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Interview with
SARAH JANICE KEE
February 29, 1992

Place of Interview: Fort Worth, Texas

Interviewer: Richard Dickey

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(Signature)

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Oral History Collection

Sarah Janice Kee

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Mr. Dickey: This is Richard Dickey, and today is February 29, 1992. I'm interviewing Sarah Janice Kee of 1600 Texas Street in Fort Worth, Texas, and we'll be talking about her experiences in the library program at Texas Woman's University and her subsequent career in library administration.

To begin, I would like to have some biographical information. First, your full name, and your birth date and your birth place?

Ms. Kee: I am Sarah Janice Kee, and I was born on February 23, 1908, in Young County. Whether it was Spring Creek or Camp Creek, I'm not sure. Neither place is on the map, so on my birth certificate it says Young County. My parents were young, and we lived on a farm. My father was trying to learn how to farm. I left Young County when I was four years old. One of the vivid and exciting memories of my childhood was fording the Brazos River, moving

from Young County to Comanche County--De Leon, Texas--
where I grew up and finished high school.

Dickey: What were your parents names?

Kee: Richard A. and Mary Dow Kee. My mother was a music teacher, and my father was a farmer. My mother was a graduate of Baylor University in the Class of 1900. My father was a graduate of a school of business in Fort Worth, and because his father was accidentally killed in 1910, his brothers and sisters thought he was the one to take over the farm place in De Leon. He was not really a very good farmer. Probably this was a big mistake, but, nonetheless, we lived on a farm. We were poor, but we were not poor, if you know what I mean. My mother, being an educated person, and my father, also being interested in our having the best of everything that was possible for us to have, made life easy for us in many ways and hard for us in many ways because of the time in which we lived when I was a child. I lived in De Leon until 1935. I graduated from high school there in 1924, and I taught school in the elementary school of De Leon, leaving there in 1935.

Dickey: How did you like teaching school?

Kee: I loved teaching school. I loved the children, and I liked everything about teaching school. You might be interested in knowing how I got interested in library

science.

Dickey: Sure.

Kee: It was in the school room. I taught school from 1929 until 19...well, anyway, I began teaching school in 1929. Our school had no library, but, as you know, in Texas there are free textbooks, and there was a textbook room in the building. I remember asking my principal if I could have a bookshelf built in the back of my school room so that I could bring some of the readers--I was teaching fourth grade--into the building, and we could use them like library books. We had, in effect, a very primitive library setup--nothing but discarded or not-in-use textbooks. But, I got interested in library science. Of course, we had books in my home--my mother saw to that--and I was a reader. I liked reading. But, we had no library in our town.

Dickey: What kind of books did you have at your home that you could read?

Kee: We had Pollyanna and the Horatio Alger books. My mother had those, and we had nice books. Of course, later we had some of the well-known classics like Dickens and things of that sort.

We did lots of reading, and, of course, because my mother was a music teacher, we played a lot of music in our home. We were taught to play. I was taught to play the piano; I was taught to play the violin. My

brother was a cellist. We had lots of music. I guess we had more music than we had reading, actually, because books were so expensive. We had no library, so the books we had were books that we bought.

Dickey: Did your mother teach at school, or did she teach at home?

Kee: No, she taught music lessons in the home.

Dickey: In the home. What was your brother's name?

Kee: My older brother's name was Rex. My mother was determined to make musicians out of all of us, and not any of us really met her expectations. We might have, had she lived longer, but she died when we were all young.

Dickey: That was your older brother. You had a younger brother, too?

Kee: I had three younger brothers and a younger sister.

Dickey: Oh, goodness!

Kee: In 1923 my mother died. I was a senior in high school, and there were four children younger than I. My father thought that it was impossible for me to go away to college, although on my mother's death bed she had said she wanted me to go to college. I was not able to go to college for three years because my youngest brother was only two years old when Mama died. I had to stay until he was able to go to school. My education is very unlike, I think, that of most people. In the two-

and-a-half years that I was unable to go to school, I took correspondence courses from John Tarleton Junior College, which is now Tarleton State University. John Tarleton Junior College was only thirty-five miles from where we lived, and I was able to go over there occasionally and meet with professors. I completed a number of correspondence courses before I ever went to college. You probably can't believe this.

Dickey: What's that?

Kee: You may want to just strike this out of the record, but it's such an unbelievable story. I wanted to go to college so badly. After two-and-a-half years, having completed several correspondence courses, I borrowed \$150 from my grandmother and went a semester to John Tarleton Junior College. The reason I did that was because in those days there were little one-room schools around, and one could get a certificate, a low-grade certificate, to teach school if you had one year in college. So, with these extra credits that I took, when I finally got over to the Stephenville campus, I had a year in college, and I was promised a teaching job in our farm neighborhood.

But, while I was studying they consolidated that school, and I didn't get it. So, I had to go to my first school in Jones County, Texas, near Anson, and I taught the first, second, and third grades. After that

I would teach school a year and save my money and go to the summer schools. However, I did go one full year to John Tarleton in 1928 and 1929. I have a diploma from that school which I believe is dated 1929.

When I had two years in college, my father had some friends on the school board in De Leon, and they thought that, because my mother was such a great music teacher, surely, I could be the same. They had an opening in the school for public school music, and they asked my father to have me apply for it. I resisted, knowing full well that I was not qualified to teach public school music, but to please my father, I did talk to the superintendent. What really happened was that the school board, without his recommendations, employed me to teach public school music.

I had in mind, of course, to work off the credits to get a degree from college, but the course changed at this point, and I went to North Texas State Teachers College in Denton. I was there all summer, taking public school music and public school art courses because that's what I was going to teach in the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades. That was one of the hottest summers I can ever remember. It was absolutely dreadful. In fact, all of the summer schools that I had in Denton were like that.

Dickey: So, were you teaching during the year, then, and just

going to school during the summers?

Kee: I taught two years in De Leon in Jones County, and every summer I went to summer school. Those summers were 1930, 1933, 1934, 1935, 1936, 1938, 1939, and 1940--eight summers. I went again in 1950 when I was working toward a MLS.

Now, how did I get out of teaching and into libraries? I was teaching in De Leon because I was holding our family together. My younger brothers and sister were going to school, and I was keeping the house and helping the family. It was, of course, hard times--the Depression years. I was teaching school for about \$75 a month, and sometimes I would even get script, just paper. My grandmother would take this paper and hold it. They would finally pay it, so she would advance some money so we could live.

Now, I want to tell you another unbelievable story about how I managed to get through college. You will notice on my record that I have a bachelor's degree from Texas Wesleyan College in Fort Worth in 1935. My father's cousin was named Agnes Hughes, and she was a solicitor. I think that's the proper title for a person who visits schools to encourage students to go to Texas Wesleyan. She came to our town, to our high school, and then came out to have dinner with us. This was my father's cousin. I was telling her what a hard

time I had trying to go to school with such little money. It developed that Texas Wesleyan College owed her money, and her father owed my grandmother money, and if I gave my script to my grandmother, this could be paid, and that could be paid, and I could go to school for nothing. So, I went to Texas Wesleyan College three summers, and it just happened that at the end of the summer of 1935 I had enough credits to get a BS degree, and they granted it.

But, while I was there, my older brother, who was an oilfield worker in the East Texas oilfields, came home, and told me about the salaries that were being paid in East Texas. They were paying about \$1,500 a year to teach school in the oilfield schools. He said, "You have, I think, contributed long enough to this family, and the children are all grown up now. Why don't you come down and apply for one of these schools? It pays more." So, I went home with him and applied for a job, and they said, "We want a music teacher." Well, I could play piano and lead singing and direct choruses and so on, and they wanted a half-time music teacher and a half-time librarian. That was in 1935. I may not have these dates quite right--I'm not sure--but this was in 1935 because that was the last year that I went to Texas Wesleyan College. Let's see [referring to personal records]. John Tarleton, 1929.

It was in 1930 that I was at North Texas State Teachers College. No, no, no! Wait a minute! I went to Texas Wesleyan College three summers. Two-and-a-half summers, actually, because in the last half of that time when I was at Texas Wesleyan, the dean of that school--Law Sone was his name; he died recently--said that I needed some library science to take that half-time library science job in the oilfield. He said, "You need to go to Denton to get this. That's the only place for you to go." That's how I went to Texas State College for Women for the last half of that summer to pick up a little bit of classification and cataloging and reference and bibliography.

Dickey: That was the only library school program in Texas at that time.

Kee: Yes, I went in 1935, as it was recommended to me. In 1935 is when I got that degree from Texas Wesleyan. It's when I got that change of jobs to go from De Leon to the East Texas oil fields. At the middle of the summer, I got the oilfield school job. They wanted a librarian, and I went over to Denton and got the library science, six hours, and then went back at the the end of that summer and got my degree from Texas Wesleyan.

Dickey: How did you go to Texas Wesleyan even though you were at North Texas?

Kee: No, I was at North Texas in 1930. I was at Texas Wesleyan three summers. I think it was called Texas Woman's College in those days. In 1933, 1934, and half of 1935--it was two-and-a-half summers. I was at Texas Woman's College, which is really Texas Wesleyan University nowadays. I have a record of my courses I had. I had some very good courses there in literature and a wonderful, wonderful English literature teacher. We had Milton, Victorian literature, and so on. I was there two-and-a-half summers. In the last half of 1935 I was in Texas State College for Women for the first time. Then, I went full summers--twelve weeks--in 1936, 1938, 1939, and six weeks in 1940.

Dickey: Okay.

Kee: Where are we on the outline?

Dickey: We're doing pretty well.

Kee: It says, "Visit to the first library, school libraries." There were no school libraries. There simply were no school libraries in my day. It's dreadful to think about how little--in the 1920s. I went to high school in the 1920s. I graduated from high school in 1924. We had no library. We may have had an encyclopedia and a few little things somewhere at the end of the study hall. We had study halls--pitiful, terrible.

I told you stories of how I managed to choose my

colleges. If I could have chosen the college to go to, I would have gone to Baylor University, which was where my mother had graduated in the Class of 1900. But, we could not afford the tuition, so I chose colleges purely on the basis of what I could afford. John Tarleton Junior College was thirty-five miles away, so I could go home on weekends and see about the kids and the house and so on. Then, I went to Texas Wesleyan College, as I explained to you, because I couldn't go on some kind of incredible arrangements about my grandmother's...

Dickey: Finances.

Kee: ...finances. Not that I regret so much having gone to Texas Wesleyan. I had some very excellent teachers at Texas Wesleyan in those days. But, there were hardly any options available to me. I just had to do what I had to do to get to school, and I would try to save enough money from my teaching to pay for my summer schools.

Dickey: Okay.

Kee: Well, that covers page one of your outline. Now the college...I just want to look at the outline.

Dickey: That fine. Which college would you like to describe?

Kee: Well, let's talk about the Library School in Denton.

Dickey: Okay. That sounds good.

Kee: [Refers to outline] "The philosophy of the school."

Now, you must remember I was there in 1935, 1936--half the summer in 1935, all summer in 1936--and then I skipped 1937, and I was back in 1938 and 1939. The head of the school was Miss Buffum. I don't know her years of service at Texas State College for Women.

Dickey: I think I have them written down.

Kee: But, I think she was there in the C.I.A. [College of Industrial Arts] days.

Dickey: Yes, 1928 to 1946. That's what I have for Miss Buffum.

Kee: She was head of the school all the time that I went. Miss Buffum was a very stern disciplinarian-type and a perfectionist. I think she typed the catalog--I don't know--which I barely passed. I'm not a perfectionist. I hated a typewriter. I was annoyed if I got marked down because I had two spaces instead of three spaces on the catalog cards that I typed. I didn't do well in cataloging. It was not for me. In fact, I don't know that I did very well at all in any of these courses. I was not greatly inspired. I certainly was not inspired in those years that I went to Texas State College for Women. I certainly, in those years, did not have what I finally developed as a philosophy of library service. I did not get it in that school. What I got in that school was: "You must keep your books; you must have them properly cataloged. You must have a perfect card catalog which you typed yourself." Maybe you would

order from the H.W. Wilson Company, but you would have that catalog. "You must keep your books. You must mark them carefully, and you must keep them properly on the shelf." It was kind of a philosophy of preservation, not service.

Dickey: Okay. Interesting.

Kee: I'm not saying it was wrong. I'm not sure that it was different in any library school. I was convinced at the time, because it was an accredited library school, that it was one of the best library schools in the country. This is what library school was in those days. It was a strict discipline of selecting and maintaining...and maintaining books more than...if you lost a book it was just a sin and a shame.

In those days we didn't talk about censorship. We didn't talk about services for audio-visual materials. We didn't even think about them. Paperbacks? Gracious, no! We had none of those. We had nothing like pictures or any kinds of services. That was a book-oriented era. Now, I did have a good course in adolescent literature. That was taught by Lucille Wilson.

Dickey: What was she like?

Kee: She was married to a professor and had a child, and she really made us aware of how important it was to introduce books to children. She was excellent on this

subject, and she knew books. She was a very good teacher.

I had Mary Taylor. Mary Taylor was a very fine woman, and I'm sure fully qualified. She had a strange voice and delivery, and it was just miserable to go to her classes.

Dickey: Really?

Kee: But, she was a nice person. When I went back in 1950-- I went back there in 1950 to write a master's thesis, which I had not done--she was still there. I know she was still there when I went, I think, in 1950.

Dickey: Through 1951.

Kee: All right. She was there when I wrote my master's paper. She was very nice about that because what happened is, I had all my hours in library science, but I had never been granted a master's degree in library science, and this was a fifth-year program. But, I had not written a paper, and I lacked six hours of language, I think it was. So, in 1950, I was changing positions, and I took off this summer and went back to Denton and did those two things, and I wrote my paper. I wrote a master's paper on a film circuit that I had planned and directed in Missouri.

Dickey: Oh, yes?

Kee: It was a brand-new idea, and it was sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation. So, that's what my thesis is

about. Are you going to ask me anything else about philosophy?

Dickey: You're going fine. Were there any other instructors in particular that you can remember?

Kee: As a matter of fact, these are the only three that I can remember. But, now this was in 1935 to 1938.

Dickey: I know it's been a little while (chuckle).

Kee: These are the only three I can remember.

Dickey: Each one had their own philosophy, I'm sure.

Kee: I made some very good friends in these summer schools. I never had enjoyed the luxury of college life in the long terms--you know, old college friends and everything. My friends were the summer school friends.

Dickey: Okay.

Kee: [Refers to outline] "Rules and regulations." They finally let us go without stockings. It was so hot, and we would be sitting there with no air conditioning in this building. We were sitting there at those typewriters and just burning up alive. I remember when they finally decided we could go without stockings.

Dickey: You remember that one well (chuckle). That was an important one.

Kee: I guess so. We were very crowded, and it was very hot.

Dickey: Where did you stay on campus?

Kee: I had a room in a home on Bell Avenue or something. I don't remember. Two summers, I think, I was in the

dormitory. I think the dormitories are being torn down now, that I was in.

Dickey: Were you specializing, then, I guess, with those courses, or were you just taking all the basics?

Kee: Yes, I was just taking the basics. No specialization. In fact, I was preparing for school libraries, and I think--in speaking of the philosophy of Texas Woman's-- it was strictly a preparation for school librarians.

Dickey: For school librarians.

Kee: I don't know that this is true, but I would bet that 95 percent of the students were doing what I was doing, qualifying for school library jobs.

Dickey: Yes, I think you're right.

Kee: I understand it even got more specialized in school library courses after Miss Buffum left. At least that's the rumor I got.

Now, I left Texas in the war years because I was an Army librarian. I was in the Army in World War II, and I left Texas. My career was really out of Texas--twenty-five years. Maybe I have a chance to show this [refers to papers]. I'm looking at this piece on the Library Science Department. Is there anything else that you wanted to ask about these?

Dickey: Anything about the Demonstration School that you can tell me? It's a little vague to me--how it worked, who taught it, who worked with it.

Kee: I can't help you on that. I really have no recollection.

Dickey: Really?

Kee: I have no recollection of the Demonstration School.

Dickey: Okay. That's all right.

Kee: Maybe there was one.

Dickey: I'm thinking there was, but I'm not sure when it started. It's hard to say.

Kee: I don't know.

Dickey: Okay. Then, you did graduate in 1940?

Kee: Well, no, it was 1951. As I said...

Dickey: You did get your degree...

Kee: I got my master's degree in 1951. Back in 1950 I took those courses, and I wrote that paper, and in 1951 they sent me a diploma. I had a lot of library experience without that diploma.

Dickey: But, you didn't have a bachelor's degree in library science?

Kee: No, I had a bachelor's degree in English in 1935.

Dickey: Okay.

Kee: I had all these hours in library science. I had everything except six hours of language and the master's paper. That's what I went back in 1950 to do. I took French. I was never any good in languages, so I didn't like to study languages. My career really, my success, if I had any--and I know I have--has been in

administration, and in management. In fact, if people asked me from what I retired, I say I retired from library administration. I don't say I retired as a librarian. I was never a great book person. I didn't like language. I didn't like the "busyness" of library work. I liked organizing and making things work and working with people, and that's where my success was.

Dickey: Okay, we'll try to follow your career now since we've got you out of school. Before you got your master's, you were still teaching.

Kee: Well, I told you that I went down to the East Texas oilfields. I have another resume somewhere that has it all on here. Here it is [refers to papers]. How does that start off?

Dickey: Sabine High School.

Kee: That's the East Texas oilfield school, where they wanted a half-time music teacher and a half-time librarian. I went down there with six hours of library science. Then, I went back there, and I was there how many years? Five? Four? Three? From 1935 to 1940 in Sabine. Sabine was in Gladewater, Texas, and I was a teacher-librarian. I was there from 1935 to 1940. Then I went to Beaumont at South Park High School as a librarian, and I was there one year.

Now I'll tell you about that. I was in Sabine. The Sabine building burned, and all the mistakes I made

with six hours of library science burned up (chuckle). They had lots of money at those schools, and then I started over, and I stayed there until 1940. In 1940, I applied for a position at South Park High School in Beaumont. Now that's the big school in the Spindletop Oilfield. They were paying more money, and they wanted a full-time librarian. You see, by 1940, I had all of my hours. I didn't have the master's, but I had finished all of the courses except the language and the research paper. So, I applied there, and the principal said he wanted a full-time librarian. The Southern Association--the accrediting agency--had told him they need a full-time librarian. They needed to have some improvement in the library. The woman that had been there was a teacher--unsuccessful teacher--who had been shoved into the library, which was a common practice in those days. The library needed a lot of uplifting, he said. It was a full-time job and a better salary, so I was employed.

At the end of that year the principal called in the faculty and teachers, all the teachers, and asked them to make a requisition of things they needed for the next year. I went up to him. I remember this story. It is a traumatic story. You won't believe it. We went to the principal, and I said, "Do you want me to say what I think you might provide next year, or

what we really should have? "Yes, what we really should have, Miss Kee," he said.

I had the cooperation of the head of the English Department. There were a number of English teachers in that school because it was a big school. We had a very fine mechanical shop. We called it a shop. But, anyway, this man was good in mechanical drawing and so on, and I got him and I got the head of the English Department. I got the English teachers all together, and I said, "Now is our chance to really say what we need." We had a little library room. It wasn't any larger than this apartment. Books were stacked up on top the shelves. There was no workroom; it was just one room. Then, adjoining was a huge study hall that would seat hundreds of students. So, we planned to make that study hall the library, and we developed conference rooms and a workroom and so on out of what we had. We drew it all up to scale and submitted it.

I had a new car that year, and that summer a cousin of mine and a friend went with me, and we made a long trip out to California, up and down the West Coast. We were living it up. When I got back to Beaumont...oh, when I went to Beaumont, they matched my Sabine salary. They had a salary schedule, and their beginning salary was less than what I was making. So, they matched my Sabine salary, for which I was

grateful, of course.

So, when I went back, then, at the end of the summer, from the vacation, I was broke. We got a check right away, and I remember just being real pleased to get it. I went in and went on about my business. Well, of course, I didn't say or hear anything about our requisition. So, when I had been working in the library about a week in the second year, the principal came in one day and said, "The superintendent wants to see you." We never saw the superintendent for anything--never. "What does he want?" I said, "What's happened?" He said, "You'll just have to see."

So, I went to see him in his office, and he was an older man. At that time, I think he was about a year from his retirement. He got up out of his chair, and he said to me, "Did you notice that you didn't get a raise?" I said, "No. As a matter of fact, I didn't." He said, "Well, there is a reason for that." I won't go into all of it because (chuckle) transcription would be a problem. But, anyway, he accused me of insubordination because of that plan that I gave. Who did I think I was, that I could tell them how to run the school!

He just laid me out, and I got up out of my chair, and I said, "Mr. Bingham, you may have my resignation as of the end of this month." I had no job, I didn't

know where I was going, but I was determined I would not work for that man. I left Beaumont, and I got a job in the Jefferson County Library, and that switched me into public libraries.

But, there's a footnote to that. When I was at the headquarters of the American Library Association, I was executive secretary of the Public Libraries Division. I was invited to the Texas Library Association, which met in Houston, and I took off a few days and drove from Chicago to Houston. I had a brother in Houston at the time, so I was taking off a few days. I went through Beaumont. I had kept in touch with some of the teachers there, and they invited me to go by there. Particularly, the nutritionist at the cafeteria was a good friend of mine, and she said, "I want us to go to the cafeteria for lunch today," and I said, "Okay." I was thinking to myself, "I can think of a lot of places I'd rather go than to that school cafeteria." Well, the reason she wanted me to go is because she wanted to show me that the study hall had been made into a library. It took them from the time I left until...it took them about five years or so to do it. But, that's how I got out of school libraries.

I had lots of trouble in school libraries. I was well-trained by Texas State College for Women in book selection and in building school libraries on a

balanced kind of list and so forth. I would get in my school, and the superintendent would get chummy with the book salesmen and buy books and all kinds of things that annoyed me very much. I could not be the professional as I thought I should be or was supposed to be. School libraries bothered me very much, and that, at the end, was just all I could take.

Dickey: (Chuckle) The last straw.

Kee: That was it. That's when I went into county libraries, and while I was at Jefferson County Library, the war came. I went into the Army Library Service and was stationed at Independence Army Airfield in Kansas, and then I went back down to Randolph Field because I was promoted from post librarian to command librarian.

When the war was over, I went into state library work at the Missouri State Library. I was a field librarian, field consultant, and I was working on developing county libraries. I was in Missouri when the major county libraries in Missouri like Saint Louis County and Jackson County, where Kansas City is--all of the large county libraries--were developed. This occurred in the years that I worked as a field worker.

The state librarian was fired, and I was elected acting state librarian, and I served there for one year. Again, I had a bad career experience. When Katherine Meyer, the state librarian, was fired for

overspending her budget and not reporting it, I was one of four field librarians--extension librarians, I guess, is what they were called in those days--and she recommended that I be appointed to carry on, which I did. But, they said to me, "Until we can find a man, will you hang on?" Well, I was very happy in Missouri. I was doing what I could do best. I was working out in communities with county boards and public libraries and committees to develop tax campaigns and developing libraries. I was doing it, and I was doing it well. I liked it. Things were happening in Missouri in those years, and I didn't want to leave right at that minute. So, I hung on, and I cleaned up the budget mess and stayed there a year. When they got the man, I left.

When I left there I went to the Wisconsin Free Library Commission.

Dickey: Did you work with the ALA first?

Kee: There is one little thing that's left out of this list. From Missouri, I went to Wisconsin as a teacher. I taught public librarians who were on-the-job, like, public librarians who were not qualified, you know. They were nice women who had been elected to run the library. This was a very elementary course that had been developed by the Library Commission to offer to these people, to acquaint them with their jobs. Also,

it was a course for staff members who were not professionally trained. I taught in three cities.

From there I went to Chicago, to the American Library Association. I was there from 1952 to 1956. When the head position of the State Library Commission opened up in Wisconsin, I went back there, and I was there nine years. So, I had two state library experiences--from Missouri and Wisconsin.

Then, after nine years in Wisconsin, I was approaching retirement, and I was thinking, "Am I going to live here the rest of my life?" I had an opportunity to come back toward Texas through Emporia, and I taught in that graduate library school a couple of years. Then, I spent my last ten years at the U. S. Office of Education--the Regional Office in Dallas--working with five states. I retired at age sixty-nine.

Dickey: That's quite a career there.

Kee: I had a wonderful career, and I was kicked upstairs by that superintendent. I just really was. I didn't miss any work at all. I went straight to the County Library. They were looking for somebody, and I took the job. This was during the war years. I operated the book mobile and drove it myself. You know, the men were all gone. I was there for a while. I talked a moment ago about administration, responsibility, and satisfaction, I guess. Now, professional associations,

oh, I'll tell you! I got a list here. This was prepared sometime or another [reading]: "In the course of my work since 1946, I have been a participant, discussant, panel member, speaker, or consultant in the following state, regional and national conferences."

Dickey: Wow! You've got a long list.

Kee: They are listed by year [reading]: "I participated in all the annual conferences and mid-winter meetings of the American Library Association since 1948." Special National Advisory Committees, I've been on a bunch of those--all this stuff. This list goes on and on.

Dickey: You're extremely accurate.

Kee: It was a very, very, very fine career that I had. I often think to myself, "How did this happen to me? The country girl working her way through school, just digging it out little by little." I don't know how it happened.

Dickey: It was very fulfilling.

Kee: But, I think that somebody who knew me real well and watched me in all these years would say that it was my ability to work with people. On my eighty-third birthday, I went back to Wisconsin and had visit with some of the people I worked with. When I was the state librarian in Wisconsin, that was the height in my career. I was visiting with some of these people. We're all retired now. We're all old. One of the men,

who is a retired professor from the University of Wisconsin, was on the State Library Board for many years while I was there, and he said something to the effect that he had never known anybody who could get all the ducks in a row. We had difficult times in Wisconsin. We had difficulties with the legislature in getting appropriations. I followed a man who had been fired, and there were problems in the association, and there was need for a change in the law, and there were just a lot of difficult problems to face. My leadership was recognized as being one that could bring people together and get things worked out, and I think that's the kind of contribution that I made to library service. It is not scholarly. I'm not a scholarly person. I've always recognized that. That's not to say that I'm an absolute ignoramus (laughter). But, I think, my gift was really working with people and organizing things.

Dickey: Do you think that went back all the way to when you were taking care of your brothers and sisters?

Kee: Well, it went further back than that. When my mother died, her mother came. My grandmother came to live with us for a year. There were these four little children, and I, a sixteen-year-old, was running the household. We had a big, two-story house. My grandmother was an organizer. She organized all these

kids: "This is your job." "This is your job." "This is your job." "This is your job." And, it started then. In fact, I have one brother and one sister left, and they were little, tiny kids in those days, but they often talk about Grandma Daniel and how she operated. They say, "You're just like her."

Dickey: It worked out well for you (chuckle). I have a question. You were saying it was quite a transition--probably a good one--in going from a high school environment to the county environment. How about going from a public library experience to the Army environment?

Kee: The Army Library was a public library.

Dickey: Was it really?

Kee: That's what it was. It was a public library with an Army clientele. I mean, we had men in the Army in those post libraries. We had men who cared less about books on up to PhDs. We had all kinds of people. We had all kinds of people to serve. So, the post library is really a public library. If it happened to be a post where they had families somewhere around, well, we even had children come there. But not much during the war. It was just generally these soldiers.

I'll give you a little experience out of the war years--a little story out of the war experience. I was sent to Neosho, Missouri, for orientation. I think it

was for one week. This was just to acquaint me with paperwork and all that kind of business. Then, I was assigned to Independence Army Airfield. This was a brand-new airfield. It was just being built. One barracks, which was a hundred feet long by twenty feet, was to be the library. I got there, and they said, "This barracks is going to be the library." Nothing in it! It was up to me to decide how to set it up, what kind of furniture and fixings we should have, emphasizing that this was not to be a permanent thing, but to be attractive. It was to be attractive and so forth. Then, there were all these Victory Books. This is probably before your days. You probably don't remember this at all. But they had a Victory Book campaign--give books to the soldiers, you know. All these new posts had boxes and boxes of Victory Books, and they had those stacked around. They said, "Here are the books." The commanding officer of the post said, "Do you think you could have this library open by May 30 or at least sometime in May?" I said, "Well, I'd have to have an awful lot of help." "We'll get the help." So, I got all of the lame and the dumb and the soldiers who couldn't march or for some reason couldn't perform. They were sent then to me as my help. I had a Special Service officer to help. So, I said to my Special Service officer, "I need to have tables in a

long row. I've got to have somebody who can type." So, he managed to get a good typist for me, and we lined up these tables, and I took 3 x 5 cards, and I wrote on the 3 x 5: "If you sit in this chair, this is what you do." I was down here classifying books (chuckle), running them down this table, and at the end came out a little catalog card. It was really, I think, not called a catalog, an inventory card or something. That was required. It was a brief record of that book we had. So, that's the way we set up the library and opened it on May 30. You know, there would be a different soldier at this chair now and then. It wouldn't be the same soldier every day.

Dickey: Just following the instructions (chuckle).

Kee: We might have one who couldn't march or drill or whatever they did. He would be put in this chair: "When the book gets in front of you, that is what you do."

Dickey: (Chuckle) You had to pull on your organizational skills again.

Kee: So many times in my career I've been thrown into those positions of having to organize it and make it work.

Dickey: It sounds like you did well, though, each time, I'm sure.

Kee: Yes.

Dickey: Each one was a challenge (chuckle).

Kee: This is one thing that I could do.

Dickey: That's great.

Kee: Now, there's one thing, maybe, that I have not emphasized enough, and that is based on my experience. But, it could be based on anybody's experience, really. Library school is just the beginning of all of the things that you're going to run into in the library field. Now, some of you fellows who choose to do reference work and don't have to cope with all the problems that librarians confront these days may not appreciate this as much; but if you're going to be in any kind of administration, even if you're going to be people who select books...now we have a little library down here, you know, a little volunteer library, and every once in a while some woman will come to me and say, "I don't think this book ought to be in the library." If you are working with people in any way...do you have any problems with reference? I don't guess you would with reference. You're seeking out facts.

Dickey: We have angry patrons if we don't have what they want right then. That's about it.

Kee: But, it is so important to know that you have to keep studying, keep learning, and keep up. When I was working in state libraries, both in Missouri and in Wisconsin, it was not only keeping up with was going on

in my own shop, but it was keeping up with all the shops in the country--you know, what are the trends, what's new, what's going on, what do we need to do to meet today's needs and soon. So, it's a constant learning. It's got to be constant learning. That's the reason I have this interest in this scholarship.

Dickey: Could you explain this scholarship--how it began?

Kee: I don't think it has very much money in it because I don't know that it's been promoted. But, the way it was set up, it was a scholarship for continuing education for graduates of Texas Woman's University. For example, you could apply for that scholarship if you wanted to go to...I just got the Texas Library Association Conference thing the other day, and there are all kinds of workshops for \$150, \$160, whatever. I noticed that registration fees that used to be \$30 and \$40 and something like that are now over \$100. You could apply as a graduate of Texas Woman's University. You could apply for one of these scholarships to pay your fee to attend a continuing education program.

Dickey: That's great.

Kee: I was thinking mostly of the Texas Woman's University girls that go out to these public libraries in "Podunk" and all these places, you know. They want to go to the conference, and they are not going to get their expenses paid by these little ol' town library boards.

They look at this conference, and they say, "Well, maybe I can afford the hotel bill for three nights. But, here is this workshop I would like to go to. It costs \$100 or something." She could apply for one of these continuing education grants.

Dickey: That's just wonderful.

Kee: I don't know whether they're promoting it or not.

Dickey: I see it all the time in the newsletters.

Kee: I've noticed two people had gotten grants.

Dickey: We haven't had a lot of people apply. We've got to keep working and promoting it more.

Kee: I don't know if anybody is giving to it or not. I have given to it two or three times. A lot of times I get...you know, many of my friends are all dying. You see, we are at that age. And, I get these notices, you know: "The memorial is to your favorite charity." And, I have given several of those to that scholarship. I just got a notice a few days ago about Frank Schick's death. Frank Schick was one of my colleagues in the government days. He was with the Office of Education. Last year I had five of those, so I gave \$500 to the scholarship in memory of these people. You know, when they say "your favorite charity," that's my favorite charity.

Dickey: I think that's wonderful. You are helping others to get that extra education. Let's see. Do you have any

last minute comments you would like to make?

Kee: Well, you looked at your outline.

Dickey: You've done well with my general outline. We know why you chose the library school you went to, because at the time it was the only one offering a degree.

Kee: Here is the list of awards that I have in my log. In 1971 the American Library Association met in Dallas. Where were you then?

Dickey: In 1971, I was graduating from high school (chuckle).

Kee: The ALA met in Dallas, and I was working in Dallas at that time. I was in Dallas from 1967 to 1977, and I was living with my cousin, Roger Mae Smith, who has a master's degree from Texas Woman's University. She went to that school in summers only, and she went in the years of...who headed the school before Brooke Sheldon? I can't think of her name.

Dickey: Genevieve Dixon?

Kee: Genevieve Dixon. She went to the summer schools in the Genevieve Dixon era. The Genevieve Dixon era was a bad slump at Texas Woman's University, and Roger Mae was never very proud of her degree from there. She already had a master's degree from North Texas in English and had done a lot of work on her doctorate, but she decided she couldn't finish it. Her mother was an invalid, and she decided just to quit. I said, "Why don't you go to summer school and get a master's

degree? I think you would be a wonderful librarian." So, she began going to summer schools over there, but it wasn't very satisfactory to her. But, anyway, Roger Mae did finish over there, and she was a librarian at El Centro College when I was with the Regional Office. We shared an apartment.

Well, on this particular evening before the conference, Roger Mae said, "Do you have a ticket to the Texas Woman's University reception?" I said, "Well, I don't think I'm going to be able to drive over there because I've got a lot to do and so forth, and they're going to have it in Denton." She said, "Well, I think we ought to go." I said, "Oh, I don't know about that." She said, "Yes, I think we ought to go." I thought to myself, "This is a new deal from Roger Mae because she was not an enthusiastic graduate from Texas Woman's." But, anyway, she was pushing me to go, so we drove. I drove over there. I got off late, and we drove like drunkards, and we had a hard time finding a parking place. We came in late, and there was a big dinner, and everybody at the head table had an orchid and everything. They gave me this Distinguished Service Alumni Award.

Dickey: And, you had no idea that you were going to get that?

Kee: They enlarged the Library Science Department at Texas Woman's University from the way it was when I went to

school. It was in the basement of the little old college library, and then they built on something, built on an extension to that, for the Science Library Department. When they did that, I think I was in Chicago at that time at the headquarters. They invited me to come to a symposium and speak about...I don't remember what the title of the speech was. But, anyway, it had to do with Texas Woman's University and public libraries. I was invited to present the viewpoint of a public librarian. So, I had a little paper that I gave at that.

By the way, there's one more thing I will tell you. I had a complete file on the Library Services and Construction Act papers. This was passed to provide federal aid for public libraries. From the very beginning, I worked with that. I worked to get that through Congress, and I had worked with it all of these years; and I had a very excellent file of materials from the LSCA, Library Services and Construction Act. Some studies were done of how the regulations had changed and all of that stuff that went with it. I gave that to Brooke Sheldon. I said to her, "I have loads of memorabilia from my career that nobody in my family cares about." You know, they don't care for anything like that. She said, "We would like to have it! We would like to have it!" So, all that stuff was

given to Texas Woman's University, except I still have major papers, some major things, that I'm going to give to them. Now, I have a very nice letter from the librarian at Texas Woman's University, thanking me for this material. It's something about women. I still have more stuff for them, and I don't know who is in charge now, and I'm kind of getting further and further separated from it.

Dickey: Oh, well, I can help you with that.

Kee: So, if they're still really interested in this stuff, they can have it. I've got my whole Army career with all of the promotions and the commendations and stuff. I got all that stuff. It's in there in that closet in a box. I have given them a whole lot of stuff. For example, I have copies of speeches and studies that I participated in, advisory boards, and all this stuff. That's all at TWU.

Dickey: I'm sure they put that in the Woman's Collection, the Special Collection. They have a lot of people's papers up there.

Kee: Well, I have really more valuable papers that haven't been given to them. When I went to Emporia State College, they offered me...well, actually, I had been a state librarian for nine years. Things were going real well. I always believed in kind of, you know, moving on while things were doing well. My roommate came home

one day. She was at the University of Wisconsin. She was at the Library School up there. She said, "We got a request today from Emporia. They want somebody to teach public library administration. Do you know anybody to recommend?" We were at the lunch table or supper table. I said, "Yes, me." She said, "You're kidding!" I said to her, "I've been telling you that it's about time for me to check out and let somebody else take over." We had just changed the law, and things were pretty well jelling and everything. So, she said, "Okay."

So, I applied and I got the job. Well, one of the reasons is that Bob Lee, who was the dean, was brought out there at the time. He was new, and he was trying to get a faculty that had some reputation. The school had lost its accreditation, and we had to get the accreditation back. That was when all of this stuff was developed--you know, the kinds of things that faculty members had done. That's why I have a lot of this stuff.

Dickey: Were you able to get back to reaccredited then?

Kee: Yes, we did.

Dickey: Good.

Kee: We sure did. We had people come out and observe our teaching. I enjoyed that teaching for two years, but I never intended for that to be permanent. I was on my

way back to Texas for retirement. While I was there the U.S. Office of Education decided to establish these regional offices, and they were going to put a library services program officer in each region. Ray Frey was in the U.S.O.E. I went to New Orleans to the ALA conference, and I met him, and he told me about this. He said, "How would you like to be one of these program officers?" I said, "I certainly would consider the Dallas office." When I tried for this library services program officer's job in the Dallas office, I had to fill out a form and show all of my experiences--for forty years! I have that in my papers here--everything in detail what I did for forty years. It took about two months for them to clear it, and so I got that job. That's when I came back to Texas--in August of 1967.

Dickey: Where was your office then?

Kee: You know where One Main Place is?

Dickey: Yes.

Kee: First, we were in the old Santa Fe Building across the street, and then they moved us to the One Main Place. In the office, when I first got there, there were about sixty people in it. I think I'm right about sixty. It dwindled some; it wasn't that big when I left. They began cutting back. I don't know, but I think it's a very small office now. I know they don't have program officers in the regions anymore.

Dickey: Well, let's see. I can't think of anything else that we really haven't covered. Is there anything else you can say about the Library School at TWU, maybe, that you haven't mentioned?

Kee: Let me emphasize that the Library School in the 1930s was a good library school. I think it was probably as good, or better, than any in the country because those dear ladies, Miss Buffum and Miss Taylor, meant for everything to be letter-perfect, and they were very hard on us. But, the Library School of the 1930s did very, very little to prepare me for a library in the 1990s. Very little! This is why I say you have to keep learning, learning, learning all the way through. I have no complaints about the Library School of the 1940s--I don't know--because I think they cut it back a lot. Frances de Cordova was there during that time. She was one of the faculty members, though.

Dickey: (Chuckle) She might have a different opinion than a student at that time.

Kee: But, I know Genevieve Dixon was well-meaning and all, but I just...at that time I was not in Texas, you know. She was kind of an in-grown Texan, if you know what I mean. That can be dangerous.

I learned an awful lot from working in the State of Wisconsin. Of course, I was associated all the time with professional people in all fields of study, and it

was a great experience to work nine years in Wisconsin. The university and the state work together. They were just down the street from each other. They had the reputation of working things out together. I learned an awful lot. I learned an awful lot about library service from Katherine Meyer when I went to Missouri. She was the state librarian, and she inspired us, all of us, more than any teacher had ever inspired me, as to what libraries are about in this world. I never came out of Texas Woman's University with the feeling that libraries were indispensable. It was just something we had. But, I would fight and die for a library now. I got an awful lot from Katherine Meyer.

The reason she got fired in Missouri was...we were developing libraries in counties in those days, in the 1940s. We'd go out and get these committees organized, and the people would vote to tax, and they would be ready, then, to establish their library. The State Library had promised certain basic collections of books. This was part of the Aid Program. So, she had these four field workers, and we were all out there working ourselves to death in establishing these libraries. We would go in on weekends, and we would say, "We need 2,000 to 5,000 books at such-and-such a place." She kept buying books when she didn't have money to buy them. Her thought was that she would get

over this year, you know. She would get over this hump. She didn't have the money in this year's budget, so she'd pay for them from the next appropriation. They caught up with her, and they fired her for it. It was just that an overzealous Katherine Meyer had gotten into trouble--kind of like a Greek tragedy, you know. She just destroyed herself.

Dickey: Oh, that's a shame.

Kee: But, she worked, and she worked. She worked so hard, and we all worked so hard. We just knocked ourselves out. She sent us, the field workers, to San Francisco to the American Library Association meeting. I guess this was about 1946 or 1947, along there. We had a little state car, but you weren't supposed to take these cars out of the state. I didn't know that. I didn't know we weren't supposed to, but she did. She sent us in the what we called "The Little Red Car" in which to travel the state. We went to San Francisco, and she arranged for us to have breakfast with Carl Mylan, the great Carl Mylam, who was the executive secretary of the American Library Association for many years. She knew Carl Mylam. She had worked at ALA, and she wanted Carl Mylam, you know, to inspire us, you know. And, he did. He said, "You're great! What you all are doing down in Missouri is great!" And, we were great. We were really working at it.

I loved Missouri. I've often thought about what would have happened if things hadn't turned out the way they had. I had no intention of leaving Missouri. Missouri was an underdeveloped country, as far as library development was concerned. We were really making progress. But, it's also an interesting state in that it may be Republican or it may be Democratic, so you were always on your toes. You had to be a real independent to work in Missouri. It was kind of exciting politically to work in Missouri. First, we had the advantages of Kansas City and Saint Louis for cultural outlets, and there was a real fast train. We were in Jefferson City, right in the middle of the state. There was a real fast train that came through from Kansas City to Saint Louis and would get back by about 3:00 in the morning. We often did things like that. We enjoyed Missouri. There are only two of us who are left from that group. That was a long time ago.

I was very, very enthusiastic about Wisconsin, too. Wisconsin is a great state. It is a state where things happen and where the very best minds of the university are employed in the decisions of the state. Having said that, I have to apologize for Joseph McCarthy. He was really not one of us (chuckle). You know the history of William Proxmire? He was a great

senator. Gaylord Nelson was a great environmentalist, and he was in the government when I was there. Then, he went on to the Senate. Vernon Thompson was the governor when I was there. He went to the House of Representatives in Congress. Social Security was born in Wisconsin.

Dickey: I didn't know that.

Kee: They had a wonderful public broadcasting system, a radio system, long before anybody else did. Even when I was there in the 1960s, we were teaching by radio and doing interesting things. I loved Wisconsin.

Dickey: You had quite a life and lived several places.

Kee: Yes. I was out of Texas twenty-five years, and the best of my career was out of Texas, really. In Texas, I was in school libraries, and that just didn't work.

Dickey: But, you came back (chuckle). Well, I'd like to thank you for the interview.

Kee: You are welcome.

Dickey: You were very helpful.

Kee: I don't know what you're aiming to get from this study.

Dickey: I'm comparing both schools right now to see if something develops or not--something of interest. There is not a lot of written material, and the purpose of oral history is to help supplement what's already been written, to fill in the gaps in the paper trail.

Kee: I can't emphasize it enough. I believe that the

Library School in the 1930s at Texas Woman's University was superior. Not for today by any means, or even for maybe ten years later. But at the time--at that time--I think it would have stacked up with any school in the country.

Dickey: During that time period that you went, it was the only one in Texas. I think Louisiana State University might have had the next closest one.

Kee: I believe Our Lady of the Lake had some kind of a library school. I don't know if they had it in the 1930s or not, but they were second in the state, as I remember it. When was North Texas...

Dickey: It started in 1938 officially.

Kee: Isn't it true that it was largely for a training school for librarians?

Dickey: School librarians, yes. It sure was. About the time you were attending during those late 1930s, it was already ALA-accredited.

Kee: I have no recollection of the Library School at North Texas when I was in Denton.

Dickey: It moved a little slow at first. Did you have very many friends that went to North Texas while you were going to Texas Woman's University?

Kee: No. I have a friend here who is comatose in the Health Center who did a great deal for North Texas. That is Virginia Clark.

Dickey: Yes. Her name has come up.

Kee: Virginia Clark moved into Trinity Terrace soon after I did, and we were very close, congenial friends. I didn't know her well because, you know, I was gone from the state so long, but I knew of her. She and I and three other people who live here had set up a little library, and Virginia contributed so much to it. She used to be a perfectionist, and we were two of a kind. Two of a different sort, you know, of librarians. We established this little library. This is a retirement center. You have to be sixty-two to get in, so everybody is older people. We talked about what our reading clientele would be, what it would be like, but not really knowing what it would be like. We conducted a survey. We did all kinds of things. We set up a little reader interest system of classifying our gift books. All of our books are gift books, and we have some very nice books. We have very good books in the gift book library that we have here.

Dickey: Wasn't she in charge of the Demonstration School at North Texas?

Kee: Yes, she was, and she also had a specialty of organizing audio-visual materials when they first began putting those in the schools. She worked at the State Department of Education, I think. When she had been here about...see, I've been here nine years. I came

when it first opened, and on the March 5, I will have been here nine years. When she had been here for about four or five years, she began to lose her memory and had blackouts, and now she's in a nursing home, and she doesn't know anybody, doesn't respond to anything at all. That is so sad. Now, she was very much a part of North Texas. Too bad you can't have her in your study.

Dickey: Exactly. I agree.

Kee: I think she still has some good friends over there. I go down there sometimes, and I try to get her to look at me, but there's no response.

Dickey: No responses at all.

Kee: Completely out.

Dickey: That's awful.

Kee: She didn't have a living will, which she should have had.

Dickey: Well, I thank you once again.

Kee: You're welcome.