

Oral History Interview with Dr. Elizabeth Chard
Conducted by Angela Baker, June 3, 1993
Transcription by Denise Beaubrun

AB: Okay, lets start with a little bit of background information on you. Could you state your full name please?

EC: Elizabeth A Chard.

AB: And your date and place of birth.

EC: Halifax, '39.

AB: Okay, could you describe your educational background?

EC: Well I graduated from Queen Elizabeth High School, then I went to Dalhousie and earned three degrees at Dal, that's between First Class Honors in History, Master of Arts in History, and Bachelor of Education degree. Then I did Post Graduate work in History, and Historiography at McMaster University, and I have my Doctoral Degree from St. Thomas University.

AB: Okay, lets talk a little bit about your research interests. I understand that, that your own historical interests have included Indian fares and really quite before it became a widely used area of historical inquiry.

EC: Well that's true, my Masters thesis at Dalhousie was on the Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia up to the establishment of the first reservations in 1834, so that took me back to the year dot almost and I did a fair amount of analysis of land claim settlements and educational systems and the impact on the social life of the Mi'kmaq at the time, which were quite right, it was before most anthropological studies had been done, so most of it original research.

AB: How did you become interested in this topic?

EC: Ah, a couple of things. I am a native Nova Scotian, and at least at Dalhousie at that time in the Masters program, there were no other people that had quite the same sort of historic roots. Ah, my parents, at least my mother, was from a rural community and had a lot to do when she was growing up with Mi'kmaq children and others, and sort of a natural interest in the historic roots of Nova Scotia. And it was anew area, brand new area, and that was lots of good first class material in the archives that had been catalogued but never used.

AB: Okay, so how many years have you been associated with St. Mary's?

EC: I came in '61 as a part-time lecturer of History and came full-time in '63, and I've been here ever since.

AB: And how has your role changed over the years?

EC: Well I went from straight academic into a combined academic administrative period and then of course now its straight academic.

- AB: Okay, so what was it like to be a staff member when you first arrived at that period?
- EC: Well it was interesting because of course I was not very much older than most of the students in my day classes and certainly younger than just about everybody in my evening classes. The university was all male at the time, as you are aware, and except in the evening division there were some part-time students studying there and they were women. The size of the university I think is probably the most area, or the area where I have seen the most drastic change, there were less than 300 students when I came here so that at least all the students knew the faculty and the administration by name, and you'd know a goodly number of them, themselves. More than half the students lived in Residence at the time so that there was a different spirit here at that juncture, and a great, of course it was the early '60's and a great deal of discipline which would certainly not be acceptable, I am sure to people nowadays, but there was a dress code. The students were expected to wear shirts and ties to class at all times though, most of the classes started with a prayer, things of that nature. So very different things, small college were much evident of the Roman Catholic influence in the school at that time.
- AB: So what changes did you see take place after women were admitted, I know you were closely associated with the women in Residence.
- EC: Well I was the first Dean of Women, because we had women students in the University population, one year before they became eligible for residence, so I went from being Dean of Women to Dean of Residence for a number of students, as well as keeping my full-time teaching job, so a little more intrigue at that time. Ah, two things I think happened, one was the very rapid increase in the population of the University which was one of the reasons why we went that way, but I am not sure if the other thing ever materialized and that was a sort of, I suppose a crude way the idea that we needed to improve the locker image and language of some of our students and by introducing the women we would do that. I am not sure it's really happened but if anything it may have gone the other way.
- AB: Okay, let's see. You came here as well when the Jesuits withdrew and it (the University) became a secular institution, what type of effect did that have on the University?
- EC: Well I think that a number of things happened at roughly the same time. Mainly becoming co-educational and therefore growing much more quickly than any other institution was at that juncture, and so that rapid growth and the withdrawal of obviously, of the very strong influence of the church created a fairly unstable period, in my opinion at the University in terms of trying to establish a type of philosophy that was relevant for the students that we had and also capable of being managed within the institution because there was still a lot of archdiocesan tradition at the University, some still exists.
- AB: Okay, so you say there was less than around, 300 you said, (EC: 300 students, yes) students, so what was the faculty, the size of the faculty?
- EC: Well it was very tiny, more than half of them was Jesuits, I don't know if you know very much about the Jesuits philosophy, but they often moved their members around from one institution to another. To give them I suppose a broad base, so it was not unusual for instance, for a person to be present at the University one year and then to go as head of personnel or head of maintenance at another institution, the following year. So that there

- was a fair turnover of Jesuits teaching here at the University and I was the first full-time woman in the '60's that was teaching here. So most of the people were either young males or Jesuits.
- AB: You must have had some interesting experiences here being the only female!
- EC: Oh yes! Well there were a few people doing lecturing and tutoring for the students that were women, but ah...
- AB: Okay, okay in the mid-'70's unionization of the faculty was taking place, what effect did that have on the institution?
- EC: Well I wasn't teaching by that juncture, I was in here (Registrars Office) since 1973. I think it set a, probably set us on a path that some people would say, led to a great deal of professionalism, I think other people would say we lost a lot of the spirit and the inner strength of the University because it tended to have faculty on one side and the administration on another, whereas in the Jesuits period it was a lot of, a lot more interaction between the two. They had the same philosophy as well so it was a bit of a unionized game that goes on, I suppose. But it may have happened anyway, I don't know if necessary, if the Jesuits withdrawal had much to do with it.
- AB: Okay, so over the years that you have been here could you describe the changes in the academic programs and course offerings, and that kind of thing?
- EC: Well I suppose that the most important one is the fact that when we were very tiny, some of us were expecting to teach a number of different courses. I mean I was responsible basically for ten different History courses and I mean we have expertise in some areas but you don't have the depth of knowledge in some of the others. So that I think that that was true in many areas because there were some departments that had one or two individuals that were trying to offer relatively good diversified programs. So the knowledge base of a lot of us that were quite young, in a few areas were weaker than perhaps, certainly weaker than it is now and the range of courses that the students had to choose from, in History for instance, would be about fifteen, because only two and a half of us teaching at that juncture, whereas now if you're looking at the calendar at what they have numbers of ninety-five or something like that. I think that that's true not only in my own discipline but it's true in a large number of other areas as well. Because there was a limited course offering at the time, when I first came here there were 21 credits required for a degree program and 15 of them were laid down, registration was easy because between doing the 15 that you needed for your program, the rest were always in your major, so that the question of students getting the right courses or wrong courses was really not an issue.
- AB: Are there any new academic programs here?
- EC: There have been a huge number added as well, so if not in the depth within the existing one but there were all new ones.
- AB: What new ones can you think of?
- EC: Well all you need to do is take a look, probably it's faster, I can take a look at the calendar for 1965 and compare it to all of the areas that have co-ordinators now such as Asian studies, Atlantic Canada studies, International Development studies, Women's

studies, English studies, all of these are new. Any, I suppose the easiest way to say it, all the inter-disciplinary studies are brand new and what we had initially was a very, very structured but a very straight forward type of University.

AB: Doing my, doing my research in Women's studies I came across your name a couple of times in conferences that have been held across the country. So did you have much of a role in the implementation of the Women's studies program here?

EC: No, ah because by that point I really was not involved in the so called academic side of it. I guess some people say that I am a bit of a pioneer, not only because of what I was doing here at the University but I got very involved in the Collegiate Athletics, and I was the first President of the ah, first woman president, excuse me, of the Inter-Collegiate Athletics Team at the University Athletic Union (CIAU), and I did two terms in that role and I was also the first President of Atlantic Universities Athletic Association. So in those two roles I had a fair amount to say and do shall we say in collegiate athletics and the role of women in Inter-Collegiate athletics.

AB: Okay, so what changes have you noticed in regards to the student population over the year, years, in terms of gender, age, ethnic origin.

EC: Well ah, we always had, this was really one of the things that attracted me to Saint Mary's at the beginning and which kept me here in my first years, Jesuits were always strong in trying to have a good mix of students and it was easy to some extent for them because they had very significant High Schools in a large number of countries in the world and they frequently would admit students from Hong Kong for instance, who had gone to a Jesuits High School there, or from the United States, and always things of that nature. So the mix of students has really not changed that much in terms of ethnic origin. Also the age, students are certainly becoming older, in terms of their average age, younger students are slowing the program down and a significant number of more mature students are beginning their program at the University. That however, goes back to the Jesuit days because the community out-reach of the University was fairly significant both in non-credit and then gradually into the credit area, I mean we were expected as young faculty members to, to be involved on a gratis basis with some of those extension out-reaches. I remember doing a course on Great Books with one of the Jesuit priests, another year doing the Debating Society Directorship and things like that, so that that was one of the changes that came about, mainly people not putting as much into extra-curricular things, but it was expected at the time when you first came here. I find that students are much more aggressive now than they used to be, ah that's both good and bad. I think that intellectual curiosity is an extremely good thing, I think the only problem when I came here and certainly looking back on my own days, is that students were rather passive and not prepared to start an intellectual argument in the classroom or discussion, so I think that that is useful. I find for instance across my front counter listening to students, some are extremely rude and I don't think they're going to go very far in the outside world if they don't quell that temper and that aggressiveness. So I am not so sure where they are going to earn that but until they do, they are not going to be terribly successful.

AB: Yes, have you, do you think that the nature of the student's family background has changed over the years?

EC: Ah no, I really don't, ah, we always, from the time I came here, had a core of people coming in from the Halifax Metropolitan area at that time, primarily from Roman

Catholic families, some two and three generations have gone through the University but we always had a significant outreach into rural Nova Scotia and I have often said that although Dalhousie is my old alma mater, that if I were to compare in very general terms the students in my own day or now I'd say that we have more blue collar students from blue collar families than Dalhousie and I think that's a very legitimate role for this University, that's one of the reasons that I've wanted to stay. You see that at graduation with the parents and with the real excitement that comes from that kind of success does that fit your situation.

AB: Yes, exactly.

AB: What do you think students wish to gain from their educational experience at St. Mary's, and do you think that's changed over the years?

EC: Yes, I think it has. I think that there is a, more of a thrust now, it is understandable but it is a bit sad as well, ah, for students assuming that a degree will automatically equate into a job, so that the, the skills for work, the work place, seem to be more what a lot of students are looking for rather than a chance to literally, mentally, grow and develop and mature within a fairly cocoon like situation. And you see, I see that a lot when I hear some of the students arguing about what courses they want to take or don't want to take, I suppose you might say for electives and things of that nature.

AB: How have the research facilities at St. Mary's developed over time?

EC: Well I think you would have to look at it in terms of the different types of programs. Certainly I think in the historical area with the new technology and with the proximity to the new archives in Dalhousie and things of that nature, is a gold mine. Here its not even begun to be tapped and I think though in some of the other areas for sciences, for instance, there have been certainly some progress, people have done very well with research grants which have enabled them to purchase specific types of materials. But I suspect that like any other University in a small, smaller urban center, we lack sometimes the opportunities that will enable us to attract and more particularly keep some of the prime researchers in Toronto and some of those cities have a huge amount to offer both in the industrial side and economic side.

AB: Okay, let's see.

EC: You have to just add a p.s. to that. I guess one of the, one of the concerns that I've always had, I guess it's a growing concern, is whether some of the University faculty members, and I have certainly talked to a few of them about this, whether they're really keenly interested in teaching or whether it was just a means to an end, and the end being research. And I think you have to, to look for a balance particularly in a smaller undergraduate university, such as we like to portray ourselves as being.

AB: So what do you feel that St. Mary's has particularly to offer students?

EC: Well you know I was attracted here because it was small and it had sort of a hands on, sort of caring attitude, and I think that some of us that go back with the older period still try to keep some of that, not it's not easy for instance as a registrar with 8700 students currently enrolled and others but the kind of attention which we try to put in things like convocation booklets, graduation booklets for instance and our registration booklets and

everything sort of still have enabled us to carry forth some of that philosophy. For instance one of the saddest things for me is that I rarely ever see a student directly in this office, no I obviously can't see 8700 students, so I have to put a screening device on my front counter to find out what the student wants to see me about and 99% of the time I have to direct them either to a Dean or Associate Dean or student services or something like that. So that you tend to get a little bit further removed from the student and therefore not as responsive as quickly to what some of their need might be. But, but I still think there is that hands on, unevenly distributed now throughout the University no question about it, but there are not many Universities where you can go down the hall as a student and make an appointment to see the President and you can still do that.

AB: So okay, in what areas do you think improvements need to be made?

EC: Well I think the biggest challenge and I'm not so sure if it's an improvement, is I think we have to decide what is our maximum size in terms of student enrollment and that I think has to be carefully orchestrated in terms of what our physical plant is capable of doing at holding either now or with some expansions. I also think we have to decide whether we are going to stay basically as an undergraduate university with a few specialized areas of grad studies or whether we want to open the door a little bit more broadly to grad studies and even do some Ph.D. work. And there is certainly capabilities in some areas in terms of staff and facilities to do that, but I think we are in a juncture right now where we have to make our minds up that way, and I think the jury is out as to what our best role is that way.

AB: Okay, is there anything you'd like to add that you've noticed?

EC: Well I guess this is a bit of a criticism and I mean it quite the way I am going to say it, is that having been responsible for the residents in part right opened, I am very disappointed in the way the residence has turned out as an adjunct to our campus and it's my own personal philosophy that successful residents require the heads of that residence to move in. I certainly had to when I was responsible for the women and to my dying day I'll say that you know you can't be expected to be successful as a Director of Residence unless you're going through the same conditions as the students themselves. For instance I didn't need someone to bang on my door on Monday morning at nine o'clock and say that we didn't have any hot water all week-end because I was living there and I didn't have any either and so it's a very different feel. Now mind you, that goes back to the early '70's when it was a different philosophy to students but residence can be a tremendous asset to a University or it can be a tremendous detriment and at some of the other Universities for instance a prime place to live is in residence in the study, quiet areas and things like that. But that's been a disappointment for me because that's a huge expenditure for us each year.

AB: Okay

EC: Okay that helps a bit?

AB: Yes I think so.

EC: Good.