

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

HILDA EDWARDS LANCASTER

INTERVIEW 416

This is Marea Kafer Foster representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 400. I am interviewing Hilda Edwards Lancaster, interview number 416. This interview is being conducted on Wednesday the 24th of June, 1992. We are at 1508 Rhem Avenue in New Bern, Mrs. Lancaster's home.

Marea Foster: Now, Hilda, if you'll tell me your full name, your birth date, birth place, parents names, all your personal history.

Mrs. Lancaster: My full name is Hilda Edwards Lancaster. I was born July 8, 1916. I was born at 68 Johnson Street, one block from the library. At that time it was 68 Johnson, but since then, they have changed the numbers. But I lived one block on the corner from the library. My mother's name was Laura Collins Edwards. She was from Swansboro. My father's name was John Edwards and he was from Greene County. I had three brothers and two sisters. My two brothers died at an early age. One was two years old and the other was eight when they passed away. I had one brother that passed away two years ago. His name was John Patrick Edwards. My two sisters have passed away. My younger sister passed away in 1974, and my oldest sister passed away, I believe, in 1968. I tried to push those years in the back of my mind and try not to dwell on it too much because all of my family, now, have passed away except myself. I'm the only one left.

MF: I can understand your feelings on that.

Mrs. Lancaster: I'm sure you can because you're a little bit leaning toward that yourself.

MF: Let me ask you about your childhood. Who were your playmates?

Mrs. Lancaster: The ones that I grew up with, my closest dearest friend is living on Spencer Avenue right now, Shirley Avery Duffy.

She married Francis Duffy an electrician. She and I started to school together and have remained friends all of these years. She visits me every week. That is really, I will have to say, the closest one I have. Now, I have other friends here that I keep up with and have through the years. Mrs. Henry Dixon, Rhoda Dixon, I don't know whether you know her or not, but I grew up with her. Marjorie Parker that married Bill Blackley here, she lives in Rocky Mount, but we still keep up with each other. She calls me and I call her about once a month. Then I have another one, Grace Hagood. She married a Whaley and lives in Roanoke, Virginia. She is a retired RN. She was with the Veterans hospital. We all keep up with each other.

MF: Tell me about school. You lived just right across the street from the school.

Mrs. Lancaster: Right across from Central school, and that's where I started. My first two teachers in the first and second grade were two that everybody in New Bern must either have heard of or did have, too, people certainly of my age; Miss Lizzie Hancock and Miss Molly Heath. Miss Molly was my first grade teacher which I've never forgotten and dearly loved.

MF: Everybody loved those ladies.

Mrs. Lancaster: That's right. Then I moved here in this home where I'm living now when I was, well I had just finished the second grade. I have been living in this home sixty-nine years. I have been

married, this coming Sunday will be fifty-four years, and we've stayed right here.

MF: Tell me your husband's full name.

Mrs. Lancaster: Millard Howard Lancaster. Howard was born in Craven County. His father was a farmer. He was born up in the Asbury section, but lived most of his life at Spring Garden.

MF: You and Howard have the one daughter. What is her name?

Mrs. Lancaster: Ruth Annette.

MF: And she's married to?

Mrs. Lancaster: She is married to Charles Litzenberger and he's a Methodist minister.

MF: When did you start working for the library?

Mrs. Lancaster: I started January 10, 1950. I retired February 1, 1990. I was with them forty years.

MF: When you started working for them, where was the library located?

Mrs. Lancaster: The library was located on New Street in the John Wright Stanly House. It never was the same to me after we moved. I just loved that home.

MF: Who did you work with?

Mrs. Lancaster: The first librarian person that I worked with was Mary Scott Gurley. I don't know whether you knew her or not, but a very lovely person. She was here for many years. Her mother became ill after I had worked with her five years, and she went back to her home in Sanford to be with her mother and become librarian there.

She has just retired recently.

MF: Was it just the two of you in the library?

Mrs. Lancaster: Sara Meadows was on the bookmobile, and that was it. We had Mrs. Nina Jacobs. Do you remember her?

MF: Yes, I do.

Mrs. Lancaster: Mrs. Jacobs was doing some volunteer work repairing books, and that was it.

MF: How did you repair the books?

Mrs. Lancaster: When the spine of the book become ragged and objectionable, looked real ugly on the shelf, and worn, and they were books that really should be going out, people just won't take them.

So, she would put new binding tape and letter them by hand. This was really a crude way to do it, but it certainly looked much better than the way so many of them were. It helped the books to circulate more. She would repair pages, and she just loved it. She was such a wonderful person. I missed her so much. Mrs. Jacobs and I became real close. I really missed her a lot. She was just like a mother to me really.

MF: She was a lovely lady. Was she the only volunteer that you had?

Mrs. Lancaster: The only one. That was it. When Miss Gurley would want to go home for special occasions on the weekend, I kept the library by myself so she could go. Of course this day and time, they wouldn't let you do that, but back then you did a lot of things that would not be permissible in this day and time.

MF: What were your hours?

Mrs. Lancaster: We went at ten and got off at six. Of course in that day, we did not stay open any nights, but we did stay open six days a week. We were open all day. If one of us had to be off for some reason, then the other one just had to stay. You would bring your sandwich to the desk, eat your lunch, and just do the best you could. We even had a rocking chair in the circulation room. It was just entirely different, that's all, it was just almost like home.

MF: Do you mind telling me how much you earned during that particular period?

Mrs. Lancaster: (laughter) Well, it wasn't much. It really was a job of - an appreciation I guess you would say - of books, and of loving to read, and a love for books, and a love for people. If it hadn't been for that, no one could of survived on about thirty-five cents an hour.

MF: Oh my gracious! It's a good thing that Howard was working.

Mrs. Lancaster: I'll tell you why I took it. Do you remember Mrs. Georgia Dowdy?

MF: Yes, I do.

Mrs. Lancaster: She was on the board at the time. The board was composed of fifteen women, there were no men on this library board when I started, just women. Miss Georgia, she had known me all of my life. At the time, we were just right after the war and so many people when they got trained down there, they'd be moved some place else and they didn't have an application in their file for anybody

that wanted to work at the library. So, she thought about me. She knew I was staying at home, and she knew I had worked for the city before. The first job I had out of school was in the tax office here in New Bern and I worked there. Then when Annette come along, I stopped.

I have never worked any where else. That's the only two places I ever worked, there and the library. She called and said she, "wanted to ask me if I would be willing to take this job. They had to have somebody to relieve Miss Gurley, and she didn't have anyone with her at the time, and would I go down there and take it for three months and see if I liked it and maybe I would stay." So, I went to stay three months, and I stayed forty years. I loved every minute of it.

MF: Since the library was really across the street from the school, did you have a lot of students use the library?

Mrs. Lancaster: We did have a lot of students to use the library. They used it for the purpose that they were suppose to use it for, and then some of them used it for a "get away spot", I called it. They would slip away from the school ground and come over there in back in the reading room and just play around. I mean, just to get away from school. But, the Superintendent finally got hold of that and he broke that up.

MF: Was this Mr. MacDonald?

Mrs. Lancaster: It was Mr. Brinkley. He was the one that broke that up.

MF: He was the Principal?

Mrs. Lancaster: Well, he wasn't the principal, but he had charge

of that particular time of this group that was doing this. But he broke it up. Like I say, it was nothing ever boring! I had people that would ask me sometimes, don't this job just bore you to death?

I said, "no." I said, "you wouldn't believe the things that go on in the library other than just checking out books. There's much more to it than that!"

MF: I certainly agree with that after I worked there. Getting back to Miss Gurley, after she left, who became the librarian?

Mrs. Lancaster: Betty Flowers.

MF: Tell me about her.

Mrs. Lancaster: No, you don't want me to tell you about her, I don't believe.

MF: Yes, I do, if you want to. I know Mrs. Flowers and she was the librarian when I was in high school, and was always very nice to me. If you want to talk about her that will be fine, if you prefer not to, that's fine, also.

Mrs. Lancaster: It was hard, it was really hard because a lot of her reasoning powers and things were not normal. I will say this, I think Bill Flowers, her husband, was one of the finest men that I have ever known.

MF: I agree with that.

Mrs. Lancaster: He was principal of the school when Annette was in elementary school, and then when she went to high school, he followed her as principal right on to high school. He had known me of course.

I had worked with PTA and different activities at school, so I was

close to him already. When she started down at the library, that man, I just don't know, he was just a wonderful person or he couldn't of gone along with a lot of things. One Saturday afternoon, I'll never forget it, he came to the library and he pulled the rocking chair up that we had in the circulation room, and he says, "Hilda, I want to talk to you just a minute." Of course, Betty was off that afternoon.

I was there by myself. He said, "you know, I hope you can go along with all this because I know what you're going through." He says, "every day my stomach is tied in a knot at the end of the day I feel like I just can't take it, but I go along with it because some day I think it's going to be better." I went along with it because I thought if he lives with it twenty-four hours a day, I can put up with it a little while. So, I got along all right. She and I just didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things, but I stayed. The board asked me to please stay. She became pregnant and so it worked itself out.

MF: When she was there as librarian, didn't she start a book review program on the radio?

Mrs. Lancaster: Yes, she had that. And I'll tell you something now, she did some wonderful things. She was really smart. When I started at the library, they never had a card catalog. Can you believe that? Now, that's what we started out with. They never had one! This is where you search a title, author, and the subject. We didn't have anything to go on whatsoever. If a person came in and wanted to know how many books we had on a certain author, we couldn't tell them unless we knew what we had seen on the shelf, I mean we had no

way. And she started it. She made that card catalog from scratch.

She made the title cards, the author cards, and subject cards. She worked the whole thing. She would go to Chapel Hill every summer.

They hired her in Chapel Hill for two weeks every summer to work in the office in the library to help catch up on their work. So, you know she had to be good. That's where she went to school.

MF: She was a smart woman. I think she was probably too smart.

Mrs. Lancaster: Well, see that was the thing. It was hard to understand her because she couldn't get across to you what was really in her mind. There was no way you could take that in.

MF: What else did she do for the library?

Mrs. Lancaster: I guess getting that card catalog together was really the most important thing that she did. She didn't like to meet the public. I, most of the time, stayed in the children's room. That's where she wanted me to be. I didn't do that when Miss Gurley was there, but when she came, she wanted me to look after the children's room.

So, I did that mostly. She had a bell like the teacher has on a school desk when she wants to make order.

She had a little bell and hung a little sign up there saying, "Please ring bell for service", and she'd go in the back office and sit back there and type or do whatever she had to do, and they'd have to ring that bell for her to come and wait on them. She wouldn't let me go wait on them, and that bothered me. It made it look like I wasn't looking after my people and waiting on them. So, that did get to me.

She did that for a long time.

MF: Why did she start that book review program?

Mrs. Lancaster: I don't know. She never discussed it. She would go and give book reviews sometimes to different organizations, but she never discussed any of that with me. In other words, there was no conversation. I will say this and then you might understand. She was the kind of person, when she came in in the morning, and you'd say "good morning", she would say "what's good about it?" Now, that might explain to you why I knew nothing about it.

MF: That's sad. When Betty left, who was your librarian?

Mrs. Lancaster: When Betty left, we were two or three months and we didn't have one, and I was it. I had to do everything.

MF: Was Mrs. Jacobs still helping you at that time?

Mrs. Lancaster: Mrs. Jacobs was still coming and doing some volunteer work, and she would stay for me to go sometime just to get a break; to go to the corner and pick up a sandwich or something. She did do that. Another person that helped us a lot was Mrs. Rose McCullough. Bless her heart, she did a lot of volunteer work. I do want to say this, the library said they would not let her work. She would stay there all day long and did not want any money. But those women on the board said "she's just not going to work down here like she's working and not get any pay! " They would write her out a check.

She never accepted the first one. She would take the check and she'd go downtown and buy something for the library and bring it back. I think people should know that. I'll tell you something else. A person that I have missed down there after she passed away was Mrs. Mary Louise

Guion. She was on the board. When I started to work down there, the library did not own an electric fan of any description. And you know how big those windows are, how heavy. Those windows in that particular time, when that place was built, there were no such things as weights to put the windows up, they had sticks. Every window in that John Wright Stanly House when we were using it for a library, had a stick lying in each window. Our first job when we went to work in the mornings was to push those windows up, and they were heavy, and put that stick under them so that we could get air in the building. Mrs. Guion came in there one day and it was so hot you couldn't hardly stand it. She says, "Hilda, how can you stand this?" I said, "Well, it's the way it is. This is what we've got." She had never been told that we didn't have any fans. It had never been told to the board. I don't know why, but it just hadn't. "You don't have any fans?", she said. "No fan, no." She got up out of that chair, she went and was gone about an hour, and she came back with either two or three fans. That's the kind of thing if she found out, she got to the bottom of it. I loved all fifteen of those women and I believe they loved me. So, I really missed them when the changeover come. We didn't have contact then of course.

MF: Tell me about when Elinor Hawkins came.

Mrs. Lancaster: That was one of the happiest days of my life because, like I say, I had been there between two and three months with no one there and just to keep things going the best I could. I'll never forget the day Mrs. Guion brought her down to see the library,

and she came down for an interview. Mrs. Guion brought her in and I was in the hallway when she come. Elinor says she'll never forget it. She said that she was going to be our new librarian. I'll never forget it because I was just really happy about that. I have missed seeing her and being with her so much. She was just a joy to work with.

MF: Tell me about the changes that took place under Elinor.

Mrs. Lancaster: She is a builder and right away she saw the need for branches to be built, and she went to work on it. She just kept going before the different boards, and they just couldn't say no to her, I guess. She just had a way that she could make them see how important it was and how we were growing. She really had programs going that really built that library. Well, it wasn't even the same. She just had so many things going.

MF: What programs?

Mrs. Lancaster: She started the "story hour" for the children. They had in the summer, the summer program for the children, and she would tell the stories herself. In that John Wright Stanly House, you know how large that hall is when you go in?

MF: Yes.

Mrs. Lancaster: We didn't have such a thing as an auditorium or anything like that in the house and so we used the hall for the children to sit on the floor and she got right in the middle to tell the story. That's how it really started growing, I think, as the programs she put on for the kids in the summer time. Then, when the

TV station come, she started going out there every week. The kids would come in there and they say, "Mrs. Hawkins, we saw you on 'Story Time' this morning." They looked forward to that. Then, the different organizations in town would have her. She's a wonderful speaker. She really got it together and got it going. If it hadn't been for her I know we wouldn't have what we have today.

MF: You're right, Hilda. Did she expand the staff?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh yes. She wasn't there anytime before we just had to have more help, and it just kept growing and kept growing. Like I say, when I started, there were just three of us and when I quit, I believe there were thirty-three or thirty-four on the payroll just out of that building, not counting the branches.

MF: Hilda, when you were in the John Wright Stanly House, did you get any funds from the city or the county or the federal or state government?

Mrs. Lancaster: We got just enough from the city to maintain the staff you might say. The funds from the government, I believe Miss Gurley told me, of course I didn't know too much about the book work along then, because she did all of that, but the way I understood it, the funds that they got from the state paid her salary. What little bit of help we got from the government, they bought the books with that. When I started, we were just New Bern Public Library there and it was Craven-Pamlico Regional Library later. Carteret come in just real late. That was a three county region. Those fifteen women on that board had to chip in a lot of times to make it go, I know about

that. Another way they got money was the John Wright Stanly House, they rented three apartments and that money helped maintain the building. They kept things going with that. Another thing I will tell you that probably a lot of people don't know. When I started down there, we had an old coal furnace and it was real old, and it would go out. I have built a fire in those fireplaces many a time to keep it open, Miss Gurley and I both, to keep that place opened during the day to the public. Because the furnace would kick out.

It was still home to us. It never was the same after we moved out of that house. We just loved it!

MF: Did you have a fire in every fireplace in each of the rooms?

Mrs. Lancaster: No. We just put it in the front room in the circulation room. The rest of time we just wore a coat when that would happen. It would go out at least once a month in the winter.

It was really something!

MF: You had to wear warm clothes!

Mrs. Lancaster: You did! We didn't have a janitor or anything. There was a fellow that worked in several places downtown. That was the first seven or eight years. Places downtown, that's what they all used. This fellow would come by late in the afternoons and stoke the furnace, they called it, so it would be there the next morning, and he'd come back in the mornings down there before we opened and fire it up and get it going again.

MF: Was he paid to do that?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh yeah, they paid him to do that. They didn't

have to pay him much because he didn't stay, he'd just come by.

MF: Well, that meant, Hilda, that you and Miss Gurley had to sweep, and mop, and dust.

Mrs. Lancaster: We did a lot of it! We had a black woman that would come once a week and do a little bit. But you can imagine in a public building that was almost a daily chore.

MF: You did not have carpets on the floor?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh no!

MF: Did you have a vacuum cleaner down there?

Mrs. Lancaster: No, just a broom and a mop, and a scrub pail. That's what I say, it's just come such a long way! There were so many changes made after Mrs. Hawkins come that I appreciated it so much that I couldn't begin to tell you the difference.

MF: Did any black people use the library?

Mrs. Lancaster: No, not then. Very little until they closed the library on West Street.

MF: So, they had their own library on West Street?

Mrs. Lancaster: They had their own library on West Street. By the way, this past week I saw in the paper where Mrs. Sadie Lowe died. She was their librarian, and when they closed West Street Library, she come to work with us. I got to know here real well and she was a lovely person too.

MF: I remember Mrs. Lowe and I was hoping to interview her.

Mrs. Lancaster: I wish you could have. I learn to think a lot of Miss Sadie.

MF: Did the two libraries work together as far as you know?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh yes! I've been up there many times. If one or the other would run out of book cards or book pockets, we'd borrow from each other. When our order would come in, we'd repay. We got along fine.

MF: Did you share books?

Mrs. Lancaster: No, we didn't interchange books with each other. They had their own books. When they closed the library up there, they brought all of their books over to us.

MF: They closed their library after you moved into the new building on Johnson Street. The first year you were on Johnson Street, is that right?

Mrs. Lancaster: Yes.

MF: When you were moving from New Street, from the John Wright Stanly House, you went to East Front Street?

Mrs. Lancaster: To East Front Street right across from the Holiday Inn. Sara Bradbury owned that home and they rented from her. That was sort of a bad situation because of the traffic and the parking, but we got by.

MF: You weren't there too long anyway.

Mrs. Lancaster: No, I believe about two years. Then of course we went to Johnson.

MF: When you opened on Johnson Street, did the staff enlarge and the services?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh sure, everything. We started having many

more programs because they had an auditorium and they had a place to have them.

MF: Who did you work with on Johnson Street with the enlargement of the staff? Who else came to work that you remember?

Mrs. Lancaster: Well, Lila Smallwood was with us but she was with us on East Front Street. Of course, Mrs. Jacobs stayed on and got on the payroll after a while. Lucille Reel was with us. Hannah Weskett and Lucie Hodges were with us. It's hard for me to remember now, we had so many and that's quite a ways back. When I left down there, I had a folder in the safe down there with everybody that had ever worked there. I mean there were a lot of them, but they were the main ones.

MF: When a new book comes in, what is the first thing you do with that new book?

Mrs. Lancaster: When I started, I'll have to go back to that to tell you the change. When I started down there and we ordered a box of books, they'd come in with the jackets on the book just loose like you buy them at the book shop when you go down to the news stand and buy one. We timed it just to work it out, Miss Gurley and I, just so if we were asked that question how long did it take to process a book from the time it comes in to get it on the shelf. It took thirty minutes for each book for you to do everything that had to be done to that book before it went on the shelf, just one book. So, you can see how time consuming it was.

MF: What did you do?

Mrs. Lancaster: The first thing we had to do was take the jacket off the book. You know, just on the inside of the fly of the jacket, it gives a synopsis of the story. We had to cut that out and glue it in the front of the book. You don't see one that way anymore unless you're looking at a real old book. That was called the "blurb". That was the library term for that. Then, we had to stand the books up around the room and put spray lacquer on the backs of the books. That was to keep them from fading, and the wear and tear of the book to the public. Then, we lettered the category in which it was going whether it was non-fiction or fiction, or the author, or the title, or whatever. That had to be put on the spine of the book. We had the accession records that you typed, a whole sheet on that book; where you bought it, how much it cost, how many pages it had, just the whole description of the book had to be typed on a sheet. Like I said, it took thirty minutes to do that one entry on that book. Now, in later years, we had the processing center in Raleigh. Now, the jackets stay right on the books and, they are already lettered for us, and the number is on the books. Oh, just so many changes.

MF: Hilda, you mentioned spraying the book. What did you use?

Mrs. Lancaster: It was a lacquer. It was called book lacquer. It was just a clear liquid that you sprayed on the books. It smelled terrible. Sometimes I wonder if that's what I have in my lungs now. You spray that stuff in a room that didn't have any air in there much and you'd almost be overcome with the fumes. I don't believe it did a bit of good, but that was in the process, so we had to do it. It

would make the covers of the books look good and they claimed that they would wear better with that on there.

MF: How long could patrons keep a book at that time?

Mrs. Lancaster: Two weeks.

MF: Did you have fines at that time?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh yeah. Two cents a day for the children and five cents for adults.

MF: And that's true today.

Mrs. Lancaster: Never over fifty cents on a child's book and never over a dollar for an adult. I think it's still the same.

MF: I think so too. Did you, when you were in the John Wright Stanly House, have library "forgiveness week"?

Mrs. Lancaster: No. That came about later. Elinor brought that along in later years which I thought was a good thing. When we first started that, we got back some books that had been out for years and years. But you know, in the last few years before I left, we didn't get any that I know of. We would ask every day, those of us working in the back, how far back. It was just interesting to see what you were going to get back. The last few years that I worked, I don't think they got anything outstanding.

MF: If someone checks out a book and they return it late and they do not pay the overdue fine, do you let them continue to check out books?

Mrs. Lancaster: No. Now, that's something else Mrs. Hawkins started that was a good idea. I'm telling you how it was before I left. She has what they call a rolodex that everybody that owes a

fine is on that rolodex. About once a year they go through that and if it's something say like fifty cents or less, they just pull those out. But say if it's a dollar or more, they stay on that rolodex.

When you're checking out to a person or making out a new card for a patron or something of that nature, they check that rolodex, and if their name is on there, they have to clear that before they can get a card or before they can check out any more books.

MF: Now, it's all on computer.

Mrs. Lancaster: It's all on computer they tell me.

MF: Yes it is, but I remember that rolodex.

Mrs. Lancaster: That's how it was. Now, they can just push a button on that person and their history is there.

MF: What is the book fine money used for?

Mrs. Lancaster: Mrs. Hawkins can tell you more about that. I really don't know. One of my duties was to keep up with all of that and turn it in everyday from the day before, you know, what we had collected. Then, we gave a report to the board at the end of the month, the monthly collections. I don't know whether it went into the general fund or whether they took that to buy supplies. It was used for one of the necessary items for the library I know.

MF: I vaguely remember when I worked there that someone mentioned that they thought the fine money was used to buy new books, and I always thought that was a wonderful thing.

Mrs. Lancaster: That's what I say, if it went in the general fund, it would of been. Of course as far as our salaries and all of

that, the city and county took care of all of that. Of course, Friends of the Library, they have their own treasury. So, I guess it went for supplies and necessary things that we needed.

MF: When did Friends of the Library support organization start?

Mrs. Lancaster: I don't remember the year, but that started after we moved back over there from East Front, starting in with Johnson Street.

MF: Is this another innovative feature that Mrs. Hawkins thought of?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh yes, by all means yes! Every thing made growth, it added to the growth of the whole complex.

MF: What did the Friends of the Library do? What is their purpose?

Mrs. Lancaster: I never got in on that either because when they were meeting at night, we were working those times. They bought a lot of books which we needed badly because our book budget had been cut. They bought some other things for the library that we needed. There was some equipment that they bought for the library that we wouldn't have had it they hadn't done that.

MF: Years ago, I know the membership dues for Friends of the Library were two dollars and now it's five dollars. That's not bad at all to pay, and it's certainly a very worthwhile support organization.

Mrs. Lancaster: That it is.

MF: Hilda, maybe this is before your time, you go back a long way with the library and some of these questions you may have heard

about. Do you know anything about the WPA and the work they did for the library?

Mrs. Lancaster: Before I went down there the WPA had been in there doing work. I was told that they had done right much for the library. They did a lot of volunteer work, but just what they did, I couldn't say because I wasn't there. I went in after they had been there. I know we used a table to repair books on. I was told that that table was made and put in there by the WPA so that they'd have a work table, which the library didn't own at the time.

MF: Wasn't that nice?

Mrs. Lancaster: I thought so. And just little things like that and they did do a lot of volunteer work, but just how far they went with it I just don't know.

MF: Do you know of any branch library that the WPA set up around 1938?

Mrs. Lancaster: No, I don't, Marea. That was the year I got married

MF: And your mind was not on the library, was it?!

Mrs. Lancaster: Well, not at that time, no. (laughter) Not at that particular time. I was doing a lot of courting and whatever. I wasn't doing much reading along then.

MF: Did you ever hear anyone mention who the first children's librarian was?

Mrs. Lancaster: The first person that worked with the children in that library I was told, was Mrs. Elizabeth Chadwick. Did you ever

hear of her?

MF: Yes, I did.

Mrs. Lancaster: She was a lovely person. I knew her real well. She had one son but I don't know what happened to him. He left here and he come back when his mother passed away and now he lives away somewhere.

MF: But she was the first one?

Mrs. Lancaster: She was the first one to work with the children that I knew about.

MF: Did you ever hear of anyone speak of Frances Jones Howerton?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh yes! She was the librarian when I was in school!

MF: So, you knew Miss Fannie?

Mrs. Lancaster: I knew Miss Fannie. When I was going to school, the library was in what used to be the Christian Science reading room. They've torn it down now. It was in that house across from the Clark building. Over there is the Christian Science Church and then this little house sits over in the back of the church, and that's where the library was before it moved to New Street. When I was in high school, that's where I went to the library. The kids in high school really hated to go to the library.

MF: Why?

Mrs. Lancaster: Miss Fannie was strict! If you brought a book to the desk and she thought that you didn't need to read that particular book, she'd open her drawer, she had a special drawer in her desk and

she'd open that drawer and throw that book in the drawer and say, "Go get another one." So, it wasn't very pleasant. (laughter) I shouldn't tell that because she was a wonderful person! She was a school teacher, but I didn't have her because I left from downtown after the second grade and came to Ghent. I believe she taught either fourth or fifth grade, and everybody knew Miss Fannie, she was something else. But you didn't read that book if she didn't want you to have it! It was called the "naughty drawer."

MF: Well, Hilda, she was just exercising the rights of a parent then.

Mrs. Lancaster: That's exactly what she was doing and that's why we resented it. (laughter) But it really did discourage the students from going to the library though. Somehow there should of been another way. Because I love to read and I wanted to go to the library but I hated to face Miss Fannie.

MF: It's really ironic that you ended up there (at the library) for forty years.

Mrs. Lancaster: Isn't that something! It must not of bothered me too much because I went back and stayed. The best years of my life were spent right there.

MF: Did you ever hear anyone speak of Margaret Chapman who was the librarian?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh yes. Margaret Chapman was there just ahead of Mary Scott Gurley. I went to school with Margaret and she is about my age. I wonder if she is still living.

MF: I don't know. I didn't know she was from New Bern.

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh yes! Her mother was my Sunday School teacher. We went to Centenary Church. She left here and went to Chapel Hill. The last I heard she was still working in the library in Chapel Hill. She left and that's when Mary Scott Gurley took her place.

MF: I have two other ladies to ask you about; Rosamund Meadows and Lula Broadstreet.

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh yes, I knew both of them. They worked there too. Miss Rosamund worked in the children's room more than any where else. She was there until she was almost ninety. I don't know exactly how old she was, but she had been there a long time and she worked. She didn't do any story telling or any thing like that. She just did the checking out and helping the children find the books. She left just before I went, maybe a couple of years or so. Miss Lula was down there. Of course, she was down there before I went. I don't know what her duties were. I think Miss Lula was there when Margaret was there, probably. I don't know that for sure.

MF: Elinor told me that you probably would have some information on these ladies.

Mrs. Lancaster: Yeah, I knew them because I used to go to the library when they were there. They were on New Street all except Miss Fannie and she was on Middle Street.

MF: Do you know anything about the Mary Hendren Vance Memorial Fund? It's for book purchases.

Mrs. Lancaster: I think she lived in Raleigh, and I think she

was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Tom, oh I can't think of their last name. They lived on the corner of Metcalf and New Street in the house where Margaret Stallings lives now. Not that house, there was another house then. This was a memorial fund. She was real active in UDC, United Daughters of the Confederacy. I just cant' recall her last name to save my life. You know Mrs. Mary Roberts, who lived on the opposite corner?

MF: Yes. It wasn't Jones? Moore? Hollister?

Mrs. Lancaster: No. I knew all of them.

MF: Henry? No, it wasn't Henry, that I know.

Mrs. Lancaster: Roberts, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Roberts. She was their daughter. I think I'm right. She married a Vance. She was named for her mother, she was Mary Roberts, and she married a Vance. And this fund, I think, was a memorial to her. I think I'm right.

MF: Is that fund still in existence?

Mrs. Lancaster: I don't know.

MF: Hayden couldn't tell me.

Mrs. Lancaster: I can't tell you that. I mean I really don't know whether it still is or not.

MF: The funds were probably depleted.

Mrs. Lancaster: I imagine so, just like the UDC. The United Daughters of the Confederacy used to have a shelf in the library with a little gold plate on it. Just a shelf that they bought books for, and put on that shelf. Well, they did away with that. Don't ask me why now, I don't know. It was a special shelf that they had with book

supports on each end and they had the gold plate on it that said, "United Daughters of the Confederacy." Those books, when we moved over where we are, now were just intermixed with the other books. We did away with that shelf. Maybe the organization become inactive. But Mrs. Tom Roberts was the head of that. She was the head of the UDC and she looked after all that.

MF: We talked about school students using the library. The schools did not pay the library a fee to let the students come did they?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh no! They just used it. They'd come over there during study hall period.

MF: I used to go there. Not for study hall, I'd go after school and get my books and do my research for my papers.

Mrs. Lancaster: Well, they did a lot after school. But when they got to getting into a lot of mischief they'd get an excuse at school to come to the library to do reference work during study hall and they'd go down to Clark's Drug Store. That's where they'd wind up, a group of them down there. That's where they would meet and just have a ball! That's when Mr. Brinkley got hold of it and he broke that up.

MF: That was after my time in high school. Because I was in high school when Betty Flowers was the librarian at the high school.

Mrs. Lancaster: I didn't realize that. Well, did you ever ring the bell for service?

MF: No.

Mrs. Lancaster: I reckon that bell is still down there somewhere.

MF: I think at that time I was in college, then married and lived away for a while, so when I would come home for vacations you no longer had the bell. I didn't have to ring it. I could just check out a book. That's interesting about Betty, it really is. Hilda, is there any special way that you go about selecting books?

Mrs. Lancaster: They have a book committee that meets once a month. They give book reviews. Nettie Cox was on there and I guess she still is. Different ones on that committee would come in there before they had the meeting and get out the New York Times book review section and Publisher's Weekly, and different things and go through them and make their recommendations for books and give a review at their meeting. Of course, Mrs. Hawkins has the last word in the selection, I'm sure.

MF: That's the way it ought to be.

Mrs. Lancaster: Why certainly. I know this must help her a lot. Of course now, I don't know, I think Debbie Caton is the purchasing agent or whatever. I think she has a certain title. I believe she does most of the ordering now.

MF: Hilda, what can you tell me about this book leasing?

Mrs. Lancaster: Now that I don't know anything about. This is something that started just before I retired. Jean Lawrence was looking after that and Debbie Caton. But I don't know how that worked.

MF: The logical thing seems to be leasing the books. You don't buy them, you just pay a rental fee.

Mrs. Lancaster: I guess that's the way it works. Some of that I expect has changed in all this new system.

MF: Do you have anything you'd like to add?

Mrs. Lancaster: I was going to tell you about my childhood diseases earlier, so I'll tell you now. I had, I guess you would say, the unfortunate experience of having just about everything that they offered - really! I had whooping cough, I had three types of measles, I had the mumps, the chicken pox, and scarlet fever. I don't know why I'm here.

MF: Because you are supposed to be.

Mrs. Lancaster: I reckon. For what, I don't know. Anyway, the scarlet fever was about the worst thing that happened to me. Scarlet fever is a disease, they say, that goes into the weakest part of your body and I had that at a time when there were only two people in New Bern had it. Sadie Gaskill, Johnny Gaskill's sister, and myself had it at the same time. Her's left her with a heart condition and she died very young, many, many years ago. Mine went into my eyes and caused me to have a growth inside my left eye. I had to have that operation in 1940. I had just been married two years. It was a year before Annette was born. I had to go to Duke Hospital and have eye surgery and I have since lost the sight in that eye. Anyway, thank goodness I'm still here. But the thing I remember, what I wanted to tell you was, that maybe a lot of people don't know unless they're my age, back in that day when you had any one of these diseases that I named, the health department came along and put a sign on your door.

They tacked a cardboard up on your door like you were a prisoner and you were quarantined for thirty days. So, we had many signs on our door. For every one of those diseases, in great big bold letters "DO NOT COME IN-WHOOPING COUGH, CHICKEN POX" or something. We got through that and then when I was about three I fell out of the swing and I broke my collar bone. Then, a year before I got married I fell out these front steps out there and broke my leg. All on the left side, everything happens to me on my left side.

MF: On your left side. That's your weak side.

Mrs. Lancaster: Yeah. Then, after I'd been working for the library over there on Johnson Street, I fell and broke my wrist. Then, in 1982 I had a heart attack. But I'm still here.

MF. Who were your doctors when you were young?

Mrs. Lancaster: Dr. Robert Jones. That's Hayden's family.

MF: I think he's her great uncle.

Mrs. Lancaster: He delivered all of my mother's children. A wonderful person. My baby sister was named for him, DuVal, that was his middle name. So, my mother gave her his middle name.

MF: You were born at home?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh yeah, on Johnson Street. All mother's children were. Annette was born in this home. Dr. Oscar Kafer, oh he was my love and joy, oh I just loved him. He wouldn't let me go to this hospital. It was sort of bad along then. He said, "We're going to have her right here." So, he did.

MF: He was a wonderful doctor.

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh yes! He come to my mother. He was her doctor and she had a real bad heart condition. He's been here three and four o'clock in the morning. Along then, they'd come when you called them. That's how he went to his maker. He was out making a call and he got in a bad wreck up here in Five Points.

MF: He had a heart attack. It was very sad. But doctors did make house calls.

Mrs. Lancaster: Every time we ever called him, he was right here.

MF: I think they all were. Well, then you did not really go to the hospital much when you were growing up?

Mrs. Lancaster: Oh no, but I've made up for it! I was in there last October in Durham. I had a real bad operation. I had a navel hernia. I was split all the way down. He told me that it would take about a year to really get over it.

MF: You certainly don't look like you've been ill.

Mrs. Lancaster: But that was the worse of that. Of course I had the heart attack in 1982 and I was up here three weeks in this hospital for that. Then, I was over there last May a year ago with pneumonia. This has all been since I retired.

MF: You retired to have a good time and spent it being sick.

Mrs. Lancaster: But I'm feeling wonderful, I really am.

MF: Well, all the bad times are behind you.

Mrs. Lancaster: Let's hope so.

MF: I'm sure. Well, Hilda, I want to thank you so much for this wonderful interview.

Mrs. Lancaster: I don't feel like I've helped you much at all. I've enjoyed it cause you are one of my favorite people any way. Working down there, I got to know you so well. Howard can tell you that every once in a while I'll say, "I wonder how Marea is doing? Wonder if she's still working at the Palace?" Howard will always say, "Well, why don't you call her?"

MF: This is going to be a wonderful addition to our oral history program. So, on behalf of Memories of New Bern, thank you very, very much.

Mrs. Lancaster: Well, you're welcome. It was a pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW