Alice Clark Donahue '46
Oral History Transcription

NOTE: The first two pages of this transcription are written exactly as spoken. The following pages were edited for style. Transcription by Jennifer A. Lewis.

Karen Lamoree: Why don't we just start at the beginning and um talk about where you grew up.

Alice Clark Donahue: Well I grew up on what is now an area that now is surrounded by the Brown University campus. By then it wasn't quite so built up but it was on Charlesfield Street. And I guess because I always lived so close to Brown and Pembroke I just couldn't wait for the day I was going to turn seventeen or whatever and go to Pembroke. The uh parents way back in those days used to have baby carriages and so I grew up to [riding] one around on the Green...And it so happened, you know what happened?

KL: What?

ACD: I was there during the war so there were no campus dances.

KL: Oh! There were no campus dances. The irony of all.

ACD: Isn't that something? But you know this is being very funny but these are my very first impressions of Pembroke. Uh... (At this point there was trouble with the tape recorder. The problem was corrected.)

KL: So you were working up in North Providence, and that was for the first year?

ACD: I worked there from uh September until probably January or February and then there was an opening in the English department at Brown in the speech depart...in speech really, speech department. So um Janis Vanderwater was director at the time of Sock and Buskin, so she called and asked if I would like to come back to Brown and teach speech.

KL: Oh, that's how you got that.

ACD: And that's how I got that and I was absolutely delighted because it gave me not only the time to, the opportunity to teach speech which I really loved but I could also work as her assistant at Sock and Buskin. And it was that following summer that I went to Columbia.

KL: And why did you decide to do that?

ACD: Because I wanted to get, I had to get more, you see the only speech that I had was speech lessons that come that, well I was fortunate enough to have the from time I was in first grade right through high school um and my love and enjoyment of being in plays. But, I did not have any theory or anything although that's what I received from Janis Vanderwater so wanted to go to Columbia and take courses. And that was what I did, uh that uh one year

KL: So why have you had speech lessons since first grade on, was that something you wanted to do or something your parents wanted you to do?

ACD: Uh,it it was just there. It was offered to us. Uh we had an elocution teacher who came from Boston every Thursday and she would go to every class in my little elementry school and then you would have either ah something that you must read. Sometimes it was a dramatic presentation, sometimes it wasn't. And you had to learn it uh by the next Thursday. And then we had three or four plays a year uh and every week uh we had an opportunity, ten minutes, just ten minutes a day, every single one in the class within that week's period would have to get up in front of the class and just talk about what you did yesterday when you went home from school or anything. But it did give you that opportunity to get rid of your fears.

KL: Um. Good practice is the thing.

ACD: Yeah. I know when I graduated uh from ah Pembroke and I just thought the one thing I want to do is teach speech so I wrote to a recent pretendent(?) in Rhode Island. You know when your twenty years old you're the smartest person God ever created. So needless to say I heard from quite a few of them and they said they were very sorry but they did not have funding for it at the time. But that was um, and that was the year that I did go to do some work at Columbia. But you mentioned living at uh, on campus and missing it. Uh I do remember I lived there for one one week and it was sort of just what I expected it to be but it was the going into my senior year and I was a freshman I was a counselor to the freshman in one of the dorms. And it was fun cause there were no classes to go to it was just freshman orientation.

KL: Right.

ACD: But uh I enjoy I enjoyed that so much and I knew how much they [her children] would enjoy it and how much I had missed it.

KL: So when you uh, you finished Columbia you came back to Brown? Or...

ACD: Yes I only there, I only did it during the summer.

KL: I see. And when you were at Brown did you teach women or women and men?

ACD: In speech it was just women. But in Sock and Buskin it was women and men.

KL: What was the theory behind just having women take speech and not having men take speech?

ACD: I haven't any idea. Men needed it more than we or as much as we did. I don't know whether, why in fact when I was there I wasn't aware that it was not a requirement for men, like the swimming, I knew that it was. I think it's, well I got a great deal out of it. I think it's amazing to you the first time you hear your voice on tape. And there are so many of the words that I don't say that you mispronounce them but you don't pronouce them clearly. That if you hear that and you're in speech it does help a great deal. The only thing that we did, it was just speech. It wasn't speech preparation. So I think speech is better combined with something else other than just the pronouncation.

KL: You have a goal to work for.

ACD: Yes.

KL: When I was in college if I had to make an oral report I'd drop the class I was so terrified of doing that, which is partly a result of being insecure. And when I came this job I

felt that I should go out and do some P.R. And so what quaked me was I did my first speech in front of a group of seventy people. And it was on a deliberately funny topic. It was the history of the relationship between Brown men and Pembroke women. But it had a serious tone to it. I was talking about how gender relations effect curriculum and so on and so forth. Well I was very nervous and even today I tend to talk extemporaneously. I don't read. I prefer to have five words on a page just as cues. But because I was nervous and it was complicated I wanted to read from at least the first few lines. And the worst thing that I could envision happening happened. I had a microphone on and I'm sure my voice was quavery because I was nervous and I was reading and this old battle ax stands up and screams at me "Don't read to us. Talk to us."

ACD: It does make the world of difference, doesn't it?

KL: And I said, "You know bear with me I'm getting through this very complicated passage and once I get through then I will start to talk more extemporaneously." Basically, you know hold your horses. I took a drink of water and then gathered myself. And actually it became quite funny for me because everyone just kind of glared at her. Because clearly she had thrown the speaker off.

ACD: But you were honest too in what you said following what she said.

KL: So now though I don't have any fear because I don't think anything worse can happen.

ACD: But that's really great to have happen right away because...

KL: It's over with.

ACD: ...because everyone else was with you too.

KL: Yes. They were on my side. They were pulling for me. And I think they laughed extra hard at my silly jokes.

ACD: Oh. I'm sure.

KL: So that's my one speech story. Just get the awful speech over with and then die down.

ACD: When you speak of the gender gap I don't think the students who were there in the forties thought much about the gender gap. Having the same professors I feel absolutely sure that our marks were the same, depending upon what we put into it. I guess I didn't notice that the guys were there. Even as far as plays were concerned there were no more men than women, or more of a male dominated caste in plays.

KL: So was it a shock to you when the students wanted to merge in the sixites and seventies?

ACD: Ya. You mean the dormitories and everything. Yea that part of it was because at that time so many of the Pembroke dorms by that time were all over the campus. You see when I was there they were just where what is now Pembroke campus not on George Street or wherever. Yes I was really surprised. Because you were close enough going to classes and all that bit. But you know that was just the time.

KL: That's right. Times change.

ACD: They sure do change.

KL: So you were at Brown until forty-eight, also from forty-seven to forty-eight you were also at Salve Regina.

ACD: Yes. One of the ladies who has probably meant as much to me as anyone, helping me and giving me advice, was Sister Mary James, the principal of Saint Xavier's Academy (high school). She became the first Dean of Salve Regina College. She said she was delighted I was going to Pembroke, but she said to me your education is going to mean a great deal to you there's no question about it. It will open doors for you. And if you want to be a teacher you can become a teacher. But she said it's going to be meaningful only to the degree that you share it with others. And I thought that's what all of us should do when we do have an education. You share it in your work or with your family and children. She went on to say that it is important to do community work. Particularly, it is important to work with people who do not have the advantages that you do. Now that's more important today than it was in nineteen forty-two or forty-six when she mentioned it to me.

KL: So do you think that was one of the things that spurred you to volunteer?

ACD: I enjoy it. Well the other reason I did it was because at that time very few married women worked. As a matter of fact in many schools in Providence once you were married you could not teach anymore. And I knew I wasn't the kind to want to play tennis or golf or bridge. So I know that's when I became interested in organization and volunteer work. To me it was very similar to having a job. Of course today I don't know how women your age, including my own daughter, I don't know how you can work all day and take care of children

KL: I don't have children. That's the answer.

ACD: ...maintain a home. Well honestly Karen I don't.

KL: It's a real problem. I'll get home tonight at seven and we are having people over from our church tomorrow night, so we have to prepare the house tonight, because they are going to get to our house five minutes after we get home from work. We have a new niece who was just born yesterday so we're very excited. And whenever that happens we always think should we have children. And Paul said "Well when would we pick them up?" But, honestly something would have to give because we don't have that much flexiblity, I mean I have to work. I mean if I didn't work then we wouldn't have our house, which is what makes me so angry when people say women are working for BMW's. No. I'm working to put food on the table.

ACD: I would say the vast majority of young women like yourself are working for the immediate need and even beyond that, trying to put money away for a college eduacation for children when they come.

KL: My husband is in an even less paying job than I am. And my being out of work for six months is really not feasible. The most I could be out is three months. It would take us three years to save my salary for those three months, which is not how it used to be twenty-five years ago. It really frustrates me. Women were more affluent then than they are today. And it's hard for my father because he has a high school diploma and here's his daughter and son-in-law who both have masters degress and they have a lower standard of living than he does.

ACD: That's really tough, but that's the way it is today. It's unfortunate.

KL: I think it's going to make a big difference in the community work that people are going to be able to do. Women are really the backbone of it. And if government is going to cut social welfare programs and they think volunteers will fill the gap...

ACD: They're not there. That really is one thing that amazes me. The number of hours that members of the General Federation of Women's Clubs put in, especially our younger members. I don't know how they do it. Of course their volunteer work is different. They have to do a great deal of it on weekends. And it's family oriented. They get it done, but they cannot put in the hours that I was able to. I was fortunate. When I was going to conferences and conventions when the children were younger, my mother would babysit.

KL: My mother works.

ACD: I can't babysit for my grandchildren. You see it's entirely different now. My little granddaughter is four years old. She was born during a regional conference.

KL: This is how she remembers.

ACD: She has seen more of me in Washington or some other part of the country than in Barrington. Like my daughter, women don't even have families to rely on for help with child care.

KL: That's it. One of the things I was investigating was this place for people who have moved away from their families. My mother is three hours away and my husband's mother is two hours away, so clearly they cannot be there as grandmothers. It used to be that when people had babies their mothers would move in and help out for the first few weeks. Many people found that their mothers either worked or lived far away. So now in Rhode Island there are actual companies that provide that service. They are basically surrogate grandmothers. They come to your home and they teach you how to diaper the baby and wash the baby. And if you are breast feeding, how to breast feed. And they give you that emotional support that your mother would give you.

ACD: I didn't know that.

KL: Yeah. There are several. It is a burgeoning business for women who have small children of their own who perhaps bring them along, perhaps not. It's a whole new business. It's for people like myself who have been displaced. But that's for people who make more money than I do. These are not cheap services. It's several hundred dollars a day. It's a new growth industry for women to take the place of our mothers.

ACD: It's a good salary though, isn't it?

KL: I was telling my mother this and she said, "Oh is that what I'm worth?".

ACD: Golly.

KL: So to get back to you, when did you get married?

ACD: I was married in 1947.

KL: Forty seven. And you stopped working in 1948. Did you have children right away?

ACD: Yes. My daughter was born in 1948. So I taught speech right up until five o'clock and she was born at midnight. Cause then again I felt fine and I just as well keep going. Actually it was between semesters and I had resigned and taught until the end of the semester. I was in registering people for the next semester the day I delivered.

KL: So I see the first thing on this list is the International Federation of Catholic Alumna which was forty-two.

ACD: Okay. We joined that almost automatically when we graduated from high school. And as a matter of fact that was one of the first conventions I ever went to. In fact I'm still a member, although I'm not as active as I was in the forties and fifties.

KL: That kind of gave you a little preface to being a Pembroke alum. So let's see forty-eight to fifty-three it says co-founder of Pembroke College Junior Club members. Now why did you form a junior club?

ACD: Well as I look back at nineteen, twenty and tweny-one, we went in a became members of Pembroke College Club. And we really felt that the older women treated us as these nice little girls who just came to join the club. And we felt there might be something we could do rather than be candy vendors. So that's when we decided to make our own club. We wanted programs that were different. We didn't care about hat shows. We didn't like to wear hats anyway. So we decided that we would form Pembroke College Junior Club members. We didn't put an age limit on it. We figured we'd stay until we were ready to join those old, old women. And of course I can remember going back to my tenth and fifteenth reunions and thinking golly they still come back at that age. And here I am I can't wait to get back. Well I don't know how many years we were in existance, not that many, but we accomplished alot. And first things we became co-chairmen of a scholarship bridge. And we had a say so as far as the speakers for the programs. We had a representative on the executive committee and then we just dropped it. Because that's what we wanted. We were tired of being candy vendors. And at that time that's what all the new members were, candy vendors to the rich. I had been doing that since I was nine. I felt that at twenty I was a little beyond that.

KL: So what kind of programs were you interested in?

ACD: We used to use quite a number of professors and I think those of us who never had an opportunity to take Classics for instance, would enjoy that from time to time. Most of the speakers were professors. It was just another part of our education.

N.B.: At this point Rita Morando, the Executive Hostess for the GFWC in Washington and a close friend of Alice Clark Donahue, came into the room. ACD introduced her to Karen and described their friendship. ACD remarks that their friendship culminated in the marriage of Rita's daughter to her son. Karen then told them about her grandfather's marriage to her best friend from high school's grandmother.

KL: The first thing you did after Pembroke was the PTA and the school Parent's Association?

ACD: Yes. That's cause my kids were in school.

KL: Everybody joined the PTA?

ACD: Yes. Almost every parent did. Every mother.

KL: And what did you do?

ACD: I was going to say raise money. That was really all we did to bring the extra things into the school. Not only that we had to (?). But you see by that time we had moved to Barrington. At that time the PTA was becoming more actively involved in the education issues that were coming before the school committee and that the school committee was presenting to the town. So you wanted to get involved and hear the teachers' viewpoint. We would read the principal's and the superintendent's viewpoint in the newspaper. So that was the part of the PTA that I enjoyed, getiing away from the run of the mill things. It was very interesting.

KL: So the next thing you were involved with was at Rhode Island Child Welfare Adoption Advisory Committee. How did you get involved with that?

ACD: Well I joined the Barrington's Women's Club in 1955. That and the Pembroke Club, the Junior Women's Club and PTA, made it all fall into place. I think that the Child Welfare Advisory Committee was just someone who called and asked if I would help. It was just in an advisory capacity. Then it went on to help with transportation for children in foster homes. But I started because someone called and asked me to help.

KL; Were the committee members mostly mothers?

ACD: Yes. I can't remember a man sitting on the advisory committee.

KL: In the 1950s what would you say is the most significant voluntary position you held?

ACD: In the 1950s? That was when I did join the Barrington's Junior Women's Club. One of the things that I was very definitely interested in all my life was joining the women's club. I had been reading about some of the projects and programs that they had been doing. One of their programs had to do with some of the candidates for election and some of the things that were happening on our school committee and our planning board. I was talking with a friend and she asked me if I wanted to join the club. In a new town it gives you a wonderful opportunity to meet new people from all walks of life in the community, but all with children with the same concerns about communtiy affairs. That did lead to my being a candidate for the school board committee in 1958. Needless to say being a Democrat in Barrington, I was not elected but at least I got a higher number of votes than any other candidate every did. I think part of it was that I was a women and the other part was that we really did have a good campaign. One of my really good friends who was a professor at Brown, Phil Brey, was also a school committee candidate those two years. Neither one of us were politicians but boy did we ever work. We worked very hard. The other man who ran was a lawyer in Providence. His name is John Doan(?). So we didn't get elected but we worked very hard. I've been very active in the Democratic Party ever since. I'm a member of the State Democratic Committee and the town committee. The other thing I became interested in in the fifties was the School Survey Committee. When I lost the election they put me on the Survey Committee. But at that time too a group of us

thought that the time had come in Rhode Island to have candidates in the government of different ethnic groups and religions. And asked why don't we have more black women in positions of authority? So we organized in the late fifties and early sixties the Women's Intergroup Relations Committee. We had our first conference at Brown during spring vacation. We had women, particularly Catholic, Protestant and Jewish women. There were others but we thought for the first we would take the major religions. Other than black and white women, I think there were some hispanic women as well. But I think going back thirty years ago the hispanic community in Rhode Island was not as large as it is today. We sat down for two full days and just had discussion groups about...it was an eye-opener. There were many black women I had know for years. I had gone to Pembroke with them. I never knew they had concerns. They were like any others student, I thought. But they had to overcome many obstacles but I had no idea. It was the first time we had brought women of all different colors, creeds, and religions together and we had rabbis and priests and ministers talking to groups. It ended up we had several conferences. I was the chairman of the second one. Then it branched out to a very important thing I think we did concerning fair housing. I was co-chairman of the Good Neighbor Pledge. It was a pledge saying that you would not be adverse to someone of another race buying or renting a home next to yours. It was, I think, very effective because we had pledges signed and we also raised money to have the pledges put in the local newspaper. Lots of the local newspapers published them without charge but the Providence Journal we had to pay a little bit. But that did have, it had other effects on me. One night when I was leaving a meeting I noticed in Barrington that someone was in back of me driving. Usually you don't have the same person following you from Providence all the way down. Then my first thought was to look to see if it was a policeman. And I thought no I'm not speeding. Then I drove up my street and went in. Half an hour after that the phone rang and it was the man who was following me. He said, "You were lucky tonight. You might not be as lucky with your children." Well I went downstairs and called the police. I didn't tell my children. I didn't want to scare them. The police wanted to come over but I told them not to since everyone was asleep. They did have a policeman at the bus everyday for my children. They went to different schools then. I also had to call them up regularly and tell them where I was going. Needless to say I didn't go out that much. Nothing ever came of it. Of course part of it had to do with the Good Neighbor Pledge.

KL: Isn't that creepy. Did you hear about the woman down in Southern Rhode Island whose dog was stolen? The person who stole it said they'd give it back only if she resigned from the school committee. It was early in the summer. She had purebred Golden Retreivers. Apparently she would let them out at a certain time and then go for a jog. The dogs would return to the house. Well one came back and the other didn't. The next day she got blackmailed. She wouldn't give in because she felt the dog might already be dead. To my knowledge she never got the dog back. It's the same kind of thing. When you hit someone in this area of the brain, they have a bigotted part of them.

ACD: That was really scary.

KL: I bet.

ACD: And they told the kids. And they told the school principal that no one is to take those children out of school. Nobody can come and say that they're an uncle or whomever. They are to take the bus. Not even I could pick them up. They wanted them to go on the bus and nothing else. I hadn't thought of that in years.

KL: That was scary though, I bet.

ACD: Yes. It was really scary.

KL: Now did you say you had become involved in the General Federation in the fifties?

ACD: In fifty-five I joined the Junior Women's Club and then was president in sixty-one. And then director of the Junior Assembly in Rhode Island in sixty- four. And then I was a Junior on the national board for four years. And then state president in Rhode Island for two years. I just kept going.

KL: Now when you achieve posts like that are you elected to them?

ACD: Yes.

KL: And are there several candidates?

ACD: Yes.

KL: And you campaign?

ACD: On the national level you do. As junior director you're elected to and state president you are too. Chairmenships you are appointed to. I was elected first in seventy-eight as treasurer. At the time there were two or three candidates. When you're elected president-elect that's the last election you have to go through. Because it takes you those to years to plan for your own two years.

KL: So, what was it that made you want to move up the ranks?

ACD: Let's see. I guess there were a lot of reasons. One of them, I certainly approved of everything the GFWC was doing, as far as there programs were concerned. Because the whole purpose of it was to meet a need in your community and go out and work with others. So I thought basically they do what I would like to do. The friendships that you make are also very meaningful and very important. I was particularly interested in things I thought we could do in education and health. Those were the two areas that to me were where my interests were, more so than conservation or the arts. We do have many programs you know, because what a woman in Maine wants to do and what a woman in Southern California wants to do may be different. But those were basically the reasons. When you start you never think that you'll ever be president. Whenever any one suggests that you might be you say no I don't think so or you weren't thinking about it. You do have to make the commitment early because it takes a long time. We're going to have to change. And we are going to change. This is our hundredth anniversary year and it's a time when we can look at change a little bit more. Part of it is we're going to be able to get more women who would be willing to run for office and do the job. But not move to Washington for two years. If they want to that's all well and good, but you don't need to today. You don't have to do that. You can use a Fax machine as long as you have a good executive director and staff. We have that in place now. We didn't have that twenty years ago because the president was the C.E.O. and the whole thing. She always had an executive secretary but within the last five to ten years we've needed to develop the oraganization with a stronger staff because women have jobs and hold office. And then the other thing is that usually you have successive jobs. You have to start as treasurer and work up. If you want to be president why should you have to do this.

KL: So when you were president at the state level what exactly do you do?

ACD: The first thing that you do is to get a program first hand by going to training and orientation in Washington. Orientation is given by the officers and some of the chairmen. And then it is your job to, we don't have all of the structure that other states have we're

too small to have districts, and then you go home and have a meeting and give all of the material and ideas and suggestions for programs to your state chairmen, whether it's education or homelife or whatever. She in turn brings that information down to the local club. We're doing a lot more in legislation than we have done. I'm sure not all of our members agree with our stand but we vote for resolutions to do this and the majority rules. We do expect quite a bit of help from our members in supportive legislation. The Disablilities Act is one we're working on right now. I don't know how that's come about in the last few days because when we did work on the Civil Rights Act [unintelligible]... We're working right now on Senator Kennedy's bill on teen pregnancy because that should be one of the major concerns in the United States today. Most certainly the idea of good prenatal care. The area I'm specifically concerned about is education, doing some kind of alternative education for the young woman who is pregnant so she will stay in school as long as she can healthwise, and then come back to school with daycare for that little infant if she doesn't have parents or someone to care for the child, to be sure there is some form of education. I think that's the only way so she can get her high school education and some sort of job placement training. It's the only way to keep these young women off the welfare payrolls. They're keeping their babies, they're not putting them up for adoption. The young women who are losing the work force because they have a baby.

KL: I just walk down Hope street and I see fourteen year olds with babies and I think of myself at fourteen and I'm glad my parents were strict.

ACD: It truly is unbelievable. I know that quite a few women with kids just want to get out of the house, away from that situation and yet what do they have? They don't have their own apartment. It's horribly sad. But to me it's let's get them educated so they won't just pass the same kind of ...

KL: Third generation. I know one of the programs they have at Brown which was started by a young woman from Washington, D.C. She had worked with the Urban League down there and came up here and worked with the Urban League here. She started The Peer Sister Program. They match up Brown women with pregnant urban teens in South Providence. It's an educational program. You can only get matched up if you promise to stay in high school and you have a certain grade point average. She's from Washington. I'm sure she went back there. I could give you her name. They devised this program. Young women from Brown tutor them and they also try to serve in a very non-threatening way as role models, acknowledging that they have had advantages that these women have never had. But making it on your own, preparing yourself for a job or a career, teaching them. They also go to parenting classes so they are not just thrown into the world with a screaming baby at fifteen. She was telling me that her peer sister who is fifteen and has two children. Her mother had been fifteen when she had had this girl and had been determined that her daughter was not going to make that same mistake. And then her daughter did. And Galia was telling me that there was such pressure on young women in the minority community that's the only way achieve self-worth, is to prove that they can reproduce. Galia said it was quite a shock for her to go to this young woman's apartment. She had never seen a rat before. And she had these two babies. But that's the program. You get to really help. This program is really designed to help these girls becomes self-sufficient.

ACD: Those are the only kind of programs that I can see helping. To have school available to them and God knows they do need the parenting. These were some of the things I thought we could do. The major emphasis, we don't truly have an emphasis, one project, we're not that kind of organization, we never will be because there are so many things that are important in one community. In so many of these rural communities they're not going to have a great big program on drugs. They are starting to have them a little bit, but not like they have them in Washington or Providence. But literacy is something that the

Federation has been interested in since we started. Of course then it was just the educational norm cause most of them never even went to high school. And we haven't developed our own because you have Literacy Volunteers of America, you have dozen really good programs. So we are just working with them and supplying them, as they work within a community, with volunteers, tutors and transportation , fund raising and babysitting. And we have close to a hundred thousand volunteers in the United States just doing that. I went to the Second Literacy Congress in Washington, just this past weekend. Honestly Karen I just couldn't believe there were a hundred first readers, meaning they had just learned in the last year or two. I had never seen such a room of such assertive men and women in my life. They put me to shame. And boy the guts they had to change their entire way of life and let people know they had never been able to read. One worked for the department of education in California. Another lady has had her own consulting business for fourteen years. She said there's no question she had the best paid secretary. Most all other businesses of that kind you can compensate in what you do. They call themselves non-readers. They do not like the work illiterate because they are not illiterate. They speak well but they just never learned to read and write. It's just amazing to me. I just has breakfast with Mrs. Bush Monday morning. She really has done a lot because she has the means to do it. But that's one of the major interests that we have and teen pregnacy and daycare. So I can see way back the things that we were doing in the fifties and sixties and seventies and we got zero support. And now you can get a majority to pass legislation, you have a pretty good chance of seeing that the legislation does get passed. That's why a lot of women in the Rhode Island Woman's Club resigned, because their husbands made them resign. It was really funny, well it wasn't funny, but the women knew what they were doing and in our area particularly the interest was in child and female laborers because they were working in the mills and working in the night and they were not getting paid for it. It was hazardous work and when the Rhode Island Women's Club was chartered in 1895 most men, of course all the women were pretty well educated women as you well know, thought their wives would be getting together to read and embroider and the idea that they were truly getting down to the nitty gritty of women's rights and many of them just had to. There were among the industrialist around the country there were letters sent and you have some of these in the archives, warning to other industrialists please be sure you do not let your wife and friends join this new organization they are nothing but trouble. And a lot of them didn't and thank goodness a lot of them had the guts to stay in there.

KL: That's interesting. There was much earlier than the General Federation of Women's Clubs a bunch of track societies in Rhode Island and they were focusing on the illiteracy problems in the mill towns. And it's fascinating to me that on Saturdays and Sundays the mill owners' wives would go up and teach these poor children how to read. And the mill owners would be screaming there are these agitators teaching your children how to read and basically they are going to be able to better themselves. And the agitatiors were their wives.

ACD: Yes. They really were astounding. Did you know that in those days women couldn't even talk to their husbands, I mean at the dinner table discuss current events and what's going on in the office?

KL: One of the things you find when you study history is we have this image of women being at home but in fact that's never really been true. And the Victorian woman if you've looked at someone like Sarah Doyle who was unmarried but still she was at work from eight until three. And then you look at what she did with the rest of her day just like Mrs. Gustave Radeke these women were never at home either, they had club meeting after club meeting. And they were not at home embroidering as you pointed out, they were out there rebelling.

ACD: We have a picture at GF headquarters, Robinson was the name of the painter this happened to be a photograph of a convention. And the women were all different ages with their hats on and you can pick out a trend just by looking at the expressions on their faces. And it was in *McCall's* magazine in 1927 and he said that he presented it to us, his mother was at that time the president of the Nebraska Federation of Women's Clubs. He went with his mother one time and carried placards vote for women up and down on Fifth Avenue. So he said, " I learned at a very young age what the women were up to." But they really did fantastic things back then. You know how it started just because founder, Jennie June Crowley in 1868 was not invited to a dinner that the New York Press Club was giving for Charles Dickens. She decided to do her own thing and do her own thing she did. I've often felt badly that we were the first organization, together with AAUW and Business and Professional Women's Club to write the ERA Ammendment in 1944. And I wish we had really kept at it. You know that was an ideal time. I mean women were all taking the jobs of men.

KL: They were away. You could have slid it through?

ACD: We really, really could have. And even how well we did, we were running the country. But then as soon as they came back, women gave up their jobs. They were happy to do that. I still think that if we had kept at it before, cause I am not a total feminist, I don't believe in some of the things that even the National Organization For Women are thinking about. You know they change the meaning of the Equal Rights Ammendment I think.

KL: Their rhetoric is often so strong. I know I got something in the mail the other day. Their next march on Washington is for the Pro-Choice movement and I laughed at how typically NOW the opening of the letter was. It said, "Help prevent the enslavement of women!" And I thought this rhetoric is a little overblown for my taste. If they had just said we need your money for this march on Washington then I would have written them a check for twenty dollars.

ACD: Because we know what they need.

KL: Yes. But the "enslavement of women"? It just turns me off.

ACD: I really was upset with them 1982ish where they did pass a resolution to in so many words outlaw volunteerism. These women must get paid. And I don't think there is a woman who is volunteering anyplace that would want to be replaced by a paid worker. Because they don't do the kind of job that would be a paying job in most cases. Not that we are having more help in schools where I think they are paying. Paying to a certain degree is fine. To the men and women who are working in schools and doing a job, give them some money. That's great because to me that's half volunteered, half paid. But when they said that,I thought do they think we are ever going to have enough money in this country to do it? I think we've lost members, so has every other organization in a way I think we've lost them for a good reason. Either they've gone back to work or having to work and not having the time to volunteer. GFWC started with the PTA because we found that the work with the education department was getting to be so astronomical, all of the education problems in our country that it needed an organization unto itself. So that was when members of the GFWC education department started the PTA. And the League of Women's Voters to a degree too was an offshoot too. We realized we had to get right back to basics and get women registered. So we thought it was only natural that you go to about the only organization for women. Then as all of these other issue oriented ones started of course our membership would go to single issues. So I think that's more things to be proud of than to be concerned about.

KL: Why don't we try to sum up the things. What would you say would be the thing that you were, of all the volunteer work you've done, the proudest of?

ACD: Well I guess part of it is being president of GFWC. There's no question about it because some of the advantages given to me just by virtue of the office and I'm here thank goodness only by the support of the Rhode Island women's clubs. Also the years that I had appointed service. But just in the past year I've been asked to speak to the Federation of Asian Women's Associations in Taiwan, to go to all the (?) in China. I'm going to Ta iwan again and the People's Republic of China. The cultural university has invited me to come over for a week and just participate in discussions and meetings with women and men leaders in the People's Republic of China. When I was there last time I met with the president of the People's Republic of China. And in the end of October I'm going to Hanover, Germany to speak to women's groups there. So at this point I'm getting much more of an international interest. I guess it's always been there but you have to talk with women involved in other countries to really be surprised at the accomplishments that they have made that we haven't made. And one of them that really concerns me most is some of these Asian and African countries that women are much more evident in their legislatures working in their political government. And the other thing that is becoming more and more apparent by the year two thousand half the women in Japan will be working. Now I still think that Japanese --- has fallen two steps behind. And because women in Japan are working and going back to work their extended family is changing. There is not the number of women there to take care of the grandmothers and fathers and great-aunts. So the economics of these countries will change a great deal too. But the one thing was uppermost in mind of women in China were members of the Old Chinese Federation. And it's a women's organization, unlike ours and they are government appointed, not volunteers, but their concerns are the same, literacy, child and family health care, employment for women, equal status for women, everyone of them is a China-American conference that is going to be held in Beijing in June this year. And the GFWC is a member of the steering committee. We hope to get two thousand Chinese-American women to meet and discuss just those issues. In Liberia the issues are the very same, but literacy is number one because it's felt in so many of the African and Asian countries that until women can learn to read and write and get the self-esteem and self-confidence they need they are always going to be where they are.

KL: It's interesting when you talk about the international flavor. We just completed a grant funded project investigating women's volunteerism in Rhode Island from 1900 to 1987. One student was very interested in the General Federation of Women's Clubs and so she zeroed in one it. One of the things she was talking about was I believe in 1906 was the "colored question" , letting black women in because in Rhode Island there was a bifurcated system. There was the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the General Federation of Colored Women's Clubs. The thing she noted was that in the women's club column there were always reports about what was going on in foreign countries, there was networking. They were giving details about what was going on in Taiwan or Malaysia with all these clubs, but they never reported what they were doing internationally so that was something new. No one had historical sense before. So it's interesting that you are talking about it now. (At this point the recording stopped working. There were only a few minutes left in the interview.)