

This is an interview with Cleora Skinner, March 19, 1963.

About how many years were you connected with the Portage School System?

I came when the Portage School System started here in connection with this with a as a sub\_\_\_\_\_ school with Western. I was here about 18 years.

Were you the first principal here?

That's right. I was.

What were the duties of the teachers under you when you first came? What were their duties? Did they have a library in the classroom?

Well, there were only 5 teachers when this school first opened and each one had a class.

Did you teach at all when you came?

Yes, I love teaching and I..it was necessary at the beginning that I teach, of course and during the..there was a contract between Western University and the Portage School Board and they paid the teachers and the District furnished the building and as we grew rapidly right at the beginning and the first year was the only year that we had plenty of room. We had one extra room and after that we have always been crowded.

Where did you live when you came here?

When they asked me to come here I had a family of adopted children, <sup>nieces</sup> and nephews and I said that I didn't want to come ~~in~~ unless I could find a place to live and there weren't many places to rent at that time so the school board said, "I'll build a house for you <sup>Had he built it</sup> right across from the school," and I rented it all the time that I was here.

Was your house used for school purposes also?

We were affiliated with the college and Dr. Sangren taught testing at that time and he would often call me and say, "I'm bringing a class of students out for testing, and I will need 8 individual booths or places for them to do the testing." And we didn't have many spots where the students would be uninterrupted, so the best that I could do would quite often be that I would take students over to my house and there would be one testing in the kitchen and another one testing in the living room and maybe even one upstairs. I always took a hurried run over there first to see how the family had left things.

Did the school operate buses?

Yes we had buses from the very beginning, and one interesting thing, at a board meeting when the bus drivers were hired, the President of the School Board, one question that he asked the bus drivers, "Are you willing to take instructions from a woman?" They were Hollanders and sometimes they might not like it but they looked at me and looked me over and said, "Yes, I think that I can take instructions from Miss Skinner."

What kind of public relations were there at that time?

We spent a good deal of time to create the right kind of feeling between the school and the parents. I saw them relax after leaving the school because I

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did so much, we all did calling in the homes. We aimed to.. we had to know the people. We always aimed to get into a home first before there was any trouble. And then if we needed, if there was some misunderstanding or some trouble that we needed to report, the parents understood us. We tried to get into every single home.

What was the economic status of most of the families from which the children came? Were they farmers or?

At the very beginning, we had a number of celery farmers and some people who worked in Kalamazoo but they always were interested in the kind of schools and I think that is the spirit that has existed to this very day. Portage would do anything for their schools.

Would you say that the School Board was very far-sighted?

I think they were. They had built this first unit that is right across/<sup>the road</sup>from the house they built me and from the very beginning I feel that they were far sighted. They wouldn't have been chosen to have been a part of Western Michigan College in the beginning if they had not been far-sighted. That was something quite worthwhile at that time.

You said that you were affiliated with Western Michigan. Did you have student teachers at that time?

~~xxxxxxxx~~ Oh, yes. Buses came, probably two bus loads in the morning, two busloads in the afternoon. We had many. Part of my work was ~~xxx~~ with the student teachers even though they didn't teach with me, work with me in the classes that I taught.