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Dorothy (Black) Davies interview

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CWU Living History Project

Dorothy Davies
March 30th, 1973
Interviewed by Nona Patrick

Ms. Patrick: Do you recall the circumstances of your father coming in to Ellensburg?

Mrs. Davies: We came to Ellensburg in 1916 in midsummer. Our trip here from Lewiston, Idaho...where the family had previously lived when my father was president of the normal school there, was heroine in light of the fine highways that we have now. We came through roads that were axle deep in dust and we had to go so slowly because of chuck holes, that instead of the dust blowing behind us it blew up through the car and we arrived about as dirty a family as you can imagine; my father, my mother, two sisters and myself. We stayed at the old Antler's Hotel and very soon moved to a house on 10th street. At that time there was no president's residence for the college, in fact it was a good many years later that they moved a house that had formerly been the property of a family named Barnes over onto the campus where the high rise dormitories are now...and placed it, I might add, on very shallow foundation so that we literally froze to death the first winter we were there until my father had us attached to the heating plant and after that we were very warm and comfortable. The school at the time dad came here was going through a process of reorganization. Although I don't know the exact figures, the Normal School, as it was then, had somewhere between 100 and 150 students and two of them were men. That was there were, all of the rest were women students and all of them taking education that was the primary purpose of the school at that time. I don't know how many there were on the teaching staff, but it was small and rather intimate. I like to think of the time when my family first came here to the college, all the people in town were interested in everything, particularly in the social affairs of the college. Each time there was a formal dance...and they were formal at that time, there would be a group of patrons and they would arrive with long white gloves and in their very best bib and tucker to serve as patrons and take part in the dance and one thing and another. At that time I would say there was a very close connection between the town and the 'gown' as we call it now. There was a...of course no athletic program at that time. There was a little bit of halfhearted basketball, but not anything in the sense that we have it now. The campus was very small. The big building, which is now, I believe, know as Barge Hall, which at that time it had a high steeple on it...as many people will remember, was the main building and the training school, so called, was one of the other buildings. I tried to remember whether there were any other main buildings...Kamola Hall was the main dormitory and a great many of the dances were held there or on the first floor of Barge Hall, which at that time was the gymnasium. There was a second floor...well, it was a place where we had our assemblies...I guess it was what you would call an assembly and our amateur plays. Dramatics were a real big thing at that time and when they put on a play the whole town turned out for it and it was really quite an affair. There were lots of flowers going over the footlights to the various leads. Of course it's obvious that the...Ellensburg, which was strangely enough not very much different in population than it is now...irrespective of the college and its staff. There was a sort of a graciousness and a slowness, I guess you would call it. At least nobody rushed a great deal. There was several of the people that had come here that were from the east coast and they brought a certain amount of formality to the life and a few southerners who brought a certain amount of leisure. Along Eighth Street, which is now no longer residential to the same degree, there were some very gracious homes and there was a lot of visiting back and forth. One particularly horrendous thing that used to happen, was they had a large afternoon tea. This was before the day of the cocktail party. They would have large teas with the hostess and her so called house party, which was made up of her very closest friends, dressed elaborately and everyone called and had tea and coffee; both men and women, there would be a great many of them attend all these affairs. I think when the men came instead of calling them teas they called them receptions...but the thing they ate was just the same every time anyway, as I remember.

Ms. Patrick: These would be afternoon teas?

Mrs. Davies: Afternoon teas...usual]-y from about 3:30 to 5:30 or 6:00. They had quite a bit of pom to it. As I say the men would come to it and then they got to be receptions. There wasn't as much recreation in the sense that we have it now; skiing, later on, in the '20s a few of the...particularly the Scandinavian people from the coast and from around here started having contests up in the Cle Elum area, but the general public didn't take part in the skiing they went to applaud and freeze to death, I might add...to see all of these ski jumpers and ski pros that time. But, skiing wasn't so common. The hunting, on the other hand was really quite fantastic when I think of it. Dad and all of his friends could go out before they went to their offices in the morning and get their limit of chucker and Hungarian pheasants. There were very, very many more of them because at that time there was much more cover and much more brush in the surrounding valley. There weren't the cattle in this valley at that time. There were some dairy cattle, but not the beef cattle in the numbers there are now. There was regular hay raised, but it was exported to a large extent and not used right here to feed local cattle. There wasn't the interest in fine—blooded horses. There were a lot of horses, but they weren't what I would call elegant by any means. There was a certain amount of polite riding. Of course when we first came here the rodeo had not come into being. That was later in the '20s, I remember exactly when it started, but it gradually came into being as the activities of a group of local men both from the farms and from the business district.

M. Patrick: Was it English riding?

Mrs. Davies: No, we just went out...in fact, we rode in western saddles. I learned to ride and I had never seen an English saddle until a great many years later. No, it was nothing formal and we wore...when I first rode here we wore a horrible contraption called a riding skirt. Some of us who were very daring wore overall pants that was before they called them jeans. During the First World War here we had a cavalry troop and it was very great for some of us that liked to ride. I happen to be one of them. They wanted their horses exercised and they would saddle them and bring them to your house and then come and pick them up and take them back, so we had all of the pleasure and none of the pain of keeping horses or rooming them or having the tack to ride. But, our riding was not in the fine favor with the present day. I don't know what more there is...so many things have changed, obviously...as they have every where else in the world. I think at the time when we first came here this was a very church oriented community. I think that the churches were even more active then they are now. There was a great deal of attendance at churches and church activities for the women were very, very much in the lead. One of the things that I think was interesting when we first came here... there were available quite a bit of household help. There were people who not only wanted the work, but could do it very well. I think people, therefore, lived with a little bit more elaborate style than...I remember that everyone had damask table cloth and big napkins that were ironed on one side and then polished on the other side...that sort of thing One of the things that was very prevalent at that time...many, many of the girls that came here came with very, very few funds and they lived in homes. It was a rare thing for a family not to have a college girl living with them. Those girls went to school and for board and room they helped...that was before the days of the babysitter, I guess they were pre-babysitters, but they didn't call themselves that. There were a great many of those girls who made their way through the four years of school with that kind of background. For the people who did not have a girl living in the house, the Dean of Women and house mothers at the dormitories would find girls that would be glad to go out and help with children or to sit with children. As I said before, I guess they were the first of the babysitters.

Ms. Patrick: Did the Dean of Women exercise a great deal of influence at that time?

Mrs. Davies: She did. They had what I thought was a delightful custom at that time. Many of these girls that came here to school...and believe me, it was a girls school at that time, wanted as much as anything else to learn the niceties of food and serving food and clothing. They were given a great deal of advice and help in the matter of clothing. The physical education department would weigh them in as freshmen and if a girl was overweight and noticeable so, she was helped with diet and exercise to get to a more attractive look. The home economics department gave them a great deal of advice on clothing...the proper clothing and how to wear things and one thing and another. There was much more attention to appearance. Their idea being that when they turned out a teacher she would be socially and personally advanced as well as academically. It was a very important part of her recommendation at that time. There was a lot of corrective

gymnasium at that time, which really helps the girls. You could see some of these girls come very shy and rather unsure of themselves and develop into quite charming young women. In the dormitory, which I always thought was an excellent thing and much better for instance than it was for college when I went there, they had small tables. By that I mean...I think eight or ten, I can't remember which. Every week one of the people at the

table was a hostess and she supervised the serving of food, which was done more or less as it would be family style...and was responsible more or less to seeing that things went well on the table, which was excellent training for these girls because many of them really hadn't had the background in their homes. That wasn't the days when the newspapers had so much information on food and service and so on. When radio and television and all that sort of thing had made one place very much like another...whether it was New York or Thorp...but, at that time it was a very valuable part of the preparation of these girls for teaching. And, as I said, it had a great deal to do with their recommendation for teaching jobs. Almost everyone who went out from the school went out as a teacher that was their idea. At that time of course it wasn't a four year college.

Ms. Patrick: Did they have honoraries and college societies?

Mrs. Davies: Not when I was here, there was nothing of the sort. You must remember your talking about 100 people or so and there was very little...there was no group activity and as far as I know there were no honoraries, and if there were I didn't make any of them.

Ms. Patrick: What was your father's educational background in general?

Mrs. Davies: My dad was a Canadian, he was born in a small town named George Town near Toronto. He was a...graduated from Toronto University and came to this country as a Canadian and was naturalized. This is sort of a personal family thing, but it was always sort of a family joke...his father never, never, forgave him for becoming an American citizen and as a matter of fact disinherited him because he had a very limited attitude toward Americans at that time and in fact on the day of his death he knew they existed but he didn't care much for them. Then dad went to...this may be interesting to some of you...he went down to Missouri and was on the staff. He was very young at the time, I think he was 20 or 21, something like that. I might add he was very handsome.

He went down to Missouri and was on the staff of a small college at a place called Clarksburg and that's where he met my mother.

Ms. Patrick: What was her name?

Mrs. Davies: Her name was Elizabeth Stewart.

Ms. Patrick: What was your father's full name?

Mrs. Davies: George Harold Black. We never named any of our many, many grandchildren after him and it hurt his feelings terribly, but everyone in the family took a dim view of both George and Harold. So, he never did have anyone named after him. Dad just loved Ellensburg and he stayed here until after mother's death and then...and he...this is an interesting thing to show the difference in education...he never did have a doctorate until after he left here.

Ms. Patrick: Where did he go from here?

Mrs. Davies: He went back and took his doctorate...he went back eventually to New York, he took some work at Berkley and then went back to New York and he was on the staff at New York University and then was made a...I don't know what you call it when there is two universities...

Ms. Patrick: Chancellor?

Mrs. Davies: I believe that it was at the University of New Jersey and or at Rutgers and finally became the President of the University of New Jersey when Rutgers and Newark University combined. He stayed there through the war and actually retired several years after he had wanted because during the war there just weren't available people to take his place. I miss spoke...he went to Newark University and it combined with Rutgers rather than the other way around. Anyway, they lived in New Jersey.

Ms. Patrick: How long was he at the Normal School in Ellensburg? About what age was he when he came?

Mrs. Davies: Let's see...in 1916 he would be...well, I'm not very good at arithmetic, but I would say in his 40s and he stayed here until 1929.

Mrs. Davies: I have always been proud to say that the college increased and progressed and had quite a bit of more recognition and prestige. At that time almost all the credentials from here...even in the beginning, were exchangeable at State Universities. You go get full credit for the work taken here, it was a full credited...from the beginning.

Ms. Patrick: What were some of the requirements for admission?

Mrs. Davies: You had to be...have graduated from an accredited high school to enter here. As I say, their accreditation was good and they gained a certain amount...well, not a certain amount, but a great deal of prestige here for their excellence in rural education. Before the days of consolidated school, rural schools were completely separate from any city system and some of them were deplorable. Their standards were bad, their housing was bad, the whole curriculum was way below standards. This school did a great deal of work, which was recognized nationally in improving rural education and training programs.

Ms. Patrick: Did the great majority of its graduates go into rural teaching?

Mrs. Davis: Well, I wouldn't know, I really wouldn't know. I don't think they did necessarily, I think probably many of them did go into rural education...I really couldn't tell you about that.

Ms. Patrick: How long was the education program at that time?

Mrs. Davis: They had a two and a three at that time. There was a certain elementary...my memory isn't too good on the details of this, but there was an elementary certificate that they got at the end of two years. It had to be renewed, I think, after a very short period of teaching, than there was what was then called the advanced program which was three years. In other words you went two years if you wanted to and came back...it was not for some time a four year college. I graduated from here in 19...well, I didn't get my certificate...this is sort of interesting, I didn't get my certificate from here until 1919 because they couldn't give it to me because I was too young I couldn't teach in this state at that time, I never did teach as a matter of fact, but I didn't get it until after I had been out of school and I came back and was awarded my diploma and teaching certificate at that time.

Ms. Patrick: What age did you have to be?

Mrs. Davies: Eighteen...

Ms. Patrick: ...and you were?

Mrs. Davies: I was fifteen.

Ms. Patrick: Was that very unusual?

Mrs. Davies: I don't think so. There was always a certain amount of suspicion that the reason I did so well in school and got through so early was because my father was in the school system, but we don't talk about that.

Ms. Patrick: You graduated from high school in Lewiston?

Mrs. Davies : Yes, in Lewiston. I graduated from high school and came over here. I was able to, by switching my credentials from here to the University I entered as an advance student...that I was able in three years to get a degree from both the University of Washington and from here.

Ms. Patrick: Did you find the University at that time much more difficult?

Mrs. Davies: No, it wasn't...I think, as a matter of fact, and I have said this and I will continue to say it...I learned more here than I did over at the University. Of course when I got over there I went into the school of journalism and it was rather specialized and for me...extremely interesting and easy. I really felt that when it came to learning the basics I think I did better here. They had some excellent teachers here. Some very dedicated teachers. For instance, Mary Grupe in Physiology was a thousand years a head of herself. She reminded me of...in appearance, of Margaret Mead in Anthropology. She was a dedicated woman and very well versed in her subject. She lived and breathed her teaching. Mr. Smyser was another man who, in my estimation, was way a head of his time. Of course they had a real spark plug in Professor Stevens, who was eccentric as could be, but he stimulated people to thinking. You could go into his class and learn to think independently and argue and support your point of view, which frequently was wrong...but, he was in the old school of teachers, a really stimulating teacher. I think of course, I have no advanced degrees, I stopped with bachelor degrees, but I think that some...there are not very many provocative teachers and that happened to be three that I named off the top. There were very many other members of the staff who were excellent, too, but those three sort of stirred people up to going on and self educating themselves.

Ms. Patrick: Did your father teach also?

Mrs. Davies: He did when he first came and later on as administrative matters became more demanding....the school grew very fast. I can't give you figures, I really don't know. After I left here to go to the University I only was a visitor for many, many years until I came back here in 1948.

Ms. Patrick: Did you find the town greatly changed?

Mrs. Davies: Not much, no. I haven't ever thought...maybe I sound very...in my attitude, but I have never thought of Ellensburg as changing a great deal. I don't believe it will change in its flavor. Now, don't get me wrong; it is a different sort of town and people are different and have gone along with the times, but there is a certain flavor...I guess that's the word for it, about Ellensburg and I don't think it will ever change. For instance, I can't see us as an industrial place. I think that the charm and delight of Ellensburg has always been that it was a family town. If you notice in business here how many third and fourth generation families there are here in business. Now, some people deplore that, but it is whether you like it or don't like it...I like it, it's part of the picture here. I think that that's one of the things that has made it interesting and kept it very much the same sort of community. That and the geography. You know you can only go so far until you hit the hills here. The one thing that is noticeable now and many people look upon...go out for a drive and look around and see all the new houses and they say, 'Oh, Ellensburg is growing.' Oddly enough, it's shifting rather than growing in population. There has been some increase, but it's shifting in the sense that people are moving away from the central part of the town and moving out into the country and living a more or less country life, which is the charm of the valley as I see it.

Ms. Patrick: Did the one college residence that you moved into remain the Presidents house or was there a change?

Mrs. Davies: Until my father left...no. This house was...it's rather interesting, there must have been one builder here who cornered the market. I don't know if anyone is familiar with the house that the Denman's are making over...it's just exactly the same floor plan.

Ms. Patrick: There are two still existing.

Mrs. Davies: Well, this house that we moved into was moved onto the property right behind the...the heating plant was there at the time. My mother who was a meticulous housekeeper lost her mind over the soot that came in on her white curtains. She had to wash and fluff them every week or so, it was really quite bad. It was the same old pattern and a house with quite a lot of charm...it was a great inconvenience. One of the things that was interesting about that house and I expect some of the older people may remember it...in back of it was sort of a cellar that had been half buried in the ground and had sod over it, which was a kind of cold room. We didn't have to have a freezer because it kept all but the most perishable foods just at the right temperature...melons and fruits and all that sort of thing...we used that for a store room. It, apparently, must have been there before they moved the house there because there must have been some sort of structure there and I honestly don't know what it was. But, at any rate we added it on in a sort of a rambling fashion...it was part of that house. The house was not big enough to have a very large college function...the things that happened there were more or less the teas and reception sort of things. But, it was a house with a lot of charm and as I say it, must have had a house on that property which was removed to put it in because there were big trees and it was a very pretty place.

Ms. Patrick: How would you describe the physical look of the college at that time?

Mrs. Davies: Well, it had a pattern to it that was, I thought, extremely charming because the buildings were all of the same architectural type and connected by trees and walks. It had a certain amount of charm and dignity and of course it. was very...the architecture was of that kind and if you look now at Barge Hall and Kamola and Sue Lombard and the buildings around there, they have a certain friendliness of architecture and of course the next buildings that came in were...of any size were McConnell and I don't know what they call that building on the other side, but which of course was the library when it was originally put in, but I don't know just exactly what it's name is now, I should, but I don't. They were the next two buildings and they had a quad pattern that they were going to work out, which did not work out.

Ms. Patrick: You attended the 50th reunion of your class?

Mrs. Davies: Yes I did. It was in '69.

Ms. Patrick: Were there many members there?

Mrs. Davies: I think there were only about seven or eight of us. It seems to me as if Mrs. Stan Farrell and I were the only local members. We have had a certain amount of discussion, Mrs. Morton McQueen and myself as to whether we were classmates. She maintains that she was a graduate in 1918 and that's possible that I was in her class, but I didn't get my diploma until 1919, so I think I got through school here in '18, but had to come back in '19. I don't know there is a certain amount of...and I shied away from that 50th...I didn't want it.

Ms. Patrick: Was there a ruling at that time that women teaching at the Normal could not be married?

Mrs. Davies: No.

Ms. Patrick: What about teachers?

Mrs. Davies: Graduated teachers they didn't encourage married women to teach. I don't know if it was a state law or simply a custom, I really don't know. But, there would be very few married teachers. Another thing too, they were very, very fussy about off campus residents. The students were only allowed to live in places that had been inspected....you might say, I don't think you would call it inspected, but O.K. before...the rules in the dormitory were very strict. The hours were...certain hours the doors were locked and they would only go out on certain nights. I don't think, in general, the students were allowed or encouraged to have any social activities in the midweek.

Ms. Patrick: Did you live in a dormitory?

Mrs. Davies: No, I lived at home. But, as I say we lived on 10th Street in a house that had been owned by the Holmes family. He was in business here. We lived there and several other places and then finally in the residence that was moved onto the property. I had a rather...I don't know whether you would call it a moving or experience; when I came back here to visit one summer I saw a house being moved down the street and that was it being moved off the property and it still is on Ruby Street, part of it, they broke it in half and it's over on Ruby Street and painted brown...hardly recognizable, but it is over...I think it's between Fourth and....well, it's off Ruby Street between Fourth and Fifth some where. I know my sister when she visited here long ago argued firmly that it couldn't be, but we finally recognized some windows and one thing and another, but the house was broken in two.

Ms. Patrick: Was there not much dating...since there were no male students?

Mrs. Davies: As a matter of fact the young men of the town were very much interested in the girls here but there wasn't the dating there is now obviously, there wasn't as many men available. But, you would be surprised if you go down the list of matrons in Ellensburg of about my generation, how many of them were girls that came here to college and married local business men. I could name many, many of them who were girls who came here to college; Mrs. Lewis Fitterer, Mrs. Stan Farrell, those are just two of many.

Ms. Patrick: Do you remember anything about clothing standards?

Mrs. Davies: We were very conservative...of course every place, let's face it, was much more conservative than it is now. For instance, I was thinking the other day, my mother would have absolutely dropped dead to see me go to market. She wore hat and gloves and was properly clad when she went to market. Of course going to market then you didn't push a cart around, you called up your grocer and gave him your list and it was delivered to your door. You didn't have to go out and struggle with the market cart. Life was a little bit easier and more formal. But, my mother never would have thought of going down town for any errand whatever without being properly dressed. None of this running in a hurry with a scarf around her head to get the groceries.

Ms. Patrick: What was your mother's background?

Mrs. Davies: She was the daughter of a doctor who lived in this little town in Missouri and her father was a veteran of the Civil War on the Northern side and her mother came from Ohio. Her mother was a distant relative of Williams Jennings Bryan. Her family name was Jennings. We were not awfully proud of that at the time being staunch republicans, but nevertheless that was mother's background. She was not, in any sense, interested in education before she married my father. She was a rather reluctant student at a young ladies academy of some sort. As a matter of fact I think it was the one where my dad taught.

Ms. Patrick: Who was in your family besides you and your sister?

Mrs. Davies: I have two sisters. I was the oldest and then I had a sister, Elizabeth, she also graduated from here and the University of Washington and then a sister, Janet. Elizabeth then came back to be my dad's secretary for several years, after she graduated from college. None of us ever taught, much to my fathers

sorrow. When I say none of us...Janet taught very briefly for one year or so, but he always wanted us to go on into the profession. He was very, very proud of educational achievement. I think it really made him very sad to see none of us did. I graduated in Journalism and Elizabeth went into secretarial work and Janet taught very briefly and then did other types of work. She

worked in libraries and that sort of thing.

Ms. Patrick: There is a Black Hall.

Mrs. Davies: Yes, that's named after my father.

Ms. Patrick: Was he still alive at the time?

Mrs. Davies: He was dead the time that it was named after him...so was Miss Grupe. If you remember Grupe Center and Black Hall, which are close together... were finished about the same time. He had died quite a number of years before it was named after him.

Ms. Patrick: In the circumstances of his coming to Ellensburg was he interviewed in advance by a higher education board?

Mrs. Davies: No, it was rather an interesting thing; my mother just loved Lewiston, Idaho. He had been President of the Normal School there and there was a certain amount of reluctance on the part of both of them, but it was more of an opportunity. Idaho was a very backward state educationally at that time. They didn't have the money or the people or the tax money to spend on higher education. He felt that this was a more progressive state. He came here...I think we could say...he didn't call them, they called him. There was no review of any sort. As I say, it was rather remarkable in light of the fact that so many people now bare doctor and master degrees...he got his master degree after he was here...he went back to the University of Chicago for that, but he didn't get his doctor until after he had left here. He realized that to get into any kind of a good position in higher education that he had to have that. He completed his thesis and then went back and did some departmental work at New York University before he went to Newark.

Ms. Patrick: Did the professors perhaps not have advanced degrees either?

Mrs. Davies: Very few of them. I don't know that there were very many doctors...I couldn't speak on that, but I don't remember that there...it wasn't certainly as prevalent as it is now.

Ms. Patrick: In what order was your father President...second or third President?

Mrs. Davies: Dr. Wilson was the first real President. There was another man and his name escapes me...I should know it...who had taken over supervisory work, but I think Dr. Wilson...I believe he was a Doctor, but I'm not sure. Anyway, President Wilson was the first formal President I think of the college. I think one man was named Barge and then there was another supervisory man in there by the name Morgan. I don't know the exact ratification. I should, I read this...*First 75 Years* and I think it bears out any ideas.