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## UA68/8/2 Sara Tyler Oral History

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Produced by Oral History Committee  
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Lowell Harrison: This is an interview with Miss Sara Tyler in Cherry Hall on April 27, 1983..

Miss Tyler, suppose we start talking a bit about your family, your general background.

Sara Tyler: Well, what do you want to know? Where my mother and father came from?

LH: Yes. And their names and your birthplace.

ST: My father's name was John Edwin Tyler, he grew up in Meade County, down on the Ohio River. I don't know a great deal about his family. I do know that when he was 17 or 18 he went to Louisville to take a course in pharmacy. He worked in Louisville for a while and he also worked in Frankfort. He didn't marry until he was 33, and he was working in Eminence, Ky. My mother, Robbie Read, was a native of Shelby County. After she married daddy in 1909 they lived in Pineville, KY. It was a while before they moved to Bowling Green, I think in 1910, and he had a drug store on the square by the Princess Theatre.

LH: Down on Main Street?

ST: Yes. And for a time he owned a Coca-Cola Bottling Company, but he couldn't afford to keep it. So, I've lived in Bowling Green all my life.

LH: What about your early schooling?

ST: Well, I went to the training school up here, which at that time was in one wing of Potter College for young ladies. Which had been taken over by Western.

LH: Wasn't that at one time called Recitation Hall?

ST: I didn't think it was called that until after it became the classroom for the college. I went to the eighth grade up here and I think we used what used to be the Chapel, and the sixth grade was in separate rooms.

LH: Was there a high school?

ST: I think it just went through the eighth. I didn't have the benefit of moving into the training school building. Mother wanted me to go to high school anyway. She didn't think I was learning anything, because at that time the student teachers had no supervisors in the room. And we sometimes took advantage of the teacher because they couldn't discipline us. Mother said if I didn't like Bowling Green High that I could come back, but I liked it and I have never regretted staying there.

LH: You graduated from Bowling Green in what year?

ST: In 1928.

LH: Did you come back upon the hill?

ST: I did come back to the hill. Our home by that time was at 1353 State Street. I had lived in four different houses and they were all on the same block. After my mother's death in 1963, I sold her house and also renovated my Aunt's house next door into two apartments. And that's where I am now. I hope I can stay there the rest of my life.

LH: Tell me a little about your days on the hill as a student?

ST: I think I was a fairly good student as far as my attendance and class work went. I managed to graduate in four years, and received the Scholarship medal, which had come to Western from Ogden College. But other than that I don't think I made any outstanding contributions.

LH: You were here for what, four years?

ST: From the fall of 1928 to May or June of 1932.

LH: Was the Depression hitting pretty hard at that time?

ST: I don't recall much about it, I'm more aware of the effect of World War II.

LH: Well, we'll come back to that.

ST: I think I'm more aware of the effect that it had on me, rather than on anyone else.

I majored in Library Science. I wanted to go the Business University, but my mother didn't want me to take the Secretarial course. So, I said I like to read, I'll be a librarian. So from the fall of '32 I came back to Western and took as an undergraduate enough to major in English and some graduate courses and started working for the degree. I had applied for a job in the library but didn't get it and that made my father very angry. He had a talk with Dr. Cherrt one day at the Post Office and I was called in for an interview the next day and also given a job.

LH: Would this have been in 1933?

ST: In 1933, I remember Dr. Cherry telling me that I must feel discriminated against. But all my life I have felt that way. Librarians were the least respected of the teachers, and the least paid too.

LH: Considerable improvement has been made.

ST: I think it has, too. I always received sufficient recognition from Mr. Garrett. I started working for 20 cents an hour; he realized this and helped to improve this.

LH: Did you ever feel any constraint in expressing your opinions or disatisfactions?

ST: I didn't with Mr. Garrett, I don't think I felt anything more than a lonely employee. I liked Mr. Garrett, and I always felt that he respected me as an individual and a librarian. Miss Helm and I always did our best to promote what was best for the library. Dr. Thompson always put Western first and foremost, and if it wasn't going to help Western he sometimes didn't want to listen. I recall one time we made a proposal, something concerning a building change, but his response not only made me "fighting mad" but it also hurt my feelings. I recall one incident where I felt that I should have spoken up but said nothing. It related to a faculty member here that was asked to leave, Mrs. Justin Lynn, who was in the English department. There was a lot of trouble over that. But I felt like a coward.

LH: For not speaking out?

ST: I know that Dr. Earl Moore, who was a faculty member, he came to her aid.

LH: I'm assuming Miss Tyler, that at that time there were no faculty senate or a group procedure that one could use.

ST: There wasn't one that I recall. Someone asked Miss Helm one day if there had ever been a library committee before and she said that she and Dr. Cherry were the committee.

LH: You mentioned Miss Helm, was she the head of the library when you joined the staff?

ST: Yes she was, of course the staff was very small.

LH: About how many people? Name them if you can.

ST: Kathryn Sullivan, Janice Pace, Mildred Parkhurst, and Agnes Hanson. When the depression was going on, Dr. Cherry asked Miss Helm to do away with some of the positions, or change them to half time, which I think she did. Most of the library facilities were available on the second floor of what is now Gordon Wilson Hall.

LH: Do you remember when that move took place?

ST: Around 1927, I think.

LH: Where was it located before it was moved to Gordon Wilson Hall?

ST: I suppose it was in the Faculty House, which used to be called the Cedar House. Prior to that it had been in one wing of Potter College.

LH: What about the Library Science department, was it also located in, let's use Gordon Wilson Hall?

ST: It was on the third floor of Gordon Wilson.

LH: How big was the department staff?



ST: Only one, Mrs. Edna Bolte, who was a very fine teacher. I had my training here and I would say that Mrs. Bolte is a very fine teacher. I fussed about her because she made you work, but now that I can look back on it I know that she was an excellent teacher.

LH: You mentioned something a while ago that I thought was interesting, I've noticed that looking over some registration figures that summer school had the enrollment of maybe a third of what you have during the year. In the 1920s the peak of the enrollment would come perhaps late in the summer or in the spring. What's your explanation for that?

ST: I'm sure that it was because when school let out that a lot of teachers would have to come back and make up work, and also work for certification.

LH: I got the impression of Dr. Cherry that he was ready to start a student about any time they showed up.

ST: That's right, he was.

LH: Did you ever take advantage of any type situation in class?

ST: No, I was never that type of student. Some of the classes I had were very tedious, though.

LH: Give me an example of what you mean.

ST: Well, I don't like to call names, but occasionally a faculty member would get up and just go on and on about something. I sometimes wanted to pull his coat tail and tell him to sit down.

LH: That's something that hasn't completely disappeared today. What did you think about Dr. Cherry himself in Chapel?

ST: Oh, I thought he was very good, his stories that you have undoubtedly heard were great.

LH: I gather that he wasn't the type that spoke from a manuscript.

ST: No, he sure wasn't.

LH: Would you say that some of his talks were inspirational?

ST: Yes, and that's what he meant them to be.

LH: Do you think he got his message across?

ST: I think he did to some of them. You must remember that not all of them were young people here in school.

LH: Do you think he could still today, give one of his speeches to today's generation?

ST: I don't know, I think if he got their attention with an introductory story he might.

LH: What about Mr. Garrett in Chapel?

ST: Well, Mr. Garrett's Chapel appearance was entirely different from Dr. Cherry's. The highlight of his Chapel was that he would read passages from books that he liked to the class. I think the students, as well as the faculty, enjoyed this.

LH: But he wasn't the inspirational type that Cherry and Thompson were.

ST: No. Dr. Cherry wanted to make a reality of what his visions were, and Dr. Thompson was the same way. Dr. Garrett came between these two, he like to do other things.

LH: Cherry, for example, would go ahead and spend money for buildings, money that he didn't have, and depend on the State to bail him out. Dr. Garrett would never have done that. Had Dr. Garrett had any contacts with Western prior to the time that he became president?

ST: I don't think so, I think it was a political appointment.

LH: Governor Chandler was State Governor then, I believe.

ST: Garrett had many fine qualities, but in his defense, I would say that he had some difficult years as president. I don't think anyone else would have done any better. His health was also a problem he faced.

LH: Was there any faculty resentment of Garrett being appointed?

ST: I'm sure there was because there were some that just didn't like him.

LH: I guess one of the main problems Dr. Garrett had to contend with was World War II.

ST: That, and the enrollment, how they were going to keep the University going. They did succeed in getting the Air Force Attachment Group here.

LH: Do you remember some of the changes they had to make in order to qualify for this group?

ST: No, I don't remember much about that. I remember for a very brief time we tried to keep the library open on Sunday afternoon, in order for the young men to come to the library. But this didn't last very long. At that time I was working down in the Periodical Room on the first floor of Gordon Wilson Hall.

LH: Did Western lose many faculty members because of the war?

ST: I really don't remember, I can't help you with that.

LH: Let me ask you about the faculty. Who were some of the ones that were more influential?

ST: Miss Francis Richards and Gabrielle Robertson. I had Dr. Stickles, who taught with a different method than I had ever been exposed to. His chapel talks, when he talked about current events, were the highlight of the class. He would just talk and talk.

LH: I bet he had trouble staying within a time limit.

ST: Yes, I suppose that he did.

LH: Are there any other faculty members that impressed you?

ST: I liked Mrs. T. C. Cherry. I thought she was an excellent teacher. I had never had a class under M. L. Billings, but as I worked in the library I got to know some of the faculty members. They would come in and use the library. That's what impressed me about him.

LH: What about the impact of graduate work? Did that call for more book ordering?

ST: It did because of the different courses that needed books.

LH: As I understand it, we had graduate work for a few years and then they discontinued it, and later it was resumed.

ST: When it resumed, it wasn't so much about the subject.

LH: I think it started with a masters in education, and then it became possible to major in other fields.

ST: In those few years, I believe everyone that got their masters were required to write a thesis.

LH: How and why did the move of the library occur to the Helm building?

ST: We had truly out-grown the building we were in.

LH: When did you begin to feel the need for more facilities?

ST: After Dr. Thompson became president, because after that the school just mushroomed. I think it was in the late 1950s. One thing he did do was ordered a reorganization of the library staff.

LH: What was done there?

ST: Miss Helm, who had only been working half-time from 1950 until she retired, got her hours fixed so that she spent two hours in the Ky. library and two hours in the college library. I was then moved to the second floor and became head librarian. We both shared an office.

LH: Was that half-time something that she wanted?

ST: She was ill around 1950, she had over extended herself. She had sort of a nervous breakdown. Louise Hutchinson, who was the cataloger, helped me keep things going straight. We both took care of the library. So, when Miss Helm came back, she came back on a half-time basis.

LH: What was your preference for a site for the new building, or had you thought that far?

ST: They built a new athletic building and I said there goes our library. They renovated the Physical Education Building and we were given the blue prints to decide what we wanted.

LH: It was certainly different not being able to start from scratch.

ST: It was hot in that building, we didn't even have fans for a long time.

LH: You moved into the Helm Building in what year?

ST: In 1965. Right before we got everything settled there were some water pipes that burst in the basement, and it ruined some of the things in the library science collection.

LH: When you moved into the building, how long did you think that it would be adequate?

ST: I don't know if we ever discussed that or not. It soon became evident that it wasn't going to go as we had hoped.

LH: What was the next step?

ST: By that time Miss Helm had retired in 1965, I had become the so-called director. The arrangement as it turned out worked pretty well.

LH: A person in the late 60's wanted to go in and greet a friend in the library, but she wasn't allowed to because she had shorts on. Could you comment on this?

ST: I think that incident occurred after we had moved into the Helm Building and we had checkers. They would check people as they went out to make sure they weren't taking books with them. Anyway, we had this elderly man working and he was strict as far as the students were concerned. He was always making comments about them wearing shorts, and I think it may have been an incident like that.

LH: I assume that this type of code went as far as the classroom too.

ST: Yes it did.



LH: What about blue jeans?

ST: I don't remember anything against jeans. We later moved into the hippy attire, but we didn't have many students in this. I have always felt that if a person was clean that he could dress the way he wanted to. We later had to tell Mr. Shields, who was the checker, that he could not comment on the dress appearance.

LH: Let me ask you about the formation of the University archives.

ST: My working with the archives took up the last three years before I retired. But I thoroughly enjoyed it.

LH: How did the archives get started?

ST: If it hadn't been for Miss Mattie McClean, who was secretary to Dr. Cherry, we may not have had the archives. We started a collection about the archives, and after I retired, Dr. Crowe, who took my place, added to it and by now it has become better known.

LH: As you gathered information about this, are there any particular gaps that you remember?

ST: I believe there were but I can't remember exactly what they were.

LH: I remember one teacher saved all of his lecture notes for this reason, but so many don't do this.

ST: I think I made an effort to talk to widows of the deceased faculty members, we did get a little material, but not in the way of lecture notes.

LH: I am now trying to contact the people who are retiring, because here they are going to be cleaning out files and this sort of thing. But I am not having much luck.

ST: Did you keep all your notes from your classes?

LH: No, some of them I discarded. How would you compare the contrast and attitude of the past presidents?

ST: This is difficult to say. Dr. Cherry and Dr. Thompson were a lot alike. I've probably said enough about Dr. Garrett.

LH: You indicated a while ago that there was some concern when Dr. Garrett became president. I also understand that some of the faculty would not have picked him as their first choice.

ST: Oh yes, this I think was true.

LH: What sort of objections were there?

ST: Well, he was ill. First he had a stroke, and then he broke his hip. He just wasn't able to do anything.

LH: What about Downing? He was president when you retired wasn't he?

ST: Yes, he was. I always found that he was a gentleman, and also a wonderful person to work with.

LH: You said earlier that you thought Thompson was brought up in an image of Cherry, do you see that carrying on into the Downing Administration?

ST: I don't think that Downing is in the style or in the mold of Cherry or Thompson. I think of him as a more kind person.

LH: Which of the three would you say was the easiest to work with?

ST: I always felt free to go to Mr. Garrett with anything. But with Dr. Thompson, he was always busy. I don't know if I ever went to Downing.

LH: Any other specific changes that you remember taking place?

ST: Some of them I would rather not remember. I just want to say that I have enjoyed the three years that I was an archivist. I've also enjoyed my retirement, I try to take at least one nice trip a year, sometimes two.

LH: Well, Miss Tyler, if there is nothing else we can close down and you can go home and start packing for Scotland.

ST: I have enjoyed this interview very much, I think more than I did the last time. Maybe this one won't get erased.

END OF THE INTERVIEW