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Interview with Bessie Garison

Bessie Garison

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Abstract: In December of 1980 and April 21, 1980, Anne Ledford and Susan Rippy interviewed Winthrop alumni and former faculty member Bessie Garison. Garison describes student life at Winthrop from 1908 until her graduation in 1912, as well as her memories of Winthrop’s training school. Garison discusses her memories of Winthrop’s founding, campus life, buildings, uniforms, and professors. Garison offers insights on changes made at Winthrop between her years as a student and when she began teaching in 1937. This interview was conducted for inclusion into the Louise Pettus Archives and Special Collections Oral History Program.

Keywords: Anne Ledford, Bessie Garison, Winthrop, alumni, faculty, 1980, 1900’s, Rippy

Interview Session I (December 10, 1980; December 14, 1980): Digital File

Time Keywords

00:00:00 **Start of Interview**/Interviewer’s Introduction

00:00:23 **Question:** Tell us about when Winthrop first opened **Answer:** First heard of Winthrop at age 3; Garison describes childhood in Ridgeway, SC; discusses memories of Winthrop moving from Columbia to Rock Hill, all Clemson students came to Rock Hill to see the cornerstone laid; Garison moved to Rock Hill in fall of 1895; no homes, but people lived in dorms and buildings previously used by Presbyterian church/Davidson college; Garison describes town’s excitement about Winthrop; describes childhood; began kindergarten in 1899, discusses memories of kindergarten including memories of hearing many stories/fortales including Uncle Remus stories and Hans Christian Anderson stories; finished kindergarten at the end of summer, did
not get to go back to school on time because Garison and her eldest sister had typhoid fever, did not start school until latter part of October 1899; Garison describes training school; Garison discusses memories of first grade, favorite teacher; Garison went to training school after this until 1908; describes training school grades

00:06:18  **Question:** First buildings on college campus?  **Answer:** Main building which is now Tillman hall, and North dormitory; Garison describes layout of North dormitory and Tillman

00:07:10  **Question:** Who built Winthrop? People from Rock Hill?  **Answer:** Not sure, contractor was from Rock Hill; Mr. W.H. Stewart; Garison discusses President’s home, Dr. Johnson; next building was Carnegie library added in 1906

00:08:35  [no question] Garison talks about seeing South dormitory built in 1901 and 1902, later became McLaurin hall; Winthrop student population growing, needed more dining space, built Johnson hall in 1908 and 1909, later became Bancroft hall, second floor was called senior hall and only seniors lived there; during summer of 1910 added new dining room; fall of 1910 had new dormitory and new dining hall

00:10:07  **Question:** Is this new dining room McBryde?  **Answer:** No, McBride was added later

00:10:13  **Question:** Where was the dining hall located?  **Answer:** It was where it is now; dining hall built in 1910 was in the front part of Tillman, McBryde was a wing added later

00:10:36  **Question:** What was it like living in a dorm?  **Answer:** Do not know, do not get to spend much time in dorms, especially during study hours; girls had strict rules; Garison describes a typical daily routine of a Winthrop student; discusses student’s smoking habits and continues discussing daily routine

00:15:23  **Question:** What about the week? Go to school Monday through Friday?  **Answer:** When Winthrop was open Saturday was a holiday, in 1900 and 1901 Rock Hill decided that farm hands and mill workers had to come into town on Saturday, made streets crowded; Dr. Johnson decided that Winthrop would have a holiday on Monday and go to school on Saturday, from that time until 1923 or 1924; Garison discusses boys going to training school

00:17:30  **Question:** Students from Winthrop college taught at training school?  **Answer:** Yes; when first went to Winthrop had “practice teaching;” Garison discusses Johnson, school in Columbia; when Garison first went to school, had student teachers from sophomore, junior and senior classes; Garison discusses student teaching

00:19:57  **Question:** When you went to Winthrop, live in dorm?  **Answer:** No, lived “within running distance of chapel,” lived about a block away; lived in same place from
kindergarten until graduation from Winthrop and also 2 or 3 years after also when she was teaching at Winthrop

00:20:46 **Question:** Issued a uniform? Make uniform? **Answer:** Garison describes her enthusiasm about uniform, describes making uniform; first Sunday of fall semester all girls marched to church; Baptists and Presbyterians in different groups, one group whose church was farthest away led the line, usually the Presbyterians, Dr. Johnson led the line with the head matron

00:23:23 **Question:** Is this the Blue Line? **Answer:** This was the Blue Line

00:23:26 [no question] Garison talks about uniforms; making uniforms; Garison describes hat; liked uniform; when teaching at Winthrop, Garison used to tell girls not to discard uniform; Dr. Johnson said that important people considered Winthrop girls well dressed; even though girls are dressed similar, every girl is unique; governor Burns discarded uniforms when Garison was teaching at Winthrop

00:25:36 **Question:** Mr. Johnson was first president? **Answer:** Yes; Tatler was decided to Dr. Johnson, describes dedication

00:25:55 **Question:** Did he live on campus? **Answer:** Yes; when Winthrop first opened, Johnson lived in North dormitory, corner room in northern corner; after house was bought, lived in house with mother and half-sister Margaret Nance; Nance married Paul Workman in Rock Hill; Garison liked Johnson’s mother, used to deliver her packages; Johnson’s mother was a Nance, had remarried; Johnson fell in love with secretary Miss May Smith from Charleston, married in Fall 1901; president’s house built by Mr. Stewart (overseer of Winthrop); Garison discusses house renovations, carriage house, horses, streetcars used until 1911; Streetcar barn where Joynes Hall is now, streetcar barn owned by Dr. Joynes, gave to Winthrop to be used as home for teachers

00:29:19 **Question:** Where Joynes Hall is now? **Answer:** Yes

00:29:23 **Question:** Girls that went to Winthrop all from South Carolina? North Carolina? **Answer:** No, had students from any state; school was established for SC girls, SC girls did not pay tuition unless father owned valuable property; out of state girls paid tuition

00:29:55 **Question:** So this allowed mill workers’ daughters to come to school? **Answer:** Yes

00:30:04 [no question] Garison talks about Dr. Johnson; Johnson stated that with Winthrop’s uniform, could not tell a queen’s daughter from a slave’s daughter; Garison talks about scholarships, entrance exams
Question: Remember any teaching experiences from training school? Answer: Yes; taught last week of first term in January, assigned to teacher that was her 6th/7th grade teacher, scared of her, realized this teacher had asked to work with Garrison specifically, teacher left Garrison in charge of class one day, no children showed up because of snow

Question: How many times did you attend training school before teaching? One quarter? Answer: Second semester taught first grade, discusses teacher with whom she taught

Question: Did people graduate and not become teachers? Answer: Yes; had many classes on special music, millinery, sewing, cooking, stenography; could get diplomas/certificates; Garrison talks about Ms. Withers

Question: School began in August and go through May? When did it start? Answer: No, began in mid-September; training school began a week before; discusses holidays, commencement ceremonies

[no question] Garrison discusses commencement ceremonies, graduation, Joe Riley; class of 1912 first class to wear graduation caps and gowns

Question: What color were caps and gowns? Answer: Black

Question: Do you still have yours? Answer: No

[no question] Garrison discusses graduation

Question: School lasted about 9 months? Answer: Yes

Question: Girls did not leave campus to go home between semesters or for holidays? Answer: Parents had to write the president a letter if they wanted girls to come home

Question: Where did the professors live? Answer: Dorms at first—especially female teachers; rented homes and rooms

Question: Were tunnels under Winthrop already established? Answer: Never knew of tunnels, maybe a myth

Question: Did they have swimming pool in Tillman? Answer: Yes, pool was small; town girls stayed on first floor, gave town girls room near pool; Garrison discusses room decorations for town girls
Question: Did Carnegie library have large selection of books? Answer: Not sure, but seemed to have wonderful selection, library was enlarged after Garison’s graduation

Question: Did Winthrop have clubs? Answer: Yes; tennis, music, art, home ec clubs; no sororities

Question: Professors or students oversee clubs? Answer: Mostly students, but professors were affiliated

Question: All the classes taught in main building, Tillman? Answer: Yes

Question: Where were classrooms located in Tillman? Answer: Classrooms in Tillman first, second, third, fourth floors; shared first floor classrooms with training school; describes Tillman layout, second floor library, third floor dining room, third floor rooms for literary society; art classes used to be in Tillman, moved to third floor of South Dormitory; kindergarten, pool in basement; all classes in Tillman until South Dormitory and another building was built

Question: Where did the paintings and statues found in Tillman come from? Answer: Dr. Johnson’s trip to Europe—brought objects and prints back; Garison describes objects and prints, mostly replicas of famous works

Question: Scholarships for girls? Answer: Yes; each county could give as many scholarships as people in house of representatives; girls took exams, one who made highest grade got scholarship; no scholarships in this manner when Garison came back to teach around 1937; dining room scholarships—24 girls could work in dining room and earn tuition money; service scholarships—girls could help teachers in exchange for tuition money

Question: Did it cost a lot of money to come to Winthrop? Answer: Not sure; was a “town girl,” believed deposit was about $25-$50; Garison discusses what deposit covered; out of state girls paid more

Question: What kind of social events on campus? Answer: Usually girls organized events; discusses German club; clubs could meet with people in town at “receptions”; Garison discusses receptions; discusses mock circus girls organized; Saturday night two societies met, girls performed; girls could have music or chorus recitals, Cecilia Chorus performed; Garison discusses plays, debates, football games
[no question] Garison discusses dining hall seating; Dr. Kinard and wife, pranks played in dining room; discusses memories of Winthrop; discusses Dr. Kinard’s career and life, discusses death of Dr. Kinard’s wife and children in a fire, talks about Dr. Kinard’s wife and interactions she had with her

**Question:** Did Winthrop have anything special for junior/seniors? **Answer:** Yes, every spring had a junior/senior reception; after Kinard became president, wife decided that seniors could bring boys to junior/senior reception

**Question:** What happened at junior/senior reception? **Answer:** Banquet, dance—girls would dance with girls, orchestra; discusses orchestra

**Question:** Would you describe dining room set up? **Answer:** Rows of tables, dining room under the auditorium; never allowed town girls to go in dining room, discusses memories of event held in dining room

**Question:** Was it cafeteria style? **Answer:** No; had 10 people to a table, head of table would be senior or teacher; food served on long tables; describes serving food

**Question:** Did Winthrop have their own silver? **Answer:** Yes; later sold

**Question:** What about the security system? **Answer:** Garison discusses housekeepers at Winthrop; discusses night watchman, locked doors; night matron in dorms—slept during the day; Garison discusses rules for girls

**Question:** Could you change out of Winthrop uniform off campus? **Answer:** No, but town girls could

**Question:** You always wore uniform? **Answer:** Yes, liked to wear uniform

**Question:** What about college farm? Always a part of Winthrop? **Answer:** Yes, it was always a part of Winthrop; describes farm, overseer, dairy cows, vegetables

**Question:** What about the meat? **Answer:** Farm is still there; Garison discusses buying meat

**Question:** Did people in the town work at farm? **Answer:** Yes

**Question:** State employees? **Answer:** Yes

**Question:** Did some of the classes give gifts to the college? **Answer:** Yes, every graduating class gave something to Winthrop; discusses some gifts from various
classes; clock tower/chimes; discusses Richardsons

01:28:16  *Question*: What about the alma mater? Did they have one then? *Answer*: Yes, sang it on occasion; discusses old and new alma mater

01:29:04  *Question*: It was sang a lot? *Answer*: On special occasions, like daisy chain

01:29:18:  *Question*: All the girls knew the words? *Answer*: Yes, but does not remember them now

01:29:29:  *Question*: Did they have “classes nights?” Junior follies? *Answer*: No, came after she graduated, but before Garison came back to teach; discusses basketball games

01:31:24  *End of interview*

**Interview Session II (April 21, 1981): Digital File**

**Time**  
**Keywords**

00:00:00  *Start of Interview*/Interviewer’s Introduction

00:00:33  *Question*: When did you first come to Winthrop? *Answer*: Summer of 1899 in Kindergarten; discusses Kindergarten teacher, class, students, Kindergarten activities; Garison discusses going to training school afterward

00:04:23  *Question*: When was the new training school opened? *Answer*: Started work in 1911, finished in 1912; discusses Robert Winthrop’s birthday

00:05:24  *Question*: What was public’s reaction to Winthrop’s opening? *Answer*: Happy, especially those that went to public school; discusses Presbyterian High School; A.R. Banks’ school for boys, city manager; Catawba Military Academy; discusses buying land for Winthrop training school; Garison discusses training school, move from Columbia to Rock Hill, layout of training school

00:11:08  *Question*: Do you remember anything about dorm life? *Answer*: Did not know much, only heard from friends; discusses love for Winthrop, uniform; Garison was a “town girl,” did not live in dorms, lived in basement of Tillman with other “town girls;” Garison describes typical daily routine of girls in dorms, bell/bell schedule, electric clocks, chapel—describes chapel schedule/routine; continues to describe daily routine

00:19:56  *Question*: Did you think classes were difficult? *Answer*: Garison discusses
“classifications/sections” based on seniority at Winthrop; discusses advisors; Garison discusses love for Winthrop, past experiences

00:22:12  *Question:* Did you do any student teaching?  *Answer:* Yes, “one miserable week;” Garison discusses her week of student teaching in 1912

00:25:26  *Question:* How did the students like Dr. Johnson?  *Answer:* Students loved him; Garison discussed Dr. Johnson’s nickname, accident involving arm; Garison discusses Dr. Johnson’s love for students; different majors, feelings about women’s colleges, different clubs at school

00:31:15  *Question:* When did you come back to teach at Winthrop?  *Answer:* Fall of 1937, graduated in 1912; Garison discusses her past employment; Winthrop summer school, back to school at Pratt; Garison discusses experiences in New York; graduate school at Columbia, teaching in Michigan; then taught at Winthrop, discusses experiences teaching at Winthrop

00:39:39  *Question:* What types of things changed?  *Answer:* Schedule, chapel, students had more free time/less restrictions, less strict on uniform, students had more contact with teachers; Garison discusses student government

00:41:43  *Question:* How do you think student government affected students?  *Answer:* Students looked forward to it, student government helped; Garison discusses past experiences with student government

00:43:51  *Question:* How did the curriculum change over the years?  *Answer:* Followed popular educational trends, new subjects; Garison discusses home economics, “practice home” at Winthrop; music program, clubs; Dr. Johnson kept up with new trends

00:48:46  *Question:* Were there other faculty that made important contributions to Winthrop history?  *Answer:* So many of them; Garison discusses important/memorable teachers and staff

00:53:29  *Question:* What do you think about President Sims?  *Answer:* Garison knew him before she taught at Winthrop, discusses memories of him; thought he was a good president; Garison discusses head of art department

00:56:24  *Question:* What was her name?  *Answer:* Ms. Annie Dillon; Garison discusses Dillon

00:56:45  *Question:* Do you remember any students that were outstanding?  *Answer:* Sarah Harriett, first president of student government; cannot recall other students, discusses Olympics/former Winthrop student who competed
00:59:08  *Question:* What kind of committees did you serve on while you were teaching?  *Answer:* None, there were not any committees; had advisees; discusses committees when she taught in Michigan

01:00:13  *Question:* Is there anything that you would like to talk about?  *Answer:* Afraid that Winthrop is losing prestige; Garrison discusses beliefs about Winthrop as an all-girls school

1:01:47  [no question] Garrison discusses love for Winthrop, Rippy discusses Garrison’s yearbook inscription

01:02:31  *End of interview*