

**VOICES OF THE CAPE FEAR
INTERVIEW WITH HELEN E. DOBSON**

AUGUST 14, 1995

INTRODUCTION

This is Sam Bisette on a very hot afternoon in August, August 14, 1995. It is Monday and I am at home at 1939 South Live Oak Parkway in Wilmington and Helen Dobson is with me today. Helen is a friend of many, many years standing. Both she and I have been in the same church. I will be talking a little today about her church, church experiences, and a little about church music, perhaps some of her friends in other churches, some of the organs in the downtown churches, and things that I think that she would be familiar with. She is also quite a historian. She's the historian of the First Baptist Church, if I remember right, officially/unofficially and we will talk to her a little about that.

INTERVIEWER: So Helen, let's establish as a basis for the beginning where and when you were born.

DOBSON: I was born in Boston, Massachusetts on November 14, 1913.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I never would have known. Tell me just a little about when you came to Wilmington and how you happened to come to Wilmington.

DOBSON: My father moved here to be in business with a brother-in-law. My mother was from Boston, that's how I happened to be born in Boston. We lived there until her family was mostly gone and she was ready to make the move. It worked out just fine and I was ready to go to school.

INTERVIEWER: Were you six years old, then?

DOBSON: Yes, I was six. I went around to Ruth Pleasant's, a little kindergarten at 6th and Princess Streets.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

DOBSON: I then went to Hemingway all the rest of the time.

INTERVIEWER: I've heard of Hemingway girls before. We had 14 of them out of our class of 1939.

DOBSON: You really did.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little about Hemingway School and what was life like going to grammar school. That would be right at the end of World War I?

DOBSON: Just about. The only thing I really remember about World War I were the little trinkets that my father got that he thought we ought to have as mementos. I think there is a little umbrella; red, white, and blue, that still works and moves open and shut. That's amazing to think an umbrella would last 75 years and still be workable. We did come here when I was entering school and it was a good time to come.

INTERVIEWER: Were we over the flu epidemic?

DOBSON: Yes, evidently you were. I don't remember a thing about that.

INTERVIEWER: That was a terrible epidemic around 1918/1919.

DOBSON: I went to Ruth Pleasant's and then into Miss Kate Yarborough's second grade when I went to Hemingway. Then, from there I was with Octavia Smith and all the rest of them through Hemingway.

INTERVIEWER: Octavia Smith?

DOBSON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: And who were the rest of them?

DOBSON: The rest of them were Bernard Solomon, Rosalee Waters...

INTERVIEWER: Oh my goodness.

DOBSON: There were a bunch kindergarteners from there, you know.

INTERVIEWER: That group went through high school. Did you sit in alphabetical order in those days?

DOBSON: Oh yes and I forgot, Carl Dunn was behind me and Helen Daniel was in front of me. She was the daughter of the presiding elder of the Methodist Church, called the redheaded mischievous boy.

INTERVIEWER: In asking some of the boys if they ever misbehaved, I had one prominent Wilmington citizen say, "Yes, I hate to admit it, but I got expelled twice." I won't tell you his name, but you know him.

DOBSON: I wouldn't ask you.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me, what did the girls do in those days besides schoolwork and so forth? What did the girls do for entertainment? How did they occupy their time?

DOBSON: Well, Octavia and I have laughed about it many times. We played what we called yard ball in the Hemingway School yard in those days. It was absolutely barren with hard dirt and not a sprig of grass growing anywhere. Not until the administration came in and took it over as its headquarters, did they bring in the backhoes and the bulldozers to plow it all up. Octavia said we played lawn ball 30 years too soon. Now, we should have waited and we would have had a lawn to play on.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DOBSON: We played yard games at that time, the girls on the 5th Street side and the boys stayed on the 6th Street side.

INTERVIEWER: I was going to ask if you were separated.

DOBSON: Oh yes, we were entirely separated.

INTERVIEWER: That saved the crunch condition.

DOBSON: But there was a....

INTERVIEWER: The spec schools were separated I know, up through World War II.

DOBSON: There was a real comfort in being secure at Hemingway. It never occurred to us at one time that Hemingway School would not last into eternity. Now, everything's gone: the houses, the school, and everything.

INTERVIEWER: Well tell me, wasn't that about the same time that the high school was being built.

DOBSON: What?

INTERVIEWER: The high school was being built?

DOBSON: Yes, the high school was being built in the early 1920's.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Well, that's when you were in grammar school?

DOBSON: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: You did go to New Hanover High School?

DOBSON: I went to New Hanover High School and they took 26 of us from Isaac Bear, Tileston, and Hemingway and put us together as a group and we were sent out there as exhibit A. They took us around as a unit and our schedule followed one unit. We didn't like it because we were pointed out as one of the exhibit A's. We lived through it and they were trying to test and prove that the 8th grade, which was a bone of contention, was not really necessary. It was repeating so much.

INTERVIEWER: How many did you have total?

DOBSON: Of our group?

INTERVIEWER: No, the total grades you had in school. Was it eleven up through high school?

DOBSON: Yes, I guess so. I didn't even know at that time. All I knew was I was sitting in the 7th grade and they gave us the first half of the 7th grade and the last half of the 8th grade work.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, my goodness.

DOBSON: Then, they sent us on to freshman 9th grade in high school, so I guess that was as mixed up then as some of it is now.

INTERVIEWER: Well, tell me when you finished high school. Do you recall when that was?

DOBSON: Oh yes, I finished in 1930.

INTERVIEWER: In 1930?

DOBSON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Well, that was really hitting the rock bottom of hard times, wasn't it?

DOBSON: It really was. We were really children of the depression.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DOBSON: Really.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of your recollections of those days of the 1930's from Black Friday in 1927 on into 1930 and 1932?

DOBSON: Well I can best say it, I guess, the way that Burnell Curtis and Mike Brown expressed it after we had a high school reunion. They said, "We furnished our own playing materials, we organized our own games, we did the things we wanted to do, and we didn't even know we were poor, down and out, and having a hard time. We just got along and we did. We had a good time together, but it took some ingenuity out of us. We had to think up things to do.

INTERVIEWER: How big was school when you graduated? How many students did you have? Do you recall?

DOBSON: I don't remember exactly, but we had a large graduating class from New Hanover High School.

INTERVIEWER: From New Hanover?

DOBSON: Or for that time it was a large class. There were around five or six hundred students.

INTERVIEWER: When you left New Hanover, what happened to you?

DOBSON: Then, I went to Meredith.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

DOBSON: When I entered Meredith, I was 16 years old. Can you believe it? I went to Meredith as a freshman. My roommate was Magdalene Davis and she later married Larry Cotton.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Did you go through Meredith for four years?

DOBSON: Yes, I went to Meredith for four years and graduated in 1934.

INTERVIEWER: Did you graduate with a teaching certificate?

DOBSON: Yes, I had a certificate to teach English and Music in public school and that was a time you could not find a job. Jobs were scarce, you went all over, and you interviewed with anybody that would listen to you. Finally, school was starting and I didn't have a job and I was getting frantic. A man from Murphy was down at Carolina Beach and he got my name. A man from Hickory was somewhere down here at the beach and he got my name, too. I had an offer to go to Murphy to teach English and also an offer to go to the little baking village in the Hickory area. I thought, "Helen, you've been in Raleigh for four years, that's home to you, and you'd be better satisfied." So, I chose to go to neither of those places and that same week, they called me from a little place called Knightdale, or Crossroads, out from Raleigh. They said, "We can't pay you the salary of a public school music teacher, but you can teach private piano lessons and do some part-time public school music but no English at all." There was nothing in my major, so I thought this is better than nothing. I went up there and taught part-time public school music and then the principal's wife left when he left to go to another school. That made a vacancy in the

English department and I went to Mr. Ball and said, "Now, I came here and helped you out and I want you to help me out. If you will, see if I can get the English job." So, that's how I got in.

INTERVIEWER: Well, that's fine. How long were you in Raleigh?

DOBSON: In Raleigh or just at Knightdale?

INTERVIEWER: Well, Knightdale really, I was thinking about Raleigh earlier.

DOBSON: I was in Knightdale seven years.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DOBSON: And I just loved it.

INTERVIEWER: Was teaching English what you preferred, rather than teaching music?

DOBSON: Yes. I've always enjoyed music and I've always liked it as a vocation more than anything else, but I never wanted to excel. I knew I was no concert pianist or performer, but I did want to be able to accompany and do things that I would enjoy doing.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

DOBSON: And I have.

INTERVIEWER: Well, when did you get back to Wilmington?

DOBSON: I came back to Wilmington in 1941 just after Pearl Harbor.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever leave again?

DOBSON: No, I've been here ever since.

INTERVIEWER: Well, tell me this, how long have you been a member of the First Baptist Church?

DOBSON: Since I was baptized at the age of 12 or 13. Reba Norman, Mary Hewlett, and I were all baptized the same night.

INTERVIEWER: That would make it about 1927.

DOBSON: Yes, it was along then.

INTERVIEWER: Who was the minister then?

DOBSON: We did not have a minister, but Wilcox was the interim minister. We joined when he was preaching and he baptized us.

INTERVIEWER: Who was the first permanent minister?

DOBSON: Let's see, after Wilcox...

INTERVIEWER: Was that before Dr. Foster?

DOBSON: No, it was after Dr. Foster.

INTERVIEWER: After Dr. Foster?

DOBSON: I wasn't quite that far back.

INTERVIEWER: I don't tie my ministers directly enough to...

DOBSON: I don't either to tell the truth, but I believe the one who came next was Kester.

INTERVIEWER: Marcus Kester.

DOBSON: I think that was the one.

INTERVIEWER: Kester was the one that had a large family of children.

DOBSON: They had ten children and one of his daughter's, the oldest one Gwendolyn, called me one night last week. I hadn't heard from her in thirty years. She said, "Helen, this is Gwen Kester Warring and I just wanted to talk to you." I said, "This is the nicest surprise, Gwen." We had a nice visit and she is living in a place like Plantation Village, but it's a place in Mathews, North Carolina.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Well, Kester had one son that made quite a name for himself in the art world and that was Mel Kester.

DOBSON: Oh yes, he has.

INTERVIEWER: I've sort of lost touch with him in the last several years.

DOBSON: And I have, too, and I wish I hadn't. He's done very well. Jack, the youngest son who was a doctor, of course, died.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. After Dr. Kester, who did we have next? Do you recall?

DOBSON: Blanton.

INTERVIEWER: Blanton?

DOBSON: Dr. Blanton.

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Blanton came here in 1936. The reason I remember that is because he came in September and we moved to Wilmington in September of the same year. We were the first family he visited when he moved to the church.

Wilmington has some fine churches downtown such as the Temple of Israel, St. James Episcopal, First Presbyterian, First Baptist, St. Paul's Lutheran, and Grace Methodist. It looks like the two steeples of First Baptist sort of set themselves apart. First Baptist did not have the misfortunes that Grace Methodist and First Presbyterian had.

DOBSON: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: In that the churches burned and had to be rebuilt, but our church building is still intact.

DOBSON: We have been very fortunate.

INTERVIEWER: You wrote a history, did you not, of the First Baptist Church?

DOBSON: I was commissioned to write it and I was really just shoved into writing it.

INTERVIEWER: While we are on the subject, let's go back and pick up a few facts. The church dates from when?

DOBSON: 1808 officially.

INTERVIEWER: Officially?

DOBSON: That is the little church on Baptist Hill.

INTERVIEWER: What, they call it Baptist Hill?

DOBSON: That's right, the one your Sunday school class was named for.

INTERVIEWER: That's down at Front and Ann Streets, is it not?

DOBSON: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: They were down there for a number of years and I guess when they built the church at 5th and Market Streets, it was started before the Civil War?

DOBSON: It was started before the war and when the war was being fought, it continued being built.

INTERVIEWER: They must have been down there for 40 or 50 years before they moved.

DOBSON: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Before they built, what do you think was at 5th and Market Streets in those days?

DOBSON: Well, nothing was at 5th and Market Streets in those days. It was outside the city limits if you can believe it. The Synagogue was just in the city limits but the Bellamy Mansion and First Baptist were outside the city limits. They were out in the country.

INTERVIEWER: Well, what was Market Street like in those days, do you think? Just an idea, of course, since you weren't there.

DOBSON: I wasn't there. It was just a two-lane dirt stretch. That's about all it could have been.

INTERVIEWER: That's true. Well, the size of our sanctuary and the way in which the church was built certainly has added to it being a very practical and distinguished building.

DOBSON: I have the greatest respect for Dr. John L. Pritchard.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me a little about Dr. Pritchard.

DOBSON: He was certainly a man of deep conviction. When he was approached to consider First Baptist, it was at the time they were dickering for the property and they didn't know how much they were going to be able to pay. It went on a year or two and finally, he said he would come on condition that the church would build a sanctuary within a certain amount of time. He was in Lynchburg at the time. He did come down and got things going. They said he would go out everyday and watch the building. They got through with the buying of the property with the help of Mr. French and some other friends, but that lot that we're on was purchased for forty-five hundred dollars, but the price offered them was four thousand. Can you believe that?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I can...

DOBSON: It relatively was motivated by change, I realize.

INTERVIEWER: That's right, I can believe it because inflation makes the dollar go up and down.

DOBSON: Oh yes, that's right.

INTERVIEWER: Well then, the church itself was apparently started before the war and ...

DOBSON: And the day of dedication was the first Sunday and first day of May in 1870. From then until now, we've had continuous worship services in the sanctuary.

INTERVIEWER: I see.

DOBSON: I think that's something to be proud of.

INTERVIEWER: It is and it is quite remarkable. It certainly is. I've been a member of the church for many years. I've been conversant about its history, but not enough to remember dates and things like that, that you have given. Apparently, the church must have set there in an unfinished state during the Civil War?

DOBSON: Partially. As shiploads of materials would be brought in, they would work, but I don't think it was a continuous building for ten years. It took them ten years and it cost them much more than they thought it was going to cost them. But, look what they did with that few people.

INTERVIEWER: By the way, I was talking to Henry Von Oesen the other day and he was talking about churches. I'll add one fact to your history that I didn't know and perhaps, you didn't know. He said as an engineer that the reason that church has stood up so well and has not cracked or had settlement problems, was because the people who built it had sense enough to get the ballasts from the ships to create the foundation. They created the foundation so deep and wide that the weight of the foundation compacted under part of it. So, when the rest of the church's weight was added, it was so compacted that the church never had an opportunity to settle.

DOBSON: Oh gracious, I didn't realize that.

INTERVIEWER: It was just an engineering feat.

DOBSON: An engineering feat, really?

INTERVIEWER: That's right.

DOBSON: Gracious. It was built so that the tower would give a certain amount.

INTERVIEWER: Well tell me, is there any truth to the story that people did climb the scaffolding to watch the battle of Fort Fisher? Have you ever picked up anything on that?

DOBSON: I've never been told that. I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: I had heard that, but I didn't know.

DOBSON I have read from Dr. Pritchard's own history that he felt that he could just feel and hear the drums and the battle sounds from far away. Now whether he really heard them or whether it was so real to him that he thought he did, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Well, Fort Fisher was supposed to have been the world's heaviest naval bombardment of that time and I guess that the other night over at the activity center, they could hear the battleship shooting their little two pounds off. Maybe he could hear it.

DOBSON: I know it.

INTERVIEWER: On the church, let's go now to the music. You've been a very vital part of the music program for as long as we can remember. What do you consider as some of the high points in connection with the musical programs at the church.

DOBSON: Well, we started off with Ralph Yopp and Miss Camie Chasen, who was an organist and then of course, Lila Head.

INTERVIEWER: Lila Williams Head.

DOBSON: Lila Williams Head was picked for Miss Camie Chasen's successor. Well, if you remember, the choir loft at that time had no depth to it at all and it was just a lineup. People could lineup across the front of the bronze rail so that their little heads peeped over the top. We had the paid quartet for years and years. We had Vernon Cheek, Mrs. Almstead, Allabell Futrell, and Mr. Snakenburg. The church could not have a volunteer choir because it just would not work. That went on into the early 1940's and when Dr. Blanton came, he said, "We just have to have a choir. We just can't go on like this." So, it was Dr. Blanton who hired Henry and turned him loose. Really, Henry became as far as I'm concerned, the music man of Wilmington.

INTERVIEWER: Is this Henry Emurian you are speaking of?

DOBSON: Yes. He was the music man of Wilmington for years and he organized but they never gave him the full credit that he really deserved. He really organized and got the Wilmington Orchestra started, which has turned into the Symphony.

INTERVIEWER: Apparently, he was a very brilliant person.

DOBSON: Oh, he was brilliant. My father used to say, "You know, Henry is just so brilliant on music, but when you've said that, you've said it."

INTERVIEWER: He was eccentric.

DOBSON: Oh, he was eccentric. They used to tell the story about Mr. Efird saying, "Henry, I don't care how many pairs of pants you buy down here, but just don't tell 'em where you got 'em." Henry didn't want anything to touch him and he wanted them to hang loosely on him.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Did you know that Henry Emurian called me up one time at two o'clock in the morning and asked me if I wanted to sing in the choir?

DOBSON: No, but he called me up at three o'clock when my father was dying down on 5th Street. He had been out of town for some time and had no idea what time it was. Time was absolutely out of his realm.

INTERVIEWER: Didn't he have a strong talent for composing?

DOBSON: Oh, yes. And you know, I have pieces that he composed and he gave me but I wish that I could get up with his son. I don't know whether he has an interest in music at all. I have tried to contact his wife but I've had no luck at all. I think it's a shame that the family doesn't have the pieces. It really is.

INTERVIEWER: What's the history of the organ in our church? How long have we had one?

DOBSON: Well, since that Chantz organ was put in. Henry was there when we first got the first one.

INTERVIEWER: What did we have before? Was it a piano?

DOBSON: No, they had a little organ, but it was a smaller organ but I can't tell the type of it. It was adequate for the size place that we had and they didn't bother.

INTERVIEWER: A Chantz organ apparently was a...

DOBSON: Well that was a big step forward.

INTERVIEWER: ...a big step forward.

DOBSON: We have stuck with the Shontz organ and they are supposedly keeping it tuned and up to date. I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of the music milestones in the church?

DOBSON: Well, I think Henry was the first milestone and he was the one who got a volunteer choir started and had a good music group. He had Barbara Guy, Ruth Clayton, and people of that aged group who sang in the youth group. He did a good job getting started but he didn't care a thing about having the little ones in the children's choir. That was just too messy, so he wanted me to do the children's choir, so on one afternoon, I'd go down there and we'd have the children's choir with Betty Jean, Saber Grew, and that next group coming along. They sang there little songs and did pretty well. I was lucky enough to have Emerson Head and the little Ellis girl who could do duets as well as any of the adults, for that matter.

INTERVIEWER: Among benchmarks, what music services have been held in the church? What are some of the outstanding ones? I was reminded of this last Christmas with what was put together by the choir and orchestra. It did so much for the church.

DOBSON: Yes. Well, Henry started the idea of bringing in professionals to augment what we had,

figuratively. We needed it so he started the core of an orchestra. Of course Laura Howell helped him a great deal and there were others who contributed. The Dutch group out at Castle Hayne that played violins and different instruments, also contributed a lot.

INTERVIEWER: Ms. Tinga was one.

DOBSON: Yes, that's right, but then after he got that started, but then, he was the first one who really tackled presenting the entire Messiah and we did do that a number of years and did a beautiful job of it. People would come from miles.

INTERVIEWER: What about in recent time, what have been some of the things that have happened?

DOBSON: Changes?

INTERVIEWER: Well let's pickup, have there been any major changes that have been made in recent times?

DOBSON: I'd say we had the era of Henry that went on and on. Of course, Henry is legendary and he will go on and on. Following him, we had a variety of people coming and going through nobody's fault but I think as a congregation, we really didn't know what we needed and wanted but the committees did the best they could. And you know, it was kind of trial and error for a while, but then we finally got over into the era of Walter Ross. Do you remember him?

INTERVIEWER: Yes, I do.

DOBSON: He did a very good job with the youth choirs at that time. Then, we had one fellow who come in for a Thursday rehearsal and never came back Sunday to play. We never did see him again.

INTERVIEWER: Let's change the subject and go to something else for a second. How did you learn to play the organ?

DOBSON: Oh yes, I filled in and I've never had an organ lesson, I'm ashamed to say.

INTERVIEWER: You're self-taught then?

DOBSON: Dr. Blanton was the one who was responsible. Henry went off to Norfolk and he called Dr. Blanton and said, "Now, I'm not going to be back Sunday." Henry had a way of being able to tell you what he was going to do. Dr. Blanton asked, "Well, who's going to play?" Henry said, "Well, Helen can play." "Oh, I don't know," Dr. Blanton said. He said, "Well, you try and see if you can get her to do it." Well, the first thing I know, I was up there playing and then I picked at it with Henry's help. I didn't have organ lessons, but he did sit down and talk with me about combinations of stops and so forth. I'm not going to say I didn't have any help at all because he did help me.

INTERVIEWER: All right, let's leave Henry for a minute and let's go to some of the things in the last several years. We've had two well-attended Christmas concerts with a 37-piece orchestra.

DOBSON: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: And then...

DOBSON: Jeff.

INTERVIEWER: These are first names to you and I, but who ever might be listening will want last names, and will want to hear Jeff Lewis.

DOBSON: Well, Jeff Lewis was the organist/director at the time.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

DOBSON: He is the one that got together the two Christmas concerts and then we've had good pageants. See, Betty and some of the women have done a great job of getting costumes organized and scenes set for the manger scene. They have done that type of pageantry.

INTERVIEWER: In being in choir and in one church have you become acquainted with any of the principle musicians in other churches such as the choir directors and organists.

DOBSON: Not as much as I wish I had. Now I do feel like I know John, Jordan, and Woodward, the fellow down at First Presbyterian, Woodward. When different ones were coming and going to First Presbyterian, they were on a good basis with Henry and with our group. Walter Clark and well anyway, there were others that came in with us a lot.

INTERVIEWER: Now, I want you to tell me something totally different. You ended up being a high school teacher at New Hanover High School?

DOBSON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: When did you start as a teacher there?

DOBSON: Well, I started at New Hanover in the fall of 1960. I came back to Wilmington in 1941 and I had to take a job in junior high because there were no jobs open for me. So, I suffered through junior high for several years and then there was an opening in the high school. They needed somebody to do the yearbook, so John Kelly and I labored over the yearbook for ten years.

INTERVIEWER: John Kelly was a photographer?

DOBSON: Yes, sir. He was the best help I've seen and he was as good as gold. We did the yearbook for ten years and tended to all the presses.

INTERVIEWER: Where were you teaching when you were doing the yearbook?

DOBSON: At New Hanover.

INTERVIEWER: You were there?

DOBSON: I was at New Hanover for ten years.

INTERVIEWER: What were you teaching?

DOBSON: I was teaching English.

INTERVIEWER: Teaching English? Okay.

DOBSON: And Journalism.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DOBSON: They called it Journalism.

INTERVIEWER: But, didn't you get out of English later?

DOBSON: No, I stayed in English.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. For some reason, I thought you taught one of the sciences?

DOBSON: Oh no, I've never taught in the science department at all.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I had misunderstood that.

DOBSON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Weren't you an advisor in the National Honor Society?

DOBSON: I never was involved: I was in attendance.

INTERVIEWER: You had some other English teachers there, one of which was in our class?

DOBSON: Frances Formyduval?

INTERVIEWER: That was Frances Formy Duval.

DOBSON: Yes, she is a delightful lady.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Did you have a homeroom group?

DOBSON: Yes, I had a homeroom group.

INTERVIEWER: Can you remember the number of the homeroom?

DOBSON: 205.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

DOBSON: I was right next door to Fred Capp's office.

INTERVIEWER: All right.

DOBSON: I was right on the front and was there when all the integration business was coming and going. I would tell the kids, "I have a front view right here in room 205 and if anything spectacular happens, I'll be the first to let you know. So, you sit down and wait until I tell you."

INTERVIEWER: What were some of the instances if you can remember, that may have happened during high school regarding relationships with the students and some of the things that the students may have done in the way of pranks? Can you think of anything?

DOBSON: Pranks?

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DOBSON: Well, I can't think of anything.

INTERVIEWER: I didn't give you any advance warning on that one.

DOBSON: Well, I think there was a boy in my own high school class, Ben Adams, who accidentally on purpose pushed the door closed on Mrs. O'Legwin, not the Mrs. O'Legwin you know, but an older Mrs. O'Legwin. He shut her in the Science Lab on the first floor for a matter of several hours. That was the maddest woman you've ever seen when she got out of there and he didn't get his diploma that year.

INTERVIEWER: Well, you must have served under the residency of T.T. Hamilton?

DOBSON: Oh, yes. Well, most of my time at New Hanover was with ...

INTERVIEWER: Was Wallace West there when you were there?

DOBSON: He was there one year and then, Harrington was there a year. He was a gem.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DOBSON: I liked him very much.

INTERVIEWER: The things that I seem to remember most about the high school related to some of the customs and some of the practices for example. The underclassmen couldn't use the front center circular stairs...

DOBSON: Only the seniors.

INTERVIEWER: Who started those traditions?

DOBSON: Well, they were started before I ever got to high school.

INTERVIEWER: About the senior steps?

DOBSON: Yes. When I went out there, we didn't dare look at the senior steps. We were lowly freshman, you know.

INTERVIEWER: That was quite a senior year.

DOBSON: That's right; that was something.

INTERVIEWER: I guess you were out there during the years the ROTC came in?

DOBSON: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, you were; you would have been.

DOBSON: We had some prize teachers such as Miss Hester Struthers in math and Miss Formy-Duval.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DOBSON: We just had wonderful teachers.

INTERVIEWER: That was when you came along?

DOBSON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Later on, didn't you teach when some of those people were still there?

DOBSON: Yes, I did.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DOBSON: I felt about that high and I had a new view of some of them. There were some that I had not liked at all...

INTERVIEWER: Were you teaching in 1937 and 1938 out there?

DOBSON: No, I didn't start at New Hanover until 1960.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, that's right. You didn't go until 1960 because you were in one of the other schools.

DOBSON: Yes, I was in Sunset Park and Winter Park. Then, they shifted me out to New Hanover in 1960 and then in 1970, I went out to Cape Fear Academy and I loved it out there. There were small classes and no real problems.

INTERVIEWER: Are there some recollections of things that happened that were turning points in Wilmington's history or remarkable times or situations that could have happened that you remember? We all remember the feeling in Wilmington when the Atlantic Coast Line announcement to close was made.

DOBSON: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: But, were there significant events that you might have witnessed?

DOBSON: Well, I think the fact that we were there during World War II...

INTERVIEWER: How did World War II affect the high school? I was out of it by then, so I don't know.

DOBSON: Yes, that was in the early 1940's, wasn't it?

INTERVIEWER: That would have been 1942 through 1944, those three years.

DOBSON: Yes. Well, of course, the ROTC was played up and it really meant something, then. When they would raise and lower the flag, everything stopped. Market Street traffic and everything else stopped and they stood at attention. Now, they don't even slow down.

INTERVIEWER: And they've had to put a long fence all the way down the Market Street for about four blocks to keep the students from running across the street.

DOBSON: I know it. I just can't believe it.

INTERVIEWER: The students kept getting killed.

DOBSON: I know it.

INTERVIEWER: Well Helen, I think that covers a lot of the areas that I wanted to cover. I did not realize that you had been born in Boston. Tell me one other thing. Are there other family members such as brothers or sisters?

DOBSON: I had no brothers or sisters.

INTERVIEWER: You were an only child, then?

DOBSON: Yes and I never married.

INTERVIEWER: Well, were you related to any of the other Dobson's in Wilmington?

DOBSON: Not the Wilmington Dobson's, but some have come in since we've been here. Brian came from Virginia and was a first cousin of mine, but I really never did have many.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever know Red Dobson?

DOBSON: Oh, yes. Richard said if it hadn't been for Gene and Joyce, and cousin Davis as he called my father, he didn't know what would have become of him because daddy would sit on the porch and talk with Richard for hours when he was having his problems. Daddy said, "Now Richard, you can do it." Richard really took on with the young group and the band and really did go places with them. Richard felt like daddy was a real influence in helping him.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Where did you live in Wilmington?

DOBSON: I lived down on 5th Street in the Hemingway District.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DOBSON: And we always said that the North Hemingway...

INTERVIEWER: Is that somewhere up close to where H.M. Roland and the Roland family lived?

DOBSON: Yes, they lived on Chestnut Street.

INTERVIEWER: 5th and Chestnut Streets?

DOBSON: 5th and Chestnut Streets and we were between Grace and Walnut Streets.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

DOBSON: But as Mike said, "We were poor and we were without, but we didn't know it."

INTERVIEWER: Mike Brown?

DOBSON: Yes, we had a good time.

INTERVIEWER: And he was a contemporary of yours?

DOBSON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: I see. Well Helen, I appreciate you coming over this afternoon and sharing some of these thoughts about what is our church and our high school. I thought it would be interesting especially from you viewpoint as a lady and giving some highlights as a teacher and self-taught organist. I found that out today for the first time and you remember the imprint that Henry Emurian left on our church during the period he was there.

DOBSON: Oh, yes.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much. I think we are going to sign off here; so thanks again.

DOBSON: Thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

INTERVIEWER: Helen Elizabeth Dobson, if I've got that right.

DOBSON: You have, thank you.