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This interview was conducted with Kathleen Mitchell Taft in Spokane, Washington, on November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005. The interviewer is Tamara Belts.

**TB:** Today is Saturday, November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005, and I'm over here in Spokane with Mrs. Kathleen Mitchell Taft, who attended Western. We are going to proceed with our oral history: our first question is why did you choose to attend Western?

**KMT:** I chose Western because it was to get me away from where I lived. I wanted something [as] far away as I could [get] and so we picked Western. My older sister had been there, and liked it, and of course it's a beautiful town. At that time teaching was about the only thing out there open to women: teaching and nursing.

**TB:** That's right. Now what was your sister's name?

**KMT:** Mary Sidney Mitchell; later Thompson.

**TB:** So you chose Western because you really wanted to get farther away [from home]; because Central also had a [teacher training program].

**KMT:** Oh, god, have you ever been in Ellensburg?

**TB:** And you said this once before, but what were your dates of attendance at Western?

**KMT:** September 1923 to March 1925.

**TB:** So did you attend summer school then, that summer [between]?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** What degrees or certificates did you get from Western?

**KMT:** I got a certificate of graduation, but no degree with two years.

**TB:** A two-year certificate (Elementary Diploma). And then what other degrees did you receive elsewhere? I know you got your law degree from...

**KMT:** University of Washington. That's the only [other one] I ever got.

**TB:** So you went there with your two-year certificate? You never really got a bachelor's degree?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** How did you decide to go to law school?

**KMT:** I was down at the University that was after I'd been out working. I didn't care to be a teacher and so I looked through the catalog and found the occupations that I could learn. I knew I wasn't good in science, I knew I wasn't good in math, and then here came along law. I looked it over and there was a girl from Boise, Idaho, that had been there before me. And I thought, my god, if she can do it, so can I.

**TB:** Excellent. This is backtracking a little bit: what was your first job after leaving Western (after you got your two-year certificate)?

**KMT:** Oh, Coeur d'Alene.

**TB:** And what grade level were you teaching?

**KMT:** Third and fourth.

**TB:** How long did you teach before you decided you didn't like to be a teacher?

**KMT:** Oh, it wasn't a matter of likes or dislikes; it was a matter of economics. But I did save up a little money, so then I think I taught out there about ten years and then I decided to go to law school.

**TB:** So then you went to law school at University of Washington.

**KMT:** Yes; peace meal.

**TB:** So how long did it take you to get through there?

**KMT:** I think about six years.

**TB:** So were you working part time then, still?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** Did you stay in Seattle all that time?

**KMT:** Well, I went to summer school.

**TB:** So you were teaching and then going to summer school at the law school. Wow. Have any other family members attended Western?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** Your sister.

**KMT:** Two.

**TB:** Okay, what was your other sister's name?

**KMT:** Evelyn. She went there longer than any of us.

**TB:** Are there any special achievements you would like us to know about? I know that you have been one of the outstanding alumna of Western, I think in 1991; and you also [received] a Gonzaga Law Medal. Are there some other ones that we don't know about?

**KMT:** Yes, but I can't think of what they are. I got several from Gonzaga. And, well those are the only [three] schools I've attended.

**TB:** So what did you take at Gonzaga?

**KMT:** Law.

**TB:** You took law there, too?

**KMT:** Well, I took extra courses that I couldn't get in by going to summer school.

**TB:** You were kind of doing both at the same time?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** Did you take some of those when you were also teaching, during the regular year?

**KMT:** Yes, I went to night school. I didn't take a lot at Gonzaga, but Gonzaga's a funny place. I went there one semester and I am an alumna.

**TB:** So now, let's go back a little bit to your job. After you got your law degree did you start your practice over in Spokane or did you start somewhere else?

**KMT:** I [had a] private practice for, I don't know how long, a couple of years I guess, and then the O.P.A. came along. Do you know what the O.P.A. is?

**TB:** Probably not.

**KMT:** Office of Price Administration during the war. And it was easy for attorneys to get jobs, there weren't many of them. I was a price attorney and my salary more than doubled.

**TB:** From being a teacher?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** So what did you do as a price attorney?

**KMT:** We passed on regulations whether the people were violating, and then setting prices, too.

**TB:** How long did you do that?

**KMT:** I think about two or three years, and then it just folded like that. One day we were going to work and the next day we had no job.

**TB:** Then what did you do?

**KMT:** I went back into private practice.

**TB:** In Spokane?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** And that's the one you stayed with, then, for the rest of your career?

**KMT:** Well, yes.

**TB:** So you started your own private practice in Spokane and that's what you did for fifty years or even more...

**KMT:** Oh, no, whatever length of time, and then I was appointed a court commissioner.

**TB:** That's right. I don't know much about law, what exactly does a court commissioner do?

**KMT:** Well, he's a little judge. They're appointed by the courts and not with the electorate and legally you can try everything except jury trials. And in jury trials, just the courts approve you.

**TB:** What kind of cases did you preside over?

**KMT:** Mostly domestic. Then sometimes I'd be appointed to do something else when they needed somebody.

**TB:** Well, you were one of the first women attorneys in Spokane, so what was that like? Did you feel accepted?

**KMT:** I've never felt that I was discriminated against. I felt that any limitations I had were mine, not my sex.

**TB:** Excellent. That's good. Any other comments about your career: what were some of the other highlights or what did you enjoy most about it?

**KMT:** Oh, it was a sense of emancipation, that you were out in the real world and that you weren't stuck with the confines of teaching. And it paid better. When I was teaching, there was a spring convention in Spokane and teachers from all over came. And they went wild! Those of us from Coeur d'Alene, and people that were close, it didn't affect us much. A lot of teachers came there and got jobs, too. It was a disposition. And then when I went to legal conventions, people weren't the least bit friendly.

**TB:** They *weren't* the least bit?

**KMT:** No.

**TB:** Oh, very reserved?

**KMT:** Yes. They kind of looked for their friends.

**TB:** Oh, O.K. How long were you court commissioner?

**KMT:** Twenty-six years.

**TB:** Oh, wow. That's a long time. And then in your own practice, what kinds of things did you do?

**KMT:** Oh, most everything except things that had to do with domestic problems, because those I heard in court, because court commissioner was part time.

**TB:** I know that you still go into work most days today.

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** What kinds of things do you do now?

**KMT:** Not much of anything.

**TB:** But you like to go in and see what's going on?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** Well, that's good. Now we're going to go back to your time at Western. Where did you live most of the time while you attended Western?

**KMT:** 1010 High Street. I still remember.

**TB:** So was that a private home?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** How many women probably were also there?

**KMT:** Well, there were about there of us. We didn't board there, we just had rooms; \$15 dollars a month.

**TB:** And then where did you eat at?

**KMT:** Someplace on the campus.

**TB:** Edens Hall, maybe?

**KMT:** Well, Edens Hall we had some meals and then the meals we didn't have we'd eat at the commons.

**TB:** Do you have any other favorite memories of where you lived?

**KMT:** No, it was just a place to live.

**TB:** Who were your favorite or most influential teachers and why?

**KMT:** Olive Edens, she was a dream.

**TB:** Can you tell me more about what she was like, because she died young?

**KMT:** I know she did. She was the daughter of one of the early trustees and she had a sense of humor and she treated us all as if we were kings. I worshiped her.

**TB:** Oh, wow. She taught English, I think, right?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** Wow. Do you remember anybody else that you thought a lot of?

**KMT:** Yes, I liked Miss Sperry. Miss Sperry taught English I think. I'm not sure what she taught. I had great respect for [Mabel Zoe] Wilson; now other people said she had a sharp tongue, but she was always nice to me.

**TB:** Oh, excellent.

**KMT:** Yes. I would have tried to be a librarian if I'd had the facilities.

**TB:** So your main course of study was education?

**KMT:** Yes, upper grades.

**TB:** Which classes did you like the best or learn the most from?

**KMT:** I think Shakespeare I liked the best that was with Miss Edens.

**TB:** And then what activities did you enjoy the most, such as sports, clubs, student government?

**KMT:** Oh, we liked to be out to the Sagebrush Club.

**TB:** So why don't you tell me a little bit more about the Sagebrush Club.

**KMT:** The Sagebrush Club was anybody from our part of the state. I think we had about thirty and I was president.

**TB:** That's right.

**KMT:** We didn't do anything much except go hiking. People didn't have so much to do with eats as they do now.

**TB:** And also what about orchestra? You were in orchestra.

**KMT:** Oh, I was just second fiddle, that's about all you can say.

**TB:** Well, any other outstanding memories of your college days?

**KMT:** Yes. We had a dean, Miss Jones. Miss Jones I think was likely a remarkable woman. But somewhere or other, there was gossip around school that she was more than a detective. We didn't go to activities in Bellingham. So we went to dances out at Lynden and Ferndale and out in there. I don't imagine the woman gave a damn what we did, but it was definitely rumored around school that we'd get kicked out if we got out going to public dances and that made them that much more interesting.

**TB:** Now, you remember in the Sagebrush Club, at least according to the annual, you made some interesting trips around town. You went to the coal mines: do you remember any of that?

**KMT:** No.

**TB:** Any other memories of your college days?

**KMT:** Most of the good memories are outside of college. We liked to hike and we hiked everywhere. We went out to Orcas Island and hiked up to the top of Mount Constitution. We hiked up Mt. Baker and that was interesting. I thought of Miss George, poor lady, you know, she was kind of a stern master. We were paired off, most people had friends and she got stuck with me. Well you know how a faculty member liked to have some snot nosed kid. But she was awfully nice to me.

**TB:** You were in the Women's Athletic Association, the WAA?

**KMT:** No.

**TB:** No, just in one group that went hiking?

**KMT:** Well, maybe I did belong to it. It didn't have much influence on me as an organization, but I guess it arranged trips.

**TB:** All right. Did they used to do the salmon bake when you were there?

**KMT:** Yes, but I didn't go. I went to that when I went to the U of W.

**TB:** Did you ever have Dr. Bond?

**KMT:** No, but people loved him.

**TB:** OK, what about Mr. Arntzen? Did you have Mr. Arntzen?

**KMT:** He was a speech teacher?

**TB:** History teacher or social studies.

**KMT:** No.

**TB:** Now did you do any student teaching in the Campus School or the Normal Training School, then?

**KMT:** Yes, that was part of our training.

**TB:** What were the grades that you student taught at the Training School?

**KMT:** Seventh and eighth.

**TB:** Could you describe what a typical day was like in the Training School?

**KMT:** Well, we taught just half days, Miss Crawford was our teacher. She was a teacher and started it and I think that a lot of the students were children of faculty members and were made to go to our school. It was just an ordinary school and then we had to do the teaching and I guess periodically the teacher came in and straightened things out.

**TB:** OK, do you have any other memories of what a typical school week was like there? Or school assemblies or anything that you...?

**KMT:** Oh, we had [assemblies]; I guess that's the proper word to use, anyhow, meetings of the school. That covered a lot of things; lectures and I can't remember what else we heard, just like I can't remember who lectured.

**TB:** Do you remember what they did at recess or some of the games that children played back then?

**KMT:** I had nothing to do with that.

**TB:** Do you think there was a dress code, or remember what children wore?

**KMT:** I doubt it.



**TB:** Or for teachers?

**KMT:** I doubt it.

**TB:** Do you remember anything about the grading system that was used when you were a student teacher there?

**KMT:** I don't know if it was A, B, C or good, fair, flunk or not.

**TB:** Any thoughts about what classroom activities or classes that you most enjoyed teaching?

**KMT:** Oh, I didn't teach that much.

**TB:** So you were doing a lot of observing when you were there?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** Do you remember was there very much interaction between the Training School and the rest of the college?

**KMT:** I don't know. It was just more or less a class to us.

**TB:** Did you think that there were any differences then when you went out to teach in the classrooms that you had versus what you'd experienced at the Training School?

**KMT:** No, but I think we knew a little more of what was expected of us.

**TB:** Well, any favorite memories of that experience, at the Campus School?

**KMT:** Well, no.

But there were about 100 men and about 900 of us. They got [to be] all the elected officials. They got all the attention. They did this and that. Finally it got under our skin [that] we were being discriminated against. So we had a meeting up at Sehome Hill and we elected our slate of candidates and by god, we won the election.

**TB:** Excellent. So that was for the whole school?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** Good job.

**KMT:** I was ahead in my two bits worth.

**TB:** Now, do you remember President Fisher? He had just came when you came?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** Can you tell me a little bit what he was like?

**KMT:** We hadn't much contact with him. He seemed to be very business like and there was some friction between he and the regents that we didn't know anything about. His wife had been very ill and I think that that was hard on him.

**TB:** Is there anything else I haven't asked you that you'd like to tell me about your time or your memories of Western?

**KMT:** Well on a September night my sister and I trudged up High Street and to 1010 High Street and that was the beginning. The next morning we were there very early in order to get registered -- one line for this and one line for that. So we lined up for the line to get our classes, we got all set then we went over to actually get registered and half the classes were closed. Then we had to come back, all of this was queued. But I felt that was kind of... I think they changed it, I don't know how they changed it. I think it got changed.

**TB:** So both you and your sister were going there for a while at the same time?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** I don't have any other questions, unless you have some more comments.

**KMT:** Well, I had a lifetime friend I made there and that was Rosine Pipio. She came from Connell. She was a delightful girl. She lived in Everett, but she's gone.

**TB:** That's the sad part about a long life; you lose a lot of friends.

**KMT:** Yes. Well, [there's] something that people that came out of similar backgrounds that sort of cements you together. But Rosine was a little French girl. We used to go around. Then of course we went to dances, if you took a girl out for the evening, very likely what you did was dance.

**TB:** Did you date a lot when you were at the normal school?

**KMT:** Oh, a certain amount, but entirely away from the school. I never dated anybody from school. Most of us felt that those hundred men on the campus were too damn spoiled. Whether they were or not, I don't know.

**TB:** Just because they had too many other women to pick from?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** So you preferred to go to the dances then, off campus, too?

**KMT:** Yes. Anyhow, we under this impression Miss Jones had feelers out to catch us. I don't think Miss Jones gave a damn. Because I imagine that she had many degrees and that she had been hired through a great selection and her business was elsewhere.

**TB:** All right. Well, anything else?

**KMT:** Well I didn't tell you about the sailors. The battleships came up and down the coast every summer and sometimes one, sometimes two. So anyhow, everybody always wanted to go out and see the battleships. Miss Jones told them to keep their sailors off of the campus. She had the authority to do so. And the captain said, "*Keep your girls off my ship!*"

Well, anyhow, you know where your normal school is, and across the street was a little bookstore that I think was privately owned and the sailors would all line up on the opposite side of the street and there was quite a bit of picking up. Well, anyhow, we were invited to go dancing at the sailor's place. And we had to have a chaperon, so the lady next door, she had several boarders, roomers or whatever you call them, and so there was about eight of us, went with a chaperone down to dance with the sailors. Well, you know they're a bunch of poor little lonesome kids in the [navy.]

**TB:** Oh, I bet.

**KMT:** But anyhow, they had to introduce us as being monsters. Because the Seattle kids then, didn't go in the Navy. They went on the other kind of ships.

**TB:** Oh, O.K. Like the Coast Guard or something?

**KMT:** No, just plain old merchant ships. That was the time of the dollar steam ships.

*End of Side One Tape One*

**TB:** Any other stories?

**KMT:** I don't recollect very well, but there were always rumors running around school about this, that and the other thing. And I don't think that they even gave a damn because our conduct was very much dependent upon rumor and not upon fact.

**TB:** I think that's probably still true.

**KMT:** And we went to dances outside of town and we went with kids that lived out there. We had a friend that taught one of our country schools that lived there, that's how we happened to meet these kids from...

**TB:** Oh, so did you grow up in Wheeler?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** What was it like growing up in Wheeler? Did you live on a wheat farm?

**KMT:** We lived on a cow ranch. Well, it was a farm, it was everything. There was a coulee. You know what a coulee is?

**TB:** Kind of.

**KMT:** Well, the water you know would [run down] down from the hills and we had good land, which is kind of rare for that part of the country. We lived five miles out from Wheeler. We rode horseback into town periodically. At that time Wheeler had two stores, a hotel, livery stable (which went out), and a bank. Then it shrunk to even less and then during the depression, they drug all of Wheeler off to Moses Lake.

**TB:** Now, did you have any problems teaching or having a job during the depression?

**KMT:** No. But I did have friends, because a girl in law school's father was superintendent of schools someplace and that's how I got into Coeur d'Alene.

**TB:** And you were going to law school actually during the depression?

**KMT:** Yes, but my law school's pretty much one year at a time.

**TB:** I'm just interested in life in Wheeler. What were the fun things to do when you were growing up in Wheeler?

**KMT:** Oh, there weren't any fun things. I had horses, crazy horses. Farm kids don't have to have entertainment.

**TB:** You enjoyed riding the horses, then, right?

**KMT:** Yes. And you had plenty to do.

**TB:** Chores; right.

**KMT:** I think that's why kids are such brats today; they don't have enough to do. We felt we were some bumpkins. We could ride up on Powder River.

**TB:** And you guys had cattle, so were those beef cattle?

**KMT:** Yes. And the living was [that] you'd sell them in the fall. And then we raised hay and dad would sell that to the sheep men. We knew we were part of a bigger unit.

**TB:** So what about school? Did you go to a one room school house?

**KMT:** We went to a one room school house and we walked three miles.

**TB:** Did that go up through high school or did you have to go someplace else to go to high school?

**KMT:** When we were still in grade school my older sister finished the eighth grade. And there were no high schools around close, and so mother brought us kids to Spokane so Mary Sidney could go to high school and we traipsed along, we went to grade school here. And she went to Lewis and Clark. I don't know where my mother got her information, but she said the two best high schools in the state were Lewis and Clark in Spokane and Columbia in Tacoma. And so we came to Lewis and Clark. Then the year she graduated (she went to Ephrata in the mean time), we started Lewis and Clark and we took our regular four classes and so forth. At that time, she graduated from high school; she went a quarter to Cheney and taught. Then we went back and graduated from Ephrata.

**TB:** Oh, you graduated from Ephrata high school?

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** And then did that sister end up going to Western also?

**KMT:** Well, yes, everybody then intended to go to school. Ellensburg was the closest one, but that was too close. So Bellingham was beautiful and we went there.

**TB:** Now, how did you get back and forth to school, did you go on the train or how did you get over to Bellingham?

**KMT:** Oh, we got the train in Ephrata; we got off at Everett and took a train up north to Bellingham.

**TB:** So did you come home, like at Christmas time or did you stay over there usually all year?

**KMT:** No, No. We came home Christmas. But we didn't Thanksgiving.

**TB:** So what did you do for Thanksgiving?

**KMT:** I don't even remember.

**TB:** Well, anything else I haven't asked you?

**KMT:** Well, I was thinking of some of the things. Well, you mentioned Mr. Bond, everybody loved him. And I loved Miss Edens. And I liked [Mabel Zoe] Wilson. I realize she lived a long time.

**TB:** She lived to be in her eighties (86). I know she passed away in 1964.

**KMT:** Yes. Well, she was quite a distinguished person.

**TB:** She was actually kind of short, wasn't she?

**KMT:** She wasn't very big, she was kind of pretty, in her way and I wanted to be a librarian [because of her], but I didn't have any facilities.

**TB:** Do you remember any of the sports, going to any of the football games or anything?

**KMT:** No. Oh, I went to some, but I just didn't have much interest in them.

**TB:** That's fair. O.K, well, if nothing else, I'll say thank you and turn off the tape.

**KMT:** Well, thank you. I feel that I haven't given you what you want.

**TB:** I never know what I want. I like to hear the stories and not very many people reach back to where you were anymore.

**KMT:** No.

**TB:** You're the first one to mention Olive Edens to me.

**KMT:** I am?

**TB:** Yes.

**KMT:** Oh, she was a wonderful person.

**TB:** Yes.

**KMT:** When did she die?

**TB:** I don't know; I just know that she was very young. I think she got the flu or something.

**KMT:** Oh, dear.

**TB:** I just know she was young. A lot of them, I mean, the flu used to be very bad to get sometimes. I've seen pictures of her, she was beautiful, so it's nice to have someone tell me something about her.

**KMT:** She was a wonderful teacher. Everybody loved her classes. She treated us right, because at that time we were scared of most of the teachers. I will say this, the teachers as a whole went out of their way to try to keep us in school. And there were a lot of them teaching people, coaching them on the side and all that. They had great interest in the students.

**TB:** So what was a typical day like? It looked to me like it was a lot fuller day than it is now, weren't you pretty much in school all day?

**KMT:** No. But we were in the library to study, and home to study. And monkey work on weekends.

**TB:** Now did you have any job when you were there?

**KMT:** No.

**TB:** So you just went to school.

**KMT:** Yes. It's awful to say, but all the people I knew there are gone.

**TB:** I think you're right, I mean, pretty close. I've done one person who's older than you, he's going to be 102 on December 6<sup>th</sup>, Howard Wilder, and he's still alive and doing good.

**KMT:** Good.

**TB:** He was up just a couple weeks ago for, they don't call it homecoming any more, it's the Great Big Weekend. He was up for that. And I interviewed, Dr. Fisher's daughter. She is still alive. She's about, I don't know, 92 or 93.

**KMT:** Gosh.

**TB:** And Victor, did you know Victor Hoppe?

**KMT:** Yes, he was the speech teacher.

**TB:** Yes. I've done his daughter, but then, she's only 88, so she's ten years younger than you.

**KMT:** And he's gone, I take it.

**TB:** Yes. But her husband, I think, is going to be 93 tomorrow and he went to Western, too. So there's a few of you out there, but not very many. You're the first one to mention Olive Edens, so that's pretty cool.

**KMT:** I guess Mr. Bond's son was also a teacher in Bellingham.

**TB:** Yes, a couple of sons actually taught there. And Guy, in fact, who was his son, his wife is still alive, Fredericka Bond and lives in Bellingham. And then Mary Bond, who is I guess another of his son's, wife, Elden's, is still alive. She's in her nineties and she still plays piano at a nursing home.

**KMT:** Wonderful!

**TB:** I have not interviewed her yet. She broke her hip or she broke something, because we were trying to do an interview with her. Hopefully we'll get to do her later.

**KMT:** We had very little to do with the top rank.

**TB:** Well, you were living off campus a little bit, so you probably socialized with your group. You mentioned a little bit ago about there being a store across the street from campus.

**KMT:** Yes.

**TB:** I just interviewed his daughter last week. Whoever had owned that company, actually, built it, College Pharmacy. He built it in like 1924 or something. So that was new when you came.

**KMT:** Oh, yes; kind of a restaurant, a lot of people, a little grocery store or something.

**TB:** Picking up little pieces of the puzzle there.

**KMT:** Well, money was tight.

**TB:** Okay, can you think of anything else you want to say?

**KMT:** [No.]

**TB:** All right, well, thank you very much. I'll stop here.