

Mrs. H. F. Carmichael

Interviewed by  
Miss Betty Turnell

for the  
Decatur Public Library

Junior High Schools.....	1
Billy Sunday's Visit to Decatur.....	2
Decatur Art Class (oldest organized women's group in Decatur).....	3

Interview with Mrs. H. F. Carmichael

December 1, 1977

Q. This is Betty Turnell for the Decatur Public Library. Our guest today is Mrs. H. F. Carmichael. Mrs. Carmichael, I believe your husband had a position with the Decatur Public Schools. Is that correct?

A. Yes, he came to Decatur in 1917, I would say - 16 or 17 - and he was first a principal under Mr. Engleman and was the principal for one year of the old Jackson Street School, which I think has been demolished and after that was closed, he went to ~~Durfee~~ <sup>Durfee</sup> School for three years, and that was the beginning of the junior high school movement in Decatur. Then they had opened another small junior high school in the old, old High School and Mr. Unaware was principal there. He left Decatur, and when he left, my husband was made principal of the Junior High School in the old high school. I forgot just where it was. It was near the old Stephen Decatur High School and he was there, I think, two years, when Roosevelt School was built on Grand Avenue. He even helped in the construction of that. You know, teachers weren't paid during the summer and so they found summer work and he found work in the construction of Roosevelt Junior High School so he helped build it. He opened it in about 1922. It was built for about 700. About that time we were getting into the true junior high school. It was a movement all over the land, and he came into that building with 1000 students, when, as I said, it was built for 700. It took in all of the west side of Decatur at that time.

They had nothing. They had the building and that was all. They didn't have any equipment, whatever. They didn't even have a curtain for their stage. They didn't have a piano. But the parents rallied. They got busy. They donated. They had a big carnival and made a lot of money and bought a piano and bought a new stage curtain. And one of the patrons, Mr. Ed Powers, gave the equipment for the dining room so that the Home Ec department could function. They did have some stoves so they could teach cooking and he gave the equipment for the dining room and they equipped that. They really had a lot of school spirit.

Q. How long was your husband principal there?

A. From the time it opened until he died in 1943.

Q. Well, he must have had a special regard for that building - those bricks that he put in himself!

A. He was very fond of and believed in the Jr. High School movement sincerely. He visited one of the model schools in St. Louis at that time that was moving along, and he was thoroughly sold on the true junior high school movement, which means the plan of 6 - 3 - 3 - the first six grades in one building and then the junior high - that would be the 7th, 8th, and 9th in the next department and then the 10th, 11th, and 12th.

- Q. Mrs. Carmichael, that was certainly interesting about the Decatur Public School system and your husband's association with it, but I don't believe you've always lived in Decatur, have you? Where were you born?
- A. We were both natives of Indiana. I was born in Posey County, Indiana, which is known for its fine melons and near the little town of Poseyville. A lot of people think that that means flowers, but it doesn't. It was named for the first Lieutenant Governor of the Indiana Territory - Mr. Posey - and that was where the county got its name. We're the corner county. People always say we're from "down in the pocket", where the Ohio River and the Wabash come together down there, and that's our corner county.

I finished high school in Poseyville, Indiana, and right away entered Indiana State Teachers College in Terre Haute. I graduated on an accelerated course there in 1917. It was there that I met my husband, who was originally from Brown County and had had all his teaching time in Indiana, and so we stayed good friends for two or three years, and he came to Decatur to teach. I met him in Terre Haute, where we were married and came to Decatur to live, and I've lived here ever since.

- Q. Well, that really is a romantic beginning to your association. Have you always lived in this house?
- A. No, we lived first - for a short time we lived in rental property on West Packard Street and then we bought a little cottage at 1820 North Church, and at that time everybody was talking about the crusade that Billy Sunday had had here in Decatur and how the church memberships were enlarged so much and they were very thrilled when I came here to have had Billy Sunday here.
- Q. Mrs. Carmichael, maybe you may have to explain who Billy Sunday was, for the sake of some of the younger listeners.
- A. Well, he was an evangelist, very comparable to Billy Graham. He had the crusades, just the same and when they had Billy Sunday in Decatur they built a huge tabernacle. That was before my time. It was over by the time I got here, but when we bought the little house on North Church Street from these English people; they had planted a beautiful garden in the back yard. Being from England, they loved their flowers and their garden and back at the end of the garden was a garage and one of the neighbors came over after we had gotten settled down there and said, "I think you people will be interested to know that your garage was built from the lumber from Billy Sunday's tabernacle." I don't know if that garage is still standing or not, but it was always of interest to us because it was a part of Billy Sunday's tabernacle. His crusade I understand was very successful in Decatur.

Q. So if that garage is still standing, it does have a very historic connection in Decatur.

A. I know that's right because the man who came over - the Stauffer Brothers were prominent builders at that time and it was Mr. George Stauffer who came over and told my husband where the garage came from.

Q. Well now, I believe you have done some teaching yourself, haven't you?

A. Yes, I did all my regular teaching in Indiana for two or three years. I started in a little one-room country school. I had never been in one before, but that was where I got my start, and I never worked so hard anywhere in my life! To have eight grades with fifteen minute recitations, one right after the other. I thought I couldn't do it, but I did. From there, I went back to Indiana State and finished and taught in a small high school in southern Indiana until I was married.

Q. And you did one time teach here, didn't you?

A. I just substituted here and then I taught mathematics in night school when my husband was principal of the night school.

Q. What about your family, Mrs. Carmichael?

A. We have one daughter, who is an English teacher in a community college in Astoria, Oregon, and she has three teen-aged children, all in high school now. They came to visit me last summer. They like Decatur - they love to come to Grandma's house.

Q. Well, I believe you also have some outside interests. Is the church one of your interests?

A. Yes, the church is one of my interests, and that always has to come first. My daughter being a Tri Delta, I'm a member of the Tri Psi mother's group. Then I belong to the Decatur Art Class, which I think is the oldest organized women's group in Decatur.

Q. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about this. What are the activities?

A. Well, we have nothing but self improvement as the only object. We have no projects in the Decatur Art Class. Your only obligation is to give one paper a year and furnish your home for one meeting a year. We meet every Saturday afternoon beginning in October. We go up to the first of April - every Saturday afternoon except for the holidays.

Q. How long has this organization been going?

A. I'm not quite sure. It's almost a hundred years. I believe our birthday tea this year will be the 97th.

Q. Well, that really is a remarkable history for the group.

- A. Mrs. Anna B. Millikin was one of the founders. I think it started with eleven women. They used to meet in the Millikin Home. There was a room there in the Millikin Home where they frequently met when Mrs. Millikin was a member.
- Q. You have enjoyed your life in Decatur, haven't you?
- A. Very much- very much. I didn't think much of it from the start, because we were married in that very very cold winter of 1917-18 and the thermometer dropped below zero when I got here every night for two weeks and I thought it was about the coldest place I had ever seen.
- Q. Decatur gave you a cold reception!
- A. They certainly did. We still hear in the weather records about that cold winter and it was everything they said.
- Q. What about Decatur today? Do you have any reaction to the life around here today?
- A. Oh, I'm afraid I don't have much to say about today. Since my vision is impaired, I don't go about much. Oh, I go out - I go to church - I go to the First Methodist Church all the time.
- Q. I believe you said you listened to the talking books program. Maybe you could explain a bit about that service?
- A. It's federally financed, I am sure, because it's available to everyone who has impaired vision and all you have to do is to get your doctor to say that that's what you need and this service is provided entirely free of charge to anybody by the taxpayers. My daughter says it's gratifying to see that the tax payer's money is going for something so worthwhile.
- Q. There are recordings of books?
- A. Oh, it's not just books. Yes, it's books and a lot of magazines. Now I take only three magazines myself because I don't like to get things stacked up to where I can't handle them. About the only magazines I've been taking are Guideposts, Reader's Digest, and Farm Journal and they've been sending U.S. News and World Report. I didn't order that.
- Q. You say you listen to these on recordings? You read them by listening to recordings?
- A. Yes, that's right.
- Q. Well, you probably are better informed than many people with perfect vision!
- A. Well, I don't know about that. It depends on what you like to read but I've certainly read some very interesting books. Right now I have one I can hardly wait to get into on the National Parks. There are two volumes on the National Parks, and I just have the first one.

Q. Is this a service through the library?

A. The Rolling Prairie Library. Now I don't know really what the connection is between the Public Library and the Rolling Prairie Library.

Q. But it is available through the Rolling Prairie Library? That is really a remarkable service to the community - to the people of the United States in general.

A. It's just invaluable.

Q. Well, Mrs. Carmichael, we really appreciate your sharing your reminiscences with us. I'm sure that the people in Decatur will like to be reminded of some of the past history that you've lived through and wish you a long and very enriching life yet to come. So we thank you very much.

A. Well, I hope I have given you what you need and something that will be worthwhile in the future.

Q. It has been very worthwhile.

A. Any time I can help, I'll be happy to.

Q. Thank you. You have been listening to the experiences of Mrs. H. F. Carmichael for the Decatur Public Library. This is Betty Turnell speaking.

