

Interview with Helen Tarasov Reed
November 27, 1992
Dorothy Joynes, Interviewer

Dorothy: Helen, it's a great delight to not only know you through AAUW experience and hearing you on tape, and having been able to get that for the University file and also for the church file, but to find pictures of you in the Pack Library where you were teaching Russian, and hearing that you are a translator of Russian, and that you have sailed to Russia on a sailing vessel. Before we talk about the church, I wondered whether you would tell me a little bit about your experience with the Country Day School, at the time. It is now the Carolina Day School. You were there in '59. Can you tell me how that came about.

Helen: Yes, we had some problems with our local school because the teacher wanted to move one of my sons up two grades because he passed all of the exams for the upper grade, for the 4th grade, and the principal was very averse. He thought they should just keep giving him more work at the same old level. Since he had made a 99 grade on all of the achievement tests at the end of 4th grade, although he was in 3rd grade, we decided to look into other possibilities, and Country Day did test him again, of course. They said they would have to test him by their standards, and they said he was really ready for 5th grade. So Ronald, our older son, entered Country Day that fall. At that time Country Day School was still carrying on a lot of its old traditions of a lot of the work being done by volunteers. I'm not much of a gardener or anything like that, and it occurred to me that maybe they would be interested in having young children taught some foreign language. By that time, of course, there was a great deal of interest in foreign languages in our country.

Dorothy: Jane Bingham was there at the same time, wasn't she?

Helen: I believe so.

Dorothy: She was teaching French.

Helen: Yes. So I talked to the headmaster and he agreed with alacrity for me to teach a multilingual program starting in the pre-first, which would be like the kindergarten, but a little more serious in its approaches, and I would come in for 50 minutes every day and teach them. Then we brought that up

to the lower grades too. After I did that as a volunteer the first year, Marche Bill, the headmaster, asked me if I would consider doing it as a staff member, so I did become a member of the teaching staff.

Dorothy: And you were there for how long?

Helen: I was there for thirteen years.

Dorothy: Were they able to encompass the Cyrillic alphabet and the pronunciation?

Helen: Well, that was the idea, that very young children have an enormous range of pronunciation that they can maintain if they're given it early, and, of course, as the children grow a little bit older they love strange alphabets and things like that, by second or third grade, and they like games where you do math in different languages. It was very interesting to watch the children catch on to things on their own. I remember even in the pre-first a little boy asking me after we talked about pencils and balloons and so on and different colors in four different languages, he said, Mrs. Reed, in French they don't say a red balloon, they say balloon red, don't they. He caught on to the word order as significant in a language without any prompting. That kind of discovery -- it's not reinventing the wheel when little children do it. It's a discovery that they make which, of course, stretches their minds or shows how their minds can operate independently. The same thing occurred with math lessons and geography in the different foreign languages. What I taught was German, French, Spanish and Russian, and they did not get confused by it. They just had fun out of the multiplicity of sounds and patterns of language. Obviously they didn't learn a lot of the language, but one of the things that experts like Penfield have written about is that of you get your foreign language sounds early, that is before the age when you start doing more reasoning than memorization, they remain with you as a background and you can always recoup them.

Dorothy: This was most unusual, wasn't it?

Helen: Yes, it was very experimental, but we were quite satisfied with it, and maintained the program for a number of years, through the 6th grade. Then since the school started serious foreign language study in 7th grade, we stopped the multi-language at the 6th, and then the children went into either French or Spanish as a fulltime foreign language study when they entered

7th.

Dorothy: Was there any follow-up done on this?

Helen: A little. I never really had the time to do maximal follow-up, but some children got very involved. There was one boy who eventually went to one of the military academies and majored in Russian.

Dorothy: Very gratifying. You taught them a different way of thinking too.

Helen: That's one of the things we wanted to do because little children accept the idea that ball red is the way you say it in French. Later on when they start having grammar they might have problems, but it stretches their minds very definitely, even if they don't accomplish a lot with language per se. It's good thinking training.

Dorothy: That's a wonderful experience. Have you had any contact with any of them since then?

Helen: Oh, yes. I run into them. Living in a small city like Asheville you run into your former students. One of the girls is now a stockbroker, and others are musicians and all kinds of activities, so I do keep in some touch.

Dorothy: That's an incredible experience to have as a child.

Helen: Then I also introduced a course in what used to be called civics, based on my League of Women Voters experience, and also a terribly poor course I had had in high school myself in which the teacher drones through the textbook aloud. I introduced a field work course for the civics or government and we visited the courts and we visited various enterprises. We found that people were most generous with their time and arrangements. When one class got interested in banking questions we were invited to one of the banks, and were able to ask questions of specialists. So we did a lot of various work that I think was also very useful for them as future citizens. This was for seniors, of course.

Dorothy: Wonderful opportunity. I wanted to ask you about what you are doing with your Russian right now.

Helen: I am a freelance interpreter and translator. I have been doing that

since I quit teaching in '73. The State Department, right about that time, started a program of contract interpreters instead of expensively enlarging each language department, which would have been very costly, when interpreters were sometimes needed only occasionally, or several interpreters of the same language might be needed, say, when Soviet scientists came here. They established a contract interpreters program, which continues to this day, and they would call you -- they tested me, of course -- and then they would call you and ask if you were available for such and such a date, so it really was a freelance program, and I did quite a lot of simultaneous at that time because many of the conferences and conventions and meetings of Soviet doctors were at national institutes of health, and there were many other scientific conferences all over. So I continued that until I left the country for two years in '84. I'm still on the list, but I don't do as much of that now.

Dorothy: You went to China.

Helen: Yes, in '84.

Dorothy: And what did you do there?

Helen: Taught advanced English at engineering schools.

Dorothy: How did that come about?

Helen: I had always wanted to go to China since I read Pearl Buck as a child, and during the war, of course, with the generals we had women were not welcome -- that is American women were not welcome to go abroad. Then this program came up and I signed up and I was accepted, and I continue on the listing now. But I also have a lot of other -- as a freeland, you see, I am not required to work only for the department, so I continue having a lot of other contacts and do both translations, which is written work, and interpreting. I did a lot of written translations during the years my children were growing up for American Enka Corporation, now BASF, and for other companies in the western region of North Carolina.

Dorothy: Many people say you were born in Russia. You were born in Toronto.

Helen: Right.

Dorothy: And did you learn all of your Russian from your parents?

Helen: Yes. They were well educated people so that I got quite a high level of language learning, all the way through literature and, of course, advanced grammar and composition.

Dorothy: So you really carried an extra load of education because of this interest that your parents had of passing it on to you.

Helen: Yes. You know when you are a child you take things for granted, so didn't think of it as a load particularly. It was an activity.

Dorothy: You had a whole course that you were getting.

Helen: Yes, I did it in summer and it was a lot of fun to be learning a language, and I was later studying French in high school. I had some excellent teachers, and the other languages, as again Penfield pointed out, children who are bilingual, who have two languages before they are 8 or 9, usually can learn further languages very much more easily.

Dorothy: Your parents you described on the other tape, but would you on this tape also give a little thumbnail sketch of your mother and father. They sound like most unusual people.

Helen: Well father was a graduate of Moscow University, well before the first world war. He got involved in the student movements of 1905 and 1906, which wanted to liberalize the autocratic government, and mother was a student at the University, although I don't think she would have been allowed as a woman to take a degree, but she studied there and met my father there, and eventually they had to leave Russia because of the -- after the reaction in 1908, and then left separately. Mother went to Paris for the year abroad, which was very customary among young ladies at that time; and my father and a brother of his went to England, where father did some graduate work in engineering. They corresponded and eventually she went to London and married him in 1911.

Dorothy: Did they live because it was politically safer to leave or . . .

Helen: They had to leave.

Dorothy: So this was a guise, the year abroad for your mother, it was really a guise to leave.

Helen: It was a cover. As I say, she and father were corresponding. They were young people, but not teenagers or anything, so they married in England, where my brother was born, and then Father got an offer to be an assayer at a Canadian owned goldmine, which was in Wisconsin, so they moved to Toronto, where I was born, and then eventually as conditions changed and jobs changed they came to the United States, and I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, where father worked for General Electric for the rest of his adult life, until retirement.

Dorothy: And your brother, where did he go?

Helen: He moved to -- again, after several depression jobs, he finished Case Institute of Technology as an engineer, and ended up finally in the Worcester, Massachusetts area. He lived in Framingham for the rest of their lives. He married and had two children.

Dorothy: What is his name?

Helen: Leo Tarasov. He died in '89 of a heart attack.

Dorothy: You met your husband in this country.

Helen: Yes, in the Smokies. He and some friends of his were fishing and I was hiking alone, and they thought maybe I'd lost my hiking group, so we talked a little bit and they invited me to share their fried chicken picnic that their mothers had fixed, and later I returned to Washington, but he followed up with correspondence. During the war he was in a medical corps, served in New Guinea and the Philip
pines, and after the war we married.

Dorothy: And then he came to Enka.

Helen: He had been with Enka before his army service. They took him back, of course, when that was finished in '45.

Dorothy: That was your introduction to Asheville.

Helen: Yes.

Dorothy: Before we get to the church, I wonder if you could tell me about getting into Russia because you knew Russian, and when did you first go to Russia?

Helen: I was at that time a member of Delta Kappa Gamma, which is an honorary teachers' organization, and they had a series of so-called seminars abroad because one of the professors, a Dr. Reid -- no relation -- felt American teachers need more exposure to what their colleagues in other countries were doing. He was with Kent State University all of his career, so he arranged these trips, and I got in on one of the early ones to Russia in 1972 or 3, and that was my first trip, and meanwhile I had signed up with the State Department, but I thought this was a very good opportunity for me to verify that my Russian was up to date, and that Russian in Russia hadn't changed a lot over the years, so I did meet people there, including the superintendent of public schools in Leningrad, and he assured me that my Russian was perfectly normal and it hadn't changed. He made a little comment, remember this was in the days of Berkeley, he made the little comment that sometimes when he was in the high schools in Leningrad he was horrified at the vulgarity of the language that young girls used. It would have been unheard of, he said, when he was a youth, but basically, of course, the Russian I used with scientists and other engineers and so on, for whom I was interpreting, was standard, and caused no problem for them to comprehend or for me to comprehend them.

Dorothy: Because languages do change.

Helen: They do, but not that much in some areas.

Dorothy: Then you went back again.

Helen: Well, I took some other trips. I went in 1982 with a friendship force group from North Carolina, which was a very interesting tour. Then in 1989, quite by chance, at a meeting of women's future plans at Asheville High I learned of a schooner trip that was being planned by environmentalists and peace groups in Moscow and Massachusetts, so I wrote to ask for details about it and was hired -- not hired really, I mean I was accepted as one of the interpreters. The trip was on an 156 foot

schooner, the Tavega, which had been built in Hamburg as a Pacific racing schooner back in 1929. It had undergone a lot of different changes and uses. It had been used as a training ship sometimes for Outward Bound in the Maine-Massachusetts area. Anyhow the ship was chartered, money was raised by volunteers in both countries, and we had a Dutch captain since the Tavega at that time was nominally under the Dutch flag, and we had 23 Americans and 22 Russians, both men and women. All of us had real lives apart from sailing, but this was an adventure that was undertaken jointly, and so I and the other interpreter, not only interpreted orally but did some translations of documents. We had classes and tutorials for Russians who wanted to improve their English and Americans who wanted to learn some Russian, and we had seminars at which we interpreted almost daily on various topics that were of interest to all of us. The ship's doctor was a well-known specialist in emergency medicine, and he grabbed at the chance to go on this. Nobody was paid, you understand, but we got our trips free. Most of the people who didn't have professional status like the captain and I and others, we did our jobs and the other people raised a lot of money before they were allowed to be sailors or crewmen or what have you.

Dorothy: What was the purpose of this?

Helen: It was to check the environment and to promote relationships between the two peoples. That was the peace movement, but it was also very strongly environmental. We did all kinds of water sampling in the North Atlantic and even fog sampling to find out how polluted the moisture above the oceans is. We kept a careful record of all the animals and birds we saw, and, of course, we did all the ship's duties. Everybody was out of his field. The first mate was a 6 1/2 footer, who in real life wore a coat and tie all the time because he was with the State Department. He wore only torn jeans and cut-offs on the ship. One of the mates, the second mate, was a Russian who had a commercial license as a captain although his work, he said, was as a bureaucrat. He normally worked in Leningrad as head of a bureau. So many of the people were amateur sailors -- they loved sailing. One of our men runs a very fine lodge in Washington State, but he loves sailing and so he signed up, and the Cossacks on board made him an honorary Cossack.

Dorothy: What an experience, and with a background such as yours it is not surprising that you are a Unitarian. Not only that, you've been a Unitarian since 1952 by the records, and you indicated maybe before that. You have

been chairman of the board twice and your husband was chairman of the board once, and I wonder if you will start back in 1952 and tell me how it all started. Were you always a Unitarian?

Helen: No, my parents were reared as Russian Orthodox, of course, but father was pretty much a agnostic, and mother had no use for the church she'd grown up in, so we actually were not church members. Occasionally I attended some church with friends, but never regularly. I never was a member. Mostly I guess it was for funerals. After we were here our daughter was born in 48 . . .

Dorothy: Your daughter Ann?

Helen: No, Diana. She was a very sociable little girl, and in 1950 we had Ronald, whom I had mentioned previously, and at that time, of course, this was very much a bible belt area, and my daughter, as I say, was a very social sort of person, and I did not want her getting pulled into traditional fundamentalism, so when I heard about the attempt that was beginning to organize a Unitarian Church, I was interested. My husband had grown up a Baptist, but he had always had questions that nobody would answer, like when he was asking the elders about the trinity, they said, well nobody understands it. You just have to take it by faith. And my husband had a very critical sort of mind and he wanted a better answer than that, so he was perfectly interested, well, willing that we look into this Unitarian Church. I went to some of the preliminary meetings at which Ruth Melcher was one of the leaders, Ruth and Wood Melcher both, and they were really probably the driving force that got the church organized.

Dorothy: So it was a small group that would meet in different houses.

Helen: At first we met at the Congregational Church. They let us a room for brown bag supper and meetings, and when the group was organized we did meet at various houses, the Cornells for instance, who were Universalists, George and Muriel. Very strong activists. They had a big house in the country. We met there. We met and many other houses, depending on weather and the number of children, but it was becoming increasingly difficult as the membership grew, and with a lot of small children, and we were eventually allowed to use the downtown YMCA, which often lent its space on Sundays to churches that were burned out or, as in this case, was being organized. We were there for five years until, I think,

the YM began suggesting that we ought to find us a place since we seemed to be set up permanently, and that's when we began looking for a location.

Dorothy: That's hard to do, isn't it?

Helen: Yes, because it was still a small church, 40 or 50 people, adults. Then we looked into a lot of things, and we lucked into a house, a former mansion that had been converted into apartments at 120 Vermont. The apartment use apparently had led to its becoming somewhat shabby, and it was empty at the times. I suppose there had been several sales back and forth as usually happens with older houses. Of course Vermont Avenue is a beautiful street, with most houses very well cared for. This particular ex-mansion had a huge yard and beautiful trees and so on, so there would be room for young children to play.

Dorothy: You had another child just about then.

Helen: Yes, in 1953 Andrew was born.

Dorothy: Now you really had an impetus to find a home for your children's church.

Helen: Oh, yes. And the Poultnes, who lived at their house also on Vermont Avenue, were a very strong and relied on family. Relied on, I say, when things went wrong with the house or some emergency occurred we always called on Norma, because we were only a few houses down the street. Anyway we discussed the purchase of a building which didn't need too many modifications.

Dorothy: Can you describe the house?

Helen: Yes, it had been made into a four apartment house and that worked out very well. There was a good kitchen so we could have our church suppers and things like that, and there were a lot of rooms so the different age groups from the church school could meet separately, and there were enough rooms for special purposes, for a temporary office and so forth. At that time we were still using members of the congregation to give the talks -- oh, wait a minute . . .

Dorothy: Did you have a minister by then?

Helen: Yes, we hired Daniel M. Welch, who was a retired Unitarian minister. At the time he was living in Knoxville, Tennessee, working a night clerks job at a rather shabby hotel because in those days, you may remember, ministers were not entitled to social security, but the law had just been changed, so he came out of retirement and became our minister. He was a delightful person, lots of sense of humor and very understanding. He handled the several jobs of a minister excellently. He was highly thought of in the community after he settled in. He participated in some of the interchurch activities. He gave very interesting sermons and probably was the factor, if you want to call it that, that established our church as a permanent institution.

Dorothy: You were still a fellowship?

Helen: Yes, we were a fellowship, but we broke all the rules on that because we hired the minister and bought a building. It would not have been recognized as a church, but we did become a recognized church under his ministry. That was one of his last actions.

Dorothy: So he was there from the very beginning then, wasn't he?

Helen: Yes.

Dorothy: And took the fellowship all the way through. That's quite a job. There's a lot of work that goes into that.

Helen: Oh, yes.

Dorothy: Can you tell me about some of the ways that you got yourselves known in the community and what kinds of activities you had in relationship to the community, because you were kind of a far out group.

Helen: A lot of the members were active in the community anyway. Some of us had helped organized the League of Women Voters. Many of the men were well known in their particular professional groups, and some of the women too. Mrs. Cornell, for instance, was a kindergarten teacher at St. Joan of Arc, and, as I say, Daniel Welch was a very outgoing, warm sort of personality, and he joined some of the interfaith, interchurch groups, in which the ministers met for lunch every week or so, and created a very

favorable impression, so there was always a strong participation in the community. It was not just people coming in from outside to set up a church. The Melchers, for instance, would have been with his company for decades, I guess, so there was not a sense of strangeness at all about it.

Dorothy: So most of the people that joined in the beginning had been in Unitarian churches beforehand.

Helen: Many had been, but also many came in from other churches gradually, and of course we have always had quite an influx of northerners, and the Unitarian church has been much stronger in the north, so when they found that their was a Unitarian fellowship here, or a church, many of them came to see and stayed to become members.

Dorothy: You had the interfaith people also from the Catholic and the Jewish faith.

Helen: Well, some individuals, of course.

Dorothy: Did you find that mixed marriages were often brought to the Unitarian church?

Helen: Yes, very often. For instance, the Druizes were strong members. She became a teacher at Country Day too, and she and I used to have these joint classes in which the -- she was a biologist -- in which we got our students to realize that scientific things still have to have money, and that government things have to have a purpose, and so on. We got them into strange fields for the youngster. The Druizes were both biologists and they were both strong members of the church in the early years. Later, of course, they were transferred out of town, as happens to many, many people in our mobile society.

Dorothy: You had people drawn to Asheville for many reasons, but the church must have been a large factor.

Helen: For some. For one thing we did not -- unlike many Unitarian churches we did not close up for the summer. Since it is a tourist town and at that time it's big season was summer, we continued having services all through the summer, and that of course attracted many people who were maybe visiting just to see Asheville, or they may have been visiting to see if

they wanted to retire here. So we got a certain steady trickle, if not more, that way in the early years. In later years it became much more of a stream as retirees here invited their retiring friends to come down and visit.

Dorothy: Tell me some about the plans, of getting the whole structure together. You started with a group of people that wanted to meet. You found a retired minister who, because of the social security rule, was able to be paid a minimal amount and receive social security for the first time. But you had all sorts of hurdles. One that I read about was the fact that your boiler blew up on a very cold day. Tell me about that. Were you in church that day?

Helen: Yes. It was still while we were on Vermont Avenue in that house. We came -- it was rather a snowy day, so the attendance wasn't very large that day, and we were freezing, and it turned out the boiler had gone bad. That was one way to raise funds because the president of the congregation -- I think it was Norman Holbrook, but I'm not sure -- asked for pledges for a new boiler, and \$1200 was raised within ten minutes. Of course people like that usually pay their pledges. It's not show off, it's a pledge.

Dorothy: What were some of the other obstacles that you had and hurdles that you had to work out. You had to work out by-laws, you had to work out the whole structure.

Helen: Like any struggling new organization we counted on a lot of volunteerism. Mrs. Welch, the first ministers wife, donated a huge number of very beautiful china cups that she had accumulated over the years.

Dorothy: So you had china cups to drink out of.

Helen: And of course we had occasional social suppers. We decided we had to become less casual and more organized one evening when seven of the main dishes brought in were baked beans because we didn't have a chairman to consult, and as you grow you realize certain bureaucratic approaches are really much more efficient, and we began to have a chairman to contact people and ask them what they were planning to bring. Probably our major problem with the building was pigeons which roosted in the attic and couldn't be chased out. My husband talked to some of the agricultural people and they suggested soaking a lot of dry corn in whiskey, so my husband sacrificed a pint of whiskey and a pail of corn. The pigeons loved

it, but they didn't fall down to be caught in nets. They just staggered around and stayed in the attic. Eventually we had the forest service or the agriculture department, somebody came out and trapped them all and took them away. That, of course, was a minor thing, but amusing to everybody.

Dorothy: Pigeons in the attic I think is a lovely touch.

Helen: I guess they had settled in during the time that the house was standing empty and probably between a seller and a buyer before us. We didn't know anything much about that. We were growing steadily and, of course, necessarily there were some financial problems, but also some financial solutions when you're growing. You have more people pledging and paying. We had a lot of people with young children, and nobody to donate great big chunks of money, but we managed to build up a capital building fund of \$3,000. We had some excellent treasurers, starting off with Russell Wooden, who was also the organist. We had an old-fashioned wooden pump organ and he produced very fine music on it. At the same time, he had accounting training so he kept beautiful books.

Dorothy: And he wrote a history.

Helen: Yes. He was retired from his job. He lived a long time after that.

Dorothy: The organ was retired. Tell me what happened to the organ.

Helen: Eventually when we got a gift in the new church building on Edwin Place, we got a gift of a new organ, a real professional organ, my son said he wanted to have that pump organ. So he bought it for a few dollars from the church, which was glad to get rid of it. It's now in New York in his apartment as one of his musical instruments.

Dorothy: The church was a big part of your family.

Helen: Yes. My youngest son used to watch the organist play, and Mr. Wooden -- he would ask Mr. Wooden how the notes were produced and Mr. Wooden explained it, and then Andrew would play the same notes and Mr. Wooden suggested he ought to be taking piano at the age of 7. Andrew was delighted so he got him into music at an early age on his own desire, not because we thought it was the right thing, but because he wanted to.

Dorothy: So it works that way, doesn't it.

Helen: Yes. Then you don't have practice problems because he was eager to have a piano and practice on it.

Dorothy: Did you have a choir at this time too?

Helen: People who liked to sing sang some. It was pretty much a congregational effort at this time. There weren't really that many people to do separate singing, nor did we have the kind of space. The old living room of the main apartment served as the place for the services, and there was a smaller room in back that made a nice alcove for the organist. Obviously the building wasn't geared to church, but it worked very well for several years.

Dorothy: What did you do with the children?

Helen: Various members of the church taught different classes. Mrs. Cornell particularly was a trained teacher, and Ruth Melcher and some of her daughters. The Cornell's daughter, who was 14, taught some of the little children, so there was a variety of volunteer work. I think anybody who has organized anything like that knows how much volunteerism goes into it, and people used their talents for those purposes. We had help from Boston, of course, where the center of the Unitarian movement is. We had visitors from there who came and discussed the organization of the church school. Some of them became very well known. So we had help of that kind. Of course the Unitarian-Universalist church -- at that time it was the Unitarian church -- furnishes church school books, lessons, lesson plans, and all the usual things that are needed for a Sunday School.

Dorothy: You had the Beacon Press material.

Helen: Yes. And that was followed pretty much. Because we were still fairly small we tended not to make a rigid age distribution of children, but we combined, say, the first, second and third graders if necessary. Whatever the number of children happened to be in that particular year.

Dorothy: This is side 2. Helen you were talking about the changes that took place in the church.

Helen: Yes. Well, we were growing steadily. In 1962 Mr. Welch, who by that time had been our minister for a number of years, retired for the second and final time, but before he retired he was able to celebrate the granting of church status to us by Boston, and we called Mr. Gross to be our minister after Welch retired in '63.

Dorothy: Was there much change in the relationship with the parishioners and the new minister?

Helen: As always, of course, there is. Mr. Gross was a much younger man with two elementary school children. His wife was very active in the alliance. She was originally from Germany but very much a good Unitarian and very sociable. Dick Gross was liked organization and administration. He was not as well geared towards -- he also liked to do counseling and a lot of people from outside came to him for counseling. His sermons were not as popular. He was considered to be rather pop type of thing, read a lot from current magazines and so on, and the congregation was not impressed by that. Also he was very much into administration and, of course, in the Unitarian church, which is congregational in structure, the laymen are supposed to handle that, so there was some friction developed. In addition he really wanted to do social work so he left not only the church but the ministry and joined the North Carolina Heart Association where he did very well, and then later they moved to Pennsylvania where he had a job in the governor's staff in the field of social work, and I think he was much happier doing that. Meanwhile, of course, we had been building up our capital fund. In 1967 Carl Sandburg, one of the most prominent residents of the Hendersonville area died, and his widow asked our church to conduct the services for him. They had not been members of any church, and she and her daughters joined the Unitarian Church. They were quite active and very generous as well. To succeed Mr. Gross, we got another retiring or retired minister, Tracy Puhlman, who was a great success. He had been minister in central Detroit for many years and had had the guts to stay in the center city church rather than moving out to the suburbs. He was made several offers. He had decided to have a lighter schedule than what you get in an inner-city church because he and his wife were getting on in years. They had a son working in Durham and so they decided among the places they were invited to come to our church. Again we did not follow the routines recommended by the Boston church. Several people knew Puhlman personally from having been Michiganders and some of them invited him personally. Everybody was quite enchanted with his sermons and his warm personality

and his relaxed attitude towards the difficulties that any rising church has. This was the year, in 1968, that the national churches, the Unitarian and the Universalist, were merged, and so we changed the name of our church to the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Asheville.

Dorothy: What was the purpose of that. What was the need, that they were both small and they thought the same anyway?

Helen: They were smaller than the mainstream churches and they really thought, that is, their philosophy, their religion, was very similar in attitude so it seemed that the separation was a little bit out of date. This was an era when a lot of churches were merging because they realized that they didn't have all that much doctrinal difference. There might be a slightly different emphasis but no real disagreement on doctrine, so that, of course, took a number of years behind the scenes for the churches to organize. Anybody who has been through some of the other church mergers knows about that. We did not have any problems with merging since several of our most active people, like the Cornells, had been actually Universalists originally.

Dorothy: Was there a Universalist church in town at the time?

Helen: Oh no. There hadn't been. There had been a Universalist community in western North Carolina years and years earlier, just as there had been an attempt to set up a Unitarian church by the elder Robertson, the one who came from Ohio to set up the Champion Plant in Canton, and it was the Robertson's who, having learned about our Asheville church, offered us a site of essentially several lots on Edwin Place and Charlotte, opposite the Manor. By that time we were feeling quite crowded in the Vermont Avenue church and decided, after due congregational discussion about could we afford this and how we would raise the funds and so on, we decided to go ahead with accepting the gift property and a three year matching fund offer by the Robertson's to try to raise the money and, of course, we knew we could sell the house on Vermont Avenue for some amount of money. A lot of organizations were started, the Unicorns, for instance, which was started as an organization for the sort of young and middle aged married, but spread out to everybody who was interested. There was a very active social concerns committee, so the church was becoming quite well known, at least as a name. Geographically not so. After the church was built with the architect designing it being a member of our church, Bill Moore, it became very visible physically too right in the heart of town. Obviously the energy

of the congregation went largely to fund raising for awhile, but the size of the congregation doubled with the church being built, and a lot of younger people joined as they saw what it was and where it was, and visited just to see what it was. Mr. Puhlman, while of retirement age himself, was a very forward looking youthful thinking man, so there was no problem for the young people in our minister, who was most responsive and very friendly, eager, and also preached very good sermons. We had also in the 70's a considerable influx of retired people coming in from the north following their friends, as I mentioned earlier.

Dorothy: What were some of the functions at that time? Did you have the sharing dinners?

Helen: I couldn't say for sure. I think we may have had that somewhat later as the church had grown so much that a lot of people weren't too well acquainted with fellow members of the congregation, and the sharing dinners seemed to be a good way to spread acquaintance.

Dorothy: And potlucks.

Helen: Yes, those were always considered necessary. The groundbreaking on Edwin Place was in 1971. The section for the religious education was postponed temporarily because of the costs, but the basic church, the sanctuary and a social hall, were built right away. It was felt that by postponing the religious education instruction we could have a better quality of building. The first service was held in 1972. The Sandburg family made some generous grants. Other people who had retired from the north were also very generous, so that we had much less of a struggle to have the kind of church that we wanted, and which apparently has been very favorably received by the public, of natural stone and lots of light, a breezeway type of connection between the social hall, which was named Sandburg Hall in honor of the Sandburg women, and the sanctuary. Of course when one person makes a gift very often somebody else thinks of a gift, so we got out electric organ, and we had space for a choir, decent offices for the minister where he could meet with people and also do his work, and not have to move all his files every time somebody came in. This had been the situation at Vermont. A group was begun called the Noonlighters. Under Mr. Puhlman's guidance and later his successors, a lot of additional activities developed. Again we had the space for them. We also had space that could be rented out to organizations, that found it a very agreeable place.

Dorothy: There's a lot of that, isn't there?

Helen: Yes. We did not stint on the kitchen because it is a very important part of church life, the special dinners, the various gatherings that are held. Unitarians are notorious for always having coffee hours after the service, which is a time that this rather scattered congregation has a chance to become better acquainted, to meet, to talk. Sometimes committee meetings are fitted in there since many of their members were driving in from Hendersonville and Waynesville and other places at some distance, even from Old Fort.

Dorothy: You had other groups meeting there also.

Helen: Yes. We would charge a nominal rental because, of course, there are expenses, not so much of cleanup as electricity, heat and so forth. But many people seemed to find it a very welcome place. It's in the heart of town, almost.

Dorothy: Easy parking.

Helen: There's plenty of parking space, and that was something we knew in advance we would need and have. One of the things that was done for the church -- we had to tear down some of the rental houses on the lots that were donated to us, but at that time they were not fully rented and there were no particular problems with people finding affordable housing. Remember this was in the early 70's. So the first service in the new church was again one of the Reverend Tracy Puhlman's last services there, and he retired for his second time and moved to Boston where he continued being interim minister for almost any church that needed somebody for a particular Sunday.

Dorothy: Will you speak about interim ministers?

Helen: Interim ministers now are strongly recommended for churches that are looking for a new minister. I don't think they were as commonly known, say 20 years ago, but now it is the policy of the Boston church to recommend that a church between ministers should hire an interim minister who can look into what problems there might be, what plans the church has, so that the church committee on selecting a minister isn't pressured to find somebody to take the first possible choice, but to have time to really look

into the market, shall we say. Since then when we have had changes of ministry we have had interim ministers. At that time, as I say, it was less common here in the south, partly because we had the same minister, just as the Charlotte church had the same minister for 20 or 25 years, so that wasn't such a common problem.

Dorothy: What were some of the social activities that the church carried through within the community? You had mentioned the sit-ins. Will you tell me about how those were organized? That was awhile back.

Helen: That was in the mid fifties after the Greensboro sit-ins to force the dime stores and other cheaper shops to open their coffee bars to their black customers. At that time it was the policy that they couldn't sit down because they might be sitting next to a white. And the blacks had no choice to go to a more expensive restaurant. Many of them did not have that kind of funds, and they felt entitled after they had done their shopping to sit down and enjoy a cup of coffee, so that was the origin of the student movement in Greensboro that finally integrated the coffee shops, with considerable disorder. The idea came that we should be doing the same thing, but it was done very much behind the scenes, and a lot of Unitarians participated in this. Ann Boyce, the wife of our second president, was very active in the YW, where Eunice Adams was the executive secretary at the time. Eunice had served in the Philippines as executive secretary, so she knew a lot about racism at various levels, and she had been instrumental in integrating the YW board, one of the first boards of that kind of organization to be integrated in Asheville. This had happened quietly and effectively back in the early '50s too. So committees went, largely at the YW, and they included of us Unitarian women, and the whole process involved a lot of delays because the dime stores were managed by people sent from New York and other places, and the managements were very, very afraid that they might do something to disrupt things and lose money. So we did some educational work among the management levels and eventually in about '56, without any fanfare the three dime stores at the time, Woolworth's, Newbury's and Kresse's, had their coffee shops integrated. The black community recommended some very nice students and other people to go and order coffee, or whatever, and a number of people from different churches, and particularly from the Unitarian church, also went at that same set time and sat down next to the blacks without causing any commotion or acting nasty, and the waitresses had been ordered to serve the blacks without making any comment, as if it were normal. So it turned out to be normal.

Two days later the newspaper, which had a very liberal editor, also a member of the church, Walter Adams, published a little squib from the Associated Press saying that the coffee shops in Asheville had been peacefully integrated two days earlier, and that was the first a lot of people knew about it. The buses, by the way, were integrated in a similar fashion. This had nothing to do with our church, but when it was decided that the buses should stop seating blacks from the rear, the signs were simply taken off in the bus. There were no signs saying blacks will seat from the rear and, of course, some of the more alert people noticed that and began sitting where they pleased. Again there was no problem, no publicity and no problem.

Dorothy: Did you know anything about the change of the water fountains in Pack Square?

Helen: That occurred about the same time, I think. I don't know that anybody was particularly involved. That was already going on at national level, and I think probably some of the black organizations were more instrumental in doing that, but again in Asheville it did go through quite quietly. Some of the restaurants were integrated quite unexpectedly without difficulty. One of them, a black came in to pick up some carryout things, but while waiting he was tired, he's been working all day, so he sat down on a stool and the waitresses had been instructed not to cause any trouble, so instead of telling him that he couldn't sit there, she asked him what he would like to order. That was the integration of one of our better restaurants, so he ordered something even though he wasn't hungry.

Dorothy: Aren't you glad that you lived through this?

Helen: Oh, yes, it was really fascinating, as jobs opened up. The Winner's Store, Harry Winner, which was a family owned department store, was active in -- well he didn't exactly promote it, but he began hiring qualified black graduates of commercial courses to work in the offices of the store, and then when pressure began from the federal government to banks and others that they must hire some blacks, they began stealing his employees because they could pay them more. But he said that's the way it should be. People should be able to advance, so some of the banks hired away his best secretaries, and he hired some more black people to work there, and was really quite effective and instrumental in some of the easier aspects of integration.

Dorothy: All of this was happening while the church was growing.

Helen: Yes. We have had over the years a few black members. They are always welcome, but of course most blacks, like many whites, are members of a church already and they're not going to leave their church just to provide token membership in another church. But over a period of time we have had a number of black members, and then they have moved to other cities.

Dorothy: I was thinking about your two ministers that came in after retirement and found themselves doing more than they probably had ever been able to do in moving a fellowship to a church and then a church to its own home within their span of retirement. You had other ministers coming in who made other changes too. Who were some of the other ones after Puhlman dedicated the church?

Helen: That was in '73, and then in 1974 he retired as I said to Boston, and we called Hammond who became the minister. There were some disagreements on social action issues, whether the church should act as social action or whether we should continue, as had been the case, of a lot of individuals within the church doing social action. But has changed over the years everywhere, I think. The church does take stands on social action more. Hammond went in for introducing a number of social activities, or perhaps it was just that with a new minister these activities developed. Friday night potlucks were started. The Noonlighters began, which has become mainly a retired peoples lunch group once a month with a program. Because it's at noon, lunch, obviously people who work can't very well join that. We had one very difficult period when it was found that the treasurer had embezzled \$10,000. It had to be kept quiet in a way, I mean there wasn't much one could do, and that again was a time of growth and we realized that we couldn't be as casual and just trust every fellow member of the congregation, that there should be auditing committee and a serious audit conducted annually. Obviously with a big church we had insurance, we had bonding. I don't think we'd ever had a bond set for treasurers before, but from then on we began bonding whoever the treasurer was. I think that is a symbol of the growth that occurs. We developed a summer fair that attracted a lot of people from outside the church, and, of course, the meetings that other organizations hold in our church often people of these other organizations to visit the church, because they read some of the

publicity things and the notices on the bulletin board, and they say, well, this sounds interesting and I'll come. And we have had some members come from that. We undertook one -- having managed the financial strains of a larger church, we undertook some social responsibilities. We adopted a Vietnamese family that we continued helping with for about a year until they found some connections in New Orleans and moved there. We continued our connections with other people. We had a memorial garden dedicated and, of course, many of our very active, productive members continued passing on. There were quite a few deaths reported during the 70's of retirees, who had been working practically full time to do things for the church as volunteers.

Dorothy: There was a problem also about attracting enough younger people to take their place.

Helen: There had been, but with the new church building that seemed to almost solve itself. We had an influx of new members at the time. We also, because so many new members came and people didn't get to meet each other personally, we started a system of so-called care rings, which were sectional meetings of people who happened to live in the same area, like west Asheville or north Asheville, or what have you.

Dorothy: What do they do?

Helen: They are supposed to get acquainted with each other and have occasional social meetings, and make sure that any newcomer who happens to be living in that area is welcomed and made a real part of the church family. We did hire some professional fund raisers in '77. We were still planning to do a lot of expansion. Our social hall was minimal at the time, and we needed to do a lot of work below the social hall for some of the church school classes, although they have expanded into another house, Jefferson House, that was one of the houses that Robertson had donated. So with a lot of discussion, or after a lot of discussion and argument, professional fundraisers were hired to raise extra money. There is always, as I think anybody who has done this for any kind of organization, a lot of disagreement as to whether fundraisers really raise enough extra. In this particular case they were fundraisers with a great deal of Unitarian experience. These particular fundraisers were very sympathetic and they raised three times our annual budget. Apparently they very well earned their commission. Among the problems that arose, there had been talk of the

people from Hendersonville organizing their own fellowship or church, and at that time too many of them were too experienced, they were retired, they had worked on new churches, they had been in all kinds of things and they really preferred driving 20 miles to getting involved in starting another church. In the last two or three years that has worked because younger people in Hendersonville participated in it, but we stayed in very close relationships. In 1977 there was an anonymous \$10,000 donation, and we have never known whether it had any relationship to the embezzlement of two years earlier.

Dorothy: That will always be a question mark, won't it?

Helen: Yes. The Unicorns, which had started, as you know, as more or less a social club were full of younger vigorous people and they began raising funds and matched some of the donations very successfully.

Dorothy: That was for the addition to the building?

Helen: Yes. And it was felt by that time that the church with several hundred members really couldn't rely on part-time office help, members of the church who worked maybe half time or helped out, and regular consistent office administration began also in 1977. We were on our feet financially by then and therefore could provide budgets that would have a secretary who could really do a professional job, and an office manager and so on, because, of course, the larger your membership the more work of that kind there is, and it happens that the secretaries and the office managers we have had are members and active members of the church, but are paid for their professional skills.

Dorothy: You had so many jobs in the church. Which were your favorites?

Helen: It's really hard to say because they were such different eras. I was chairman of the board when very few women in town were chairmen of church boards, so we could always point that out. I remember one year when we had a number of men nominated for the church board, some newcomer arose and said, why are there no women. And we were able to say that we have had women, we have had women chairmen, it just happened that this year nobody wanted to spare the time for that, and the men did, which was true. Probably my most unfavorable job is being on the nominating committee, having to call people and see if they will consider certain jobs, and so on. I have worked on the by-laws committee, which is

always interesting. I've taught some parliamentary law, so by-laws are something that I enjoy rather than suffer from. I have taught in the church school; the 7th and 8th graders are always fun to teach because they have such extraordinary questions, as anyone who deals with that age group knows. My husband always enjoyed teaching in those grades too.

Dorothy: He was president of the board, and then you were president of the board about ten years later twice.

Helen: Yes, well the reason I was elected the second time was that my successor, Adrian Rost, was suddenly in the middle of his term transferred to Europe by his company immediately, and since only half the term remained it seemed logical to ask me, who was familiar with the whole thing, to complete that term, and I was willing to do it because a half year isn't quite so overwhelming.

Dorothy: And your children went through the nursery school and the high school, all the way through?

Helen: Yes. They were all quite active in the so-called Liberal Religious Youth, which used to be the national organization of the high school age students, who were Unitarians. One of the big meetings of the Liberal Religious Youth was held at Blue Ridge, the YM buildings, for many, many years.

Dorothy: You said "used to be". It is not called that any longer.

Helen: No, Liberal Religious Youth disbanded and now I think they have a different name, but I'm really not too much in touch with the formalities of it. But at any rate, the children were all active participants and eventually chairmen of their year, until they went to college, and of course in college you have a totally different setup. People go off and some remain in a church, many quit for several years.

Dorothy: You said something about the Blue Ridge meeting. Was that a meeting place for the LRY?

Helen: The LRY rented the facilities. Blue Ridge Assembly is a YM center near Swannanoa -- halfway between Swannanoa and Black Mountain. It has since built a much nicer building, but many, many organizations,

including the United Nations Association and other organizations, some environmental ones, have met there. It's available for non YM groups, and very much favored by many people. It's a lovely climate and very nice facilities, and the LRY did meet there for a number of years.

Dorothy: And the church goes there for weekends, is that right?

Helen: No.

Dorothy: Not that one. The Mountain?

Helen: The Mountain is west of here, way out to the west. I think that may have been the site where the Universalists Church once was. Incidentally, I mentioned the Robertson's and, of course, Mr. Robertson, the elder, Rueben B. Robertson, had been a Unitarian in Ohio and he had tried in the 20's after he came down here to start a Unitarian group, but apparently that fizzled. There wasn't the interest at that time and so he had dropped it, so apparently he was very pleased when he found that we did have a flourishing Unitarian Church, and eager to help.

Dorothy: And this was started again after the depression, when things were beginning to look a little bit better.

Helen: It was after the war, in the 50's, and that was when there was a considerable influx into Asheville of people from all over, servicemen who had married local girls or women who married local men that they had met in service, so there was a great influx of new blood at that time.

Dorothy: Your life has been a varied one and you have given freely of your time to so many organizations, and it's wonderful being able to find out more about what you've done with the church as well as what you've done with AAUW. We're almost out of tape. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about? Is there anything that you would like to add?

Helen: I would add that the Unitarian-Universalist Church has always believed that actions speak louder than words, and that merely preaching something doesn't make it so unless people act on their beliefs.

Dorothy: You've been a very active lady.

Helen: Well, most of my fellow congregation members have been. There are a lot of very interesting lives of people in the church.

Dorothy: Thank you for sharing yours. And I have a tape for each one of your children, so thank you very much Helen.