

University of Illinois Student Life 1928-1938
Oral History Project
Grace Green Clifford – Class of 1931
Ottawa, Illinois
May 25, 2001

START OF TAPE 1 SIDE A

Ellen Swain: This is an oral history interview for the University of Illinois Archives. The interviewer is Ellen Swain, the narrator is Grace Green Clifford an alumna from the class of 1931. We are at Mrs. Clifford's home in Ottawa, Illinois and the date in May 25, 2001.

I wonder if we could start by you just stating your name and birth date.

Grace Green Clifford: My name as it was then?

ES: Or right now, sure.

GC: Grace Green it was then, and I was born in 1909 in Ottawa.

ES: Where, where were you from?

GC: In Ottawa, right here in Ottawa.

ES: In Ottawa.

GC: Ottawa, Illinois.

ES: Did you go to high school here?

GC: Yes, the whole thing.

ES: What did your parents do?

GC: My father was a lawyer, my mother had taught country school for a few years, before she was married. [*Cough*] Excuse me.

ES: Did you have brothers and sisters?

GC: I had one sister and one brother.

ES: How important was education to your family?

GC: Very important. Yes, everybody went to college. My father was a lawyer. He hadn't even had a high school graduation. He was a farm boy, and he had to study by himself and with Mr. Foster. Do you remember, have you ever heard of Mr. Foster yet? Mr. Foster was the head of

schools here in Ottawa, and he helped everybody that needed an education, and my father went to him every level, and he tutored him and gave him classes and then he passed the bar exam.

ES: I see.

GC: So, that was the way he got to be a lawyer, so they were very insistent that all three of us go to college.

ES: Now where did your siblings go to school?

GC: At the University.

ES: At the University. Why did you choose the University of Illinois?

GC: Because it was the cheapest I guess.

ES: Had other family members gone there?

GC: No, nobody had gone there.

ES: I wonder, did you want to go to college?

GC: Yes.

ES: So it wasn't something that just your parents wanted?

GC: No, no. Most, most of my friends were thinking of going to college, it was, oh in those days that wasn't usual, it wasn't usual at all.

ES: A lot of your classmates went on to school?

GC: Yes.

ES: Did they go to the University of Illinois too?

GC: No, though a few went to the University of Illinois, yes, but they seemed to scatter all over.

ES: What did you want to do with your degree, did you have something in mind when you went?

GC: No, not hardly, I just went. I liked school, and I was glad to go and I had a wonderful time.

ES: Had no career in mind?

GC: No career, didn't know what I wanted to do, until, well not until I graduated I didn't. I didn't know then. I didn't really want to teach that was just—

ES: You just kind of fell into it?

GC: Yeah.

ES: What was your major, education?

GC: No, no I didn't even take any education at the University—English and philosophy.

ES: Do you remember any of you professors?

GC: Professor Weirick [Bruce Weirick], and another one that was, he had a beautiful voice, he read poetry to us. I can't remember his name, but he did have a lovely poetic voice for poetry. He read German poetry that I had no idea what it was telling about, and yet I just loved to listen to him.

ES: Do you remember anything about any classes you took, anything stand out in your mind?

GC: Well, I really haven't had time to think, but right now, I don't think of anything unusual at all.

ES: How big were your classes usually?

GC: They weren't terribly big, I don't think. We filled a room, but I don't think there were people standing or anything like that.

ES: Were students in the late 20s close to the professors on campus? Did you socialize with them outside the classroom or—?

GC: Well I didn't, and I don't know of anybody that I knew did, but that doesn't mean they didn't. I really didn't know too much about what was going on.

ES: Were you able to go see them if you had a problem?

GC: Yes, they always had a time that you could go. I don't know whether I ever did, but they always had a time posted that you could go.

ES: What do you think the main strength or weakness of your education was? Does anything come to mind, something you really appreciated about your academic training, or something you missed out on?

GC: Well, it didn't give me any purpose I admit. I just went to enjoy myself, and I did. And, of course I wanted to do something that would make me, be able to support myself.

ES: Were you happy with the University of Illinois?

GC: Yes.

ES: You didn't really have any other schools in mind that you wanted to go to?

GC: My best friend went to a college in the East which was very expensive and I wanted to go with her, but I knew that was impossible, so that was the only other thing, I wouldn't have thought of anything else.

ES: What do you remember about rules on campus for students? Were there things you couldn't do?

GC: I suppose there were, but in those days I never heard of any student unrest or anything like that. Now if there was any, then I never knew of it. In fact, I walked through college [*laughter*] if anything was going out here, I didn't know it. Or I suppose people would have talked about, I'm sure there was nothing special that went on.

ES: Do you remember Thomas Arkle Clark?

GC: I remember the name, certainly. I don't remember what he looked like, remember this was 65 years ago.

ES: Sure, sure. Also, Maria Leonard was the Dean of Women.

GC: Yes, yes.

ES: Did students have much contact with her?

GC: I think they did. I mean I think you could. I'm sure that her office was always open to students. I don't think anybody in our house ever had to go to her, for any reason, but they certainly could have.

ES: Do you remember if students liked them, if they were popular? The deans I'm talking about.

GC: Yes. I really don't know whether they were. I know they were certainly everybody knew the names. I don't think that they were overly strict. I never heard that they were.

ES: Uh-huh. What about drinking on campus, this was during Prohibition?

GC: Well, there was some. I never saw much of it, because I wasn't interested and I wasn't going with that kind of people, but I know that a lot hid flasks just to show off.

ES: Oh yeah?

GC: And when they went to games, of course, it was quite the thing to take a little nip here and there during the game. But, I never heard of anybody, or, they may have been expelled, or, I don't remember now.

ES: Your friends didn't do that?

GC: No my friends didn't.

ES: Were there strict rules about dating on campus?

GC: I don't think there were any strict rules, no.

ES: You had a curfew.

GC: Yes you had a curfew, and in those days you didn't have men in the house, I mean you didn't live with them. There weren't men and women in the same house. I think that yes they had to be in by 9 o'clock or something that, I don't know just when.

ES: How involved were students in religious activities?

GC: In what?

ES: In religious activities? Did they belong to the—?

GC: I think so. I think so. I can't really remember any. I know nobody in our house was especially religious I know.

ES: Okay, do you remember the President of the University? It would have been Kinley [David Kinley].

GC: Oh yes, McKinely.

ES: Did students have much contact with him, or much opinion about him?

GC: I don't think so. I wouldn't remember his name until you said that [*laughter*].

ES: Well he must not have had a big effect.

GC: Yes.

ES: Tell me when you first came down to the University, what were your impressions?

GC: Scared to death.

ES: Were you, why was that?

GC: It was big. This high school about 400 when I went to school here, and the University was 10,000, and I don't, what is it now 24, 25?

ES: 30 over 30 right.

GC: About 10,000, could have been 30. I didn't go home until Thanksgiving, and until Thanksgiving I was living in a daze. I didn't know what I was doing. I didn't know where I was going, and I didn't know anything. After I had been home once and got settled back and forth, and came back and from then on I loved it. But, that first year was pretty bad.

ES: What was hard about it? Was it hard to find your classes or—?

GC: It was hard to find my classes. The classes, they weren't too much bigger maybe than what I was used to. Yes they were bigger, they were bigger and—

ES: Did they offer you any help?

GC: I didn't ask for any, I didn't. I was in a daze, I didn't do anything. I joined the sorority just because I was lonesome and maybe I might never have met anyone otherwise, but I made friends there, and it was small enough, it was a small University, and I had one friend, and I mean she was Ottawan, and she's the one who got me in there, and from then on I was okay. All I needed was some friends that I knew. It was the first time that I had been away from home I was only 19 when I went, in fact I was only 18 when I went 18, 19, 20, 22, no it was 19. Anyway, I was very young, 19, very young, and in those days we were all younger than that.

ES: Did your parents drive you down?

GC: Yes, yes.

ES: So it was hard to say good-bye?

GC: Yes, and they didn't come down at all to get me until Thanksgiving. And I telephoned a couple times, but that was all. We wrote letters.

ES: Where did you first live, when you first moved down there?

GC: On, well it was a little house. They were building the sorority house, and this house was an old house on Green, not on Green Street. It was in Champaign, it wasn't in Urbana. It was right across from Red Grange. No that was, Red Grange had just graduated, and he was still...we lived right across the street from Red Grange's fraternity. Now I don't remember what street it was on.

ES: Did you live in a rooming house, a boarding house?

GC: Yes. For the first year and a half, I guess, and then our house was done, and we moved in, and that was in Urbana.

ES: So when did you join the sorority?

GC: Right away.

ES: Right away? And that was, that was through a friend?

GC: Uh-huh.

ES: That was already down there?

GC: Uh-huh.

ES: What did you have to do, what kinds of things did you have to do to join?

GC: Oh, you had, no lets see you had to be a pledge for a year. Oh, and my grades were () the first year, so I didn't even make it, the first semester. I had to wait another whole semester. After that, they went up all right. But the first semester I didn't know what I was doing.

ES: Just had a terrible time adjusting.

GC: Yes, yes I had a terrible time adjusting. And my granddaughter had almost as bad I'm afraid. She went to North Central, and there she had two scholarships. She graduated Summa Cum Laude, but she came home every weekend. I'm afraid our family is sort of like that. The other granddaughter, oh she's out making friends with everybody. But Tracy and I—

ES: Once you got in the sorority, did you have an easier time making friends and meeting people?

GC: Yes, yes.

ES: What kinds of things did your house do together?

GC: Oh we had all kinds of activities. Every holiday and every other thing, we always celebrated things. And we made up little plays and we made up this (). We were always doing things. I liked to do that, so I was good at that. I remember one of the things, when I was still a pledge, we had to go out and sing, "Our stunts a flop, our stunts a flop, we thought it was good, but it fell down plop," or something like that [*laughter*]. That kind of thing.

ES: Did you give these plays just to each other in the house?

GC: Uh-huh.

ES: I see, I see.

GC: Yep, just for amusement.

ES: What was your routine like, did you all eat together?

GC: Yes, it wasn't a big sorority and we had a fairly large living, dining area. And we had a cook, Mrs. Higgins, I can almost remember, Higgins or Higston, something like that, she was a nice women.

ES: Did she live there with you?

GC: Yes she did.

ES: In the house?

GC: Uh-huh she lived in the house.

ES: Did you have a housemother too?

GC: Yes we had a housemother too. The first housemother we had everybody liked very much, but she retired after the first year I guess. And then we had to hold on for a second one that had to be approved by...I guess the University gave you a list of approved people, anyway the one we got, we never did, unfortunately and it was too bad. She was a nice enough women I guess.

ES: What kinds of things did the housemother do? What was her job?

GC: I don't really know. I know she was supposed to see that everyone was in at the right time and lock the doors, see that no one was swearing I suppose.

ES: Do you remember the dances and the other social events?

GC: Yes there were dances, at first I didn't go to any. I didn't know anybody. Afterward, I guess I did, but I can't remember much about them. I guess they didn't make much impression on me, the one I went to.

ES: Did you socialize with the other fraternities?

GC: Well not that I remember. I don't remember that we did. We may have. If so, it's gone.

ES: How did the Greek students, the students involved in the sororities and fraternities, get along with the independents or the people who weren't involved?

GC: I never knew that there was any difference. I know the sororities were always looking for someone that they wanted that always needed new people, and they were always looking for new blood. There wasn't much student descent in those days, troubles.

ES: Did it give you prestige to belong to a sorority?

GC: I don't know that it did. It just gave you a base, that's all.

ES: It made the University smaller.

GC: Yes, yes. It gave you family.

ES: You were involved in some other organizations to, the YWCA?

GC: Yes.

ES: Do you remember how you got involved in that?

GC: Oh this friend of mine who was from Ottawa was very much interested in that, and she got me a little bit, though I never did very much, just a little.

ES: Were you involved in any other organized activities?

GC: There was always this place that they went every week. There were teas, somebody gave teas.

ES: Oh the Woman's League?

GC: Is that what it was? And it seems to me that everybody had to take turns for that tea.

ES: Was that held in the Woman's Building?

GC: Uh-huh.

ES: So you did attend those?

GC: Yes, I always went to those, though you got cookies [*laughter*]. Everybody was starved by this time. I still remember, some of the people that were giving the tea would go out to get refreshments, and when they got to the door, everybody was there, that was in the house. Very polite.

ES: What kinds of things did you do for fun? Where did you go with your friends or where are the places students went to meet?

GC: Where did we? I don't remember, I really don't. I don't think I ever did any. They had all kinds of things like bowling, things like that, but I don't think I ever did any. Did I ever take up any of those? You'd think, now I look back on it, I wonder what I did do. I suppose I did a lot of things that I can't remember.

ES: Did you have to study a lot for your classes?

GC: I flunked algebra my first semester, and I took it again, and I flunked again. No, no, no, I passed it with a D I think. But my first year my grades were awful, as I say. I couldn't make the sorority, I had to wait another year. I was a good student really, but—

ES: You'd been a good student in high school?

GC: In high school yes, and after my first year I got good grades. But that first year was pretty bad. My parents were mad. They had expected better grades certainly, but they didn't say anything.

ES: Were your siblings there at the same time you were there?

GC: No my sister is four years younger and my brother is 9 years.

ES: So you were the first to—?

GC: I was the first one to go. And then my sister came out right in the Depression. Well dad couldn't afford to send her to school. I got a job right then, I got \$90 a month, \$90 which was wonderful pay, at the Depression. And I would go home and gave her \$50 a month, and Dad could supply the rest, so she could go onto college. She had gone Drivener College in LaSalle for 2 years, and the second year I had a job and I could help her. Then when my children came along she helped them.

ES: Oh that's neat, when did she graduate?

GC: Four years after I did, whenever that was.

ES: '35?

GC: I suppose about then, yes, and she got engaged while she was down there, and she married the man that she met down there.

ES: Do you remember when you were first feeling the effects of the Depression? Do you remember the Stock Market Crash when you were in school.

GC: Yes, yes.

ES: Did people talk about that?

GC: It was a big thing, and well I had always been on a very strict...we never did have much money. And after the Depression, Dad had often to take jewelry and things like that for pay, instead. He didn't have to take any cows or pigs, but he did have to take jewelry sometimes for pay at that time. That was just a few times. We managed to get along very well.

ES: Was it more expensive to be in a sorority?

GC: Yes, yes it was. But it was over the last semester. I think the Crash came my last semester.

ES: '29, fall of '29.

GC: '29, oh I didn't graduate until '31, that's when I graduated. Well, maybe the Depression didn't hit Ottawa until a little later. Yes I remember talking about it, certainly. It didn't really hit me until I graduated and found out there was no jobs.

ES: What did you do? Did you look for teaching jobs?

GC: Yes.

ES: Before you graduated?

GC: And then, like I say, I guess I just didn't look too far. Everybody else said they weren't getting anywhere, so I just gave up and tried here, and as I say I love teaching 2nd grade and I got used to it. I'm good at just giving in and liking what I have to do.

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ES: You said you did go to sporting events?

GC: I didn't mean that I went, I meant we had them.

ES: You had them.

GC: I went to football games of course, and I think that's about all.

ES: Was Homecoming a big deal.

GC: Yes, yes, yes, everybody decorated and had the big things, yes.

ES: Did you have contests to decorate the different houses?

GC: I think so, I think so. I know there was a big thing, I think it was a contest.

ES: Did alumni come back for Homecoming?

GC: Yes, uh-huh, yes.

ES: Was it difficult to afford some of those things? You said you really didn't notice the Depression too much until '31?

GC: Yes.

ES: '30 and '31? Did that affect attendance at things like sports and theatre?

GC: It didn't. I didn't never notice that we were...I didn't ever go too much of anything but football games. I wasn't interested in other sports, but I never noticed, I suppose it must have.

ES: Did you know how the Depression was affecting other classmates? Did you talk about the economic situation or—no?

GC: Not that I remember, not that I remember. It was something over there.

ES: It wasn't something that affected you on a day to day basis?

GC: No, no.

ES: You talked a little about this, but did your parents have to sacrifice by the early 30s to keep you in school?

GC: I suppose they did, but they didn't say anything about it.

ES: Did you have a job while you were in college?

GC: No.

ES: No? Okay—

GC: Never had any job in my life except for teaching at Hill School.

ES: Now that was up in Ottawa.

GC: Yes.

ES: Near Ottawa.

GC: Yes.

ES: Did you want to come home or was that someplace that was open?

GC: Well, I decided, yes that it was, I could save more. I got paid money if I lived at home, without any expense, so I decided it was much senseful to live at home, and I did. Dad got me a little Ford to drive out to Hill School because there was no other way to get there.

ES: And tell me again how you got into teaching, why you chose that field?

GC: Because that was the only thing that was left I guess...just turned into it.

ES: You said you took some courses after college to get your certificate?

GC: I went over to this Southern Illinois, I don't know just, what I think advertised a class that I only had to take one semester.

ES: I see.

GC: Just one semester in grade school, you know teaching grade school.

ES: And then how long did it take you to find a job after?

GC: Well not very long, because this is right here in Ottawa. One year I just stayed at home and did nothing, that was horrible year. But the next year I had a job.

ES: That was the year after Southern, after you came back from—?

GC: Yes, yes, yes.

ES: I see.

GC: Well no, let's see. I don't know just when I went down there. I think maybe I could get a job if I had this thing, and I knew it, and so I went down there first, and then came back and I had the job, and then—

ES: And then you looked for a job after the year?

GC: Well, no I think that they promised me one. Oh as I say, it's a long time ago. I can't remember the details. But I think maybe I knew I had job if I got the certificate.

ES: I see. I've got a couple more questions about school again?

GC: All right.

ES: Do you remember if there were black students on campus when you were in school?

GC: Uh-huh, uh-huh. There was one sorority, and we went there once, our sorority. I suppose they thought they were being big headed or something. I don't know, and they never went again. We had a giant meeting that was all.

ES: Just your sorority and—

GC: This one yes, this one Negro women group sorority, they were very nice and everything, but, that was all, just that one time.

ES: And you don't know why that came about?

GC: No, I don't know a thing about it, except I just know we went. Probably I knew in those days, but—

ES: How were black students treated? Do you have any idea?

GC: So far as I know there was no trouble at all. I never heard of any, although maybe that was one reason we went. I don't know, just maybe there had been some.

ES: Do you remember Jewish students on campus?

GC: Well if there was any difference I never knew anything about that. In fact I never knew, couldn't ever tell which was which, so I probably wouldn't have known.

ES: What about Catholic-Protestant divisions at all?

GC: That was a little more evident. Our sorority had been anti-Catholic originally, and by the time I got there it was not. Well I'm afraid that some cling to it sometimes. It had dropped all of that, because you have Catholic girls or anything, but they knew, people knew before. I didn't realize it for quite a while. It had been made from, oh let's see, it had been Masonic. You had to have a Masonic relative to belong before, but it had been dropped for sometime. So, originally, I suppose there must have been Catholic and Protestant I think, but not by our time.

ES: You didn't have any rules about excluding Catholics from the sorority when you were in?

GC: No, no, nothing like that.

ES: But as you say, you didn't have much contact with the black fraternities and sororities at all?

GC: No we didn't.

ES: Were they involved in like the Panhellenic conferences and—?

GC: No, if they were I didn't know it. I didn't know much of anything that was going on. I'm afraid you made the wrong trip for nothing.

ES: Oh no, no. What about national events going on, do you remember what was going outside in the world? Did you keep in touch with, with—?

GC: Oh, I remember the President that was elected. I remember because his wife's name was Grace. That's all that I know of. No I can't remember which one was he.

ES: Coolidge?

GC: Must have been so.

ES: Did you listen to the radio or keep up with the paper?

GC: Did we have radios? I suppose we did, certainly we have a radio, we had them. Yes, we kept up and we had newspapers yes, we always got newspaper. We always got the Champaign one and I don't know about the *Tribune* or not. But we always got the Champaign paper.

ES: But you didn't keep too close tabs on what was happening outside?

GC: Only the presidential election, that's what I would—

ES: The big thing?

GC: Yes, that was the big thing.

ES: Were students on campus involved in student politics? Was student government strong?

GC: I think so, I think so. Yeah I'm quite sure it was because there was a lot of talk about getting different jobs and things.

ES: Switching gears here a little bit but, what did you wear to class?

GC: We didn't wear pants. We wore skirts and dresses. Dresses mostly, sometimes skirts and sweaters, but I think mostly dresses.

ES: Did you have much contact with Champaign-Urbana or did you stay on campus mainly?

GC: Oh I stayed on campus, but whether other people...there were a few people, I think, that dated girls from the town. You hear about that every once and a while, oh he's dating a girl from town. But, that's about all that I know of.

ES: Did you go through Commencement ceremonies?

GC: Uh-huh, yeah.

ES: What were they like?

GC: Well it was hot, and we had on these black things, and it was really hot and as soon as you got through getting your diploma you took your thing off quickly because you were roasting. I never knew too much about graduation either. It was quite a long, quite a long ceremony.

ES: Where was it held?

GC: I don't remember. We stood out in the hot sun for hours in a long line waiting to go in and then you went inside, I think. Yeah, I guess, yes, I know we did. So then we had a lecture, of course. A man spoke, told us all what we were going to do, all the things we were going to do in

the future which we didn't do. And, yes I remember it was a very interesting speech as I remember.

ES: Did your parents come?

GC: Yes, yes.

ES: Was it a big day?

GC: Yes, big day.

ES: How do you think your U of I education has influenced your life, later life?

GC: Well, it did make me grow up a little bit more. I should have grown up more. But by the time I had taught school for five years, yeah, five years, before I married Charles, I think I finally grew up.

ES: Well thank you. Do you have anything else?

GC: I'm sorry I couldn't give you anything more sensible.

End of interview.