good project. We'd had a person to come over to speak to us who was experienced in Soroptimism. And she felt that we should find some big project that we knew we wouldn't be able to carry on. We would need the community to support us and help us. And this seemed to me perfect for the Soroptimist, it's a group of women. And the girls club of course was just for girls.

And so, I asked Mrs. DuPont if she would speak to our club. She hesitated to do it but she said she knew her mother would. So her mother came down from Connecticut and talked with us and to meet with an ideal and to our need. Well, that's another story, do you want it?

Interviewer: Yes.

Mrs. Dennison: At that time, there were 20 of us in the club. None of us had anything but at the end comes our salaries. So there was not a lot of money to work with and we didn't know just exactly how we were going to do this. But we talk to some people in the beginning. And invited different people to come to a meeting we had in that upper room in old number nine school and quite a few people came to that meeting.

**[0:30:02]**

And we discussed the possibilities. Some of them happened to be communions *[phonetic]* **[0:30:09]**. Mr. Merit Fisher, Mr. Finklestien *[phonetic]* **[0:30:14]** both of them saw the possibilities and what it might mean to girls. And I understood that they were going to gather together \$2,000 as a start for us. And I say our Soroptimist had very little money. So I asked them and perhaps I did more than asked them, I think I made it almost obligatory for everyone not to give but to bring in a \$100, we would have our \$2,000 to give to.

Interviewer: You mean the Soroptimist also?

Mrs. Dennison: The Soroptimist would have their \$2,000 to give. So some of us tried to make things to earn some money. I had several very poor batches of orange marmalade and I decided it was cheaper to get money than to depend on trying to earn some money. And we got our 2,000.

And then we began to work with the community to see what they would say. I can't remember the name of the organization that proceeded in either way back there in the 1950's.

Interviewer: Was it the United Fund?

Mrs. Dennison: It was before that. And I'm sorry I can't remember the gentleman's name who was the head of it. But those men were one said, where are you going to get the...

Interviewer: Was the city of Wilmington interested in this kind of project?

Mrs. Dennison: Yes. Some of them were very much interested in this. As I said, the Communion were. And there was interest but they hadn't thought about it very much so that it became necessary for us to have meetings and to bring people in. At one time we had a worker from the National Board come down and speak to the canniest *[phonetic]* **[0:32:18]** and they became quite enthusiastic about it at that point.

However, they were – the city was making a study of where such organizations were needed. The question was whether Pyle settlement would include Negroes or remain a White organization. And if it had not included the Negroes, I think they would have asked us to place our club there. But since they open their doors, they were telling us that as we made our plans, they wanted us to go some place south of 8th Street or 4th Street down in the southern part of the western part of the city.

We were still concerned about the money. On one occasion, we met with a citizen of Wilmington who had very much interested. We were discussing what we could do, how we could some money and various ideas were coming forth, this gentleman arose and he said, "What I think you need is a good push." And I sort of laugh because I thought we needed more than a good push we needed really a show.

But he offered to give us \$20,000 on three conditions. One, that he did not have to be a member of the board, that he will remain anonymous and that we use the money within the year.

We began hunting. We found that there was nothing – well, we felt that the need was a little further south because in Brownstown in that area, we found that children had no kind of recreation at all and play on the street most of the time and so on. So that we were looking down through that area to see, on one day I went with a real estate agent to look at a place that they had thought might be pretty good. And when we got there, it happened to be raining. And the rain was coming through the roof right on down to the first floor. So we decide that was not our house. But by and by a place was indicated to us as a possibility. It had been just a little farm in the middle of that community at 1019 Brown Street.

[0:35:04]

It had quite a bit of land and a little old farm house. And we were able to buy that with the money that had been given to us and get started. The first day that the Girls Club opened, there were so many children there that they didn't know what to do with them. Seven-hundred children came. And the little house, it was a little house with a nice little living room that I thought was going to be delightful for the girls because it had a fire place in it but by the time we got there, they had picked the fire place up and moved it. It was a decoration.

We immediately saw that we needed to have more space. Over a period of time we were able to run drives to carry us for a year at that time. And I think it was the third year that we were organized that the United Fund took us in, which was the greatest thing that could have happened really for girls in Wilmington. It was great and has been ever since. And we feel that they – we didn't get all our money this time that we asked for but we feel that they do appreciate the work that we are doing.

Well, we started there. But really when I was thinking about it, I planned to have it near Gray School. But no one seemed to think that was desirable at that point, it was needed somewhere else.

There was a little church nearby; I can't remember the name of it.

Interviewer: That doesn't matter.

Mrs. Dennison: Just a block away from the school and I happened to meet one of the officers of the church on the street one day, and I told him my idea that I would like to take an organization that we had been running as substitute for a local club and running it in the Gray School after school. But a club for girls is not in a school or for boys either. It's away from the school where they are on their own.

Well, he said, he thought that would be possible. So by that time we had another president of the club and she worked to get that organized and we got some people to work with the girls. We had paid employees and volunteers. And that got started but it had to be small because that little church was tinny too.

However, we looked, and looked, and looked, and looked and couldn't find any place. A place was suggested to us on Vandever Avenue where the diamond icing color people had their own property that they wanted to sell. It was enormous; we never could afford a space that was there. And the property could have sold a portion of it for an advantage.

However, by and by, we found that Veteran to Barren Mores *[phonetic]* **[0:38:17]** were getting rid of their club, it was for sale. We had another drive and we found the money to renovate it and now it is a thriving club. We have three thriving clubs. The one at 1019 Brown which is known as the Dennison Club. The one at...

Interviewer: That was named after you?

Mrs. Dennison: ...at 28th and Carter which is called the Communion Club because they were the ones who invested a considerable money in it and took a real interest. And it was really through these gentlemen that I mentioned earlier who gave us the good beginning with the Communion. But former club in near Peterson was the one that clinched us for us to get something like \$65,000 to carry on a program there for a period of time. And I'm eternally great full to him for that.

Interviewer: You must be very proud?

Mrs. Dennison: The third – yes, I am. The third club is in Newark and they are using a part of a church building down there. But we need to have a different space there because the girls who needed the most, we have to pick up and we don't have good enough facilities for transporting them for one area to another.

But it gives me a deal of satisfaction to see ongoing successful. We have now the third director in the Wilmington Club. Our first director was there I think three years and went on to become an outstanding person in the national field, working in the national field.

**[0:40:00]**

And the next person was Darin Kirkland *[phonetic]* **[0:40:03]**, who retired at the end of December this past year in 1976. And now, Margaret Henry is the new chairman, a new director. She had been the director under Miss. Kirkland director of the Kiwanis Club *[phonetic]* **[0:40:21]**. And we saw her effectiveness. She has a wonderful way of working with the girls and also of making things happen.

Interviewer: Then have you really done an awful things in your life you wanted to?

Mrs. Dennison: Oh, my – no. Who does?

**[Laughter]**



However, you see I was still working at Gray School when this began. And then in 1964, I retired. And so, I've been out of the work now for – what is it?

Interviewer: Seventeen years.

Mrs. Dennison: Thirteen years.

Interviewer: Oh, 13 years, yeah.

Mrs. Dennison: Thirteen years and it seems as yesterday.

Interviewer: You're still involved with the girls club?

Mrs. Dennison: Oh, yes, yes.

Interviewer: You're on the Board?

Mrs. Dennison: I'm on the Board and a permanent member I guess on the Board. But we have some very fine people; we've had wonderful people on the Board. And we had a wonderful drive to get money, campaign to get money to build up and make suitable for girls at the newest club there at 28th and Carter. And we did it within our organization. One of our Board Members who was a banker, really made it possible for us to do that on a very, very limited amount of money. And we were so proud that we weren't spending our money just paying somebody to raise money. But for all just on all of us as angels we're paid for. But not his time, or his energy or his planning and we are deeply great full to him.

Interviewer: Well...

Mrs. Dennison: David Heligous *[phonetic]* **[0:42:11]** is a member of the staff at the Wilmington Trust Company.

Interviewer: Well, you've been very fortunate that you've been able to fulfill some of your dreams and some of your missions?

Mrs. Dennison: I have indeed. And now I'm enjoying retirement. And always busy getting into something more. I enjoyed very much the AUW Legislator study group, where we select certain areas that we're interested. And then invite them in, in the state or the women who are participating in these legislative affairs. And by knowing what needs to be done, we sometimes can write a letter or we hope influence somebody to consider the importance of things that need to be done.

Interviewer: I can see you're still functioning very actively in that community. What advice would you give to young people?

Mrs. Dennison: There's a lot of people that I'd like to talk *[inaudible]* [0:43:11].

Interviewer: Oh, yeah, I was going to ask you that. What advice would you give to young people?

Mrs. Dennison: Well, in what direction?

Interviewer: Well, you've had a lot of experience and...

Mrs. Dennison: The young adults you mean?

Interviewer: Yeah, the young people today.

Mrs. Dennison: Oh, I think they have to get into things and work. With community affairs, participate. If they're just playing around, life is not so meaning full. I think that young mothers are pretty well tied by their children and should be for a period of time, they need them so badly. The children need their mothers so badly.

But after that, I think a mother is a more interesting person who gets into things, and she comes home, and she's telling of what's going on and this broadens the outlook of a child, so that I think that this is one of the big things. Also I think that if they were thinking about things in the community and things that they can do, or things in the church or many other things that one could think of, there is less likelihood for them to be thinking of all the little pity things that bring about arguments and disagreements within the household and cause them to break up.

Interviewer: Well, then that leads us – I need to ask you about your involvement in your religious life. You mentioned that your early life and you mentioned it in Dover; you mentioned it several times, what part does religion played in your life?

Mrs. Dennison: Well, at times it has played a big part and it times it hasn't, probably as big A part.

**[0:45:00]**

Always as a child I was part of the Sunday school and then join the church. Then there came a time when I was going to Columbia all the time, and working and studying which I did very little for the church. I had a Sunday school class I had son in the choir as a young woman. But by the

time I was doing these things at Columbia, I really couldn't spare the time because I was working fast until I get things finished up and not having just drag along too long. But after that, I became more interested.

When Tom Luis was the best church where I had been a member since I was baby, he was very much involved with the community. And the community around west church had a very hard time. It was there that we had a riots in the city, that we had many people who are unhappy, frustrated, thought that they were neglected and hurt in their ways of living. And I have felt that Mr. Luis, gave more than anybody I know to trying to meet the needs of those people around Center City.

And I became interested; as a result I became a member of the session. When you are elected to a session, you are part of it for three years and then you'd take a year off.

Interviewer: Is that a governing body of the church?

Mrs. Dennison: It is the governing body of the Presbyterian Church. And also I was invited to be on committees that were serving the church. We had an urban committee, it was citywide or rather Presbytery wide that was planning and concerned for what was going on in the city using money and that still goes on. I'm no longer on the session nor working on those committees. I have found that it's better for me to let other people do those things.

Interviewer: But you're still very interested...

Mrs. Dennison: But it has been a great part of my later particularly after I retired and I've been very interested in it. I served on the Presbytery which extends down through Delaware and part of Baltimore. And then a higher group goes on clear down into Virginia and North Carolina.

Interviewer: Then the church has been very, a very important part of your life?

Mrs. Dennison: A very important part of my life. And I hope I've been able to contribute something worthwhile to it.

Interviewer: Well, obviously it has given you something too. May I ask you how do you feel about America? Is run well or is it run badly? That what are the kinds of direction do you think our country is taking?

Mrs. Dennison: How could I know? I think no one knows. It's very hard to say naturally, I'm really a very patriotic person. Not in that modern sense but I love America. And I feel so often what we see happening is hurting America

and many time just disgraceful. How we happen to be that way? If you go back and read the lives of Jefferson, and Adams and some of these older men, they're point of view was always for building or doing the direct thing and the correct thing.

But today, we have so many people who are willing to do the wrong thing for a little profit. It may not be a serious wrong thing but that accumulates in time. And we have lived through a bad spell of that. I'm not like a lot of people, I don't damn Nixon all together, I think he made many mistakes. Somebody else in that place might have made the same mistakes. And maybe his organization was part of what lead into so many misfortunate performances. And I feel that Mr. Ford tried hard to lift the country out of that and accomplished a great thing.

**[0:50:07]**

Maybe he had accomplished what he was intended to do, we'll have to wait and see now what happens next.

Interviewer: Well, I thank you very much for sharing with us.

**[0:50:20] End of Audio**