

Interview with Jeanie Gibson  
Interviewer: Keith Howes  
April 22, 1974

**Q:** What makes the year 1939 memorable to you?

**A:** That was the year in which I received my B.S. degree in education, after having worked for it in extensive classes at the University of Evansville for several years.

**Q:** You taught before the year 1939, weren't you required to hold a college degree before that date?

**A:** No, according to my knowledge and observation in the early days in Evansville schools, very few teachers had formal college work in education. High school graduates could take a six-week course in one of the colleges – come back and teach, usually in the country schools at first. After some experience was acquired the next step was a position in a city school. One of our superintendents, Mr. Tomlin, [taught] in the white schools. One by one these schools were closed, and the children and teachers were dispersed, and integration then was in effect. As to female principals, they outnumbered male principals and held their positions for a long time. I attended [elementary] schools and during the 8 years had just one male principal. About the time of World War II, the superintendent, Mr. Benezet began to place young men in the schools as principals. At this present time there is just one female principal in the Evansville schools, and she is black.

**Q:** Why was Mr. Benezet interested in hiring male principals?

**A:** That was just about the time that a number of the female principals were reaching retirement age and because a young man could be deferred from the naming of the schools was the naming of Wheeler School, was recently disbanded or closed. In the beginning it was called Canal School. The great Erie Canal, which came down from...Michigan and crossed Indiana was alongside the school grounds. That later was changed to Mulberry School which later still was called Wheeler. A name of a personality in Evansville.

**Q:** What subjects did the children study?

**A:** They studied the usual, such as 3rs. [reading, writing and arithmetic], language, history, geography, and Evansville had a large group of immigrants from Germany who used their language in the schools, so very early there was a strong course in German offered, even in the elementary schools. Most, some of the schools had a full-time teacher in German, others a teacher...30-35 which was considered quite small, my last class was a great pleasure to me, it had only 27 in it.

**Q:** We are nearing the end of our 15 minutes, but I would like to ask one question. How would you like to be a schoolteacher in the Vanderburgh County system here in Evansville today?

**A:** I have said a number of times that I am glad that my teaching experience is in the past. I enjoyed every bit, every year of my teaching experience, because I felt that I had gained the respect and the affection of my pupils. I think that is very important for a successful teacher.

**Q:** You don't feel you could gain that affection or that your experience now could be the same?