This is an interview for the Humboldt State University Oral History Project. Edie Butler is interviewing Estelle Preston McDowell at her home on December 2, 1983. Mrs. McDowell was associated with the college first as a student at the training school, next as a student teacher practicing teaching at the training school, and then as a supervising teacher at the college elementary school.

EB: I understand that you’ve had a lot of association with the college.

EPM: Oh, yes. Many years. Yes.

EB: Would you briefly explain in what different eras you’ve had what connection with the college.

EPM: Well, the earliest recollection that I have of even realizing that there was going to be, course at that time, a normal school here was when my father returned one evening from a meeting and, he was normally a very quiet individual, but he burst open the front door and just shouted, he called my mother, “Carrie,” a nickname and “Carrie, we’ve got it.” And I was about eight or so. I remember sitting up in bed and wondering what we had but then, of course, I heard so much talk about it afterward that it wasn’t too long but that’s the earliest that I can recollect.

EB: So this had been a project that had been real important to him?

EPM: Oh, very. Yes, and he saw it as something that would be good for the entire area, to have an institution that would go beyond the high school level here in this area. So, of course, when the appropriation was made for the school, then of course there had to be someplace to hold classes, and of course at that time, they had no buildings.

EB: So when he declared “we have it.” Did that mean that Arcata?

EPM: He meant that Arcata, that there had been a meeting of the, I believe, of the Board of Trustees, who had voted that it should be placed in Arcata. And he had attended that meeting, not in an official capacity, but of course, it was open to the public and that’s why he went. And so of course, while the, they had a site, they had no buildings and yet they wanted to open the institution as soon as they could. So they constructed one-story, wooden buildings, down on 11th Street. I usually say to people, right near where the Copeland Lumber Mill Yard is now, if you know where that is. And there the open classes then, well I really wouldn’t know just how many months, but it was not too long a time, and then when the permanent site was prepared, they moved those one-story buildings bag and baggage up onto the permanent site and they were placed in a quadrangle, just like Founders Hall is now, built around a court and a

EB: On the same side?

EPM: On the same side, yes. As soon as they had leveled, cleared it off. Then that was used until about 1920 or 21 when an appropriation was made for the first permanent building which is Founders Hall. And of course then they had to get the temporary buildings out of the way so they moved them again.
This time they split them and part were moved onto the site what is now Nelson Hall and used as the elementary school and the other part was moved to down on the end of the hill where the engineering building is now. And that consisted of the buildings they retained there. There was a small gymnasium and the building that was used as a cafeteria and a, but those were still in use when I returned to Humboldt as a graduate student, '36 to '37, to get a degree. They were, those temporary buildings on the south side were still in use and weren’t moved and disposed of until the engineering building which was built as a library to start with. And that was dedicated in the early 1950s and that was when the temporary buildings were finally disposed of.

EB: Long time temporaries.

EPM: Yes, yes and then the ones that were on the side of Nelson Hall, of course, were disposed of before that because then the State appropriated money to build Nelson Hall. Then they disposed of them.

EB: I saw accounts of many efforts to get money for a new and better dormitory and on account of the sad condition of the current dormitory. Is that the dorm they referred to?

EPM: Yes, yes. They...

EB: One of the original temporary buildings and its third location.

EPM: Yes. Right.

EB: And being it’s just a dorm.

EPM: Yes. That was right and of course as I mentioned, you see, when the normal school, as it was then known, was established, it was exclusively for the training of elementary school teachers and they later in the 1920s did institute a junior college course. You could take two years of college work and then transfer to the university. But at first they had just the normal school training teachers and it was necessary if they were going to have an elementary school on campus to house them, and so then they moved the temporary buildings from the side of Founders Hall over to Nelson Hall that was where the elementary school was and that’s where I graduated from the eighth grade from, over there.

EB: That’s what you said on the phone. Tell me about... you must have been one of the first students to attend.

EPM: Well I was...

EB: Was it called the college elementary school?

EPM: It a, well largely it was referred to at first as the training school because it was for training teachers and supervised by the college professors. And I was a fourth grader when and we a... the first classes were up on the side of Founders Hall after they had moved the temporary buildings up there. And we were in the back, on the side of the quadrangle, it would be toward the hills. And that was all great. And of course were taught by the student teachers, who were preparing to teach and they were
supervised by the college professors so it was, we really did get a very thorough education and it was, the teachers were assigned to teach a subject, like we would have a teacher for arithmetic and then he or she would go on and the teacher for reading would come in. So, of course, then in the course of the day we might have six, seven different student teachers.

EB: Was there a supervising teacher who was in the classroom throughout the time?

EPM: Not at that time. Later. That came later. After the present Gist Hall, you see, was built for an elementary school and then they instituted the system of having what we called supervising or room teachers and they were to come in and help the student teacher and kind of see that they were understood. But at first... Of course, we had a principal of the elementary school and, as I say, all eight grades and we did have opportunities. I think, for a special thing that the average elementary school didn’t have a chance to do and a chance to do things, I know, when I was in fourth and fifth grade, the music supervisor at the time, Miss, she was Miss Rachel Lothrop then, she later became Mrs. Tom Hine, and she organized an elementary school orchestra. And we met, oh, on a regular basis after school and while, of course, we were not any competition for a symphony or anything, we really did learn a lot about playing with others and what it meant to be a member of a group of that sort. So, and I remember, of course, I suppose we always remember the, either the ridiculous or the things that embarrass us, we had gotten some, we had several things that we could play and play reasonably well. I played second violin, by the way. I never got to first. But, anyway, we were invited as the elementary school orchestra to play for the normal school graduation. And, of course, at that time, the graduating class was quite small. But still, we were thrilled. Those were the people we had known as teachers and they were going to be graduating and we were going to play. And so my parents had walked up to the graduation and, it was quite a little event in the community, and I remember Miss Lothrop was standing up front and she had her baton and, of course, everything was just the very correct issue, had just tapped her music rack, silence, we would proceed, and my chair was directly in front of the boy with the bass drum and right at this period of silence, boom, boom, boom, boom, rang out. Ah, what is the matter with Paul Worthington? Not knowing... starting to play the drum. I looked down and our family dog, who had followed my parents down, unbeknownst to, I guess even to them or to me, they weren’t watching him, he had located me in the orchestra and his tail up against ___ and I had to get up at ____ at great embarrassment to take the dog out. So

EB: Oh dear, did you then come back?

EPM: Oh yes, I came back but my day was ruined.

EB: You mentioned that you had lots of opportunities that children going to the other schools didn’t have. It was a plus in that way. Were there any negatives going to the ...?

EPM: Ah, well, of course, a children isn’t as good a judge, you know, now an adult might say, you mean you didn’t do this, you didn’t do that. But now, for instance, when we were in the sixth grade, a teacher decided that we should know how to debate and we followed the regular debating format and just as adults would. And you know, that never left me. I was on the debating team then when I went to Humboldt later. Loved it, every minute of it but my memory kept going back to this in the sixth grade.
Now, of course, we were not tied to a course of study like, I say, an ordinary elementary school. We had to get over the basics, of course, but we couldn’t devote time to something like preparing a debate, where in a regular classroom and in many of the classes at that time in the schools in the outlying areas there was more than one grade in a room. And we had a maximum of 12 youngsters in each class.

EB: Per class?

EPM: Per class. And, of course, discipline was just almost of negligible quality with that few, you know, and we did get to do a lot of these extra things. I even remember what we, the question we debated. Was resolved that the Indian, the American Indian, was more cruelly treated then the negro? And we had to look up things and... but it... and another thing that, oh I must have been about, along the same time, when one of the students teachers had us using dictionaries, looking up words in dictionaries, and he found that we did not know what a diacritical markings were which meant a soft, a short a, and which meant a long a and so forth. So he undertook a little project, I thank that man mentally more times, he saw to it that we did know, and then we would, with a great deal of practice, a what those diacritical markings meant so that any dictionary was opened up to us. Things like that and we did do quite a bit too in the way of a, oh, dramatization, and that sort of things.

EB: So you had a small class and exuberant teachers.

EPM: Oh very... yes, yes. And the supervisors, that is those were, of course, faculty people. But they came in, oh, such a cooperative manner. Sometimes one of the supervising faculty would take the class. Now I remember a Mr. Bier, who was the, the supervised the arithmetic. And I can remember so well that he would come in and watch what was going on and how we were responding and then sometimes he would take the class for a few moments and go to the blackboard and illustrate something and turn to us with a quick... so that we would have to respond quickly and we got a great deal out of that. And, of course, we knew all the faculty. We had that direct contact with them. And drama which, of course, always been a love of my life, we had lots of fun with plays but they had high standards of seeing that you got what you should get in the basics. So a...

EB: How ere the students selected in the community that would attend that school?

EPM: It wasn’t so much a matter of selection as it was a matter of who came and applied first. It wasn’t “oh we don’t want him” or “my _____ _____ _____ _____.”

EB: I imagine it was a desirable school for a child to go to.

EPM: Yes, yes and it was more in the nature, really... it was more comparable to a private school and, of course, the advantage you had in individual help from the teacher with only 12 youngsters, he or she had time to see that you got any help that you needed and a, but I have very fond memories of the elementary school and a... it was really a very, very joyous experience.

EB: Are any of your classmates from those days still in the area?
EPM: Well, I know where they all are. Yes. There were 12, of course, in our class and one... I know where I think at least six are who are still living.

EB: Are any of them in the area?

EPM: Yes. There's one in Eureka, and one in Woodland, and one in Sacramento, and one in San Mateo. They're kind of scattered but there is one in Eureka.

EB: Yeah. You have followed each other.

EPM: When we were in...

EB: The person who's in Eureka, may I have that person's name?

EPM: Tom Carey. I don't know that he would want his name mentioned or not.

EB: Uh huh. Okay. _____ _____ _____ I'm writing names down as you mention so I can check spelling later so that when these are transcribed...

EPM: Well. I can give you the names of the others, of course, I don't know that they would want their names mentioned but I can give them to you, if you want them.

EB: Well I'm writing them down so we can check the spelling later so it's transcribed...

EPM: But then speaking of drama, when we were in the eighth grade, we had a very dynamic student teacher and she thought that we were plenty old enough to read and appreciate Shakespeare, so we read the Merchant of Venice in eighth grade, then she wanted to know if we didn't feel like we would like to dramatize the courtroom scene and, of course, we thought we would and so we did The Merchant of Venice. In fact, I have some pictures from that – some snapshots I could lay my hand on, if you want to see them.

EB: Oh, I'd love to.

EPM: But, course, they're small ones. But we did it again for the Normal School student body, not just for other children and in fact, the fellow that lives in Eureka calls me Portia if I have to_____ and he was Antonio in the Merchant of Venice. And I remember, course again, it's the funny things that stand out for you, you know. The fellow is gone now who played the Duke in the courtroom scene and a, but he was absent when, he was not very strong, he was absent for an illness, but he had been a very gentle person, I was to shake hands with him when I came out and he said, “give me your hand, come you from Old Bolero.” And I _____, I was so used to this gentle approach, well Norman was ill the day we were doing the performance so Fred Stone, another one of the boys, just so, one of these peppy youngsters, was reading the part and here he stood taking Norman's place with a book in hand, he didn't have to worry about cues or anything else. So when I came in and put out my hand, of course, he squeezed down hard, you know the way ______. Honestly, I couldn't _____.

EB: You slapped it, huh?
EPM: Anyway, those are the things that you remember.

EB: Uh huh. Did you carry on with your lines?

EPM: Oh yes, yes. Of course, we had good off stage support but anything like that, he wouldn’t have been, would have done that if he had been trying to remember his lines too, you know, but he didn’t have to. He was reading as a substitute. But I think it was a high point for all of us to have done Shakespeare, you know, when ... and to have had a teacher who was inspired enough to make us see the beauty of it and all. That all, of course, was elementary school again.

EB: Uh huh. What kind of graduation ceremony was there?

EPM: For us? Well, we were in the, what we called the little gym, that was the part of the temporary building that I said remained so long on the south end of the site. There was a... they couldn’t put chairs in there at that time. It was before the completion of Founders Hall. They had started to build it but it wasn’t finished. And that’s where the graduation was held in that little gym and we did a play again and the... it was the 1920 and it was the Tercentenary of the Landing of the Pilgrims and the teacher had told us that and we’d talked about the pilgrims and so forth so she thought it would be very, the reading teacher, thought it would be very appropriate if we did a dramatization that had to do with the pilgrims and so they were very methodical. They wanted everyone to have a fair opportunity and so they said we had done the Merchant of Venice along the middle of the term and they, so they said any who had a fairly long role in the Merchant of Venice would be assigned a shorter role in this one. So, I think, as I recall, all I did was burst open the door and say that the Indians were coming and that there was great danger. _____ one line type of things. But we did do that dramatization with John Alden, Priscilla, Miles Standish and... honoring the pilgrims. That was part of our graduation and then, of course, the President of the University came in and gave us our little certificates, so we were all ready to go to Arcata High.

EB: Before we go forward in time, let me back up a little bit and ask how it came that your family contributed some of the land for the college.

EPM: Well, I don’t think there was any particular thing that led up to it other than the fact that there was the opportunity but there would be a school for higher education here. And, of course, they were very anxious to see that happen and as usual a question of money arose and my father did have the land and saw it was something that would be very beneficial to the area and so he decided to make the gift. He a, my father gave part of the original site and the Union Water Company, part.

EB: Twelve and a half acres?

EPM: Yes. It was the... at the top of the hill, clear along the top of the hill.

EB: Uh, huh. What was the property like before it was given to the college.

EPM: Well, it was just a bunch of brush mainly.
EB: It had been logged?

EPM: Oh yes, quite some time before. It was brushy, bushy, lots of sticky blackberries and things that way. I remember the water tank that supplied the immediate neighborhood, not the whole town but just the immediate neighborhood was up there on top of the hill and if we youngsters got far enough from home to get up near that tank, we were well away from home and, of course, we could see out all over the town. But, it was just completely unimproved at the time. And I know when they started to clear the site, my father thought that I should light the fuse that blew the first stump and so I did have that opportunity.

EB: Oh, did you? Tell me about that.

EPM: Well that... it was just a question of going up. They had it all set with the dynamite charge in it and a very long fuse, I might add, and my mother thought that I should be dressed up and my father said, “she can’t go out through the brush,” and a... “with good shoes on and so forth.” So I did have a white dress on but I had my play shoes, just to get up through the brush. So... it was just that they were starting to clear for the permanent site.

EB: So when you finished high school, did you attend Humboldt?

EPM: Oh yes. And, in fact, I had, of course, by that time, that was, I graduated from high school in 1924 and by that time they had instituted a two-year junior college course, as I mentioned and I felt that I would like very much to go into library work. So my plan as I left home to go up and register, and at that time, of course, it was not through computer registration, you went down to the registration line and evidently the faculty had been instructed to tell us that this was the last class that could register in two years and two summer sessions get a teaching credential. And at first I didn’t pay any attention because I was going to register to take this junior college course and then I hoped to transfer to the university and study to become a librarian. And a, but as I progressed down the line, I began to think “well a credential really wouldn’t be any burden and if I could have it anyway.” So I signed up for teaching. And when I came home, my mother was so surprised because it wasn’t what I’ d left to do. So, of course, in two years and two summer sessions, I had a credential, then I wanted to use it. What good was it doing in the bureau drawer, so I got my first job in Sacramento Valley and taught over there for 12 years.

EB: Uh huh. So all in that one morning the plans to be a librarian just got set aside?

EPM: Yes. Well, I always thought I could do it later. I thought well, I _____ I did go back to school but I didn’t go back to study library... well I had library training when I was in school. In fact it was required. I don’t know whether it is now or not but when I was a regular student, we were required to take a 18-week course, we were on semester then, in library training. And I have been so grateful for that all my life. You can walk into any library and use it, you know, we got so much out of it. But it was a requirement just so we would get more out of the library on campus.

EB: Yeah, when I was in college, I worked in the library and boy, I learned how to use the library.
EPM: Yes. I worked in a library too.

EB: _____ _____

EPM: Yes. Well and libraries everywhere in this country are arranged the same way. So you can walk into any library and dig for whatever you think you want to look up and it’s really a... I’m very happy to have had that.

EB: Uh huh. Were you... was that in a time when different teaching credentials were offered or was it just a blanket teaching credential?

EPM: It was general elementary. It was not specialization. Now, of course, they will specialize in speech therapy or you know, they’ll have a special field they hope to go into. No, that was general elementary and my credential was the first through the eighth grade. You could get at that time a kindergarten primary that wouldn’t, you couldn’t teach above the third grade. But mine was a general elementary and then when you had taught five years, you could apply to the State for a life credential and I did that and then I went back to school, of course, as I told you, to earn my degree because I didn’t have it.

EB: Uh huh, and that was in the mid-30s?

EPM: ’36-’37 – went back to school.

EB: Uh huh. When you were doing your student teaching there, the classroom was different because it was up in Founders Hall by that time.

EPM: No. At that time that I did my student teaching, the University, it was not a university then, of course, it was the state college, or state teachers college, the a, there’s a school, or there was at that time, now how can I explain to you so you’ll have some idea, it was on 11th Street, a near a, oh near 11th and Union in that neighborhood and it had been used as a city school for Arcata for the primary grades. It was called...

EB: Was it the Union ______

EPM: No, no, Pleasant Hills School and, but the city was no longer using it and so the, they were no longer staffing it, and so the college took it over and then they supplied student teachers to Pleasant Hill and I was assigned at that time, of course, as I say it was semester and not quarter, I was assigned to 18 weeks in the first grade at Pleasant Hill and that’s where I did my student teaching.

EB: Um huh and how was it having been in a, well this was a little bit different set up then?

EPM: Yes and much more...

EB: So it’s not quite comparable.

EPM: No, and much more like what you went into when you got a job, a than, the, of course, in the... the classes were not large but they were larger than the CES classes and, of course, we had the, a supervisor from the college on duty, full time. We weren’t just turned loose.
EB: Oh no.
EPM: And we had regular meetings with her to discuss our problems and progress and so forth and of course it was there that I developed my great fondness for first grade which I never got over.
EB: Um huh, so you taught first?
EPM: There, there. Oh no, my first job after I got out was third and fourth grade, combination third and fourth. And then I taught sewing in the eighth grade, and I taught crafts in the eighth grade, and I had the school newspaper with the seventh and eighth grades where, when I taught in Sacramento and really, well, kids are kids and I just loved them all and yet during World War II, why, I went back to teaching because they were so short of teachers. So many were people were gone and I was back to my first love, first grade and I taught two years of first grade in Eureka.
EB: Uh huh. Now I’m getting a little ahead of myself but did you work in the college elementary school?
EPM: Yes.
EB: As a supervising teacher?
EPM: Yes. I came home in January of 1938. I had had word from the President asking if I would be interesting in coming home and, of course, my parents were still here and they were very anxious that I come back up, got a little closer home. So I started in January of ’38 and taught until June of 1940. “Mr Right” had come into the picture in the meantime and he a, we were going to live in Eureka and so forth, so it was just 2 ½ years at the elementary school and enjoyed it thoroughly.
EB: Uh huh. So there you were supervising students where you had once been one and...
EPM: But not more working with the students than supervising them. If the supervisor would say, for instance, I hope you will help Miss so and so. She has either a uniting progress that seems to be giving her problems or something of that kind. You a, we worked with them offering suggestions or we also would take a... there would sometimes be groups come down from the, their classes that were to observe the presentation of a lesson to children and we did the demonstration work, of presenting a lesson and that sort of thing. And we used to say we were the drifters because, now my job was anywhere from the fourth through the eighth grade but that’s a “yes,” wherever they wanted some help for the student teacher or mainly that way or a demonstration lesson.
EB: So you didn’t have a particular class...
EPM: No, no.
EB: ...of students that you were connected with?
EPM: No, no. Just anywhere.
EB: Which was more the way it had been when you had been a student there?
EPM: Yes, um huh. And, of course, it was very interesting because when your teaching and you are the teacher and here are the children, your whole plan is how am I going to be sure they are getting this? This is... put it over to the children but when you have a student teacher, you are trying to give her the help she needs as well as see that the children get it. So it's kind of two-way...

EB: Yeah, goes round about through her...

EPM: Yes, but it was very interesting. I thoroughly enjoyed that and am in touch with a number of the girls that did their student teaching when I was there. So its...

EB: There probably aren't too many people that got to see it from each prospective like you did.

EPM: No, no. It was interesting and, of course, it was interesting from the standpoint of a student at Humboldt in the early 1920s and then to come back ten years later, I was just amazed at the changes that had taken place, not only the physical changes of the buildings and all. But, well, it was so much bigger, there were so many more people, it was just a different...

EB: Was there a different president? Was there a different philosophy up there then?

EPM: Well, Mr. Van Matre, was president when I was attending the elementary school, before I went to high school, and when I came back after high school, Mr. Sweatman was president. And when I came back in 1936-37, Mr. Gist was president.

EB: Uh huh. So you have some contrasting _____.

EPM: Yes.

EB: How was it, how could you notice the changes from administration to administration?

EPM: Well I think as children attending the elementary school you were not too aware. We knew when we’d see Mr. Van Matre, which we did occasionally, that that was the president but we had no direct contact with him. So it was just that we were aware of who he was. He was the president of the university. And then Mr. Sweatman was a very pleasant, approachable man and so was Mr. Gist, just very nice people. And, of course, I have known every one of the presidents but these first three I knew through being in school at one level or another.

EB: So when you left the CES job and moved to Eureka was that the end of your official involvement with...

EPM: With the university? Well, of course, I got pretty well involved with the Alumni Association and worked with them quite actively, was president and all. And, of course, that is very dear to my heart because you’ve known those people, most of them, and to stay in touch and to know what they’re doing and what they have done with their lives and all. It’s very interesting. I’m still very interested in the Alumni Association.

EB: Most of the students at that time came from the local area, didn’t they?
EPM: Yes. I don’t think there were any from any great distance. It was very heartwarming, though, when the Normal School, as it was known when it was first established, was established here. Of course, transportation then was very different than it is now and it was made known that there would be students who, say, even from Mendocino, Ft. Bragg, Ukiah, and down that way would need someplace to stay and there weren’t at that time dormitories or anything of that sort. It was really very gratifying the way the townspeople, who had never thought or entertained any idea of having someone live in their home or rent a room or anything, just were so happy to open their homes—to make a home for students. Of course, the townspeople, the merchants and all responded so wholeheartedly to cooperate, you know, and make things pleasant for the students and that was very gratifying. But as far as dormitories were concerned, I don’t think there was a dormitory as such until those old temporary buildings were moved from the permanent site and put down where Nelson Hall is now and part of them were used as a dormitory—well, where Redwood Hall is now is where they were.

EB: So most of the people were pretty local?

EPM: For the most part, yes.

EB: With your connection with the Alumni Association, you’ve kept track of the people in addition to your own correspondence and so forth. Have many of them moved away from the area?

EPM: You mean that formally lived here or that...

EB: Um huh, they grew up here and went to the local college.

EPM: Well, many of them are still in the area, came from the long-established families. Of course, we made lots of friends of people who did come from away, you know. But no, I think many of them are still in the area.

EB: Because you moved away for a time and then you moved back.

EPM: Yes, and then came back. Of course, that was very good for me because having been raised in this area, you do take on the whatever the attitudes of the people around you happen to be. Now, one that that was, I think was especially good for me, was that, of course, I think that you know or have heard people mention that there was a very distressing incident here regarding the oriental people in very early times and you knew what happened. In the Chinese quarter in Eureka which would have been right at about Fourth and F, in that neighborhood, it’s right in the middle of town now, the Chinese were quarreling amongst themselves about what I have no idea. But anyway, one of the Eureka city councilmen took it upon himself to go and see what they were quarreling about and a stray bullet hit him, killed him, and of course, that was tragic, that was a terrible thing. But there was indignation on all sides and they gave the Orientals 24 hours to leave. And my mother was child at the time, a little girl of around 3. She remembers hanging onto the garden gate in my grandfather’s yard and watching these people pass and of course, what she remembered was that maybe one would have a live chicken under his arm. They could take whatever they could carry in 24 hours, and she remembers a lot of things. But they were on foot, and they were, at that time there was long wharf extending out into the Bay here
and they were loaded on to boats and taken to the Bay area. So I grew up in an area where the sign of an Oriental was (aw, ooh), you know, what was that? And of course, I developed certain attitudes that you’d… I’d run into Sacramento Valley where there are so many Orientals – my first class was about fifty percent Japanese and I’d look – oh my. Well I learned that they are the sweetest, dearest, cleanest, thought… well, you name it. They were just darling children and that was very good for this little Northern California girl to find what fine people they are and to know that you can’t label people. You know, it was just very good for me and oh, I look back with such pleasure on my contacts with the youngsters and working with them. But as I say, I was used to the Indian children, who didn’t teach children in practically every class that I was ever in. That was fine. I knew all about that but there was this Oriental...

EB: Another race.

EPM: Yes. So that was good for me. I needed it.

EB: What other, what extracurricular activities were you in?

EPM: You mean like when I was in school?

EB: Yes.

EPM: Well, of course, as I say, I never could stay away from the Drama Department and I didn’t do as much in that as a student right out of high school as I, the year I went back to school. I spent a lot of time under the direction of Garrf Bell Wilson, who as I talked about was as fine a drama coach as anyone could have and he was at Humboldt at the time. And I can remember I would be studying, of course, at night, way late, and I remember one evening my mother came in and found me studying and “Well if you weren’t spending all your time in that Drama Department, you wouldn’t, you’d have more time to study,” and I said, “Well that’s the dessert, that’s what I want to do.” So… we had a lot of fun, traveled around with the plays, took them to the different areas.

EB: How far did you travel?

EPM: Oh we went as far as Ukiah to the south and as far as, it doesn’t seem very far now but...

EB: But then it was.

EPM: And we went to Crescent City and we went to Chico.

EB: That is far.

EPM: And took plays and put them on but, of course, if that drama bug bites you, it never lets up.

EB: It’s got my curiosity. Have you been involved in drama things since then? Some of the local outfits?

EPM: Well, not little theatre or anything that way. I haven’t taken the time for that. I did do quite a bit when I belonged to the Eureka Women’s Club in Eureka. Another friend and I used to, we wrote several
shows, then put them on at the Women’s Club and enjoyed them. But there’s something about it that’s just, it’s always been a high point with me.

EB: Any other extracurricular activities beyond the drama?

EPM: Oh well, the... course, first you know we were studying to complete in two years, you didn’t have an awful lot of time for extra things, you know, that take time and I was not involved with the Athletic Department. Of course, that takes a lot of time, you know, with the games and all. Well, it was... as far as extracurricular, I think I’d say most of my attention, any time I had

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EB: What other activities were available for students at the time and what things were popular?

EPM: Well, of course, the Athletic Department and...

EB: What was there in the way of athletics at the time?

EPM: Well the, not a football team, not right out of high school. I don’t think Humboldt fielded a football team until, oh, 1928 or so, but of course, they had some of the inter-class activities and as I say, when things are telescoped into two years, you don’t have an awful lot of time to spread yourself that thin. If you have some extracurricular activity, usually it’s in one department or it was at that time. But, of course, the Athletic Department has grown tremendously since, you know.

EB: What are some of the important events which occurred while you were on campus? That would be campus events or town events, state or national events.

EPM: You mean like something that affected the news or...

EB: Um huh or happened on campus.

EPM: Well it’s kind of hard off hand to think of... I’m thinking of course, it was peace time, you see World War I had been over for several years and there wasn’t the international tensions that we hear so much about. Of course, one thing was the media. We did have radio, but it was... some of the time it worked and some of the time it didn’t and you didn’t have the consistency of good reporting that you were getting all the time on what was going on here and there and so... but it was, as I say, a time of peace, we weren’t on the brink of war or anything that way. Course, one thing that did happen, this may or may not be the type of thing that you wanted, but the year I was back in school, ’36 to ’37, King Edward the Eighth decided to abdicate for the woman of his choice and that did stir up quite a bit of discussion at school and people were... there were those that said, “Well after all that’s his business. If he wants to do that, he should be allowed to.” Then there were the purists who said, “Ah, but England doesn’t have kings that abdicate and not for a woman who’s been divorced.” And it was just... and so I was a History major and so when the word had arrived that the king was about to abdicate, we were all talking about it, waiting to go into the room, the history class, and quite innocently, one person asked
the professor... they said, “We’re curious, we’re getting this in the news, now constitutionally, what
does it mean?” Well, he only too gladly obliged and the lesson that we had prepared for the
day, we didn’t use at all. We were getting a great deal, of course, out of what he was telling us about the
proposed abdication, so we spent several class periods on that.

EB: Focusing on the English constitutional government?

EPM: Focusing on the English constitutional government and whether this was an unprecedented thing
or had taken place before and what were the issues. That is, in this country, if our president had
decided that he would marry a divorced woman, I don’t think the country would fall apart but they
made such an issue of it. So there was that.

EB: Back in those days, do you think a presidential candidate who had married a divorced woman, do
you think that would have been a liability?

EPM: I don’t know, I don’t know. It had never happened. We had had presidents who married a widow
but not, I don’t think we ever had one who married a divorced woman. So I don’t know, just don’t know
what the subject...

EB: Do you recall the history professor’s name?

EPM: Yes, Dr. Vernon Puryear.

EB: Um huh.

EPM: And we thoroughly enjoyed him, and he certainly knew, you know, the whole background of, you
know, how this would affect people and the attitude of parliament and all. It was very interesting.

EB: Any other events?

EPM: In connection with that same thing, of course, my mother was born in England or my
grandmother was born in England. My mother was born here. But, of course, she’d heard so much
about England from her parents, you know, and all, and her sympathies were just with the English
constitution government and so they... one thing they had in the family was a little doll that had been
sent to my mother’s younger sister by one of the aunt’s in England and she was in the coronation robes,
duplicate of the coronation robe, of I believe it was one of the duchesses, what she wore to the
Coronation of King George V and Queen Mary, and evidently these were souvenirs that were on sale.
But she had her little velvet robes and all and, of course, it was a no, no. As I was growing up, I was not
to touch that if it was out, that doll was out to show somebody, that was not for me to play with. That
was something entirely different. So anyway, my mother was just so interested in what was going on
and felt very, so strongly that parliament was right and so forth. So back to the Drama Department. Mr.
Wilson wanted us to go and see, as a class, attend the high school play, and he said, “You’re going as
critics. I don’t want you to just sit back and enjoy the play but pretend you have to write a column
criticizing the play.” So we attended the play and I had invited the group, oh there were maybe 16 or 20
of them, in for coffee afterward. My mother hadn’t said a word, nothing had been said at all about this
proposed abdication. When we came home, I had left, I had fixed the dining room table and put out the cups and the coffee with makers and everything all ready. When we came home, my mother had gotten the little doll, in her coronation robes, out and she had stood her up in the center of the table. She didn’t need to say a word, she had made her statement. But, of course, that opened the discussion again and they were all talking about it then. So that was, of course, inventing the news.

EB: Were any of the people who were so interested in this thinking that he should be able to stay on the throne and marry?

EPM: Oh, yes. There were quite a number who felt that he had served the Empire well. He was trained for the job and that he should have a little freedom, and if he had found a companion that he could be happy with, then he should have _____ and there were others like my mother who felt that that’s an unheard of _____. Then my father loved to tease her, of course, and he was always saying, “Well, poor King, he certainly should be able to do as he likes and…”

EB: So that would keep it stirred up.

EPM: Oh yes.

EB: Do you feel that the college work that you took prepared you for the life you actually lived?

EPM: Yes, I do and I think that they did an especially good job in meeting the needs, anticipating the things that would be helpful to us.

EB: Any examples of things?

EPM: Well, I certainly felt in the student teaching that they really were dealing with basics as far as situations you might meet with children and how they should be handled. Yes, oh I think that, well as I say, in my original teacher training the time was so short—two years—that they really had to stay with basics. There wasn’t the time to go off on a tangent and study something else and we had to fulfill requirements and that was that.

EB: How were the academic standards and had they changed by the time you arrived in the ’30s?

EPM: Well, as far as their quality, I don’t feel that they’d changed. There was still the very high quality of training that we were receiving and I think that the institution was small enough that you felt a direct, personal interest on the part of the faculty. You know, that they knew you as an individual and wanted to help that way.

EB: And that was still that way in the ’30s?

EPM: That is the feeling that I had. Of course, I was quite well acquainted. I met many new people, coming back ten years later but, of course, there were quite a few people around that I knew or did know before but it was a nice experience and I have always been glad that I did it. Of course, I had tried by taking, oh, University Extension courses and night courses and all… working toward a degree, and I
thought after two years, I’m going to be the rest of my natural life getting this done, so I decided the only thing to do was just taking—going back to school. So that’s what I did.

EB: So you were a student there when Homer Balabanis was quite a new faculty member?

EPM: Oh yes, oh yes, yes, yes.

EB: Then if you were taking history, did you take classes from him _____?

EPM: Well not history, econ.

EB: Econ.

EPM: And political science. Oh yes, I had classes from him.

EB: Your recollections of him from years ago.

EPM: Oh yes, he’s always been such a fin man and a dedicated individual. He was just so intent on seeing that we got what we needed and we understood and he was interested personally in seeing that we did, you know. And I thoroughly enjoyed coming back as a graduate student ten years later. Majoring in social science and history, I had to take upper division economics and several courses and I was really just amazed at, where that was not my field at all, how he was able to put across the things that, I really didn’t have any particular interest in, you know, and of course, he’s always been a good friend over the years. He’s our neighbor here, you know and a...

EB: Yeah, I noticed his name coming up in here.

EPM: Yes. He’s a very fine man and Arcata’s been very blessed to have him.

EB: He’s been here a very long time.

EPM: About 1923.

EB: Is there anything that you would have changed in your preparation if you could have looked into the future?

EPM: You mean changing your field of what you would do or...

EB: Well either that or in the curriculum, or the preparation that was presented to you or that you selected?

EPM: Well, for the most part I think everything was pertinent. You needed it somewhere along the line and as I say, it was the shortness of time. If you were an a, had a longer period and time for more electives, you might have done differently but there wasn’t all that much time to accomplish it in two years. So you had to fulfill your requirements.

EB: Now I think it takes five years.
EPM: Yes.

EB: For a person to get a credential.

EPM: Yes, my young husband just got her teaching credential two or three years ago, one of them, and she took five years.

EB: Um huh, now was that available too? I know by the ’30s, by 1930 or so, it was close to a requirement if not already a requirement.

EPM: Five years?

EB: No, to have a four years program.

EPM: Oh yes, yes and they began, in fact, that’s what alerted me really to go back to school. They a, we had a supervising principal in the district where I was and they had begun to mention, like in teachers’ meetings and all, that this is on the horizon and that we should be thinking and, of course, there was the understanding for most of the time that I taught that you would earn so many units, usually at summer sessions, for your self-improvement and working toward something higher. Well I could see that the time was going to come when you didn’t want to be the only one without a degree, so there was that incentive. And I kind of had the feeling that I didn’t finish the job, I want to get back and get the Bachelor’s to my degree and as I say, I enjoyed every minute of it—all but finals. There’s n feeling that compares—this is it!

EB: Yeah. Well then you had semesters.

EPM: Yes.

EB: Now with the quarters, those finals roll around a lot more time.

EPM: Oh yes, I know, I know but they’re necessary, I guess.

EB: Yeah, they are. In the times you were associated with the college, what curriculum changes did you notice? Were different things stressed at different times?

EPM: Oh, I can’t recall any major change. There was a wider choice. When I went back, of course, in ’36-’37, there were many things that weren’t offered before in a shorter term period at all but as far as stressing, they were available if you wanted to take them. I don’t recall they were… anything was stressed.

EB: I’m not real familiar with the different philosophies of education that were considered important in those days. I have some vague ideas but it seems there were some different ones that were considered the better way to approach teaching and...

EPM: Oh, you mean in teaching methods.

EB: Um huh.
EPM: Well, of course, the... for instance, reading which is basic as far as teaching children is concerned, there was a major change in that. I was surprised when doing my student teaching that they were teaching what they called the sentence method. And instead of teaching children what individual words were or individual sounds, they would have a whole phrase. You’d have a picture, perhaps, and under the picture it would say, “This is papa bear,” and the youngsters, of course, memorize very quickly and they would be able to go up and say... run their hand along... “This is papa bear.” But if you’d say, “Alright will you take your hands and show me which word says ‘bear,’ they couldn’t do it. They’d learned the whole thing. That was very short lived. And, of course, there was the time when they were not teaching any phonics. We were not giving them the tools with which to sound out the words which again is basic to reading and spelling. And I was happy to see phonetics come back.

EB: Do you remember what era or what years approximately that was?

EPM: Oh well, let’s see. I remember a fifth grade that I was teaching in Sacramento County and I never saw such a group, as a whole, of poor spellers in my life and by poor I mean it wasn’t just an occasional mistake, it was, there just simply hadn’t gotten spelling and that would have been about 1933 or ’34, and at that time they were not teaching phonics in the first and second grade. So I went to the principal and just told her, I said, “I just hope I’m not going to be in trouble, but I am going to teach phonics to that fourth and fifth grade. They cannot spell at all.” And then I kept a graph to show how they improved. You wouldn’t believe when you gave them the sounds to go by how they came up in spelling. It was very gratifying but right at that particular time phonics was not being emphasized.

EB: And do you know if that was true up here at this _____?

EPM: Oh, I think pretty generally because it was—the reading methods, of course, come from the State Department—the reading methods you’re supposed to use. So that was one thing that I remembered very well but a... course, you have to give them the tools to work with, just like you have to see that they know their tables and their addition and subtraction combinations. No matter what type of problem they may work out later, they need that.

EB: Yeah, the basics. What was the reputation of this college on the local level and State level?

EPM: Well I think that people had a very distinct sense of pride in having the university here and over a period, of course, the univ... it has grown so much in recent years but there was a great deal of, oh, I guess you’d say, community participation. If there was something going on in the way of entertainment or something, the townspeople wanted to go. They wanted to... “Oh, this is going on or that is going on—and the tenth commencement or what have you.” It was just that it was a pride in seeing the... what was being accomplished. Of course, the size of the university makes a difference, too; you see, it was much smaller then.

EB: So there wasn’t a town and gown split?

EPM: No, no.

EB: How was it in the ‘30s? Was it different?
EPM: Well, I couldn’t say that I noticed any particular difference over when I was there. There was still the community and I remember, as I say I keep going back to the drama because that’s where I was involved, but I remember Mr. Wilson, the drama teacher, in talking about, “Well, we’re going to work on such and such play,” and he said, “You know, we need to keep the community in mind. We have so many community people who like to attend.” And he wouldn’t, didn’t want to put on anything that he felt that the community might be, feel offended at or anything that way. So I know they were considering that at that time. But of course, size has a great deal to do with it. You see, the university is so much larger now and the individuals… you don’t single out individuals unless just like now ah, ah, you, we know each other but we see each other on a one-to-one basis. But if you go to a game, it’s just a sea of faces. You know, it’s a different situation.

EB: I thought of another question for when you returned to school in the late ‘30s. Oden Hansen was a student.

EPM: Oh, Oden’s an old friend of mine.

EB: And I’m going to be interviewing him. Tell me some memories you have of him from those student days.

EPM: Well, he is certainly a very fine, outgoing, capable person. He was student body president the year I was in school. He too was interested in drama and he has a very, oh a very outgoing personality. He meets people so well and he is just, well he’s just the solid, good individual, dependable. I can’t think of anything but good to mention of him.

EB: He too moved away and then came back.

EPM: He moved into the Sacramento Valley. I found him on my door step one day. He know that I was over there and, of course, he was not acquainted and so I got… had him meet some of the people that I knew and all, and then he came back up here. He was here, I guess he will tell you, he was City Superintendent in Arcata, of schools. But he is a very, very fine man.

EB: So he was active in drama also?

EPM: Well, yes, he was. But he really had a handle on budgetary when he was in school—student government.

EB: Um huh. That was primary. Um, did you have any awareness of how budgetary decisions

EPM: Very little, very little. What wasn’t drawn to our attention, uh I think that goes back to again to… well shall we say the media. Uh whether, now the way things are today, if something, say with regard to budgeting from the State, if you didn’t hear it at school, you would probably hear it at home and you might raise the question with someone at school—“Did you hear this or that” and you would be aware of it. That wasn’t true then. We were not hearing it on the side. Of course, the student body, we paid our student body fees and we knew about how the student body money was apportioned but we weren’t really thinking in terms of money coming from the state.
EB: It’s not things the student thinks about.

EPM: No, it isn’t. Unless there’s some reason why it’s brought to their attention.

EB: Yeah. I think in the late ’20s, well in the beginning of the depression, I think students probably thought more about the college budget.

EPM: Oh yes, and particularly when something was deleted that they had been having, or being able to do. Yes, but I do think, as I say, I think it goes back again to the media because all you have to do is turn your radio or TV on and whether you want it or not you are peppered with it all day long, so...

EB: What things did the student fees go for in the times that you were in school?

EPM: You mean fees that you paid at registration?

EB: Um huh.

EPM: Well I would hesitate to quote the exact amounts but they were very, very small fees.

EB: Uh huh... what sort... did they go to pay for athletics, or student union, or any of... the health center, or any...

EPM: Well now, of course, we paid student body dues. But you mean fees that were paid at registration.

EB: Well I think I mean either.

EPM: Uh huh. Well of course with the student body dues, I was on the Board of Control when I was at Humboldt, right out of high school and we would have decisions to make on apportioning student body money, you know, of things that they wanted to do.

EB: Do you recall any of the things that money was allocated for?

EPM: I really don’t recall anything particular right now. I do remember that the Board of Control, as they were known at that time, had something to say about that. Of course, the student body dues were not very high, so it wasn’t any large amount of money they were talking about. So a... it was... working with student government was very interesting. I was treasurer for one semester, I remember, but I don’t remember any large expenditures of money or anything that was...

EB: Any controversy or any strong issues at all?

EPM: No, no. The treasurer just collected the money...

EB: What did you ah, let me back up a minute, what college-related situations challenged you the most in any of the ways that you were associated with the college?

EPM: Well just from what standpoint?
EB: Well I think as your preparation for a teacher or when you came back and were working and...

EPM: Well, of course, I think that when you’re right out of high school, you really don’t have anything on which to base what your needs are going to be. You accept... _____ this is it, and you are taught for ten years, and you are conscious then, “Well I want to get a better handle on this or that” and you pursue it from that angle but it’s just that the experience has shown you.

EB: So you need to trust the faculty is going to know what those future needs are.

EPM: Yes and I think too that coming back with a few years more on your head, so to speak, you’re much more apt to seek out answers and feel free to ask, where a student right out of high school, well, you just don’t...

EB: Not used to asking so much.

EPM: No.

EB: What did you appreciate the most from Humboldt?

EPM: Well, of course, the years that I attended, where the, well even in... when I was back in school as a graduate student, the school was small enough that you knew practically everybody and knew the whole faculty. And there were some very gratifying relationships form that, you know, and you knew... well you knew faculty even if you were not involved in any of their ah... things in their department. You knew who they were. I have a picture in there taken of the faculty at a picnic at Mrs. Little’s cabin at Moonstone when I was teaching at CES that have... I’ll have to get that little scrapbook down and show you but I don’t want to interrupt you now. I’ll get it when you finish.

EB: Okay. What did you appreciate least—the other side of that question?

EPM: Well.

EB: Or what things were disagreeable?

EPM: At this perspective of so many years, you know, I think that if there has been something in any field that was unpleasant, it has much more of a tendency to fade from your memory. Your mind seems to sort out the happy things and the good things and the effort was made to make things pleasant for you. I think that you just normally sort out... I don’t recall, there may have been at the time, you know things that you were disturbed about but I don’t... they don’t stand out in my thinking as oh... just like that or anything that way. One thing I would like to see though, I don’t know how to go about it or anything, when I was at Humboldt and out of high school, they had a very lovely sculpture of the Victory of ______. Oh, it was, how tall, ten or twelve feet maybe or maybe it wasn’t quite that big. It was right in the center of the entry of Founders Hall and it was... well it just stood for Founders Hall. I understand that it, I was told that it is still on the premises, put away somewhere. I would love to see Victory back where she was there in...

EB: That’s right inside the front door.
EPM: Yes. Right where you go into the entry of Founders Hall. I don’t know, maybe they had a good and sufficient reason for taking it out. I don’t know.

EB: Or it could be put someplace else.

EPM: Uh huh, but that, of course, is a fond memory. It just simply stood for Founders Hall when you came in. So, but there... of course, things do change. But, as I say, I’ve been told it’s on campus but that’s only hearsay.

EB: Uh huh, ah, those of us taking the class with Dr. Tanner are looking for people who are, had a connection with the college to interview and we’ve been doing our research and come up with our beginning list ah, but we certainly haven’t exhausted all resources. Are there people who come to mind, either students or faculty or staff members, even custodians and cooks or groundskeepers who are still...

EPM: Well I’m sure someone has talked to Jessie Woodcock.

EB: Yes. She’ll be interviewed.

EPM: Well she, of course was Humboldt. When I was at Humboldt, Jessie was Registrar, she ah, well you name it, she was it. Any problem you had, you went to her, so she could give you background. Oh, oh yes. Martha Roscoe, who was the first secretary. She was secretary to Dr. Van Matre and she’s very knowledgeable.

EB: But are there any people who come to your mind, particularly, I’m having particular difficulty locating people, er the names of people who weren’t in a professional capacity on faculty, some of the people who were employed at the college cause they have a perspective also. Can you think of anybody?

EPM: You mean like cafeteria or something...?

EB: Yes.

EPM: Well let’s see. Off hand, now someone may come to me, can’t think of anyone. There’s just always been a large... take Lyle Ochletree, who was the head gardener for so many years and did so much to make that a beautiful... it’s O-C-H-L-E-T-R-E-E. And he lives down on 11th Street, I’m sure it’s in the phone book. But he might give you a perspective ah from ah, you know, from that viewpoint.

EB: Um huh. How long ago do you think he started there?

EPM: Well, he was there over quite a long period. He’s been retired, I think, for about, oh, three or four years, after I would say—25-30 years, something like that. But it was quite a while, a long period. But I think he would be quite knowledgeable. And as for other people who were employed, how about... now Helen Everett was librarian there so she’s been...

EB: Uh huh. She’s going to be interviewed.
EPM: Uh huh. And who else? And, of course, there need to be people that you can reach. People that are here.

EB: Oh, even if someone is not in the immediate area, Dr. Tanner might be able to go to them and interview them.

EPM: Well I think I have Garff Bell Wilson’s address. He was the drama teacher/coach that I mentioned that was here for so long and now at... Dottie Barnes, Dottie Barnes Davis was this secretary to the principal of the elementary school for several years. She might have some thoughts, I don’t know where she is. She is just a darling girl.

EB: Okay that gives me two more to pursue. What do you think is important about the college that should be recorded somehow?

EPM: Ah, you mean some ______

EB: When you think about it because you’ve had such a long association. What stands out as being real important that someone fifty years from now ought to... if they dug it all, would be able to find out about?

EPM: Oh, Robbie, Chipper is squeaking. Maybe Tyrone’s out there. We have a chipmunk, comes into the breezeway, and the cat next door comes... and it’s not a good combination, you know.

EPM: I think Tyrone must be out there. The Chipper’s squeaking. Robert, come in and meet Edie, your last name, dear, was?

EB: Butler

EPM: Edie Butler, my husband Robert

EB: Hello, Robert.

EPM: And I’m trying to think of things about Humboldt for her. I don’t think I’ve done very well so far.

EB: Oh yes, you have.

EPM: But Robert, I’m afraid Tyrone’s out there.

Robert: Tyrone? I don’t think so.

EPM: Yes, but he’s squeaking.

Robert: Yes, but he always knows it’s there, so...

EPM: I know, but... hear him? Something’s making a squeak. You go see.

EB: You’re concerned, huh?
EPM: Tyrone is the cat next door. Someone with a very large imagination, I think, named the cat too. But he will stray over and, of course, it’s just natural for him to watch a little animal scurrying around and I don’t really appreciate that.

EB: Yeah, our pet chipmunks scurry away when the cats come around.

EPM: Oh, do you have pets too? Where do you live?

EB: Redmond Road. Do you know where that is?

EPM: Oh yes, yes, uh huh. But still... there he goes. He just went across there and down the bank.

EB: Yeah, so the culprit’s gone.

EPM: Yes.

EB: I have one last question. Anything I didn’t ask? Anything _____

EPM: I think you’ve covered things very well. Of course, I think that you have a very warm feeling of association with Humboldt I have had over the years and back from the time I was a child, you know, through the elementary school and all. It’s ah, well, you just... it’s an interesting _____ and I feel very fortunate to have seen it from the beginning when it was very small and getting started and then a few years later when I’d come back from high school and then ten years or so later after I had been out in the world, so to speak, and come back and it’s all... a very happy situation... all around. So, as I say, we had... my father was always so deeply interested and just felt that it was important to Arcata that the institution was here, so...

Robbie: It was just wanting our feed, that’s all.

EPM: Oh, well did you feed him? He went down the bank there.

END OF TAPE.......