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QUAESITA DRAKE  
RETIRED PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY  
DELAWARE WOMEN'S COLLEGE  
UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE

Interviewed by:  
John H. Gauger  
August 12, 1966

Transcribed by:  
Marie McNulty

QUAESTIA DRAKE

INTERVIEWED ON AUGUST 12, 1966

PERSONAL DATA SHEET

B.S. and M.S. from Vassar

PhD. from University of Chicago

Women's College, University of Delaware Faculty - 1917

Full Professor - 1920

Secretary of Delaware Section American Chemical Society

Department Chairman when Delaware College and Women's College  
consolidated

Retired in June, 1955

This interview is conducted with Doctor Quaesita Drake, retired professor of chemistry, first at the Delaware Women's College and later at the University of Delaware. This interview was conducted on July 12, 1966, by John H. Gauger.

Interviewer: Doctor Drake, why did you first enter the field of education? Who got you interested in it?

Professor: Oh, I wanted to teach from the time I was a child, almost. I suppose really one is always influenced by a friend or a close relative, and I was extremely fond of my mother's sister. She was a teacher, and I always wanted to teach. After I entered Vassar, there wasn't any question when I started to take chemistry at Vassar--I had had it a year in high school--and I know 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. 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. During the last part of the time I lived in the dormitory, the head of which was Winifred Robinson, who afterwards was the dean of the Women's College. Of course, that is my immediate connection with the Women's College.

Interviewer: That's why you came to Delaware?

Professor: 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. 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 college whose name I have 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 was 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 magnificent. It was the large sum of \$1,300, which was a good deal 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 1,300 was not even then very magnificent. So I came in the fall that the first class were seniors.

The chemistry was me. I was the chemistry department. When the chemistry department started, rather when the Women's College started, Doctor Penny, who was head of the chemistry of the Delaware College, was presumably the head of the chemistry at the women's end just as Doctor Seifert was head of the English department and Doctor Vaughn, I guess it was, was head

head of the history department. But Doctor Penny really did not have time to take that on his shoulders. 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 departments 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. She went to Wellesley and took that graduate course there, and many years later was head of the physical education at Vassar for a long time. Her name was Alfreda Mosecroff, and many 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 who I never saw. She had gone to California before I came here. But I inherited part of Alfreda Mosecroff's job.

That first year I don't seem to think I did anything but work. (chuckle) I taught five different courses, all the groups small, but nevertheless five different courses. When you never planned a full course, it is quite a thing to tackle. And I remember that I had said to myself: "I'm not going to work on Sunday." Well, I generally worked from 8 a.m. Monday morning till 9 p.m. Saturday night.

Of course, I knew Miss Robinson very well, and the people who stand out most in my mind as making significant contributions are Mrs. Alfred Warner, who was one of the people who had the idea of reintroducing higher education for women into the state

and 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 those vivid people that I remember was a young woman who came here to teach biology when I came here to teach chemistry. Her name was Dora Ware. 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 partly was 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 Curtis. Once in the spring we went as far as Strickensville, and in the fall of 1918 when the college was closed for the flu epidemic, we walked to New Castle. We were the talk of the town after that. (chuckle) So I really did see a great deal of her. She was a very vivid and interesting person. She afterward married a man named Ted Hillebrand who became the head of the mathematics department at the University of Michigan. His proper name was Theophil Henry Hillebrand, but he was commonly known as Ted.

I think 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

for Sussex Hall took place in the fall of 1912, but in the meantime they needed more space for living. There was what I call a double house, a single wall house that faced Kent Way, where Miss Rich and I lived, and there was an extra house a few doors up the street--I think it is the same house that's now on Delaware Avenue that faces the college, sometimes called Mosher Hall--where Dora Ware and Miss Janvier, who was the assistant matron, lived. We ate there, and we saw a great deal more of each other than we would see the other faculty. We moved down to our offices to sleep in the middle of winter when the furnaces wouldn't run on soft coal and you couldn't buy 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, the dining room, the storerooms, and the laundry used by the college were all down in the basement.

The conditions of the time, the war and so on, and the lack of very good transportation meant we went to Wilmington almost not at all. I think Dora and I went once to the theatre. I think maybe a whole group of us did, one evening to the theatre, in the whole year. Of course, I went to Philadelphia; that was where my parents lived. 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 feet.



Some years later, we used to walk farther by going up to a little railroad station that was where the shopping center is and taking the Pomeroy Division as far as we felt like going and then walking back. The railroad used to go from there up through Avondale and on up to Pomeroy, which is on the main line of the Pennsylvania Railroad. It was a freight cutoff, and we used to go up to Thompson's Station or Yedman or any way along there to picnic. Saturday afternoon there was a train at 2 o'clock. And we'd get up there and they'd wait for us if we didn't get there. We would say: "Oh, there's a friend of mine coming down the street." 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 kind of woods, and you can still find wild flowers growing in the same places that they grew in those early days. As I say, it is almost the only thing that is really unchanged, and we hope it wont. It will have to, I suppose, the dam will change it, but----

I thought 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 college was completely closed on account of the influenza, the big influenza epidemic that struck here about the first of October. I think it was the full month of October that we were closed, because we certainly were back here when the Armistice was declared. And while I think I remember fairly vividly the first proper

November 11, what stands out in my memory far more vividly is the night of the so-called "false armistice" when

Interviewer: It was November 9, I think.

Professor: Yes, I think it was, when someone on the men's faculty had been, perhaps it was to Elkton, anyway we all knew about the rumor which we thought was the truth at that time, and they brought back quantities of sparklers which I think were not illegal at that point, and we all gathered up--this was a great occasion for the undergraduates because they usually weren't allowed off the Women's College Campus after nightfall--but we were all up on Fraser Field, and everybody had sparklers, and that whole field was ablaze. 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 the Armistice was officially declared, and I guess there was a parade. I know there was no classes, but it wasn't the same thing as that false armistice with the night celebration and the sparklers all over Fraser Field, which was called Fraser 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 laboratories 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 AAUW 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 30's I was president of that and about the same time, if not exactly the same time, I was secretary of what they called the North American Section, which was the division that included the New England states. 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 was one of the things that they remember me for in the local AAUW. And unfortunately at the same time I was also secretary of the section, the Delaware section, of the ACS, American Chemical Society. That section was formed the fall I came here, and I don't think I went to any meetings that year. Mr. Lamotte DuPont was the first president, and Christmastime, December of 1918, he gave a dinner for then about 200 members of the American Chemical Society that were in this area. They invited Doctor Mitchell who was then president, and Doctor Mitchell and I went in together. And I was the only woman there; there were 200 men and I was the only woman. Then about five years later 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. She had a concern, I think she had Quaker

ancestry, and she had a concern about education for women in this 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's. I guess Mrs. Warner and the other people who had charge of things wrote around to the various colleges for suggestions, and Mrs. Matthews suggested Miss Robinson, but there was--someone met someone on shipboard, now it seems to me it was Dean Habert who knew Miss Robinson; and he, Dean Habert, was very much interested in the Women's College; and he remembered this person talking about her. Because I remember 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 was head of a dormitory, she was a member of the botany department, and I think she was only instructor, at that, because in those days at Vassar there weren't many assistant or associate professors. There was a professor and a lot of instructors.

Interviewer: Were there many women's colleges at that time?

Professor: Oh, yes, there were a good many.

Interviewer: There weren't many, there weren't any in Delaware until-----

Professor: 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 Douglass College. It is just four years younger than the Women's College here. But there were all the so-called seven colleges, Wellesley, Vassar, Mount Holyoke, all those colleges have been established a long time. Barnard was established I think in 1889, and there were women in places like Oberlin and places like Randolph Macon. There were a good many colleges in the south that people don't know about, Agnes Scott, and Randolph Macon Women's College and so on. So women's college was no rarity, it was simply that the short coeducational experience that Delaware College had in the 80's 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. It took a good deal of persuasion to make them think that 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 ones of that very early day, although there were some very good and some very interesting students here at that time that I came. Of course, I know 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 Thomasczechski, and her father was one of the two German chemists who came over here after the First World War to help with the dye manufacture. She came here, 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 the college work except two courses, and then entered Women's Medical and we permitted her to transfer 12 hours, so that she graduated with her class. She has taught at Women's Medical for many years and is one of the outstanding dermatologists in Philadelphia. I suppose I should also mention Lucille Petri, whose present job I can't tell you exactly, and her name is no longer Petri; but she is head of the Women's Army Nurse Corps or something like that, or 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 did get through college in 3 years; she certainly did a remarkable amount of work and edited the yearbook in addition as I have 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. 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 that they are 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 them up beautifully; and sometimes that was a little disconcerting for the people playing with her; but she acted at 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 because she was definitely the best actress that we had. I guess I did act with the drama group at least once. What was it called, The Dead Sisters 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 at Women's College. It was before 1935, at least. I don't remember exactly.

Interviewer: Were there any research projects that you were particularly involved in the field of chemistry during your career?

Professor: Well, not very specific ones. I had an unfortunate kind of research problem for my doctorate, the kind that had

negative results; and when I was teaching here, my teaching load was so heavy and I was also doing advising to arts and science students that I didn't have very much uninterpreted time nor did I have any very good place to work in the summer because we couldn't stay around here in summer, so research was not my contribution to the Women's College. 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 a special problem. During all this time I was particularly interested in the field of history of chemistry, because history was my second love in college. I introduced a history of chemistry course at the Women's College when we revised the curriculum about 1930. 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 saw 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, Rossea, and Sir Humphrey Davey, as they were reprinted. 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.

END OF INTERVIEW