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Reedy, Elizabeth Oral History Interview: Class Projects

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For Dr. Huttar

Doug Mulvaney

INTERVIEW WITH DR. REEDY

JANUARY 22, 1977

On Saturday, ~~Doug and Lena~~ went out to Lakeshore Drive to interview Dr. Elizabeth Reedy. Upon our arrival, we were met by four large black labrador retrievers, our first encounter with Dr. Reedy's menagerie. Expecting to find Dr. Reedy in her house, we instead found her out in the barn where a lamb had just been born. Our impression of Dr. Reedy at that moment was that she had a very simple lifestyle. We found this later ~~of~~ to be correct. After spending some time in the barn waiting for Dr. Reedy, we followed her into the house. The house itself is beautiful! It is constructed of aged wood. We were later to learn that Dr. Reedy herself designed and built it along with help from some of her friends. After noticing what a large and beautiful house she owned, we could not help but see many cats occupying chairs, ^{and} tables, where they were leisurely sprawled out asleep. She has ten cats in all. We settled down in the living room.

Our interview opened with small talk which concerned the house and the grounds. We soon found out that Dr. Reedy not only has ten cats but also has four horses, seventeen sheep, ducks, geese, hens and chickens. Our talk shifted to her simple lifestyle which includes growing and preparing her own vegetables. She also raises most of her own meat in the way of lamb and chicken. After such beginnings, Doug asked why she was on leave from Hope College, where she has taught English the ¹² previous year. She quickly replied that she was not on leave but had really quit her position. She is still a part of the Hope faculty, but is now connected with the Rural Humanities Program for the next two summers. We were interested in what the program consisted of, so she expounded.

Due to malfunction of tape recorder caused by cat chewing on cord, we were unable to create a proper transcript. This is from memory.

The program teaches self-reliance through such activities as growing ones own food and preparing it, and learning how to construct building.⁴ In other words, it prepares the student to make-do with what he has at hand. Hopefully this program will take place on a farm in Wisconsin which Dr. Reedy is trying to acquire. Grading for this course, according to Dr. Reedy, would be easy because as she puts it, she will be living with the students 28 hours each day. By having such close contact with them, she will be able to tell who is really trying and who is not. She also made an interesting comment to the effect that every student would fail at something in the course of the program. This she feels would be the most important learning aspect of the course in that one learns from ones mistakes and tries again. She feels that this program is very beneficial because it touches on a part of reality which institutions of higher learning do not. She feels, interestingly enough, that Hope is basically unchanged and a little backwards in its ways, but even that now is changing.

We were interested in finding out a little about her personal life and background. Dr. Reedy grew up in Philadelphia, but she always had the longing to live on a farm. She is now a Quaker, but has not always been so. While in Philadelphia, she grew up having many Quaker friends. She joined a Quaker meeting in Wisconsin and is still a member of this meeting. She told us that there was a meeting in Grand Rapids which she could attend, but she feels that she can worship God just as well on Sunday where she is. We asked her about her faith and what made it different from other faiths. She told us that Quakers believe in the simple life. Quakers are also very individualistic in what they believe in that some Quaker^s believe in the virgin birth while others do not. They have no set doctrine. We asked her how she felt about the Reformed Church since she had been affiliated with Hope. She replied by stating that there were many in the Reformed Movement she respected. She went on to say that many of the freshman students at Hope coming from strong religious backgrounds tended to be at times very narrow-minded and hypocritical. But the redeeming factor is college itself which seems to mellow these freshman by the time they are seniors.