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Mary Jo Wiley

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Profiles of African-Americans That Helped Shape Wright State University

Interview with Mary Jo Wiley

Date of Interview: September 2, 1992

Interviewer: Emmett C. Orr, School for Professional Psychology

Interviewee: Mary Jo Wiley, Center for Labor Management Cooperation

[Note: Video and audio frequently skip throughout the interview and are perceptibly out of sync after 4:00]

Emmett C. Orr: Hello and welcome to another series about profiles of [African] Americans— [tape breaks] —[Wright St]ate University. I am [pl]eased that Professor Alyce Jenkins has asked me to be guest interviewer. Today, my— [tape breaks] —Mary Jo Wiley. Welcome Mary Jo, I just wanted to say welcome.

Mary Jo Wiley: Thank you Emmett.

EO: We appreciate the opportunity to talk to you about contributions you've made and other African Americans have made to Wright State. As we begin— [tape breaks] —I'd like for you to tell us a little bit about yourself and what your role is, rather, with Wright [State] University. What— [tape breaks] —current— [tape breaks].

MW: I'm a senior secretary. I work at the Kettering Center in downtown Dayton. I've been with that organization for about the past six years. The center is— [tape breaks] —it's called the Center for Labor Management Cooperation. We're a grant— [tape breaks] —we've been given— [tape breaks] —one-half county area— [tape breaks] —we do is try to help labor and management learn to work with others as equals. It's an interesting field; it's new and it's an exciting and challenging place.

EO: Right. Well, we're gonna have plenty of opportunity to talk about those experiences currently and what your role is with the university. One of the things, though, that I'm reminded of is that you've been with Wright State for quite a while. I don't want to— [tape breaks] —since the beginning, but it ha— [tape breaks] —since the beginning.

MW: Right.

EO: And can you tell us a little bit about that [exp]erience and how you [be]came involved— [tape breaks] —Wright State University?

MW: Well I say I grew up here. I came here the day that they opened Allyn Hall, which as you know is the first building.

EO: Right.

MW: I was hired in July of that year and Allyn Hall was being completed. I was assigned to the University Library— [tape breaks] —periodicals were being received. I worked in the second basement [of] the Dayton and Montgomery County main library. So I was down there with the crackers and all of that that were saved for the world war crisis that we were expecting at the time. We received quite a number of periodical— [tape breaks] —moved to Allyn Hall— [tape breaks] —quite a collection already.

EO: So then you were actually part of Wright [State] University before it was Wright State University as we know it today.

MW: That's correct.

EO: Can you— [tape breaks] —now, Wright State Univers[ity]— [tape breaks] —[under]stand it star[ted]— [tape breaks] —as a branch campus I bel[ieve] —[tape breaks] —other st[ate] universities. Can you— [tape breaks] —do you know about that—?

MW: Well, truthfully I was employed by Miami two years prior to [the] building of Allyn Hall. Let me back up a little bit. [tape breaks] —teenager— [tape breaks] —saw the job in the Dayton library at Wogaman School— [tape breaks] —and worked there two days a week, and that's where I got my library experience. Many many years later, when I [was] a young mother, my husband was getting out of service and I was concerned about our income. I looked at the classified [ads] and saw that Miami University was looking for— [tape breaks] —[libr]arian at Ro[th] High School. So I applied for that job and worked there for two years. That was the predecessor to— [tape breaks] —as I worked there— [tape breaks] —both Miami University and Ohio State were offering what they called extension courses in the area. And then some civic leaders had worked to bring a university to this area. — [audio cuts out] —So when I came to work for A— [tape breaks] —Allyn Hall— [tape breaks] —at Miami. So yes my employment precedes even Allyn Hall by two years.

EO: Alright. Well see, one of the things that Profe— [tape breaks] —is doing with this series is putting together— [tape breaks] —African Americans who were involved with the contributions, and one of—and you bri[ng]— [tape breaks] —interesting and a very ear[ly] — [tape breaks] —from that standpoint that you were here from the very— [tape

breaks] —What involvement [in] the commu[nity]— [tape breaks] —in those early days with Wright State University, that either the community at large or more specifically the African-American community that you might be aware of?

MW: Well, to my way of thinking there was very— [tape breaks] —involvement for the community, particularly the minority community. I can remember that right away that Reverend Lucas of Bath— [tape breaks] —board mem[ber], and he was followed by Arthur Younger and then finally by Sarah Harris. But I don't— [tape breaks] —thought much about the community. Plan was for us to become another Ohio State, and we s[poke] of ourselves as big busi[ness] rather than an institution that needed to look out— [tape breaks] —and get the community involved. Therefore, since we weren't interested—maybe we were but this is my impression—that we did not seem to be interested in the majority community, then certai[nly the min]ority community was overlooked.

EO: Well I think based upon what your current— [tape breaks] —where your c— [tape breaks] —ment is and what your current responsibilities are, we can see that— [audio cuts out] —chang— [audio cuts out] —from that general— [tape breaks] —if you wi[ll] — [audio cuts out] —about the way a university operates to more the current model, and we'll talk about that— [tape breaks] —what I'd like for you to do now is to tell us— [tape breaks] —about the varieties of roles or depart[ments] that you might have worked in at Wright Sta[te].— [tape breaks] —started in the library area but— [tape breaks] —a little bit since then. Can you talk a lit— [tape breaks] —

MW: Yeah. Let me back up and say that one of the interesting things about when they opened Allyn Hall was there was— [tape breaks] —even out here. And it's hard to remember and imagine, but the librarian used to shuttle me and another employee down— [tape breaks] —stop which was Third and Murray. And it was a number of years before— [tape breaks] —bus service. Inside the building, we were all excited, it was new, and everything was very modern, and we all seemed to feel that we were here for a— [audio cuts out] —big purpose. Everybody worked together. The distinction of faculty, staff, all of that was kind of blurred at that time— [tape breaks] —because we were all working towards one— [audio cuts out] —We were small enough that we had one break area— [tape breaks] —go first and take their break, and the wo[men]— [audio cuts out] —[f]ollow. When we'd come in the men would get up and give us these same seats and we would sit down and have our break. So you know you really got to know everybody in the building. You— [tape breaks] —are you doing, and— [tape breaks] —

The portion of Allyn Hall that now— [tape breaks] —lounge served as the library and the lounge at that time. The portion of Allyn— [audio cuts out] —is the bursar's office and the registrar's offi[ce] — [audio cuts out] —was, that was all of the offices. All of your

services were in that little ar[ea]— [tape breaks] —And then the area of Allyn Hall that is now the administrative wing more or less served as your sciences area: your chemistry and other sciences were taught in that area. And the library was a two-story library.

EO: Okay.

MW: It was like a little dollhouse; it was really cute. So we were very— [audio cuts out] —we kept the library open six days a week— [audio cuts out] —staff members. So Mirka Ray, who came here with her husband John from Miami University worked a couple of nights, and we worked Saturdays. We wrote to— [tape breaks] —and kept the library open the whole time.

EO: See that must have been an exciting time around here from the standpoint of building something and having vision, if you will, and that feeling that you [went to some? 9:08]— [tape breaks] —see based upon the way the university has grown to this po[int]— [audio cuts out] —were right.

MW: Right.

EO: One of the things that has impressed me— [tape breaks] —your role with Wright— [tape breaks] —is ag— [tape breaks] —iety and a breadth of experiences that you've had. With my research, I was able to determine that— [audio cuts out] —are one of the first, how shall I say— [tape breaks] —one of the first persons among the classified staff, if you will, who served as chair of a major— [tape breaks] —search committee. Can you talk a little bit about— [tape breaks] —that experience? What was the— [tape breaks] —What was your experiences during that?

MW: Well the university was looking for an affirmative action officer and I was asked if I'd serve on the committee. Attended the meetings, as did a number of people that I knew. We entered one day into a discussion about who would serve as chair of the committee, and to my surprise almost everybody said, "Well you know I'm kind of o— [audio cuts out] —here; I just can't do it." And I believe it was Millie Waddell who said, "Well what about Mary Jo? She'll do a good job." And, as you said, no classified employee had ever served— [tape breaks] —like this, and I just didn't imagine that they would agree. But the president set ba— [tape breaks] —Kegerreis, set back and said, "Well why not? Let's go with it," and I was appointed chair. And it was interesting, we— [tape breaks] —more than two hundred applicants apply. I was in charge, you know, ordering all of the things that you do for a major search— [audio cuts out] —One of the things that I remember is that we interviewed so many people, and ate at Stouffer's so many times, we were bored with the menu. We were like, "Oh, do we have to eat that food again?" But it was very rewarding. We ha— [tape breaks] —Juanita Whirly Einhorn, who is still here as our Affirmative Action Office[r]— [tape breaks] —people

from around the U.S. make application— [tape breaks] —and it was a very— [audio cuts out] —interesting process.

EO: One of the—you're right. I recall now those times, and one of the positive things about it was— [tape breaks] —not only were you a role model for us— [audio cuts out] —for your professional area, and I— [audio cuts out] —[I suppose? 11:27] very well for you and your involvement in Wr— [tape breaks] —One of the things that Professor Jenkins— [tape breaks] —been able to discern through these series— [audio cuts out] —is— [audio cuts out] —involvement persons— [audio cuts out] —have had as it related— [tape breaks] —representatives, but can you speak now, as we come more to the current time, about what areas that you might be aware of— [tape breaks] —at the university is extending itself into the community that speaks to metropolitan co— [audio cuts out] —that Wright State is— [audio cuts out] —

MW: Well when we int— [audio cuts out] —[cu]rrent president, Dr. Mulhollan, I did have a— [audio cuts out] —sessions— [tape breaks] —was open to the— [audio cuts out] —reached out to the co— [audio cuts out] —and I have to give him cre[dit] — [audio cuts out] —having worked— [audio cuts out] —we now have the building down on W. Third. As I said I worked downtown. We have buildings in Yellow Springs and other places, and I do see a big difference— [audio cuts out] —to get the community to know that we're here. — [audio cuts out] —Center is contributing with bringing the shows that come here which bring the community into Wright State. I can remember discussions years ago where people that I knew did not know where the— [audio cuts out] —was. For years, people in the black community did not know that Colonel Glenn was— [audio cuts out] —Third Street, and they'd say, "Oh you work at Wright State. Well how do you get there? Where is it?" You know? And I'd go— [audio cuts out] —how you get here. I don't think that that's the case anymore. I— [audio cuts out] —the university. I would however still like to see our African-American students feel more at home, more a part of the university. I th— [audio cuts out] —something that we have to work on. And I think as the dollars given to the university become less—fewer—we've got a job to do.

EO: You mentioned that the attitude and the feeling that students have when their on campus, that's what our first mission is as a university. And I'm glad you brought that up because— [tape breaks] —at those lines were blurred and it was more of a family environment. Can you speak about how the students related to the faculty— [audio cuts out] —and more specifically, the role and the attitude that facul[ty]— [tape breaks] —se of color towards African American students when they came to the campus and what that experience was like. Or what did the staff try to do to make— [tape breaks] —welcome here as students?

MW: Well I do think we always had staff— [audio cuts out] —work towards— [audio cuts out] —campus, and— [audio cuts out] —that a number of them did not feel comfortable

here. And you could see some of our people reach out towards— [tape breaks] —out. I think of Eddie Sim— [tape breaks] —by name, and I can of— [audio cuts out] —office and seeing students— [audio cuts out] —she always took the time to talk with them— [audio cuts out] —was in need of someone to direct it. I can remember Carlotta Johnson from h— [tape breaks] —found. And I can remember that the choir received recognition under her tutelage, so— [audio cuts out] —reached out. In my own role, I've had student employees work for me throughout the years, and if they— [audio cuts out] —I think I always tried to put a little more extra— [tape breaks] —out of them and that other people cared that they were here. [stopped by 15:54]

EO: [audio cuts out] —other areas that I had wanted to talk with you about often. Well you represent a unique exp[erience]— [audio cuts out] —[St]ate University. — [tape breaks] —contributions that one ma— [audio cuts out] —to an— [audio cuts out] — person who is in the classified ser— [audio cuts out] —A: I know that Eddie Simms is an African American and so is Carlotta Johnson, and these are people who have functioned in ways outside of— [audio cuts out] —job descript[ion]— [tape breaks] — covered for people who were here— [tape breaks] —imes overlook— [audio cuts out] — doing a review of— [audio cuts out] —how it goes unrecognized.

MW: Well, [Alberta Blonde] is in Human Resources, and many is the time that I've heard people say how helpful she was to them when they began. Alberta has done virtually the same job for years, but I've heard people say that she really cares, that she really does a good job, that she's really there and knows all the answers. That's a real positive. I can't think of— [audio cuts out] —

EO: It's been very enlightening for me to hear and to learn some of the various areas and activities that you've been involved in since you've been at the university. I'm encouraged by the— [tape breaks] —speak a little bit about how you see the direction of the university going. What do you feel— [tape breaks] —things, from your perspective, that we as a university should— [tape breaks] —move into the year 2000?

MW: The biggest thing is to be all-inclus[ive]— [tape breaks] —the biggest thing we've got to not— [tape breaks] —survive. It cannot afford barriers. And a number of people come to Wright State not by choice but they— [tape breaks] —you of the fact that their families cannot send them some other place. A lot of these people are borderline. I don't ca— [tape breaks] —borderline. When they come he— [audio cuts out] —terble, they will slip through that big cr[ack] — [tape breaks] —for this university. I talk to a lot of people and see that a lot more people are feeling that this is their institution, but by the same token I still talk to people who feel that— [tape breaks] —being here— [tape breaks] —which has got to change.

EO: Well if one spoke to y— [tape breaks] —their enthusiasm would change because I've been very encouraged by the comments and the idea that you've suggested or shared with us today. Can you— [tape breaks] —talk to us a little bit about how you see your— [audio cuts out] —future as it relates to Wright State University?

MW: Well my plan is to leave Wright State at the end of this fiscal year. So in June of 1993, I do plan to retire. But it's like cooki— [tape breaks] —think I will always be an advocate for Wright State and I will always remember it fondly and I will always encourage people that you can get a good education here. My pla[n]— [tape breaks] —get out of nine-to-five gamebut I do plan to— [tape breaks] —In fact my husband and I work with a junior golf group, and that means that we're interested in— [audio cuts out] —cation, and of course has— [tape breaks] —so I think that my relationship with Wright State will continue. It will be informal, but it will continue.

EO: Well very goo[d]— [tape breaks] —We're saddened to know that you'll be leaving us, but that is part of the reward for working many years and having, more or less, paid your dues as it were. And so we look forward to— [tape breaks] —to us and work with us in the future. As we conclude, though I did want to ask if— [tape breaks] —that you have received or recognitions that you have received while you've been at Wright State?

MW: Well— [tape breaks] —your regular awards, but one thing— [tape breaks] —who have been here— [tape breaks] —[re]ceiving my five-year award at about y— [tape breaks] —followed by my ten-year award, and then— [tape breaks] —as I receive awards, I'm always in that group that is the first to receive them. So we are— [tape breaks] —act as the pioneers for awards, but other than the regular "thank you"s for having done a worthwhile job, I haven't received any other awards.

EO: Oh okay. Well, what I want to say to you is that we're very proud of— [audio cuts out] —Wright State University, and I'd like to take this opportunity on behalf of Professor Jenkins to thank you very much for sharing your experiences with us about Wright State from the very beginning— [tape breaks] —

MW: Thank you for the invitation.

EO: So again I'd like to say thank you, Ms. Wiley.

MW: Thank you Emmett.