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**INTERVIEW WITH HELEN HIND FORTUNE**

by Carla Ehat & Anne Kent, with Kittie Dibblee and Lucille Ehat  
September 20, 1976

**INTERVIEWEE:** Helen Hind Fortune (HF)

**INTERVIEWERS:** Carla Ehat (CE) and Anne Kent (AK), with Kittie Dibblee (KD) and Lucille Ehat (LE)

**DATE OF INTERVIEW:** September 20, 1976

**CE:** Today is Monday, September 20, 1976. Continuing the Oral History Program of the California Room at the Marin County Library at Civic Center, this is Carla Ehat, and joining me today at the residence of Mrs. Thomas Kent, in Kentfield, California is Mrs. Kent, Mrs. Harrison Dibblee, Miss Lucille Ehat, and our guest of honor, Helen Hind Fortune. Mrs. Fortune resides in Carmel Valley and is here today, joined by Kitty Dibblee, Mrs. Kent and Miss Lucille Ehat, to tell us the story of the founding of the Katherine Branson School, which has been a wonderful institution for 56 years. It is presently located in Ross, California but it had its beginnings in another community. Good morning, Helen.

**HF:** Good morning, Carla.

**CE:** Now I understand that your father, Mr. George Hind, was President of the Board of Trustees at the Katherine Branson School and had a great deal to do with its creation. Can you tell us, how did the Branson School come about?

**HF:** There were several people, couples, in San Rafael and Ross who were interested in having a girls school, other than Dominican Convent which was also a good school. They first started an intermediate school in a little building in San Rafael called -- first it was called Miss Stewart's School which was a school that a great many of my mother's generation went to. Then after that it was called the Little Red School and then it was painted gray and called the Little Gray School, which is where I started.

**CE:** Well, where -- Could you locate the site for us?

HF: Yes, the building is no longer standing, but it was on Fifth Avenue, between Fifth and Mission, I think. It was back from the street kind of in the middle of the block and when I remember it, it was gray with green and white awnings and little green chairs, is the main thing I can remember. Two maiden ladies from England ran it and they were called Miss Vin and Miss Eastman. Miss Eastman sang and Miss Vin played the piano, and gave lessons. It was co-educational and I think went up to the age of six or seven. Then, two or three years later they bought a large cupolaed building, house, which had been a boarding house and then first a private residence. It was shingled and this was next door. They took down the fence between the Little Gray School and this, and painted it up a little bit and it was called the San Rafael School for Girls. This was run by a Smith woman called Miss Egbert, but then Miss Egbert fell in love and went to Hong Kong so they had to have a substitute. The substitute was the wife of a man studying at the Seminary in San Anselmo and their names were Wisler, Mr. & Mrs. Wisler. They had, while she was headmistress, a baby which we all called Little Wis and that was the mascot of the school and we just adored that little baby. Well, since we kept having different headmistresses every few years or months, the Board of Trustees decided they really needed something a little more stable. So Mrs. George Markham was a member of the Board, was sent east to look for a headmistress. She went to Bryn Mawr because her daughter, I think, had just graduated from Bryn Mawr, or was there, or whatever, and on the roster, the appointment bureau or whatever you call it at Bryn Mawr, she found the name of Miss Katherine Branson and a Miss Laura Branson. Miss Katherine Branson was at that time at Miss Beard's School and she had been at the Madera School before that. So, Miss Branson decided she'd better look over this place, San Rafael and the San Rafael Girls School, and she came west by train and was met by my mother, Mrs. George Hind, and Mrs. George Martin at the Oakland Mole. They took her for lunch, to the Town and Country Club, where they met Mrs. Albert Dibblee who was going to be the next door, back neighbor to the Katherine Branson School when it moved to Ross. So, Miss Branson obviously liked what she saw and went back and packed up her things and brought her sister, Miss Laura Branson, with her to stay. The Board of Directors decided to call it the Katherine Branson School; Miss Branson was the senior of the two sisters, and so it began. They stayed with my mother and father in San Rafael for several months while the old Cochran house was being refurbished. And that was really quite a problem, to put this thing into a school atmosphere. They built out at back from the kitchen and made two-story classrooms, and there was a little house at the back, one room, two rooms. One side was used for algebra and the other side for history and it was called the Brown's Study.

CE: Well, Helen I'm a little confused, you're talking about the Cochran house. Now where was this located?

HF: Right next to the Little Gray School on Fifth Avenue.

CE: I see, so initially you came to Katherine Branson, came to San Rafael.

HF: Yes.

CE: Okay, continue.

HF: That was quite a business getting this ready for boarders, which they hoped they were going to get. Unfortunately only one the first year.

CE: Do you recall who that might have been?

HF: Yes, I remember, it was Carla Whirliton. My mother and Mrs. Martin, I remember, talking quite loudly in the halls that first day of school to make it sound as though there were a lot of people around. Also the men on the Board did all the clearing of the old garden and burning the debris and our sewing woman, that went around from house to house in those days, Miss Flossie Dunham made all the curtains. And that was where the first rawhide chairs appeared, and, of course, rawhide chairs have been kind of a trademark for many years. Mother liked rawhide chairs so that's why we've got them.

KD: And they still continue in the Branson situation.

HF: Yes, they certainly do. Now, most of them have pads, but in the old days --

CE: They could take it. Where was your family home, in San Rafael?

HF: Yes, it was about, I think now is the Marin Yacht Club.

CE: That area.

HF: Yes. Up on the hill.

CE: All right. Miss Branson is here by now and things are going.

HF: Yes, and the school opened and we had an assembly room which was the front and back parlor, thrown together, but you could put glass doors that folded to make two classrooms if you wanted. The window seat, under the big cupola was for the faculty for assembly.

KD: What grades did the school cover at that time?

HF: I don't think there were any seniors that first year because Carol didn't graduate until Ross and she was in the first graduating class.

KD: Was it elementary and high school?

HF: Elementary still stayed in the Gray School and then we went on up. I suppose probably from what, the third grade through, but we offered elementary through high school.

KD: From the third grade up you were in the Cochran home?

HF: I would think so, we were, yes. I'm not quite sure about that.

KD: How many did you have in the faculty?

CE: Yes, I wonder.

HF: Miss Hunt, Miss Mixner, an athletics mistress, Miss Branson taught Latin and began Latin in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade in those days, and Miss Laura Branson taught mathematics. Then there was a physics or science teacher, so I think that would be about it.

KD: What did Miss Hunt teach?

HF: Miss Hunt taught history.

KD: And Miss Mixner?

HF: And with great flair. Miss Mixner taught English and was an excellent teacher.

CE: I think before we move on to the relocation of the Branson School to Ross, that Kitty Dibblee has an interesting little story. She's going to tell us a little bit later how she came west to be Miss Branson's secretary in 1930, but what were you telling us earlier, Kitty, about the early days of Miss Branson's arrival?

KD: Miss Branson, several times, told this story about her arrival. She had originally been interviewed by Mrs. Martin, who was a very beautiful woman, and then she came out here to see the school and she was met at the Oakland Mole by Mrs. Martin and Mrs. Hind, who was equally beautiful, just a beautiful woman. Then, as Helen said, she was taken to the Town and Country Club for lunch, where she met Mrs. Albert Dibblee who was an exquisite looking person. Miss Branson was, well, she was just overcome, she thought every woman in California must be really beautiful.

CE: That's a charming story. Helen, I wonder if you'd clarify for us: this Mrs. George Martin was not the Mrs. Martin who owned the residence that later became the Branson School?

HF: No, that belonged to the John Martin Estate.

CE: And he was a railroad man, Mrs. Kent, wasn't he?

AK: Yes.

CE: All right, shall we move to Ross?

HF: Yes, in 1922 the John Martin Estate became -- was on the market. I remember going over with my father before it was bought by the school and looking at what is now the administration building. And going in to where the stalls were, which later were the assembly room and the study hall, and it still smelled of the horses who had only recently left.

CE: Thoroughbreds, no doubt.

HF: It was most interesting to me. My father used to go almost every day, and since it was summer he would take me. They had a buttery kind of building which I don't know what it's used for now, but in my day it was used for a physics lab. Then a servants' cottage which was a classroom in my day.

CE: And this is down the road.

HF: Down the road and --

CE: Where the present classrooms are?

HF: The Administration Building had Miss Branson's office where she also taught Latin, and the main office and a place where we bought supplies and books, and then the Assembly Room which during study hour was made after the model in Bryn Mawr of desks with partitions between them, all around the walls.

CE: This was rather innovative at that time.

HF: Yes, it was and copied after Miss Branson's alma mater. So they decided to buy it and did quite a bit of painting and redoing and moved.

CE: Did you ever learn from your father, what the cost of that property might have been in those days?

HF: I didn't, no. I may have but it's quite a while ago. There the first graduating class had two, Carol Rulofson and Katherine Hill.

CE: What year was this again?

HF: This was 1922.

CE: '22.

HF: Yes, but then that mixes up -- They may have graduated -- No, I think they graduated in the Ross School. I'm not quite sure. Then in 1923 there were four graduates; that was a big class. Then for the next two years there were two in each class.

CE: Were these boarders, all of the students, the majority of them?  
HF: In my class there were only a couple of boarders.  
CE: Did you board there, even though you lived in San Rafael?  
HF: No, I drove from San Rafael. Our class was seven and the biggest bumper class that ever had been.  
KD: And that was in 1926?  
HF: 1926.  
CE: Could you name some of your classmates for us?  
HF: Oh, yes.  
CE: Would you?  
HF: Louise Thursten, who was a very brilliant student. Sally Eells, who is now Sally Eells Hoagland. She, of course, was a day girl. Louise lived with the Griffiths, who were related to her in-laws; Sally Hopps, who is now Sally Hopps Innes. Louise, by the way, died only about three weeks ago, very sadly, in Scotland. Then Frances Yaezell, who lived in Sausalito. Elizabeth Woodyatt, who was a boarder and lived in Palo Alto.  
CE: What was her name?  
HF: Woodyatt, W-o-o-d-y-a-t-t, now Mrs. Ford Nichols. And I, I think that makes it.  
CE: That it, was the tradition of the graduation, is that where the tradition came?  
HF: With Prize Day, you mean?  
CE: Prize Day and the ceremony down on the lawn?  
HF: Well, it was, of course, in Ross and on the lawn and under the great big tree. We used to pray that it would be warm enough, or not too hot. Then in 1926 we formed the Alumnae Association; in July we met. I have a picture of us, every one of us in hats, which is rather amusing to think of. I don't remember how many there were at that time, but it wasn't a very big group. There is a picture, I think it's in the 50<sup>th</sup> catalog or brochure. Maybe not.  
CE: Here are the ladies with hats.  
HF: Yes, I think that's the day, because I sent a picture of my own.  
CE: And gloves.  
HF: Yes, probably we took them off once we got there. Then, of course, as soon as Miss Branson and Miss Laura Branson came, they decided that the school should be divided into two teams for everything. Athletics and parties and everything else, and they were called the Blue Bonnets and the Tam O'Shanter. Miss Branson was a Blue Bonnet, because she liked blue the best, and Miss Laura, I'm sure, was the head Tam O'Shanter because she liked red and we all wore these floppy berets that were really awful. We had Halloween parties which one side gave to the other and we had basketball games. I remember the basketball games. The first one that I can remember with another school, we, of course, all wore the long floppy bloomers and middies, and the team was excellent. At the end, my mother brought a great big case of Eskimo Pies, and those were the first, that's when Eskimo Pies first started and it was terribly exciting, and we were allowed to have them even if we hadn't played. But one point, the Dibblee twins were the opposing captains of the Blue Bonnets and the Tam O'Shanter. They were Mr. & Mrs. Albert Dibblee's twin daughters.  
CE: What were their names?

HF: Peggy and Polly. Peggy was the Blue Bonnet and Polly was the Tam O'Shanter. Then came the time when we moved to Ross, and Miss Branson thought we should have a uniform.

CE: I see.

HF: So, Miss Branson went to Spaulding's in San Francisco, which used to sell ladies' clothes and uniforms, I think they did most of the uniforms for the Bay Area schools, and chose two. One was the summer uniform, which was blue and white gingham, very much as it is today. The only difference was in the placement of our belts and the length of our skirts. But what we did with that uniform, we all wore very garish ties and the loudest stockings, of course, long, that we possibly could and generally Spaulding loafers or saddle shoes. Then the winter uniform was what was known as lapis lazuli tweed. It had a skirt which didn't do the most for any of us and after a few weeks became rather unsprung and a little short jacket with a round collar that came open in the front in a rather weird way. With that we wore blue or red sleeveless sweaters depending on whether we were Blue Bonnets or Tam O'Shanters. You could wear a tie with that to vary the monotony but that uniform soon gave up. Miss Branson went to Spaulding's again and saw a very good looking piece of plaid, which I think is the plaid that is used today. The only thing was it was very expensive.

CE: I see that her color preference prevailed over Miss Laura's.

HF: Yes, that's right. They had to buy a thousand yards because Spaulding's wouldn't make the skirts unless they did, and they both died, they were so scared. They'd never use up a thousand yards, and, of course, it was used up quite quickly. But everybody loved those skirts. I, unfortunately -- It started in my senior year and it was thought by everybody that the old tweed skirt was good enough for the last year, so I never had it, sadly.

CE: An outstanding uniform and Kitty, you have a story of its national prominence, don't you?

KD: Well, my daughter went to KBS and graduated, I forget when, '54, I guess, and went to Smith with five other girls from KBS and they wore as sort of a badge, recognizable for miles around, these skirts constantly through the winter. You could spot the KBS girl way far away and they just loved them. They did everything in them, they rolled them up under their pants and played basketball and did everything in them. We still have Kathy's skirt; one lasted the whole four years she was there.

CE: The thousand yards, I imagine, had to be reordered and reordered.

HF: Reordered many times, Miss Branson told me the other day.

CE: I wish you'd tell us, you saw Miss Branson last week, was it, Helen?

HF: Yes, I did.

CE: How did you find her?

HF: Very well, very well.

CE: Good. And will you tell us her age again?

HF: She is 89; she'll be 90 in February next.

CE: Did you tell her you were coming up to see Mrs. Kent?

HF: Oh, yes, I certainly did. She filled me in on a few things, especially this thousand yards of material, which I had never known, of course. But, oh, she's marvelous

and so interested in everything and everybody who ever went to school and remembers everybody's children and grand-children; it's perfectly extraordinary.

CE: She has been called a patrician, with humor and gentle wit. Would you agree?

HF: Yes, I think that that's a very nice description. She taught me Latin for five years. I had five years of Latin from Miss Branson and when I went to Smith, really, it was my easiest subject. So I took two years of Latin at Smith, simply because it was my snap course. You had to translate your Latin as though you were speaking in English, and it was sometimes kind of a strain, but she demanded perfection and generally got it.

CE: Tell me, Helen, did the residents wear a summer uniform?

HF: They wore the same day uniforms, but they had dinner dresses.

CE: Dinner dresses?

HF: Dinner dresses. They were short, of course, but pleated, and either white crepe de chin pleated with kind of cascading sleeves, pleated sleeves or the famous Katherine Branson blue, French blue, they used to call it. I think they were allowed to vary those slightly with belts once in a while but not always. They, I think, wore those over weekends. Then I think they had a navy blue crepe de chin that they wore regularly everyday nights.

CE: What was the dinner hour like?

HF: I never, except for special occasions, went there for dinner, you see, because I was a day girl. Lunch was quite an experience, at first, because we were made to eat everything and it didn't matter whether you liked it or not. I had a cousin who was allergic to raspberries and she had no excuse from her parents to say she didn't have to eat them, and she would fill her mouth with her raspberries and keep them until she got away from the table. Very strict days those were.

CE: It seems that Miss Branson had a second motto, then, "Want not, waste not" as well as, "Truth is beauty and beauty is truth."

HF: That's correct. Until my last year I could not prevail upon my parents to give me an excuse for chocolate pudding, which the cook loved. Then we changed cooks my last year, I had the excuse but we never had chocolate pudding. That was very sad.

CE: In addition to the Latin and the serious curriculum that was at the Katherine Branson School, Helen, did the school, even in its early days, ever get involved in any theatrical productions?

HF: Yes, we had a school play every year. They were really beautifully coached and beautifully done and very well directed. There was one particularly that I remember which was a musical called *The Toy Shop*. It took place in the old Foster barn at the end of Forbes Avenue in San Rafael.

CE: A.W. Foster's estate in Fairhills?

HF: Yes, that's right. And it was perfectly charming, and the sets were beautifully done. I think the faculty, mainly, directed the sets and practically made them themselves. And then as time went on in Ross, Miss Branson instigated a thing which we called "play week."

CE: Oh, yes. Now that ran for many, many years; you had that tradition.

HF: Yes, from about 1925 from, I think, until 1952. And I've never heard of another one in any other school.

CE: Perhaps when Miss Branson retired.

HF: Yes.

CE: Well, what was play week?

HF: Well, we stopped in May --

CE: What do you mean, "we"?

HF: The whole school stopped its regular classes and the faculty and girls were put into various committees. If they wanted to act, they were in that section. They learned their lines and were directed and so on and so forth. They made all the costumes and I remember Mademoiselle Learda who was the French teacher in my day, doing a great deal of the sewing and loving it and doing a very good job. The costumes were superb. They made hats; they made everything. Another faculty member had charge of the stage sets and knows all the students and we had a marvelous time. Instead of trying to keep up with our lessons and learning our parts, too, we just dropped the lessons, got a great deal out of the whole play production and in so doing, a happy relationship between girls and faculty.

CE: Would this be traditionally at a particular time of year?

HF: Yes, it was, I think, Kitty, the first week in May.

KD: Well, the play was the first Saturday.

HF: Yes.

CE: Where would the play be given?

HF: Well, at one point -- I think it depended. We did have it on the front lawn and then we had it down in the quadrangle afterwards. But we started on the front lawn. I know my year, the year I graduated, I was Maid Marion and I remember going on the lawn through hoops of flowers or something, very exciting.

CE: Well, years later the school has given plays in the gymnasium.

HF: Yes, I think that's true. I haven't seen any of those. In my day the gymnasium was not built.

CE: The gymnasium, tennis court today are adjacent to a pool. Did the school have a pool in those early days?

HF: No, it used to be a little lake with an island in the middle of it and a little rustic bridge. In fact, I think the class of 1924 had its picture taken on the bridge; I don't remember which.

CE: Where was this lake?

HF: This was where the pool is today. My senior year we decided that we needed a pool. Miss Laura Branson was in charge of raising the money for the pool and we all had to have a hand in it. It was called, "The Whirlpool Campaign," and she had a huge thermometer which she brought to every assembly showing the money we had raised. We did it by means of selling ten-dollar memberships to various different members of the community and these memberships could be used for them and their families in the summer to swim at the pool. I think that continued for some years. We raised the money; I wish I could remember how much it was. We were very proud of the pool. Unfortunately I never swam in it until after I had graduated because it only just came into being that year, but I raised some of the money for it.

CE: That's wonderful. In retrospect, Miss Branson was about 33 when she came out to take over this school?

HF: Yes, she must have been.  
CE: And her sister a little younger, I presume.  
HF: Yes, I would think two or three years.  
CE: Now, we have your impression of Miss Branson, Miss Katherine Branson. Would you describe Laura?  
HF: Yes, she was an inspired teacher, really, and --  
CE: What were her subjects?  
HF: Her subjects were algebra and geometry. I think she taught some advanced arithmetic, but I only remember her in -- No, she taught me in San Rafael, the first year, taught me arithmetic, and beautifully. She was very patient and excellent and everybody loved her who took -- She taught algebra and two years of geometry, beginning and advanced.  
KD: How long did she stay in the school with Miss Branson?  
HF: I think she must have left about 1927, I would think. She was married and lived in New York and I went once to visit her when I was in New York and met her husband.  
CE: Well, that brings us up to Kitty Dibblee, who is with us today. Katherine Drury Dibblee, who we are informally addressing as Kitty, is here today and she is an old friend of Helen Fortune and also has an interesting distinction of having come west to be Miss Branson's secretary. How did that come about, Kitty?  
KD: Well, it came about in a rather unusual way. Miss Branson was looking for a new resident mistress and someone, I never found out who, recommended me. Miss Branson telegraphed me while I was still at Smith to ask me if I would be interested in that position at her school. If so, would I meet her in Boston to be interviewed at such-and-such a time. So I thought it would be nice to go and see what it was all about. She gave one look at me and laughed. And when Miss Branson laughed, it was the most wonderful laugh; it went all through her. For one thing I was only twenty and I was very young-looking, you know, for a resident mistress. So we visited for half an hour or so until her next appointment came and I never expected to see her again.  
CE: So that was it.  
KD: After I had left, she remembered she needed a secretary. So she wrote me at great length about this job of secretary, what I would have to do, and asked me if I was interested, and I called her right up and said yes. I just loved her.  
CE: Had you ever been west prior to --  
KD: No, I lived in Massachusetts.  
CE: That was your home.  
KD: A lot of people thought of Miss Branson as having rather cold, blue eyes but, you know, my introduction to her was such that I never saw them that way. She just was warm and humorous to me; she just was a wonderful person. I enjoyed working for her very much.  
CE: How was she as an employer, as a boss?  
KD: I will tell you, she was very --  
CE: Demanding.  
KD: Demanding, and you did exactly what she wanted you to do and she just was appreciative of absolutely everything. She didn't demand anything you couldn't

do, but you did it when she asked you. I must say that she was very patient with me. I didn't know much about what I was doing when I went but we liked each other.

CE: Did you have, in retrospect, a typical secretary sort of job or did you have many other things to do that secretaries have to do, errands to run?

KD: Oh, I had many other things to do, like telephone calls as to how do you feed, water dogs and things like that, you know. I answered the telephone at the main school.

CE: Did you?

KD: I would get really, some very funny questions. I did a little bit of everything, and I loved it.

CE: Was Miss Branson, at that point, living on the property?

KD: Oh, yes, she lived in one room and a bath.

CE: Where was this? In the --

KD: In the residence right next to the main entrance. I don't know how she stood it all those years.

CE: As you come in the main door off to the left, perhaps?

KD: Yes, before you went down the hall, where the girls' rooms there. But she was right on the spot and she had no rest for the weary, as far as I could make out. She was always right in the middle of everything.

CE: Well, don't you think that's --

KD: That was what was wonderful.

CE: That was the wonderful part about it and the fact her presence was there.

KD: Yes, the school was her life.

CE: Her life.

KD: She was right with it every minute.

CE: You can't be an absentee headmistress.

KD: No.

CE: And you stayed there for, I understand, for about five years?

KD: Five years, 'til I was married, then I kept on staying.

CE: It's interesting that you should marry a man whose family had that land.

KD: Yes, wasn't it?

CE: That seems so quixotic to me because, if I remember after talking with your husband, Harrison, that Mr. Albert Dibblee, his grandfather, had purchased some seventy-plus acres in Ross in the 1870s, I believe.

KD: Apple orchards used to be there, where they played baseball and everything in among the trees, which is the apple orchard, things like that.

CE: And here you come west and find a job in such a lovely place, and then meet a gentleman whose estate it was.

KD: Yes, it was beautiful. I was absolutely overwhelmed with it, because it's so lovely. Not that I hadn't come from a similar, almost similar, place in the mountains at Massachusetts up in the Berkshires, but I was just overwhelmed.

CE: You know, Kitty, Mrs. Kent and I have been interviewing a lot of early Ross families and you talk to the Schmiedels and you talk to the Dibblees and you talk to the Kittles and on. It was a wonderful lifestyle for some, a period of life from about 1870 forward until the early '30s and '40s.

KD: The war.  
CE: The war changed it.  
KD: Then the bridge, maybe.  
CE: The bridge.  
KD: I think it was the bridge, perhaps, began the change.  
CE: Then everybody saw this little piece of heaven and wanted to have a part of it.  
KD: Yes.  
CE: When, do you remember, did they introduce some of the outdoor activities? Had they had horseback riding when you were there?  
KD: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I think when Helen was there.  
CE: When you were there, Helen?  
HF: We used to ride with Mr. Youngren. He had a stable in San Rafael.  
CE: This is going right back to the original school?  
HF: Way back and then I think that we still, even when we were in Ross, we went with Mr. and Mrs. Youngren and they had horses of varying quality.  
HF: Did they come to the school? Did you go to them?  
HF: No, when we were in Ross we rode on Seminary fields. Generally, we had our field days there. And there were still quite a few dirt roads around or the sides of roads we could ride around. But we always had our field day in Seminary, on the Seminary field, which, I don't know if it still exists.  
CE: Well, what is field day? Will you explain what field day is?  
HF: Well, field day for riding.  
CE: The trials?  
HF: That was just the riding part and we did a little dressage and that kind of thing.  
CE: And the parents would be invited?  
HF: The parents would be invited and watch and it was quite a thing.  
CE: Quite a day.  
HF: One girl had her own horse and she, of course, rode that but the rest of us just had Mr. Youngren's horses.  
KD: They still had Mr. Youngren's horses in my day.  
CE: Did they?  
KD: I can remember paying the bills.  
CE: Well, there's so many horses in Ross, even today. I wondered if any of the students were permitted ever to ride to school.  
HF: Yes, one had her own horse, Marian Wood.  
CE: Marian Wood?  
HF: Yes, who lived with her grandmother up on Crescent Road.  
CE: Oh, that's the E. K. Woods residence, which is now the Robson-Harrington Park.  
HF: Yes, she now lives in Pebble Beach. Her name is Mrs. --  
KD: We haven't mentioned two organizations within the school. One is the Vagabonds.  
CE: Tell us about it, Kitty.  
KD: It was a hiking organization. Anybody could belong to the Vagabonds. Miss Branson very often, not always, and Helen Bontecou, who was the Resident Mistress in my day, very often but not always would take the girls on really long hikes.

CE: Where would you go?  
KD: Oh, up Bald Hill and, in those days, all up through Del Mesa which was not built on then. There wasn't a house there, all dirt roads. It was a dirt road all the way over to San Rafael on Wolfe Grade, and they walked there.  
CE: Go up Tam?  
KD: Once a year they would go up Mount Tam. Miss Branson usually went on that trip and she was the best hiker of all; I went a couple of times. She was much better than I, and we'd spend the night.  
CE: Where at West Point?  
KD: Yes.  
CE: That wonderful place. You've been to West Point, Helen?  
HF: Yes, I have, long, long ago. I was a Vagabond but I never went on any of the walks, really, maybe one or two, because being a day girl.  
KD: Yes, I think it was --  
HF: Because it was always --  
CE: These were things, activities to diverse --  
KD: The other organization that I thought of was the Fantastics, which was originally a drama group. It did little things during the year, not play week, but little things for weekends for resident girls, mainly. Then, I think, the Fantastics took over after play week, and put on two or three plays during the year when they no longer had play week.  
CE: Could you name some of the plays that were given, that were outstanding, either of you ladies?  
KD: There were five wonderful plays while I was there and only one had to be given in the residence because of rain, but I cannot tell you a single one.  
CE: Well, most of them were designed for outdoors?  
KD: Oh, they all were planned for outdoors.  
HF: No, I remember one which Betty Griffith Latta, Anne Cope, now Simon, who was a superb actress, and Esther Perry and I were in. And that was in the dining room end of the living room, on a raised stage, very narrow, hard for us to move around on, but it was a very good play.  
CE: Do you recall it?  
HF: No, I don't remember the name. I don't think, except for things like *Robin Hood* or anything like that in our day, we had names. I think they were rather simple plays, not well known names.  
CE: I see.  
KD: I think it's funny I can't remember the name of a single one.  
HF: No, I can't either.  
CE: Well, maybe they were scripts by the faculty and students; this was often done in schools.  
KD: Well, I don't know about that.  
LE: And in later years they did many Shakespeare plays.  
KD: I remember them doing --  
LE: *As You Like It*.  
KD: I think it was, *As You Like It*.  
HF: I think I saw it.

KD: About every other year, I think they tried to do *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Oh, that was a wonderful one.

CE: Tell me, Kitty, with your close association as a young girl coming out west, did you feel this restrictions placed upon the students at that time were demanding? For example, you could go to town but it was only on certain days, certain hours.

KD: Oh, if you only had to go to the doctor or something. That was just about the only time you went to town for the girls.

HF: A symphony.

KD: Symphony, a few of them for a special treat could go to the symphony. If you were not away, if you lived too far away and couldn't have your fall weekend, then a group of girls could get together and perhaps go bicycling in Golden Gate Park or something like that. I don't remember their going to the city, except for things that were necessary.

CE: How about into the local community in San Anselmo? Could they go there?

KD: Oh, yes, on Tuesdays and Friday afternoons, they could go down and do -- in groups of three, I think, maybe two or four.

CE: Do some shopping perhaps. What about Sundays and church? Were they --

KD: Oh, we all went to church. I mean, all the girls went to church.

CE: Could you go anywhere?

KD: No, we went down to St. John's and then I think there were --

CE: What if you were Catholic?

KD: Well, there were only one or two Catholic girls and they were allowed to go to Catholic church if they wanted to. But by and large Miss Branson and the resident mistress and sometimes, you know, two or three others of us would hike down to St. John's.

CE: Who was the resident mistress, after Miss Branson interviewed you and decided you were too young?

KD: Miss Bontecou, and she was there for years.

CE: Miss Bontecou.

KD: And she is still living and she's just a wonderful woman, just a marvelous person. She's about Miss Branson's age.

CE: Is she living in this area?

KD: No, she lives in Grass Valley or Nevada City, I'm not quite sure of which.

CE: Mrs. Kent, we should perhaps talk with her some day.

KD: Oh, she would give you all kinds of information and she remembers everything.

CE: Tell us some of the other celebrations that the school would be involved in for example, Helen. What about Christmas?

HF: Oh, that was a lovely time, really. I think the carols under the great big lighted tree were perfectly lovely. We'd start, generally, at the foot of the hill.

CE: That tradition goes back to the '20s.

HF: Oh, yes, oh, yes, it was lovely.

CE: It's a beautiful sight, today, to see those --

KD: Oh, just beautiful; it's still just lovely.

CE: To see those girls marching up.

HF: And we were very well taught, you had to know all the words too, there was no fudging at all.

CE: You had to know the words of all --

HF: Then every year at the Grape Festival, here in Kentfield --

CE: How would you get involved?

HF: On the --

CE: Kent property.

HF: Kent house, the garden, we KBS girls were in charge of the grab bag.

CE: And what's the grab bag?

HF: Well, the grab bag was a great big bag filled with little wrapped presents and we would take turns, two or three of us together, selling the chances for the children to put their hand in and draw out something. I think KBS was in charge of that, oh, as far back as I can remember, and I guess, Kitty, when you were there, too.

KD: All the time it was in Kentfield, I think. Then I think after it left Kentfield. I'm not sure about that because I wasn't involved.

HF: Yes.

KD: The resident school had a wonderful Christmas party, too.

CE: They did.

KD: And all the faculty. That was the time for the faculty to put on a real good skit and entertain the girls. This was usually the night before they went home, or perhaps it was Saturday night. I really don't remember. Miss Branson usually wrote the most marvelous poem, taking in all kinds of things and it was always very entertaining and very clever. The girls just had a great time.

CE: Helen, do you want to add to that?

HF: No, of course, I missed the Christmas parties. I missed quite a few things not being a residence girl, but I used to hear all about them. Another thing, in the early days in San Rafael, we had very exciting Halloween parties. There was a very eerie basement and the faculty were really primed up for this and scared us to death with cold cooked spaghetti, and so on. Then later on, I think in Ross, the Halloween parties were superb and that was done by a committee of faculty and girls together. They really did a good job.

KD: Oh, they had wonderful parties.

HF: They had super parties.

CE: Have you ever thought of what it would be like if Miss Branson were to teach today?

KD: Well, she came back.

CE: That's right; she did come back in the '50s, 1960, was it?

KD: My, that was a wonderful year. When she came back everybody was so happy to see her.

CE: She would have coped with the liberated woman somehow, wouldn't she have, today?

HF: I think she'd cope with almost anything.

CE: There is something in this 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary booklet that is called the *KBS Scrapbook, 1920 to 1970* and I think it would be nice if we would read it into the record. It was something written by Katherine Branson when she was Headmistress at Meredith's. And it reflects, I think, her philosophy about the school. Lucille Ehat, would you like to read that into the record for us? Miss

Ehat was the French teacher for a period of some eight years at the school and has some warm remembrances also of Katherine Branson.

LE: Miss Branson wrote:

Fifty years have slipped away since my sister Laura and I talked together and planned together for our school. We believed a college education for all young people who were endowed with sufficient gray matter to win the privilege of it and, once embarked upon it, to value it and pursue it, responsibly and thoroughly. In our earliest years, our girls met and fought through obstacles I imagine they had never dreamed of in blithely entering upon preparation for college. And they achieved in colleges, east and west, distinction that established their school at once among the best college preparatory schools of our country. We were, and I continue to be, very proud of them and of their teachers, pioneers in and for KBS College preparation, however, was not our sole purpose. We wanted the Katherine Branson School girls to learn not only to think independently, but to exercise self-discipline, to cherish self-respect, to value things of the spirit as well as things of the mind. The ideals of our school, from the beginning, were expressed insofar as ideals can ever be put into words by our school motto: Beauty is truth, truth beauty -- a pervading spirit of honor and a high expectation of one's self and of one's school. Sister and I tried to weave into the fabric of our school, shining, enduring threads, we hoped. Whatever the wear and tear upon them through the years might be, I hope they were still bright and strong. Katherine F. Branson, Head Mistress, Emeritus.

CE: Ladies, Mrs. Kent, you have had daughters at this school. Helen, you have been at this school; your father made it possible. Kitty, you've been at this school; your daughters have attended this school. Is there any doubt in your mind about the future of the Katherine Branson School?

HF: No, certainly not.

CE: And the pursuit of its ideals? Mrs. Kent, tell us about your daughters in the school.

AK: Oh, I don't think there's very much to tell, except they were in the primary school and as they moved from the fourth to the fifth, or whatever it was, that class was no more. Each time they moved along, and that was the end of that class. Maybe it was too much for the school.

CE: They loved the school, did they not?

AK: They loved the school. Of course, I had much to do with the driving the girls, all through the years, through the dark days, let's say, the war days, and all those things. When they had to have people to help I used to help them when my girls were gone. So I feel like the grandmother of the school.

CE: How about you, Kitty?

KD: I think that a school that is built on a foundation like that is bound to keep going.

CE: Prevail. Helen?

HF: Yes, I agree with Kitty.

CE: You agree with Kitty.

HF: Yes, I certainly do.

CE: And here you've -- We want to thank you so much for making the drive up from Carmel to join us today at Mrs. Kent's residence and do give our warmest greetings and affection to Katherine Branson when you see her next time.

HF: I certainly will.

CE: And I hope we can have the pleasure of seeing her, ourselves, shortly.